

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 18 JANUARY 2007

NEW FOREST NINTH CENTENARY TRUST: POTENTIAL ASSOCIATION UPDATE

Report by: Jeff Haynes, Director of Understanding and Enjoyment

Summary

This report summarises the findings of the consultants appointed to examine the basis for an Association between the Authority and the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, in relation to the operation of the 'New Forest Museum' complex in Lyndhurst.

Recommendation

Members are recommended to:

- i) receive the Consultants' Report and note its findings;**
- ii) consider the potential financial implications of the Consultants' proposals;**
- iii) agree that the principle of an Association should be pursued and authorise officers to open discussions with the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, subject to any guidance from members and in consultation with the Chairman and Susan Achmatowicz, and to report back to the Authority's March meeting.**

Resources and Corporate Plan:

Implementation of the proposals as set out in the Consultants' Report could amount to £90,000 expenditure in 2007/8 and an ongoing annual commitment of approximately £70,000.

Corporate Plan Objective U3: Improve everyone's understanding and awareness of the New Forest National Park, in particular hard to reach groups.

Other major considerations:

None

Papers

NFNPA 127/06: Ninth Centenary Trust Partnership Proposal update.

NFNPA 149/07: Cover paper

NFNPA 149/07: Annex 1: Study of a Possible Association between the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust and the National Park Authority to help deliver National Park objectives.

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Report by: Jeff Haynes, Director of Understanding and Enjoyment

1 Background

- 1.1 At its September 2006 meeting, members were informed of the progress made in discussions with the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, in pursuit of an agreement relating to the operation of the building complex comprising the museum/exhibition, library/archive, temporary gallery, gift shop, lecture and field studies rooms, and the New Forest District Council operated Information Centre, located in the centre of Lyndhurst (NFNPA 127/06). Members were advised that agreement had been reached with the Trust jointly to appoint a consultant “to advise on the development of a 3 or 5 year business plan to address the Trust’s funding position, including business options for an ‘association’ between the Trust and the Authority as a means of helping to deliver the objectives of both organisation’s priorities through the Trust”.
- 1.2 Following consideration of three tenders for this contract, Dr Derek Langslow was appointed at the beginning of November 2006. Derek and Helen Langslow spent four days in discussion with representatives of the Trust, the Authority, New Forest District Council, the Forestry Commission and the St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery, in addition to studying documentation, undertaking telephone interviews and web-based surveys. Their report was submitted, on schedule, on 21 December 2006 and is attached at **Annex 1**. It contains an Executive Summary, and the Consultants’ proposals for action are set out in full in paragraph 12.4.

2 Findings

- 2.1 The Report concludes that there are great potential benefits, to both parties, from the Trust and the Authority establishing an Association for the operation of a rebranded New Forest Centre. It recommends that for the Trust to develop and capitalise on its potential strengths it needs proper executive leadership. Similarly, for the New Forest Centre to run effectively, and for the many relationships to be managed,

(including the key relationship with the District Council), the Report recommends that the Authority needs to have executive leadership within the Lyndhurst complex. The consultants recommend that the most beneficial contribution the Authority could make to ensure the success of an Association would be to make an annual grant to part fund a New Forest Centre Manager. They also propose revised governance arrangements including a new executive management group to manage the Association and support the Centre Manager.

- 2.2 The consultants recognised that the Trust is asset rich, but revenue poor, and they have put forward a range of measures for improved financial management of the Trust. They have proposed a series of actions comprising the appointment of a Centre Manager, revised governance arrangements, an invigoration of displays, the retention of entrance charges for adults, the development of collaboration with other partners, Authority support for the Trust's education programme, a small marketing budget, better day to day arrangements with the District Council in relation to the Information Centre, the development of a 'Friends' group and the greater active use of volunteers.

3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 Taken together the Consultants' proposals (Report paragraph 12.4) would involve an initial commitment by the Authority of approximately £90,000, followed by an annual commitment of £70,000 at current prices. This would comprise a contribution of 75% of the cost of a Centre Manager (say £25,000 including on-costs); a 30% contribution towards fixed building and maintenance costs (£20,000); rebranding and updating displays (£25,000 initially and then £10,000 annually); £15,000 to support the Trust's education programme and to help offset the reduction in income from making entry free for under 16s and educational groups; and an unspecified, first year only, marketing budget (say £5,000). To achieve financial stability, the Consultants' proposals also envisage the Trust securing a 'fair rent' for the Information Centre facility; it gaining an assured annual grant or endowment to maintain the Library; and it working to secure additional external funding partnerships.
- 3.2 The proposed annual financial commitment from the Authority would represent approaching 50% of the current non-staff budget for the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate, subject to a review of budget allocation between Directorates being undertaken as part of the 2007/08 budget-setting exercise. The Consultants saw few benefits to the Authority from an alternative option involving the Authority purchasing the museum complex and leasing back the library and educational facilities for the Trust to manage. This would involve significant capital expenditure by the Authority, which it does not have, nor is likely to acquire, as well as heavy running costs, which would only be partially offset by the income streams from gift shop sales and 'museum' admission charges.

4 Next steps

- 4.1 Dr Langslow has offered to present the Report's findings to, and answer questions from, representatives of the Trust and the Authority at a meeting which is shortly to be arranged. It is expected that the Authority will be represented at this meeting by the Chairman and Susan Achmatowicz.

Recommendation

Members are recommended to:

- i) receive the Consultants' Report and note its findings;**
- ii) consider the potential financial implications of the Consultants' proposals;**
- iii) agree that the principle of an Association should be pursued and authorise officers to open discussions with the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, subject to any guidance from members and in consultation with the Chairman and Susan Achmatowicz, and to report back to the Authority's March meeting.**

**Study of a Possible Association Between
The New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust
and The National Park Authority
To Help Deliver National Park Objectives.**

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this report:

CTF	Christopher Tower Foundation
HCC	Hampshire County Council
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
ITT	Invitation to tender
NCT	The New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust (“the Trust”)
NFDC	New Forest District Council
NPA	National Park Authority
VIC	Visitors Information centre

“The Museum Complex” is used to describe the complex of gift shop, exhibitions, library and education rooms

Executive Summary

E1 We were invited by the NPA and the NCT to conduct a study into a possible Association. This report sets out how we undertook the study, our analysis based on documents and interviews, and our conclusions on how an Association could function for mutual benefit. (1)

E2 The report includes a SWOT analysis (5). The Trust owns an attractive building freehold in an excellent central location in the New Forest at Lyndhurst, and beside a car park. The Museum is the only interpretative display of how the New Forest functions. The Trust has a fine library and archive of the New Forest. We were told that the library had the best collection of publications on the New Forest in existence. In addition it has an attractive Gift Shop through which is the entrance to the Museum and the VIC. However the Trust's income is inadequate for current running costs and there is a lack of strategy to correct the position. Strategic partnerships within the New Forest are weak and there is a lack of knowledge of the Museum audience.

E3 The Museum should be **the** place to see for all visitors to the New Forest. It provides the opportunity for visitors to understand how the New Forest functions and enhance the enjoyment of their visit.

E4 Overall the purposes of the NPA and objectives of the Trust match quite closely. The arrival of the NPA has created an extra tier of administration in an already complex system, and the NPA needs to show added value for its £3.5 million annual expenditure (6).

E5 The Trust's Museum and educational programme have very similar objectives to those of the NPA. The Trust's Museum thus provides an outstanding opportunity for the NPA to have a focal centre to interpret the complex habitats that make up the New Forest, to explain the roles of commoners, verderers and agisters, and to propagate the benefits of a National Park for the New Forest. Both the Trust and the NPA want to provide education, and the Trust, along with the FC, focuses on explaining the workings of the New Forest and some of its cultural heritage. The Trust's education programme is good and uniquely offers the Commoning Day (6.4).

E6 The Museum displays were created about three years ago and still look fresh. Overall the displays are of high quality and explain the New Forest and its history well. It is the only place which endeavours to explain how the New Forest lives and breathes and why it looks as it does. We identify the main issues to address in refreshing the display. For the future we suggest that clear objectives for the display needs to be articulated. We recommend that a review is undertaken and concluded within, say, three months. New installations could then be built (7.1). We comment on the suitability of the name "Museum" and suggest renaming would be beneficial (7.2)

E7 In any Association between the NPA and the Trust, the NFDC will remain a key partner. NFDC grant support to the Trust should continue and we suggest it should be allocated to the education and library programmes as the primary beneficiaries are NFDC residents. We make a number of recommendations, mainly directed at NFDC (7.3)

E8 We have concluded that an entry charge to the new display should continue. If the visitor feels the display will be entertaining and informative, a small charge will not be a deterrent. The Trust's revenue is so fragile that the risk is too high to remove the charge completely. Other comparable activities in the New Forest, such as St Barbe Museum and the Forestry Commission walks, make a small charge (7.5).

E9 We summarise the potential benefits and disadvantages of an Association between the Trust and the NPA (8).

E10 We found the Trust's budget estimates unsatisfactory. The budget for 06/07 presented to the Trustees in March 2006 showed a funding gap of £42K. However no plan was presented as to how the funding gap was to be met. (9)

E11 Our overall conclusion is that there are great potential benefits to both the Trust and the NPA of an "Association". Beyond the initial steps to form an Association and provide a New Forest Centre, a better agreement over the running of the VIC with NFDC needs to be part of a second stage. In entering an Association, the Trust will have to accept changes and the NPA will have to limit its role to that of a partner, not a controller. As the bigger partner, the NPA should ensure a fair financial settlement (10).

E12 The analysis suggests advantages for both the NPA and the Trust of a formal Association. More importantly, visitors to the New Forest (general and educational) will benefit from the collaboration in several ways. For local residents it will show local cooperation and benefits from the NPA presence (11.1). Shared objectives for an Association against which both the NPA and the Trust gain benefit are proposed (11.3).

E13 We reject the "takeover option" because of the high capital and running cost to the NPA although there would be large benefits to the Trust (12.2). We also reject the proposals in "Version 5" (12.3). We propose a basis to negotiate an Association based on the NPA part-funding a New Forest Centre Manager, paying 30% of the fixed overheads of the centre, making an education investment of £15K per annum and one-off costs of £20-25K to refresh the Museum and £5K for new marketing. In return the NPA would gain a fine New Forest Centre branded for the National Park together with a partnership with the Trust's library and education programmes. Once the decision is taken, an agreement should be reached in three months.

E14 The Trust would be placed on a stable financial footing and should engage more fully with local residents. Such an Association could provide clear benefits for visitors to and residents of the New Forest.

1. Introduction

1.1 We were invited by the NPA and the NCT to conduct a study into a possible Association. This report sets out how we undertook the study, our analysis based on documents and interviews, and our conclusions on how an Association could function for mutual benefit.

1.2 Whilst we both have a considerable knowledge and fondness for the New Forest, we have had no previous dealings with the Trust or the NPA. We were much impressed by the achievements of the Trust since 1979. They have established themselves in central Lyndhurst in a fine modern building which includes the Museum, a Library, a Gift Shop, and educational facilities. Our comments and criticisms should be viewed against the background of overall substantial achievement.

1.3 Throughout our visits to the New Forest, all the many people we met were helpful and responsive. We are very grateful to them for their courtesy and support to us and for responding willingly to our many questions and requests for information. Everyone we met was united in their commitment to the special qualities of the New Forest, and its residents and visitors.

Derek Langslow CBE
Helen Langslow

December 2006

2. The purposes of the study

The study was jointly commissioned by the National Park Authority and the Ninth Centenary Trust, following discussions which have gone on for more than a year about a partnership or “Association”.

The purposes of this study are as follows:

1. In the light of the recent financial performance of the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust (The Trust) to:
 - (a) analyse the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of the Trust and its asset base including an assessment of the Trust’s prospective financial performance and robustness
2. Taking account of the recent establishment of the National Park Authority (NPA), to:
 - (b) review the degree of complementarity between the objectives of the Trust and the Authority:
 - (c) assess how an ‘association’ with the Authority could improve the financial and other performance of the Trust, and how the Trust could help the Authority to achieve its objectives, using a SWOT analysis.
 - (d) develop a business model or models for creating a mutually beneficial “Association” between the two organisations together with an analysis of the practicalities, costs and risks associated with each model.
3. In the light of 1. and 2. above make recommendations on a course of action within a 5-year business plan.

Issues to be addressed are

1. The relevance of the traditional ‘visitor centre’ now, in 5, 10 and 15 years; adjusting to changing consumer and behavioural preferences - who should the target audience be - what will they want - what will need to change?
2. How the Trust should maximise use of its assets and income / improve its current financial performance:
 - Charging and pricing policies (museum and educational facilities)
 - product and sales policy
 - potential for and stability of external funding sources
 - new activities?

3. Relationship of the museum complex with the Visitor Information Centre.
4. Complementarity and coincidence of purposes and objectives of the two organisations, alongside differences in scale and scope of their operations – the Trust's operations are in general terms focused on a narrower audience with a more in depth experience, the Authority needs to reach a wider audience.
4. Business models which would provide positive and supportive engagement between the two organisations, including analysis of benefits, limitations and risks.
5. Alternative 'associations' the Trust might consider eg with others in the same sector.

3. The methods used in the study

We spent four days in the New Forest in discussion with members of the Ninth Centenary Trust (NCT), the New Forest National Park Authority (NPA), New Forest District Council (NFDC), St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery, and the Forestry Commission (FC). Meetings and telephone consultations were held with the following:

Trustees of NCT:

Ednyfed Hudson Davies, Chairman
Maldwin Drummond, Deputy Chairman
Chris Gwyn-Evans, Treasurer
Mel Kendall, HCC representative: also Chairman of NFDC
Mary Montagu Scott

From the NCT staff:

Trish Dorricott, Museum Administrator
Louise Bessant, Gift Shop Manager
Lyndsey Stride, Education Development Officer
Caroline Stride, Assistant Education Officer
Richard Reeves, Librarian
Jude James, part-time librarian and former consultant

From the NPA

Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive
Jeff Haynes, Director of Understanding and Enjoyment
Amanda Elmes, Education Officer (telephone discussion)

From the FC

Helen Wood

From NFDC

Anthony Climpson, Tourism Destination Manager
Terry Kane (telephone discussion)
Mel Kendal, Chairman

From St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery

Steve Marshall, Curator
Mark Tomlinson, Education Officer

Prior to these meetings, we studied the documentation provided by the Trust and the NPA. We were sent the NPA Corporate Plan for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 and the "Version 5" proposals for an Association; also the "Strategy for the New Forest" prepared by the New Forest Committee (2003), and the NFDC document "Our Future Together" (1998). We conducted a web-based survey on the provision of visitor information in the New Forest as part of an assessment of the relevance of the traditional visitor centre. We also conducted a web-based review comparing education provision at the New Forest Museum with other New Forest sites. We studied the results of the Survey of Recreational Visits to the New Forest National Park on visitor use of

the New Forest (Survey prepared by Tourism South East Research Services (2005)). We read the Minimum Service Standards for National Park Centres in England, Scotland and Wales (draft, 2004).

In order to find out the aspirations of the Trust and assess progress made since the opening of the extended building we studied the following documents produced by the Trust:

- Education Policy document (2002)
- The Business Plan for 2003 – 2005
- The Forward Plan (2003)
- 'Milestones 2004 - 2005', a review of progress
- The Trust's Marketing Strategy (2002), which contains some tourism data
- The Market Research report commissioned by the Trust in 2005.
- Minutes of Trustee and Executive Committee meetings in 2006

The following financial information was available:

- The budget and management accounts in the Invitation to Tender
- The final accounts for the Trading Company for the year ending 31 March 2005
- The draft accounts for the Trading Company for the 10 month period ending 31 January 2006
- The New Forest Museum Trading Ltd profit and loss statement and balance sheet for 1 Feb to 31 Oct 2006
- The New Forest Museum Treasurers Account profit and loss statement and balance sheet for 1 Feb to 31 Oct 2006
- The accounts submitted to the Charities Commission for the year ended 31 March 2004
- A breakdown of shop figures showing profits for different categories of sales for 1 Feb to 31 Oct 2006
- A spreadsheet provided by Chris Gwyn Evans based on the end of month 9 profit and loss account for the year 06/07

We were also given a breakdown of categories of student numbers (eg tutor led, self guided, commoning day) admitted to the Museum for the years 2001 to 2006 excluding the closure year, 2003, from which we could assess how each category contributed to the revenue from educational activities.

The report is based on information collected up to the end of November 2006.

4. The Museum complex

4.1 The Gift Shop

4.1.1 The shop is attractive and everyone using the complex has to pass through it, as it provides the entrance to the Museum displays and the VIC. There is no external signage for the shop.

4.1.2 It sells some expensive items of metal-work and porcelain, a wide range of books on the New Forest, other books on the countryside, historical, heritage and cookery books, a range of other gifts such as china, tea-towels, candles, mats, produce from the area and the South West such as honey, jam and fudge, and items for children including pocket money toys.

4.1.3 The Gift Shop manager has a thorough knowledge of the market and of which lines sell. She knew exactly how the shop was performing and has tailored the shop to the market. Local people buy the honey, books and some Christmas gifts. The shop is tightly managed financially with good retail data. Turnover so far this year is below budget although there is no evidence as to why the budget for this Financial Year is above the last. An increase in visitor numbers to the complex would help the shop turnover. There are options to control costs further and enhance turnover.

4.1.4 The shop makes some losses due to overlap of items with the VIC meaning that items are sometimes sold at the wrong till. The agreement about which outlet sells books and maps does not work perfectly. Two staff are always present in the shop, even at quiet times, to provide some security if the alarm goes off in the building.

4.2 The Museum and its displays

4.2.1 The total number of admissions to the Museum between 1 February and 31 October 2006 was just under 15 000. This includes around 2 700 visits by children in school parties. Children under eight who are not in school parties are not recorded.

4.2.2 The entrance to the Museum from the Gift Shop is not very obvious, despite large signs. The Lesley Errington room houses temporary special exhibitions, which are free to enter. Though the special exhibition we saw was interesting to anyone prepared to look thoroughly, the pictures on show were small and a lot of reading was needed to appreciate their significance. This meant that it was not family friendly and not an inducement for families to enter the main displays. The temporary exhibition changes every two or three months. This room is also used for evening lectures and occasional corporate hirings. There are two tea / coffee machines available for refreshments at lectures and events, and access to crockery and cutlery. Room-hire groups can use outside caterers on the premises.

4.2.3 The main displays in the Museum are professional and of good quality. The main message on each display board is in bold type, with further reading

below. The activities for children are sturdy and mostly low-tech and hence low maintenance. There is a lot of information available to read, and more interactive exhibits would liven it up for families. An improved scene-setting video is planned. Some sound with the exhibits, such as with the ponies, or stories from the pony sales or from local characters would liven it up.

4.3 The Library

We were told that the library had the best collection of publications on the New Forest in existence. It has books on topics related to the New Forest and surrounding areas. It also has an extensive archive of newspaper cuttings and much other New Forest specific information. It is used for research on the New Forest and by local interest groups such as genealogists. The Trust publishes or reprints some titles each year, which is done via the Librarian as editor. This produces a cash deficit within the year as it takes time to recoup the publication costs from sales. The library is open from Wednesday to Saturday inclusive, and the Trust has the ambition to open it seven days a week. Visitor numbers averaged less than 70 per month in the period 1 February to 31 October 2006.

4.4 The Barker Mill Field Studies room and the Jack Hargreaves room

The Jack Hargreaves room can seat a group of 30 and has a projector. It is used for talks to school groups and for eating packed lunches if the weather is poor. The Field Studies room has benches for practical work and some basic equipment such as tree and animal specimens. A grant of £7 000 has just been acquired for more equipment such as microscopes.

4.5 Refreshment facilities and Toilets

4.5.1 There are no refreshment facilities for general visitors to the museum complex, which limits the time visitors will spend there and reduces the chance of coach parties with a short stop (up to an hour) visiting the Museum.

4.5.2 Toilets are available to museum visitors including a disabled toilet. Visitors using the gift shop and the VIC can use the toilets in the NFDC car park. The toilet facilities in the complex are quite limited for school groups and the access to the car park toilet facilities is dangerous for young children and requires close supervision.

4.6 The Visitor Information Centre

This is run by NFDC and has a staff of three in the summer months and two in the winter. It provides information on local attractions, makes bookings for accommodation, theatres, ferries etc, and sells parking clocks and bus tickets.

It also sells NFDC publications on the New Forest including their map and accommodation guide, Ordnance Survey maps, and a selection of books. The choice of books is not as wide as in the Gift Shop, but some books are on sale in both areas.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE TRUST AND ITS ASSET BASE

STRENGTHS

Main strengths

A very attractive building owned freehold

Excellent central location in New Forest at Lyndhurst, and beside car park

Highly committed staff

The only interpretative display of how the New Forest functions

Fine library and archive of the New Forest

Open every day

Strengths in specific areas

Signposted from the edge of the New Forest

Visitor information centre on site which draws visitors

Recently revamped display, mainly supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund

Popular education packages which interpret the New Forest

Locally popular evening lecture programme

Free reference library service

Attractive gift shop

Sells books on line

Publishes newsletter

Trustees based within the New Forest

Promise of continued support from NFDC

Collection of local artefacts in Museum

WEAKNESSES

Strategic weaknesses

Income inadequate for current running cost and lack of strategy to correct

Lack of management of the NCT overall

Lack of strategic partnerships within the New Forest

Confusing methods of accounting, and lack of management accounts which show the performance of each function against budget

Poor cost control except in the Gift Shop

Viability depends on the goodwill of a few individuals

Over-dependent on uncertain grants

Lack of knowledge of Museum audience

Trust insufficiently outward looking

Specific weaknesses

Some of these factors are out of the control of the Trust such as the car parking and VIC issues, but nevertheless affect visitor numbers and viability of the organisation.

Entry charge may discourage some visitors

Entry to museum displays from Gift Shop not enticing

Special exhibitions in Lesley Errington Gallery may not attract visitors to main gallery if uninspiring

Two entrances to the Museum from Gift Shop unhelpful

Main exhibition could be livelier, more imaginative and more interactive

Car park is not free, as are many others in the New Forest

All day parking allowed by purchase of 'parking clocks', limiting visitor parking

Car parking difficult in summer

Poor external presentation caused by poor car park arrangements

No shop window for gift shop

Inappropriately named as a Museum

Poor marketing

Low visitor numbers in the winter

Education services cannot match demand at certain times

Shortage of toilet facilities in building for school groups

Library shut from Sunday to Tuesday

Not enough external recognition to make Library better supported financially

No use of volunteers except in library

Gift shop overlaps with VIC for some maps and books and loses stock

No souvenir guide available from gift shop

Lack of change machine wastes time of gift shop staff

Little sign of relations with Lyndhurst High Street

Newsletter not very attractive

No Friends Group

Lack of local interaction and commitment

Education and outreach have lacked co-ordination with others and financial management, and this is now being addressed following the appointment of the Education Development Officer in mid November 2006. More partnerships with local schools are being set up. The post of Education Development Officer is, however, only guaranteed for one year.

OPPORTUNITIES

Should be **the** place to see for all visitors to the New Forest

The opportunity for visitors to understand how the New Forest functions and enhance the enjoyment of their visit

Better partnerships with FC / NFDC / NPA

Improve the exhibition in partnership with the NPA

Increase visitor numbers by improved marketing in partnership with NFDC / NPA

Rename to improve image with enhanced marketing

Market as an attraction which opens up the unique features of the New Forest to all

Explore opportunities for joint marketing

Bolder window displays and exterior signage

Use of local newspaper and radio advertising, and targeting coach companies to make the Museum a destination in itself, rather than Lyndhurst being just a tea or comfort stop

Negotiate an endowment for the library with the Christopher Tower Foundation

Attract more funds, bequests and business support

Produce a museum souvenir / guide book

Explore ways to introduce Gift Aid on entrance fees

Introduce new outreach programme to schools

Increase number of school visits especially from NFDC area

Build outreach programmes for schools

Introduce ticketing products for repeat visits and follow up visits by parents after school trips

Introduce a commoning visit for general visitors

Set up a Friends Group

Better use of volunteers

Explore the use of the building for more corporate events

Explore local sponsorship for special exhibitions

THREATS

Revenue funding inadequate to sustain Trust

Risk of clawback from HLF if Trust does not remain a going concern

No long term formal commitment from NFDC, either financial or through other support

Large projected revenue deficit this financial year

Loss of Trust ideals if overrun by NPA

Friction over the running of the Visitor Information Centre

Competition to shop from High Street

Competition to exhibition from other attractions

Decline in visitor numbers if seen as not enjoyable for families

Free entry to schools for some attractions

Drop in school visits due to increasing cost of coach travel, safety and supervision requirements and curriculum changes.

Loss of use of Verderer's Court or Commoner's smallholding. (The commoner who runs the commoning day is a Trust employee; without her this valuable programme might not be available).

National Catastrophe eg foot and mouth outbreak

6. The degree of complementarity between the objectives of the Trust and the Authority

6.1 The NCT objectives and the NPA Purposes compared

	TRUST OBJECTIVES	NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES
1	To further the conservation and protection of the New Forest and in particular to:	Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park
2	Further health and welfare interests of the New Forest in all aspects	Seek to foster the economic and social well being of local communities within the National Park.
3	<i>Promote and support financially or otherwise any measure on the part of the Trust or any person calculated to conserve or protect the New Forest</i>	
4	<i>To find collect and conserve natural and manmade evidences of the structure and life of the New Forest</i>	
5	<i>Establish, equip and maintain a museum</i>	
6	Promote interest, <i>research</i> and knowledge relating to the New Forest, all for the education and benefit of the inhabitants of the New Forest public at large.	Promote opportunities for the understanding and <i>enjoyment</i> of the special qualities of the <i>National Park</i> by the public

Italics are used where the match of the Trust's objectives and the purposes of the NPA do not match exactly.

Overall the purposes and objectives match quite closely. The objectives of the Trust are very wide and imply general support for study of and life in the New Forest. The purposes of the NPA are equally wide but with less obvious focus on the New Forest within the perambulation.

6.2 Interpretation

6.2.1 The Trust has explicit aims to collect artefacts and to have a museum, which the NPA does not. However the exhibitions consist of explanatory

display boards with relatively few artefacts on display, and the name “Museum” seems inappropriate. The current display promotes the understanding of the special qualities of the New Forest by the public. If it had a revised introductory video and a new display on the National Park, it could also promote understanding of the National Park and its purposes. This would require relatively modest expenditure by the NPA. However the Trust (and many others) are aware of the budget of the NPA, and expect a considerable sum to be available in return for use of the existing building with most of the current display and the addition of the National Park branding.

6.2.2 There is a store of artefacts, and the Education Officer uses some with schools. The Trust has an extensive collection of books and archive material in the library, and this is used for research purposes by academics and people with a more casual interest. Promotion of education and the success of the library are important to the Trust, and contribute to the interpretation of the New Forest. The education programme and library complement the display, and all can enhance the visitors’ understanding of how the New Forest works.

6.3 Education

6.3.1 The NPA Corporate plan states that “The New Forest National Park’s landscape is unique; it is a ‘living’ and working remnant of medieval England with a powerful sense of continuity, tradition and history. It is the survival of not just one special quality but a whole range of features that brings a sense of completeness and integrity.”

6.3.2 Both the Trust and the NPA want to provide education, and the Trust, along with the FC, focuses on explaining the workings of the New Forest and some of its cultural heritage. The Trust’s education programme is unique in offering the Commoning Day. Other education providers offer a wide variety of outdoor activities, and use the area as an outdoor field studies site and a site for outdoor activities. They explore historical topics, ecological aspects and issues such as those associated with tourism. Most, if not all, education providers explain that the New Forest is now a National Park, and how the NPA aims to protect and conserve it. However some of the studies which are done on, for example, coastal erosion, do not emphasise the aspects of the New Forest which are described in the NPA Corporate Plan statement. The St Barbe Museum in Lymington complements the education provision of the Trust with a focus on the New Forest coast. Courses on the coast are also offered at Calshot and Lepe

6.4 Summary

6.4.1 The arrival of the NPA has created an extra tier of administration in an already complex system, and the NPA needs to show added value for its £3.5 million annual expenditure.

6.4.2 The Trust’s Museum and educational programme have very similar objectives to those of the NPA. The Trust’s Museum thus provides an outstanding opportunity for the NPA to have a focal centre for its promotion of

the complex habitats which make up the New Forest, to explain the roles of commoners, verderers and agisters, and to propagate the benefits of a National Park to the New Forest.

6.4.3 The Trust's building is in the best location in the New Forest; it is beside a car park, is accessible to all the main roads, and bringing more people to Lyndhurst ought to help local businesses. The NPA is fortunate that the Trust does not regard it as necessary to promote itself as a brand, but rather hopes its charitable objectives can be met more effectively in partnership with the NPA. A strong symbiosis is possible but to achieve maximum benefits the Trust will need to change. The NPA will need to help this change and establish a partnership of mutual respect with the Trust.

7. Issues relevant to Association of the NPA with the Trust

7.1 The Museum

7.1.1 The displays were created about three years ago and still look fresh. Overall the displays are of high quality and explain the New Forest and its history well. It is the only place which endeavours to explain how the New Forest lives and breathes and why it looks like it does. There are relatively few artefacts on display. The ones shown are of local interest. There are lots of children's activities. The route around the sections of the Museum in the main hall could be better signed.

7.1.2 We would identify the main issues to address as:

1. The layout is confusing with alternative routes
2. The displays lack enough life. Why is there no sound for the pony sale? What about the snake catcher's story told in the local dialect? What about more sounds, such as water, in the ecological display?
3. The message in the video seems mixed in several places and there is no commentary. Is it about the problems of the New Forest, traffic, visitors, conflicts between traditional uses and recreation, tree felling and conserving ancient woodland? Or is it about how the New Forest works currently? Some of the images would make no sense to a first time visitor.
4. The central space is somewhat wasted with colour photos (unexplained) and a pretty (and fun) map but very complex to a typical visitor.

7.1.3 For the future we suggest that a clear objective for the display needs to be articulated, and some redesign made to make sure it meets those objectives.

The objectives might be:

1. To excite the visitor about the history and landscape of the New Forest
2. To help the visitor understand the fragile nature of the New Forest
3. To help people enjoy their visit more by understanding the cultural heritage
4. To show some relevant ancient and modern artefacts

7.1.4 We suggest the following issues be considered:

1. The entrance from the shop should look enticing with a “come and explore me” look
2. Revise the video to focus on the objectives, and add some commentary on items which the visitor will see later.
3. Put a fixed half gate (perhaps with children’s peep-holes) at the front entrance to the commoner’s cottage entrance, so that the normal route is past the video and entering the cottage subsequently
4. Animate items such as the pony sale, the wildlife display and the snake catcher with sound.
5. Change the direction signing for the two loops in the main hall. Which way are visitors recommended to go to see the display in a logical order?
6. Change the projecting display of photographs and map. Can one replicate the sensation of the agister riding through the Forest? Can one view the New Forest from the perspective of a grazing pony?
7. Each paying visitor should have a small leaflet (say A5 size?) highlighting the displays with a suggested route and a feel of exploration.
8. Add a key feature about how the National Park will help sustain the New Forest into the future and why, along with the FC and the Verderers, it is important in the running of the Forest.
9. More simple but interactive displays with low maintenance costs.

7.1.5 We recommend that the review is not rushed by false deadlines but it should be possible to decide the content within, say, three months and then to arrange installation. Installation should not be done during a key visitor period. We suggest the review is led by a Trustee with experience of marketing and visitor attractions and draws in people from the Trust, and those with experience of visitor displays and visitors to the New Forest. The FC ranger for Visitor Services, the Director of St Barbe Museum and the Director of Understanding and Enjoyment from the NPA could be invited to participate. Someone from the AIM and Hampshire Museum service might also be helpful.

7.2 The name of the Museum and its audience

7.2.1 Most agree that using the name “Museum” to market the displays is counterproductive. There is virtually no information about the audience currently using the Museum. The Tourism South East report about visitors to the New Forest suggested that around 60% of visitors came from the local

area which is defined as roughly the NFDC area plus Southampton and Bournemouth conurbations. Many of the local visitors pay frequent visits, mainly to walk dogs, ramble or jog. The 40% coming from further afield probably enjoy a similar range of activities but they also visit more attractions around the New Forest and especially notice the ponies, cattle, pigs and deer. The main target for the Museum is thus probably the longer distance visitor, many of whom will stay, together with those staying with friends or relatives within an hour's drive.

7.2.2 The Museum till records numbers of adults and children over eight, but the numbers of under-eights are not known and the data given to us did not show how many adults were on family tickets or concessions.

7.2.3 For all but the most regular visitors to the New Forest, the "Museum" should be a must-visit destination early in their visit. Clear signage from the major roads is thus vital. The name eventually chosen must appear consistently on all brown signs, web sites and literature produced about the New Forest.

7.2.4 We are not marketing specialists, but titles like "Discover the New Forest", "Explore the New Forest", "New Forest Experience", "New Forest Story" or some such similar title, perhaps with a sub-title of "Understand and discover the New Forest yourself" are possibilities. The building overall might be titled "New Forest Centre" alongside a large National Park logo and with a sub-title referring to the National Park such as "Discover the National Park". Outside the building the Christopher Tower Library and Visitor Information Centre titles could be retained with the new title placed centrally over the door. But the key point will be for everyone to use the new title and help market the Centre as a must-visit destination for all non-regular visitors to the New Forest.

7.3 Relations with NFDC

7.3.1 In any Association between the NPA and the Trust, the NFDC will remain a key partner. NFDC grant support to the Trust should continue and we suggest it should be allocated to the education and library programmes as the primary beneficiaries are NFDC residents. Currently NFDC pay 15% of fixed overheads for the complex but pay no rent for the use of the VIC. The VIC is used by around 150 000 people per year, with over 1000 people a day coming through the door in August. The main revenue of the VIC comes from commission on accommodation and other bookings and, though numbers have dropped with the increase of internet use, they remain high. Information on who uses the VIC and why would need significant surveys to clarify. Suffice to say that the role of the VIC has changed markedly in the last five or so years.

7.3.2 If the Lyndhurst complex becomes the New Forest Centre for the National Park, integration of the VIC into the overall running of the Centre should be sought as a second step. The edges of the space occupied by the VIC could be more imaginatively used if the two closed access points were

open. Friction currently exists between the VIC and the Trust over the sales of books and maps. We were told that the VIC had undertaken not to sell any books or booklets except those published by the NFDC but many books were available in both places. The position over maps seemed ambiguous.

7.3.3 A new agreement is needed; currently space is wasted on duplication of the provision of books and guides in two places, aside from the confusion over where the visitor pays. Furthermore either the Trust or NFDC loses money if a book is purchased at the wrong till. Our recommendation is that the VIC ceases to sell books and maps other than those it publishes itself. Its focus should be on information to visitors, and on local services like theatre and accommodation bookings. The space created would allow promotion of the National Park, and the VIC could promote the area to visitors more fully and some redesign of the closed openings would have benefits to both parties.

7.3.4 The car park is leased and managed by NFDC. Managerially there appears to be no relationship between those responsible for the VIC and the car park. Unfortunately the parking ticket machines only take coins, not notes or credit cards. Inevitably therefore large numbers of people need change. The VIC refuses to provide change to visitors and there is no change machine. The shop till, rightly in our view, does not give change unless a purchase is made. Spending money in the Gift Shop or High Street in order to acquire change does produce business, but buying a 20p postcard with a £20 note is unlikely to engender much warmth on either side. NFDC should address this issue before the next summer season.

7.3.5 Whilst well outside our remit, we looked carefully at the car park and its relationship to the Trust's building. The external appearance of the building is downgraded by having a line of cars and vans parked directly in front of the building. For example, we saw the VIC sign partially obscured by a tall parked vehicle. We suggest that at least eight spaces where people park against the footpath, south of the entrance, should be removed. The pedestrian area should be extended to provide a clear space in front of the building (the disabled spaces north of the entrance could remain). This would also protect pedestrians from vehicles overhanging the path and reveal the small garden by the side of the building. It would also make it a safer place for children who have to cross the main exit route from the car park in accessing the Trust's complex. We would also suggest that much more of the car park is made short stay. We were surprised to count about 50 vehicles in the long stay car park at 08.45 on a November morning. Furthermore we were surprised that pedestrians were offered no protection when exiting the car park to the High Street. Vehicles seem to have absolute priority.

7.4 Volunteers

7.4.1 For a charitable Trust, we were surprised to find such a lack of local involvement in the Trust's work. The Forward Plan 2003 – 2005 submitted to HLF said that a Friends group would be established in 2003. No progress appears to have been made. Volunteers are used in the library although we

could not establish a clear picture of how many people were involved, what they did and how they were encouraged and utilised. Volunteers did not seem to be used elsewhere in the Trust's activities other than the limited time commitment which busy Trustees could make.

7.4.2 For a number of reasons, we think that this is a missed opportunity. The Trust does not seem to be as outward looking as it should be and certainly does little to promote itself. Many charities depend on active volunteers to enhance the range of activities beyond what is possible with paid staff.

7.4.3 A Friends group would provide important links into the local community (primarily but not exclusively those living within the National Park) and volunteers from it could provide much needed practical help. Starting a group would require a major effort by a small number of individuals. It is possible that one of the Small Lottery schemes might provide a grant for a part-time community coordinator for a year or two to start up a Friends Group. The Group needs both "serious" and fun activities to function, and the Trust needs to provide some exclusive opportunities.

7.4.4 The Trust must recruit volunteers with the correct skills and commitment to serve the Trust, and there is a wide range of opportunities. There needs to be a clear agreement with a volunteer so that both sides understand 'the deal'. Some training may be needed too. Volunteers could help with administration, strengthen further the library, provide support in the shop, help to welcome visitors and act as gallery storytellers and guides. Some kind of simple identification by a uniform would also help. The Forestry Commission programme shows what can be achieved locally. On two recent visits to National Museums in DRL's HLF role, one used over 150 volunteers and the other one 500.

7.4.5 Links with the local community might open many doors locally and increase business in the shop.

7.5 Charging and pricing policies

7.5 1 Currently the Museum charges £3 for adults, £9 for a family with two children, £2.50 for children over eight years old and concessions. For a small independent museum these are typical charges, being well under £5, and are comparable to St Barbe Museum in Lymington. They are also comparable to other National Park centres, such as the one in Hawes in the Yorkshire Dales. National museums have free entry and this has undoubtedly had a negative effect on smaller museums and on other attractions. The nationally published data show admission numbers often rising dramatically, but the impact is not uniform and some museums with free admission have hardly changed their visitor numbers over the past five years. A complex mixture of competition, pricing, accessibility and the profile of the museum all play a part. Generally it is the museums in large cities where the impact of free admissions on visitor numbers has been greatest.

7.5.2 Some visitors always expect museum entry to be free (that is, taxpayer funded). Some resistance to entry charges because of cost is thus inevitable, although the Trust could give us no evidence about whether visitors who reached the entrance subsequently left without entering the museum because of the charge. Some studies suggest that free entry lowers the value placed on a museum by visitors, but unambiguous evidence is hard to find. Overhead costs do increase with greater numbers of visitors, particularly costs of maintaining interactive exhibits and the basic fabric.

7.5.3 For a number of reasons we have concluded that an entry charge to the new display should continue. It is a vital source of income to the Trust. If the visitor feels the display will be entertaining and informative, a small charge will not be a deterrent. Above all, visitors need to leave feeling it is good value. The Trust's revenue is so fragile that the risk is too high to remove the charge completely. Other similar activities in the New Forest, such as St Barbe Museum and the Forestry Commission walks, make a small charge. The current charge amounts to little more than a pint of beer, is similar to the price of a cup of coffee in the major chains, like Caffè Nero in Lymington, and equivalent to the real cost of driving a car about eight miles. We recommend that an adult admission charge of £3 is retained, a concession charge of £2.50, but with all children under 16 free if accompanied by an adult. A limit of two or three children per adult on a family visit might be set.

7.5.4 A small charge is currently made for educational visits. It is charged per child and the net cost is similar to a half-day adult visit led by a FC ranger. Such charges should continue and be reviewed regularly. Children under 16 on educational visits to the Museum should go free unless on a conducted tour, when they should pay for the educational service and not entry. A budget needs to be set annually in consultation with the educational staff to ensure that all projected expenditure has a realistic prospective income.

7.5.5 There should be special group rates too. The possibility of Gift Aid on admissions should be explored. If marketing the new display is successful, then it should be possible for income to be increased. Each person entering should be given a small leaflet with a welcoming message and guidance in how to visit, including the highlights.

7.5.6 Visits to a commoner could be organised for summer visitors in the school holidays. Given the success of the FC Ranger led visits, we suspect a strong demand could be generated and a useful income stream developed.

7.5.7 A small charge is currently made for evening lectures but it is impossible to determine from the accounts the cost of administering the activity. Given that they seem to be over-subscribed, consideration needs to be given to either increasing the charges or increasing the programme or both. In any event, there should be a proper budget for the activity to ensure that there is no net cost to the Trust for time spent on administration. The Trust should not subsidise the lecture programme except through volunteers.

8. Potential benefits and disadvantages of an Association between the Trust and the NPA

Benefits to Trust	Benefits to NPA
Improved financial stability	Provides a focal point where understanding of the unique qualities of the New Forest and awareness of the National Park can be encouraged
Ongoing core funding agreement with NPA	
Gaining new name, and status from National Park	To be able to move into an attractive building in an excellent position with an existing display in a short time scale
Possibility of lower entrance fees with support from NPA	An opportunity to brand the National Park and NPA in a stylish building
Potentially increased visitor numbers and hence increased Gift Shop revenue	Puts the NPA on the local map
Funding for new introductory video	An opportunity to inform visitors coming to the car park and VIC
Funding for enlivening the display	An opportunity to promote sustainable tourism through the VIC
Staff support from the NPA	
Opportunity for improved management and implementation of recommendations in recent reviews	The display supports the primary purposes of NPA
Encourages greater use of partners	Education provision for schools matches purposes of NPA
Re-invigoration of the Trust	Education provision for adults (evening lectures) matches purposes of NPA
Potentially more attractive to outside funders	Link with a comprehensive library and archive collection of the New Forest
	Adding value to an existing local facility
	Association with the Trust fosters social well-being of local communities through employment and involvement of volunteers

Disadvantages for the Trust	Disadvantages for the NPA
<p>Reduced potential for donations and grants if New Forest Centre is seen as government funded</p> <p>Risk of NFDC being less willing to provide finance</p> <p>Loss of promotion of Ninth Centenary Trust as a brand</p> <p>Loss of recognition of achievements of Ninth Centenary Trust</p> <p>Loss of vigour of the Trust if overwhelmed by the NPA</p> <p>Loss of control over displays</p>	<p>Difficulty of imposing own management needs without providing staffing</p> <p>Cost of agreement necessary to support the Centre</p> <p>Damage to reputation if Trust performs inadequately</p>

9. Financial Issues

9.1 Current year financial position

9.1.1 The main weakness of the Trust is that its income streams are inadequate to maintain the purposes for which it was set up.

9.1.2 The main sources of funding are the admissions income, the grants from NFDC and the Christopher Tower Foundation plus a contribution from the Gift Shop. Other charitable trusts make contributions but not on a regular basis. The charges for education activities do not cover costs when overheads are included.

9.1.3 NFDC currently contribute £10K per annum as a core grant and 15% of fixed overheads. The fixed overheads are defined as building repairs and maintenance, gas electricity and water costs, rates, insurance and cleaning. The 15% contribution is fair for the space NFDC occupy in the building. The VIC is ideally situated in Lyndhurst, it is modern and attractive but they pay a peppercorn rent. However the Trust has significant administrative overheads and the NFDC does not contribute directly to these.

9.1.4 Because NFDC contributed to the purchase in 1998, the expectation of NFDC officers has been that this should cover future rent. As this purchase was nearly ten years ago, we consider such an argument no longer valid and the 'contribution' has long since been repaid. NFDC also contributed to the capital development and the VIC has benefited greatly from the large HLF and Christopher Tower Fund investment. Whilst arguments can be made for and against a fully commercial rent, since there are benefits to the Trust from the VIC's presence, we recommend that NFDC should pay the Trust an annual rent. The precise value would require the District Valuer's advice but we would expect the rent to be around £15 000 - £20 000 per annum. The provision of the VIC is an important contribution by NFDC to the residents and businesses in the district. The Trust's building undoubtedly encourages and supports visitors to the area, which in turn will benefit the District's businesses.

9.1.5 The NFDC makes an unrestricted annual core grant to the Trust to support its work. In our view, this support should be used to benefit local activities and thus be used by the Trust on the Library and the educational programmes, as the main beneficiaries of these services are local people. It is essential that NFDC retain this commitment to their constituents.

9.1.6 HCC gave funds to the Trust when the lease was purchased in 1998 and when the new displays were installed in 2003/ 2004. However it has not given a grant this year. HCC supports the St Barbe museum in Lymington, and funds part of the salary of the education officer there to do collaborative work with, among others, the Museum at Lyndhurst. The Trust should consider approaching HCC for an annual grant towards educational provision. Up to £10K per annum would seem fair, given the support to HCC residents.

9.1.7 We were told that the Christopher Tower Foundation has made a verbal offer of an increase in support from £15K to £25K this year, but there is a proposal that this is spent on more staffing for the library rather than setting off the deficit caused by the library. It is hoped that the Christopher Tower Foundation will eventually provide an endowment which would provide for the salary of the librarian, but progress on this may not be made for several years.

9.1.8 This year the Reta Lila Howard fund has donated £20 000 to cover the salary of a new Education Development Officer and her outreach budget. She took up her post in November 2006. Other donations are given occasionally. For example £7 000 was given this year for more equipment for the Field Studies room, and there are occasional grants from industry. There is no single Trustee or member of staff who has the responsibility of seeking donations and grants.

9.2 Future financial stability

9.2.1 The greatest requirement of the Trust (excluding the Gift Shop) is to secure much better day-to-day financial management. While some confusion inevitably arises in the accounts with the split between the Trading Company and the so-called 'Treasurer's Account', we found the budget estimates seemed to be based on theory rather than reality. No financial targets exist and there is no indication as to how the financial shortfall will be met. The budget for 06/07 presented to the Trustees in March 2006 showed a funding gap of £42K. However no plan was presented as to how the funding gap was to be met.

9.2.2 The year to date (YTD) spend and the likely outturn for the year were difficult to reconcile with the data provided to us. In particular, the assignment of overheads seemed random other than for building maintenance and core service costs, which were assessed by floor area. Budgets appeared to be set involving a significant loss without any indication of how the shortfall would be met. The Trust is, of course, asset rich on its balance sheet but this is of no value in the day to day cash flow of the Trust.

9.2.3 We therefore recommend the following actions to the Trust:

1. That the budget is divided into six headings, four for the Trust and two for the Trading Company.
2. That a new financial management system is introduced to allow expenditure / income against the six headings. Grant income should be specifically allocated to a function.
3. That the six headings are Library, Education service (children), Lectures and exhibitions, Book publishing and sales, Gift Shop and Museum.
4. That building maintenance and core service costs be divided by floor area occupied.

5. That a schedule be devised to share all the administrative overheads according to which of the six sections creates the cost.
6. That a budget manager is appointed for each sub-heading with responsibility to ensure income and expenditure match. Forward expenditure commitments should not be made without an income stream.
7. That an individual is responsible for seeking external funds to support the budget, based on the outcome to be achieved by that function.

Some further commentary on the 06 /07 YTD figures and other current financial matters are covered in the confidential financial Annex.

10. Conclusions

10.1 General

10.1.1 Our overall conclusion is that there are great potential benefits to both the Trust and the NPA of an “Association”. In our view, the NPA needs a central presence within the New Forest to help establish itself. Beyond the initial steps to form an Association and provide a New Forest Centre, a better agreement over the running of the VIC with NFDC needs to be part of a second stage. In entering an Association, the Trust will have to accept changes and the NPA will have to limit its role to that of a partner, not a controller. The financial issues will run the risk of creating tensions and so arrangements on both sides must be transparent and inspire mutual confidence.

10.1.2 Thus we conclude that the present museum complex should become the “New Forest Centre” and be branded for the National Park as recommended in para 7.2.4. (We consider the name the “New Forest National Park Centre” to be too long for marketing and signage purposes). Branding needs to be consistent within the complex and especially on all signs and marketing products. The Library and VIC signage on the building could remain. The Association needs to provide a new income to the Trust, a revamped display and new arrangements by the Trust to run its affairs as a partner with NPA and NFDC (especially as the NFDC is the present VIC and car park manager).

10.1.3 For the Trust to develop and capitalise on its potential strengths, it needs proper executive leadership. For the New Forest Centre to run effectively, and for the many relationships to be managed, the NPA needs to have executive leadership within the Lyndhurst complex. We recommend that the most beneficial contribution the NPA could make to ensure the success of an Association is to make an annual grant to part fund a New Forest Centre Manager.

10.1.4 The financial management of the Trust must be revised urgently and thoroughly. Setting expenditure budgets without adequate income prospects is highly risky and could lead to the Trust trading insolvently, unless it sold its major asset. The Trust must be able to show it is a “going concern” for cash flow. We have recommended a number of specific actions to be taken and we suggest these should be done for the new Financial Year. Furthermore it is unacceptable to have no proper information on visitors or accurate records on the income from different parts of general and educational visitors.

10.1.5 The Trust needs a simple and achievable forward plan which the NPA supports. The plan for 2003-05 lacks credibility as there was no evidence that human or financial resources were available to deliver the plan. The Trustees in their March 2006 meeting did not appear to review how well the 2003-05 plan had been implemented nor how much of the business plan had succeeded.

10.1.6 Above all the Trust needs to sustain its current income sources and add to them if it is to become financially stable. Hence we strongly recommend against free admission to the Display / Experience. If free admission was implemented the Trust would forfeit income in excess of £20 000 per annum. This pays for a substantial amount of fixed overheads and generates a small surplus towards other overhead costs. The aim must be for each budget heading (we have recommended six) to have credible income/ expenditure plans each year. Frankly, the education and library cannot sustain administrative overheads of circa £10k each annually. A small study should be conducted as to how the administrative salary cost is actually spent so that the cost can be properly assigned to each of the six activities we have identified. Without that information, proper budgeting will remain problematical.

10.2 Library

The library is an excellent asset for the Trust and for the New Forest. Its prospects of significant revenue income from its activities are virtually nil. There are two significant costs of running the library. Firstly it occupies a large floor area with expensive and essential environmental controls. Secondly the benefits of the library will be hard to realise without adequate staffing, both paid and voluntary. The key objective for the Trust in the future must be to make the library contain its costs to no more than its income for the library on an annual basis. A proper annual budget must be set and then income assigned to meet the planned expenditure. Realistically it either needs an assured annual grant from the Christopher Tower Foundation or similar source and, if possible, an endowment yielding at least £20k per annum.

10.3 Education

10.3.1 The New Forest provides a wide variety of opportunities for education and enjoyment (not that these are mutually exclusive!). The activities offered at the Trust give specific interpretation of the unique nature of the New Forest, as opposed to facilitating environmental studies which use the New Forest as a field site but could use other sites in southern England equally well. The programme matches the purposes of the NPA, and will expand when the projects being set up by the new Education Development Officer start, and when the Forest Day in collaboration with the FC is offered to schools.

10.3.2 The NPA should support the existing programme provided by the Trust and ensure the new developments are sustained. There would be no point in setting up yet another education programme when a good one exists which already has contacts with schools. If staffing were increased there would be opportunities to increase the number of school visits to the Museum and to extend outreach programmes. The NPA could also support projects such as setting up loan boxes for schools.

10.4 Interpretation

10.4.1 It would be appropriate for the NPA to support the Museum complex at Lyndhurst because

- The NPA needs a physical presence in the New Forest to fulfil its duties
- The displays enhance understanding of the unique culture and history of the New Forest
- Many websites give details of visitor attractions but only a few websites attempt to interpret the New Forest.
- The VIC run by NFDC can promote tourism which could be made more sustainable in the New Forest
- The VIC could promote the New Forest National Park
- There could be an outlet for NPA publications
- Current visitor numbers indicate that centres where people are welcomed, have face to face interaction and are provided with orientation and information are still well used when the visitors arrive, even if they have used the Internet to plan their visit.
- This is likely to be the situation in the foreseeable future, though a higher proportion of information in the VIC may be provided on-screen in the future. Despite all the electronic advances, most visitors continue to seek destinations, and face to face contact.

10.4.2 The Museum complex at Lyndhurst offers more than just an interpretative display. The centre, VIC and Christopher Tower Library are used all year round.

10.4.3 Support from the NPA would be more effective if given to one main interpretation centre which is a destination in itself, rather than to a cluster of small centres. A cluster of small centres would also be more expensive to staff than one main centre. The interpretation potentially has more impact in a Centre than on scattered display points through the National Park.

10.5 Future Governance

10.5.1 For the Trust to thrive and an Association to be productive, simple structures with clear accountabilities are needed. The individuals who are members of key groups need to make a commitment to attend them regularly and deliver agreed action. For the future we suggest:

1. NCT Board of Trustees

Needs 6 – 12 active members with a Chair who can commit enough time and energy to help drive the reinvigorated Trust, and it needs to meet three or four times per annum. No executive staff member of the NPA should be a Trustee because of potential conflict of financial responsibility. The Board has overall responsibility for the Trust and all its activities.

2. Trading Company Board of Directors

A small Board is needed to fulfil the fiduciary duties required. They should write a short Terms of Reference and provide the Trustees with regular reports. Their primary objective is to maximise net income to the Trust.

3. Executive Management Group

This would be a new group to support the Visitor Centre manager and provide a clear focus for an Association between the NPA and the Trust. We suggest the Trust Chair should chair this group with two trustees from the Trust, two nominees from the NPA (one of whom should be the Director for Understanding and Enjoyment) and one representative from the NFDC. There may be a case for an additional independent member.

The role of this group would include

- (a) To approve the annual plan for the New Forest Centre and seek Trustees' endorsement
- (b) To approve the marketing plan and monitor its effectiveness
- (c) To review visitor satisfaction reports
- (d) To resolve any issues arising from the activities of the three organisations
- (e) To review collaboration within the New Forest of the New Forest Centre's activities
- (f) To receive financial reports from the Trust and Trading Company
- (g) To report its activities to the Trustee Board

Whilst the Trustee Board must retain overall responsibility so that the Charitable purposes are protected, much of the planning and management would be delegated to the executive Management Group.

11. Proposed basis for an Association

11.1 The analysis thus far suggests advantages for both the NPA and the Trust of a formal Association. More importantly, visitors to the New Forest (general and educational) will benefit from the collaboration in several ways. For local residents it will show local cooperation and benefits from the NPA presence.

11.2 If there is no Association, there are clear losses of benefit to both the NPA and the Trust and their clients. In the near future the NPA would have no major, tangible presence for visitors within the Park to interpret and promote the unique features of the New Forest. The NPA may be perceived locally as ignoring existing interests, and perhaps spending money on other facilities which replicate much of what is already present. Any new centre would take several years to be operational.

11.3 The Association must have shared objectives against which both the NPA and the Trust gain benefit towards their purposes.

We suggest these are:

1. To develop a jointly managed New Forest Centre
2. To increase the number of visitors to the New Forest Centre
3. To use the New Forest Centre to promote a better understanding of the unique qualities of the New Forest
4. To strengthen the Trust's management and financial stability
5. To provide educational opportunities for children and adults
6. To provide the NPA with a partner in education about the core of the New Forest (complementing St Barbe's for the coast)
7. To give the NPA a stake in the Trust Library

12. Business models

12.1 Business models essentially fall into two categories if the concept of an Association is accepted. The first model is that the NPA takes over the Museum Complex at Lyndhurst (para 12.2 elaborates on this). The other basic model is that an Association is formed between the NPA and the Trust, and there are many possible models. For a successful Association there needs to be mutual respect and both partners need to contribute actively. For the Trust, it needs to have financial benefits, and the NPA needs to show value for money and deliver the priority objective U in its Corporate Plan: "Encourage everyone to understand and enjoy the New Forest National Park's special qualities, while ensuring that its character is not harmed". Paragraph 12.3 is a commentary on what has been termed "Version 5". This

document was given to us by the NPA and was said to represent the current position on negotiations prior to the appointment of consultants. In our view, there are insufficient financial benefits to the Trust to make “Version 5” a fair and equitable agreement, and in paragraph 12.4 we suggest an alternative basis for negotiations. A successful conclusion will require commitment by both parties beyond the financial arrangements which have tended to over-dominate.

12.2 An option would be for the NPA to purchase the Museum Complex from the Trust and to lease back the library and educational facilities for the Trust to manage. The Trust could invest the proceeds in an endowment to provide an income for their facilities. The Trading Company would be wound up. The NPA would run the museum display, Gift Shop and gallery; perhaps also the VIC in due course. Initially, costs for the NPA would be high. The complex is valued at £1.82 million on the balance sheet and a goodwill payment would also be necessary. Also, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Christopher Tower Foundation might expect some repayment of their grants. The fixed running costs of the complex are around £60K per annum. In addition staff costs for the NPA are likely to be in excess of £100K per annum. Against that, the NPA would have a rental income from the NFDC and the Trust plus profits from the Gift Shop and the exhibition. Overall this is an expensive option with high opportunity costs. Apart from control of the Museum Complex, there would be few benefits to the NPA from the capital expenditure. The NPA could claim local benefit as it would have created a wealthy charitable trust.

12.3 “Version 5” is the most recent set of proposals for an Association. We were told that the document was dated August 2006. Our comments on the detailed proposals are:

Proposal 1: We have covered the naming issues in our report. Ideally the names would be tested on a proper sample of visitors, or advice taken from a trusted market specialist to ensure the names chosen work well in all planned marketing and usage.

Proposal 2/ Proposal 3: These need to be designed as a unity to avoid unnecessary repetition. The proposed displays outside the “Museum” should be uncontroversial and we have commented on possible changes to the VIC to support the National Park.

Proposal 4: Service standards do need to be high, but it will take time to achieve. We have read the 2004 document entitled “Minimum Service Standards for National Park Centres in England, Scotland and Wales” (draft, 2004). It is a long and bureaucratic document. Much of the content is sound, normal practice but it is full of weasel words and lacks a focus on visitor needs. It might be used as a starting point for setting service standards. There should be a commitment by the NPA to support the necessary staff and volunteer training.

Proposal 5 gives no additional income to the Trust and the offer is less than the income received from admissions in 2006 so far. Our report strongly recommends that an entrance charge remains unless the NPA is prepared to add substantial additional resources annually in addition to what we suggest in our recommended business option. Children under 16 should go free. On a conducted educational tour they should pay for an educational service and not for entry to the Museum display.

Proposal 6: The Trust's educational programme, working closely with the FC and St Barbe's, has the potential to provide the key programmes that fall within NP objectives. The NPA should add real value by focussing on new educational outcomes rather than simply funding more liaison and coordination.

Proposal 7: We consider that the NPA should support outcomes from specific services rather than give a general grant; the NPA should also pay some of the fixed overheads of the Museum complex.

Overall therefore, while "Version 5" is a potential option, we believe that more value would need to go to the Trust to recognise the scale and quality of the Trust's facilities.

12.4 We propose the following actions:

1. That a New Forest Centre Manager is appointed with the NPA giving a grant to the Trust to cover about 75% of the costs. It should be possible to appoint a suitable individual at a salary of c £25 - £30k. The remaining 25% should be provided by the Trust from the net profit of the gift shop. In addition the NPA should pay 30% of the fixed building and maintenance overheads of the complex (c £20K per annum).
2. That revised governance arrangements (para 10.5) including a new executive management group to manage the Association and support the New Forest Centre manager.
3. That the NPA fund an invigoration of the displays in the current Museum and that the display is renamed. Paragraphs 7.1.2 to 7.1.5 set out some of our suggestions for the invigoration and how the process is conducted. We would expect that an initial investment of £20 - £25k would refresh the displays and provide for rebranding. In future years £10K per annum should be allocated for updating.
4. That entry to the display continues to require a small charge for adults but that all children under 16 would enter free (para 7.5.3). Tickets should be issued to everyone entering and accurate records maintained of who enters. Better information on the origin of visitors is needed. The children's ticket could be produced as an attractive souvenir and might be sponsored.

5. That collaboration within the New Forest be pursued more actively by the NPA and the Trust. The FC is a key partner and the opportunities for joint education activities are obvious. Ideally the FC's excellent "Forest Focus" would promote the New Forest Centre and its activities. Better collaboration with St Barbe's to promote one another is recommended, especially given the complementary nature of the displays.
6. That the NPA should support the education programme of the Trust directly through an annual grant of £15K per annum. This would provide free entry to the display for all school groups, provide some contribution towards the educational programme concerned with the unique qualities of the New Forest and would support the cost of free entry for children.
7. That the NPA provide an initial small marketing budget for the new New Forest Centre. After year 1, the net revenue from the displays should be used to provide a marketing budget for the centre. The marketing needs to use NFDC, NPA, FC and their websites to maximum effect to market the centre as a "must see" for all visitors to the New Forest.
8. That the NPA and the Trust work to sort out immediately better day to day arrangements with NFDC, in particular to sort out the book / map sales issue and the demands for change for the car park (para 7.3.5). For the next financial year we suggest that the NFDC should pay a fair rent for the VIC. Over the next twelve months, there should be negotiations about running the whole complex as a single entity.
9. That the Trust engage more with local residents through developing a Friends group and the active use of volunteers on more of its activities. This would provide social benefits to volunteers, enhance commitment to the Centre and perhaps lower some staff costs to the Trust (para 7.4.3 and 7.4.4).

12.5 We suggest that the initial agreement for an Association is for five years with a twelve month option on either side to terminate. If the NPA terminates, they should bear any additional costs arising to the Trust as a result. If a decision is made for the Association, we suggest negotiations should conclude within three months.

The role of the Lyndhurst Visitor Information Centre and the relevance of the traditional Visitors Centre

The Lyndhurst Visitor Information Centre

There are 17 Visitor Information Centres in Hampshire. Those run by NFDC are in Lyndhurst, Lymington and Ringwood. The VIC at Ringwood provides mainly local services such as bus and car park tickets rather than tourist enquiries.

The VIC in Lyndhurst is centrally situated in the town and the New Forest, beside the main town car and coach park, in an inviting building and it has around 150 000 visitors a year, with over 1000 a day coming in the peak months. The VIC books accommodation, though numbers using this service have dropped dramatically as the Internet has expanded. It provides free accommodation guides and information about local walks and attractions. It has two staff in the winter months and three in the summer. On a very small number of occasions, if there are staff shortages, the VIC shuts. The staff in the Trust's gift shop then try to field enquiries. When the VIC is closed the gift shop seems less spacious as large shutters come down, and a rack of free leaflets is left in the gift shop outside the VIC.

The presence of the VIC benefits the Gift Shop and Museum as it brings in extra visitors, but there is some overlap in the products sold, and customers may take items to the wrong till point. There is an agreement about what should be sold in the shop and the VIC, but there is a grey area of overlap for some books and maps. NFDC says that sales of books and maps in the VIC are a very small proportion of income, so the problem could be solved if NFDC agreed to sell accommodation guides and its own publications only. Otherwise a coding system on the price tickets should stop stock going to the wrong till.

The VIC in Lymington provides the same services as the one in Lyndhurst and is also associated with a museum, the St Barbe Museum, which interprets the New Forest Coast.

Sources of visitor information

When visitors arrive in the New Forest they can gain information from a variety of sources.

- The Visitor Information centre at Lyndhurst and other VICs
- The seven FC information posts at the major car parks
- The FC information centre at Bolderwood (summer only) where there is a small display and a ranger present
- The many leaflets on individual attractions available at campsites, hotels, local shows and events

Visitors seeking information before coming to the New Forest mostly use the phone and the Internet. In 2005 NFDC had around 65 000 telephone enquiries and 33 000 on line enquiries. However centres where people are welcomed, have face-to-face interaction and are provided with orientation and information are still well used when the visitors actually arrive.

We studied the information that people might gain from the Internet in order to assess the value of the interpretation provided by a Visitors Centre.

Information from web sites

There are many sources of information on the Internet. Putting “New Forest” in to Google with the words visitor, visiting, tourism or information produces a long list of links. The New Forest Visitor and Information Centre at Lyndhurst comes up in all the searches we tried, as its name is sufficiently long to contain many key search words. On a search of the phrase “New Forest” alone, the Visitor Centre at Lyndhurst is on the second page of listings.

Sites

newforestnpa.gov.uk

The site of the National Park. It clearly states that the aims of the NPA are

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park, and
- To promote understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities
- In addition the National Park has a duty to foster the social and economic well being of local communities within the Park.

It describes the New Forest as a wonderful place for walking, cycling and other quiet forms of recreation. It says it is especially rich in wildlife with many rare habitats and nature conservation areas. Its advice is to “follow the signs, enjoy your visit and help to keep the New Forest a special place.” It lists a miscellany of interesting facts about the Forest, gives the key dates in its history and tries to convey its special qualities. It describes how the Forest is looked after, lists the providers of educational services and describes its planning function. For the visitor a useful section is “Out and About” which has links to local walks leaflets produced by Hampshire County Council. There are also links for cyclists, kite fliers, horse riders, dog walkers and others pursuing outdoor activities. The website covers all the functions of the Authority and is not just designed to show visitors how to understand and enjoy the Forest, though the information is all there through the many links to organisations in the Forest.

newforestmuseum.org.uk

This is the site of the Ninth Centenary Trust. It describes the facilities of the Trust – the museum, gift shop, library, education programme, events and gives details of entry fees, opening hours, links to other museums, art galleries and to a few other New Forest sites. There is no attempt to provide interpretation of the Forest or its history on the site itself, and no indication that there is a tourist information office in the building. The website focuses on

what is at the Visitor Centre in Lyndhurst, rather than what is in the New Forest as a whole.

forestry.gov.uk

The Forestry Commission site. Only this and the NPA site try to interpret the New Forest in terms other than by paid visitor attractions. It includes maps, details of car parks and closures, details for dog walkers, horse riders and cyclists. It has links to walking trails at Bolderwood, Knightwood, Blackwater, Whitefield Moor, Wilverley Plain, Moors Valley and links to other sites for walkers, for example the “aching legs” site (see below). This information is found most easily by following the links to, say, activities. Searching for “New Forest” gives a comprehensive list including all sorts of management information that most tourists do not want. There are links to FC publications. Forest Life, the free Forestry Commission magazine, covers all the Forestry Commission forests and includes articles on different forests, and topics like trail reviews and cycling in forests. Forest Focus is an excellent resource about the New Forest only, and is printed annually with the full visitor programme for the year.

butcherb.freeserve.co.uk

This comes up on a search for New Forest walks and is also described as the “Aching legs” site. It has details of walks of five to twelve miles from various starting points in the Forest.

thenewforest.co.uk

This is the New Forest District Council Tourism site and describes itself as the official New Forest web site with the official New Forest visitor guide. There are sections on accommodation, attractions, food and drink, and marque (given to New Forest products), and about the forest and its wildlife and history. It describes the forest as a walker’s paradise but though it gives links for cyclists and horse riders it gives no direct information about routes to walkers. It suggests the Lyndhurst Visitor Centre as the best place to start exploring the Forest. Of the 30 paying visitor attractions listed, only about twelve are in the National Park.

new-forest-co.uk

This is the web site of Forestdale Hotels. It gives lists of maps, attractions (again many outside the National Park), some history and a code of practice in the New Forest. The nature section refers to animals that may be seen and there are links to cycle hire companies, but no specific ideas for walkers. The Lyndhurst Visitor Information centre is well flagged up.

newforest-uk.com

This is mainly an accommodation guide with some links to attractions and a miscellaneous selection of snippets of history. The section on walking says that leaflets are available at visitor centres; the section on fishing does not give any specific locations but links to the New Forest Fishing leaflet.

touristinformationcentres.com

A list of accommodation, vehicle hire information and a list of towns on which there is tourist information. However there is no information on Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst or Lymington.

newforest-online.co.uk

A list of businesses, visitor attractions, accommodation and descriptions of New Forest towns and villages with maps. The activities section has the headings horse riding, camping, walking, cycling and water sports. There is advice for walkers, details of two Forest walks, and an advertisement for a shop which provides more information.

bbc.co.uk/handsonnature/woodlands/new_forest_access

This describes general activities eg making casts of animal tracks, how to spot badgers and gives links to official web sites eg the NPA, the New Forest Pony Breeding Society.

cyclex.co.uk

Advertises seven New Forest cycle route maps with GPS references.

Who uses tourist information?

The Tourism South East visitor survey of the Forest (2005) classified visitors as

- Local day visitors from home
- Other day visitors from home
- Holidaymakers staying in the New Forest
- Holidaymakers staying elsewhere
-

The survey found that, averaging visitor numbers on all sites, 29% visitors in the summer were locals, 23% were day visitors and 48% were staying either in the New Forest or elsewhere. In the winter the figures were 50% locals, 31% day visitors and 19% staying (p72).

The most common purpose of local day visitors to the New Forest was walking the dog (49%) followed by other walks. 17% of other day visitors said that their purpose was to walk the dog, and 28% went on walks of up to two hours. Results for visitors staying in the Forest or staying elsewhere were given separately.

Main purpose	visitors staying In New Forest	visitors staying elsewhere
relaxing/ enjoying views / picnicking etc	17%	21%
visiting a town or village	11%	17%
short walks (less than 1 hour)	11%	11%
walks over two hours	13%	8%

Of visitors staying in the New Forest, 61% used information sources before they came to plan their visit. 51% of those staying outside the New Forest used them, and only 27% of day visitors from home and 12% of local day visitors used them. This reflects local familiarity with the New Forest, but does mean that a relatively small proportion of the total visitors is using visitor information especially in the winter months. The most popular sources of information were maps, and only 3% of visitors staying in the New Forest said that they used Information or Visitors Centres. The figure for visitors staying outside the Forest who used Information or Visitor Centres was 5% (p 89). These figures seem very low in comparison to the actual number of people who turn up. They are much lower than the All Parks Visitor Survey of 1994 in which 28% of visitors said that they used Information or Visitor Centres. However it was not clear exactly what constituted an Information or Visitor Centre in this survey.

The sample of visitors which was questioned about the websites they used was small (53 respondent groups) but of these 10 referred to the New Forest Tourism website, presumably [the newforest.co.uk](http://the.newforest.co.uk) described above (the NFDC site).

Conclusions

The aims of the NPA are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park, and to promote understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities. The second aim implies a welcome to visitors, but to achieve the first aim the visitors must not damage the fragile ecosystem of the New Forest. This means that visitors need information and education about the special qualities of the New Forest and this can be provided appropriately in a Visitor Centre which has interpretative displays. Information which interprets the Forest was available on only two web sites – the NPA site and the Forestry Commission site. Other sites were geared to lists of accommodation and visitor attractions, with references to activities which have a some commercial basis eg cycle hire. The exhibitions in the Museum at Lyndhurst fill the information gap about the New Forest and therefore provide something which is appropriate for the NPA to support.

Any family looking for activities that children would enjoy could easily find a lot of information on web sites. The NPA wants to promote understanding and enjoyment of the natural qualities of the New Forest, rather than to encourage businesses or commercial paid attractions. Hence the aims of NFDC in running the VIC differ here from the aims of the NPA.

Visitors need encouragement to explore the New Forest in a non-damaging way such as on foot or cycle. Walking, whether for pleasure or primarily to exercise the dog, is the major activity of visitors, but only a small number of web sites give suggestions of routes to visitors from outside the area. However the number of visitors who say they use maps implies that the sort of visitor who comes to the New Forest is quite independent.

It would be appropriate for the NPA to support the Museum complex at Lyndhurst because

- The displays enhance understanding of the unique culture and history of the New Forest
- Many websites give details of visitor attractions but only a minority of websites attempt to interpret the New Forest.
- The VIC run by NFDC can promote the tourism which could be sustainable in the New Forest
- The VIC could promote the New Forest National Park
- There could be an outlet for NPA publications
- Current visitor numbers indicate that centres where people are welcomed, have face to face interaction and are provided with orientation and information are still well used when the visitors arrive, even if they have used the Internet to plan their visit.
- This is likely to be the situation in the foreseeable future, though a higher proportion of information in the VIC may be provided on-screen in the future.

The Museum complex at Lyndhurst offers more than just an interpretative display. The centre, VIC and the Christopher Tower Library are used all year round.

Support from the NPA would be more effective if given to one main centre which currently exists in Lyndhurst, rather than to a cluster of small centres. A cluster of small centres would also be more expensive to staff than one main centre.

Complementarity of Education provision

One of the Trust's objectives is to promote interest, research and knowledge relating to the New Forest, all for the education and benefit of the inhabitants of the New Forest public at large.

This mirrors one of the purposes of the NPA, which is to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

The NPA has collated information about existing education provision in and around the National Park. This provision is of various different types.

1. Opportunities for outdoor activities, team building and personal development eg Activate Outdoors, Calshot Activities Centre.
2. The story of historic buildings eg Breamore House, Hurst Castle, Ringwood Meeting House.
3. Introduction to farm animals eg Longdown Activity Farm
4. A site for camping and with the possibility of natural history activities such as pond dipping; activities organised by the leader who brings the group eg the Guiding centre at Foxlease or the Scout centre at Ferny Crofts.
5. Sites for environmental studies with programmes provided such as the Hampshire Wildlife Trust has education centres at Testwood Lakes and Blashford Lakes, Hampshire County Council site at Minstead.
6. AS and A2 Geography and Biology field work and cross curricular courses for secondary pupils, combining geography, science and environmental studies with adventurous activities and team building at Calshot.
7. Conservation projects such as Earth Events introduce tasks such as building a deer hide, coppicing and rhododendron bashing.
8. An introduction to animals of the New Forest such as The New Forest Otter, Owl and Wildlife Centre, the Forestry Commission Reptile Centre.
9. Clubs, holiday activities at the Countryside Education Trust's New Forest Study centre, which also runs day and residential courses on topics requested by schools.
10. Specific interpretation of the New Forest, for example the Commoning days at the New Forest Museum, "Ramble with a Ranger" from the Forestry Commission and FC visits to schools.

The environmental education and experiences provided in examples 3 to 6 above are all valuable and contribute to understanding of the natural world.

Earth Events contributes more directly to some of the activities of the New Forest, and the Otter and Reptile Centres also have direct relevance.

The displays in the New Forest Museum are aimed to increase understanding of the New Forest. Schools can visit these as self guided groups and free worksheets are available, or they can participate in an organised programme. The most popular of these is the Commoning day, which includes a visit to the galleries at the Museum, a talk on Commoning and an introduction to the history of the New Forest, a role-play session in the Verderers' Court, and a guided tour of a Commoner's smallholding. There are also talks available on aspects of the New Forest for different age groups. A resource pack on the New Forest is available and forest walks can also be arranged.

Of all the educational provision, the programmes at the New Forest Museum and the Forestry Commission programme are most directed to interpretation of the New Forest as described in the NPA Corporate Plan. A new initiative is a joint day with the FC and the Trust, in which a walk with a FC ranger is followed up with a session in the Trust's Field Studies room. It is hoped that this will be offered to schools early in 2007.

Uptake of education provision

The Tourism South East visitor survey (2005) found that 81% of the 107 Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire schools sampled were intending to visit a countryside site within the current academic year and 58% had visited or were intending to visit the New Forest. A similar percentage of primary and secondary schools responded that they had or were going to visit.

The Calshot Activity centre was most frequently visited site, but the survey did not show whether this was for an activity programme, fieldwork or a cross curricular course. This was followed in frequency by Lyndhurst town, Bolton's Bench, and the Countryside Education Trust. The New Forest Museum was the fifth most visited site in terms of frequency of visits. Total numbers making the visits were not quoted. 90% of responding schools indicated that their visits were related to curriculum-based subjects, most often geography, science, history and PSHE (physical, social and health education). The New Forest Museum was visited in February, April, May, September, October and November but there were no details of the numbers in different months.

The Education Officer at the Museum circulates the programme to about 140 schools, mostly in the NFDC area, which are within about 45 minutes travel time of the Museum. Some visitors come from much further away – for example there is a regular study visit from the University of Greenwich. The new Education Development officer has started to establish partnerships with local schools and is arranging visits to schools to work with classes, present assemblies about the Forest, and talk to teachers.

Adult Education

The Museum runs two series of evening lectures per year in October and April. These are usually sold out, and audiences are limited to 50 by the size of the room available. Information about them goes with the Trust's newsletter to about 250 people in the local area.

Other Museums

St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery, Lymington displays the history and culture of Lymington and surrounding parishes on the New Forest coast. This museum also has a strong educational programme, and HCC partially supports the education officer. One of his roles is to collaborate with other museums in the area and give advice on their programmes.

The Ringwood Town and Country Experience gives an insight into Ringwood in the past.

Fordingbridge Museum illustrates the history of Fordingbridge with tools and artefacts.

Conclusion

The New Forest provides a wide variety of opportunities for education and enjoyment (not that these are mutually exclusive!). The activities offered by the Trust give specific interpretation of the Forest as opposed to facilitating environmental studies in general. The Trust's education programme is unique in offering the Commoning Day. The programme matches the purposes of the NPA, and will be even better when the projects being set up by the new Education Development Officer start, and when the Forest Day in collaboration with the FC is offered to schools.

The NPA should support the existing programme provided by the Trust. There would be no point in setting up yet another education programme when a good one exists which already has contacts with schools. If staffing were increased there would be opportunities to increase the number of school visits to the Museum and to extend outreach programmes.

The role of the New Forest Centre Manager

- To drive the development of the Trust and the integration of its activities
- To ensure the effective running of the New Forest Centre through an annual plan approved by the Executive Management Group
- To manage the relations between the Trust, NPA and NFDC for mutual benefit
- To provide leadership for the marketing of the new complex
- To be the lead manager of the Trust's finance
- To be responsible for advising Trustees on the setting of Budgets and on ensuring the profit and Loss accounts are balanced over the year.
- Ensure tight cost control of the Trust's overheads
- Seek projects and programmes for raising external funding for the Trust
- Line manage the staff of the Trust
- Ensure a Friend's group is developed and that volunteers are effectively and appropriately used.

The post could be termed "Trust Director".