



NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PLAN

Notes from the north-west Parish and Town Councils meeting, held on 15 April 2009

This paper provides a summary of the main points made at the meeting of the Parish and Town Councils in the north west of the National Park, held at Fordingbridge Town Hall on Wednesday on 15 March 2009.

The event was attended by 12 councillors representing 8 parishes and towns, as listed in Annex 1.

The session was introduced and chaired by John Sanger, member of the New Forest National Park Authority and Woodgreen parish councillor, who also undertook to pass on the views of his parish.

The Chairman explained that the purpose of the meeting was for those present to emphasise any major points they wished the National Park Authority to take into account, and to make suggestions for changes to the National Park Plan on some of the key issues raised by their councils. He noted that all the comments made during the consultation had been looked at carefully.

Nick Evans of the National Park Authority summarised the major topics of concern or interest arising from the consultation, with particular reference to the comments made by the local councils in the north west of the Park, together with suggestions made by the topic working groups where relevant. The meeting discussion was broadly structured around these topics. A summary of the main points made during the discussion is given below.

Zoning

- The majority of parishes were concerned about the concept of zoning which, it was felt, would inevitably make the less sensitive zones more liable to development pressure in the future. There were also concerns that it might reduce access and prevent people from enjoying the core of the Forest.
- In its current form the policy is too general and prescriptive in its coverage of large areas of the Forest and needs to be much more flexible to work. However Fordingbridge Town Council noted that in principle a zoning system could work (and had been effective in protected areas elsewhere).
- There was general agreement that most of the areas in the 'sensitive' zones are already well protected by legislation, but that specific policies should be included to protect tranquil areas and back-up land. This would overcome the need for a zoning policy.

Service villages and affordable housing

- There were no comments on service villages on the basis that this was a similar concept to the current 'defined' villages. Fordingbridge, Downton and Salisbury effectively serve the villages in the north west of the Park. There was no wish for any additional service villages in this area.
- There was agreement that there was a need for more affordable housing for local people in the villages. There should be little or no new market housing in these rural areas.
- Small well-designed schemes of a few houses integrated into the village were preferred, rather than larger 'estate' type developments.
- Affordable housing schemes should not be imposed in rural areas, but should be flexibly applied according to the genuine local needs of different parishes and follow the guidelines in parish and town plans.
- Policies for exception sites, if made more flexible, must take into account the protection of the landscape.

Traffic and transport

- The majority were against the idea of road pricing, which was felt to be socially unacceptable. Most also had strong reservations about road closures, particularly where this prevented access entirely. However it was agreed that in certain circumstances there could be justification for closures, with benefits for tranquillity and for the use of the route by other users. These would need to be carefully considered to prevent traffic problems being transferred to other roads.
- There was strong feeling that traffic issues did have to be tackled and that cars could not continue to be seen as the priority if the Forest was to be conserved in the long term. Various traffic management measures were supported, in particular reductions and enforcement of speed limits, weight and width restrictions and changes in carriageway to reduce speed.
- There were concerns about measures which involved more signage (the latter should be avoided).
- Closer working with adjacent authorities would be needed to tackle through traffic from Wiltshire and Dorset.
- Parishes should be more involved in discussions on highways issues which affect their area, and local councils and the National Park Authority should be consulted on any nearby development or change of use which would create additional HGV traffic.
- Overall the focus should be on a variety of measures to discourage through traffic and give greater priority in road use to other forms of transport.

Socio-economic issues

- It was felt that new businesses should contribute in some way to the National Park, which could include the employment of local people. However it was pointed out that larger businesses often employ many non-local people.
- In the rural areas small-scale and low impact business development was preferred, with priority given to home-based businesses, micro-businesses of limited scale and rural-related businesses that have minimal impacts on the Forest. Heavier business uses, with related traffic increase, were not appropriate.
- There was considerable concern about the gradual expansion of businesses into

larger scale enterprises, which is hard to resist once the business has become established. It was suggested that a limit should be put on expansion.

- It was noted that there must be a balance between business development and conservation of the Forest. There was some surprise expressed that at the socio-economic working group it had been suggested that much more development was needed to sustain the Park and that strong controls on development would lead to depopulation.

Recreational horse keeping

- There was general agreement that a policy was needed, and it was noted that similar policies had been in place for many years but had not been brought to the attention of the public.
- However it was felt that compromise and rewording was needed, accepting that horse keeping was part of the social make-up of the Forest.
- Several people felt that revisions to the policy should not prevent it being applied retrospectively if necessary.

Comments on the Plan overall

- There was general support for the approach and content of the Plan overall.
- It was felt that the Plan should emphasise the need for stronger communication links with parishes – especially on planning. A clear commitment for the National Park Authority to work with neighbouring authorities (such as the new Wiltshire Council) was also needed, to make sure policies are integrated across the boundary.
- The tone of the Plan could be softened, but overall it was felt to be more important that the Plan had strong and clear policies.
- There was strong agreement that conservation of the special qualities should be the starting point for the Plan, and the legislative framework should be made clearer. Tranquillity (including updated mapping) and local distinctiveness were particularly important for local communities. It was also noted that conservation should be balanced with the need to enable quiet enjoyment of the Forest, which should be given greater emphasis.
- Related to the above, it was agreed that the distinction between a National Park Authority and other local authorities, including their different roles, statutory responsibilities and priorities needed much more emphasis.
- The Plan should bring across the sense of privilege and shared responsibility in looking after the Forest, and clearly show the ways in which local communities can become involved (for instance through parish and town plans).

Development Control policies

- In general there was support for tight development control policies; it was felt these were central to the successful implementation of the Plan.
- The National Park Authority should influence or work in partnership with other organisations, for instance to control verge parking and inappropriate lighting.
- More is needed in the Plan on controlling light pollution; particular reference was made to tightening the policy on conservatories.
- Replacement dwellings policy should be made more flexible and realistic – with the emphasis on good design. It should allow for dwellings of little architectural or historic merit to be replaced with better buildings, and not necessarily on the same

footprint.

Dog walking issues

- It was agreed that dog mess was an issue in some local areas and Forest car parks.
- There should be more emphasis on education and responsible behaviour to deal with the issue, together with facilities to dispose of the mess.

Further meetings

- Parish and town councillors, the Chairman and National Park Authority officers all agreed that the meeting had been very useful. Participants suggested that regular area-based liaison meetings between the Park Authority and parishes and towns would be helpful in the future.

Annex 1 Parish and Town Councils meeting – north west area, 15 April 2009

Participants:

Organisation	Representative
Ellingham, Harbridge and Ibsley Parish Council	Roly Errington
Ellingham, Harbridge and Ibsley Parish Council	Ann Shand
Fordingbridge Town Council	Chris Dennis
Fordingbridge Town Council	Paul Anstey
Godshill Parish Council	Martyn Powell
Godshill Parish Council	Ann Cakebread
Hale Parish Council	Mandy Ansell
Hale Parish Council	Jim Witt
Hyde Parish Council	Bill Dow
Hyde Parish Council	Brian Waldman
Redlynch Parish Council	Bill Dunn
Whiteparish Parish Council	Sheila Campbell
Woodgreen Parish Council	John Sanger (Chairman)