



NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PLAN

Socio-Economic Working Group Meeting

18 March 2009

This paper provides a summary of the main outcomes of the Socio-Economic Working Group meeting, held on Wednesday 18 March 2009 at the Lyndhurst Community Centre.

1. Attendance and participation

The event was attended by representatives of 17 organisations (excluding National Park Authority members and staff). These are listed in Annex 1.

The session was introduced and chaired by Julian Johnson, member of the New Forest National Park Authority who explained the purpose of the Working Group and gained agreement to its Terms of Reference. Tony Spence summarised the key issues arising from the consultation on the draft National Park Plan, as set out in the background paper. The meeting discussion was broadly structured around these issues. A summary of the main outcomes of the meeting is given below.

2. Overall outcomes of the discussion

The balance between the National Park's two purposes and its social and economic duty.

A key concern raised in the consultation of the draft Plan was the view that insufficient emphasis has been given to the duty to foster the economic and social well being of communities in the Park. The Group understood from the legislation that the National Park's duty to foster the economic and social well being of communities has to be implemented in pursuing its two purposes. However, the following suggestions were made for ways that a greater emphasis on the duty could be achieved:

1. In addition to encouraging businesses that make a contribution to the National Park's purposes, the Plan should support businesses that help maintain a sustainable local economy as long as they do not conflict with the National Park purposes.
2. The National Park Authority should develop a working partnership with the local County and District Councils and other public bodies, whose functions include the promotion of economic development in the National Park area, and consider preparing an economic development strategy.
3. There should be clearer wording, explanation and positive language in expressing the economic policies in the Plan.

The scale and type of economic development

Comments were received in the consultation of the draft Plan about the scale and type of development that should be considered in the National Park. Whilst the Group recognised that the statutory purposes for the National Park will mean that development will be different to that outside the National Park, a few suggestions for changes to the Plan were made:

4. The Plan should support greater use of technological and communication advances. This will support home working, which tends not to conflict with the Park's purposes, and also encourage a wider range of employment opportunities. Careful consideration will be needed for the construction of some of the infrastructure required eg. Masts/pylons etc although technological improvements could reduce the future need for large structures.
5. The scale of development should not necessarily be limited to small scale proposals. Medium and larger businesses that do not conflict with the National Park's purposes could provide employment that would help support local communities.

In addition, there was recognition that significant economic and technological changes have impacted businesses recently and are likely to do so over the period of the Plan. Therefore, it is proposed that:

6. The Plan's policies should consider changing economic and technological circumstances

Development Control policies

The Group considered the set of development control policies in the draft Plan and made the following suggestions of how they might be improved:

7. The Development Control policies should be less prescriptive.
8. Policies should better facilitate the development of home working
9. Policies should allow for the ability of families to accommodate elderly relatives in their homes.
10. Policy DC8 – The criteria for measuring the level of activity on the site should not include the increased level of employment.
11. Policy DC6 (i) – Should not include reference to those who 'work in the immediate locality'

The support for local communities

There were a number of concerns raised in the consultation of the draft Plan about the facilities in local communities (such as the potential loss of local shops, pubs and post offices) and the following suggestions were made of how the Plan might be improved:

12. Policies should not prevent modest expansion of small businesses in local communities outside the service villages.
13. There should be recognition that the visitor economy is important in providing opportunities to support the sustainability of local communities. An imaginative approach to tourism should be considered, including support for local produce, artisans and craftsman, together with diversification by farmers and commoners to maintain and develop a mixed economy that supports community facilities and services.

Other suggestions for changes to the Plan

The Group discussed forestry and the land management policies. It was suggested that:

14. Sustainable land management, including forestry and commoning must be economically viable and generate income for the Forest, and this should be reflected in the policies
15. Land-based businesses should be clearly supported as part of a mixed economy.

3. Key conclusions for further consideration by the National Park Authority

All the above points will be used to help inform the review of the Plan, but the main points for consideration by the National Park Authority are distilled below.

- A greater emphasis should be given to the National Park's duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Park.
- A wide variety of employment opportunities for local people should be achieved by:
 - not only encouraging businesses that make a contribution to the Park's purposes, but also supporting those that don't conflict with them.
 - supporting greater use of technological and communication advances
 - encouraging home working
- Development Control policies should be less prescriptive, allow for businesses to expand sufficiently to support employment, and consider elderly family needs and home working.
- Where possible, community facilities and services should be retained or enhanced. This could be achieved by allowing some business development in local communities outside the service villages and considering imaginative approaches to tourism to support a mixed rural economy.
- For land management to be sustainable, land-based activities, including forestry and commoning, need to be economically viable.

Further comments from participants on the outcomes of the meeting

All those attending the meeting were asked for agreement that the note was a fair summary of the key points raised at the meeting for consideration by the National Park Authority in revising the Plan, or to comment where they felt this was not the case.

Six of the seventeen organisations attending made comments on the content of the notes: the key points of these are summarised below. These comments will be included as part of the views of the working group, to be fully considered by the National Park Authority when deciding on revisions to the National Park Plan.

The balance between the National Park's two purposes and its social and economic duty

- Bullet Point 1 (*of key conclusions*): Social well being / cohesion / inclusion issues were not discussed as fully as liked, and should be included.
One Voice
- It is suggested that Point 3 is slightly misleading because it fails to make clear that economic activity that is not contrary to the purpose of the plan should be positively promoted and supported.
R.F.Giddings

The scale and type of economic development

- Bullet Point 2 (*of key conclusions*): Agrees with the summary, but stresses that home working for a larger organisation (not necessarily operating within the National Park) is in its infancy. Suggests that home working (on a self-employed basis) or micro-businesses can and will work if the technology is in place. The definition of 'home-working' needs to be explained. It is questioned whether Policy LP1.1 should meet the needs of residents first. It is suggested that Policy LP1.4 was not fully discussed, is very patronising, and it needs expanding.

One Voice

- It is considered that the emphasis on technological and communication advances has been overstated and that economic development of 'traditional businesses' have been somewhat overlooked.

R.F.Giddings

Development Control Policies

- Bullet Point 3 (*of key conclusions*): Suggests inserting the word *further* (i.e. to support *further* employment) and removing the word *elderly* (any family member may need to return to the family home for any number of reasons and this should not be precluded). *One Voice*

- Suggests that a key issue has been missed in the way points 7, 10 and 11 have been expressed. Disputes that the general thrust of discussions in this area was not that the plan was too prescriptive per se but that the plan was too prescriptive regarding changes required to sustain the economy within the park – and this was best expressed by the comment "*the purpose of the current plan is to depopulate the park because if we don't have any jobs we won't have a viable population*".

R.F.Giddings

- Agrees with Point 10 of the notes that suggests that 'the criteria for measuring the level of activity on a site should not include the increased level of employment'. However, believes that at the meeting it was suggested that the whole notion of not allowing development which increased the level of activity on a site was fundamentally flawed and contradictory, and this point is not reflected in the notes. Suggests that a point with which many of the business representatives agreed was 'why would any business want to invest in development of its premises if it was not to increase its level of activity'.

Suggests that the consensus in the meeting was that modest development of business premises must be allowed in order for the New Forest economy to survive. Believes that whilst the removal of the freeze on employment activity proposed in point 10 is welcome, in some instances development will have to include some modest increase in the level of traffic or visitors to a site other than employees, in order for those sites to remain viable - it is appreciated that 'modest' is far harder to judge and enforce than 'none' but it is believed that this point is fundamental to the wellbeing of businesses in the area.

It is suggested that an additional note is inserted with a statement along the lines of 'development of commercial premises shall be permitted provided that it does not have significant adverse effect on the purposes of the National Park', as it is considered that this was the intent of the discussion in the Working Group.

Federation of Small Businesses

- It is suggested that the need for a meeting specifically dedicated to reviewing the proposed Development Control policies was acknowledged and accepted during the meeting. A significant portion of the draft plan is dedicated to the proposed Development Control policy changes and it is considered that it was only on the basis that a further meeting was agreed that issues in relation to the quality of the built environment within the National Park were not debated further.

Review Panel of Architects and Design Professionals

- Request to attend any Working Group meeting on Development Control policies.
- New Forest Business Partnership*

The support for local communities

- Bullet Point 4 (*of key conclusions*): Suggests that social cohesion and visitor recognition etc should be included

One Voice

- It is suggested that a key point has been missed in this summary - that the plan fails to recognise that the mixed economy that currently exists, including that of tourism, local produce, local crafts and even the practice of commoning, does so from a man-made landscape rather than something that is natural. Therefore, considers that the plan needs to recognise that management of the landscape is critical to the sustained health of the park's economy and it should assume that this landscape will continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of the park's economy.

R.F.Giddings

- Considers that the emphasis on tourism's ability to play an effective part in supporting the Socio-Economic needs of the Park could be scaled up a bit.

New Forest District Council

Other comments and suggestions for the Plan

- Bullet Point 5 (*of key conclusions*): It is suggested that there was no meaningful discussions on this, and that this can't be a consideration for the authority at this point in time. This was because it was only raised at the end of the meeting by one participant during the Chairman's summing up. (*Updated amended comment*)

One Voice

- Pleased that the role that land-based businesses play within the park has been recognised and that support of these businesses is critical in maintaining a healthy mixed economy

R.F.Giddings

- It is suggested that the proposed forestry and woodland management policies are uneconomic and unsustainable and will in the short-term result in further large areas of woodland being taken out of management. It is considered that they will undoubtedly restrict woodfuel biomass development within the park and within the wider New Forest and Hampshire area, which will have a serious and detrimental impact on existing and future woodland and wood-based industry investment. It is suggested that the policy also ignores climate change and the impact that this will have on species sustainability.

R.F.Giddings

- Suggests that the summary does not reflect the view, which appeared to be supported by most people on the Group, that the plan needs a fundamental rewrite.
New Forest District Council

A number of other comments were received about the consultation process, the requirement for a further meeting and the timing of other Working Groups.

ANNEX 1

Socio Economic Working Group 18 March 2009

Participants:

Organisation	Representative
Beaulieu Parish Council	Mr Charlie Knight
Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council	Cllr Roly Errington
Federation of Small Businesses	Mr Rob Dewing
Forestry Commission	Mr Bruce Rothnie
Giddings Sawmills	Mr Tony Giddings
Hampshire County Council	Ms Frances Stokes
Lyndhurst Chamber of Trade	Mr Trevor English
Natural England	Mr Graham Johnstone
New Forest Association	Mr Michael Chilcott
New Forest Business Partnership	Mr Paul French
New Forest District Council	Mr Tony Climpson
New Forest Local Strategic Partnership	Cllr Maureen Holding
New Forest Review Panel of Architects & Design Professionals	Mr Graham Perring
New Forest Tourism Association	Mr Stephen Lorton
One Voice	Mrs Sue Baillie
Sway Parish Council	Mr Chris Bray
Verderers of the New Forest	Pat Thorne
NPA Member	Cllr Julian Johnson (Chair)
NPA Member	Cllr Mel Kendall
NPA Officer	Lindsay Cornish
NPA Officer	Richard Lemon
NPA Officer	Steve Avery
NPA Officer	Stephen Trotter
NPA Officer	Tony Spence
NPA Officer	Nick Evans