

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PLAN / RECREATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

QUESTION AND ANSWER BRIEF

General

Q1 Why has the National Park Authority published a draft Park Plan and draft Recreation Management Strategy?

Consultation

Q2 Is it true that the consultation period started in August so that people would be on holiday and not have time to read the documents?

Q3 Will you extend the consultation period to give people more time to respond?

Q4 Why should I believe that the National Park Authority will take any notice of views expressed through the consultation?

Q5 Why is the National Park Authority not holding a public meeting about its draft Park Plan and Recreation Management Strategy?

Q6 Why did the National Park Authority not attend the Forest Uprising Group meeting on Thursday 18 September 2008?

Q7 Don't these huge, heavyweight documents show that the National Park Authority is a bureaucratic waste of time?

Horses and dogs

Q8 Why do the plans single out horse-riders?

Q9 Why do the plans single out dog-walkers?

Q10 Why is the National Park Authority against horse-riding?

Q11 Will I need planning permission to keep my horses in the New Forest?

Q12 If they are adopted, will the planning policies in the draft Park Plan be applied retrospectively?

Q13 I have read that the National Park Authority is planning to ban dogs from the National Park. Is this true?

Q14 What are the proposals about dogs in the plans?

Q15 How many car parks would be dog-free and how will this be achieved since the National Park Authority owns no car parks?

Roads and car parks

Q16 Why do the plans talk about things such as roads, car parking and street-lighting when these are the responsibility of other public bodies and not the National Park Authority?

Q17 The draft Recreation Management Strategy talks about 'experimental closure of selected minor roads...'. Which roads, where and when?

Q18 Why is the New Forest National Park Authority talking about introducing 'road user pricing'? Where is this going to happen and when? Are other national parks thinking of doing the same thing?

Zoning

Q19 Is it true that you are dividing the National Park into zones and that people will be banned from one of the zones?

Service villages

Q20 Why does the Park Plan propose 'dumping' development in four villages?

Next steps

Q21 What are the next steps in the preparation of the Park Plan and who will make the final decisions?

Advertising

Q22 I did not know about the Plan: how did you advertise it?

General

Q1 Why has the National Park Authority published a draft Park Plan and draft Recreation Management Strategy?

A: The Authority is required by law to produce a National Park Management Plan within three years of taking on its full powers. Even were that not the case, the Authority would see a Plan for the whole National Park as the single most important document to guide its work and that of others in safeguarding the Park over the next 20 years and beyond. The production of a specific strategy for recreation reflects the importance of this subject in the New Forest National Park and requests for such a plan from a number of stakeholders. The National Park is hugely important for recreation both for those living in and near the Park and for those visiting from further afield and yet it is of great significance for nature conservation as well as being England's smallest National Park. The strategy proposes ways of managing recreation in harmony with nature conservation.

Consultation

Q2 Is it true that the consultation period started in August so that people would be on holiday and not have time to read the documents?

A: No. The original consultation period was due to run until the end of October 2008 and was due to last for 10 weeks – significantly longer than the six-week statutory minimum. This has now been extended (see below). The plans may be of interest to anyone who lives in, works in, cares about or visits the New Forest National Park. By starting the consultation period in August and running it until well into the autumn, the Authority is giving ample opportunity for all who may be interested to read the documents and comment including trying to capture comments from the visiting community during the peak summer holiday season. The Authority has gone to considerable effort to produce attractive, easy-to-use, readable documents in both printed and electronic forms.

Q3 Will you extend the consultation period to give people more time to respond?

A: The consultation period for the draft New Forest National Park Plan and the draft Recreation Management Strategy has been extended to three months. It will now close on Friday 14 November 2008. The extension is to meet the needs of those who have said they would like more time to consider the draft plans, including some local residents and some parish councils and other organisations that have requested flexibility to fit their cycle of meetings. The extension also gives the Authority's members and officers more time to get out and about in the Forest and hear directly from people.

The end of the consultation does not mean the end of the conversation. The next stage is equally important and the Authority will continue to develop its

proposals and discuss responses to consultation with partners, stakeholders, interest groups and individuals over the next few months before a final draft goes to the National Park Authority for approval. The Authority has a legal duty and deadline for producing its final plans so it needs to balance the wish to ensure that people have sufficient time to give their views with the need to give time for full consideration of the consultation outcome. The consultation phase needs to conclude so the Authority can set about looking at the responses, discussing the issues with key groups and revising our plans. This extension gives more time without unduly delaying the process. Work on analysing the responses we have received so far is already under way and will be completed as quickly as possible in the weeks after the consultation closes.

The formal consultation period started in August. The draft plans have been in the public domain since June when they were discussed at a public meeting of the National Park Authority. There was an extensive programme of meetings and workshops before that to inform the draft documents.

Q4 Why should I believe that the National Park Authority will take any notice of views expressed through the consultation?

A: National Park Authority members and staff genuinely want to hear the views of a wide range of people about the proposals in the draft plans. All comments will be documented and reported to members of the National Park Authority. A great deal of effort has been put into the consultation process. Only when they have heard and considered people's views will Authority members make decisions about which policies to adopt.

Q5 Why is the National Park Authority not holding a public meeting about its draft Park Plan and Recreation Management Strategy?

A: Authority officers and members have responded to and will respond to individual or group requests for further information and face-to-face meetings to clarify issues. But the Authority will not be responding on the substance of the plans until the consultation period has closed, all comments have been recorded and considered and members have reached conclusions. The Authority has also published clarifications on certain issues. It is very important, however, that the Authority's officers can record and then accurately report to its members all responses to the consultation and we believe that the best way to achieve this is to encourage people to read, discuss and reply to the plans either on-line or on paper via the response forms provided. This is why we have provided a 12-week consultation period, much longer than the statutory minimum. The Authority does not believe that a public meeting is the best method for encouraging considered responses during the consultation period. But we will keep the position under review to ensure that people do understand the purpose behind the policies and their potential impact. It is also important to note that the draft plans were produced only after an extensive series of public meetings including the *New*

Forest, New Chapter workshops and meetings and discussions with user and interest groups.

Q6 Why did the National Park Authority not attend the Forest Uprising Group meeting on Thursday 18 September 2008?

A: As far as we were aware at the time, the National Park Authority was not invited to attend the meeting. Senior officers from the Authority met leaders of the group just a few days before. We continue to encourage those with views on the draft National Park Plan or draft Recreation Management Strategy to respond as part of the formal consultation process by the end of October. Only after that date will the Authority review the draft policies. We are happy to meet representatives of the horse-riding community at any time and we are keen to continue the dialogue with them.

Q7 Don't these huge, heavyweight documents show that the National Park Authority is a bureaucratic waste of time?

A: The documents are large because they cover a wide range of topics, a long time-span and try to give a sufficient level of detail. These plans paint a picture of how the National Park could be in 20 years time and how the vision can be achieved. National Park Authority members and staff are passionate about safeguarding the National Park now and for the future – they do not believe that mission is a 'waste of time'. The documents are in fact considerably shorter than comparable documents produced by other parts of local government and some other national park authorities. They have been produced in an easily accessible and attractive format but these are draft proposals for consultation and not the final Plan.

Horses and dogs

Q8 Why do the plans single out horse-riders?

A: They do not. All the most significant recreational interests are covered in the plans including walking, dog-walking, cycling, and camping and caravanning as well as horse-riding.

Q9 Why do the plans single out dog-walkers?

A: They do not. All the most significant recreational interests are covered in the plans including walking, cycling, horse-riding and camping and caravanning as well as dog-walking.

Q10 Why is the National Park Authority against horse-riding?

A: It is not. The Authority recognises that horse-riding has a long history in the New Forest. There are currently some 3,500 horses kept for recreational purposes within and immediately surrounding the National Park. The draft Recreation Management Strategy acknowledges that where horse-grazing is rented it can provide a welcome income as part of farm diversification and, if

appropriately managed, can provide additional benefits for wildlife and the landscape. But there is evidence that larger agricultural landholdings are being disposed of in smaller lots due to the high market value commanded by 'pony paddocks' (which is considerably higher than agricultural land). Where this does occur, the landscape can be spoiled by a proliferation of insensitive fencing, poorly located stables and field shelters, bundles of plastic-wrapped hay feed and an assortment of other items associated with horse-keeping. The land can be overgrazed, becoming 'poached' in the winter months, and increasingly nutrient-deficient with a consequent degrading in the ecological value of the land. Left unchecked, an increase in the number of pony paddocks is also likely to reduce and displace the supply of grazing land available to New Forest commoners.

Q11 Will I need planning permission to keep my horses in the New Forest?

A: The draft planning policies in the National Park Plan do not affect the need for planning permission – they simply set out the criteria against which new planning applications for equestrian development will be considered when planning permission is required. In England and Wales, planning permission has always been required for the recreational keeping of horses (as distinct from using or renting land for the grazing of horses). There are existing planning policies that have covered the New Forest National Park area for a number of years. The policies set out the need for planning permission for recreational horse-keeping, stables, field shelters and maneges. The draft planning policies do not preclude planning consent being granted subject to the stated requirements being met. Agricultural land can also be used temporarily for horse-keeping, horse-riding and horse-training for up to 28 days in any one calendar year without the need for planning permission.

Q12 If they are adopted, will the planning policies in the draft Park Plan be applied retrospectively?

A: In cases where planning permission is required but has not been sought, the Authority would always encourage people to address the situation by submitting a planning application. The Authority is likely to pursue a retrospective planning application actively only for those sites where the use of the land is having a harmful impact on the landscape character and appearance of the area. The Authority will always investigate complaints it receives about unlawful development, following which it will consider whether or not it is expedient to take enforcement action.

Q13 I have read that the National Park Authority is planning to ban dogs from the National Park. Is this true?

A: No. There is nothing in the plans about banning dogs and the Authority has no intention of doing so. Some reports have misleadingly referred to a ban in their coverage of the proposal to 'investigate the concept of dog-free car parks', which is mentioned in the plan.

Q14 What are the proposals about dogs in the plans?

A: Dog-walking is recognised in the draft Recreation Management Strategy as an important way in which many people enjoy the New Forest. The National Park Authority values the major contribution that dog-walking makes to the enjoyment, health and well-being of local people. But if dogs are not kept under control they can disturb ground-nesting birds, worry livestock and cause a public health issue through fouling. The draft strategy aims to promote responsible dog-walking in the National Park. A number of initiatives are proposed for discussion and debate. Suggestions such as temporary car park closures and some dog-free car parks are among many ideas to enable a wide range of different interests to enjoy and care for the National Park.

Q15 How many car parks would be dog-free and how will this be achieved since the National Park Authority owns no car parks?

A: The draft Recreation Management Strategy suggests 'developing the concept of dog-free car parks' among a range of possible initiatives to 'reduce the impacts associated with car parking on the most sensitive areas of the National Park'. There are no firm proposals for numbers or locations at this stage. But it is likely that, as for the current temporary seasonal car park closures for conservation reasons covering four car parks, the numbers affected would be few and the locations limited to the most sensitive areas of the National Park. Any proposals would be developed in full consultation including with owners of car parks who would then be responsible for their implementation.

Road and car parks

Q16 Why do the plans talk about things such as roads, car parking and street-lighting when these are the responsibility of other public bodies and not the National Park Authority?

A: The National Park Plan is intended to be a plan for the whole National Park and not just the Authority. It is also the statutory strategic development plan document for the National Park, covering many aspects of private and public sector development that require planning permission. Many other public bodies are responsible for services in the Park that have a major impact on the achievement of National Park purposes. Indeed, all public authorities, including neighbouring ones, have a duty to take these purposes into account in their decision-making. As a result, the Plan is broad in scope, seeking to embrace and influence the work of others in the National Park. We hope they will embrace positively their role in helping to ensure the Park remains a very special place for future generations to enjoy.

Q17 The draft Recreation Management Strategy talks about 'experimental closure of selected minor roads...'. Which roads, where and when?

A: The objective proposed in the draft strategy is to ‘increase the enjoyment of visitors by reducing the impact of vehicles on the National Park, making the Forest a safer and more peaceful place’. In particular the policy says ‘Make road space available for visitors thereby increasing the recreational experience, especially for walkers, horse-riders, cyclists and the less able by: in zone 1 and 2 introducing the experimental closure of selected minor roads during peak periods between Easter and September and potentially at weekends throughout the year.’ There are no firm or detailed plans for any particular road or location at this stage. However, parts of the Ornamental Drive in the heart of the National Park are the kind of location which could be suitable if the objective and policy are approved in the final plan. In particular this could provide opportunities for visitors with disabilities who use powered buggies. Any closures would be subject to full discussion and consultation with land managers and owners, highways authorities, local residents and visitors and they would be on an experimental basis and for limited times. Proper provision would be made for emergency vehicles and any others requiring local access. Ideas such as road closures and pricing are not new: similar approaches are suggested in documents such as the current New Forest Transport Strategy which dates from 2003, before the National Park was established, and in the Hampshire County Council Local Transport Plan (2006-11).

Q18 Why is the New Forest National Park Authority talking about introducing ‘road user pricing’? Where is this going to happen and when? Are other national parks thinking of doing the same thing?

A: In the draft National Park Plan one aspect of the proposed policy framework is to ‘reduce the impacts of road traffic on the tranquillity and environmental quality of the National Park through traffic and demand management, road design and landscaping.’ The text goes on to say: ‘Various tools may be used, such as quiet road surfaces, reduced speed limits, **road user pricing**, weight and width restrictions, single track roads, selected road closures (including temporary and seasonal closures), revised road hierarchy, traffic routing, car park location and size, control of verge parking, car-free zones (only accessed by non-car transport) and landscaping for noise and visual screening. Planning policies will be used to control new development which increases private vehicle use.’ The key word is ‘may’. There are no specific proposals for locations or timings at this stage. Before being introduced, any proposals would be subject to extensive consultation, need careful and detailed planning and close collaboration with the other public bodies responsible for implementation, for example the Forestry Commission and the highways authorities. It should not be a surprise that the impacts of road traffic feature in plans for the New Forest National Park, given its location and the pressures it faces. Traffic featured prominently among the issues raised by stakeholders in the *New Forest, New Chapter* workshops that helped to develop the plans. The New Forest is one of the nation’s most treasured landscapes with the highest level of countryside protection and it is right that the National Park Authority should consider measures to reduce adverse impacts on the things that make it special. Other national parks face

similar challenges to varying degrees and make their own plans appropriate to their local circumstances.

People

Q19 Is it true that you are dividing the National Park into zones and that people will be banned from one of the zones?

A: The plans identify three zones based on conservation designations, which aim to protect the most fragile parts of the National Park by diverting or where practicable relocating some activity to more robust areas. People will NOT be banned from any of the zones. The zones are based on the potential degree of sensitivity of the natural environment to defined activities. Highly sensitive areas are those most vulnerable to the impact of recreational activity. Typically they have nature conservation and cultural heritage designations, or are fragile habitats such as bogs, and/or are the most tranquil and remote areas. More robust areas are those that have greater physical resilience and the capacity to absorb recreational activities.

Service villages

Q20 Why does the Park Plan propose ‘dumping’ development in four villages?

A: It does not. The plan proposes providing for small-scale development to meet National Park needs, including employment, retail and main community facilities within the four defined service villages of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway. It says that these larger centres of population within the National Park should be maintained by providing some employment opportunities and a good range of shops and facilities to meet the local needs of each service village itself, other nearby villages and visitors to the National Park. Communities within the Park will continue to look to nearby towns to provide wider shopping, housing and leisure needs. The plan also proposes allowing the provision of essential local community facilities within villages outside the defined service villages where the proposal is of clear and direct benefit to the local village or rural community. The plan proposes to restrict residential development to the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs through development within the four defined service villages or through the release of ‘exceptions’ sites within or adjacent to other villages.

The proposed four service villages in the National Park Plan are a continuation of the approach by New Forest District Council in its Local Plan which has been in place since 2005. This identified the same four villages. The concept of service villages has applied in the New Forest since at least 1999. The service village policy was discussed at length in the workshops held when the Plan was being prepared. The overwhelming consensus was that this approach was better than the option of not identifying any villages and thus having no policy on the location of new development needed by the Forest communities.

Next steps

Q21 What are the next stages in the preparation of the Park Plan and who will make the final decisions?

Debate and discussion will not stop when the consultation period ends on 14 November. Officers and members of the National Park Authority expect to engage with organisations, interest groups and communities in and around the Forest in response to the issues raised through consultation, focussing on the policies and proposals that may need to be reviewed. Members of the New Forest National Park Authority will then make the final decisions about which policies and proposals are included in the National Park Plan and the Recreation Management Strategy at public meetings of the Authority in 2009. Following that stage, the key spatial planning policies in the Plan – this is called the Core Strategy - will be subject to a public local inquiry in front of an independent Planning Inspector where evidence will be heard in public. This provides a further opportunity for interested parties to make their case. The Inspector's Report prepared as a result of this exercise will be binding on the Authority.

The final Park Plan and Recreation Management Strategy are plans for the whole National Park and include areas of work that the National Park Authority will deliver itself and areas which are the responsibility of others. Where the responsibility for action lies with others, we hope that they will be able to endorse and adopt the final policies in the Plan and then proceed to implement them.

Advertising

Q22 I did not know about the Plan: how did you advertise it?

A: A public notice about the consultation was placed in three newspapers (*Lymington Times/New Milton Advertiser, Salisbury Journal, Romsey Advertiser*) at the start of the consultation. A news release about the Park Plan was issued on 19 August and received wide coverage in local newspapers and on local radio. There have been more than 130 separate pieces of newspaper coverage relating to the Park Plan since it was published including front-page articles and extensive features as well as prominent and repeated coverage on both BBC South Today and Meridian Tonight plus coverage on the Politics Show and in the *Times* and the *Telegraph* and on Radio 4 nationally. One hundred posters were produced and sent for display to a range of organisations including 39 parish and town councils within or adjacent to the National Park and 14 council and other offices with public display areas where reference copies of the Plan could be inspected. The consultation on the draft Park Plan was the front page lead story in the Authority's *Park Life* newsletter distributed to 90,000 homes (all postcodes inside the boundary and those close to it). Distribution of the newsletter was brought forward from its usual date in October to September so that it would arrive during the consultation period and act as a further prompt following from the media coverage. A link to the Plan was placed prominently on the

home-page of the National Park website. Between 19 August, when the formal consultation started, and mid-October the Plan document received 24,482 hits. To date 2,250 hard copies of the Park Plan have been printed and most have been distributed in response to requests.