

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PLAN
WARD COUNCILLORS MEETING: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

A large number of comments were made during the public consultation on the draft National Park Plan. All these will be taken into account in the process of producing a final document, but overall five key topic areas were of particular concern or interest to a wide cross-section of respondents. These are:

- Zoning policies
- Service villages and affordable housing
- Traffic and transport
- Socio-economic issues
- Recreational horse keeping

These topics are the subject of this background paper. The main concerns raised for each are summarised, and the main suggestions made by the working groups* on each topic are given. These provide a useful starting point for discussion at this meeting.

** The working groups comprise a range of local organisations with a particular interest in the topic, including statutory and non-statutory organisations, parish and town councils and local interest groups. Their suggestions are summarised as a draft only, pending agreement from the groups.*

Zoning policies

A. Main points raised during the public consultation

1. Appropriateness of the concept of zoning in the New Forest

Many respondents queried whether zoning was appropriate for the New Forest, and in particular that the implicit hierarchy conveys a sense of priority between one zone and another. However there was recognition that certain parts of the New Forest are more sensitive than others, and that the concept could be refined.

2. The relocation of facilities and services

Comments focussed on the practicality of relocating facilities and services, and queried how the policy will be implemented, particularly the cost implications for businesses. However there was support for the relocation of damaging activities where it can be done in a socially and economically acceptable way.

3. Identification of the three zones / Resulting pressures in some areas

A number of respondents queried the boundaries of the three zones, and whether certain areas are robust or sensitive. Several respondents were also concerned that channelling visitors away from Zone 1 will put more pressure on Zone 3, and that Zone 1 will no longer be accessible to the public.

4. Relationship of the zoning concept with other objectives / policies

There were a number of comments querying how the zoning policy fits with the service villages and how development control policies will be applied.

5. Lack of details of the zoning approach

There were concerns about the lack of detail on the zoning policy, particularly its implementation, and the need for a more detailed map of the zones.

B. Suggestions from the Zoning Working Group

- More explanation is needed on how the zoning approach emerged and how it is to be implemented, as there is a lack of clarity about how the concept will be applied.
- Clarify the links between the zoning policy and Development Control policies.
- Assess whether zones could be expanded to include other sensitive areas.
- Include a detailed map of the zones.
- There is concern about loss of economic activity from Zones 1 and 2 (including local employment). It is important to keep these facilities and services for visitors and the local economy which are needed throughout the National Park, not just in Zone 3.
- Give consideration to a fourth zone which gives more positive encouragement for businesses.

Service Villages and Housing (including affordable housing)

A. Main points raised during the public consultation

1. The scale of future housing development in the National Park:

A range of views were expressed regarding the appropriate scale of future development - with some feeling there should be no new residential development while others supported significant development. It should be noted that the draft South East Plan proposes a housing requirement of 11 dwellings per annum in the Park in the period to 2026.

2. Are the affordable housing targets in the draft Plan appropriate?

Generally agreement that the Authority should support limited open market housing to subsidise affordable housing, with a 50% affordable housing target within the four main villages suggested by some. General support for retaining the rural exceptions policy, rather than allocating affordable housing sites.

3. Other housing issues raised

Respondents suggested that the Plan should address the issue of second homes / holiday homes; the need for a specific policy on commoner's housing; and consideration for gypsies and travellers sites.

4. The concept of 'Service Villages'

Concerns raised included the feeling that the term would lead to the dumping of development with no consideration given the infrastructure capacity of the four villages. However, other respondents supported the 'Service Villages' concept as a continuation of the existing planning policy approach.

5. Alternative options proposed to the four 'Service Villages' identified

Alternative options included: the dispersed growth of villages across the Park; expanding the 'Service Villages' to include villages in the north; and changing the name 'Service Villages' back to the current 'Defined Villages'.

B. Suggestions from the Service Villages and Housing Working Group

- Future development should be to meet local needs, rather than to satisfy wider needs best met in surrounding urban areas.
- The Authority needs to reconsider the affordable housing target in the Plan in light of economic viability evidence and the need to ensure deliverability. A revised 50% target within the four villages received some support as it would allow limited open market development to be built in the Park.
- If the Authority is to rely on rural exceptions sites to deliver local needs housing across the Park (outside the four villages), consideration should be given to making the policy (DC4) more flexible and enabling.
- There was no consensus over the settlement hierarchy. Alternative suggestions included designating a second tier of settlements below the four 'Service Villages' where limited development would be considered; or replacing the settlement hierarchy with a set of indicators to assess proposals on a site by site basis.
- If 'Service Villages' are retained, the terminology needs to be changed.

Traffic and transport

A. Main points raised during the public consultation

1. Road pricing, road closures, car free zones and car park location

These were all issues of major concern due to potential impacts on access for local people, businesses and visitors. However there was also some support for carefully selected closures of minor roads where this allowed access for local residents, and for the relocation of some car parks away from sensitive areas.

2. Responsibilities for transport

A number of people noted that the Plan should be clearer about who is responsible for transport in the area, and emphasise the importance of the main agencies working together (including those with transport responsibilities in adjacent areas).

3. Need for a reality check

It was noted that the policies are ambitious and some of the measures suggested will be difficult to achieve; funding for major infrastructure projects (eg. underpasses) and improved public transport are unlikely to be available from mainstream budgets.

4. The importance of improved public or community transport

Many comments suggested there should be improvements in sustainable transport (including public and community transport, cycle and footpath routes) and that this must happen before a real reduction in private transport is possible.

B. Suggestions from the Traffic and Transport Working Group

- A full range of possible measures should still be included as part of a long term strategy for traffic management, although some will be contentious. It should be made clear that these will need further investigation and consultation and must be accompanied by much better explanation of potential benefits to the Forest. Road pricing should not be pursued unless part of a government initiative.
- More emphasis should be placed on traffic management measures which are less regulatory, rely on education and information and do not deny access for local people.
- The detail of all the policies and measures proposed should be worked up in liaison with the relevant statutory highways organisations, to ensure they are in line with existing policies and that measures proposed are feasible.
- Policies on sustainable transport should be strengthened and include practical measures to encourage non-car use. Innovative approaches will need to be considered, bearing in mind the high cost of public transport provision.

Socio-Economic Issues

A. Main points raised during the public consultation

1. The balance between the Park's two purposes and its duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities

Many queried whether there was too much focus on the National Park's purposes and insufficient emphasis on the duty to foster the economic and

social well-being of local communities. Some considered that there was not enough support for development of businesses, tourism and employment.

2. The scale and type of economic development

Many thought that there should be greater emphasis on economic and social development, and some that further development is needed to ensure a buoyant economy. Fewer comments considered that development should be limited to a scale appropriate to a National Park, or tied to local needs. Some suggested that a wide variety of employment activities are needed. It was also suggested that businesses that do not detract from the Park's purposes, but maintain local jobs, should be supported. There was also support for the land-based economy, tourism, home working and better communications.

3. Development Control policies

Whilst there was some support, many comments expressed concerns about whether policies would restrict the ability of businesses to sustain the local economy and employment. Many thought the policies are too restrictive and insufficiently flexible.

4. The support for local communities

There were a number of concerns about declining services and facilities in local communities and these should be retained/enhanced. Some suggested that development should be allowed in villages outside the service villages.

B. Suggestions from the Socio-Economic Working Group

- 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.
- 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; and 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. Some business development in local communities outside the service villages should be allowed and imaginative approaches to tourism could be used to support a mixed rural economy.
- For land management to be sustainable, land-based activities, including forestry and commoning, need to be economically viable.

Recreational Horse Keeping policies

A. Main points raised during the public consultation

1. Comments on the intentions of the policy

There was some support for the intentions of policy DC12 to protect agricultural land and reduce the impacts of horse keeping on the landscape, but major concerns from many people that the policy will have an adverse impact on animal welfare.

In quoting stocking densities, horse size and nutritional requirements should be qualified. One horse per hectare is too much for most breeds.

There was support for a policy that aids the viability of commoning and safeguards the existing stock of land available as back up grazing.

2. Evidence base

Many did not accept that there has been any loss of back up land due to recreational horse keeping, and that, although there is localised evidence of landscape problems, there is no evidence that horse keeping damages biodiversity or causes erosion.

3. Field Shelters, Stables and Manages (DC13 and DC14)

There was support for a less restrictive policy DC14 – if stables and maneges were permitted generally (not restricted to residential curtilages) this would reduce pressures on the Open Forest and improve the condition of grazing land. Concrete floors should be allowed in field shelters (DC13).

4. Alternative policy approaches suggested

A number of people suggested alternative approaches to the policy, including:

- Using the current New Forest District Council policy.
- Rewording the policy to state there will be a presumption that planning permission will be granted.
- Ensuring there would not be retrospective enforcement of alleged breaches of planning prior to the date of the Park Plan being formally implemented.
- Producing a New Forest Good Practice Guide for horse keeping.

B. Suggestions from the Recreational Horse Keeping Working Group

Not yet available - to be reported verbally.