

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 MARCH 2007

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary

Another very busy month with work again dominated by budget setting, the Corporate Plan and various other governance issues. Work on implementing the Development Control process review is progressing well and performance in meeting key targets has been sustained.

As we approach the anniversary of the Authority's first full year in operation, I would like to record my thanks to all our staff for their unstinting efforts during the year. Working with new offices, new or incomplete systems, new people and a new 'agenda' has been a huge challenge. A challenge which everyone has risen to with some notable successes, including : drawing in £0.5m match funding for, and fully committing, the Sustainable Development Fund for projects assisting local communities and businesses; meeting all of our key planning targets; drawing up a major agreement with the Ninth Centenary Trust to deliver new information about the National Park at its heart; and significant progress, in consultation, on defining the Park's 'special qualities' and jointly with New Forest District and other key stakeholders on developing the Local Development Framework and the National Park Management Plan.

My thanks also go to our members for their patience, advice and support for our work as it has developed over the year.

Recommendation

To note the report.

Resources

Routine

Paper

NFNPA 166/07: Cover paper

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

1. This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 22 February for all work except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in January. Another very busy month with work again dominated by budget setting, the Corporate Plan and various other governance issues. Work on implementing the Development Control process reviews is progressing well and performance in meeting key targets has been sustained.

Members

2. Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:

- Training for Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen, following the February Authority meeting
- Standards Committee meeting, 26 February
- Member training on Equality and Diversity, 28 February
- New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 1 March
- Joint Core Strategy working group meeting, 2 March
- Accommodation Project Ownership Board, 14 March
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 16 March
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 20 March
- Giddings sawmill visit, 23 March
- Corporate Plan informal briefing session, 21 March
- Joint Core Strategy working group meeting, 27 March

3. Forthcoming activities include:

- Informal session to discuss the working structure of the Management Plan, following the Authority meeting on 28 March 2007
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association, 30 March
- Environmental Design Training, 30 March
- Boundary markers and signage advisory group meeting, 30 March
- Tour for members of the Planning Development Control Committee, 2 April
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 3 April
- Interpretation and Education strategies meeting, 4 April
- Joint Core Strategy working group meeting, 13 April
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 April

- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Improvement Board, 20 April
- Authority meeting, followed by Standards Committee meeting, 24 April
- Second purpose workshop (yet to be scheduled)

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

First Purpose

Conservation and Enhancement

4. Partnership Working

- The steering group of the Commoning Review panel has been identifying further research requirements for the review. These include plotting the location of commoners back-up land on GIS and carrying out a review of past educational campaigns relating to commoning e.g. feeding ponies.
- Staff, with officers from New Forest District Council have had initial discussions with SEEDA on their proposals for the Rural Development Programme England funding, and in particular the new round of LEADER funding. SEEDA will be looking for expressions of interest for the LEADER funding over the next few months, followed by completed applications later in the year. Staff will be meeting New Forest District Council colleagues and Local Action Group members to discuss project ideas and will then be meeting with SEEDA officers again to discuss outline proposals. Initial indications are that SEEDA may be looking for a wider approach to the LEADER funding, so we will be investigating opportunities to join forces with other Local Action Group areas if required.
- Staff have also been working with colleagues at the Forestry Commission to identify specific conservation schemes which can be packaged together as bids for a number of external funding sources including the 2007 Biodiversity Challenge Fund and a number of Landfill Tax funding schemes. Kathryn Boler (External Funding Officer) has also been meeting staff at the National Trust and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to discuss potential externally funded projects for their organisations.

5. Corporate Plan

- **Sustainable Development Fund (C4/SE1)**

The following three projects were approved for funding by the Sustainable Development Fund in February:

Honeypot Forest Schools Programme

Honeypot House (nr Exbury) provides respite breaks to severely disadvantaged children aged 5-12. This project will provide opportunities for the children to discover and learn about the New Forest. 'Forest Schools'

environmental education sessions will be offered to those children that come from the areas surrounding the National Park (such as Waterside, Holbury and Blackfield). Sessions are intended to promote learning in a fun way, raising awareness of and respect for the natural environment.

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust - Breaking Down the Barriers

This is a volunteering project designed to encourage young people and vulnerable adults to access, protect and learn more about the New Forest National Park by being involved in a range of practical conservation tasks on nature reserves within or adjacent to the Park.

Hampshire Country Learning - Countryside Education Project

This project will develop opportunities for school children from in around the National Park to learn about farming and where their food comes from. It consists of several strands including: training New Forest farmers in hosting educational visits; running educational visits to farms in the Forest for schools; delivering in-school workshops looking at local food and farming; and running teacher training sessions on the value of farm visits.

▪ **Forest Friendly Farming (C1)**

The Forest Friendly Farming Business Grant Panel approved five grants for businesses which deliver forest friendly farming objectives. These include a start-up company producing home made chutneys using local produce and a grant for a commoner who needs a chiller to store New Forest Marque beef and pork.

A number of projects are being developed for funding under the Authority's LEADER+ Small Grants Scheme. These include an incinerator for the local hunt to use for disposal of fallen stock and chainsaw training for farmers, commoners and allied rural businesses.

▪ **Archaeology (C6)**

Staff have recently obtained copies of archaeological survey data from Hampshire County Council, English Heritage and other agencies. The data included urban archaeological survey and strategy data for Lyndhurst, Lymington, Fordingbridge and Ringwood. English Heritage has also provided to us, and to Hampshire County Council in electronic form, at our request, the survey data previously not included in the County Sites and Monuments Records, resulting from the Royal Commission's *New Forest Earthwork Remains of Enclosure* project published in 1999.

The potential for a maritime and coastal archaeological project is being explored with Peter Murphy, Head of the Maritime division of English Heritage and a range of other potential partners such as the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology. This could involve a detailed survey and assessment of coastal archaeology around the New Forest, the

development of a management strategy in respect of coastal erosion and a range of interpretation and education projects. An application to the Heritage Lottery Fund is anticipated.

Negotiations continue with Siemans about the Gas pipeline from Lockerley to Marchwood. A new archaeological consultant has been appointed and a further meeting has been arranged with Hampshire County Council, Siemans, the Pipeline contractors and their archaeological consultants. Work starts on the pipeline in the near future.

▪ **Higher Level Stewardship (C1/C2/C3/C6)**

The Conservation and Enhancement team are now working on a Farm Environment Plan consultation received as part of an application by a landowner to join the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.

Second Purpose

Understanding and Enjoyment

6. Partnership working

- Staff attended a variety of meetings with partner organisations including Solent Skills Quest (Education Business Partnership), the County Award Officer for Wiltshire Duke of Edinburgh Award, the Forestry Commission and PROGRESS about creating a National Park Primary Age learning resource, a meeting on developing a Solent Forum Beach Warden project, meetings on the HGV diversion route for the forthcoming Tannery Bridge closure at Downton. Staff also accompanied the Police and other organisations for 'Operation stay under 40', during which 88 speeding drivers were stopped and given information on the dangers of speeding, animal accidents and the special circumstances relating to driving in the National Park.

7. Corporate Plan

- **Recreation and Visitor Management (U1):** An Invitation to Tender has been issued for consultant input to the preparation of the Recreation Management Strategy, and consultations on the National Park Management Plan (including the Strategy).
- **Traffic and Transport (U2):** Staff attended a transport seminar organised by the Council for National Parks which looked at how best to progress the recommendations of a recent report on tackling traffic in National Parks. Staff are currently finalising the marketing campaign for effective promotion of the New Forest Tour in 2007.
- **Understanding and awareness (U3):** In parallel with the work of the design consultants developing proposals for Boundary Markers, proposals

are being drawn up for rationalising road signs and identifying more effective ways of reducing animal accidents.

- The litter campaign, jointly organised with Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council, will culminate in a series of litter picks between 24 March and 1 April. These will be spread across the National Park and undertaken by specific local organisations, Forestry Commission rangers, schools or as public events, with Authority staff taking part in an afternoon of litter picking activity.
- The draft Interpretation Strategy was completed in preparation for a forthcoming member workshop.
- There have been several discussions with the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust to progress the Draft Heads of Agreement for a potential Association.
- **Education (U4):** Staff attended Bartley Junior School Assembly to introduce the special qualities consultation to 360 pupils and selected consultants to progress work on developing a Fun Zone on the Authority's website, targeted at young people. The draft Education Strategy was completed in preparation for a forthcoming member workshop.
- **Countryside Management (U5):** Staff met Forestry Commission rangers and attended the Agisters' monthly team meeting. Following further discussions with partner organisations, a date in May has been set for hosting an initial event for front-line staff, working on the ground in the New Forest.
- **Countryside and Rights of Way Act and Access Forum (U7):** See separate report of the March New Forest Access Forum. Following up a previous recommendation of the Forum, consultants have been invited to tender for research to inform the Authority's publication of information about 'easy access' to the countryside. The report will specify what information is needed by the target groups, how the information should be described, and in what formats it should be made available.

Planning Policy

8. Corporate Plan

Partnership working (A3)

- Work continues on the development of the New Forest National Park Management Plan issues and objectives, with Nick Evans leading.
- The Core Strategy Joint Members' Panel met for the second time on 2 March. This informal meeting considered the analysis of results from the 'Future Matters' consultation, the initial drafts of the Core Strategy vision and objectives and the development of spatial options.

- Meetings have taken place during February with the New Forest Business Partnership and the affordable housing providers in the New Forest to explore issues linked to the development of the joint Core Strategy for the National Park and New Forest District.
- Initial work on the requirements for undertaking the Sustainability Appraisal, Appropriate Assessment, Transport Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the Core Strategy have been taking place with the Policy and Plans team at New Forest District Council.

Spatial planning policies (A4)

- Statements for the public examination into the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West are being finalised for submission in mid March. The National Park Authority has been invited to participate in the sessions relating to the impacts of development on protected habitats, and the growth proposals for the Bournemouth-Poole-Christchurch area.
- The issues surrounding the principle of extending the submitted Core Strategy into the Wiltshire area of the National Park will be considered at the public examination into the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy at the end of March. The Authority has sought legal advice on the approach taken and is compiling the evidence required for the examination.
- Members will consider the recommendations into the binding Inspector's Report into the Authority's Statement of Community Involvement at the 28 March Authority meeting – See separate report.

9. Development Control

During February the Development Control team carried out the following work:

- **Planning applications: received 100.** Applications continue to be registered within two to three working days following receipt. The Authority remains on course to receive the projected 1,400 planning applications per year.
- **Planning decisions: 89 issued**, of which 60 were approved (68%) and 29 were refused (32%). Four applications were withdrawn. Twelve (13%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 20 February.
- 84% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 66% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

- **Live planning applications: 290 at 28 February**, compared with 289 at 31 January.
- **Appeals: Two new appeals** received this month. Of the eight appeal decisions in February, four were dismissed, two allowed and two 'split' decisions, allowing the appeal in part.

Planning Appeals

	Against decisions taken by predecessor LPAs	Against decisions taken by NFNPA	Total
Appeals Received	9	68	77
Appeals Determined	71	18	89
Appeals Allowed	26	7	33
Appeals Dismissed	45	11	56
% of appeals allowed	37%	38%	37%
Number of outstanding appeals	5	50	55

- Enforcement: 47 new enforcement cases were registered in February and 46 cases were closed. There are currently some 290 outstanding enforcement cases.
- At the beginning of the month, work started on implementing the recommendations of the Naked Eye Review on development control administration process. With the further assistance of Naked Eye, five project teams have been tasked with looking at the following issues:
 1. Communications with customers – pre-application enquiries, planning applications and monitoring and enforcement
 2. Processing planning applications
 3. Management of phone traffic
 4. Roles and responsibilities within the Development Control administration team
 5. Acolaid

Further sessions took place in March and the consultants have now handed back the final stages of implementation to Authority staff.

10.Environmental Design

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 53 applications during February. Twenty three consultations were returned within the 14

day target, three over, the rest are still live. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**

- Thirty tree work applications were registered during February and 21 determined. During February, 95% were determined within the eight week target date, the outstanding decision was delayed by the need for a referral to the Planning Development Control Committee.
- Five new Tree Preservation Orders were made in February. The preparation of tree advice leaflets is in progress.
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- Work is continuing on design guidance for new agricultural buildings. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**
- Staff are continuing to put together a framework for a Conservation Area Management Plan which will cover all conservation areas in the Park while at the same time looking at the extent of existing conservation areas. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**
- Work is continuing on text and illustrative material for the Park's website. **(Corporate Plan Objective A1)** Design and building conservation pages have gone live. Tree pages will go live later this month.
- The team contributed material to the Education Officer in the Understanding and Enjoyment team towards the preparation of student fact sheets, and specifically on 'Historic Buildings and Architecture'.
- Work continued with Burley Parish on the preparation of their Village Design Statement, which hopefully will be adopted as a supplementary planning document. Paula Freeland (Head of Environmental Design) and Penny Velandar - the Community Planning Officer from New Forest District Council - met for the second time with an enthusiastic group who have volunteered to work on the statement. A Village Design Statement is also being prepared by Hyde village in liaison with us and the most recent draft was received during February for our comment.

Corporate Functions

Communications

11. Corporate Plan

- The 2007 *Pocket Guide* was published in late February. Distribution is under way and copies will be available in the National Park and the surrounding area throughout the main visitor season. **(A1, U3, U4)**
- The National Park's corporate identity guide was published in mid March. **(A1, U3)**

- Work started on writing the copy for the third edition of the Authority's newsletter, *Park Life*. (A1, U3)
- Responses were given to numerous media enquiries about the New Park planning application. (A1, U3)
- Preparation work started on this year's New Forest Show stand following the first planning meeting. (U3)
- Work continued on writing the script for the short introductory film about the National Park for use in presentations, talks and on the website. (U3, U4)
- The website was improved with small changes and updates across the whole site. New pages included building design, and photography competition. Work continued on plans to develop the 'fun zone', a tree section, photo galleries and freedom of information. (A1, U3)
- Communications worked closely with colleagues in the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate to help progress work on National Park boundary markers. (U3)
- Display equipment was ordered for use by members and staff attending summer events to represent the Authority. (A1, U3)

12. Partnership working

- The joint 'spring clean' litter awareness initiative with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council was launched in late February with events and press coverage. (C2)
- The 2007 *Forest Focus* visitor newspaper was published in early March in conjunction with the Forestry Commission. (U3)
- A 2007 photography competition was launched in late February, with the National Park Authority supporting the Forestry Commission's initiative with prizes and publicity on the website.
- Copy was completed for the next edition of the *New Forest Today* magazine which is produced jointly with New Forest District Council, the Forestry Commission, the Primary Care Trust and others. (U3)

Member Services

13. Member Services have:

- Been involved in facilitating preparations for Authority and committee meetings, providing committee and member support and following up on actions arising from the meetings.

- Monitored complaints received by the Authority; finalised venues for 2007 Authority meetings; assisted in drafting a report to the Authority meeting on members' attendance; researched the Secretary of State appointments in 2008 and interim committee arrangements following the local government elections; arranged for the advertisement of the amended Scheme of Allowances in the local press; prepared a members' IT questionnaire; assisted with the creation of a members' extranet and updated members' Authority document files.
- Organised various member events including workshops, the trip to Giddings sawmill which took place on 23 March and a planning tour to take place on 2 April.

Corporate Services

14. Human Resources

- Diversity awareness training was completed for staff and is outstanding for some members. The members' training session raised several interesting points that are being followed up by officers. Work has started on the Disability Equality Scheme with meetings with external stakeholder groups. Working in partnership with these groups staff will undertake impact assessments with the Disability Champions identified in each Directorate.
- Interviews took place in early March for the Project Development Officer - New Forest: Life in Common - post which is a fixed term 12 month contract funded from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Interviews were held with panel members from partner organisations - the Forestry Commission and the New Forest Trust.
- Following a self assessment questionnaire completed by all staff, the first sixteen staff undertook training on Microsoft office software in February. The feedback from this training has helped to develop and tailor further training to best meet the training needs of the remaining staff.

15. ICT

- In January the Authority received over 9000 external emails of which 15 had an attached virus which was detected and removed by the Authority's security systems. Just 650 emails were classified as spam. The Authority sent approximately 7330 external emails in the same period.
- The Authority's web site was accessed just under 9000 times by unique visitors (i.e. not returning within a 30 minute time out period). During these 9000 'hits' nearly 131,000 pages of information were accessed by the visitors.

- The planning web modules for trees and tree work were completed on 2 March and once system testing is completed they will be made available to the general public.

16. Finance and performance

- An extraordinary Management Board discussed next year's budgets and drew together options and priorities that were presented to the Resources and Performance Committee on 16 March, supported by the finance team from New Forest District Council.
- The consultants draft report on Future Funding is planned to be presented to the Senior Management Team on 28 March. The final report will be presented jointly to Defra and members of the Resources and Performance Committee in April.

Recommendation

To note the report.