1. **Summary**

This paper sets out the broad framework for producing a new National Park Management plan, including an outline timetable to enable adoption of the completed plan by early 2008.

It draws on recently published formal guidance for National Park Management Plans produced by the Countryside Agency, but also emphasises the need for the process and the final plan to have a clear New Forest approach and relevance. Specifically this paper:

- Suggests basic principles to guide both the consultation process and content of the Plan
- Seeks member involvement in the overall design of the Management Plan process
- Gives an overview of the future needs for implementation, monitoring and reporting
- Notes possibilities for links with the preparation of the Local Development Framework and review of New Forest District Community Strategy.

The National Park Management Plan is the central policy document for the National Park and the National Park Authority. The preparation of the new Plan is the first opportunity for the Authority carefully to consider the longer term priorities for the National Park, and engage all relevant partners and stakeholders in that process.
Recommendations:

1. That four or five members are invited to form a Design Group, meeting initially in late January 2006, to advise the Authority on the design of the review process taking into account the broad scope and guiding principles in this paper.

2. That officers clarify the requirements and implications of including a Strategic Environmental Assessment as part of the review process.

3. That the final Plan should include the essential ingredients listed in section 5.1

4. That officers carry out further work to test the likely compatibility of policies in the Management Plan and Community Strategy and seek ways of bringing the two together.

5. That the Design Group should provide advice to the Authority on:
   a) options for ensuring the implementation of the Management Plan;
   b) additional research and monitoring needed for State of the Park reporting and the review of the Management Plan;
   c) options for reporting on the delivery of the Management Plan.

Resources:

Officer time, research costs, stakeholder engagement cost, document production and publicity.

Other considerations:

Links with timing and scope of other relevant strategies and plans.
NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 15 DECEMBER 2005

NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW: OUTLINE PROCESS, PLAN CONTENT AND TIMETABLE

Report by: Nick Evans, Policy Adviser

1. Statutory background and formal guidance

1.1 The Environment Act 1995 requires a National Park Authority to produce an agreed management plan within 3 years of its operational date. In the case of the New Forest National Park Authority this is April 2009. The Plan should be reviewed at least every 5 years.

1.2 The Secretary of State’s Guidance to the New Forest National Park Authority emphasises the need fully to involve the Forestry Commission and Verderers, in particular, in preparing the Management Plan.

1.3 The Countryside Agency has recently published new formal guidance on the production of National Park Management Plans, following advice from all National Park Authorities (including the former New Forest Committee). All National Park Authorities will be expected to take this document into account when reviewing individual Management Plans.

1.4 The guidance expands on Circular 12/96 and the Defra Review of English National Park Authorities and makes it clear that the National Park Management Plan is:

- the over-arching strategic policy document guiding the long term management of the National Park;

- a plan for the Park, not just for the National Park Authority;

- the means of involving all relevant organisations and communities in delivering National Park purposes.

The Guiding principles, Chapter 2 of the document, is being provided separately to members. The document as a whole has been used to
2. The approach taken in other National Parks

2.1 National Park Management Plans vary considerably in the level of detail they contain and the structure used. All however contain the basic components of Vision, objectives, key issues and policies. A number of very brief strategies have been produced recently which are useful for referencing policies, but perhaps lack a sense of Park-specific individuality.

2.2 Similarly different National Park Authorities have taken different approaches to the degree and type of consultation undertaken and the level of engagement of communities and interest groups. The more recent Plans have generally included more comprehensive stakeholder involvement. The Plan review process has consequently varied in terms of resources and time. On average, 18 months to 2 years have been required to reach Plan adoption.

2.3 It should be noted that no National Park Management Plans have yet been produced using the new Countryside Agency guidance.

3. The current situation in the New Forest

3.1 At its meeting on 17 May 2005 the National Park Authority adopted the Strategy for the New Forest, published in 2003, as its interim National Park Management Plan. It was agreed that this interim Plan should be reviewed and a new National Park Management Plan produced by 2008.

3.2 The Review process will give the Authority the opportunity to:

- play a central role in guiding the long term priorities for the National Park and develop a firm sense of ownership of the document;
- assess the impact of changing circumstances and the effectiveness of current policies and actions;
- build its relationships with the statutory bodies, other partners and stakeholders, and strengthen their commitment to delivering National Park purposes; and
- assess the possibilities of linking the Plan consultation and the development of policies with the production / review of other key policy documents locally (notably the Local Development Framework for the National Park and the New Forest District Community Strategy).
4. The Management Plan process

Design of the review process

4.1 National Park Management Plan guidance makes it clear that the process followed is critically important if the final Plan is to be accepted and used by a wide range of partners.

4.2 It is suggested that a Design Group comprising four or five Authority members is established to advise on the detailed design of the review process and the overall shape and approach of the Plan.

Recommendation 1:

That four or five members are invited to form a Design Group, meeting initially in late January 2006, to advise the Authority on the design of the review process taking into account the broad scope and guiding principles below.

Scope of the Review

4.3 The Interim Management Plan includes detailed coverage of the underlying character and issues relevant to the New Forest, and was produced with a high level of involvement from stakeholders. It therefore provides a sound starting point for the new Management Plan.

4.4 It should, however, be noted that major changes have occurred over the past two years, notably the designation of the National Park, the establishment of the National Park Authority, the restructuring of rural delivery nationally, changes to the planning system and increasing development pressure.

4.5 It is therefore suggested that the review, in broad terms, should include a re-assessment of all the key elements in the interim plan, including the Vision, objectives, key issues and proposals / policies. The review also gives the opportunity to shape the Plan to reflect National Park designation.

Guiding principles

4.6 There are a number of principles which should guide the review process and the work of the Design Group. These are based on the Management Plan guidance and previous experience in producing the Interim Management Plan.

4.7 The process should ensure that:

- There is a clear focus on the delivery of National Park purposes, as the prime purpose of the Management Plan;
• The priorities of the National Park Authority are strongly reflected, as the organisation with overall responsibility for the Plan;

• All major partners and stakeholders understand the relevance of the management plan for the whole National Park and for the work of their particular organisations;

• There is the opportunity for direct involvement of all interested organisations, communities and individuals in developing the Plan, to produce a strong sense of ownership and support for the final document. In particular, this should include:
  
  o all the statutory bodies and other major partners, in order to build the commitment necessary for successful implementation;

  o stakeholders involved in producing the Strategy for the New Forest;

  o those organisations and groups which are ‘hard to reach’ or have been less well represented in previous consultation work (such as the business interests, young people, surrounding communities, coastal groups, visitors, national interests); and

  o a high level of public awareness of the Plan and its purpose, through publicity and opportunities to comment on the draft document.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

4.8 National Park Management Plans require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (under the European SEA Directive, 2001/42/EC). The SEA assesses the impacts of the Plan on the environment and should be integrated into the review process. This work may require the involvement of specialist consultants.

Recommendation 2:

That officers clarify the requirements and implications of including a Strategic Environmental Assessment as part of the review process.

5. Content of the Management Plan

5.1 The published Management Plan must be a practical document, easily used by the National Park Authority and the range of statutory bodies, key partners, stakeholders and local communities.
5.2 It is considered essential that the final document should:

- include an agreed Vision and strategic objectives setting out what should be achieved for the National Park over the next 20-30 years;
- set out the key issues facing the National Park, current and predicted;
- contain policies which are clear, based on the latest evidence, and will deliver the Vision and objectives;
- be concise, well written and designed, avoid jargon and acronyms and be structured in straightforward and accessible way;
- convey the particular circumstances and special features of the New Forest, and avoid an over simplistic and formulaic approach (some National Park Management Plans contain policies transposable to any Park);
- reflect the international, national and regional importance of the National Park and seek to influence wider policies which will affect the area;
- be forward thinking and ambitious in pursuing a long-term vision and developing innovative strategies for delivering National Park purposes;
- reflect the underlying themes of working together, sustainable development and social inclusion; and
- clarify the links with other relevant strategies and policy documents and explain the relationships between them.

Recommendation 3:

That the final Plan should include the essential ingredients listed above.

6. Links with other plans

6.1 As the key strategic policy document for the National Park, the National Park Management Plan will clearly guide other more detailed plans produced by the Authority and others. It is particularly important to ensure close links are made with major policy documents which are currently being developed locally.

The Corporate Plan

6.2 Work to agree short term goals for the National Park Authority, for inclusion in the Corporate Plan, is helping to clarify broad areas of
interest for the Authority and stakeholders. These can be used to inform longer-term policies within the Management Plan.

The Local Development Framework

6.3 The new spatial planning policies for the National Park, and for the adjacent districts and boroughs, will be a major tool in delivering the Management Plan objectives. The Authority has agreed that a joint Local Development Framework Core Strategy, covering both the National Park and New Forest District, will be produced with the District Council.

6.4 It is essential that Core Strategy policies are compatible with the emerging Management Plan. Due to the similar timing of both processes there may be the opportunity to achieve this through joint consultation events and close liaison on policy drafting. Joint consultation work would have major benefits in avoiding 'stakeholder fatigue' and preventing duplication of effort and resources.

6.5 It should however be noted that the Management Plan may require more comprehensive stakeholder involvement, and will certainly need to include wider regional, national and visitor interests. In addition the Local Development Framework process is driven by a much tighter timetable, with a final draft of the Core Strategy currently required by Spring 2007.

6.6 The suggested work of the Design Group will clarify the feasibility of joint consultation events.

Community Strategies

6.7 The New Forest District Community Strategy and the new National Park Management Plan will potentially cover many of the same topic areas. The Community Strategy is to be reviewed during 2006/7.

6.8 The Management Plan and Community Strategy do have different remits, both in overall approach and (to some extent) in geographical coverage. In simple terms the Management Plan is concerned with achieving National Park purposes, taking into account the Park’s wider regional and national context; the Community Strategy is concerned with improving the quality of life of local people in New Forest District.

6.9 Nevertheless there is a major opportunity to ensure the Community Strategy and National Park Management Plan do complement each other and that policies in the two plans are compatible wherever possible. Joint consultation events may be possible. It will also be important to establish links with Community Strategies being produced by the other local authorities within the National Park.
Recommendation 4:
That officers carry out further work to test the likely compatibility of policies in the Management Plan and Community Strategy and seek ways of bringing the two together.

7. Implementation, monitoring and review

Action Planning

7.1 Action plans are an essential tool for agreeing in detail how the Management Plan will be implemented by all partners, and of monitoring progress on that delivery.

7.2 Most National Park Authorities have, to date, used topic-based plans or work programmes produced separately for key areas of work. Only a few Authorities have produced an overall action plan directly linked to the Management Plan and covering the period to the next plan review.

7.3 Whichever method is used, action plans or programmes should:

- include a clear timetable, milestones and measurable targets;
- allow progress on implementation to be accountable, easily monitored and reported;
- be easy to update to include new or completed work (for instance by using a website based document);
- inform annual work programmes of the National Park Authority and other partners.

State of the Park Reporting

7.4 State of the Park reporting is an important means of informing the review of Management Plan policies, through long-term monitoring of relevant trends within the National Park. State of the Park reports are usually published on a five yearly basis and have only been produced by a minority of Park Authorities so far.

7.5 A baseline State of the Park Report for the New Forest National Park will be published prior to the Management Plan review process. This will provide factual material and information on trends (where this is available through previous monitoring work).

7.6 An accompanying paper will be produced for the Authority, setting out additional baseline information needed for the headline indicators. In some cases this may entail commissioning further research where needed as part of the Management Plan review work.
Other reporting mechanisms

7.7 Regular and transparent reporting on the delivery of the Management Plan is important to maintain the interest and engagement of stakeholders, and allow the National Park Authority and partners to demonstrate progress and address obstacles.

7.8 In addition to the State of the Park Report and detailed action plans mentioned above, other existing mechanisms can be used, such as the Corporate Plan and updates to the New Forest Consultative Panel and other forums. The National Park Authority may also wish to consider further means of conveying information to a wide audience through, for instance, newsletters, an intranet site or an email network.

Management Plan Review

7.9 The Environment Act, 1995 requires the Management Plan to be reviewed on 5 year cycle. It is envisaged that future reviews will draw to a large extent on this first National Park Management Plan, and so can be a process of refinement, focusing on specific issues and policies.

Recommendation 5:

The Design Group should provide advice to the Authority on:

a) options for ensuring implementation of the Management Plan;
b) additional research and monitoring needed for State of the Park reporting and the review of the Management Plan;
c) options for reporting on the delivery of the Management Plan.

8. Indicative timetable

8.1 An outline timetable for the Management Plan process is included below. A detailed programme will be produced once the design of the consultation has been agreed, and the feasibility of linkages with other relevant plan processes has been established.

- January – April 2006 Agree scope and overall design of the consultation
- May 2006 – March 2007 Consultation on Vision, issues and policy options; research work as required
- June 2007 Consultation Draft
August – November 2007 Analysis of consultation comments and final draft preparation

January 2008 Final draft for adoption by National Park Authority

9. Resource implications

9.1 Review and production of the Management Plan is part of the core work of the Authority, and will require a considerable resource commitment. A detailed budget will be drawn up following agreement of the consultation process, taking the following elements into account:

- Dedicated officer time (included within the approved structure for Planning and Strategy)
- Research requirements
- Technical advice, GIS contribution, administrative and communications input from a range of Authority staff
- Consultation events and materials, including specialist consultancy advice / facilitation if required
- Production of draft and final document
- Publicity.

Background papers