NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 March 2013

CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:
This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 13 December 2012. The report has been formatted to accord with the ‘Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Aiming for Excellence’ themes from the 2011-15 Business Plan, summarised below:

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Aiming for Excellence

**In all we do:**
▪ seeking to provide the highest quality of service
▪ working closely with others in championing the Forest
▪ achieving an efficient and high performing organisation

Recommendation:
To note the report

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Equality & Diversity Implications:
There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.
NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The winter months have seen the delivery programme for 2012-13 successfully completed and much work to prepare a focussed programme work and budget for the coming year, which Members will consider at this meeting. We have also spent time looking further ahead, in particular beginning to prepare for the revision of the New Forest National Park Management Plan due in 2015, the overarching document which sets out objectives for the whole of the National Park for delivery by the Authority and its partners. A group of senior representatives of the main statutory bodies and key partners met in January to consider how to take this important work forward.

The rural economy remains at the forefront of our work. A hugely successful conference looking at how to stimulate and sustain a wood fuel market for the Forest was attended by over 100 people last month. This comes at a time of opportunity for this sector, with the recent Government policy statement on forests and woodlands signalling an intent to work with National Parks on realising wood fuel potential. Recent courses in traditional skills such as hedgelaying, coppicing and in equine pasture management run by the New Forest Land Advice Service have also provided opportunites for development of local businesses, all courses being oversubscribed. We have also responded to planning reforms with the unique economy of the Forest in mind, hosting visits of the Government’s Chief Planner and John Glen MP, who has recently taken up a position as Principle Private Secretary at DCLG. We have applied for an exemption to the relaxation of permitted development rights for change of use from office to residential which, given the difference between commercial and residential land values in the Forest, could serve to undermine rather than boost the local economy.

Work on protecting the natural environment has engaged a wide range of people and communities. The Community Wildlife Plan project is working with seven communities with a variety of events organised to help engage local people with the wildlife on their doorsteps, from woodland survey workshops to invasive species control working parties. Work to prepare a bid to a Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme has begun with three well-attended workshops on biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage, bringing together many local experts and interest groups. We have also successfully secured a secondment with Natural England to progress ‘Growing the Forest’, which will work to deliver further projects benefitting wildlife, people and economy at a landscape-scale.

Our cultural heritage work has reached a fascinating phase with World War II New Forest Remembers Project ready to engage further with the public following the gathering of huge amounts of data about war-time in the New Forest. A temporary exhibition was launched at the New Forest Centre with Julian Lewis MP and an online ‘portal’ pulling together maps, aerial photography, war-time photographs and memories is now available for people to add in their own information via the Authority website.

A notable success of the WWII project is the large number of volunteers involved in recording the archaeology out on the Forest and capturing the memories of people who were engaged in the area’s war-time effort. The team was present at the third NPA Volunteer Fair earlier this month, attended by nearly 300 members of the public and achieving a large proportion of people signing
up to donate their time to different organisations which help care for the Forest and its communities.

With the main **visitor season** fast approaching our preparations have included a reprint of the Pocket Guide including the Authority’s messages about caring for the Forest; front of house training for tourism businesses throughout the National Park; a new issue of the Essential Guide for visitors, joint with the Forestry Commission; and planning for a full season of events. The New Forest Tour is agreed for the coming season, with a third route confirmed taking in the south west of the Forest, building on the success of the first two routes over the past few years.

### DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

The report has been formatted to accord with the ‘Protect, Enjoy, Prosper’ objectives from the new Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the previous page.

In addition, a fourth section, ‘Aiming for Excellence’, summarises those activities that support and contribute overall to all our work, and the final section lists Members’ activities and events.

1 **Protect**

1.1 **Enhancing the Forest’s landscapes and habitats**

*Water environment catchment plan for the New Forest*

A plan was successfully finalised and submitted to Defra and the Environment Agency to meet the deadline of the pilot. The Authority received positive support for it from stakeholders on the catchment stakeholder group and feedback from Defra has been encouraging. We have been contributing to final workshops held by Defra to use experience from the pilots to inform the national roll out of the catchment based approach.

The Environment Agency has agreed that we will continue to host the catchment process for the New Forest in conjunction with Pond Conservation. We are in the process of securing funding from the Agency to assist with this and have also been liaising with Natural England who are also interested in funding aspects of the future work. As Jim Whatley the project officer for the pilot has come to the end of his contract it is hoped that going forward officers and the Land Advice Service will provide coordination and progress action on the ground with Pond Conservation.

*Strategic action for wildlife*

As part of the development of a Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership scheme a workshop was held to review projects and priorities for biodiversity. This provided an opportunity to disseminate the strategic actions of the New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan to other organisations and seek their input. Over 20 stakeholders attended including representatives of wildlife organisations, local groups, statutory bodies and landowners. Feedback was positive and we see the workshop as the start of an ongoing dialogue with partners to identify projects for the grant bid, as well as opportunities to work more closely together on projects that contribute to the agenda of ‘Growing the Forest’. This is to be assisted by secondment of a Natural England staff member to the Authority to help develop partnerships to deliver action.

The Authority has been undertaking complementary liaison with senior representatives from wildlife organisations and bodies, with a workshop to identify opportunities for joint working.

*Undergrounding of overhead electricity power lines*

The undergrounding at Buckland Rings has been confirmed by Scottish and Southern Electricity and preliminary work is being carried out with the Estates Department at Hampshire County Council to draw up the legal paperwork, Heads of Terms and payment of a peppercorn rent for
the easement on the ground either side of the cable route. The digging of the trench for the cable will take place later in 2013.

Understanding tranquillity

A licence has been signed with CPRE for their national data set for tranquillity mapping. The disc with all the data was received just before Christmas and is now being examined in detail. The NFDC and NPA boundary will be superimposed on the mapping with the data ‘cut’ to these boundaries. It is intended that the measurements of tranquillity will be ‘ground truthed’ later in the year with the help of volunteers to ensure that the mapping is as accurate as possible and suitable for use within the New Forest.

Landscape workshop

A workshop was held with stakeholders to discuss potential landscape projects which could form part of the Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership Scheme. This could provide significant support for the delivery of landscape objectives set out in the Landscape Action Plan. The workshop was the second of three, the others covering Cultural Heritage and Biodiversity. The workshop explored ideas through a number of themes – tranquillity and dark night skies, settlements in the landscape, integrating roads into the landscape, integrating access to recreation provision, integrating renewable and low carbon technologies, managing forests and woodlands and managing the enclosed landscapes.

Native hedgerow planting at Sway

A recent highways scheme adjacent to Jubilee Fields in Sway will be enhanced with native hedgerow planting. A footpath was built adjacent to the road on a grass verge and existing vegetation had to be cleared to make way for the path. This has opened up the view of the field and reduced screening, exposing the new timber post and rail fence built next to the path. After much encouragement, the highways engineer who designed the footpath and supervised construction arranged for NFDC to plant up a native species hedgerow behind the fence. In the long term this hedgerow will provide screening from the road and a link for wildlife.

Community Wildlife Plans Project

Publicity of the project has generated interest from members of the targeted communities and several wildlife survey workshops for these communities have been organised in these areas. Site walkovers have commenced by the project officer to get to know the resource. A practical woodland management event was organised by the project, in partnership with a new community group and New Milton own Council to generate more local interest in New Milton, and the project has written a biodiversity policy and wildlife management plans for New Milton Town Council.

Events organised: amphibian and pond survey workshop (which is fully booked), two woodland survey workshops, a meadow survey workshop and a veteran tree survey workshop. Community and volunteer surveys and pulling events of Himalayan balsam and other invasive species on the River Blackwater in Wellow and Landford have been organised. The project is being presented at the HBIC recorders forum to generate further support and interest amongst recording groups, and network with local experts who may be able to assist in training provision for communities.

New Forest Land Advice Service training courses

NFLAS have developed, designed and run 6 land management related training courses and events over the last two months. Two hedgelaying courses on farms in the Forest helped to train 32 people in the traditional skill with the help of a local hedgelayer. A coppicing course in woodlands near Ashurst engaged with both adults and children and was run with the help and expertise of a local woodland manager.

The ‘Harvesting Energy’ conference designed and organised by NFLAS was attended by over 100 local woodland owners, businesses, foresters and those with an interest in wood fuel
production and biomass boilers.

A two part Equine Pasture Management course was also delivered during two evenings in February, with 90 people booking on. A waiting list of another 80 people who would have liked to attend will mean NFLAS plan to run a repeat course later in the year. New Forest Marque food was supplied at the events.

1.2 Achieve excellence in development and planning

New Forest National Park Management Plan Leadership Group

The New Forest National Park Management Plan Leadership Group met at the end of January. The Group is made up of senior representatives of the main statutory bodies and key partners in the New Forest – including the Forestry Commission, New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council and the Verderers – and has been established to steer the review of the National Park Management Plan. The Group will meet again in April to focus on the potential gaps in the current Management Plan.

Visit by Government’s Chief Planner

The Authority welcomed the Government’s Chief Planner for a visit on 17 January. Mr Quartermain spent the day with Authority staff and members discussing a range of current planning issues, including the Government’s proposed planning reforms relating to redundant agricultural buildings and relaxing permitted development rights. The day also included site visits in Lyndhurst, Pilley and the Cadland Estate where, among other issues, the local need for affordable housing and the development of renewable energy schemes were discussed. The Authority was able to raise directly with the Government’s Chief Planner its views on national planning policy and the visit provided an opportunity to show Mr Quartermain the impacts of national policy on the delivery of the planning function within the National Park.

Planning Reforms

Government planning reforms have continued apace and the Authority through ENPAA has responded to several recent Government consultations including proposals to extend permitted development rights for homeowners, businesses and schools and streamlining the planning application process.

In respect of the Government’s proposals to enable the change of use from office to residential without the need for planning permission, the Authority has applied for an exemption following discussions at the February Planning Development Control Committee. Like a number of other National Parks, the Authority is concerned that given the significant difference between commercial and residential land values within the New Forest, the relaxed permitted development right would result in a loss of important local employment sites to residential development. This would undermine the local economy – in conflict with the Authority’s socio-economic duty – and the clear adopted planning policy framework for the National Park which safeguards employment premises from competing uses.

Hampshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan

The reconvened Examination hearing sessions for the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan took place in Winchester in mid March. Following the original hearing sessions held in summer 2012, and the subsequent public consultation on the proposed modifications to the Plan, the hearing sessions focused on a number of outstanding issues including the safeguarding of wharves and land-won aggregates. The Authority continues to work in partnership with the other four minerals and waste planning authorities in Hampshire to progress the Plan towards adoption. The Inspector’s Report is expected later in 2013 and will be the subject of a full Authority paper later this year.
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Authority hosted a training session on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in Lyndhurst in January. The training session was run by the Planning Officer’s Society and attended by staff from both the South Downs and the New Forest National Park Authorities. Both authorities are now considering whether to progress with the Community Infrastructure Levy in their respective areas.

New Forest Habitat Mitigation Steering Group

The first meeting of the New Forest Habitat Mitigation Steering Group took place in January. The group – comprising staff from the Authority and Natural England - has been established to oversee the allocation of developer contributions gathered from new developments. The funding available is proportionate to the small scale of residential development within the Park, but the group will ensure the funding is directed towards deliverable mitigation projects in the New Forest, in accordance with the requirements of the Habitat Regulations.

Development Control

The Development Control Team has issued 175 decisions since the beginning of the year, 83% of which have been approved. The approval rate for the year currently stands at 74%. The team continue to make decisions generally within the targets set and it would appear that the targets for minor applications (65%) will be exceeded by the end of the month as will the target for householder and other applications (80%). Whilst large scale major applications have not reached the target (60%) given that 2 out of 3 received exceeded the timescale. However the two small scale majors that the Authority received this year were both decided within the time limits thus achieving 100% for those applications. Approximately 90% of the applications which are considered are decided under delegated powers.

The Authority success rate for appeals currently stands at approximately 65%. Being slightly below that which was achieved at this time last year.

Enforcement

The Enforcement Team has served eight Enforcement Notices since the beginning of the year directed at developments and uses that if left to remain would be harmful to the special qualities of the National Park.

At February’s Planning Development Control Committee Members authorised that a six week period of public consultation be initiated for the draft Local Enforcement Plan. The production of the Plan has been encouraged by Government, as part of the National Planning Policy Framework, so local planning authorities can set out how enforcement will be managed in a way appropriate to their respective local areas.

1.3 Conserving strong local distinctiveness

Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

The Western Escarpment, Steering Group has been working on four of the actions in the conservation area action plan which was endorsed by the Authority in June 2012.

- A draft for a conservation area guidance note tailored to the Western Escarpment (designed to give building owners advice and guidance on what a conservation area is, why it is designated, what works require consent and where to obtain further advice) has been prepared and has been circulated to the seven parish and town councils within the conservation area for discussion and feedback is awaited.
- Preparation of guidance on boundaries including drives and gates is due to start in February.
- Work on looking at ways of identifying specific problems of parking on verges within the Western Escarpment Conservation Area, notifying the relevant organisations and looking at
ways of agreeing the most appropriate solutions is ongoing.

- A constructive meeting was held in January to look at ways of encouraging reporting of fly tipping for early removal. The meeting was attended by representatives from the National Park Authority, New Forest District Council, the Police, the local Councillor and representatives from the Steering Group. It is proposed to produce guidance on how to report incidents and who to contact.

The actions are being lead by the Steering Group with assistance from the National Park Authority.

Village Design Statements

Village Design Statements provide a valuable opportunity for local people to explain what makes their area special and provide a framework to ensure that new development fits in. It takes lots of commitment from a community group to produce a VDS. We have been working with a group at Sway to help them produce one. We’re pleased that Sway Parish Council approved the draft VDS on the 14th Feb, it was uploaded onto their website http://swayvillage.org.uk/ and comments were invited until mid March. The Boldre and Hordle groups have also continued to work with us on their Statements.

‘New Forest remembers - untold stories of World War II’

The New Forest Remembers (NFR) project has been running since January 2012; since then we have seen a huge amount of data gathering and collation, utilising local knowledge, studying relevant war diaries as well as a range of other historic documents and archives, some privately owned. We have also digitised historical RAF and Luftwaffe aerial images, maps, charts and map traces. All this information is being fed into the public archaeological record and elements of interest are being processed to produce an interactive web based portal, hosting the archaeology, photos and memories gathered about the Forest during World War II. Field work to check and update all the identified sites has now commenced with a large number of active volunteers.

A plan for cultural heritage in the Park

A workshop was held with around 30 stakeholders attending to look strategically at the work taking place in the Park in relation to cultural heritage, the challenges for the Forest, priorities and the direction of future work. Much discussion took place on the subjects of archaeology, settlements, buildings and structures, parks and gardens and forest life, priority work and ideas for projects. This will all be collated and the stakeholder group will meet again in April. The workshop was also used to explore the possibility of making a bid for a Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership Scheme which could provide significant support for the delivery of cultural heritage objectives. The workshop was the second of three in relation to the idea of a Landscape Partnership Scheme, the others covering Landscape and Biodiversity.

New evidence about past landscape

A report on new evidence for the Roman period at Lepe on the Cadland Estate, resulting from the Scotia Cross Solent gas pipeline to the Isle of Wight, has provided a fascinating insight into later Roman pottery production with at least nine kilns producing course flat rimmed bowls and jars ranging in size from small pots to large vessels for storage. The evidence indicates that the site was probably a centre of production and is the first evidence outside the better known pottery kiln sites on the Crown land. It is now clear that a relatively substantial community existed at Lepe in the Roman period with ring shaped ditches probably representing house structures and an extensive range of ditches around fields with evidence of track-ways.

Also on the Cadland Estate, evidence for the medieval period has recently been recovered from the site of the new solar array at Whitefield Farm. Thirteenth century pottery associated with ancient field boundaries, marked by ditches, appears to be consistent with manuring the fields at that time.
1.4 Encouraging environmentally sustainable land management

New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme

Historic environment work - A plan had been made and continues to be implemented for Lidar analysis throughout the life of the HLS scheme. This will include a planned programme of analysis as well as providing the Forestry Commission and other agencies with ongoing archaeological and historic landscape data as required for ongoing wetland restoration and other work on the ground. Working with volunteers to verify sites located through Lidar analysis, assess their condition and determine conservation work required to bring monuments back to favourable condition is now well established. In February the project saw the first undertaking of a volunteer lead ground survey with great success. After being provided with the mapping details of Blackwell Common, an area was covered of just over 100ha in size and recorded over 50 sites and monuments.

At the beginning of March both the HLS LiDAR Project and the New Forest Remembers Project combined forces to undertake a week long survey across Ashley Walk and Island Thorns Enclosure. Over a period of 5 days, the survey saw over 20 volunteers assist with the recording of a range of monuments, including a vast quantity of Second World War associated features. In total and area over 1000 ha was covered, with the recording of many new and previously known sites and monuments.

Survey of SPA species and nesting waders - The Authority is supporting the HLS scheme in developing plans for and managing SPA and nesting wader surveys. A proposed project timetable for future surveys was prepared for agreement by the HLS board and will now be progressed by the Authority. This will involve preparation of tender documents, the tendering process, appointment and management of contractors.

Landscape projects - Two landscape projects are also in progress: the first involving the preparation of a leaflet for property owners adjacent to the open Forest, about boundary treatments, importance of native species, avoiding damage to verges, light pollution and so on; the second, working with Hampshire County Council highways team on the removal of redundant sign posts on the B3078 and B3079 in between Cadnam and Godshill.

Tree work in the National Park and surrounding New Forest District Council area

In November 2012 New Forest National Park Authority and New Forest District Council tree teams combined to form a single tree service based at the National Park Authority in Lymington Town Hall. The team is dealing with all tree work matters in both the National Park and the District Council areas of the New Forest. The service is working well and between 1 January and 19 February 92 new tree works applications were received and 67 tree work decisions were issued. Applications are at record levels. 4 new Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) were made during this period.

Also between the same dates consultations were received from the Forestry Commission on 10 felling licence applications.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park

Volunteers

Our volunteers have continued to do sterling work on the New Forest Remember WWII project. The Oral History team are looking forward to a busy year with over 100 interviews to
Chief Executive’s Report

Our few transcriptionists are managing to keep up with the flow of recordings and always ask for more! We are training more interviews and are now able to train editors to work on the recordings to produce sound-bites and podcasts. The field survey and site improvements have continued. We have 431 volunteer days completed to date, in Field Survey, Oral History, Education and Research. This equates to £21,550 in match funding for the NFR project at £50 per volunteer per day. We had a target from HLF of £18,750 so well surpassed, with over year left on the project.

The third annual New Forest National Park Volunteer Fair was held on 2 March at Lyndhurst Community Centre. It was a very successful event with exhibitors reporting that they had an encouraging number of serious enquiries and that they were appreciative of the opportunity to network with a wide range of other New Forest organisations. Nearly 300 members of the public attended.

Of those exhibitors that were taking expressions of interest to volunteer, the following numbers signed up:

- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance- 17
- Game & Wildlife Conservation trust- 11
- RSPB- 3 definite, 4 possibilities
- LiDAR Project- 3
- New Forest Centre- 4
- Sir Harold Hillier Gardens- 11
- Hampshire Search and Rescue- 19
- HIWWT Non Native Plants Project- 20

New Forest Access Forum

The Forum met on 4 March. The Forum was asked to comment on, and support, an application from New Milton Town Council to the Secretary of State to erect fences on Barton Common. Dylan Everett of the National Trust gave an update on the progress made at Foxbury Plantation and the Trust’s future plans for recreation at Foxbury. Dylan also answered members’ questions on National Trust activities in the wider New Forest area. The Forum agreed the content of its Annual Report, and received reports on recent access works from representatives of the Forestry Commission and Hampshire County Council.

New Forest Community Routes

The Community Routes work is now being taken forward through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Discussions with Hampshire County Council’s highways and rights of way officers have taken place to agree the direction of the work and to establish some timescales.

Path improvements

The Authority has supported improvements to a footpath by the side of Sturt Pond, Milford-on-Sea. The path is frequently covered by tidal waters, and so has been raised and resurfaced. More bespoke timber kissing gates have been supplied to the Wiltshire Area Board volunteers who are replacing a number of stiles on footpaths in the northern part of the National Park.

2.2 Improving understanding of the special qualities

Interpretation projects

Final work has been completed on a temporary exhibition to be held at the New Forest Centre, interpreting the New Forest Remembers: Untold stories of World War II. The exhibition focuses on the military build-up in the Forest in preparation for D-Day, and includes more than 100
donated and loaned photographs, documents and artefacts collected as part of the New Forest Remembers project. The exhibition is open 23 March to 28 April.

Work also continues on an exciting new permanent exhibit for the New Forest Centre’s museum, again relating to the New Forest’s World War II history, though with a more domestic focus.

Events

Two Front of House training sessions were delivered in partnership with the New Forest Centre, attended by staff and volunteers from a range of organisations and businesses across the Forest, with a third planned for April.

Planning is well underway for a busy season of stand-alone and partnership events in the Forest. Our first stargazing event, held on 20 March sold out more than three weeks in advance. Date With Nature, a partnership event series with the Forestry Commission and RSPB launches Easter weekend at the Reptile Centre with Goshawk nest-cams and family-friendly things to do.

The theme for the Authority’s stand at the New Forest Show this year will be around biodiversity, habitats and ‘Growing the Forest’. This will enable us to feature some of the excellent projects we are running (e.g. Land Advice Service, Community Wildlife Project, Catchment Project) as well as some partner-led work programmes. Assistance from Members will be requested as usual, in due course.

Rangers

Rangers have been delivering an increasing number of sessions as we continue to extend contacts with pre-schools across the National Park. There has been a lot of interest with visits covering Hordle, Sway, Blackfield, Woodgreen and Hale to name a few.

The mobile unit got a spring clean and was out and about for a cold but busy half term. Visits were made to some of the busier car parks engaging with their visitors to raise awareness of not feeding of the ponies, responsible dog walking and ground nesting birds. Car parks included Hatchet Pond, Blackwater and Bolton’s Bench.

On 27 February the National Park Authority ran a New Forest ranger training morning. 18 New Forest rangers from Hampshire County Council, Forestry Commission, National Trust and New Forest National Park Authority met Sarah Hunt and Jenna Bessant with the aim to:

1) increase their knowledge of the New Forest Marque, it’s producers and importance for the area

2) provide an opportunity for the majority of New Forest rangers to get together, meet each other and ‘network’

Whilst they all work within (or just outside) the National Park and predominately share the same priorities many often have little contact with each other.

It was a very successful morning with many new contacts made, a visit to Loosehanger Cheeses and lunch from the very accommodating staff at the Royal Oak at Fritham.

Media

The Communications Team has worked on publicising the third Volunteer Fair (including flyers, an event guide, press release, radio interviews, web pages and social media); a wood fuel conference attended by 100 people; our submission for an exemption to planning reforms; a consultation on the draft local enforcement plan; a response to the Government’s decision on the Independent Panel on Forestry report; and community wildlife events.
Publications

Visitor publications are about to be distributed, including a revamped Pocket Guide showcasing the additional New Forest Tour route; the Essential Guide, joint with the Forestry Commission; and a guide for tourists which will be used by accommodation providers.

Website

The Authority launched a new website, with features including enhanced imagery and video; improved navigation and search; an events calendar which community groups and businesses can use to submit events; a design which adapts to mobiles and other handheld devices; the ability for officers to make simple amendments to their own pages; plus greater interaction with website visitors through social media.

The site aims to provide better customer service, to showcase the work of the NPA and its partners, while also reducing officer time in answering queries.

2.3 Agreeing positive recreation management

Practical recreation projects

Rangers have been using their links with communities to assist Angela Peters with the Wildlife Community project. Support has included assistance with scrub clearance and litter picks with Long Meadow Community Group, Community Pond Protection Scheme training with PondNet at Golden Hill, Hordle and visits to Landford Bog and Maybush Copse.

The National Park Authority has been working with Nomandsland Litter Action Group to help with their community activities. We have sourced litter pickers, bags and gloves for them to use, kindly donated by New Forest District Council.

On 6 March a ranger attended the Lover Green Management Committee meeting to take forward plans for the management of the site.

2.4 Leading on education about the New Forest

Education work

Work with schools groups has been steady over the winter period, focusing mainly on GCSE groups and colleges / universities. Also a series of sessions with Hale Primary School looking at the ‘New Forest: now and forever?’ and allowing us to draw on a number of important subjects within the Authority including animal accidents, impacts of people, sustainability and climate change.

We attended the Hampshire County Councils ‘Learning Conference’ on behalf of the New Forest Educators’ Forum, to showcase and market the wonderful educational opportunities across the New Forest to 80+ Hampshire school teachers. This has now led to the development of the new Educators’ Forum’s leaflet (also available as PDF), and the new learning map on our website.

The New Forest Curriculum project, a web based resource for schools to assist them with planning to embed the National Park in the school curriculum, is due to be launched in June with a Conference for teachers.
Educational campaigns

The Dogs Forum agree a revised, more detailed, National Park-wide Dog Walking Code and this is now on the National Park website along with various other dog-related information. Window stickers saying ‘I walk my dog responsibly... by following the code...’ have been ordered, as have some credit-card sized emergency hotline cards for dog walkers. The New Forest Dog Owners Group will be promoting these to their members in their next newsletter, and we’ll be putting them in vets, information points etc.

Various discussions are on-going about cycling in the New Forest and National Park web pages have been updated and extended. On the one hand these pages promote cycling as a healthy form of exercise and a great way to travel about the New Forest. On the other we are promoting the importance of cycling responsibly and the need for cycle events to be organised in ways which minimise negative impacts on the Forest. Hopefully, a code of practice for responsible cycling, and a charter for event organisers will be agreed through consultation with a range of stakeholders during the year.

Regarding animal accidents, 2010, 2011 and 2012 all had relatively low numbers of animal deaths (65, 66 and 65), and the number of animals killed and injured in 2012 (83) was the lowest since records began in 1956. We continue to work with partners to find ways to reduce the death toll further. The web site has maps showing which roads are worst, primarily because they carry most traffic. We showcased the work of Hampshire County Council and the Authority in addressing traffic speed and animal accidents at a national ‘Speed Summit’ in London and this promoted a lot of interest from other local authorities.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive local economy

Landowner and Business Liaison

Following discussions at the February Planning Development Control Committee, the Authority has applied for an exemption from the Government’s proposals to enable the change of use from office to residential without the need for planning permission. Like a number of other National Parks, the Authority is concerned that given the significant difference between commercial and residential land values within the New Forest, the relaxed permitted development right would result in a loss of important local employment sites to residential development. This would undermine the local economy – in conflict with the Authority’s socio-economic duty – and the clear adopted planning policy framework for the National Park which safeguards employment premises from competing uses. The Authority liaised with the New Forest Business Partnership in considering the Government’s proposals.

New Forest Marque

A successful rangers training day took place with 18 rangers attending from the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, National Trust and Hampshire County Council. They learnt about the Marque and how it helps promote local produce and how they can help people find out about it.

Current work includes developing sponsorship packages, talking to other protected landscapes about using a Marque to promote their local produce and attending talks, conferences and tasting events.
3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

Planning staff continue to work with Community Action Hampshire and interested local communities in the National Park in preparing housing needs surveys. In the last quarter the housing needs survey for the parish of Netley Marsh has been completed and the final report and its recommendations are with the Parish Council for consideration. Staff are also working with three other parishes in developing ideas for the delivery of affordable housing in their local areas. A separate report looking at affordable housing is presented as part of this agenda.

3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

New Forest Tour

The New Forest Tour operation is now agreed for 2013; operating dates are 29 June through to 15 September. A third New Forest Tour route, the blue route, is now confirmed, and will complement the existing red and green routes during the 79 day period of operation. Officers are working with a wide range of stakeholders to deliver the New Forest Tour marketing plan for 2013.

Sustainable Transport Solutions Fund

A new Authority grant scheme was launched in February, the Sustainable Transport Solutions Fund (STFS). Using funding from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF), this grant scheme allows businesses and organisations to apply for funding to deliver projects which will help achieve the outcomes of the LSTF programme. Eligible projects include those which promote cycling and walking, and projects which develop the electric vehicle market.

Department for Transport (DfT) funding to support cycling in national parks

On 15 February the DfT launched a £12M fund to support cycling in national parks. All English national parks are eligible to apply for up to £5M of funding, to support cycling initiatives such as new cycle routes, development of cycle hire opportunities and rural traffic calming and speed reduction. Applications need to be submitted by 30 April, with announcement due in May/April. The funding needs to be spent by March 2015.

3.4 Encouraging sustainable living

Sustainable Development Fund

The Sustainable Development Fund awarded a total of £74,000 to four projects in December. Burgate Sustainable Kitchen Garden will help teach young people the importance of, and how to grow food locally. Whiteparish Memorial Trust was awarded funding to improve the standard of insulation that will be installed in the new hall. Avon Tyrell is building a new boathouse with many sustainable features including a heat recovery system for waste water from showers. The Campaign for National Parks was given a grant towards their Mosaic Youth project aimed at engaging local young people who are facing economic or social exclusion with the National Park.

Transition

A successful New Forest visioning event took place at Lyndhurst Community Centre on 1 February. Organised by New Forest Transition and supported by the National Park Authority
groups looked at how to move towards a sustainable New Forest in 2030 and came up with ways to help achieve this. Go to www.newforestvision.ning.com/

4  Aiming for Excellence

4.1 Seeking to provide the highest quality of service

Support to members, officers and the public

- Business Services has provided support to various NPA meetings, including the meetings listed under the ‘Members’ section below, and also to members through supporting members’ days, processing expenses, answering queries.

- The team is working through a number of difficult Freedom of Information requests, particularly one involving an appeal to the Information Tribunal where we are co-respondents with the Information Commissioner. Members of the team are also working with the Monitoring Officer on updating the Standing Orders, protocols and codes in line with the updates to the Localism Act.

- The team has also been assisting PPOs with updating and formatting the four sections of the Operational Plan and assisting officers in other areas such as HR recruitment and preparations for the New Forest Show and liaising with New Forest District Council and Lymington Town Council about upgrading the microphone system in the Council Chamber.

- The eight year term of office of three Secretary of State Members on the Authority (Vicky Myers, Ted Johnson and Peter Frost) comes to an end on 31 March 2013 and the team has been assisting Defra in the advertisement process to fill these vacancies by Defra.

4.2 Working closely with others in championing the Forest

- Officers have provided support to various meetings of stakeholder and partner organisations such as the Sustainable Development Fund Panel, NF Marque, Forest Watch, NF Tour Steering Group, Dog Forum, Quadrant meetings, Cycle Working Group, the NF Access Forum and NF Consultative Panel.

4.3 Achieving an efficient and high performing organisation

The ICT team has worked with the Communications team to finish implementing the new Authority website which went live on 22 January 2013.

A preferred supplier has been selected for a new backup solution, and implementation work will begin on this in the month.

4.4 Human Resources

As at 4 March 2013 there are 67 members of staff or 59.01 full-time equivalents (excluding externally funded posts), of whom 21 are part-time and 6 are on a fixed-term contract.

Welcome to the following staff who have joined the Authority in the last couple of months:

- Ann Braid – Planning Officer
- Katie Pearce – Planning Officer
- Nik Gruber – Tree Officer (part-time)
And also to the following staff who have joined on fixed-term contracts:

- Tracy Weeks – Graphics Officer, part-time (one year)
- Sion Donovan – Communications Officer (until March 2015)
- Mark Holroyd – Sustainable Transport Officer (until March 2015)
- Nat Taplin – Sustainable Transport Officer (until March 2015)

We wish them every success in their new roles.

Congratulations to Paul McDaid who, after an internal recruitment campaign, has been appointed as the new Transport and Tourism Officer (part-time) until March 2015. We wish him well in his new role.

We said goodbye to Mark Funnell (Planning Officer), Richard Pugh (Planning Administration Assistant) and to Jim Whatley (New Forest Catchment Pilot Project Officer). We wish them every success in their future ventures.

Recruitment is in progress for the following vacancies:

- Planning Administration Assistant (one year) – currently under offer
- Receptionist (part-time for one year) – currently under offer
- Corporate Partnership Officer – part-time for one year

5 Members

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

- Recreation Management Strategy Working Group, 13 December
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 December
- New Forest Consultative Panel, 10 January
- North West Quadrant meeting, 14 January
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 15 January
- Visit by Steve Quartermain, Chief Planner, 17 January
- South East Quadrant meeting, 23 January
- South West Quadrant meeting, 28 January
- Members Workshop on Priority Setting, 31 January
- North East Quadrant meeting, 6 February
- Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, 4 February
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 February
- New Forest Consultative Panel, 7 March
- Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, 11 March
- New Forest Equine Forum meeting, 18 March
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 March
- North West Quadrant meeting, 25 March

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 16 April
- Members Day, 11 April
- Standards Committee, 29 April
- New Forest Consultative Panel, 2 May
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 21 May
- Members Day, 23 May
Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, 10 June  
Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 June

5.3 Chief Executive’s engagements

- Verderers Tour of Stock, 14 December
- FC / NFDC Liaison Meeting, 21 December
- E-NPOG Meeting, 8 January
- Natural England Executive Director Meeting, 9 January
- Consultative Panel, 10 January
- HCC Liaison meeting, 15 January
- UK ANPA video conference, 16 January
- Visit by Steve Quartermain, Chief Planner, 17 January
- SE Quadrant Meeting, 23 January
- ENPAA Meeting, 24 January
- Sustainable Solent Conference, 28 January
- New Forest Management Plan Leadership Group, 29 January
- HLS Board, 30 January
- Meeting with Executive Director, LTL, 30 January
- Independent Panel on Forestry Event, 31 January
- Members Session, 31 January
- LSTF Programme Board, 1 February
- Visit by Deputy Director, Defra, 5 February
- Attended launch of Fordingbridge Town Council Information Office, 8 February
- Hampshire Plenary Briefing, 13 February
- Strategy for Natural Environment workshop, 14 February
- Dinner with Director General, National Trust, 14 February
- Visit to South Downs National Park with Chairman, 20 February
- Attending and presenting at Harvesting Energy conference, 22 February 2013
- NFA Meeting, 25 February
- RAC Meeting, 26 February
- Protected Landscapes Meeting with Natural England, 19 March
- ENPAA Meeting, 21 March
- Intro Meeting with Assistant Director, HCC, 27 March

6 Recommendation

To note the report.