

NFNPA 495/16

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 March 2016**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

**Summary:**

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 21 January 2016. The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Aiming for Excellence' themes from the 2015-18 Business Plan, summarised below:

Protect	Enjoy	Prosper
<p><b><i>Our priorities:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhancing the New Forest's landscapes and habitats</li> <li>▪ Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with its surrounding</li> <li>▪ Conserving the historic and local way of life</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Our priorities:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park</li> <li>▪ Improving understanding of the National Park</li> <li>▪ Managing recreation to benefit the National Park</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Our priorities:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy</li> <li>▪ Promoting sustainable transport</li> <li>▪ Encouraging sustainable communities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Aiming for Excellence</b></p>		
<p><b><i>In all we do:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providing the highest quality of service</li> <li>▪ Working with others in achieving maximum benefits for the National Park</li> <li>▪ Using available resources effectively and efficiently</li> </ul>		

**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**

At the heart of the protection of the New Forest are a wide number of people passionate about the landscape who volunteer their time in many ways to ensure it thrives.

In this quarter we have really seen this in action – from the hundreds of people turning out for a mass litter pick to 'Clean for the Queen', to the 500 who came to our volunteer fair to sign up and give their time to a huge range of projects.

We have also seen this in the first phase of the Our Past, Our Future Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) scheme – 17 volunteers attended a hedgelaying course and sessions in traditional Forest building techniques are already fully booked, showing the enthusiasm for skills which will help rejuvenate our landscape and built heritage. Other volunteers are busy recording fascinating documents and photographs of local history from the Christopher Tower Record Library at the New Forest Centre to make them more widely available online. Meanwhile the National Trust's 26-hectare Foxbury estate has a target of planting 20,000 trees over five years as part of the HLF scheme, with volunteers helping to plant several thousand already. In all, over 200 volunteer days have been recorded in the first three months of the HLF scheme.

In another example of a great collaboration with communities, local history groups worked with our staff to produce the New Forest Remembers WWI exhibition at the New Forest Centre. The exhibition charts the diverse range of activities which happened in the Forest during the Great War, from temporary hospitals, to dog training schools and encampments of Indian soldiers. The exhibition runs until 1 May and is well worth a visit.

Villages around Fordingbridge came together a few years back to form the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group. Helped by our officers, they have defined what elements make their villages special and developed an action plan to preserve them. The wide open verges – many of which, perhaps surprisingly, contain rare plants and are important for wildlife – are being parked on or driven on by motorists which damages the habitat. In another example of community action, they are introducing measures to protect these areas and have produced a leaflet to let people know how important they are. Other communities are interested in following their lead.

Meanwhile work has begun on building two affordable houses at Bransgore which, in an innovative scheme, the Authority will rent out to local people with the income put back into similar schemes elsewhere in the National Park. With around 80 people on the District Council housing list in the Bransgore area alone, these homes will play a small but much-needed part in helping local people to live and work in the Forest. Our Planning Committee also unanimously approved plans for a new commoners' home in Sway, further supporting this traditional Forest way of life which is essential in maintaining the landscape.

Housing will be a strong theme as we continue the review of our planning policies this year. We are holding a series of workshops with stakeholders to discuss this Local Plan before a full public consultation in the autumn. These workshops having included discussions with neighbouring planning authorities about cross-boundary issues; with local business groups to discuss how the Local Plan can support the National Park's economy and communities; and a presentation to the Enterprise M3 LEP Rural Board, forging good relationships with regional decision-makers. Other important work with the EM3 LEP includes supporting a consortium bid for funding a wood fuel project in Hampshire to create local wood fuel supply networks and provide advice for businesses and woodland owners.

Considering landscapes on a wider scale rather than individual pockets of land is a key theme of both the Our Past Our Future scheme and on-going discussions with our neighbours. We have been talking with a number of organisations about creating a 'green halo' for the National Park – a buffer around our boundary to strengthen the resilience of the internationally-protected habitats and ecosystems of the National Park.

Our education and communication officers have put together an innovative children's book and online game to teach youngsters about travelling car-free. Funded by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, the book will be given to school children and supported by assemblies and classroom sessions. This is another useful tool for our two education officers who this year have exceeded all records and worked with over 10,000 children and young people.

Our team has put a lot of thought into our new work programme for this year, which members are asked to approve. Our actions and targets this year clearly reflect the elements which we signed up to deliver of the wider Partnership Plan for the New Forest.

## **DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS**

The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper' objectives from the 2015-18 Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the first 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**

##### *HLS Verge Protection Project*

Parishes have been informed of the project that seeks to protect grazed verges on the Open Forest that are being damaged by vehicle overrun, parking and storage of materials. The Landscape Officer is raising awareness at the parish quadrant meetings and the March New Forest Consultative Panel. The Forestry Commission is carrying out the works which uses dragons teeth and ditching works to prevent vehicle access.

##### *Our Past Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme*

Work has now started on the Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme. A number of posts have been recruited by the National Park (five full time posts and five part time posts) and by partner organisations to take forward the 21 individual projects.

The OPOF Board has met to discuss progress, claims, funding, issues etc. Working Groups have been held for the communication and interpretation subgroups and others are planned to cover the other key themes within the scheme. Individual project leads have begun to take forward actions as outlined in their individual work programmes. Key achievements to date include:

- Hedge-laying course held for the New Forest Rural Skills project and further training planned for the remainder of the year
- Initial courses held for the Building Skills project and remaining courses for the first year arranged and are now fully booked
- Practical conservation volunteer events held to undertake scrub bashing on land included in the Stepping Stones Project
- Volunteers started cataloguing items for Ecademy project
- 5,000 trees planted at Foxbury and deer fencing, access and car park improvements are underway
- 209 volunteer days recorded across the scheme in the first three months
- The Arts Festival is planned for June 2016, branding has been agreed and over 50 organisations/individuals have signed up to be involved in the week long event
- OPOF had a stand at the New Forest Volunteering Fair offering a range of volunteering opportunities across the scheme which resulted in over 50 new contacts for potential volunteers.

#### *New Forest Land Advice Service*

The main emphasis for the two advisors during this phase has been delivery of specialist detailed advice to Natural England for several farms around the New Forest where there is potential for Water Capital Grants (available through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme) to help increase water quality and make better use of water resources.

The second NFLAS newsletter for commoners was produced with its new name 'Commoner's Corner'; this will be published twice a year in Autumn and Spring. This goes out to all active commoners and advertises NFLAS events and training courses, plus reports relevant information and news.

We will again provide help for commoners with their Basic Payment Scheme applications through 1:1 appointments two days a week leading up to the May deadline.

The Better Boundaries and Nature's Stepping Stones projects are well underway with work having begun on several of the identified boundaries prior to the start of the bird breeding season. In addition four practical conservation work parties have been carried out with volunteers on some of the Nature's Stepping Stones restoration sites, mainly focusing on removal of scrub and invasive plants from grassland Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).

The New Forest Rural Skills Project is also well underway. A very successful hedgelaying course saw 17 farmers, commoners and landowners lay 45 metres of hedgerow in Linwood on one of the Better Boundaries project sites.

We are working with Sparsholt College and our other training providers to organise our programme of over 30 courses per year. Five courses are now organised for April including a City & Guilds certified course in Transporting Livestock by Road and an Introduction to

Welding course aimed at young farmers and commoners. In addition we are nearly ready to launch our Commoner Mentoring Scheme in partnership with the Commoners Defence Association which will see five young or new commoners per year learn relevant skills and traditions from an experienced commoner on their holding over a minimum of 10 days across a year.

### *Growing the Forest and Ecology*

Natural capital and ecosystem services – the elements of nature that produce value or benefits to people - are terms that we will be hearing more about as Defra finalises its 25-year Plan for the Environment. Locally, we have started to consider ways to strengthen the resilience of the habitats and ecosystems of the New Forest National Park by working beyond its boundaries. A Natural Environment Strategy group, which we lead, is developing a shared vision of a 'green halo' for the National Park. A members' workshop in March considered the opportunities and challenges in developing the green halo and adopting an ecosystem approach here in the New Forest.

We facilitated one of our regular meetings with the New Forest Catchment Partnership in January. During the period work has been undertaken to progress the Living Waters element of the Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme initiative as well as working with landowners to deliver measures to improve water quality within the Beaulieu catchment which should be complete by April. That work has been assisted by funding from the Environment Agency which was awarded to the Partnership. The period has also seen the Environment Agency publish a River Basin Management Plan for the South East, including acknowledgement of the successful role the Partnership plays in supporting delivery of Water Framework Directive actions.

Staff in the Environment and Rural Economy team attended a workshop held by the Channel Coast Observatory based at Southampton's National Oceanography Centre and New Forest District Council. The event highlighted the work the teams carry out to design and undertake coastal defence works to protect the Park's assets from flooding. In addition the staff also co-ordinate the monitoring of the entire south east coast and undertake research into coastal change which is of importance nationally and internationally. Current issues relate to the funding of coastal defence and the need for schemes in the short to medium term which have implications for the landscape, ecology and cultural heritage, as well as local communities of the Park.

We also attended a workshop held by the Environment Agency to develop a collaborative approach to managing delivery of improvements to the water quality of the Solent which are impacting on its wildlife value and other ecosystem services (e.g. fisheries, recreational use). The initiative 'SolentView 2027' is intended to agree joint objectives for the Solent estuaries to enable them to be in good ecological condition by 2027.

We have been liaising with Southampton University to support its use of the New Forest National Park as an ecological learning resource and identify how they could help us develop an evidence base around issues of concern. We provided a seminar to their second year students to assist this work and promote their involvement in water surveys due to take place during March/April, as well as volunteering for the Landscape Partnership Scheme.

We continue to provide professional ecological input to the Park and NFDC planning processes. During the period this has included supporting initiating a contract with consultants to provide the necessary environmental assessment of forthcoming Local Plans, as well as

responding to over 40 requests from NFDC for development control input as well as over 20 from within the Park area including input to environmental assessments for Lepe Country Park.

## **1.2 Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with its surroundings**

### *Development Control*

In this reporting period, the team received 135 valid planning applications, with 133 decisions issued. The approval rate for the period was 89%. 11 appeals were determined and it has been encouraging to see that in most cases (73%) the appeals have been dismissed, with the Planning Inspectorate offering strong support for our local planning policies.

### *Enforcement and Trees*

Since the beginning of the year the team has successfully secured compliance with three Enforcement Notices. Most notably at January's Planning Committee Members authorised direct action to clear a woodland site on the outskirts of Bransgore of all the accumulated recreational, domestic and other items present. This followed the service of an earlier Enforcement Notice and subsequent prosecution against the owner for failing to comply with all the requirements of the Notice despite more recently removing a caravan. The site was subsequently cleared using a contractor on 4 February which was well received by local residents who had become increasingly concerned by the condition of the land.

We have confirmed three new Tree Preservation Orders since the beginning of the year to protect trees that were under threat and which were important to retain owing to the contribution to the amenity of their areas. A further 148 Tree Work Applications have also been determined during January and February throughout the National Park and surrounding New Forest District.

### *Policy*

Work is continuing on the review of the local planning policies for the National Park following the initial public consultation late last year. This has included:

- An update on the progress on the Local Plan Review at all of the Parish Quadrant meetings held in February
- Work on various evidence-based studies, including a review of the defined village settlement boundaries (which in some cases date back 30 years); an assessment of the suitability of existing employment sites; early work on the Habitats Regulations Assessment; and an assessment of the 100+ sites raised during the 'Call for Sites' process
- A session held with members on 29 February on the Local Plan Review
- A series of topic based meetings held in mid March with neighbouring planning authorities to discuss cross-boundary issues and to local business groups to discuss the role that the Local Plan can play in fostering the socio-economic well being of the local communities in the National Park. A presentation was also given to the Enterprise M3 LEP Rural Board on the Local Plan at its meeting in Lyndhurst on 8 February.

The current intention is to present a consultation draft version of the revised Local Plan at the September 2016 full Authority meeting and more information on this timetable can be found in the separate paper of the Authority's Local Development Scheme. We will also be holding a training session for local town and parish councils in June 2016 on planning policy matters which will cover the review of the Local Plan and the emerging policy approach.

The Policy team has also worked with the other English National Parks to co-ordinate the National Parks England consultation response to the Government's proposed changes to national planning policy, which were published in December 2016. A number of the proposed changes – such as broadening the definition of 'affordable housing', the removal of the 'in perpetuity' clause and the proposals for a 'Housing Delivery Test' – could have significant implications in the context of planning in a National Park and the detailed National Parks England response highlights these concerns.

The Planning Development Control Committee considered a further Government consultation on implementing planning changes at its meeting on 15 March.

The National Park Management Plan Leadership Group met in Lyndhurst in February to discuss the monitoring of progress on the actions in the 2015-2020 Management Plan update. The Group was keen to hold an event for staff of the partner organisations during summer 2016 to exchange ideas and promote further joint working.

### **1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life**

#### *Design advice and guidance*

The shared Building Design and Conservation team continues to respond to a wide range of consultations for proposals in the National Park Authority and District Council areas.

Consultations from within the National Park have included the proposed re-building of the prominent listed boundary wall to grade II\* Queen's House, Lyndhurst, which is suffering from structural movement. The repointing of a substantial section of the walled garden to grade II\* Newtown Park, South Baddesley. Listed building consent has been granted for the sympathetic repair and restoration of grade II Chestnut Cottage, Beaulieu. The cottage is also on the Buildings at Risk register and when the repair and restoration is complete will be able to be removed from the register. Consent has been granted and conditions discharged on works to improve the working kitchen at the grade II Montagu Arms Hotel, Beaulieu.

As well as providing specialist advice on a range of proposals affecting Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, work has also progressed on a number of pro-active projects. This includes the work of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group (see below) and the Heritage Lottery funded Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme traditional building skills courses. Two courses have been held so far and these were aimed at homeowners of historic, unlisted buildings within the National Park. The courses were well attended and positive feedback has been received.

Training has been organised for Town and Parish Councils on 12 April on the historic environment.

#### *Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area*

The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group met in Fordingbridge in early March to discuss the priority projects to be taken forward from the 2012-2017 Action Plan. The meeting also covered the proposals for works to protect a number of damaged verges in the Woodgreen area through providing dragons teeth and ditch and banking. The issue of verge damage is certainly not restricted to the north west of the New Forest and Steering Group members will be liaising with Minstead Parish Council which has identified similar issues with vehicles overrunning in its parish.

### *Archaeological research priorities and strategy*

Development of the New Forest's archaeological research agenda started with two one-day seminars to meet the 2015-2016 work objectives as identified in the Cultural Heritage Strategy. The strategy informed projects within the Landscape Partnership Scheme. Academics, PhD students and commercial archaeological organisations attended.

The sessions aimed to develop the justification for archaeological work being undertaken through the planning process; to assist local groups undertaking research; to guide students and academics to channel their energy into useful enquiry, to improve and plug gaps in our knowledge. This builds off the regional Solent-Thames Archaeological Research assessment and strategy funded by Historic England and published in 2015.

The first session involved reviewing the mid-late Iron Age and Roman periods ranging in date from about 400BC to 410 AD. The second session reviewed the Palaeolithic and Early Holocene periods from about 300,000 years ago to about 7,500BC.

The work from these sessions will be circulated in due course to the New Forest Community Heritage Forum to gain the view of local heritage groups and for their input to further develop the archaeological research agenda and archaeological strategy for the New Forest.

The Community Heritage Forum is being established to meet objectives in the Landscape Partnership Scheme and will be managed by Community Archaeologist James Brown.

### *Heritage Mapping*

The Heritage Mapping project is continuing as normal as part of the HLS. The yearly target of 10% of Lidar analysis and survey work was met in December and work has now commenced for the 2016 year. To celebrate the midpoint of the 10 year scheme a temporary exhibition was hosted at the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst over a four month period. This saw over 19,000 visitors and received very positive feedback from the public. As part of the exhibition National Park staff organised the first New Forest Digital Archaeology Weekend which looked to engage a younger generation with the heritage of the New Forest. The interactive and hi-tech weekend proved a big hit with over 800 people attending. As a result, we were asked to write a case study outlining the approach taken to engage younger generations with Lidar data and the natural and historic environment to be used by Defra and the Secretary of State.

### *New Forest Remembers*

There are now 13 groups signed up to the online archive, all of which are adding material relating to the New Forest during WWI (and some for WWII). Total registered users currently stands at 269. Over the past year the portal has had over 93,000 page views with over 18,000 users. Our current archive consists of over 400 WWI photographs and recently project volunteers have been transcribing British Censors Reports relating to the Indian Mail 1914 to 1918. Current word count for the transcription is over 55,000 words with work continuing.

The WWI exhibition at the New Forest Centre was officially opened on 6 February by Dr Julian Lewis MP. The exhibition continues until 1 May after which the panels will be available to tour the New Forest area for the rest of the year. Booking requests are already being received.



## **2 Enjoy**

### **2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park**

#### *Outreach, volunteering and health and wellbeing*

The sixth annual New Forest Volunteer Fair took place on 30 January and was the most successful to date with 46 stalls and 500 people attending. It was opened by Mosaic volunteer Karl Epps who was presented with his national award for National Park Young Volunteer of the Year.

Feedback from the groups was very positive including:

*'It was another great success and there seemed to be more people than ever before. It was, as ever, a very friendly, sociable event and a great opportunity to catch up with so many people involved in the New Forest area.'* (Catherine Chatters, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust)

We have recruited the Our Past, Our Future wild play project officer who will start on 11 April. This project will work with landowners and communities around the Forest to identify suitable sites for natural play.

#### *Inclusive cycling*

New Forest Inclusive Cycling has continued to deliver cycling sessions during the winter months for the first time ever due to the mild weather. A further ten sessions have been delivered since the last update bringing the total number of participants to 1117 for the year. Work continues to turn New Forest Inclusive Cycling into independent organisation (PEDALL); the constitution and application to the charities commission have been drafted and ten volunteers were sign up at the New Forest Volunteer Fair.

### **2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park**

#### *Public and community events / rangers*

Rangers have organised sessions in the Forest with home-educated children and young people, introducing them to the John Muir Award, run mobile unit outreach events during February half term, talks and walks in local villages and assisting with the Clean for the Queen series of litter picks on 4-6 March. There were 23 events over the weekend with about 6 more between now and the end of June; 740 bags of litter have been collected so far, plus 43 bags of recyclable material.

We met with rangers from the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership, who help reduce the impact associated with new development on the internationally-protected habitats of the Solent coast (including the New Forest area). We will be working closely in partnership to ensure that we have the same messages when talking to recreational users on the coast, as well as sharing best practice and results to improve our own mitigation work.

#### *Interpretation projects*

The 'Shedding new light on the New Forest's past' Lidar exhibition finished and was replaced with the 'New Forest Remembers: untold stories of WWI' exhibition at the New Forest Centre. We have installed a new nine-minute film in the Museum, supported by LSTF funding. This film provides an excellent introduction to the New Forest, and the Museum – which from 1

February became free for all visitors (previously it was free only for children). The Ninth Centenary Trust has taken the decision to drop charges to increase visits and has introduced donation boxes. We will not know till after the summer season, but the initial indications are that increased donations and shop takings may more than compensate for the lack of entrance fees.

We have been assisting the development of projects such as OPOF heritage interpretation training programme (advertising and letting the training support work), the Arts Festival, a toolkit for monitoring and evaluation the benefits of the OFOF programme, new self guided trails, and 'front of house' bus driver training.

### *Communications*

Marketing for events has included the launch and promotion of the WWI exhibition, the Volunteer Fair, digital archaeology weekend and Our Past Our Future training sessions.

We have worked on short films about walking routes; a longer film for the New Forest Centre; a children's online game and book to promote sustainable transport and a new section of our website with walking and cycling routes.

Campaigns have included the Clean for the Queen litter picking event with the Forestry Commission, Lepe Country Park and the District Council. We highlighted the 10,000 motorists caught speeding in the joint animal accident reduction initiative. We are working with National Parks England on VisitEngland campaigns including English Tourism Week, and connecting children with nature.

Publications have been designed and printed for the visitor season including an updated Pocket Guide with our caring for the forest messages, the Essential Guide with the Forestry Commission and the latest issue of our residents newspaper Park Life. Other design work has included a leaflet for dog walkers and information panels for the mobile unit about ground nesting birds.

### *Formal education*

This year's Litter Assembly, with the theme Clean for the Queen has proved very popular with schools. The assembly, delivered by the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council, has been seen by an amazing 5,600 children from 25 schools during this quarter, with more to follow later in the year.

823 students from 14 education establishments have received outdoor education sessions from the education team since January; many of these are university groups studying Countryside Management or Conservation, or Geography GCSE students carrying out fieldwork.

Planning has begun for the annual teachers' and students' conferences, taking place on Friday 17 June and Friday 8 July respectively. We are delighted that the New Forest Association has agreed to support the Our Forest, Our Future student conference for the second year.

A very exciting project supported by the LSTF and Communications teams came to fruition in late February. Furzley's New Forest Adventure, a picture book and computer game with a sustainable transport theme, was launched at Hythe Primary School and was very well received by the pupils, with each family at the school receiving a free copy of the book. To launch the book Forest-wide, every local school has been sent a copy and headteachers have

been invited to make use of our free education service, with suggestions for a range of follow up activities. The book provides a brilliant starting point for us to deliver all of our key messages about caring for the Forest and we expect Furzley to become a valuable addition to our 'team'!

Finally, we are delighted to report that we have exceeded 10,000 pupil contacts in 2015-16 (up from 9,300 last year).

## **2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park**

### *Recreation Management Strategy*

The Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) Steering Group next meets in May. Its plan is to collate options for improving the management of recreation across the New Forest, initially from the six organisations on the Steering Group.

In the meantime, we are working with the Forestry Commission and other partners to ensure we are encouraging 'responsible' recreation in robust areas, for example by focussing self-guided walking routes away from heathland sites. External funding such as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund has enabled us to develop a number of projects that support this rationale and the associated educational campaigns.

Natural England staff have written to land owners / residents between Highcliffe and Calshot that may be affected by the proposed England Coast Path, and they are holding five community drop-in sessions during March and April. The Scheme to which they work allows them to take full account of potential issues such as wildlife disturbance and we await to hear their initial proposals for the route. We are also seeking clarity on how Natural England would like the Authority (as the Access Authority) to be involved, alongside Hampshire County Council (as the Highway Authority).

### *Educational campaigns*

No major cycle events have occurred during the period, but the Head of Recreation Management and Learning attended a workshop organised by Dartmoor National Park Authority for organisers of walking, running, horse riding and cycling events. There are similarities, but also significant differences, between their environment and road network and the types of events being organised. So, although there are ways in which both NPAs can learn from each other, none of the codes, or liaison systems would work equally well in both National Parks. The visit also offered a good opportunity to compare strategies for dealing with issues such as animal accidents, litter and disturbance of ground nesting birds.

The Dogs Forum met in January and agreed to progress work with commercial dog walkers. The plan is to hold a workshop that will be useful to these businesses (by involving a vet and providing information about accreditation schemes) and provide a platform whereby we can work with them to reduce the impacts of dogs on the environment. Rangers have developed a good range of events and activities aimed at influencing dog walkers both within the sensitive parts of the Forest and close to where they live – including outside of the National Park through the NFDC-funded People and Wildlife Ranger.

We have spoken about the various ways we approach educational campaigns at all four Parish Quadrant meetings: codes, leaflets, face-to-face, window stickers, schools work, events, partnership working, web-based information, social media, press releases etc. There

are no 'magic wands' so we try to focus our efforts where the problems are greatest and where we can have maximum effect.

It was good to see very wide uptake of the press release about animal accidents that we sent out on behalf of key stakeholders. The combination of a record low of accidents in 2015 and 10,000 people caught speeding by the Police created a compelling story.

NPA communications staff, education officers and rangers all played a significant role in generating a lot of interest and publicity about Clean for the Queen event. The Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council both lead or facilitated litter picks and there was a three-day event at Lepe Country Park. A range of local communities and Forest organisations got involved and 152km of Crown Land roadsides were also litter picked by contractors. Hopefully the combination of on-the-ground removal of litter and a strong message not to drop it in the first place will have at least some impact going forward.

### *New Forest Access Forum*

The Forum met on 7 March at Ferny Crofts Scout Activity Centre near Beaulieu. The Forum received a presentation on the implementation of Hampshire County Council's updated Countryside Access Plan and progress on the delivery of access projects within the Our Past Our Future HLF programme. A sub-group of Access Forum members is meeting regularly with the team at Natural England which is leading the development of the England Coast Path.

## **3 Prosper**

### **3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy**

We have supported a consortium bid for funding a woodfuel project in the Hampshire EM3 LEP area. An outline bid, led by Surrey County Council, has been submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government. If successful there will be resources available to support local woodfuel supply networks and advice for businesses and woodland owners. This work will complement the Working Woodland element of the Our Past Our Future HLF scheme.

The New Forest LEADER programme has started to receive its first outline applications with two rounds of applications considered in this period. The European grant scheme has £1.43million to support the economy of the New Forest area over the next five years and we are represented on the Local Action Group.

### **3.2 Improving affordable housing provision**

With the Government's draft Housing & Planning Bill currently progressing through Parliament towards Royal Assent later this year, there is a degree of uncertainty regarding the provision of new affordable housing at the moment. Proposals set out in the draft Bill (and related changes to national planning policy) seek to broaden the definition of affordable housing to include starter homes and low cost open market dwellings.

We continue to liaise with Parish Councils including Brockenhurst, Copythorne and Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley regarding potential rural exceptions sites within the Park, and Parish Councils are currently considering the implications of the draft Bill on the delivery of affordable housing in their areas. No planning applications have been submitted for affordable housing developments in any of these parishes and local communities will obviously have the opportunity to comment should planning applications be received.

Work has started on the construction of two affordable housing on land just to the south of Bransgore kindly donated to the National Park Authority. Once completed, these dwellings will be managed by the Authority and will available to local people.

### **3.3 Promoting sustainable transport**

#### *Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) programme*

The Transport and Tourism team is busy completing elements of the current programme by the end of March 2016 as well as preparing for the 2016 summer season. The New Forest Tour and Travel Concierge service will return from 25 June to 11 September 2016 and the Beach Bus will return from 23 July to 29 August 2016.

On 15 February, the Department for Transport announced that £20 million of revenue funding will be available to Local Authority partnerships in England for 2016-17 to continue projects which have been developed through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). The programme aims to reduce the impact of visitor traffic on the special qualities of the National Parks by developing sustainable alternatives. We are currently working with partners to develop a bid and hope to be able to provide support for existing bus services (New Forest Tour, Forest Bus (BlueStar 6) and Beach Bus) on which greater use by visitors will improve their overall commercial viability, and to trial a shuttle bus service between Brockenhurst and Beaulieu in partnership with the rail operator and Beaulieu Estate. Other projects will aim to encourage people to walk or cycle, or use a train or bus instead of a car (through the Travel Concierge service at Brockenhurst station, initiatives to at camp sites and holiday parks, support for 'healthy walks', historic routes, inclusive cycling, guided walks and cycle rides.

#### *New Forest Family Cycling Experiences programme (NFFCE)*

Work is ongoing to complete the final projects within the programme. This includes: the family cycling centre at Brockenhurst, a new right turn pocket outside Hollands Wood Campsite and improved signage from Brockenhurst station.

### **3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities**

#### *Sustainable Communities Fund*

To date, £42,800 has been approved to six sustainable transport projects listed below, bringing in match funds of £159,109 as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme. All the projects aim to enable visitors and residents to travel car-free in the New Forest and reduce the impacts of traffic on the National Park.

- Action Academy: further develop on site activities at the Big Bike Bash Festival at Avon Tyrell Youth Centre
- ORA Events: provide a shuttle service from Brockenhurst train station to the New Forest Marathon site at New Park and bike racks at the event
- Hire a Twizy New Forest: help relaunch the business
- Reward Your World: develop a rewards programme focused on sustainable transport and linking this with Brand New Forest and New Forest District Council Leisure centres
- New Forest Project Bike: market a new community enterprise focused on recycling old bikes and encouraging skills development for those not in education or employment
- New Forest Activities: design a new leaflet and map board to accompany the Garmin sat nav device which is programmed with agreed cycle routes in the New Forest.

In line with our SCF objective to help conserve the biodiversity of the National Park, £30,000 is helping to deliver a project as part of the New Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme. Nature's Stepping Stones is helping landowners to restore species-rich grasslands, heathlands and wetlands on 30 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation through a programme of scrub clearance, invasive non-native species, fencing and seed harvesting. The project will help to reduce 'landscape at risk' by improving biodiversity, landscape integrity and resilience against climate change within the National Park.

## **4 Aiming for Excellence**

### **4.1 Providing the highest quality of service**

#### *Meetings and Authority membership*

Support to Members and teams across the corporate structure has included support to the Authority and committee meetings, Members' days and briefings (Eco-systems Services and Local Plan Review), Executive Board, All Staff team meetings and Managers Forum. We have assisted in the recruitment process for the new Secretary of State member (confirmation of which is awaited from the Secretary of State) and for new members to attend the NPUK induction course.

#### *Review of the records management system*

The new electronic records management system is working well. Work is progressing in reviewing the Authority's document retention schedule to support the new records system.

### **4.2 Working with others in achieving maximum benefits for the National Park**

We continue to respond to and arrange requests for public speaking by local organisations on a range of topics. Support is provided for parish quadrant meetings, external partners such as the New Forest Marque, Access Forum and Consultative Panel (which, at its last meeting considered presentations on the England Coast Path consultation, road verge maintenance and underground cabling in the New Forest).

### **4.3 Using available resources effectively and efficiently**

Following proposals agreed at the 5 November meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel, arrangements were made to hold the Panel meeting on 3 March at the new venue (Lyndhurst Community Centre) and a Panel agenda setting group, comprising the Chairman of the Panel, NPA Chief Executive and Deputy Surveyor met in February and agreed Panel agenda items for the year which were informative and designed to promote debate.

#### *Human Resources*

As at 3 March 2017 the total staff headcount was 87 or 77.85 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Core funded	69*	61.86*

Funded by external projects	18	15.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>77.85</b>

\*Of the core funded roles, 10 staff (9.31 FTEs) are working in shared services, 19 are part-time and six are on a fixed-term contract (two of which are providing maternity cover).

Welcome to:

- **Suzi Shilling** – Communications Assistant (fixed-term until January 2017)
- **Lucy Saunders** – Assistant Tree Officer (maternity cover until February 2017)

In the last couple of months we also welcomed the following new staff who have joined the Authority as part of the 'Our Past, Our Future' Landscape Partnership Scheme:

- **Denise Allen** – Administration and Finance Assistant
- **Richard Austin** – Volunteer, Training and Mentoring Co-ordinator
- **Beki Mole** – Communications Assistant
- **Jo Ivey** – Project Co-ordinator (A Shared Forest)
- **Clare Bates** – Project Co-ordinator (Through our Ancestors' Eyes)

Another new member of staff will join this project in April in the following role:

- **Wildplay Project Officer** – part-time and fixed-term for four years

Recruitment is currently underway for:

- **Planning Officer** – maternity cover
- **Seasonal Assistant Rangers x 2** – Jointly funded by the Authority, Camping in the Forest and the Forestry Commission

### *ICT Services*

The Microsoft Licences have now been renewed. This entailed a complete review of Active Directory and as part of this process email configurations were altered. This reduced the number of overall licences required which had a positive impact on costings. The Media Library has been upgraded and moved to another server. Progress is being made on updating the IT policies ahead of implementing audit recommendations. Officers are working with Idox Support to help rectify an ongoing issue with the Idox DMS/Redacting systems. This has involved testing various options on how to scan/index and redact documents. We are looking into which systems are compatible with Windows 10 in advance of carrying out an upgrade to all PCs.

## **5 Members**

### **5.1 Some Members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events**

- Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 1 February
- Planning Development Control Committee – 16 February
- Eco-Systems Members Day – 2 March
- Consultative Panel – 3 March
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 7 March
- New Forest Access Forum – 7 March

- Planning Development Committee – 15 March

## 5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Development Control Committee – 19 April
- Planning Development Control Committee – 17 May
- Consultative Panel – 2 June
- Resource Audit and Performance Committee – 6 June
- Planning Development Control Committee – 21 June
- Members Day – 7 July

## 5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- Natural capital event, 25 January
- Business South Local Produce Show, 28 January
- RAPC, 1 February
- EM3 LEP Rural Action Group, 8 February
- National Parks England meeting, 10 February
- National Parks UK meeting, 11 February
- HIOW Devolution Partnership meeting, 12 February
- NPPL Video Conference, 16 February
- South Downs NPA meeting, 18 February
- Meeting with New Forest Marque Chairman, 18 February
- Devolution Chief Officer Steering Group, 19 February
- SW Quadrant meeting, 23 February
- SE Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee, 24 February
- Natural Environment Strategy Group meeting, 25 February
- Army Engagement briefing, 25 February
- HIOWLGA meeting, 26 February
- Furzley launch day, 29 February
- Members Day, Ecosystem Services, 2 March
- Meeting with Cyclexperience, 3 March
- Business South Champion Black Book Dinner, 3 March
- Devolution Chief Officer Steering Group, 4 March
- RAPC, 7 February
- Safer New Forest Strategy Group meeting, 7 March
- Business South Board meeting, 8 March
- Lyndhurst Community Centre AGM, 21 March
- HCC meeting, 23 March

## 5.4 Chairman's engagements

- NPE Chairmen's Video Conference, 27 January
- Secretary of State member interviews, 28 January
- All Staff team meeting, 2 February
- WWI Exhibition launch event, 5 February
- National Parks England Board meeting, 10 February
- National Parks UK Board meeting, 11 February
- HIOW Devolution Partnership meeting, 12 February
- New Forest Trust Trustees meeting, 15 February



- Clean for the Queen launch event, 4 March
- Chairman's briefing, 10 March
- Quarterly meeting with Official Verderers and Deputy Surveyor, 11 March
- Recreation Management meeting, 15 March

## **6 Recommendation**

**To note the report.**