

NFNPA 502/16

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 14 July 2016**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 24 March 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><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhancing the New Forest's landscapes and habitats ▪ Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with its surrounding ▪ Conserving the historic and local way of life 	<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park ▪ Improving understanding of the National Park ▪ Managing recreation to benefit the National Park 	<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy ▪ Promoting sustainable transport ▪ Encouraging sustainable communities
<p>Aiming for Excellence</p>		
<p><i>In all we do:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing the highest quality of service ▪ Working with others in achieving maximum benefits for the National Park ▪ Using available resources effectively and efficiently 		

**Recommendation:
To note the report**

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Equality & Diversity Implications:

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This is my report for the first quarter of the 2016/17 financial year and I am pleased to report good progress against our themes. It is also the time when we are able to report on performance for the past year 2015/16; we have successfully completed our work programme with year-end budgetary and performance targets met.

We are now six months into the delivery phase of the Our Past Our Future Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) scheme and we have many highlights to report: 5,000 trees planted by volunteers at the National Trust's Foxbury site; 500 items of New Forest history catalogued on a digital archive by the New Forest Centre's 'Ecademy' project; over 90 people received training in traditional building skills and an additional 200 people have expressed an interest in volunteering.

Planning remains at the forefront of our work and to protect and enhance the Forest. This quarter a series of meetings and workshops have been held to inform our local plan review. These included a parish council training event attended by over 30 parish councillors; discussions with the District Council; quadrant meetings and access forum. The second round of public consultation will begin in the autumn.

Planning activity is high with the team receiving 179 planning applications this period. Notable appeals that were dismissed included two large scale solar farms (at Sway and Exbury) and a new country house in Burley. Work continues to explore the feasibility of undergrounding electricity cables at Hale Purlieu to remove the visual impact this has on a spectacular area of the National Park.

We have begun looking at introducing a Community Infrastructure Levy, which most other planning authorities have, following the Government's announcement that we would no longer be able to collect developer contributions for affordable housing, public open space and transport on residential schemes of five dwellings or less.

Two new affordable homes being built at Bransgore will soon be completed and let to local people in housing need. We are also exploring with Burley Parish Council the possibility of a similar small affordable housing scheme and local heritage centre close to the main village car park.

During spring 2016 the New Forest Land Advice Service helped 150 New Forest commoners to submit their claims for the Basic Payment Scheme government subsidies. This is a complex process for commoners as they don't fit the traditional farming model and the submission process is now completely online which creates further challenges. The NFLAS has also run a

series of courses to help boost commoners' skills which were very well attended, and is setting up a mentor scheme to match experienced commoners with those who have asked for extra help.

Our education officers have reached nearly 5,500 children this quarter, encouraging the younger generation to learn more about the New Forest and help to care for it. With the communications and sustainable transport teams, they launched a children's book with caring for the Forest messages which is used as an educational tool in schools. Our primary schools conference had 16 local schools represented and explored how to embed the Forest in the curriculum.

As part of the HLF scheme, we also launched the first New Forest Arts Festival, working with all the main arts organisations in the Forest, individual artists and craftspeople as well as charities. The two weeks in June saw over 40 events celebrating the National Park's landscape, culture and heritage. Many of the events were in unusual locations such as an arts and crafts chapel, treehouse, garden centre and beach hut, encouraging people to explore new areas of the Forest. Themes explored through the Arts Festival included recycling, sustainability and health and wellbeing.

We continue to increase our collaboration with businesses. On a national scale, this quarter saw the official launch of National Parks Partnerships Ltd – with the remit to seek partnerships with businesses for all 15 UK national parks to improve significantly the quality and utility of the Parks now and for future generations. The Partnership is led by a Board of Directors of senior executives volunteering from the private sector and representatives from UK Parks.

At a local level, we worked with the New Forest tourism destination to launch the New Forest Walkers and Cyclists Welcome Scheme which has been very well received. Nearly 70 hotels, guest houses, B&Bs and self-catering cottages have signed up to the scheme, committing to provide the facilities, knowledge and information to ensure that walkers and cyclists have a great experience on their visit and at the same time, learn how to care for Forest.

We also attended the New Forest Business Expo at Brockenhurst College attended by Sir Desmond Swayne MP, talking to local businesses about issues and challenges in the Forest and how we can work together.

We welcomed Environment Minister Rory Stewart MP to the Forest this quarter, providing an opportunity to discuss the Government's 8 Point Plan for National Parks and highlighting that while attracting international tourists is an ambition for National Parks as a collective, in the New Forest we are focussed on sustainable tourism. The Minister met many of our partners at the Verderers' Court before discussing issues and challenges with staff on a walk to the Beaulieu Road Sales yard.

Tourism Minister David Evennett also visited, meeting tourism leaders and the Chairman of the New Forest Marque outside the Balmer Lawn Hotel in Brockenhurst.

We continue to keep abreast of discussions about the devolution of local government in Hampshire and are working with the South Downs to ensure that the needs and special status of protected landscapes in the county are considered. We are also drawing together partners from across sectors to understand and value our local ecosystem services and their benefits for businesses and communities. We aim to develop a shared vision for a New Forest 'Green Halo', reaching beyond the boundary of the National Park.

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**

National Grid Visual Impact Provision and Landscape Enhancement Initiative Projects

We continue to work with National Grid in its feasibility study into the possible undergrounding of the high voltage pylon line that crosses Hale Purlieu. A joint site visit was undertaken on 17 May with major stakeholders (National Trust, Natural England, Forestry Commission, NPA and National Grid). Valuable information was exchanged between all the parties, which will feed into National Grid's feasibility study. In the meantime, we have been asked to prepare a Scoping Opinion. This follows the adoption of our Screening Opinion that the works constitute Environmental Impact Assessment development.

In addition to the Visual Impact Provision Project, National Grid has recently launched the **Landscape Enhancement Initiative Project**. This comprises a fund of £24 million allocated over a period of five years until 2021 to English and Welsh protected landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) which have high voltage National Grid electricity transmission lines running through or close to them. This link gives an introduction to the project: <http://lei.nationalgrid.com/>

The funding is for up to 75% of project costs, the remaining 25% would have to be found from other sources and could include volunteering time.

We have contacted various organisations and parishes to explore opportunities of funding projects that fulfil the National Grid's criteria with a view to submitting expressions of interest in time for the October 2016 application window. If a project is successful at that stage then it can be worked up in more detail for further assessment by National Grid.

Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme

Our Past, Our Future is a £4.4 million Landscape Partnership Scheme for the New Forest supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is undertaking 21 projects to restore lost habitats, develop Forest Skills and inspire a new generation to champion and care for the New Forest. The HLF funded scheme is now six months into the delivery phase. We and partner organisations have made some excellent progress with the individual projects.

Practical Conservation

Volunteers have helped to plant 5,000 trees at the National Trusts' Foxbury reserve, elsewhere volunteers have helped to remove scrub to help improve sites for wildlife, and over 300m of hedge has been laid to improve corridors for wildlife.

Research

Initial surveys have been undertaken of industrial archaeology sites and graveyards and over 500 library items have been digitised at the New Forest Centre. The inaugural Community Heritage Forum was held to discuss training and partnership opportunities for local groups and volunteers.

Training

Over 90 people have attended traditional building skills courses that have been run for agents and homeowners and 52 people have attended courses on sustainable land management.

Events

Over 40 events were been arranged as part of the New Forest Arts Festival from 11 – 26 June 2016. Work is underway for an Our Past Our Future exhibition and activities at the New Forest Show from 26 - 28 July.

New Forest Land Advice Service

Three out of four of the NFLAS Our Past, Our Future projects are in full swing.

Nature's Stepping Stones and Better Boundaries

We are in the survey and monitoring phase of the first year of the projects.

Breeding bird surveys have been taking place being carried out by eight volunteers across many of the Better Boundaries and Nature's Stepping stones sites, with visits in April, May and June. Pond surveys have been taking place to help guide management on Nature's Stepping Stones and reptile monitoring has commenced at the Avon Tyrrell Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation with a volunteer trained to help. A butterfly transect training session has been delivered and six volunteers commenced surveys in June across all the year one Nature's Stepping Stones sites.

Results are already being seen on the ground, where we carried out scrub removal on one of the Nature's Stepping Stones sites in February there are now Common Spotted Orchids growing.

New Forest Rural Skills

Six courses have now been successfully organised and delivered.

- Transport of Animals by Road (City and Guilds)
- Safe use of pesticides
- Pesticide application – hand held
- Pesticide application – tractor mounted
- Cattle breeding and management in the New Forest
- Tree safety and surveying
- First Aid.

The Mentor Scheme is entering its delivery phase. Eight commoners have agreed to be mentors on the project and a very successful Mentor Scheme open evening introduced us to 11 mentees for this year with others on the waiting list for the future.

NFLAS core advice work

During spring 2016 NFLAS helped 150 New Forest commoners with their claims for the Basic Payment Scheme. BPS is a government subsidy for those who are classed as 'farmers' managing land and/or livestock.

Growing the Forest and Ecology

We attended a seminar on ecosystem services to present and promote the work undertaken in the New Forest to an audience of practitioners and organisations from around the UK

Landscape scale work on the New Forest catchment has seen NGO partners, Environment Agency and businesses working together with us to deliver capital works to improve the quality of water in the Beaulieu catchment as part of the Living Waters OPOF grant scheme as well as the Catchment Partnership Action Fund. Rainwater harvesting equipment and associated improvements to agricultural infrastructure have been successfully delivered as well as site management in the Sowley area to benefit uncommon freshwater invertebrates such as the Variable Damselfly.

The period also saw the launch of the New Forest WaterBlitz, a citizen science initiative that enables volunteers to help identify the best freshwater sites in the New Forest. Volunteers were supplied with water testing kits and covered a range of sites and habitats. The New Forest is perhaps the most important area for freshwater biodiversity in the UK and its clean unpolluted water is key to supporting wildlife. The initiative was a partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust and New Forest Catchment Partnership which we co-host. The collated results should be available later in the summer and will be used to assist strategic targeting of action and promote further public engagement.

As part of partnership with other Catchments in Hampshire the period also saw the production of information materials for householders on how to manage septic tanks to avoid pollution and how to reduce the impacts of phosphate pollution on the Forest's water environment. These materials will be targeted for distribution over the summer to areas off mains drainage or where evidence suggests phosphate is contributing to low water quality.

We facilitated a meeting of the New Forest Amphibian and Reptile Monitoring and Survey Partnership. Work is underway to re-commence survey work for smooth snake in the New Forest area this summer and resources are being investigated to support this work and habitat modelling for great crested newt.

We continue to provide professional ecological input to the National Park and NFDC planning processes. Nearly 50 cases in this period have been the subject of consultation from the District Council and we have also undertaken specialist pre-application advice in respect of coastal marine business development as well as extensive liaison regarding mitigating the impacts of growth as part of the forthcoming New Forest District Local Plan. Work within the National Park has seen over 30 cases being the subject of consultation and over 70 being screened due to possible impacts on wildlife.

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

Development Control

Planning and development activity remains high with a number of key sites coming forward for redevelopment. In this reporting period, the team received 179 planning applications, with 170 decisions issued. The approval rate for the period was 88%, 13 appeals were determined, of which nine were dismissed and four were allowed (the percentage allowed for this period being 31%). Notable appeals that were dismissed included two large scale solar farms (at Sway and Exbury) and a new country house in Burley.

In May, following a successful legal challenge by the Government, it was announced that we would no longer be able to collect developer contributions for affordable housing, public open space and transport on residential schemes of five dwellings or less. Following this decision Members resolved at the June meeting of the Planning Development Control Committee to endorse the development of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) that will now be worked up in tandem with the review of the local plan.

Enforcement and Trees

Since April we have served five Enforcement Notices directed against the most harmful breaches of planning control each in order to protect the character of different areas of the National Park from inappropriate developments and uses. We have also successfully secured compliance against five other Enforcement Notices that were previously served. Most notably at April's Planning Committee Members authorised that Direct Action and Committal proceedings be instigated against the owner of a site who has not responded to both earlier enforcement action and now a High Court Injunction. This work is therefore currently ongoing.

Over the same period we have made 11 new Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees that were under threat and which were important to retain owing to the contribution they made to the amenity of their areas. A further 275 Tree Work Applications have also been received across the National Park and surrounding New Forest District areas. We have also received a number of further encouraging appeal decisions supporting our refusal to fell trees that were considered to contribute to the character and appearance of their respective areas and were otherwise in good health.

Policy

The main focus for the Policy team's work over the last three months has been on the Local Plan review. This has included a series of meetings held to inform the preparation of the draft Plan with neighbouring planning authorities under the Localism Act's 'duty to co-operate'; with the larger New Forest estates to discuss their role in the future stewardship of significant areas of the National Park and with the parish councils representing the four 'defined villages' of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway. Presentations on the Local Plan review have also been given to the Parish Quadrant meetings and the New Forest Access Forum in the last quarter. Liaison on cross boundary matters has also continued through the monthly officer meetings between the planning policy teams at the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council, and at member level through the joint member group meeting held on 14 June. As set out in our adopted Local Development Scheme (LDS), the intention is to present a draft Local Plan to the next full Authority meeting in September 2016 to be published for a period of public consultation starting in October 2016.

On 16 June a parish council training event was held at the Community Centre in Lyndhurst looking at planning policy and the local plan review, which was attended by over 30 parish councillors.

On 30 June a Neighbourhood Planning seminar was jointly held by the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council at Lyminster Town Hall. The meeting was well attended by over 40 town and parish councillors from across the National Park and District areas and included presentations from Hampshire County Council, Natural England and Historic England on their respective roles in the neighbourhood planning process.

1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life

Design advice and guidance

The Traditional Building Skills Courses have got well underway. During the first six months the project has run the first set of homeowners courses in Beaulieu which covered local traditional building materials, techniques and sympathetic repair methods. The course is open to people who own or are a guardian of a historic building within a Conservation Area within the National Park. The first two professionals courses have also taken place in March and May on Historic Masonry Structures and Timber Framing at Buckler's Hard. Positive feedback has been received which we are keen to build on.

Over 40 parish councillors attended a training event in April led by our Senior Conservation and Building Design Officer which looked at a range of topical issues relating to listed buildings, heritage, design and building conservation.

Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group met on 6 June in Fordingbridge. At this meeting the group discussed the recent engineering works put in by the Forestry Commission in Woodgreen to address verge damage issues. The Group also discussed which of the remaining actions identified in the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Action Plan 2012-2017 should be taken forward to help conserve and enhance the built environment of the Conservation Area.

Archaeological research priorities and strategy

Work is progressing on the archaeological research strategies. The text for the Iron Age and Roman periods has been circulated to those attending the seminar held in January awaiting further comments from participants. These comments will be incorporated before circulation to local societies through the Community Heritage Forum for their views and comments. Aims of the research strategies are:

- To provide a channel and guide for the voluntary sector, active groups to channel their energy into useful enquiry
- To assist commercial organisations to meet requirements of planning conditions and related work
- For academic institutions to realise potential for their own research and to gain necessary approvals for work within the New Forest from land managers and Government agencies.

The seminar notes on the Palaeolithic period (from at least 350,000 years ago to about 15,000 BC) and the early Holocene period (from the last ice age to about 6000BC) are in preparation. The gravel terrace sequences across the National Park are becoming better studied. These have been a rich source of Palaeolithic hand axes held in local museums and many collections still await detailed study.

A new archaeological research project has been started by Winchester University in conjunction with us. The project led by Dr Paul Everill aims to study this poorly understood class of earthwork in the New Forest – namely those described as royal hunting lodges of the medieval period. Seven lodges have been identified in historical sources. Other than the work

of Heywood Sumner at Church Place, Sloden, in 1915 no excavations have taken place. The current work aims to understand the form of the sites, their lifespan and their relation to Forest landscapes. The site being excavated is a square enclosure at Church Place, Denny Wait, a Scheduled Monument often referred to as Church Place. It is on the edge of the Denny Inclosure adjacent to the camping site. Some initial results of the excavations should be available later this summer.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park

Volunteering

A successful 'get involved' day took place on 11 June introducing new volunteers and potential apprentice rangers to the type of volunteering on offer through the National Park Authority and its partners in the OPOF HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Volunteers have been very active supporting the OPOF projects as detailed above and at Date with Nature in the New Forest where we have been following a common buzzard on the live nest-cam.

Inclusive cycling

Over the last 12 months inclusive cycling has delivered a total of 41 sessions to over 1,300 participants. Inclusive cycling is in the process of becoming an independent organisation (PEDALL); a new website has been created www.pedall.org.uk a constitution drafted and registration for Charitable Incorporated Organisation has been submitted to Charity Commission.

2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park

Public and community events / rangers

Events that have been very well attended have included our Wild Play day, Wild Wednesday and Lepe into Action. Rangers have attended popular events such as Lambing Live and Milford Food Festival.

The apprentice ranger recruitment has commenced, with support given to potential applicants at the Get Involved day and the interviews held on 15 July at Lepe Country Park. The Apprentice ranger scheme is part of the OPOF scheme and also supported by the New Forest Association. There will be a total of seven apprentices over the next three years, who will spend time at five different Forest organisations over their 13 month apprenticeship.

The Wild Play project has started with initial development discussion at two sites, Lepe Country Park and Holbury Manor.

Interpretation projects

The New Forest Remembers WWI exhibition at the New Forest Centre finished with 11,187 visitors and very positive feedback. The Observatory also left the New Forest coast having had an extended residency enabling local artists and rangers to use the opportunity to interpret the landscape at the site and also convey messages about looking after the site and its wildlife.

The OPOF New Forest Connects project training has started with training courses on Managing Interpretation Projects (11 attendees) and 'Talking about the New Forest' (22 attendees) having been held. These will inform future workshops in the autumn delivered by the project team.

Communications

We hosted two ministerial visits this quarter.

Environment Minister Rory Stewart MP met partner organisations at the Verderers Court and walked across the heathland to the Beaulieu Road Salesyard. Topics discussed included planning, the National Park Partnership Plan, wetland restoration; Heritage Lottery-Funded Our Past Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme and our education work.

Tourism Minister David Evennett MP heard about sustainable tourism and the New Forest Marque local produce scheme when he visited the Balmer Lawn Hotel (more details below).

The first New Forest Arts Festival took place from 11 – 26 June involving 40 events in over 20 locations. The Festival is part of the Heritage Lottery Fund Our Past Our Future scheme and involved all the main arts organisations in the Forest. It aims to encourage people to celebrate the landscape, culture and creative community of the National Park.

Highlights included a performance by Brockenhurst College in the CET treehouse at Beaulieu; a film night introduced by Lord Montagu; an evening of wildlife films with Manny Hinge; a trash into treasure sculpture event created from materials collected at a beach clean; an exhibition of paintings at Hurst Castle; a talk and film about Brockenhurst's toymaker Frank Whittington; and an Alice in Wonderland exhibition at the New Forest Centre. We are collating feedback and statistics and exploring opportunities for further funding for next year.

Other events we are working on include the New Forest Show; Green Halo event with business leaders; CLA Awards; and Our Past Our Future reception.

Walking and cycling routes are the top search terms from our website visitors. We have developed new routes pages for our website which allow people to search for approved routes depending on distance, duration, accessibility. Messages about the national park's culture, history and wildlife - as well as how people can help care for the Forest - are embedded in accompanying text and videos. See www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/routes.

We met with National Grid to help plan open days and publicity for people to discuss the possible undergrounding of the electricity cables at Hale Purlieu.

We have also arranged publicity for the Date With Nature project joint with the RSPB and Forestry Commission; the John Muir Award scheme launch in the New Forest; the walkers and cyclists welcome scheme; Tame Your Wildside campaign; primary education conference; dark night skies; animal accidents; seasonal snaps competition; and archaeological dig with the University of Winchester.

Formal education

The highlights of a very busy term have been the new Furzley Days developed by the Education team to complement the Furzley's New Forest Adventure story book. The in-school sessions focus on ways in which the children (and their families; each child makes a model

with a message to take home) can care for the Forest. Furzley lessons cover issues such as animal accidents, litter and ground nesting birds as well as the benefits of sustainable transport. We have taught 1,124 primary age pupils from nine schools, and have had to turn down requests as we are fully booked until the end of term. This project has been delivered as part of the Two National Parks Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

We have continued to present Clean for the Queen Litter Assemblies, reaching a further 3,214 children from 16 schools. Our final assembly this term was part of a school's celebration of the Queen's birthday, which enabled us to deliver follow up sessions on the Queen's Larder, using a giant 'picnic hamper' to show children the variety of produce from the National Park. Children then choose a name for their own forest restaurant and design 'menus' using local ingredients. We have also taught 1,143 students from another 31 schools about special qualities and caring for the Forest, impacts and management, habitats, rivers and coasts; 24 of these sessions took place outdoors in the National Park.

The total number of young people who have been taught about the New Forest National Park this quarter is 5,481.

The primary teachers' conference, the Forest on your Doorstep, attracted delegates from 16 local schools to take part in workshops on outdoor learning.

Students from five local secondary schools will attend their own conference in July, which will take place at the Beaulieu Hotel and the Pony Sales Yard this year. Thank you to the New Forest Livestock Society and New Forest Association for supporting this valuable event.

2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park

Recreation Management Strategy

The Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group is considering a range of options that might improve the management of recreation across the National Park and beyond including improved management of parking, better join-up of cycle routes, better use of areas with networks of rights of way and potential new sites for recreation around the perimeter of the National Park.

Natural England staff are continuing to work up options for the England Coast Path but we have yet to see preferred routes mapped for the National Park section. We also still await any formal request from Natural England for us (as the Access Authority) to be involved beyond the current preparatory stages, alongside Hampshire County Council (as the Highway Authority).

Educational campaigns

We have employed two seasonal rangers, funded by the New Forest National Park recreation mitigation fund, to increase the engagement with walkers and especially dog walkers at sites close to sensitive habitat. This ran from April through to the end of June when the rangers moved onto the Camping in the Forest and Forestry Commission funded work to engage with campers at the main sites in the Forest and help people enjoy and care for the Forest.

Our New Forest District Council's mitigation funded People and Wildlife Ranger has also been working across the National Park and District to help people understand how they can help the rare ground nesting birds of the Forest. This has included outreach with Hampshire County Council, National Trust and Forestry Commission at various sites, including at the Observatory

on Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve. A new dog leaflet has proved hugely popular with its messages about responsible dog walking but also with information on how best to enjoy the Forest with your dog, maps and some history of dogs in the Forest.

The New Forest Dogs Forum met in June, resulting in wide agreement that signs used to highlight the risk of disturbance to ground nesting birds should be reviewed, and strengthened for 2017. Five of those present had attended a workshop organised by the Dorset Dogs initiative; their work with commercial dog walkers will be particularly useful as we progress our own plans for encouraging more responsible dog walking by businesses operating in the New Forest.

UK Cycling Events' spring sportive event demonstrated further progress in their ability and willingness to run cycle events with minimal impacts on local communities. We attended the debrief meeting organised by the Safety Advisory Group and were encouraged by the prospects for the future.

When the Animal Accident Reduction Group met in April those present were encouraged by 2015's record low in traffic accidents despite the large number of animals currently being depastured. We have produced new PDF maps showing data from the last five years. One shows all animals combined; another distinguishes between different kinds of animal and the times of day that the accidents happened. A third map shows the 'density' of accidents on different sections of road, again with the most recent five years' data.

All the maps are available on our website: http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/downloads/download/72/animal_accidents_data.

New Forest Access Forum

The New Forest Access Forum met on 6 June at Calshot Activities Centre. The Forum received a presentation from our Policy Manager about the updates to the local plans in the National Park and the New Forest District Council areas. The forum will be providing advice to both planning authorities with regards to countryside access and the access to green open spaces in the coming months through the consultation process. The Forum has a sub-group which is focussed on providing advice to Natural England on the development of the England Coast Path through the area and the group took part in a site meeting to look at some of the more challenging sections of this stretch.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy

We were delighted to host a visit by David Evennett MP, Minister for Tourism, Sport & Heritage in late May on the cricket pitch outside the Balmer Lawn Hotel. The minister was impressed with the efforts of the organisations involved in the destination partnership to ensure tourism within the Forest is sustainable. The minister also heard about our successful work with the Heritage Lottery Fund to interpret the Forest's war time history and the Our Past, Our Future programme. He met with Jane Overall from the New Forest Marque and the executive chef at the Balmer Lawn Hotel to hear about the New Forest Food Festival and efforts to promote local produce. The Minister has encouraged all National Park Authorities in England to work together to submit an application to the Government's new Discover England Fund to improve visitor experiences. We are in the process of discussing the possibility of this with our colleagues in other National Parks.

3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

As outlined previously, the delivery of affordable housing for local people continues to be challenging. In May 2016 a Court of Appeal legal judgement resulted in local planning authorities (including national park authorities) now facing further restrictions on their ability to negotiate the provision of affordable housing on smaller development sites. In areas like the New Forest National Park, this legal decision has significant implications.

On a more positive note, work is progressing well on the two new affordable homes being built on land donated to us on the edge of Bransgore. The dwellings are expected to be completed very shortly and will then be let to local people in housing need. The new houses incorporate a number of sustainable features including photovoltaic tiles in the roof, high level thermal insulation and wood burners in the living rooms. There will be an opportunity for Members to visit the properties over the coming weeks.

Officers are also engaged in discussions with Burley Parish Council about developing a small affordable housing scheme (similar to the one at Bransgore) and local heritage centre close to the main village car park.

Elsewhere, we continue to look to work with other local communities and landowners in the New Forest to deliver similar schemes where appropriate. In addition, there is a new consortium of rural housing associations now working in the area and they are keen to take a fresh approach to affordable housing provision on rural exceptions sites in the New Forest and surrounding areas.

3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

Visitor bus and information services

Our range of visitor travel experiences returns this summer. The New Forest Tour will be operating from 25 June to 11 September on all three routes. Our Travel Concierge service will be operating for the same period, offering free travel advice to visitors arriving at Brockenhurst railway station supported by South West Trains. In the run up to the Tour we ran 'Tour on Tour' events at local markets and public events in Southampton, Winchester and Hythe to raise awareness of the Tour among nearby audiences.

The Beach Bus will return on 24 July to 3 September linking Lymington to Hythe, via Bucklers Hard, Beaulieu, Exbury and Lepe Country Park. This year we are returning to a timetable which provides a better service to some of the smaller local villages along this route throughout the summer period, including Pilley, Norleywood and East Boldre.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) programme

Our 15/16 LSTF programme has now come to a close. Highlights in the last quarter have included:

Walkers and Cyclists welcome scheme – we launched this new scheme in May in partnership with New Forest District Council and the New Forest Tourism Association. Over 75 tourism businesses have been inspected and accredited as providing excellent information and facilities for visitors looking to walk or cycle in the National Park. The scheme has been

coupled with the launch of an improved routes website, which acts as a one-stop shop for self-guided walks and bike rides within the area.

Tame your Wild side campaign – the 'Tame Your Wild Side' film features a stag and doe that cause chaos in the Forest through their lack of respect for other people and the landscape of the National Park. The film then highlights how positive attitudes towards each other mean a safe and enjoyable day out for everyone. The film was created with input from the New Forest Access Forum, which represents key recreation groups of the National Park.

Working with Hampshire County Council and the Community Rail Partnership we have improved information facilities at Brockenhurst station, including real time passenger information for bus services. We have also worked with local volunteers to create a new guide to promote heritage walks from the Lymington to Brockenhurst Community Rail line.

With the support of RAPC we submitted a partnership bid to the Department for Transport to extend the Two National Parks sustainable travel programme for a further year. Unfortunately this bid was unsuccessful, feedback from the Department was that the bid had very clear targets and objectives, but it needed to more strongly target unemployed people. While disappointing news, we will use this financial year to reflect on what has worked about funding from our sustainable travel programmes over the past four years and develop thoughtful plans for the future. We are delighted that we have been able to sustain many of the visitor bus services we have developed through these programmes.

New Forest Family Cycling Experiences programme (NFFCE)

This programme is now complete, with the exception of the new Family Cycling Centre at Brockenhurst which will open to the public in July, with a formal opening likely to be in September.

3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities

Sustainable Communities Fund

Grant funds of up to £2,000 are available to projects that meet the following objectives:

1. Enhance the cultural heritage of the New Forest
2. Conserve the biodiversity of the National Park
3. Raise awareness of why the New Forest is a special place
4. Provide opportunities to engage people with the National Park
5. Support the provision of local food and goods
6. Reduce carbon emissions in the National Park
7. Provide sustainable transport options including cycling facilities.

We welcome applications from individuals, businesses, organisations and community groups from the public, private and voluntary sector. Applications are assessed as and when received by the grants officer and chair of the assessment panel.

The fund continues to support the Nature's Stepping Stones project as part of the New Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme. The project works with landowners to help restore species rich grasslands, heathlands and wetlands on 30 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. Work includes a programme of scrub clearance, invasive non-native species, fencing and seed harvesting.

4 Aiming for Excellence

4.1 Providing the highest quality of service

Meetings and Authority membership

Support to Members and teams have included Authority and committee meetings, Members' days and briefings, Executive Board, All Staff team meetings and Managers Forum. Two new members have been appointed, namely Russell Wynn (Secretary of State Member) and Andy Moore (local authority member for Hampshire County Council). Judith Webb (Secretary of State Member) resigned in March and Defra is commencing the recruitment process to fill this vacancy. All members have been canvassed regarding their interest in committee membership and representation on external bodies as well as nominations for committee and Authority Chairs and Deputy Chairs in preparation for the Annual Authority meeting.

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 New Forest Consultative Panel (which, at its last meeting considered presentations on the New Forest Design Plan and an update from the Environment Agency on flood risk in the New Forest). Clive Chatters was re-elected as Panel Chairman at the Panel meeting on 2 June.

4.3 Using available resources effectively and efficiently

New Forest Consultative Panel

The March and June meetings of the New Forest Consultative Panel were held at the new venue (Lyndhurst Community Centre) – the set up and arrangements for the meeting have been well received by Panel members and have resulted in a cost saving for the Authority which provides the Secretariat for the Panel. Meetings will continue to be held at this venue.

Data Protection

Corporate Services are attending workshops with other public sector organisations and are working to ensure compliance with the relevant regulations.

Human Resources

As at 1 June 2016 the total staff headcount was 89 or 78.77 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	FTE	Variation from previous report
Core funded	71*	+2	63.38*	+1.52
Funded by external projects	18	0	15.39	-0.60
Total	89	+2	78.77	+0.92

*Of the core funded roles, 10 staff (9.31 FTEs) are working in shared services, 21 are part-time and seven are on a fixed-term contract (three of which are providing maternity cover).

In the last two months we welcomed the following new staff:

Name	Job title	Contract type	How funded
Claire Pearce	Wildplay Project Officer	Part-time and fixed-term until April 2020	Funded through the 'Our Past, Our Future' Landscape Partnership Scheme
Carly Cochran	Planning Officer	Maternity cover until May 2017	Core funded
Georgia Spooner and Matthew Heaver	Seasonal Assistant Ranger	Summer seasonal	Jointly funded by the Authority, Camping in the Forest and the Forestry Commission

At the end of March we said goodbye to Jack Martin (Sustainable Transport Officer) and Mike Wescombe (Transport Officer) as their project funded roles within the transport and tourism team came to an end.

Recruitment is currently underway for the last of the OPOF roles:

- **Project Co-ordinator – Working Woodlands** – part-time and fixed-term for 18 months
- **New Forest Apprentice Rangers x 2** – Partnership between five organisations; the Authority, the Forestry Commission, the National Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Hampshire County Council.

ICT Services

Officers are carrying out a comprehensive review of our IT policies. The review looks at updating the IT policies to address new technological developments and deals with the appropriate use of our IT equipment and systems including internet and email usage, remote access, social media and the use of Authority-issued mobiles (smartphones) and other hand-held devices.

Work with Idox to rectify an ongoing issue with the DMS/redacting system saw partial success but still continues. Following investigations into the compatibility of systems with Windows 10, and meetings with Idox, the Idox DMS will be upgraded in the coming months. Due to Idox not looking at the compatibility of Acolaid with Windows 10 until 2017, on-site testing has commenced and so far has proved positive. A new microfiche has been installed. The quality of the images and the functionality of the machine is far superior to that produced by the old one, good news, especially as it came in under budget by £1,500. Two new servers have been set up to replace the existing GIS servers in preparation for the new GIS data base.

Officers attended an informative conference on the public sector moving to the cloud. Our new Microsoft licensing, Office 365, will allow us to go cloud-based for certain areas of work, but a very comprehensive review would be required prior to any decision being made. One very important message from the conference was how crucial it is to set up the framework and metadata correctly in the first instance. This was very pleasing to hear as this is the exact approach officers have taken in the setting up of SharePoint 13. Although this has been time consuming, the benefits should be seen further down the line.

5 Members

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

- Planning Development Control Committee – 19 April
- Planning Development Control Committee – 17 May
- Consultative Panel – 2 June
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 6 June
- New Forest Access Forum – 6 June
- Planning Development Control Committee – 21 June
- Developing Medium Term Strategic Points for Key Areas of Authority's Work Members Day – 7 July

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Development Control Committee – 16 August
- Consultative Panel – 1 September
- Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 5 September
- Planning Development Control Committee – 20 September

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- Public Health England visit and workshop – 1 April
- HLS Board and AGM – 13 April
- NFDC / FC / NFNPA Liaison meeting – 14 April
- NFU Liaison meeting – 15 April
- National Parks Partnerships Ltd meeting – 19 April
- H&S Quarterly meeting – 20 April
- SOLACE South East Branch conference – 22 April
- Peer Learning Group – 25 April
- Visit by Foundation for Common Land – 26 April
- Great London National Park City Trustees meeting – 27 April
- NFEA meeting – 28 April
- Visit by Rory Stewart MP – 29 April
- Business South Board meeting – 3 May
- Natural Environment Strategy Group meeting – 4 May
- Meeting with RSPB – 6 May
- Meeting with Dorset LEP – 10 May
- J-NPOG Video conference – 11 May
- HIOW Devolution Chief Officer Steering Group – 13 May
- Meeting with Christchurch and East Dorset Councils – 16 May
- Video Conference with SDNPA – 17 May
- Management Plan Leadership Group meeting – 18 May
- Meeting with HCC – 23 May
- Bournemouth Airport site meeting – 24 May
- Visit by Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage – 26 May
- Meeting with Chief Executive, HIWWT – 26 May
- New Forest Business Expo – 3 June
- Resources Audit and Performance Committee – 6 June
- Safer New Forest Strategy and Delivery Group – 6 June

- Arts Festival launch event – 6 June
- NPE AGM – 8 June
- NPUK AGM – 9 June
- SW Quadrant meeting – 14 June
- Hampshire Rural Forum – 20 June
- Greater London National Park City Trustees meeting – 21 June
- Meeting with National Grid – 22 June
- National Park Partnerships Ltd – 24 June
- CLA event judging – 24 June
- Environment Agency workshop – 4 July
- Peer Group – 5 July
- HLS Board – 6 July
- HIOW CX meeting – 8 July
- SE FWAC – 11-12 July
- Green Halo event – 13 July
- Open Art preview meeting – 14 July

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- Public Health England visit and workshop – 1 April
- National Parks England Board Meeting – 6 April
- New Forest Association AGM – 16 April
- RMS Steering Group – 9 May
- Video Conference with SDNPA – 17 May
- David Everett MP Visit – 26 May
- New Forest Business Expo – 3 June
- New Forest Arts Festival Launch Event – 6 June
- Cycle Working Group – 27 June
- Quarterly Meeting with the Official Verderer and Deputy Surveyor – 12 July
- Open Art Competition Prize Giving – 14 July
- Green Halo Seminar – 13 July

6 Recommendation

To note the report.