

New Forest Centre Annual Report for 2015-16

Prepared for New Forest National Park Authority meeting (14 July 2016) by Hilary Marshall, Centre Manager.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report summarises activities at the New Forest Centre during the year that are of benefit to the National Park Authority (NPA). They reflect the NPA's purposes and duty, the priorities set in the NPA's Business Plan (2015-18) and the NPA's work programme for 2015-16.
- 1.2 At the NPA Members' workshop in November 2015 it was agreed that the Centre provided a prominent, multifaceted 'NPA-branded' centre in the centre of Lyndhurst (the 'capital' of the New Forest) and that its aims are closely aligned to those of the NPA so that a high level of content relates to the National Park. The presence of the visitor information centre run by New Forest District Council also provides an ideal venue to promote sustainable transport and tourism.
- 1.3 Highlights of the year include the digitisation of the first 300 items as part of the Ecademy project, volunteering equivalent to three full-time posts, 114 education group sessions, 650% increase in visitors into the museum area following the introduction of free entrance, 54,000 visitors to the Gallery temporary exhibitions and a new film about the National Park.

2 2015-16 achievements

- 2.1 The table below summarises the ways in which the NPA's Business Plan priorities (in the left hand column) were delivered through the Centre (right hand column).

NPA Priorities for Protect	New Forest Centre 2015-16 contribution
a) Enhancing the New Forest's landscapes and habitats	The New Forest's special landscapes and habitats are documented and celebrated, strengthening the rationale for current enhancement strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Displays highlight the Forest's landscape, habitats and past/present management ▪ Reference library with 20,000 items of printed material including over 6,000 historic maps that are in the process of being catalogued by volunteers ▪ Venue for 'Shedding New Light' exhibition
b) Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with its surroundings	As above, traditional buildings are celebrated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visitors can walk through a cob cottage near the museum entrance
c) Conserving the historic environment and local way of life	Largest source of historical information about the New Forest available for research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accredited museum with 2000 natural and

	<p>social history objects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commoning features strongly in museum displays ▪ NPA-procured WWI exhibition ▪ The Ecademy (OPOF project) commenced in January 2016
NPA Priorities for Enjoy	New Forest Centre 2015-16 contribution
a) Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park	<p>Provision of visitor information about different venues and routes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VIC staff role, supported through joint training and resources <p>Volunteering opportunities within the Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of volunteers rose from 23 in 2014 to 35 in 2015 (not including trustees) contributing equivalent of 3 x FT posts <p>Venue for engaging with under-represented groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easy access from village car park ▪ 172 groups used the museum and education facilities in 2015, including some from areas of social deprivation and some with special needs
b) Improving understanding of the National Park	<p>Visitor information (exhibitions, museum, library, books, maps etc.) promoting understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Free entry to the Museum introduced in February 2016, resulting in 650% increase in visitor figures so far ▪ New film show installed highlighting the special qualities of the National Park ▪ Installation of new museum panels relating to Alice Liddell and Arthur Phillip ▪ Range of local history books (many by local authors), comprehensive range of maps and other Forest-related publications available ▪ Programme of temporary exhibitions with free entrance (each 2-3 months long). Numbers of visitors to the Gallery rose from 48,000 visitors in 2014 to 54,000 visitors in 2015 <p>Public events and talks reach a range of audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2015, 4,900 participants took part in informal education activities, compared to 3,900 in 2014. <p>Education and group bookings programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3,800 school children and group booking participants visited the museum or took

	<p>part in education team led visits in 2014 compared to 4,100 in 2015</p> <p>Venue for interpretation projects and training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ E.g. ancient tree and WWII displays in museum, exhibitions in gallery and front of house training
c) Managing recreation to benefit the National Park	<p>Encouraging people to go to agreed robust areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NPA and FC publications available ▪ Staff trained in directing people to popular/robust locations <p>Disseminating educational campaign messages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ground nesting bird displays and exhibitions ▪ Campaign literature available (e.g. animal accidents and dog walking stickers/cards)
NPA Priorities for Prosper	New Forest Centre 2015-16 contribution
a) Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy	<p>Venue for promoting sustainable tourism and Brand New Forest (BNF) campaign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New Forest Tourism Association venues promoted and BNF cards on sale <p>New Forest Marque promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The New Forest Museum Trading Co. is a member of New Forest Marque <p>New Forest Open Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual Open Art competition encourages creative industry
b) Promoting Sustainable Transport	<p>Promotion of sustainable transport through VIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New Forest Tour tickets on sale ▪ Venue for training workshops <p>Interception of New Forest Tour routes and Forest Bus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bus stop adjacent to the Centre ▪ Information about the New Forest Centre is included in the Tour commentary ▪ New film show at entrance to museum promotes sustainable transport
c) Encouraging Sustainable communities	<p>Best practice use of renewable fuel technologies (PV panels)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Solar panels have generated the equivalent of over 39,000 miles driven
Achieving Excellence	New Forest Centre 2015-16 contribution
a) Providing the highest quality of service	<p>High standards of customer care without need for direct NPA staff involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open every day except Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and for annual stock taking
b) Achieving maximum benefits for the National Park	<p>Partnership to deliver range of work programmes, including increasing knowledge of</p>

	<p>the Forest and inspiring others to care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most funding bids usefully include elements to be delivered through the Centre (e.g. maritime archaeology, WWII and WWI, photography competition, LSTF and OPOF)
c) Using available resources effectively and efficiently	<p>Cost-effective use of facilities and joint working between staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NPA staff regularly use meeting room facilities at no charge. In 2015, the NPA benefitted from the equivalent of £1,700 of commercial room hire ▪ Hosted many ministerial and partner organisation visits and held previews, talks and activity evenings on behalf of the NPA

- 2.2 2015-16 was a busy year for the Centre with a range of achievements with clear benefits to the National Park. Many of these are detailed in the table above but additional information is provided below.
- 2.3 In 2015 the Centre was open all year round apart from two days off over Christmas and one day for annual stock take. During that time, 209,000 visitors came through the door. Although this is a fall from 226,000 visitors in 2014 it is still an average of 575 people a day, Furthermore, the temporary exhibition Gallery saw an increase in visitors and the introduction of free entrance to the museum looks set to vastly increase the throughput of the museum; access to these two key learning environments is therefore on the rise.
- 2.4 Formal and informal education figures increased. Of the 114 formal education groups sessions conducted by the Centre's Education Team, 25 were run in conjunction with the National Park Education Team, as were two of the 58 informal groups. Approximately half of the total number of education sessions run were to schools located within the National Park.
- 2.5 In 2015 there were five main exhibitions held in the Gallery. Each exhibition lasted for two to three months and topics included 'Arthur Phillip – unsung local hero', 'Forest Connections' that showcased high quality artwork inspired by the New Forest and the third 'New Forest Open Art' competition exhibition, organised and curated in partnership with the NPA. Finally, 'Shedding New Light on the New Forest's Past', looked at the work undertaken as a result of the Higher Level Stewardship LiDAR project.
- 2.6 Informal education activities included talks on fungi, deer, bees and herbs along with workshops on photography and family history. Discovery Days continued to attract many families. Of the 22 Discovery Days run in 2015 at the Centre, ten were run in partnership with the Education Team at the NPA.
- 2.7 In the Museum, new panels detailing the life of Alice Liddell, the little girl who was the inspiration for Alice in Wonderland and Alice through the Looking Glass, were put up to link with the 150th anniversary of the publication of the first novel. Alice Liddell lived most of her adult life in Cuffnells in Lyndhurst and is buried at St

Michaels' and All Angels Church. In addition, a panel celebrating the life of Arthur Phillip who captained the First Fleet out to Australia has been installed as part of the permanent displays.

- 2.8 A newly appointed Marketing Officer has worked closely with the NPA's Communications team and ensured that our social media presence has been greatly enhanced. This has resulted in an increase in unique visits to the website (29,400 in 2015 compared to 25,230 in 2014) and the number of social media subscribers has risen to 17,900 in 2015, compared to 9,600 in 2014.
- 2.9 National Park Day afforded free entry to the Museum on one of only two such days in 2015 and was staged in partnership with the NPA and the Forestry Commission. The success of these occasional free entry days has been one of the main drivers behind the move to the free entry trial.
- 2.10 The number of volunteers working at the Centre rose in 2015 and contributed 3100 hours as opposed to 2800 in 2014. This has been largely due to the success of the annual Volunteer Fair held at Lyndhurst Community Centre and more latterly as a direct result of the OPOF scheme. Looking at volunteering so far in 2016, total hours contributed is likely to exceed 4500.
- 2.11 In the Library, work has continued on creating a fully accessible, volunteer facilitated library. Rare, fragile and valuable artefacts are now stored in a designated, environmentally controlled room and work has continued on preparing the catalogues for the Ecademy project. The map collection that is being catalogued by a volunteer and was originally estimated to be around 2000 maps, has now been calculated at over 6000. As part of the Ecademy, 300 items have so far been digitised. This includes 73 maps, three postcards and 193 photographs. Our target for 2016 is 3000 items.
- 2.12 Over the year, the Centre has been pleased to take part in a number of visits to the New Forest by Government ministers and other interested parties and organisations including a party of Chinese delegates in November 2015. In addition a NPA Members Day was organised on 19 November 2015 and a series of evening receptions in connection with the LiDAR exhibition was held at the end of the year.
- 2.13 A new film was installed in the Museum promoting the special qualities of the National Park. This film and the new interactive touch screen in the VIC promote the various ways in which people can travel around the Forest without a car.

3 Plans for 2016-17

- 3.1 In 2015/16, the NPA grant was the largest 'untied' grant awarded to the Centre enabling it to continue to deliver on a wide range of fronts to the benefit of the National Park. It has also given staff and Trustees confidence to develop forward plans for 2016-17.
- 3.2 The Museum recorded 22,033 visitors in the period from 1 February up until 5 June 2016. This is more than six times the number recorded during the same period in 2015 (3,396) and is already double last year's total of 10,826. Although

this has resulted in a loss of entrance fees to the museum, indications so far are that this will be more than offset the combination of increased donations and increased sales in the shop. This should enable the free entrance policy to remain in future years; Trustees will make a decision towards the end of the financial year. In support of increased visitor flow, front of house staff are undergoing specialist heritage attraction training with Tourism South East. Some members of the FOH team are going on to qualify for a City and Guilds level 2 qualification in customer care.

- 3.3 The Ecademy project (OPOF) will see the launch of a new web-based information portal that will provide online access to the Reference Library's collections as well as links to other sites. The portal will create a unique resource for researchers of all levels. In addition, other OPOF projects will benefit from increased 'free room hire' at the Centre.
- 3.4 Two exhibitions will be curated by the NPA in 2016: The New Forest Remembers WW1 (ran until 1 May) and Our Past, Our Future (10 Sept to 13 November). In addition, the NPA will co-curate the fourth annual Open Art Exhibition (16 July to 3 September), sponsored by ExxonMobil at the Fawley Refinery.
- 3.5 The Centre played a leading role in delivering content for the New Forest Arts Festival. 'Curiouser and Curiouser' will celebrate Lyndhurst's links with Alice Liddell and other Alice associated events will be staged. The Trust will be involved in the development of the Festival over the four years of OPOF.
- 3.6 A bid is being prepared to the Heritage Lottery Fund under their Transition scheme for between £60K and £70K. The scheme is only open to organisations that have already been in receipt of a big lottery grant and is designed to fund specialist advice in areas such as business planning, fundraising and marketing. The Trust will know the outcome of the bid in August of this year and if successful, the project would run until January 2018.

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