

NFNPA 506/16

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 22 SEPTEMBER 2016**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 14 July 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

There have been some important developments this quarter around our work to protect the Forest.

The next stage in preparing our update of the Local Plan is an informal public consultation, subject to Members' approval today. This review of our planning policies follows a series of meetings with interested parties and an initial public consultation last year when we asked people what they thought were the main issues the review needed to address. This latest draft of the Local Plan has been prepared in light of that initial feedback and to reflect changes in nationwide Government policies.

There has been an increase in planning work this quarter with several complex and significant applications. However the team is still meeting or exceeding Government targets with over 90% of applications approved. Members will have an opportunity to view some of the schemes the team has dealt with this year at the forthcoming planning tour. I am also pleased to report that our longest running enforcement case has now been resolved. Following a long history of legal action supported by local residents, the site at Fordingbridge has been cleared of the mobile home and other vehicles.

Now approaching the end of its first year, the £4.4m Our Past Our Future landscape partnership scheme has already resulted in a number of successes including a new educational centre at the National Trust's Foxbury site; a two-week Arts Festival of 40 events; over 30 training courses in rural skills such as hedgelaying and creating grassland meadows; and large numbers of volunteers taking part in a wide range of projects from putting historical documents online to pulling up invasive plants from riverbanks and recording archaeology. The new Chief Executive of the Heritage Lottery Fund - Ros Kerslake – came to visit the Our Past Our Future scheme. The HLF group spoke to landowners and commoners about the successful training and mentoring projects that have already started.

Business, NGOs and community leaders attended a workshop we organised at the Ordnance Survey HQ and co-hosted with Business South. The event was held to explore the concept of a 'green halo' for the New Forest – encouraging those working outside the Park's boundary to recognise the many benefits of the National Park and to help ensure its ecosystems are protected. We asked those attending to pledge how they would help us take this forward.

Our work to encourage enjoyment and understanding of the National Park has had a successful quarter with the New Forest Show being a particular highlight. Our stand about the Our Past, Our Future scheme won the Best Large Trade Stand trophy and we also hosted a reception for the scheme's partners and sponsors. Visitors to the stand included Sophie, Countess of Wessex; the new Hampshire Chief Constable; and the Board of the Enterprise M3

Local Economic Partnership. The Countess also presented the trophies for our New Forest Awards with the CLA to worthy champions of New Forest commoning, local produce, sustainability and rural diversification.

Our two seasonal rangers (funded by Camping in the Forest and the Forestry Commission) have shared our messages about caring for the National Park with over 3,300 campers. They held fun family activities to help visitors to learn more about the Forest – with dusk walks being particularly successful, attracting over 400 people.

The Date with Nature project with the Forestry Commission and RSPB marked its 10th anniversary this year. Based at the Reptile Centre near Lyndhurst, the project helps people learn about raptors and ground nesting birds through displays at the Centre staffed by knowledgeable volunteers and online webcams which also receive a large following online.

Our education team organised the third Secondary Schools Conference at Beaulieu Road Hotel and the Pony Sales Yard in July with a focus on learning about commoning.

Our Open Art competition and exhibition with the New Forest Centre goes from strength to strength. Sponsored by ExxonMobil, the competition attracted over 210 high calibre entries and the exhibition over the summer is one of the most popular with around 10,000 visitors.

Our successful Autumn Walking Festival will see over 70 walks across two weeks at the end of October and is now in its fourth year. The Festival offers a range of walks on different themes and locations, guided by experts from partner organisations and businesses, with over 1,000 people taking part last year.

As part of our Prosper workstream, we can report a successful summer season for our visitor services. Thanks to the fine summer weather, the New Forest Tour, Beach Bus and the Travel Concierge Service at Brockenhurst station have reported good figures with the New Forest Tour passenger numbers being 13% up on 2015's total of 34,622. We marked the official opening of the new cycle centre at Brockenhurst railway station last week, which has been open to visitors during the summer. The centre offers cycle hire and retail as well as visitor information and received a £150,750 grant from our New Forest Family Cycling Experiences programme to encourage people to travel car-free and reduce their impact on the Forest environment.

The Authority is believed to be the first National Park to help the issue of affordable housing by building and letting its own homes. Two properties built at Bransgore on land gifted to the Authority have now been let to two local families, with the official launch about to take place. Any profits will be put back into similar schemes.

As well as the HLF Chief Executive's visit, we have had a number of other high profile meetings this quarter. Romsey MP Caroline Nokes visited some of our projects in August and was very supportive of the 'green halo' concept. With fellow National Park CEOs I met the Defra Permanent Secretary Clare Moriarty to discuss how National Parks are delivering on Government's agenda, in particular the 8 Point Plan for National Parks and to identify how we can best contribute to EU exit discussions.

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 (VIP) and Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) Programmes

Several meetings of National Grid's VIP Stakeholder Reference Group (National Grid, Natural England, National Trust, NPA and the Verderers) have taken place, including a site visit in May to walk the line of the pylons and look at constraints given by the landscape and ecology of undergrounding. National Grid and its consultants are working on the Environmental Impact Assessment which they hope to have ready for submission as part of their planning application to the NPA in Spring/Summer 2018. If they receive consent from Natural England, National Grid will undertake 8 borehole tests on the western side of the high voltage line on Hale Purlieu, in October, where they are considering Hydraulic Direct Drilling (HDD) under the streams and mire system in that location. This is to ascertain the underlying geology and water table. The National Grid's VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group, chaired by Chris Baines and including representation of all the major stakeholders at national level is holding their next meeting at the end of September in the New Forest. The group will visit Hale Purlieu to look at the pylon line and see for themselves the impact that it has.

Two projects are being considered for submission to the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) fund. The next window for expressions of interest is in October. We are at present putting together an outline of the projects which are wildplay at Holbury Manor and woodland management at the same location with a view to obtaining funding from National Grid. There are other projects that we are hoping to submit in the future (the LEI is a 5 year programme) and will be working up submissions and working with other organisations to achieve this.

The overhead electricity wires that ran alongside the Iron Age Hillfort at Buckland Rings have been undergrounded by Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE) who currently have a programme to bury unsightly electricity wires in sensitive locations in National Parks and AONB's. Four years ago, the Landscape Officer applied to SSE to have this particular stretch of line undergrounded to open up the view of the Iron Age Hillfort and remove the manmade intrusion of the line. After a competitive process, SSE agreed that this line had scored sufficiently highly to merit being undergrounded and the application was given the green light. In August the line was finally taken down and buried. The landscape has been immeasurably improved and now it is difficult to remember where the line and telegraph poles actually stood.

The trenching for the cables gave an outstanding opportunity to check for any archaeological finds and this is described later in the report under *Buckland rings Undergrounding of electric cables*.

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 (please see link -

http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/info/20187/our_past_our_future/373/projects)

The HLF funded scheme is now 11 months into the delivery phase. The NPA hosted a visit from Ros Kerslake the new CEO of HLF. The group visited two sites to look at the work that's been carried out by some of the projects. This included hearing from landowners, commoners and others that have benefited from some of the work and training that has taken place to date. Some key events that have taken place over the summer include the following:

▪ **Restoring Lost Landscapes**

- New Forest non Native Plants - The HIWWT have been undertaking Himalyan Balsam pull days along the Lymington, Cadnam and Avon rivers and over 90 individual volunteers have been involved.
- Nature's Stepping Stones & Better Boundaries - Positive results have been found on sites where work was carried out last winter, including new orchids and cattle grazing.
- Living Waters – Over 25 volunteers have been trained to undertake monitoring activity and various events are planned for the Autumn to raise awareness of the importance of the freshwater environment.
- Rediscovering and Conserving our Archaeological Heritage - a successful week long excavation has been completed with 40 volunteers at Buckler's Hard.

▪ **Developing Forest Skills**

- Rural Skills – the project is on track to deliver 30-35 courses this year with courses being adapted according to feedback and demand. Mentoring is progressing well with six experienced commoners acting as mentors for 11 new/young mentorees.
- Apprentice Ranger - Two apprentice rangers have been appointed to start in October 2016.

▪ **Discovering Forest Heritage & Inspiring the Next Generation**

- Foxbury - The main building infrastructure has been completed at Foxbury and the site is now being used for educational site visits. Visitor numbers are at their highest ever and 254 volunteer days have been completed.
- Common Cause
 - The Shared Forest project has undertaken surveys at the New Forest Show to investigate whether people identify with different branding aimed at encouraging people to behave in a supportive way to the Forest.
 - Through our Ancestors' Eyes project included a display featuring old versus new photographs of commoning activity at the New Forest Show and continues to gather photographs and oral histories.
 - Restoration work is underway at the Verderers Hall and a local forest filmmaker has been appointed to provide interpretation material.
- Ecademy - Work scanning and digitising catalogues from the Christopher Tower library continues with 22 volunteers and the Adlib software is now up and running. The New Forest Centre is working in conjunction with the Heritage on My Doorstep project to develop the online portal.
- Arts Festival – the first Festival that was held in June is currently being evaluated with a view to forward planning for 2017. A bid is being prepared in partnership with Hampshire Cultural Trust for a grant from the Arts Council England for £94,950 to enable commissioning of art work and performance which will form part of future Arts Festivals.
- New Forest Connects - The NFNP marquee at the New Forest Show focused on OPOF this year, inviting visitors to learn about OPOF projects by collecting stamps from visiting the various project related activities. A well-attended reception was held on the Tuesday afternoon to celebrate partnership working. The Interpretation

Officer has also been working with Tell Tale to train people on how to best deliver interpretation. Work is also progressing for 'behind the scenes' tours and the Walking Festival in October.

▪ **Monitoring**

- Behaviour Change - Two workshops led by Aberystwyth University have been completed, giving guidance on key behaviours which individual projects are seeking to influence. Individual sessions are now taking place with projects to enable more detailed discussion as to how to effectively change behaviours.
- Biodiversity Monitoring - Survey and monitoring is taking place at the Restoring Lost Landscapes sites by the Wildlife Trust, NFLAS, University of Southampton students and volunteers.

▪ **Volunteering**

- The volunteer database continues to grow, a volunteer leaflet has been produced and volunteers are kept up to date with regular Newsletters which outline upcoming volunteer opportunities.

New Forest Land Advice Service

The four NFLAS Our Past, Our Future Projects are all going very well. Tom Murphy has now started the Working Woodlands Project as our new Project Co-ordinator and has already identified some new woodlands to add to the project. The summer of the habitat restoration projects has mainly involved survey and monitoring of sites and preparing tenders and gaining consents and licences for practical work to be carried out over the autumn and winter months. The New Forest Rural Skills Project continues to deliver its programme of courses for farmers, commoners and landowners with good take up and excellent feedback. NFLAS staff have themselves been writing and developing their own suite of courses and the first one, 'Ecology and management of species rich grasslands' was delivered in August to 20 landowners.

The core reactive work of the advisors continues to be a crucial service for the Forest's farmers and commoners; Tracé Williams and Rhys Morgan are always very busy with a wide range of enquiries and tasks making good use of their skills and knowledge.

Growing the Forest and Ecology

We have been evolving our co-hosting role in the New Forest Catchment and this quarter saw us linking up with the officers supporting the River Avon and Test & Itchen catchments in order to coordinate work on phosphate pollution and septic tanks across the Park and its surrounding area. During the period we also met with the Environment Agency and Natural England staff to identify priorities and agree joint projects. We have been successful at securing grants from Defra and the Environment Agency for delivery of partnership hosting (£15,000) as well as capital funding for project improvements in the current financial year.

The HLF funded Living Waters project which supports catchment improvements in the Beaulieu area successfully delivered a training course for volunteers. This has resulted in establishing a team of volunteers to monitor water quality in the New Forest area.

We have continued our partnership work with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust to coordinate volunteers in surveying the Forest for the rare smooth snake (see funding section

for further details). We have helped to support the Trust's national HLF bid to support conservation effort for this species. This will help build on the work and demonstrates that the Park is at the forefront piloting approaches to biodiversity evidence gathering through the Sustainable Communities Fund and our ecology work. The importance of the Forest for smooth snake was acknowledged as local MP, the Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne MP, became its Species Champion at the New Forest Reptile Centre.

The period also saw us contribute to a meeting of the Hampshire Joint Bird Group which helps coordinate bird surveys and priority for research across the county.

Our shared ecology planning service with New Forest District Council continues to be busy, with involvement in over 45 cases during the period including some larger developments and cases requiring attendance at Planning Committee as well as contributing to the Local Plan review. Planning work within the Park has included over 25 consultations as well as screening of 54 applications which had potential wildlife impacts.

Our work on ecosystems services and natural capital was shared with partners across two key events in July. We co-hosted with Business South a workshop for business leaders, local authority leaders and key NGOs to engage partners in the concept of the Green Halo for the New Forest, highlighting the need to work together to ensure the many benefits of the National Park and its ecosystems are felt beyond the Park boundary. The event was sponsored by Rambolls and included nationally renowned speakers; the environmentalist Chris Baines who also chaired the event, Sue Armstrong-Brown policy director of Green Alliance and Maggie Charnley from the Natural Capital Committee Secretariat. The event was well received and provides a base from which to develop this area of work.

We also organised an event for practitioners – planning officers, ecologists and conservation specialists – from neighbouring authorities around the National Park to start to map opportunities for green infrastructure, natural capital and ecological networks. Currently done at an individual authority level there is a gap in identifying the wider strategic opportunities that exist if areas of opportunity can be joined up more effectively. This is in keeping with the Lawton Report principles of creating more resilient, joined up, bigger and more robust areas of ecological value. This work and that of developing the Green Halo is being steered by a Natural Environment Strategy Group, which we coordinate.

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

Planning Development

Planning and development activity has remained consistently high in this reporting period, with 128 planning applications received and 116 decisions issued (up to 7 September). The approval rate for the period was 90% with all government targets met (and in some cases exceeded) for the time taken to determine an application (e.g. 96% of all householder applications were dealt within eight weeks during this period).

At the same time, the team is dealing with some significant planning applications. The application for wetland restoration at Latchmore Brook has received over 400 representations and is due to be reported to the Planning Committee on 18 October.

Nine appeals were determined, of which seven were dismissed and two were allowed (the percentage allowed for this period being 22%). Despite this good performance, there remain some concerns about the quality of appeal decisions and delays in the appeal process. A

meeting has been arranged with the Planning Inspectorate on 10 October to discuss these concerns, which are shared by some of the other National Park Authorities.

From 1 October, we are looking to introduce charging for pre-application advice for certain types of development whilst maintaining an open and accessible planning service. This is the subject of a separate agenda item. If agreed, there will be an opportunity to discuss these new charges with agents at the annual agents' meeting to be held on 28 September.

This year's annual Planning Tour will take place in October and as always, will provide Members with an opportunity to review completed schemes on the ground.

Enforcement and Trees

Since July we have successfully secured compliance against four Enforcement Notices that were previously served. Most notably Members of the Planning Committee had authorised that Direct Action and Committal Proceedings be instigated against our longest standing breaches of planning control, at a site near Fordingbridge. This followed a number of years of non-compliance to cease residential occupation of a mobile home as well as clear the site of other paraphernalia and vehicles. Furthermore an injunction had not been complied with leading to the necessity for us to consider exercising our default powers. Following the Committee's authorisation to take the action the owner finally complied and thus addressed his breaches of planning control. Consequently we have closed our longest standing enforcement investigation.

During July and August we made eight 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 177 Tree Work Applications have also been received across the National Park and surrounding New Forest District areas. We have also begun to publicise our forthcoming Family Trees event which is to be held in Ashurst on 4 December. We are anticipating that over 200 people or families will register to plant a tree to celebrate a birth, marriage or life of a relative as part of planting a community woodland. This follows the very successful event we held last year in Sway.

Policy

The focus of the Policy team's work over the last quarter has been on the production of the consultation draft Local Plan for the National Park (covered in more detail by a separate agenda item). The review of the local planning policies covering the National Park is being undertaken in response to recent changes in national planning policy and the experiences of using the adopted planning policies for the last 5 years. The consultation draft Local Plan has been produced following engagement with a wide range of groups and individuals and will be published for wider public comment in October 2016. The current intention is to then revise the draft Plan in light of the consultation feedback received before a final draft is prepared for submission to the Government for independent examination in 2017.

Linked to the preparation of the revised Local Plan and the 'duty to cooperate', we continued to liaise with our neighbouring planning authorities on a range of issues. This has included the regular officer and members level meetings with colleagues at New Forest District Council; a meeting with officers from Wiltshire Council to discuss meeting identified housing needs for the Salisbury Housing Market Area (which extends into the New Forest); and a meeting convened by Natural England with neighbouring authorities to discuss a joined up approach to habitat mitigation from developments surrounding the New Forest's protected habitats.

The team also prepared the Authority's formal consultation response to the *New Forest District Council Local Plan Review 2016 – 2036 Initial Proposals* document. It is recognised that the District Council must review its local planning policies to ensure they remain up to date and that the review is being undertaken within a challenging national planning policy context. The District Council's plan area includes a wide range of protective designations that could in the Authority's view justify a more restrictive approach than that currently proposed.

1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life

Design advice and guidance

A further two professional courses have taken place on lime plasters, renders and mortars and cob construction at Buckler's Hard. They were well attended by a variety of professional people with backgrounds in architecture, engineering and surveying and who carry out work within the National Park. A further set of courses for homeowners covering local traditional building materials, techniques and sympathetic repair methods has also been held in Beaulieu. The course is open to people who own or are a guardian of a historic building within a Conservation Area within the National Park.

Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group met on 12 September in Fordingbridge. At this meeting Sean Marsh from the Forestry Commission met with the group to discuss their recent published leaflets on encroachment. Further discussion was held on which 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.

Buckland rings Undergrounding of electric cables

Overhead electric cables have been successfully placed underground adjacent to Buckland Rings.

The archaeological opportunity was taken in January to observe the initial trenches for the undergrounding work close to the A337 near the railway bridge close to the Ampress Park Industrial Estate just outside the Iron Age hillfort at Buckland Rings. The work revealed a deep plough soil containing medieval pottery. A small hand excavated trench was excavated to train volunteers in advance of the final connections to obtain a larger sample of the medieval pottery. Soil samples were recovered; that it is hoped when processed by volunteers will provide a greater insight into the medieval use of the landscape around Buckland Rings. Scottish and Southern Electricity kindly donated £1,000 towards the work. The pottery dates from the 11th century through to the high medieval period. Work sites near Buckland Rings, within the New Forest District are producing new evidence about the Iron Age and medieval periods that potentially will change our understanding of the early origins of Lymington. The Archaeological Service Level Agreement with the District Council is working well and providing a greater insight into the New Forests wider heritage.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park

Volunteering

The number of volunteers on our database increased during the reporting period from 234 to 277. Around 200 of these are currently active. This pool of volunteers are offered opportunities as they arise. In August we invited new volunteers interested in public engagement and outreach to get together and discuss opportunities to join us at events and activities over the coming months. One of these opportunities is on public engagement and termed 'event volunteers'. This new 'event volunteer' team will help with both Our Past, Our Future activity and general events. The response was very positive with a wide range of people with many different skill and relevant experience. Volunteers have already joined rangers at key events and will be helping with the upcoming walking festival.

2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park

Public and community events / rangers

Our stand at the New Forest Show was very successful; we had 4,250 visitors over the three days, many of whom took part in the activities. As detailed in other parts of this report, our focus was on the Our Past, Our Future scheme – an ideal opportunity to promote volunteering and to raise awareness of several of the projects within the scheme. Tuesday was particularly busy: we were awarded the Best Large Stand award, hosted a visit by members of the board of Enterprise M3 LEP and by Show President Sophie, Countess of Wessex – and we held a reception for OPOF partner organisations. On Wednesday we shared the NPA/CLA Awards ceremony in the main ring followed by a reception at Rufus Pavilion, and on Thursday we welcomed the new Hampshire Chief Constable, Olivia Pinkney, to our stand.

As usual it was good to work alongside other Forest organisations; the Heart of the Forest area had moved to a new location and this proved to be an excellent place to showcase all that is special about the New Forest and the ways in which we all work to protect it and enable people to learn more about it. The Heart of the Forest won the President's Cup for the best area at the Show – a tribute to the work of all involved.

The Camping in the Forest / Forestry Commission joint funded National Park seasonal rangers delivered 65 activity sessions over a 10 week period, and engaged with more than 3300 campers. The rangers extended the project this year by adding 13 dusk walks, 12 morning activity sessions and engaged with all eight CITF sites. Feedback indicated that visitors had learnt from these sessions and enjoyed them thoroughly. All activities were hugely popular with CITF staff and they really supported the project by promoting through word of mouth and handing out leaflets.

Interpretation projects

The Buckland Rings Young Roots Heritage Lottery Fund project has commenced, led by local art and design charity SPUD and supported by the Authority, Hampshire County Council and St Barbe Museum. Young people are working with artists, archaeologists and ecologists to interpret the Iron Age hill fort and surrounding site. Early proposals include two trails and on-

site interpretation, a gateway and seating. National Park staff have led interpretation and archaeology days for the young people.

The Our Past, Our Future exhibition opened at the New Forest Centre on 10 September. This will invite people to 'step into the New Forest story' and is based on the successful exhibits that were used at the New Forest Show, including a tool / skills quiz, voting activity, walking films, Forest timeline and giant mindfulness colouring posters.

Communications

The New Forest Show enabled us to connect with over 4,000 visitors. With fun activities to demonstrate aspects of the Our Past, Our Future scheme, our stand won the trophy for Best Large Trade Stand as well as contributing to the Heart of the Forest area winning the President's Cup for the best section at the Show.

We also welcomed to our stand Show President Sophie, Countess of Wessex, who presented the trophy; discussed Forest issues with new Hampshire Chief Constable Olivia Pinkney; and Board members of the Enterprise M3 Local Economic Partnership came to hear about how we are working with rural businesses.

The Countess of Wessex also presented our annual awards which we organise with the CLA to recognise those going above and beyond to champion commoning, sustainability, local produce and rural diversification, with some very worthy winners. A reception in the President's Box following the awards presentation was held for all those shortlisted. We also hosted a reception on our stand for people from the 10 organisations involved in the Our Past, Our Future scheme, including sponsors and potential sponsors.

Other projects we have promoted this quarter include the Beach Bus; New Forest Tour; the Building Design Awards; Date with Nature; Our Past, Our Future projects including archaeology digs and training courses; Open Art exhibition; Seasonal Snaps photography competition and new rules from the Forestry Commission on fungi picking.

Our residents newspaper Park Life will now be distributed within the Lymington Times so we have been working with them on advertising, content and a refreshed design.

Formal education

The third 'Our Forest, Our Future: Secondary Schools' Conference' took place at Beaulieu Road Hotel and the Pony Sales Yard in July. The primary aim of the conference this year was to increase the students' understanding of the importance of commoning and its continuing role in shaping the ecosystems of the Forest. Students took part in workshops inside, on the heath and in the Pony Sales Yard. Themes included commoning and Forest organisations, heathland management and archaeology. The programme included workshops by NPA staff and educators from partner organisations – the Commoners Defence Association, New Forest District Council, Wild Heritage and New Forest Centre.

At the end of the day students were asked to create a presentation outlining something they had learnt during the day and all were presented with a certificate of attendance. The new venue was a success, with many students saying that the sales yard was one of the things they most enjoyed; only one of the students was familiar with the yard, so for the others it was a unique learning opportunity. "Being able to see the environment", "going for a walk" and "hearing people's first hand stories" were also cited as being most enjoyable, as was "learning

more about the Forest". We are very grateful to the New Forest Livestock Society for allowing the use of the Pony Sales Yard during the day, and to the New Forest Association for supporting the Conference and providing advice and expertise, both at the planning stage and on the day of the Conference.

Early August saw Jonathan Dean leaving to take up the post of education officer at South Downs National Park, and Helen Robinson returning from maternity leave just in time to support the Rangers and partners at summer events, and to begin preparation work for autumn bookings. September is a peak month for secondary school fieldwork, and schools getting to grips with new Geography coursework and exam requirements have welcomed assistance from the education team. Most University and HE college visits also take place at this time, with Greenwich University, University of Sussex and Uxbridge College requesting NPA sessions in the Forest.

2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park

Recreation Management

Natural England officers continue to develop a proposed route for the England Coast Path. As the Access Authority, NPA officers are providing advice to ensure the path is well designed and implemented and that impacts on the environment are avoided. The New Forest Access Forum has also provided useful advice to Natural England officers throughout this process. It is expected that the report on the proposed alignment of the route will be completed at the end of this financial year, when a consultation process will begin.

Educational campaigns

These campaigns continue in a range of ways as usual – at this time of year they feature in multiple public events. For example, the New Forest Show proved a good venue to explore with visitors the various reasons why it is not a good idea to feed the ponies and donkeys. Over a thousand people voted to say which reason they thought would have the greatest influence on people who might be tempted to feed animals in the Forest. We are working closely with commoners through OPOF to continue this work.

Following the visit to Dorset Dogs in June, officers also visited the Thames Basin Heaths area to look at how the needs of dog walkers are being accommodated at alternative sites (e.g. marked routes of a suitable length, poo bins, agility areas, washing and drying facilities). Some of the same techniques may be relevant at recreation sites identified by NFDC where improvements are possible. Our input to the dog walking aspects of the Solent recreation mitigation work continues – a comprehensive report has been compiled with numerous recommendations that are to be considered by the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership Steering Group.

Ground nesting birds have featured strongly in ranger activities, with multiple drop-in sessions at locations across the Forest, and in the Date with Nature event which this year is celebrating its 10th anniversary. We have also had renewed contact with Duke of Edinburgh Awards officers to improve the way the sensitivities of the New Forest are communicated to trainers, assessors and participants.

We continue to liaise with the Safety Advisory Group about cycle events and have met the new MD of UK Cycling Events to ensure communication with them continues.

With the Forestry Commission and to support other communications, we have produced a poster to raise awareness of the risk of catching Lyme disease through ticks which are most prevalent at this time of year.

New Forest Access Forum

The Access Forum met on Monday 5 September at Lymington Community Centre. The Forum received a presentation and issued advice on the wetland restoration scheme at Latchmore Brook and the initial plans for undergrounding of electricity pylons at Hale. The Forum received a presentation from British Cycling on their campaign to modernise rights of way legislation in England. The Forum finalised comments on New Forest District Council's local plan review and commented on Lepe Country Parks planning application. The Forum is planning to visit the South Downs National Park Access Forum at the end of October to share best practice, and to learn about how their Access Forum has advised the SDNPA on resolving user-conflict on a new multiuser trail.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy

As part of our ongoing work to encourage sustainable tourism within the National Park, we have been working with the New Forest Trust to revise their future business plan with greater involvement from the Authority. An external review of the scheme to date, including surveys of participant and non-participant businesses has made a series of recommendations. We are currently considering these with the Trust and will bring a paper to members to discuss the Authority's future involvement in the scheme.

In response to the Government National Parks 8-Point Plan which seeks to encourage more international visits to England's National Parks, we are considering with our colleagues across England whether a national bid to the Government's Discover England Fund is appropriate or possible. The fund could help to make it easier for small tourism businesses in National Parks to sell to international markets, alongside rail and bus travel.

3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

Notwithstanding the longer term challenges in delivering affordable housing on smaller sites, no affordable housing can be sought on schemes of five dwellings or less, there has been some encouraging progress in improving opportunities for local provision.

The consultation draft Local Plan includes a number of new policy initiatives to help deliver a range of housing types and tenures aimed at meeting local housing needs (which is covered in more detail by a separate agenda item).

The two new affordable homes on the edge of Bransgore were completed in July and let within two weeks to two local families. Members had an opportunity to view the homes prior to their occupation and a more formal opening ceremony was held on 16 September. An overview of the scheme is the subject of a separate agenda item.

Discussions remain ongoing with Burley Parish Council, landowners and New Forest District Council to secure a similar small scale housing scheme at Burley with the addition of a local heritage centre.

Discussions are also at an early stage with one local Parish Council who are looking to establish a new Housing Trust to help build new affordable homes for local people.

3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

Visitor bus and information services

We believe the good weather has had a positive impact on our visitor bus services; at the time of going to print we believe that the New Forest Tour passenger numbers were 13% up on 2015's total of 34,622. We'll report these and the results of our latest customer satisfaction report to members as soon as we can through the members bulletin.

The Beach Bus carried over 6,233 passenger journeys (3% down on last year – 6,436). 1,310 free ice creams were given to Beach Bus customers at Lepe County Park. The service was once again sponsored by New Forest Ice Cream and ExxonMobil.

The New Forest Travel Concierge service has operated throughout the summer season from Brockenhurst station, welcoming visitors to the National Park and helping them to explore the area. This year they meaningfully engaged with 7,624 visitors selling significant numbers of New Forest Tour tickets, walking routes and Ordnance Survey maps. This is a popular service with visitors, local businesses in Brockenhurst and with the rail operator, South West Trains (who this year contributed £7000 to the operation of the service).

New Forest Family Cycling Experiences programme (NFFCE)

The new cycling centre at Brockenhurst station was formally opened on 9 September (it has been open to the public for most of the summer). The new centre, supported by a £150,750 grant from the DfT Cycling Ambition fund provides a high quality welcome to visitors arriving to the National Park by train and looking to hire a bike. This was the final project within this programme which is now complete.

3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities

Sustainable Communities Fund

The second year of the New Forest Smooth Snake Survey is underway across the New Forest. The smooth snake is a rare and elusive species which occurs almost entirely on the heaths of Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey in the UK. Due to its secretive nature, it is difficult to conserve the species without knowing where it is and how its numbers are faring. The project received a £20,000 grant to carry out survey work over two years.

The survey involves carrying out visual and artificial refugia inspections in key areas of smooth snake habitat. Each survey site will be visited up to 10 times during the survey season which lasts until the end of October. Surveyors will aim to carry out surveys during suitable weather conditions for reptile activity in order to maximise probability of detection. Around 15 to 20 reptile surveyors from year one will undertake surveys again this year, with a further 40 to 50 new surveyors recruited in 2016 to ensure a minimum of six surveys per site is completed.

The Lover Green Wildlife Pond Restoration Project is now complete. The pond is situated on the village green in Lover in the north of the New Forest and had become overgrown in recent years, making it less attractive to wildlife. The project received a grant of almost £2,000 to help the Lover Green Association restore the pond to its former glory. The benefit to local wildlife is obvious, with newts, water beetles and pond skaters making their home in the pond and a selection of new plants has recently been purchased providing a great habitat for insects and amphibians. The local community is really enjoying watching it develop.

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. At the Annual Authority meeting on 14 July, the membership of all committees was appointed for the ensuing year and member representatives appointed to relevant external bodies.

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 an update on potential undergrounding of high voltage National Grid power line at Hale Purlieu, National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative and an update on the Local Plan review).

4.3 Using available resources effectively and efficiently

New Forest Consultative Panel

The 2016 meetings of the New Forest Consultative Panel were held at the new venue (Lyndhurst Community Centre) – this venue is proving to be suitable for Panel meetings and future meetings will accordingly be located at the Centre.

Freedom of Information/Data Protection

The breadth of Freedom of Information requests (as well as complaints) has widened and no longer focus solely on planning matters, although planning remains the primary focus for requests and complaints.

A recent analysis of FOI requests has shown that almost a quarter came from known individuals who make frequent requests and/or complaints, all of which related to long term planning and enforcement matters. The team continues to monitor the security of the Authority's data as well as new developments in FOI and Data Protection regulations.

Human Resources

As at 19 September 2016 the total staff headcount was 84 or 73.53 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

| | Headcount | Variation from previous report | FTE | Variation from previous report |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Core funded | 69* | -2 | 61.51* | -1.87 |
| Funded by external projects | 15 | -3 | 12.01 | -3.38 |
| Total | 84 | -5 | 73.53 | -5.24 |

*Of the core funded roles, 10 staff (9.31 FTEs) are working in shared services, 20 are part-time and five are on a fixed-term contract (two of which are providing maternity cover).

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

| Name | Job title | Contract type | How funded |
|-------------|--|---|--|
| Tom Murphy | Project Co-ordinator – Working Woodlands | Part-time and fixed-term until January 2018 | Project funded – ‘Our Past, Our Future’ Landscape Partnership Scheme |

We said goodbye to Jonathan Dean who had provided maternity cover for the Education Officer post, to Alex Proudlock and Daniel Pape who had operated the Concierge service from Brockenhurst and to Georgia Spooner and Matthew Heaver who ended their seasonal Assistant Ranger roles. We wish them all well in their future ventures.

We also said goodbye to Nick Evans (Senior Policy Officer) who retired recently. Nick joined the Authority over 11 years ago and prior to that he was a key member of the New Forest Committee. He was instrumental in setting up the Authority in its infancy and we thank him for his significant contribution to the work of the two organisations and to Forest life.

ICT Services

During August there were a number of disruptions due to problems with the electricity supply to Lymington Town Hall. This required some non-essential services to be closed down, thereby reducing the pressure on the back up batteries. This issue hopefully has now been resolved.

The proposed ICT Policies have now been accepted by Executive Board and we will be looking to present the key areas to staff prior to a consultation period with both staff and the Union.

Team members have been busy carrying out the annual hardware inventory check, continuing extensive testing of Windows 10 and working with other teams to ensure all the essential documentation is available on Sharepoint 13 prior to go live with the new Warbler. We have also been working closely with Hampshire County Council on the security of our external servers.

5 Members

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

- Planning Development Control Committee – 19 July
- New Forest Show – 26-28 July
- Planning Development Control Committee – 16 August
- Consultative Panel – 1 September
- Resource Audit and Performance Committee – 5 September
- Planning Development Control Committee – 20 September

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Standards Committee – 3 October
- Members Day – 5 October
- Planning Development Control Committee – 18 October
- Planning Development Control Committee – 15 November
- Resource Audit and Performance Committee – 21 November
- Consultative Panel – 1 December
- Members Day – 8 December
- Planning Development Control Committee – 20 December
- Planning Development Control Committee – 17 January

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- Open Art Preview evening - 14 July
- Hampshire Rural Forum - 18 July
- The Hampshire Partnership - 19 July
- Meeting with Natural England - 20 July
- National Parks Partnerships Meeting - 21 July
- The Landscape Institute's reception - 21 July
- New Forest Show - 26-28 July
- NPA stand at the New Forest Show visited by Sophie, the Countess of Wessex - 26 July
- NPA stand at the New Forest Show visited by M3 LEP Board members – 26 July
- Our Past, Our Future project reception at the New Forest Show - 26 July
- CLA / NPA Awards and reception at the New Forest Show - 27 July
- Breakfast meeting with HCC, HIOWWT, FC and SDNPA – 29 July
- HLS Board meeting - 3 August
- Meeting with new Port Director, Southampton - 10 August
- Introductory meeting with Chief Officer, Chilterns Conservation Board - 11 August
- Hosted visit and tour of the New Forest for Caroline Nokes MP - 19 August
- HIOW Devolution meeting - 26 August
- Resources Audit and Performance Committee – 5 September
- Safer New Forest Strategy and Delivery Group - 5 September
- E-NPOG meeting - 6/7 September, including Defra Permanent Secretary
- Launch of Brockenhurst Family Cycle Centre – 9 September
- Business South Board Meeting – 13 September
- Met with Strategic Director, Christchurch and East Dorset Councils – 14 September

- Natural Environment Strategy Group Meeting – 14 September
- Meeting with HCC and NFDC – 16 September
- Bransgore Housing Launch event – 16 September
- CDA Meeting – 19 September
- National Park Partnerships Meeting – 20 September
- Greater London National Park City event – 21 September

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- Hosted visit and tour of the New Forest for Caroline Nokes MP - 19 August
- Resources Audit and Performance Committee – 5 September
- Launch of Brockenhurst Family Cycle Centre – 9 September

6 Recommendation

To note the report.