

NFNPA 512/17

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 19 JANUARY 2017**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 22 September 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
Aiming for Excellence		
<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

As we start the New Year, it is good to reflect that a year on from the Heritage Lottery Fund award, the Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) scheme is making a real difference on the ground and involving a large number of people. Around 200 people have taken part in training courses in traditional rural and building skills to maintain the character of the Forest - such as hedgelaying and repairing cob walls. Over 160 historic documents have been scanned for the 'e-cademy' documenting our heritage and over 150 people attended a conference by the New Forest Knowledge project on 'Ecology and management of the New Forest in an era of climate change'. Nearly 2,000 people took part in the autumn Walking Festival with expert guides helping them learn more about the Forest as they explore. Around 60 sites in the Beaulieu River catchment area are being regularly monitored for water quality by 35 volunteers. These are just some of the recent achievements through the scheme, which involves 10 different organisations across 21 projects.

Encouraging the next generation to care for the Forest is one of the main aims of the OPOF scheme and it is only through experiencing the National Park and the natural world that young people become motivated to champion it. Discussions are underway with Fawley Parish Council to develop a wild play site in Holbury Manor Park, due to open this spring. It is hoped that local volunteers will champion the site and the project will work with the local schools and community to publicise the site and encourage its use. Meanwhile our education team taught nearly 1,000 students from 13 different schools in the Autumn term alone. We are also submitting a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a youth-focussed project to encourage teens and young adults to become more involved in the National Park.

Families have also been involved in our second Family Trees day when around 300 people helped plant a community woodland in Ashurst to celebrate their loved-one's birth, marriage, or life.

OPOF has also helped boost NPA volunteers to 250 actively engaged in projects and our annual Volunteering Fair, that will take place on 29 January, provides further opportunity for us and around 40 other organisations to attract new recruits and bolster the all-important volunteering force that supports the Forest.

Our planning responsibilities are a vital way to protect the National Park. Before Christmas we concluded the eight-week public consultation on the draft New Forest National Park Local Plan, including collecting views at a series of public drop-in sessions attended by over 800 people and receipt of nearly 400 written responses. All comments received are being considered and will be used to inform the preparation of the Submission draft Local Plan later this calendar year.

Case work activity has remained high in this reporting period, with 213 planning applications received and 210 decisions issued. With fees introduced in October for written pre-application advice, the vast majority of applications are still being approved (82%) and Government targets for the time taken to determine applications are still being met. We will continue to monitor and report back once the changes have further bedded in.

With house prices in the New Forest among the most expensive in the country, we are working hard to make more affordable homes available to local families. Planning permission has just been granted for 10 new affordable homes on the edge of Brockenhurst. Inspired by the scheme at Bransgore - where

we built two affordable homes to rent following a generous gift of the land - we are also exploring further opportunities to develop new affordable homes at other locations.

Sadly, following a speight of animal accidents in the Autumn, numbers of casualties in 2016 have risen over those recorded for 2015. Officers supported the Animal Accident campaign by talking to students about Forest driving at the Brockenhurst College 'Drive Safe' event, making over 30,000 emergency hotline cards available to people purchasing NFDC parking clocks and promoting the '40 is too much in the dark' poster campaign.

We are looking forward to 2017 and will continue to work through our 'Protect, Enjoy and Prosper' themes to engage with partners to effectively champion the Forest in a context of change and the challenges and opportunities this will bring. It will undoubtedly be an important year for the Forest and our focus will be on bringing people together to put the Forest First as we respond to EU Exit as well as a number of other factors including changing land use around the National Park boundary.

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

National Grid has continued its investigations at Hale Purlieu into the feasibility of undergrounding the high voltage power line. Its consultants have been looking at ecological and engineering matters in relation to the production of the Environmental Impact Assessment. There have been two site meetings to look at the feasibility of undertaking eight boreholes in the valley at the west end of the high voltage power line, attended by National Grid and its engineering consultants, National Trust, Natural England and ourselves. The boreholes are to ascertain geology and water table levels to inform the possibility of Hydraulic Direct Drilling (HDD) the cables under the existing stream rather than open trench burying of cables. Natural England is the consenting authority for drilling the boreholes and as at the beginning of January 2017 information was still being provided by National Grid to Natural England prior to a decision being made.

On 8 December National Grid held a Community Liaison Meeting at Lyndhurst Community Centre. This was to inform and update invited members of local organisations and to answer queries. Attending the meeting were representatives from the New Forest Association, Commoners Defence Association, Verderers, Hale Parish Council, New Forest Dog Owners Group, St Mary's Parish Church Fordingbridge, British Cycling, National Trust and the National Park Authority. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and RSPB were invited but were unable to attend. It was agreed at the end of the meeting that the participants would like to meet again in the future to be further updated on progress with the project.

In October we submitted a separate funding bid to the LEI programme for wildplay and woodland management for Warren Copse at Holbury Manor. In November we were informed by National Grid that we had passed the first stage of approval and we were invited to submit further details in time for the next deadline of 13 January 2017. We are working on this second stage of the funding bid and hope to hear if it has been successful in April. We have met with Fawley Parish Council, which owns the land, to gain its approval for the proposals and to approve the application for funding.

We are also currently scoping out potential improvements to the rights of way network within the area adjacent to the pylon route close alongside the Waterside to reduce the visual impact of the pylon route

through planting, interpretation and re-direction. If feasible, we will look to develop a funding bid to implement these suggestions.

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

The HLF-funded scheme is now a year into the delivery phase. Many of the individual projects are working closely with the local community and engaging a wide range of people. Our network of volunteers is continuing to grow. Over 350 people have been involved in different activities including scanning important historical photographs at the New Forest Centre, undertaking surveys of habitats and species, an archaeological dig at Buckler's Hard and pulling up Himalayan Balsam along the banks of New Forest rivers. In order to show our appreciation for their commitment over the past year we will be holding a volunteer celebration evening in January 2017. The partner organisations will present some of the work that the projects have completed in particular focusing on how the volunteers have contributed over the past year. All the volunteers will be given certificates to recognise their contributions and volunteer champions will be nominated for different projects.

Restoring Lost Landscapes

- New Forest Land Advice Service has started to undertake practical habitat improvement works on private land such as removing invasive willow from important species rich grasslands (Stepping Stones project), coppicing woodlands (Working Woodlands project) and restoring hedgerows (Better Boundaries project).
- The Freshwater Habitats Trust has trained 35 volunteers who are now regularly monitoring the water quality of 60 sites in the River Beaulieu catchment in order to inform the Living Waters project.
- An archaeological excavation at Buckler's Hard was completed in November.
- Through the Conserving the Forest Fringe project the Forestry Commission has been working with Redlynch and Woodgreen parishes and their residents to reduce damage to verges. Leaflets have been distributed and a drop-in session held in Woodgreen. Work has also progressed in selected locations to install wooden posts to prevent existing and further unauthorised parking on verges.

Discovering Forest Heritage

- Over the summer the Forestry Commission has overseen work to restore the Verderers Hall in Lyndhurst. This has included restoration to some structural elements such as the stained glass bay window, repairs to the internal tiled floor, redecoration of the walls and ceilings and improved audio visual provision. As the majority of the work is now complete the Hall is functional again. All the work will be complete by January 2017 and a launch event will be held in the spring.
- Through the Shared Forest project the Commoners Defence Association is running a winter campaign to encourage people who regularly drive across the New Forest to drive with extra care. Awareness posters publicise two messages '40 is too fast in the dark' and 'Always be animal aware'. The campaign is being progressed by working with the New Forest Business Partnership and local employers, as well as in shops and other places throughout the Forest.
- The New Forest Walking Festival took place between 15 and 30 October and 1,900 locals and visitors took part in over 78 walks – attendance was up 77% on last year.
- Work has started with four local groups in Minstead, Copythorne, Emery Down and Burley to collect accurate records of the monuments in their graveyards. Volunteers have been trained in a process called Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) which uses fixed point photography with a moving light source to enable illegible inscriptions to be read. The information gathered by volunteers will be used to write management plans for the graveyards and also identify monuments that require conservation. All the information gathered will be held electronically and be made publicly available, allowing people to trace family members and will also help us to find out more about the area's heritage.

- Discussions are underway with Fawley Parish Council regarding a wild play site in Holbury Manor Park. Work has started to clear the site which will be due to open this spring. It is hoped that local volunteers will champion the site and the project will work with the local schools and community to publicise the site and encourage its use.
- As part of the E-cademy project work continues to scan and digitise catalogues from the Christopher Tower library. Around 160 people attended a conference by the New Forest Knowledge project on 'Ecology and management of the New Forest in an era of climate change'.
- At Foxbury work has started planting more native trees over the winter.
- Work is underway to plan the 2017 Arts Festival - this will link to the 800 year anniversary of the Charter of the Forest.

Developing Forest Skills

- The first Apprentice Rangers are now in post. They spent 3 weeks with the NPA learning about our work, the National Park and our partners before beginning their placement with the National Trust at the start of November. Training has already resulted in them receiving qualifications in Brushcutter & Strimmers, First Aid and Chainsaw maintenance and felling. They will start their placement at Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust on 23 January.
- Over 100 people have attended traditional building skills courses that have been run for agents and homeowners and over 100 people have attended 14 different courses on sustainable land management such as hedge laying, pesticide use and cattle breeding.

New Forest Land Advice Service

NFLAS' Our Past, Our Future projects - The autumn and winter season is a busy time for all the practical work which has been in planning phase since the spring. The end of the bird breeding season marks the start of a very active period for the Better Boundaries, Nature's Stepping Stones and Working Woodlands Projects as volunteer work parties start to happen at many of our sites and contractors carry out a tranche of works such as tree felling, hedgerow restoration and fencing.

Some examples include;

Better Boundaries Project

One hundred and twenty metres of hedgerow and boundary bank have been restored at Ogdens with the commoners themselves putting in many days of their own time to help get the work done. They have also attended both our hedgerow and grassland management courses through the Rural Skills Project and their granddaughter and her boyfriend are mentorees on our Commoner Mentor Scheme.



Hedge and bank at Ogdens

The country lanes around Hyde are starting to look very different with several hedgerows either planted, laid or coppiced and replanted. More hedgelaying is due to take place over the next two months before the start of the bird breeding season in March. One of our hedgelayers, James Humphries, was trained through NFLAS hedgelaying courses a few years ago and is now on our contractor framework working with us on the Better Boundaries Project.



Hedge being coppiced ready for replanting at Hyde



New hedge at Hyde

Nature's Stepping Stones Project

Eight volunteer work parties have been run at 4 different sites; with several more planned in the first two months of the new year. Much of the work has involved cutting down scrub to restore flower rich grasslands. This work was carried out by 28 different volunteers who altogether put in over 50 days of their time to help us with this work. This included a day with several staff from Ordnance Survey at Tatchbury Lane Field removing willow from the Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.

Fourteen land management advice visits were carried out with landowners in the project.

Some of our other sites have now received their felling licences and soon work will be carried out by contractors who have been lined up to carry out habitat restoration works on several more sites during January and February.



Rhododendron removal on heathland



Scrub removal by volunteers on a species rich grassland



Introducing grazing and volunteer scrub removal on another site



Ordnance Survey volunteer scrub bash at Tatchbury

New Forest Rural Skills Project

Six more courses have been run during this period including Woodland Management, Hedgerow Management (both run by NFLAS staff), Sheep Breeding and Husbandry, Welding (6 week evening course), Chainsaw and Felling of Small Trees.

The Commoner Mentor Scheme is going well with the 11 mentorees building good relationships with their Mentors and learning a wide range of skills and knowledge and about commoning in the New Forest and livestock husbandry by spending time on their holdings, on the Forest and accompanying them to relevant meetings and events.



Hedgerow management course for 12 landowners



Sheep breeding and husbandry near Bransgore



Woodland Management Course near Brockenhurst

Working Woodlands Project

We are working with landowners at 8 small privately owned woodlands and have identified several more for the years ahead.

Ten volunteer work parties have been carried out in 4 of the woodlands so far this season including a day just before Christmas when some members of the Environment and Rural Economy team at the National Park joined us and some of our volunteers to help remove young birch at a woodland in Bransgore to increase the width of a woodland ride to benefit woodland flora and invertebrates.



Woodland work party removing birch and rhododendron

Core NFLAS work

The Commoners Defence Association has commissioned us to help facilitate their work with the Rural Payments Agency looking at the major issues with the Basic Payment Scheme in the New Forest. This involves liaising with the RPA, working with a group of commoners and Verderers, plus the NFU, set up to look at the issues and carrying out GIS map analysis of the Open Forest to inform the outcomes of future payment levels for commoners.

We have been helping a lot of commoners with their BPS problems, helping them to investigate them with the RPA.

We have streamlined our work with the new Natural England Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer by inviting him to spend a day with us explaining our work and how we can work together. This included site visits to some of the farms where we have been giving advice about water quality.

We have been working at a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation near Godshill which has been newly acquired by a keen landowner. The site is large and complex with partnership working required with EA and Freshwater Habitats Trust to look at the wetland complex and make decisions about future management. The management of some aspects of this site will now enter the Nature's Stepping Stones Project and other elements will be covered by Trace's guidance

We have been guiding some farmers and commoners through Countryside Stewardship applications and Rhys Morgan has been working with a landowner, Natural England, Forestry Commission and Dorset County Council on a SSSI in the Avon Valley to guide the landowner through the process of improving its condition for nature conservation.

We have started to work with the owners of a large newly acquired farm near Hale which has no environmental funding or management in order to advise on wildlife improvements and help them apply for grants. The habitats include woodland, floodplain grassland and arable; we will be guiding them through management changes including reverting arable to grassland and grazing with a new herd of cattle.

We ran a day for NPA members where we showcased the broad and various work of the team and went out to one of our Nature's Stepping Stones sites in the afternoon. Eight Members came for the morning and five stayed for the afternoon visit.

Growing the Forest and Ecology

The period saw some good news and successful public engagement in relation to our work on the New Forest Catchment, demonstrating the value the wider community places in protecting and enhancing our riparian habitats and wildlife. Over 20 people attended an evening talk in Beaulieu on the mysterious European eel and other fish species in the Beaulieu Abbey stream. A guided walk along the stream was also fully booked. The events were delivered as part of the Living Waters theme of the Our Past, Our Future HLF Landscape Scheme.

Through its partnership work the Living Waters programme of works has now successfully secured additional partnership funding thanks to the Environment Agency. As a result the project has hit its year match funding target which will enable improved profiling of delivery and additional benefits to be secured for the project working with local land owners and businesses.

A Catchment Partnerships meeting was held in December. The work of the Partnership is currently centred on the Living Waters project and achieving improvements in small scale pollution discharges from septic tanks and other sources. The project will be seeking support from local communities, organisations and businesses in this work. Further plans are being developed and we are also working with Defra and community partners to take forward collaborative working on potential flood risk.

We worked with the Freshwater Trust to support the New Forest Walking Festival, providing a guided walk 'Pond-ering and Wandering' which was fully booked. It provided a great opportunity to showcase the importance of the Forest's wetlands, particularly ponds and the work we are involved with to help protect and enhance them. Participants were enthusiastic to support the work and provided positive feedback on the event.

The period saw significant contribution to some major planning schemes which meant that professional Authority ecological advice was available to inform decisions. Over 44 requests were received as part of the shared service with New Forest District Council, as well as input to some major strategic schemes including plans for the Waterside. Over 52 applications were screened as having potential impact within the National Park area and 20 requests for input received from Development Control.



Pond-ering and Wandering. Freshwater Trust consultant Rob Aquilinia showing results of pond dipping.

The concept of the 'Green Halo' and our work on natural capital and ecosystem services is gaining momentum. A steering group has been established to develop an approach to establishing the Green Halo initiative, with members drawn from participants in the event held in July which examined the multi-functional benefits provided by the natural capital of the National Park. This is an exciting cross-sectoral partnership of private and public sector interests. Work is progressing on identifying the programme of projects and activities which can contribute to enhancing natural capital and the benefits derived through ecosystem services. The aim is to launch a Green Halo Partnership in the Spring.

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

Planning and development activity has remained high in this reporting period, with 213 planning applications received and 210 decisions issued (up to 30 December). The vast majority of applications were approved (82%). Government targets were met for the time taken to determine applications (e.g. 91% of all householder applications were dealt with within eight weeks during this period).

From 1 October 2016, fees have been charged for providing formal written pre-application advice to applicants/agents. Since introducing these new charges, we have received 97 formal requests for pre-application advice, generating a fee income of £5,257. As agreed at the last Authority meeting, an evaluation and review of the new charging regime will be reported to the next Authority meeting on 23 March 2017.

Four appeals were determined, of which two were dismissed and two were allowed. Two further appeals were withdrawn. All appeal decisions are reported to the Planning Development Control Committee for consideration.

Enforcement and Trees

We held our very successful Family Trees event in Ashurst in December where more than 300 people attended to plant trees to recognise a family member or family event. Thirteen species of British native trees and shrubs were planted including Scots Pine, Beech, Birch, Rowan and Wild Cherry, we are already beginning to plan the event for next year in Brockenhurst. In the period October through December we made seven 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 high number of 372 Tree Work Applications were also determined for the National Park and surrounding New Forest District areas.

Since October we have served four Enforcement Notices directed against the most harmful breaches of planning control and secured resolution with two Notices where the breaches of planning control have been rectified. This was in respect of the demolition of a residential building and the cessation of the use of land as a residential garden. Members also authorised that committal proceedings and direct action be taken at a site where an unauthorised residential mobile home has been stationed in breach of both an Enforcement Notice and High Court Injunction. These proceedings have been instigated and we are currently awaiting Court dates.

Policy

The main focus of the Policy team's work over the last few months has been the eight-week public consultation on the draft New Forest National Park Local Plan. The consultation was launched in early October 2016 and was extensively publicised through our monthly e-newsletter, the October 2016 edition of *Park Life*, social media, press releases, weekly press adverts, posters on Town and Parish Council noticeboards and through the regular Parish Quadrant meetings and New Forest Consultative Panel.

During the eight-week consultation a series of public drop-in sessions were held around the National Park and officers also attended a number of Parish Council hosted meetings to discuss the draft Local Plan and its proposals. In total over 800 people attended the various drop-in sessions which provided an opportunity for people to discuss the draft Local Plan and the proposed planning approach to the future of the National Park. During the consultation period responses were received from nearly 400 individuals and organisations – including local residents, Town and Parish Councils within the Park, neighbouring planning authorities, the larger estates within the Forest, statutory consultees and landowners. All of the consultation responses received have been acknowledged and are available for inspection (with personal details redacted) in the reception at Lymington Town Hall.

Now that the consultation has closed, all of the responses received will be considered and will be used to inform the preparation of the Submission draft Local Plan later in 2017. This will also be informed by

further evidence base studies, including an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the National Park and a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

In addition to the work on the draft Local Plan, the team continues to liaise with neighbouring authorities on a range of cross-boundary planning issues. This includes discussions with Wiltshire Council on habitat mitigation measures to ensure the new development planned for South Wiltshire does not affect the protected habitats in the adjacent National Park; and our formal consultation response on the Associated British Ports (ABP) draft Port of Southampton Masterplan 2016 – 2035.

1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life

Design advice and guidance

The Building Design Awards Panel met in late December 2016 to consider the range of schemes nominated this year. The Building Design Awards aim to recognise the contribution good design makes to the built environment of the New Forest National Park. Further details of the winning developments will be included in the March 2017 full Authority meeting when the chosen schemes will be formally recognised.

Our Past, Our Future Traditional Building Skills Courses

A further professional course has taken place on historic joinery at Buckler's Hard. The course was 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 marking the end to a successful first year delivering traditional building skills courses. 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 in November 2016. Agenda items included the recent verge protection works undertaken in parts of the Conservation Area (e.g. Woodgreen); the aim of coordinating work with the Forestry Commission on verge protection; and an outline of the local distinctiveness project being led by the National Park Authority which could compliment the work of the Steering Group. Steering Group representatives are meeting with Forestry Commission staff in January 2017 to discuss the range of measures available to protect the verges of the area – which are part of its rural character as well as in many places being protected as SSSIs.

Buckland Rings undergrounding of electric cables

Medieval pottery from the excavation at Buckland Rings has now been reported on and involves 11 different types of fabric all from domestic pottery jugs and cooking pots originating from a nearby settlement site and dating from at least the Anglo-Norman to high medieval periods. Soil samples from the site will be processed in January with the help of volunteers and may reveal more about medieval agriculture and the crops locally grown. The results along with emerging C14, radio carbon dates for the nearby Ampress Park site and from the Alexander Road at Lymington are revising our understanding of the origin and growth of Lymington in the Anglo-Saxon period. The information will help inform the new displays at Lymington's St Barbe Museum.

The archaeological projects within the Our Past, Our Future scheme are ongoing and continue to engage with an increasing number of volunteers in a wide range of work. As an example the Community Heritage Forum brought together 20 representatives of local history and archaeology societies in November at Beaulieu Parish church where a representative from Historic England was able to outline the value of Community Generated Research and links with local Historic Environment Records. An output from the two Community Heritage Forum meetings has been the production of a Local Archaeology and Heritage Group Directory.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park

Volunteering

The number of volunteers on our database increased during this reporting period from 277 to 313. Around 250 of these are currently active. Volunteers receive regular updates and receive a newsletter every two months. In October the wildlife conservation volunteers began clearing invasive scrub from wildlife sites across the New Forest. Many of these volunteers joined staff on a winter solstice volunteer day in Harrow Wood, Bransgore, on 21 December. Volunteers continued their water quality analysis in the Beaulieu catchment and Community tree planting days took place at Foxbury. Local groups in Minstead, Copythorne, Emery Down and Burley undertook archaeological surveys to collect accurate records of monuments. Volunteers are invited to a celebration evening at Lyndhurst Community Centre on 19 January to celebrate the success of volunteering in the first year of the Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme.

The annual New Forest Volunteer Fair will take place on Sunday 29 January at Lyndhurst Community Centre. This will be the seventh fair we have held and we are looking forward to seeing over 40 organisations and hundreds of prospective new volunteers interested in helping the Forest's habitats, heritage, landscape and communities.

Outreach, health and wellbeing

We have met with colleagues from Public Health England (PHE) and are now developing how to realise the signed accord between PHE and National Parks England. PHE have helped us understand the data and evidence base for health outcomes and are also advising on an application to BIG lottery fund on utilising national parks to build resilience in young people and prevent mental health problems.

We have recently also investigated an application to a new youth-focussed fund through the Heritage Lottery Fund, entitled 'Kick the Dust'. This fund could help us realise our Partnership Plan ambitions to help young people become more involved in the National Park. A round one application will follow in the New Year.

2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park

Public and community events / rangers

This period saw a continuation of the busy summer with rangers attending a range of public events including talking to Brockenhurst College students about reducing animal accidents and promoting safe driving across the Forest at Drive Safe. Rangers reached a new audience leading a very successful New Forest Toddle as part of the walking festival. It was aimed at introducing very young children and their parents to the New Forest, equipping them with ideas of how to look after and enjoy the National Park. A surprising 300 people attended and plans are being made to run more in next year's events programme. Ranger contacts totalled 2,908 in this period.

Work has continued to develop the New Forest Youth Action Project, a consortium of 10 New Forest organisations, led by the NFNPA in providing formal engagement programmes for youth groups. It aims to support the work of youth organisations in increasing self-confidence, motivation and employability in the participants, alongside opportunities to work with a range of New Forest organisations learning about the special qualities of the National Park and ways in which they can enjoy it responsibly.

Rangers have designed a bespoke six session programme for four Princes Trust groups of young adults aged between 17 and 20 from the Southampton and Salisbury areas and welcomed them in to the Forest to take part. Work is underway to develop the next set of programmes for spring 2017.

In addition, the project has delivered a programme of five sessions for the Cambian group of schools, who specialise in residential care of young adults with complex learning needs. These sessions provided opportunities for quiet enjoyment and sensory stimulation alongside much needed respite from their residential environment.

A key facet of the project is the encouragement of the sharing of skills, knowledge and resources between all of the organisations and individuals involved, ensuring that the learning and enjoyment is a multi-way experience between participants, youth organisations and delivery organisations.

Interpretation projects

The Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) exhibition at the New Forest Centre concluded on the 9 November. Overall feedback was very positive with approximately 9,600 visitors. One of the activities was a voting unit asking visitors "what is your favourite commoner's animal". Pig, pony, cow and donkey were the options and donkey was the overall surprise winner followed by pigs, ponies and last of all, cows. Visitor comments included "cracking exhibition" and "excellent exhibition to show girls how we need to protect/restore forest, we live in East Boldre so very relevant! Take to local schools!!".

The New Forest Heritage Portal continues to be very popular with site visits from around the world. During this period 18,326 page views and 16 articles have been added or updated. The portal, covering WWI and WWII heritage in the New Forest, continues to be a lasting legacy and valuable resource, in particular when engaging with ongoing public interest and enquiries.

The Our Past, Our Future scheme's Historic Routes and Pathways project formally started in November. Plans are in place to recruit volunteers from our current Our Past, Our Future volunteer pool as well as gain new volunteers at the Volunteer Fair in January. The Project Officer has met with HCC Countryside Access staff and attended the New Forest Access Forum meeting in early December.

Communications

Our Local Plan consultation saw 800 people attend the drop-in sessions and around 400 responses from individuals and organisations. Planning will soon begin for the formal statutory consultation in the summer.

We helped promote the launch of the new cycle centre at Brockenhurst in September, which was part-funded by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

Over 300 people attended the Family Trees event to create a community wood at Ashurst during National Tree Week, including a school competition winner who designed the certificates everyone received.

We issued a press release about Current Archaeology magazine's nomination of our archaeology team's Lidar work for the accolade of 'Best Archaeological Innovation of the last 50 years'. We also helped design an award submission to the RTPI for the Bransgore affordable housing scheme, which we launched in October attended by MP Sir Desmond Swayne.

Record numbers attended the autumn Walking Festival – 1,900 people taking part in expert-led walks, up 77% on last year's figures. Feedback included:

- 90% of walkers who left feedback said they enjoyed their walk(s) 'a lot'
- 94% learnt something new about the New Forest
- 98% said their walk encouraged them to look for further opportunities to discover the New Forest.

We launched the Volunteer Fair with a video message of support from TV wildlife presenter Simon King. Simon also narrated a video we're commissioning which will be screened to visitors of the revamped Verderers' Court, as part of the OPOF scheme.

We supplied features on the OPOF scheme to the New Forest Association's new review magazine. In November we brought together a former German prisoner of war and ex-prison official at the site of their World War II POW camp after seven decades. The story was covered by ITV Meridian and other media outlets.

We have issued a number of social media posts and press releases on our campaigns which have sparked good discussions – notably on animal accidents and the effects of fireworks on New Forest stock and wildlife. A Facebook post about driving carefully across the Forest at night received our best engagement yet with a reach of nearly 70,000 people; nearly 450 shares and 52 comments.

A 'takeover' of our Instagram page by archaeologist Lawrence Shaw to highlight his work saw a great reaction - 40,000 impressions (up 33,000 from the previous week) and 224 profile clicks (up 71 from the previous week).

Our website blog has seen contributions from staff about their favourite walks in the Forest, which are proving popular.

Formal education

The education team taught nearly 1,000 students from 13 schools and colleges during the Autumn term. Unusually for this time of year, only one of the teaching sessions took place in a school, with all the other groups requesting sessions outdoors in the National Park, including six primary schools. The most requested session was an introduction to the National Park and its management. Discussion with members of the New Forest Educators Forum at our December meeting revealed that this pattern of schools actively seeking to bring children to the Forest for education sessions during October, November and December (previously a quieter time of year) has been repeated for other providers. It is very encouraging that schools no longer regard an educational visit to the Forest as a summer trip, but perceive the educational value of first-hand experience of its unique landscape, and choose to study the New Forest National Park in each school term.

The second tranche of the Travel Grant Scheme, which runs until March 2017, has all been allocated. In previous years, funds have still been available to schools visiting education providers in early spring. The Forum agreed to reduce the amount available to each school next year in order to accommodate the maximum number of schools.

At this time of year, students from local secondary schools apply to the Authority to carry out work experience in the summer term. Each student has attended the Town Hall for an interview. It is very satisfying to see the young people, always so nervous when they arrive, become more relaxed as they are shown around the office because staff are so welcoming. All the students have written to accept the placement, and are excited at the prospect of joining the Authority for a short time.

2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park

Recreation Management

The Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group would ideally like to progress to the first stage of a public consultation focussed on how we can work together to improve both the recreational experience and protection of the Forest and to identify and respond to problems and opportunities. The scope and timescale for this will be discussed early in 2017.

We have continued to support Natural England with the development of a route for the England Coast Path through the National Park. Throughout this period we have accompanied NE officers and landowners on a walk of the possible routes. The Authority has now been asked to perform the establishment role for the route and discussions are ongoing about future maintenance arrangements. See the agenda item on the Coast Path for further details.

Educational campaigns

In October the UK Cycling Events autumn event caused concern when the route had to be changed at short notice. For further details, see the agenda item on the effectiveness of the Cycle Event Organisers' Charter.

A flurry of animal accidents during the autumn meant that the 2016 accident statistics were worse than in 2015. Over 30,000 emergency hotline cards were distributed to people purchasing NFDC parking clocks: a very cost effective way of getting safe driving messages (and the phone numbers) to these local drivers, and there are plans for further improvements to road signage (around Sway and Brockenhurst) and new ways of engaging with people through their employers.

Rangers assisted the Forestry Commission in encouraging people not to pick fungi and our work to encourage responsible dog walking is ongoing, especially through the NFDC funded People and Wildlife Ranger.

A high profile 2017 Spring Clean litter pick is being planned, starting with the first weekend in March, with several partner organisations taking part.

Good join-up across all our educational campaigns is being facilitated by the OPOF 'behaviour change' work, especially in finding positive ways to engage people in potentially negative topics. We are also refreshing, with partner organisations, our high-level 'caring for the Forest' messages that we routinely use in our communications.

New Forest Access Forum

The Forum met on 5 December in Hythe. The Forum received a presentation from the National Trust about their activities at Foxbury and the Northern Commons. Feedback was given to the Trust following complaints about restrictions on equestrian access to Plaitford common by adjacent property owners. The Forum finalised their response to the consultation on the NPA local plan and received updates on the Historic Routes project, New Forest Mitigation project and the England Coast Path. Following the meeting, a site visit was held to view the state of an existing public right of way between Hythe and Marchwood which runs along the National Park boundary.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy

We were pleased to once again be able to celebrate the work of the Forest's business community through our sponsorship of the Sustainable Business category in the New Forest Business Partnership Brilliance in Business Awards ceremony at Carey's Manor in November.

This year's winner was the Cottage Lodge Hotel in Brockenhurst, which demonstrates concern for the environment throughout its business including sourcing of local products and upcycling of furniture with restorations carried out by local craftsmen.

The membership of the New Forest Marque continues to grow and the financial support of the Authority has enabled the Marque to employ an Operations Manager. Interviews for the post have been held and an appointment will be made early in the New Year.

3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

Planning permission was granted at last month's Planning Development Control Committee meeting for 10 new affordable homes on the edge of Brockenhurst (adjacent to an existing affordable housing scheme at Vinneys Close). These are to be built and managed by the Hyde Group, a long established provider of affordable housing in the area.

It is hoped that negotiations will be concluded very soon on an agreement to purchase a small piece of land (subject to planning permission) for two new affordable homes at Burley (to include a local heritage centre). The proposal has been initiated and conceived in partnership with Burley Parish Council and a more detailed update will be reported to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee on 6 February 2017.

In the meantime, another local landowner has come forward with an offer to gift some land for a small affordable housing scheme, having been inspired by the recent development at Bransgore.

Discussions are also ongoing with another local Parish Council who are looking to establish a new Community Land Trust to help build new affordable homes for local people.

3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

Visitor bus services

The New Forest Tour had a very good year with 39,653 passenger journeys (up from 34,622 in 2015, a 14.5% increase). The Tour will inherit newer vehicles from the Purbeck Breezer service in 2017. Slight differences in the height of the new vehicles may make it difficult for the green route to pass under the Ampress bridge in Lymington. As a result we may need to make some adjustments to the green route to avoid problems.

The Beach Bus performed well in terms of passenger numbers (6,460 in 2016 vs 6,436 in 2015); however, increasing use of the service by concessionary pass users is having a significant negative effect on its revenue and its resulting financial sustainability. We are currently examining options with the bus operators to sustain a service in 2017. We are also aware of concerns about the future viability of the Hythe Ferry and we are monitoring the situation which could have significant consequences for both the Tour and the Beach Bus.

We recently met with representatives from Brockenhurst Parish Council to look at potential improvements to public spaces on station land. The south western rail franchise changes next summer and we will use the ideas discussed with the parish council in discussions with the new franchise operator.

Transport policy

We have been engaging with Hampshire County Council's structures team around the future of the A35 bridge over the C10 near Holmsley Tea rooms. The current bridge will need replacing in the next few years and HCC are currently considering the most effective and least disruptive method of replacing this.

We also met with Highways England to discuss opportunities for their £300 million Environmental Designated Fund to reduce the negative impacts of the A31 on the National Park. The Campaign for National Parks and ourselves have long wanted to see prioritisation of the A31 for resurfacing with a new whisper tarmac surface to reduce road noise. We anticipate this will occur through the ongoing programme of resurfacing works in the next few years which is a separate Highways England programme from the Environmental Designated Fund. We are also talking to Highways England and our partners about whether there are any other effective ideas for environmental improvements within the boundary of the A31.

3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities

Sustainable Communities Fund

Funds towards a project to help increase the sustainability of New Forest schools by working with them to achieve Eco-Schools Green Flag Award has now concluded. Over two years the project helped

increase the number of New Forest schools with a Green Flag from four to eight and worked with a further 13 schools to achieve Bronze or Silver Awards as part of working towards a Green Flag.

The Green Flag award includes activities such as setting up an eco-committee and carrying out an environmental review, as well as setting a detailed action plan and linking this to the curriculum. The range of projects and initiatives includes energy saving, litter, recycling, travel and climate change to help bring about behaviour change in young people and those connected to them so that good habits learned in schools are followed through into homes and communities. Operated by Keep Britain Tidy in England, Eco-Schools is a global programme engaging millions of children across 64 different countries, making it the largest schools programme in the world. Nationally more than 17,000 schools are registered and 1,200 schools currently hold the internationally recognised Eco-Schools Green Flag. There are 18 Green Flag schools in Hampshire of which eight are now in the New Forest National Park.

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. Defra will shortly start recruiting to fill two Authority positions – that of Judith Webb who resigned from the Authority in March 2016 and that of John Pemberton whose appointment with the Authority will end in July 2017. Both positions will be filled in time for the Annual Authority meeting where appointments to committees and external organisations will take place.

NFNPA reception area

Significant improvements have been made to the Authority's reception area to optimise the service to visitors – smart new furniture has been installed, providing a choice of seating. Better-quality wall mounted magazine racks have improved the general appearance and created more space. Improvements have also been made to the layout of the whole area with the very large Authority logo being moved into reception which is now much more prominent when initially entering the main building. The main foyer area now has a dedicated display area that will have changing informative and interpretive information.

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

Working with Partners

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 discussed the decision on the Latchmoor wetland restoration project and the way forward for this and other similar wetland restoration projects in terms of increased community involvement. The Panel was also updated on progress regarding high speed Broadband delivery in the New Forest and the 'look but don't pick' campaign which was a collaborative initiative to highlight the importance of the New Forest for fungi and an appeal to people to support a 'no-picking' code.

Service Level Agreements

Expert specialist advice is being provided through shared services to New Forest District Council (building design and conservation, ecology and trees and archaeology) and the Forestry Commission (archaeology).

New Forest Consultative Panel

The agenda setting group of the New Forest Consultative Panel, comprising the Chairman of the Panel, NPA Chief Executive and Deputy Surveyor met in December and agreed Panel agenda items for the year which included the Defra 25 Year Plan, the Forest Design Plan, Recreation Management Strategy, the Green Halo, the Authority's Local Plan and Wetland Restoration.

4.3 Using available resources effectively and efficiently

Medium term strategic planning

Officers continue to work with members on preparing medium-term strategic plans for key areas of the Authority's work and are progressing the four agreed strategic themes (commercial activity, partnerships and engagement, evidence and data and organisational development) with corresponding actions being included in the 2017-18 work programme.

Freedom of Information/Data Protection

To date this year we have received 34 information requests, one less than the same period last year. Half of the requests were related to the Authority's planning function, including planning applications, enforcement, trees, listed building and policy. The remainder were predominantly related to Finance, Corporate Services and ICT, and two concerned services which were not within our remit and were redirected to the correct public authority (parking contracts and school absences).

100% of requests were responded to within the statutory 20 working days and the average response time was 14 working days. Three requesters asked for an internal review and of these one was referred to the Information Commissioner's Office. In 70% of cases the information requested was fully or partially disclosed (generally only minor personal data redactions), in 20% of cases the information was not held by the Authority and the remainder (four requests) were withheld.

The number of serial requests has reduced year on year, only six compared with 14 for the same period last year. The number of complaints received by the Authority has also reduced year on year, 13 vs eight this year - serial complainants still account for the majority of these.

With Britain's impending exit from the European Union, officers are working to ensure that the Authority's data protection systems remain compliant with both UK and EU regulations and best practice requirements.

Human Resources

As at 31 December 2016 the total staff headcount was 85 or 74.72 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	FTE	Variation from previous report
Core funded	68*	-1	60.51*	-1
Funded by external projects	17	+2	14.20	+2.19
Total	85	+1	74.72	+1.19

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

In October we welcomed our Apprentice Rangers; Katherine Argyrou and Joe Ison. Funded by the 'Our Past, Our Future' Landscape Partnership Scheme project, Katherine and Joe will spend 13 months gaining valuable experience with the Authority and with four of our partner organisations; the Forestry Commission, the National Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, and Hampshire County Council.

At the end of December we said goodbye to Harriet Toeman (Scanning Assistant) as her fixed-term role within the planning administration team came to an end. We wish her well in her future ventures.

ICT Services

The revised IT User Policy has now been approved by the Executive Board and will be made effective from February 2017 – the policy will provide enhanced security to the Authority's data and systems particularly around the installation of new software and hardware. The team is also working on rolling out replacement PC's and laptops as part of its renewal programme.

5 Members

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

- Planning Development Control Committee – 18 October
- Planning Development Control Committee – 15 November
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 21 November
- Consultative Panel – 1 December
- Communications Members Day – 8 December
- Planning Development Control Committee – 13 December
- Planning Development Control Committee – 17 January

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 6 February
- Planning Development Control Committee – 21 February
- New Forest Marque Members Day – 1 March
- Consultative Panel – 2 March
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 6 March
- Planning Development Control Committee – 21 March

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- President's Reception, CPRE Hampshire's 50th birthday – 22 September
- National Grid Stakeholder Advisory Group site visit – 27 September
- HLS Board – 5 October
- Tree, Woodland, Landscape Officers Group (TWLOG) meeting – 5 October
- TWLOG site visit – 6 October
- Natural England Landscape Advisory Group – 7 October
- Visit to RSPB Arne – 11 October
- Members Planning Tour – 13 October
- National Parks England Board meeting – 18 October
- Meeting with Santander – 19 October
- Participated in a walk as part of the Walking Festival – 20 October
- National Park Officers Away Day – 24 October
- Hampshire Rural Forum – 1 November
- SE FWAC – 2 November

- Volunteer Day scrub bashing – 3 November
- The Hampshire Partnership – 10 November
- The Green Halo Steering Group – 11 November
- Conservation 21: Natural England conference – 14 November
- NW Quadrant Meeting – 14 November
- Speaker at Regenerate South Group – 15 November
- RAPC – 21 November
- New Forest Charities meeting – 21 November
- Presentation of Port Master Plan for Southampton – 21 November
- Workshop with Public Health England – 22 November
- Business South Board meeting – 22 November
- Meeting with Lord Hollick – 25 November
- Attendance to the annual Beaulieu Dinner – 25 November
- Public Health England workshop – 28 November
- Meeting with Landscape Institute Chief Executive – 28 November
- CPRE meeting – 29 November
- Management Plan Leadership Group meeting – 30 November
- English National Parks Officers Group meeting – 1 December
- HIOW CX meeting – 2 December
- Family Tree event – 3 December
- Safer New Forest Strategy and Delivery Group meeting – 5 December
- Tour of the Forest with Southampton Port Director – 6 December
- Members Day – 8 December
- Natural Environment Strategy Group meeting – 8 December
- Verderers Tour of Stock – 9 December
- Meeting with Friends of Brockenhurst – 12 December
- NPUK Video Conference – 12 December
- National Parks Partnerships Ltd Board meeting – 13 December
- Greater London National Park Trustees meeting – 14 December
- Green Halo Steering Group meeting – 15 December
- Meeting with Natural England – 15 December
- NPA Christmas Carol Concert – 22 December
- HLS Board meeting – 11 January
- Basic Payment Scheme meeting – 16 January
- Meeting with the Heritage Lottery Fund – 19 January

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- Meeting with new NPE Chairman – 10 October
- Chaired RMS meeting – 11 October
- Visit to Winchester Crown Courts as guest of High Sherriff – 3 November
- Attended NFA 150th Anniversary launch event – 18 November
- Chaired key New Forest Charities meeting – 21 November
- Chaired RMS Steering Group – 23 November
- Attended Chairmen's AONB Conference – 24 November
- Guest Speaker at Beaulieu Estate Dinner – 25 November
- NPE Video Conference – 5 January
- Meeting with Defra – 13 January
- Defra Panel meeting – 17 January

6 Recommendation

To note the report.