

NFNPA 518/17

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 23 MARCH 2017**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 19 January 2017. 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

I was privileged to be invited in late January to address the launch event for the year of celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the NFA, now 'Friends of the New Forest' and the UK's second oldest conservation charity. At the event our former Chairman, Clive Chatters, looked back at events through the history of the Forest and at challenges such as urban growth and recreational pressure. The debate showed how our work with partners through the Partnership Plan and through our 'Protect, Enjoy and Prosper' themes is enabling us to work together to put the Forest first and how much needs to be done to champion the Forest together.

Our strategic planning work has been very much focussed on major developments affecting the National Park, in particular Christchurch Urban Extension and emerging proposals for the Waterside. We have continued to support the development of a 'Green Halo' partnership to work together to identify projects which will help us to work together across sectors and beyond our boundaries to maintain and enhance the natural capital of our area. We are anticipating that the Government's forthcoming 25 Year Plans, one for the environment and a second for food and farming will have maintaining and enhancing natural capital as a core principal and our work in understanding and quantifying our natural capital in and around the National Park is timely.

Alongside the celebration of the NFA anniversary, a clear theme of the year so far has been the recognition and thanking of all those who's time and expertise is leading the way in the protection of the New Forest in a wide range of ways. Under the 'Protect' theme a number of award winners were recognised:

- We were delighted when Pondhead Conservation Trust at Lyndhurst was recognised as Best Project in the UK National Parks Volunteer Awards for its community woodland which the Authority has supported.
- The best development schemes in our second annual Building Design Awards were judged, with awards in the categories of individual building, extension and large development.
- Our New Forest Volunteer Awards saw Brian Matthews, from Lymington (who spent an astonishing 400 hours volunteering in 2016) named Project Champion for the New Forest non-native plants project at a celebration evening for volunteers.
- Lidar heritage mapping and our archaeology team's New Forest project was judged 'best innovation in the last 50 years' by Current Archaeology Magazine.

The considerable volunteer force that operates in the Forest and which is supported particularly through our 'Enjoy' work programme, has been very much in focus this quarter. Volunteering is growing at a pace with a record 700 people attending our annual Volunteer Fair; over 500 volunteers contributing over 13,000 hours to deliver the Heritage Lottery Fund Our Past, Our Future projects last year; and hundreds of people turning out to collect 250 bags of litter in the Forest as part of the nationwide Spring Clean weekend at the start of March.

We have been preparing the annual publications for the visitor season; the Essential Guide and Pocket Guide giving particular opportunities to reach people with our 'care for' messages spanning across a number of campaign themes. With the arrival of spring we have also worked with the Dogs Forum to agree clearer and stronger messages for the signs asking people to stay on the main tracks during the ground nesting bird season; newly designed signs will be displayed across Forestry Commission, National Trust and Hampshire County Council managed land.

To boost our campaigns and share information about why the Forest is special and how people can help care for it, we have produced a 'welcome home' information sheet for new residents. The aim is to point people to our website for further details about a number of opportunities to contribute to keeping the Forest special including boundary treatments, ground nesting birds, animal accidents and buying local produce.

Our 'Prosper' work on affordable housing has also been recognised this quarter. The NPA led scheme at Bransgore has been shortlisted in the Royal Town Planning Institute's Awards for Planning Excellence. The winners will be announced at a ceremony in June. With the recently published Housing White Paper heralding possible opportunities for affordable housing and growing interest in bringing forward similar schemes elsewhere in the Forest, it is great to see that our first scheme has been both timely and influential.

Under 'Prosper', we also attended the Police and Crime Commissioner's Rural Conferences, giving the opportunity to discuss issues and solutions with a range of community representatives and officers from the Police Service and other relevant Authorities. The Commissioner will be preparing a strategy for rural Hampshire in the coming months and we will be working to ensure Forest issues continue to inform this.

As we reflected at our last meeting, there is no doubt we are at an important moment for the Forest, with uncertainties and pressures around us. This quarter shows how we have many examples of exemplary people, projects and partnerships coming together to meet these challenges and create opportunities for the future.

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

Archaeology

We have received a national award for the archaeology team's Lidar (**L**ight **D**etection and **R**anging technology) work from 'Current Archaeology' magazine'. We were chosen as number one from the various contenders as the best example of archaeological innovation over the last 50 years.

The New Forest was the first UK National Park to obtain full Lidar coverage (an area equivalent to 125,000 football pitches). This has been of great benefit to the natural and historic environment work within the National Park. It has allowed the targeted verification of sites on the ground - assisted by a large number of volunteers working with Lawrence Shaw through the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship scheme funded by Natural England, and James Brown through the New Forest Remembers World War Two, Heritage Lottery Funded project.

The Lidar work started in 2008 when we were awarded a £15,000 year-long archaeological bursary from the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. This allowed the potential and benefits of Lidar data to be explored and projects to be developed.

The Lidar involves beaming harmless lasers down from light aircraft to form a 3D map of the landscape. Unlike conventional aerial photography, this innovative approach allows us to see below trees and shrubs to identify previously unrecorded features. Over 3,000 additional archaeological sites from the prehistoric period through to war-time installations and landscape features have now been added to the public record, ensuring site and landscape management decisions can be better informed.

The existing National Park Lidar data can now be compared with the more recent Environment Agency Lidar data, allowing recent landscape and site changes to be assessed. Archaeological work will continue through the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and also through the Heritage Lottery Funded, Our Past, Our Future Landscape Scheme archaeology projects.

National Grid Visual Impact Provision (VIP) and Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) Programmes

National Grid has had its specialist engineering sub-contractors carrying out borehole tests at the west and east ends of the overhead high voltage pylon line as it crosses Hale Purlieu, testing the geological makeup of the soil, sands and gravels that lie beneath the surface. This is to gather detailed information that will assist in putting together the proposals for undergrounding the overhead pylon line. The work is intended to take approximately three weeks and involves the use of drills and generators that power the drills, with access needed for vehicles. Natural England gave consent for the works that are located within the SSSI and SAC.

The application for the Landscape Enhancement Initiative fund for wildplay and woodland management at Warren Copse, Holbury is being considered by National Grid, with several queries being made after the submission, which have been responded to. The earliest we are expecting to hear if the application has been successful is May 2017.

Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Landscape Partnership Scheme

All partners are continuing to progress their projects as part of the scheme. Key events that have happened in early 2017 include the following:

- Fifth progress report and payment request to the Heritage Lottery Fund submitted.
- OPOF Board meeting held including site visits to look at the Beaulieu Icehouse and water quality monitoring in the Beaulieu Abbey Streams.
- A volunteer celebration evening in January 2017 held and attended by 60 volunteers. The partner organisations presented 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 were given certificates to recognise their contributions and volunteer champions were nominated for specific projects.
- The Volunteer Fair took place in January and a number of new volunteers were signed up for OPOF volunteer tasks.
- We are currently undertaking an annual review of the scheme for the first year.

New Forest Land Advice Service

New Forest Rural Skills Project

Three courses have taken place during this timeframe:

- Hedgelaying – at Better Boundaries hedgerows site in Godshill; very well attended on a snowy Saturday morning.
- Coppicing - in Holbury with a theory session in the morning and then a practical in the afternoon at one of our Working Woodland sites, Warren Copse.
- A two-evening course on Equine Nutrition, Health and Pasture Management - brought a series of expert talks and presentations to the equine owners in the New Forest including from a vet, a nutritionist and the country's leading author and expert in pasture management for horses.

Better Boundaries, Nature's Stepping Stones and Working Woodlands

A lot of practical work continues in the same vein as the report for the previous period. This report marks the end of the practical season due to the start of the bird breeding season on 1 March so the team is extremely busy managing contractors to get the scheduled work completed by then.

Core NFLAS advice

A very busy period with an influx of requests for advice since the equine pasture course and also since we announced to commoners a new Nitrate Vulnerable Zone designated by the Environment Agency in January. This affects hundreds of landowners in the Minstead, Emery Down, Netley Marsh and Ashurst areas.

Growing the Forest and Ecology

Much of the partnership work undertaken during the period has centred around the theme of evidence and data. We contributed to discussion and plans for action to undertake monitoring and management of 'flagship ponds' which are a suite of the best sites in the UK. The New Forest boasts several entries, demonstrating its national and international importance for freshwater wildlife.

We also undertook work to agree survey priorities for our partnership with the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre for this survey year, acted as a facilitator for planning further surveys of important bird species across the Park as part of Higher Level Stewardship funding, provided input to the Ecademy project and attended the annual volunteer recorders forum. We engaged with the Hampshire branch of Butterfly Conservation who undertake systematic butterfly surveys in conjunction with the Forestry Commission to inform management which assists nationally rare species present in key sites within the National Park. We also undertook partnership work with both Southampton and

Bournemouth Universities to enable their study of the Forest and inform approaches to heathland management and associated cultural heritage assets.

The period saw us host and facilitate a meeting of the New Forest Catchment Partnership. This is continuing to deliver practical improvements in the Beaulieu area with the support of local land owners/managers, contributing to the Our Past, Our Future delivery and engaging volunteers in citizen science. Further opportunities for public and Authority involvement in water quality testing will be taking place this April. Work by the Environment Agency is also developing a vision in collaboration with Catchment Partnerships for achieving improvement to the environmental quality of Southampton Water through agreeing action. Issues include diffuse nutrient pollution sources from inland, threats to shell fisheries and litter in the marine environment.

The work towards the Green Halo partnership has continued with two meetings of the Steering Group and the preparation of communication materials for the project. The work of the Group is proving timely as the government is being urged to set out long term outcomes from natural capital in its 25 year Environment Plan.

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

Development Management

Planning work during the period has focused on major developments affecting the Park including proposals related to 875-dwelling Christchurch Urban Extension and the emerging proposals for Fawley Power Station. The planning application to demolish the Lyndhurst Park Hotel and build 74 age restricted homes plus 12 holiday lets was refused on 15 February 2017. The application had generated over 500 representations from local people opposed to the scheme.

A further 93 planning applications have been determined since the last meeting and the approval rate remains constant at 85%. Five appeal decisions were reported to the January and February Planning Committee meetings, with three dismissed and two allowed (both in Ashurst).

Enforcement and Trees

Since the beginning of the year we have secured compliance with one Enforcement Notice and commenced investigations into 45 allegations of planning breaches during January and February alone. We have also been able to conclude 50 investigations where there was either no breach of planning control or through negotiation whereby those concerned have either undertaken remedial works or secured planning permission. A complex four-day Public Inquiry was also held where enforcement action had been taken against an unauthorised residential mobile home. The decision of the Planning Inspector is expected within the coming month. Proceedings for a High Court committal, following authorisation from Members, is also well underway with an expected final hearing now scheduled to take place during April.

In the first two months of 2017 we registered nearly 200 tree works applications for the National Park and surrounding New Forest District areas. We have also had cause to make 14 Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees of high amenity value that were otherwise under threat from new development or inappropriate works. We have also sought to review some Tree Preservation Orders, particularly in the north-east of the National Park, to ensure they remain accurate and enforceable. We have also recently received two appeal decisions, following a one-day hearing, where it had been proposed to fell a Turkey Oak and Corsican Pine. The Planning Inspector agreed that our decisions were sound and stated the loss of the trees would conflict with the regulations and national practice guidance that seek to resist the removal of protected trees.

An enforcement training event for local parish and town councils is to be held on 22 March 2017.

Policy

Following the eight-week public consultation on the draft New Forest National Park Local Plan 2016-2036 held late last year, a summary of the main points received has been prepared and is available on our Local Plan webpage. The Policy team are currently considering the main points raised during the consultation, alongside further evidence base studies focusing on commercial/employment land and property; brownfield site availability; flood risk and development viability. The Local Plan timetable is for a revised (Submission draft) Local Plan to be considered at the full Authority meeting in October 2017 before a final six-week period of public consultation before the end of the year. Everyone who commented on the initial draft Local Plan last year will be directly notified of this further consultation.

Linked to the on-going work on the revised Local Plan, we continue to liaise with neighbouring authorities on cross-boundary planning issues facing the National Park. This has included a three way liaison meeting with Christchurch Borough Council and New Forest District Council in late January 2017 where topics of discussion included the Christchurch Urban Extension, providing Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANGs) and the Green Belt review.

In February 2017 the Government published its Housing White Paper which seeks to deliver a step-change in the delivery of housing to meet identified needs. The White Paper contains a wide range of measures aimed at achieving this, including proposals to standardise the methodology for calculating housing need and the introduction of a housing delivery test for local planning authorities. The 12-week public consultation on the White Paper runs to early May 2017 and our own consultation response will be considered at the Planning Development Control Committee in April.

Under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, a number of local town and parish councils in the New Forest started work on Neighbourhood Plans. The communities in Lymington & Pennington and New Milton have been progressing this work over the last couple of months and the Policy team continue to support it with technical advice (alongside colleagues at New Forest District Council).

1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life

Design advice and guidance

The Building Design Awards aim to recognise the contribution good design makes to the built environment of the New Forest National Park. The winning developments have recently been included within the Property Focus section of the Lymington Times and are currently on display within the foyer. The awards will be presented in the March 2017 full Authority meeting where the chosen schemes will be formally recognised. The 2017 Design Awards are also being formally launched at the meeting.

Our Past, Our Future Traditional Building Skills Courses

The second year of the Traditional Building Skills Project has begun with a professional course taking place on historic masonry structures at Buckler's Hard. The course was fully booked and well attended by professionals who have backgrounds in architecture, engineering and surveying and who carry out work within the National Park.

The first set of courses for homeowners covering local traditional building materials, techniques and sympathetic repair methods has also been held in Beaulieu marking the beginning of the second year's teaching on traditional building skills courses. The course is open to people who own or are a guardian of a historic building within a Conservation Area in the National Park.

Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group met at the beginning of March. Agenda items included feedback from the January Forestry Commission Meeting; a welcome pack update; an Action Plan update; and an update on the local distinctiveness project being led by the National Park Authority which could compliment the work of the Steering Group.

Steering Group representatives met with Forestry Commission staff in January 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.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park

Volunteer fair

The 2017 New Forest Volunteer Fair proved to be a very successful event, with over 700 people attending which was a 40% increase on last year's event and feedback was again very positive from potential volunteers and Forest organisations alike. The Fair was opened by Brian Matthews, from Lymington, who spent an astonishing 400 hours volunteering in 2016. He was named Project Champion for the New Forest non-native plants project recently at a celebration evening for volunteers in the New Forest.

Further good news was received when the winners of the UK National Parks Volunteer Awards were announced and Pondhead Conservation Trust in Lyndhurst was named best project. The annual awards give recognition and thanks to all the volunteers who work hard, helping protect the special landscapes of Britain's 15 National Parks each year. Volunteers from the local community have successfully created and are managing the New Forest's first community woodland as part of the Pondhead Conservation Trust. The once overgrown hazel woodland has been restored to its former glory and is now fully sustainable through the production and sales of charcoal. We supported the set-up of the Trust and continue to work with them in a variety of ways.

Outreach, health and wellbeing

The healthy walks programme continues with hundreds of walkers being led by volunteers in and around the New Forest to gain the mental and physical health benefits of walking in nature. The 'Get Hampshire Walking' scheme, led by West Hampshire CCG and supported by the NPA is also promoting the benefits of walking.

We have submitted a round one application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's youth focused grant programme, entitled 'Youthscape', we have worked with UK Youth at Avon Tyrell and others to put together a three year funding bid to realise the potential of the landscape for young people and to help change Forest organisations to be able to better work with young people, in line with the Partnership Plan's aspirations. We will find out if we have been successful in the summer.

2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park

Public and community events / rangers

A hedgelaying open day was held on 16 February at Godshill following the Better Boundaries and Rural Skills project's hedgelaying course. The event was well attended by locals and those from further across the Forest. 47 visitors attended with many staying for a couple of hours talking with members of staff (National Park and Land Advice Service), Hampshire County Council Open Access team staff and our hedgelayer. Feedback from visitors was very positive.

Rangers have continued to assist groups with their winter works programme, supporting Pondhead Conservation Trust, OPOF Working Woodlands and Lepe Conservation volunteers.

A number of events had to be cancelled during the February half term because of concerns over participants' safety due to storm Doris and the inclement weather.

Interpretation projects

We have been delivering support and training events for local businesses in March, including for Cyclexperience, to help their staff help visitors understand the National Park, and two Discovery Days in partnership with New Forest Tourism Association (NFTA), one on commoning and one on cycling. The NFTA days will now be an annual event focusing on different things which make the National Park special, as well as getting NFTA members together to discuss how we work together for the future of the Forest.

We have been assisting the New Forest Centre with its development plans including a workshop on interpretation to help prepare for a future lottery bid.

Work continues on the planned new interpretation at Avon Tyrrell, part of the Nature Stepping Stones Project. A meeting has been held and a 'working document' interpretation plan submitted to aid further discussions and planning.

Communications

In partnership with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council, we launched the New Forest litter campaign as part of the nationwide Spring Clean initiative. The partners were joined by McDonalds at Picket Post for a photocall to launch the weekend of activity. Litter picks included six public events organised by the Forestry Commission assisted by our rangers, and other community litter picks such as Park runners at Wilverley and Sway Parish Council. Over 250 bags of litter were collected. We also helped share messages about fly tipping, including an incident when 100 tyres were dropped across a wide area in the National Park.

We have highlighted other behaviour change campaigns such as animal accidents through the media including Radio Solent interviews, and on social media with one post alone reaching over 11,000 people.

To reinforce these campaigns, we produced a 'welcome home' information sheet for new residents with information about why the Forest is special and how people can help care for it. The aim is to point people to a new section on our website with further details about a number of aspects including boundary treatments, ground nesting birds, animal accidents and buying local produce. As well as printed versions being made available to parish councils, estate agents and other community outlets, the sheet is available to download from the website and printed off as needed.

We have produced the Pocket Guide for visitors, bringing in £5,000 advertising income which has allowed us to increase the print run to 200,000. Some printing had previously been paid for by the LSTF fund, however due to the popularity of the Guide in 2016 we ran out of copies three months early, prompting many enquiries from accommodation providers and attractions. We also produced the visitor publication Essential Guide with the Forestry Commission and included content in the NFTA's Discover Guide.

We helped promote a wide range of award schemes and successes:

- The archaeology team's success in Current Archaeology Magazine's awards, receiving the award for Lidar as 'Best Innovation of the last 50 years'
- We also promoted the Bransgore affordable housing scheme's shortlisting in the Royal Town Planning Institute awards
- Pondhead Trust in Lyndhurst won the National Park UK Volunteer Award
- Our second annual Building Design Awards saw schemes recognised in the three categories of individual building, extension and large development
- Cottage Lodge Hotel in Brockenhurst was awarded our Sustainable Business Award in the New Forest Brilliance in Business Awards.

The 12th birthday of our National Park designation was marked on Facebook, with 36,000 people viewing the post to learn more about the New Forest's special qualities.

On 2 March staff from the Environment and Rural Economy team hosted a delegation from North Brabant region of the Netherlands who visited the National Park as part of a week-long fact finding visit to the UK. The group included representatives from regional government, water boards and nature conservation programmes.

Formal education

The Education Team is once again working with New Forest District Council and Forestry Commission to support the annual Spring Clean campaign. Assemblies began in February, and by the end of March, our 'Litter Heroes' will have visited 26 schools and taught 5,900 children how and why they should help to keep the New Forest National Park 'clean and tidy'.

Meanwhile, over 400 pupils from 12 schools have taken part in curriculum education sessions, mainly on caring for the National Park and impacts and management.

After consultation with local secondary schools, we have adopted a different approach to setting up a New Forest Youth Forum. Gathering the young people together proved to be difficult; students had expressed interest in the idea of contributing to the future of the Forest, but finding a time and place to meet which was convenient for the majority of them proved to be impossible.

With the support of head teachers and key members of school staff, the Education team has therefore arranged to meet the students at their schools in school time. The concept of the Forum is introduced at an inaugural meeting, followed by discussion with the students on issues affecting the future of the Forest.

Each group will select an aspect to research, with their findings to be presented at the annual student conference. The groups plan to produce a joint action plan at the end of the conference which links the Forest to the wider world.

To date, students have opted to investigate sustainable transport and pollution, with more groups to follow.

2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park

Recreation Management

At its meeting on 20 February the Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) Steering Group confirmed that it wants to consult with the public to produce an update to the RMS 2010-2030. By agreeing and prioritising actions, and assigning lead organisations to these, we will be able to focus attention on areas of work that will bring the greatest benefits to the Forest and those who enjoy it.

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 the remaining sections of the proposed trail. At the last Authority meeting members agreed that we would undertake the establishment role for the trail; we have continued discussions with Natural England about how this will work in practice. Natural England are currently preparing to undertake their own public consultation on the proposed route of the trail which will commence in early May following the local elections.

We have been engaging with the National Trust, the New Forest Access Forum and local residents about an ongoing issue regarding equestrian access to Plaitford Common via the A36.

Through our planning role, we continue to seek financial contributions from new development towards measures designed to mitigate impacts on the protected habitats of the National Park. This includes

our own package of habitat mitigation measures which focus on the habitats in the core of the Park (which have been sought since 2012); and since 2014 working in partnership with the Solent Disturbance Mitigation Project to fund mitigation measures on the coast. In January 2017 officers met with Natural England and the RSPB to agree which mitigation measures should be prioritised within the National Park over the next 12 months. As part of the on-going Local Plan work, the package of mitigation measures will be reviewed and updated.

Educational campaigns

Coordination between partner organisations on various educational campaigns continues, including renewed agreement on key high-level 'caring for the Forest' messages for use on our website, in our Pocket Guide, the FC and NPA Essential Guide and NFDC/NFTA Discover Guide.

The Dogs Forum agreed clearer and stronger messages for the signs asking people to stay on the main tracks during the ground nesting bird season. The newly designed signs are for use across Forestry Commission, National Trust and Hampshire County Council managed land.

Our work to reduce the impacts of development within NFDC's planning area included a well-attended training workshop for staff and volunteers managing recreation across the New Forest. The event focussed on helping access managers, rangers and other New Forest staff understand, develop and deliver more integrated and effective management approaches that increase the benefits and minimise the negative impacts of walkers with dogs. It was facilitated by Stephen Jenkinson, a nationally recognised expert on the subject. In the evening we met with 30 professional dog walkers to start building a good foundation for their first steps on a journey working with the NPA and other local partners /organisations to raise standards and best practice including following the New Forest Dog Walking Code and promoting this to others in their industry.

Road traffic incidents involving commoners' animals have continued to receive media attention, with several opportunities to highlight what is being done and especially the need for all drivers to drive according to the conditions. We worked with Hampshire County Council, the Verderers and Commoners Defence Association to agree stronger animal accident warning signage for roads around Sway and Brockenhurst, including several with the changing slogans that catch the eye of local drivers for whom static signs become less effective over time. We are working with the CDA's Shared Forest OPOF project to develop a new scheme whereby local employers agree to cascade safe driving information to their employees in 10 different ways.

The Spring Clean litter pick was launched at Picket Post by New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority and Forestry Commission. They were joined by representatives from the nearby McDonald's who regularly undertake litter picks into the Forest acting as a role model for other local businesses. Over the weekend 4/5 March, hundreds of volunteers braved the wind and rain to join local organisations collecting more than 250 bags of litter from the New Forest.

A new temporary roadside sign is being used to highlight that a road has been 'litter picked in the last week'. This both highlights the efforts of local organisations to clean up litter and aims to build a sense of pride in how clean the New Forest is, or should be.

The Cycle Working Group met on 27 February at Cyclexperience in Brockenhurst. The agenda included a discussion on progress around the Recreation Management Strategy, significant concern about a recent fatality at Ipley crossroads and methods of monitoring the volume and location of cyclists to influence evidenced-based decisions.

New Forest Access Forum

The New Forest Access Forum met on 13 March at Fordingbridge Town Hall. The Authority has recently appointed a new member to the New Forest Access Forum. Paul Brockman will join the Forum as the new Youth and Education representative, to fill the vacancy left by Tracey Churcher. Paul has 22 years' experience as a social worker, seven years as a woodland manager, and a lot of experience

working with the NPA rangers on youth projects. In September he won an award from CPRE and he is a member of the Educators Forum.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy

We have been exploring the potential for the Authority to be involved in a bid by all English National Parks to the Government's Discover England Fund to develop the product offer for international visitors. This will be discussed further by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee shortly.

Claire Lee has been appointed as the Operations Manager for the New Forest Marque, employed by New Forest Produce Limited with the NPA providing office space. Claire was introduced to members at a Members Day on 1 March.

3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

In February 2017 the Authority granted planning permission for the development of a further 10 affordable homes on land at Vinneys Close, Brockenhurst. The application (and mix of housing) was supported by the Housing Team at New Forest District Council and will contribute towards meeting the significant housing need identified in the area. The legal agreement that accompanies the permission ensures that the dwellings will be occupied by people with a local connection to the Parish of Brockenhurst in perpetuity.

Meetings have been held with Hale Parish Council who are looking to establish a Community Land Trust to help deliver a small affordable housing scheme in the village. Negotiations are also at an advanced stage to acquire some land in Burley to provide two affordable homes and a local heritage centre (to be run by the Parish Council). Drawings to accompany the planning application are to be commissioned shortly.

The Bransgore affordable housing scheme has been shortlisted for a national RTPI planning award in the 'Excellence in Planning to Deliver Housing' category. The RTPI say that they had an overwhelming amount of entries this year, with a 36% increase on the 2016 awards and that the Authority's scheme was one of the few that were chosen to be shortlisted. Our entry will go through to the next round of judging where the overall winner of the category will be decided, with the winner to be announced at the RTPI Awards Ceremony in June 2017.

3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

Visitor bus services

We are now preparing for this season's visitor bus and information services. The New Forest Tour will operate from 8 July to 10 September and the Beach Bus will operate from 23 July to 2 September. Our Travel Concierge service is expected to return at Brockenhurst station for the New Forest Tour season and at the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst.

Transport policy

We have continued to engage with Hampshire County Council around the replacement of the Holmsley A35 bridge. This is likely to be subject of a planning application and pre-application advice will commence shortly.

We have recently submitted an Authority response to the Department for Transport consultation on the safe use of drones in the UK, reflecting issues which have been raised by partners and at quadrant meetings. The Government is looking to update legislation and guidance to reflect current and future growth in drone use for a range of purposes. In particular, we expressed concern that while specific restrictions are in place for prisons and military locations for obvious reasons; there are limited powers

(beyond local bylaws) to restrict the use of drones in sensitive SSSI and SPA areas. This concern is being echoed by other National Park Authorities.

3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities

Sustainable Communities Fund

Funds of £2,000 have been approved (subject to planning permission) for Milford Conservation Volunteers (MCV) to convert a redundant brick-built farm building into a new bird observatory overlooking an important wildfowl area in Keyhaven. The project will enable MCV to bring local youth groups to the bird observatory providing opportunities for them to see wild birds at close quarters using equipment provided by MCV and learn more about identifying and recording different species. The building is situated on private land and an initial five-year licence to occupy has been agreed with the landowner. Entry to the building will be managed by MCV and work will be carried out by professional contractors and volunteer labour.

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. Officers are currently working with Defra on recruiting to fill two Authority positions (vacancies in respect of Judith Webb and John Pemberton). Both appointments are due to commence in July 2017 ahead of the Annual Authority meeting on 13 July where appointments to committees and external organisations will take place.

Officers have also prepared the new 2017/18 Work Programme which includes actions which support the Partnership Plan for the New Forest, the work on the four medium term strategic themes and other key areas of the Authority's work. The draft 2017-18 Work Programme was considered by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee on 6 March and is on the current Authority agenda for final approval.

An 84 inch backlit LED screen will be installed in the Council Chamber to replace the current projector and screen which has recently started to lose picture quality. The new screen can be used with WiFi and conventional connectivity and has produced a significant improvement in picture clarity and definition and comes with a wide range of features.

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 (at its next meeting on 17 March the Forum will consider reports on New Forest Recreation Management Strategy and an update on the Local Plan Review), RMS Steering group, Green Halo Steering Group and the New Forest Consultative Panel which met on 2 March (see more detail below).

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). A new three year SLA has been agreed with the Forestry Commission, extending the original agreement to assist the FC with the preparation of management plans for all their Scheduled Monuments within the South England Forest District. This is a further demonstration of the quality of work carried out by the NPA's archaeology team.

Ecology input has included liaison with applicants and other national and local stakeholders including the RSPB, Hampshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England on some of the major development proposals coming forward within and adjacent to the National Park, such as Fawley Power Station. Elsewhere the development sector continued to be busy with over 45 requests for development control input being received from New Forest District Council as part of our service delivery to them, as well as other requests for strategic advice.

New Forest Consultative Panel

The first meeting of the Consultative Panel for 2017 took place on 2 March 2017 in the Community Centre at Lyndhurst and Clive Chatters was re-elected as Chairman for the year. The Panel received an update from Steve Avery and Bruce Rothnie on the work of the Authority and the Forest Commission respectively. Mr Avery also updated the Panel and led a discussion on the developments at various stages of consultation along the Waterside and how these may relate to the New Forest and John Stride briefed members on the Forest Design Plan.

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. Arrangements are also being made to hold a members' day to update members on progress against the four strategic themes and to receive input from members on other areas for potential development in the future.

Freedom of Information/Data Protection

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has launched a consultation on its first set of guidance on the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) due to come into effect across Europe from May 2018. The new guidance is about consent in the GDPR. The basic concept of consent, and its main role as one lawful basis (or condition) for processing personal data, is not new, however the GDPR does set a high standard for consent. It builds on the Data Protection Act (DPA) standard of consent in a number of areas and it contains significantly more detail on both the standard and processes for consent. The ICO's consultation is running from now until 31 March 2017 and can be found via this link:

<https://iconewsblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/02/ico-guidance-for-consent-in-the-gdpr/#more-2592>

Human Resources

As at 10 March 2017 the total staff headcount was 85 or 75.73 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	FTE	Variation from previous report
Core funded	70*	+2	62.92*	+2.41
Funded by external projects	15	-2	12.81	-1.39
Total	85	0	75.73	+1.01

*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 the last two months we have recruited to provide maternity cover which has increased our overall headcount. Suzi Shilling is providing maternity cover for the Wildplay project as well as continuing in her

part-time role as a Communications Assistant, and welcome back to Dan Pape (Planning Officer) and Grace Sheppard (Administration Assistant) who are covering maternity related absence.

Recently we said goodbye to Clare Bates (Project Co-ordinator – Through our Ancestors Eyes) as her fixed-term role on the 'Our Past, Our Future' Landscape Partnership Scheme project came to an end and to Joe Ison (New Forest Apprentice Ranger). We wish them well in their future ventures.

We are currently recruiting for a Partnerships and Community Officer and for two Seasonal Assistant Rangers.

ICT Services

Following consultation with both staff and the Unions the updated ICT User policy has now been adopted.

Work is continuing on the replacement of PCs and as part of this project we are continuing extensive testing of Windows 10. Team members have been heavily involved in the development and preparation work for SharePoint 13, and we plan to see the new Warbler (intranet) go live shortly.

5 Members

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

- 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

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Development Control Committee – 18 April
- Planning Development Control Committee – 16 May
- Consultative Panel – 1 June
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 5 June
- Members Day – 13 June
- Planning Development Control Committee – 20 June

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- Public Sector Workshop - 20 January
- Local Produce Show – 24 January
- Speaker at NFA 150th year celebration – 24 January
- Visit to RSPB Arne Reserve – 26 January
- Green Halo Steering Group – 26 January
- Volunteer Fair – 29 January
- Meeting with CLA Director – 30 January
- Business South Board Meeting – 31 January
- PHE Video Conference – 1 February
- Interview Panel, NPPL – 2 February
- Breakfast Network Meeting – 3 February
- ELT Awayday – 14 February
- GLNPC Trustee Meeting – 15 February
- EM3 Rural Action Group – 16 February

- Netley Rural Communities Matter Conference – 17 February
- Meeting with Chief Executive, New Forest District Council – 22 February
- Tour of New Forest with Chief Executive, Landscape Institute – 22 February
- SE FWAC meeting – 24 February
- Natural Environment Steering Group – 27 February
- NPE Video Conference – 28 February
- Green Halo Steering Group – 28 February
- E-NPOG meeting – 1 March
- Hants & IOW LGA meeting – 3 March
- RAPC – 6 March
- Safer New Forest Strategy and Delivery Group – 6 March
- RSPB Officer meeting – 7 March
- Management Plan Leadership Group – 8 March
- Breakfast Network meeting – 10 March
- Rural Forum Steering Group – 14 March
- Meeting with Chief Executive, New Forest District Council – 15 March
- Visit by Chief Executive, Hampshire County Council – 17 March
- Forest Farming Group – 17 March

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- Defra interviewing Panel – 27 January
- NPE Board Meeting – 7 February
- NPUK Board Meeting – 8 February
- Meeting with Chairman of NPE - 16 February
- Attended NFA 150th anniversary lunch - 17 February
- Chaired RMS Steering Group – 20 February
- Chaired Forest Farming Group– 17 March

6 Recommendation

To note the report.