

NFNPA/RAPC 289/16

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 7 MARCH 2016

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TRANSITION FUNDING

Report by: Mark Holroyd, Transport & Tourism Manager and Nigel Matthews, Head of Recreation Management & Learning

Summary:

The Department for Transport has recently announced a competition for local transport authorities and National Park Authorities to bid for one year's revenue funding to continue developing sustainable travel initiatives. Since 2012, the New Forest National Park Authority has been delivering a large programme of sustainable travel scheme in partnership with Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire Council and the South Downs National Park Authority.

This paper provides background to the new fund, an overview of schemes which have been funded to date and outlines our initial proposal to seek further funding from the Department for Transport to continue to reduce the impact of traffic on the National Park.

Recommendation

That members:

- support the Authority's involvement in the development of an application to the Department for Transport Sustainable Travel Transition Fund 2016/17 for the Two National Parks Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme.
- delegate final authorisation of the completed bid to the Chair of the Authority and the Chair of Resources, Audit and Performance committee.

Equality Impact Assessment: None. An equality and diversity statement has been prepared for the current programme and this proposal would build on the same work.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 On 15 February 2016, the Department for Transport announced that £20million of revenue funding will be available to Local Authority partnerships in England for 2016-17 to continue projects which have been developed through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). This paper provides background to the new transition fund, an overview of schemes which have been funded through LSTF to date and outlines our initial proposal to seek further funding from the Department for Transport to continue to reduce the impact of traffic on the National Park.

2 Background

- 2.1 Since 2012, the New Forest National Park Authority has been a key delivery partner in the Two National Parks Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme, alongside Hampshire County Council (the programme lead and accountable body), South Downs National Park Authority, Wiltshire Council and other Highway Authorities within the South Downs National Park. The programme aims to reduce the impact of visitor traffic on the special qualities of the National Parks by developing sustainable alternatives. LSTF funding for this programme finishes at the end of March 2016.
- 2.2 Traffic and transport has been a major issue for communities within the New Forest for many years. Traffic volumes peak with the visitor season and congestion impacts both on the local economy and the visitor experience. It also creates significant air pollution issues in locations such as Lyndhurst, and research carried out in 2006 showed that of the estimated 505,000 tonnes of carbon emissions from activities within the New Forest National Park, 245,000 tonnes was from road transport sources.
- 2.3 The 2015 visitor survey showed that 81% of all staying visitors travelled to their accommodation by car, van, campervan or motorbike at the beginning of their stay, compared with 94% in 2004. While there are some methodological differences in how these surveys have been carried out, this is the most comparable figure with previous years and represents a new baseline. Traffic data show that although there are relatively high volumes of traffic on many of the Forest roads, in most cases there has been relatively little increase during the last five years. This reflects national trends, with the number of car journeys made over this period restricted by the economic recession and the consistently high cost of fuel. However, national predictions suggest there may be a marked increase in road use nationally from 2015 onwards, with a possible 19% rise across the country as a whole up to 2025 (taking the medium prediction of several possible scenarios). This is based on the UK moving out of recession, lower fuel prices and the increasing fuel efficiency of new cars reducing the cost of car journeys.
- 2.4 The previous two phases of the LSTF-funded programme (2012-2015 and 2015-16) have developed a number of successful products and services to make it easier for visitors to travel around the National Park without their cars. Many of these schemes are commercially viable or have developed alternative funding streams to drive them forward in the future.
- 2.5 Further funding for this programme would enable the Authority to continue delivering the 'promoting sustainable transport' strand within the Authority business plan (2015-

18), and ensure delivery of 'Improving Traffic and Transport' actions within the National Park Partnership Plan (delivering actions: TT8, TT9, TT10, TT11, EP3 and EP4).

2.6 The programme also supports other core work programmes, especially encouraging people to care for the National Park's special qualities and the work to manage recreation across the Forest and beyond.

2.7 Examples of schemes from the previous programme include:

- New Forest Tour – growth to three routes and over 35,000 passenger journeys. Now run commercially between GoSouthCoast and the NPA with support from tourism businesses
- Beach Bus – an enhanced seasonal bus route between Lymington and Hythe, calling at Bucklers Hard, Beaulieu and Lepe
- Improving Sunday services on the BlueStar 6 between Southampton and Lymington
- trialling the Forest Bus Baby service between Moors Valley and Hythe
- Travel Concierge service – an information service operating from Brockenhurst station in the summer months, directly influencing the travel behaviour of visitors to the National Park
- improved town and village signage to key facilities and attractions
- station improvements and work with the Community Rail Partnership – signage, real time information provision, accessibility improvements, community events and promotion
- training for transport operators and front of house staff
- guided experience provision and the development of the walking festival
- embedding strong messaging about car-free experiences in the National Park into communications activity by the Authority, New Forest Tourism Association and tourism businesses.

3 Sustainable Travel Transition Fund 2016-17

3.1 The Department for Transport has allowed a very short window within which to develop bids for the new funding (15 February to 29 March 2016). Applications must meet the objectives of the fund and will be assessed on a range of criteria.

3.2 The bid must meet the primary objectives of the fund:

- support the local economy and facilitate economic development; and
- reduce carbon emissions

3.3 The bid should also contribute to:

- helping to deliver wider social and economic benefits (e.g. access to employment, education and services); and
- actively promoting increased levels of physical activity through walking and cycling.

- 3.4 The guidance specifically welcomes applications relating to National Parks with their relevant transport authorities, and the involvement of National Park Authorities in delivering the programme.

4 Proposed bid

- 4.1 Hampshire County Council is considering developing a bid to continue the Two National Parks LSTF programme on behalf of the existing programme partners. Work has started to develop the content of a bid and further details will be given at the committee meeting. The bid would build upon successful elements of the previous programme using the following programme objectives which have been widened to be more relevant to local communities.

- Improve key public transport gateways into the National Parks, increasing usage and boosting the economy;
- Mainstream sustainable transport access to attractions and workplaces, reducing car traffic, increasing spend and creating jobs;
- Making it easier for visitors and residents to walk and cycle around the two National Parks through improved information and waymarking, delivering health benefits

- 4.2 The cost of implementing the bid is to be confirmed but it is likely to be no more than £200,000 for the New Forest. There is a minimum bid size of £350,000 to the fund covering both Parks. If the bid is successful the programme must be implemented by the end of March 2017. Deliverability is a key criteria for the schemes we select to include within the bid. The short term nature of the programme will make staff recruitment difficult, so plans must utilise existing staff resources or easily procured consultancy support.

- 4.3 Examples of projects being considered that fit with both the fund criteria and the programme objectives are listed below.

- Promotional activity to encourage more leisure use of the Forest Bus (BlueStar 6) from Brockenhurst to Lymington to improve its overall commercial viability (without a public subsidy).
- Continued operation of the New Forest Travel Concierge service at Brockenhurst station in partnership with South West Trains.
- A new shuttle bus service from Brockenhurst to Beaulieu in partnership with the rail operator and Beaulieu Estate (experience from operating the Forest Bus Baby service shows that there is demand for a short service which serves Beaulieu direct from the station).
- Provision of clear and easy to use information for residents and visitors encouraging the use of bus and rail services to reach key attractions.
- A focus on encouraging visitors to campsites and holiday parks (about 40% of bed spaces) to leave their cars on site for the duration of their stay through information provision on sites.
- Feasibility work for new walking and cycling infrastructure within the highway boundary which could be included into a bid for future capital funding by the highway authority (we are seeking clarification about the eligibility of this work).
- Develop the programme of small scale guided walks and bike rides available throughout the year for residents and visitors, with a particular focus on people

most in need of health intervention and working in partnership with public health teams and the clinical commissioning groups.

5 Timescales and authorisation

- 5.1 The timescales for developing the bid are unavoidably tight and present a challenge in carrying out significant consultation. Within the process we will contact key local partners including the Forestry Commission, New Forest District Council and the New Forest Tourism Association, in addition to local transport operators.
- 5.2 As the highway authority which covers areas of both National Parks, it is anticipated that Hampshire County Council will continue to act as the lead authority and accountable body for the programme. Arrangements for this have yet to be finalised.
- 5.3 Key dates and proposed process for authorising the final bid submission are as follows:
- 15 February – Department for Transport announces funding.
 - 26 February – Members made aware of funding opportunity through member's bulletin.
 - 8 March - RAPC meeting. Members provided with briefing on emerging bid.
 - w/c 21 March – final draft bid circulated to the Authority Chairman and Chairman of RAPC for final approval.
 - 29 March – Submission of bid to the Department for Transport.
 - May 2016 – If successful, delivery of the programme commences.

Recommendation

That members:

- support the Authority's involvement in the development of an application to the Department for Transport Sustainable Travel Transition Fund 2016/17 for the Two National Parks Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme.
- delegate final authorisation of the completed bid to the Chair of the Authority and the Chair of Resources, Audit and Performance committee.

Contact: Mark Holroyd, Transport & Tourism Manager, 01590 646641
Nigel Matthews, Head of Recreation Management & Learning, 01590 646684

Equality Impact Assessment: None. An equality and diversity statement has been prepared for the current programme and this proposal would build on the same work.