

NFNPA 491/16

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
AUTHORITY MEETING – 21 January 2016**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

**Summary:**

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 24 September 2015. 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><b><i>Our priorities:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhancing the New Forest's landscapes and habitats</li> <li>▪ Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with its surrounding</li> <li>▪ Conserving the historic and local way of life</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Our priorities:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park</li> <li>▪ Improving understanding of the National Park</li> <li>▪ Managing recreation to benefit the National Park</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Our priorities:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy</li> <li>▪ Promoting sustainable transport</li> <li>▪ Encouraging sustainable communities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Aiming for Excellence</b></p>		
<p><b><i>In all we do:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providing the highest quality of service</li> <li>▪ Working with others in achieving maximum benefits for the National Park</li> <li>▪ Using available resources effectively and efficiently</li> </ul>		

**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**

After 18 months in development, we were thrilled to announce the approval of the £4.4 million Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme.

The £2.8 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, coupled with match funding, means our partnership of 11 organisations can deliver 21 ground-breaking projects. With everything from habitat restoration to apprenticeships in traditional building skills and projects to get people involved in the Forest's heritage, the scheme will make the Forest more robust to face future challenges such as climate change, development pressures and threats to commoning. Coupled with the adoption of the Partnership Plan by Forest organisations in September, this quarter marked the beginning of an era of enhanced partnership for the Forest.

The work of our enforcement team has been supported by a Deputy High Court Judge who recently ordered the removal of two unauthorised mobile homes within the National Park. In both cases, the owners had been given ample opportunity to comply with earlier enforcement notices. This enforcement, as part of our planning work, continues to make a crucial contribution to the protection of the National Park. We were also very pleased that over 70 parish and town council representatives attended our planning training event in September, which will further boost our efforts to work as a team to protect the Forest.

We have opened two cycle routes as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) and Family Cycling Experiences funding from the Department for Transport. These two vital off-road routes - a new path at Marchwood to Eling and the resurfacing of the cyclepath at Ashurst to Lyndhurst - allow people to easily access the National Park by bike for employment, education and leisure purposes. In addition, more than 50,000 people explored the New Forest by bus routes supported by LSTF this summer. The New Forest Travel Concierge gave sustainable travel advice to 60% more people than in 2014.

Our Community Wildlife Plans project came to an end after three years. Eight communities have taken part across the Forest, with over 200 people involved with conserving and monitoring their local green spaces to find out what wildlife lives on their doorstep.

The first Family Trees event was held at the Jubilee Fields in Sway to mark National Tree Week. More than 180 people signed up to have a tree planted in the new community wood, to celebrate the birth, marriage, anniversary or life of a family member. There was a great atmosphere as over 300 people turned out to the event, with ranger activities for all the family and everyone who registered receiving certificates. We hope to repeat the event next year to create a woodland in another community.

Our Walking Festival over two weeks in October/November saw over 80 events with over 1,000 people taking part. The walks were all guided by experts from the Authority and other organisations, meaning a wide range of people learned more about the Forest's landscape, wildlife and culture, and how they can help care for it. Some of these events contributed to the 4651 contacts made by the rangers over the last quarter.

In the Autumn Statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that National Park budgets would be protected for the period of the Spending Review, following a 40% cut in real terms since 2010. This outcome is very much a positive recognition of our work and we will continue to identify other additional sources of income, to seek partnerships and to work creatively to deliver the greatest impact from this exchequer investment.

At the beginning of December we worked with colleagues across the English National Parks to make the case to Government for NPAs to have greater freedoms in order to help them to be even more entrepreneurial and diversify their sources of funding. This was backed by many MPs, including Desmond Swayne and Julian Lewis. Ministers agreed to include an amendment to their *Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill* allowing NPAs to benefit from a 'Functionally Specific Power of Competence', which as well as helping us to secure funding in new ways will serve to enable us to act as fully equal partners in implementing local 'devolution deals'.

I and a number of Members also attended the bi-ennial UK National Parks Conference 'National Parks there for you' in Dartmoor in October. It was an excellent and inspiring programme providing the opportunity for the consideration of the value of our National Parks; current challenges and opportunities and future direction; and how we can act collectively to sustain National Parks for future generations.

## **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**

##### *Our Past Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme*

We hosted an event on Monday 26 October to launch the Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme. The Scheme is being led by the Authority working with partners including the Beaulieu Estate, Commoners Defence Association, Forestry Commission, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire County Council, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Natural England, New Forest Centre and the New Forest Land Advice Service.

The Partnership has been successful in securing a £2.8m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the £4.4m Scheme which will deliver 21 projects to restore lost habitats, develop Forest skills and inspire a new generation to champion and care for the New Forest.

The lead partners, funding partners and Authority Members met at Appleslade enclosure in Linwood to hear about the Scheme from the Delivery Manager, learn about one of the projects being led by the Land Advice Service and discuss future work plans. Partners had spent two years developing the scheme so the day was an opportunity for the Partners to celebrate the success in being awarded the grant and look forward to working together over the next five years.

You can read more about the scheme [www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/landscapepartnership](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/landscapepartnership).

##### *Community Wildlife Plans Project*

The project has now ended and we held an informal, low key but very well attended event to thank volunteers, experts, landowners, parish and town councils and community groups for their involvement and all they have done to make the project a great success. The groups and councils will still require a level of support and this will now come from the NFLAS staff with some back up from the Ranger team where appropriate.

##### *New Forest Land Advice Service*

We received the news that the Heritage Lottery Fund had approved the Our Past, Our Future funding, a very significant moment for NFLAS as Julie has been working on the bid for the past two years and has developed four projects to be delivered by the NFLAS team.

Angela Peters has now moved from the Community Wildlife Plans Project into the Restoring Lost Landscapes Project which will deliver two of the four NFLAS Our Past, Our Future projects; Better Boundaries and Nature's Stepping Stones. More on those next quarter when the project has really got going.

The Working Woodlands Project is only a part-time post and we are waiting to see if any further funding may be forthcoming via the Forestry Commission and the LEP before recruiting and starting the project.

We have, however, recruited a new part-time team member to deliver the New Forest Rural Skills Project. Richard Austin will be the Volunteer Coordinator for the OPOF scheme and we are very excited to have him start in mid-January.

Rhys Morgan and Tracé William' posts have now been confirmed for another year and we look ahead to 2016, our sixth year as NFLAS, with great enthusiasm as we enter a phase of intense delivery for nature conservation.

### *Growing the Forest and Ecology*

We continue our work to facilitate key partners including local authorities and wildlife charities to take forward opportunities to 'Grow the Forest' – ensuring it is protected, well-managed, habitats enlarged, and that there are natural routes and stepping stones for wildlife and people to link to the surrounding area.

During the period we have secured agreement of key stakeholders to develop a shared vision and strategy for providing and managing green open spaces on the periphery of the Park – its 'Green Halo' (working title). Work on this will start in the New Year and it is hoped it will help inform Local Plans and the work of local organisations to deliver a beneficial network of greenspace in and around the National Park

Projects such as our work on river catchments with the Freshwater Trust, working with landowners through the New Forest Land Advice Service and partners on mitigating development pressure on the Solent all show our success at working beyond our boundaries with our partners.

We have been finalising work with Defra consultants which identified the financial value that the natural environment provides to people in and around the Park, these are often referred to as ecosystem services. We are working with Natural England, Defra and other National Parks to report to Government the range of work we are involved in which supports ecosystem services. We are about to start using approaches developed by Defra to help us incorporate consideration of ecosystem services into our work now and in the future.

We participated in the first season of reptile survey work being co-ordinated by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust as part of its New Forest Smooth Snake Project. The project has been made possible by support through our Sustainable Communities Fund and the extension of funding to next year has been invaluable. So far the survey work has found slow worms, common lizards, grass snakes and adders but none of the elusive and rare smooth snakes. We are hopeful that further work in the spring will find more records as the New Forest is a rare stronghold of the species. The work is targeted at sites on the edge of its current known range to test how widely they are distributed and so the lack of records so far is not unexpected. We have recently met with partners to explore opportunities to also undertake research and survey for Great Crested Newt which could help strategic and local scale planning decisions.

Our delivery of a shared ecology service for the New Forest District Council continues, with over 50 requests for input being received, funding the period and involvement in Planning Committee sessions. We have also screened applications within the Park area, with 56 having potential to affect wildlife during the period and over 30 being subject of consultation requests

from Development Control. During the period we met with the operators of the Solar scheme at Cadland to assess progress with the ongoing management of wildlife and landscape compensation at the site. We also met with Wightlink as part of their project to restore saltmarsh close to Lymington, the results of which have been very positive. After two 'recharges' of material, the habitat restoration appears to be successful, with sediment becoming consolidated and colonised by saltmarsh vegetation.

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

### *Development Control*

In this reporting period (8 September – 17 December), the team received 276 planning applications, with 262 decisions issued. The approval rate for the period was 89%. The number of applications registered this year is expected to exceed 1000 and has already reached 990. Almost the same number of pre-application enquiries have been received this year (965 and counting).

Ten appeals were determined and it has been encouraging to see that in most cases (70%) the appeals have been dismissed, with the Planning Inspectorate offering strong support for our local planning policies.

A Planning Training/Update Event for Parish and Town Councils was held successfully on 22 September 2015 in the Lyndhurst Community Centre. Over 70 Parish and Town Council representatives booked a place on the course and follow-up training on more specific issues was requested as it went very well.

### *Enforcement and Trees*

The Enforcement team has secured two High Court Injunctions in recent weeks. The two separate cases represent the Authority's longest running enforcement investigations with one stretching back to before the National Park was created, following a series of unsuccessful challenges and appeals by the owners.

In the case of Avonside Farm, Southampton Road, Fordingbridge, the owner Colin Shutler was warned by the Judge that his assets would be seized and that he risked being sent to prison if he did not comply with an upheld Enforcement Notice and remove his mobile home, vehicles and scrap from the site by 4 April 2016. Mr Shutler was also ordered to pay the Authority's costs following the hearing before His Honour Judge Iain Hughes QC at Winchester Combined Court on 2 December.

In the second case, which relates to a parcel of land off Lyndhurst Road in Landford, Robert Whitcher was ordered by His Honour Judge Iain Hughes QC at Winchester Combined Court on 25 November to remove his mobile home, after his latest planning appeal was dismissed. Mr Whitcher was similarly warned by the Court that his assets would be seized and that he risked imprisonment if he did not comply by 16 September 2016.

The Tree Team held what may well become an annual series of tree planting events; our first event having been held at Jubilee Playing Fields in Sway on 28 November 2015 where more than 300 people attended throughout the day.

People had the chance to plant one of six native tree species, while children enjoyed making 'tree wands' with our Rangers. Every group that took part in the tree planting received a free

personalised certificate as a memento, dedicated to someone special in their life. Families celebrated everything from their child's birth, to wedding anniversaries and the life of a loved-one. Trees and woodlands are a key feature of the natural beauty of the New Forest and they also make an important contribution to the appearance of towns and villages within the area.

As the Family Trees woodland grows and matures it will provide a legacy for future generations and provide a lasting memory of a loved-one.

### *Policy*

The focus of the Policy team's work since September has been on the initial consultation on the review of our local planning policies. The Authority's planning responsibilities are the main statutory power we have to deliver the two Park purposes and related duty and with recent changes in national planning policy we feel now is an opportune time to review our local policies. A six week public consultation was launched in September on the main issues and the scope of the review and as part of this we also launched a 'Call for Sites' where landowners were invited to submit potential housing, employment and gypsy/traveller development sites for consideration. During this initial consultation which closed at the end of October we received responses from a wide range of individuals and organisations and are now in the process of considering the issues raised, as well as the 70+ sites submitted as part of the 'Call for Sites'. As part of the review we have also met with officers and members from New Forest District Council to discuss cross-boundary planning issues, as well as with the Verderers of the New Forest to explore how planning can help support commoning in the New Forest.

With the successful adoption of the New Forest Partnership Plan 2015-2020 in the summer, the team has ensured copies have been distributed to a wide range of local organisations and partners. The Management Plan Leadership Group will be meeting in the New Year to discuss the monitoring of progress against actions in the Plan.

## **1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life**

### *Design advice and guidance*

The shared Building Design & Conservation team continues to respond to a wide range of consultations for proposals in the National Park Authority and District Council administrative areas. A positive six month review meeting was held with New Forest District Council in November 2015 to discuss progress against the terms of the Service Level Agreement (SLA).

As well as providing specialist advice on a range of proposals affecting Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, work has also progressed on a number of pro-active projects. This includes the work of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group (covered separately) and the training courses to be held in 2016 on traditional buildings skills as part of the successful New Forest Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

The first annual New Forest National Park Building Design Awards scheme saw over 20 individual developments nominated for an award by local residents, parish councils and architects. The Design Awards recognise the positive contribution well-designed new developments can have on the built character of the New Forest. In November a panel of members drawn from the Planning Development Control Committee met to consider the nominations for each of the three categories and the winners included (i) the rebuild of the fire damage listed thatched building at Cherry Tree Cottage, Woodgreen; (ii) the modern extension

to Poulner Baptist Church; and (iii) the redevelopment of a brownfield site at Southview in Lyndhurst to provide seven dwellings close to the core of the village. The awards will be presented to the architects of the winning schemes at the beginning of the Authority meeting.

### *Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area*

The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group met with a range of statutory bodies including Hampshire County Council, the National Trust, the Verderers of the New Forest, Natural England and the Commoners Defence Association to discuss progress on their verge protection project in December 2015. The Steering Group has identified over 12 km of verges within the Conservation Area that are being damaged by vehicles overrunning the narrow roads or parking problems. The Group are working with partners to seek to address the problems through a combination of education / awareness raising and physical measures including the use of dragon's teeth and ditch & banking where appropriate. A number of the sites are likely to see works undertaken on them in the New Year and an information leaflet is also being finalised which will be distributed throughout the area via the Woodgreen Local Information Point and the various parish newsletters.

### *Lidar Exhibition*

A highly successful Lidar temporary exhibition at the New Forest Centre has attracted over 15,000 visitors in the first three months and is likely to top 20,000 visits before the end of January. The exhibition that is free to visit uses a wide range of techniques to explain what Lidar is, how it is used and the wider benefits for conserving the natural and cultural heritage of the open forest. The exhibition includes details about conservation of archaeological and built heritage features along with three dimensional models of sites. A video explains how the potential new sites, visible in the Lidar images, are verified on the ground through field work assisted by volunteers. The help of volunteers is invaluable in achieving the annual target of surveying 2,000 hectares. Each month, during the course of the exhibition, specialist interest and local groups have been invited to visit the exhibition. Other groups have included the New Forest Walking Festival and historic environment professionals. The video created as part of the exhibition has now been viewed over 32,000 times on YouTube and visitors to the exhibition have provided a wide range of very favourable comments.

### *New Forest Remembers*

We have been planning the upcoming exhibition at the New Forest Centre on the New Forest Remembers World War I project. This exhibition includes material from eight different community groups as well as new material we have uncovered during the project including maps, photographs and papers of the training, camps, hospitals and more that were in the Forest 100 years ago. Working with the group has seen a big increase in the numbers of groups registering on the interactive portal and uploading material. The exhibition opens on February 6. We have submitted the final claim to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the New Forest Remembers World War II project.

### *Reclamation: Indian Troops of the New Forest*

Unfortunately we were unsuccessful with our application to the 14-18 Now fund for this project. This was due to other larger projects on the same broad subject elsewhere in the country being submitted. Instead we are using the upcoming exhibition and the interactive portal to raise awareness of this story, with a view that we might look again at a project in the future.



## **2 Enjoy**

### **2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park**

#### *Outreach, Volunteering and health and wellbeing*

Karl, one of our Mosaic Young Champions was shortlisted for the National Park's UK Young Volunteer Awards. In December we heard that he won the prestigious national award for Young Volunteer of the Year, fantastic news for both Karl and for the New Forest

As the end of the Mosaic Youth Project comes closer, work is being undertaken in earnest to ensure a legacy remains of what has been learned and achieved during the project. Rangers are working with the Campaign for National Parks, Forestry Commission and a number of local youth organisations to develop a young people's access project which will allow programmes of activities to be tailored and undertaken by young people working with New Forest organisations across the National Park.

Certificates have been awarded to seven New Forest Young Champions for achieving the John Muir Award. The John Muir award is a national award scheme for people of all backgrounds – groups, families, individuals. It helps people to connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places. They acted as the first pilot group for delivering John Muir in the New Forest which we facilitated. Its success has led to work now being undertaken to promote opportunities further with flyers and a website.

We met with over 120 GPs at Lyndhurst Community Centre in November at a health sector event. Alison Barnes outlined our health and wellbeing work and aspirations to work closely with the health sector in future to meet health priorities and National Park purposes. We had a stand at the event and made connections with several GPs with a view to developing this work.

We have been busy organising the New Forest Volunteer Fair 2016, which takes place in Lyndhurst Community Centre on 30 January. It is by far the largest yet with over 40 stalls from across the Forest booked to welcome those interested in volunteering and getting involved with Forest life. Please help spread the word.

#### *Inclusive cycling*

The New Forest Inclusive Cycling Project is becoming an independent organisation – PEDALL. The first trustees' meeting was held in September to plan the way forward. The website is live, marketing materials have been drafted and funding secured for two electrically assisted cycles to help people with limited mobility.

### **2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park**

#### *Public and community events / rangers*

This year's third wild play day was held at Whitefield Moor during half term and again proved hugely successful with over 200 attendees learning how to enjoy the Forest with minimum resources and maximum imagination. The event was delivered in partnership with the Forestry Commission, National Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and a woodlander from Hobourne Bashley.

Our new People and Wildlife Ranger has been busy making contact with many New Forest organisations to start progressing mitigation work relating to new residential developments in the New Forest District Council area, and raising awareness of the special nature of our designated sites, especially the SPA and SAC's. She gave an introductory talk at the NFDog AGM, attended puppy training classes with Southern Pet Services and in conjunction with the Rangers ran two successful responsible dog ownership awareness raising sessions at Wellow Common in partnership with the Parish Council and Test Valley Borough Council.

Rangers led a number of walks supporting the hugely successful Walking Festival. Overall Ranger contacts since the last report have been 4,651 people.

### *Interpretation projects*

We have been working with Lymington – Brockenhurst Community Rail Partnership on a trail and heritage project. We have also worked closely with colleagues to put on the 'Shedding New Light on the New Forest's Past' exhibition funded by the New Forest HLS in September.

We have worked with Lyndhurst Parish Council and local history groups to renovate the Racecourse telephone kiosk as an information point and are now looking to renovate the Bank kiosk so that there will be three to be visited on the Lyndhurst Parish circular walk.

We have started work on the Our Past, Our Future interpretation and outreach work, 'New Forest Connects'. This project will engage local and neighbouring audiences with Forest life and traditions. A working group has been convened, project officers recruited and exhibition and training briefs developed for tendering in the new year.

### *Communications*

Our latest seasonal snaps online photo competition attracted double the votes of the summer competition, with 7,500 people voting for their favourite autumnal image of the New Forest across the 350 photos submitted. The competition attracts further social media followers and encourages interest in the National Park's special qualities.

BBC South Today and Radio Solent carried pieces about healthy walks in the New Forest and referrals through GP surgeries.

Press releases have included enforcement injunctions, the launch of cycle routes, the New Forest Marque award winners and Christmas Fair, plus the Building Design Awards scheme. We have also answered several media enquiries on fracking and planning applications.

### *Formal education*

With the appointment of Jonathan Dean for maternity cover, the Education team was back up to strength just in time for the autumn term school bookings. We taught 616 students from 13 groups, ranging from university students to six year olds.

Bookings included a number of GCSE and A level groups investigating impacts and management, with a particular focus on the sustainability of tourism. Primary school sessions were as popular as ever, with 'Caring for the National Park' becoming the most requested topic.

It is very encouraging to see schools taking the opportunities for local studies afforded by the new National Curriculum, and very rewarding to be able to further children's understanding of, and love for, the Forest.

Plans for next year's conferences were discussed at a well attended meeting of the New Forest Educators' Forum. A steering group, to be led by Craig Daters, will be set up to coordinate further development of the John Muir Award in the New Forest. Students from five local secondary schools have attended work experience interviews, and all the young people are looking forward to joining us in the summer.

The Travel Grant Scheme continues to enable children to access the excellent education within the National Park. The total number of pupils benefitting since April stands at 1,933. *'The travel grant scheme meant we could run the trip at a reasonable cost. Without the grant, it is unlikely we would have been able to go.'* Our Lady and St. Joseph Catholic Primary School. The value of the scheme was summed up by one teacher from Lydlynch Infant School: *'It's brilliant and always so efficiently managed. Thanks again.'*

## **2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park**

### *Recreation Management Strategy*

The Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) Steering Group's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was endorsed by all six organisations represented on the Group. This summarises the desirable outcomes, guiding principles and criteria that underpin the way in which statutory organisations will work together to improve the management of recreation across the New Forest. At its meeting in November the Steering Group discussed how it could develop specific proposals for consultation. It also considered a report produced by Footprint Ecology which detailed options for studying the extent to which recreation impacts on ground nesting bird populations.

### *Educational campaigns*

We have continued to monitor the organisation and impacts of larger cycle events. We have also been looking at the way in which feedback on these events is provided to, and used by, the Safety Advisory Group and how systems can be improved. The effectiveness of the Cycle Event Organisers' Charter in addressing concerns about these events is the subject of an agenda item for this Authority meeting.

We have helped shape the Solent-wide recreation mitigation work, designed to reduce impacts of people visiting the Solent coast on wintering birds. As well as advising on the establishment of a team of rangers we have recently been advising on the development of initiatives that encourage responsible dog walking on the coast.

Following input from the Animal Accident Reduction Group, HCC officers have prepared options for revised warning signage in the north of the Forest. These proposals include signs with the same changing slogans that are in place on the B3054 between Lymington and Dibden Purlieu. Use of the same seasonal messages across the Forest will strengthen this way of raising awareness. The Group also discussed ways in which deer road traffic accidents might be reduced. One idea being followed up with Forestry Commission, the Verderers and Hampshire Highways is to enhance the roadside fencing either side of underpasses; these routes are used, but stronger fencing is likely to make them the route of choice where they are close by.

The Joint Litter Working Group was able to reflect on a busy year in which litter featured strongly in a range of initiatives, generating some useful media coverage. In March 2016 there is to be a 'Clean for the Queen' event (celebrating the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday). NPA staff will be working with New Forest District Council and Forestry Commission staff to encourage communities to organise litter picks as well as to highlight the importance of no dropping litter in the first place.

The official New Forest Cycle Map (including the Cycling Code) has been reprinted between ourselves and the Forestry Commission. These maps are now for sale at various outlets at £1 each to cover printing costs.

### *New Forest Access Forum*

The Forum met on 7 September at Lepe Country Park. In addition to regular updates from key access agencies, they received a significant presentation from Natural England's Coastal Access team on the implementation of the England Coast Path by 2020. A subgroup of Forum members will engage with NE on this throughout implementation. Ordnance Survey gave a presentation on a detailed mapping project they are delivering in National Parks to make their data and maps more accessible in a digital format.

The Forum also met on the 7 December in Brockenhurst. They received a presentation from Bruce Rothnie, the Deputy Surveyor about the Forestry Commission's vision. The Forum considered its response to Hampshire County Council's draft walking strategy consultation.

The Forum has been working with us to develop a new campaign called Tame Your Wildside, to encourage the mutual respect and shared use of roads and tracks by all user groups. An online film and web page will be launched in the spring.

Two applications were made to the Small Grants Scheme from within the National Park. Tiptoe Green Trust was successful in its bid to improve the drainage and surfacing of paths across the site. Minstead Parish Council was offered part funding for bridleway improvements within the Parish. A fourth round of applications is currently being welcomed.

## **3 Prosper**

### **3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy**

On Thursday 1st October NFNPA Members met with members of the Country Land & Business Association (CLA) for a business breakfast at Setley Ridge. Key concerns from the CBLA included planning and the need for further diversification in the face of declining agriculture incomes, coastal access and broadband provision.

November is the month for the annual Brilliance in Business Awards, held at Carey's Manor Hotel. The winner of the NPA sponsored Sustainable Business Award was Marque member New Forest Aromatics.

In December the New Forest LEADER programme was finally given the green light by Defra. The programme will start to take applications from businesses in January.

### 3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

Changes continue to be proposed to the delivery of affordable housing as the Government's Housing & Planning Bill makes its way through Parliament. The Bill, and related proposed amendments to national planning policy, would have the effect of broadening the definition of affordable housing and changing some of the legal clauses. We are working with the other English National Park Authorities to consider the implications of these proposals on the provision of much needed affordable housing.

We are continuing to liaise with the local parish councils and landowners in Brockenhurst, Copythorne and Sway to consider potential rural exceptions sites in these areas. No planning applications have been submitted for affordable housing developments in any of these villages and local communities will obviously have the opportunity to comment should planning applications be received.

Works are due to start on site this month in building the two new affordable homes in Bransgore, which should be ready for occupation in the Autumn.

### 3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

#### *Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) programme*

More than 50,000 people explored the New Forest National Park by bus instead of a car this summer - despite it being a colder, wetter summer. After two good summers, Met Office records for the south of England showed July 2015 was the wettest and coldest for three years, whilst August had the least amount of sunshine since 2011.

- The New Forest Tour attracted 34,622 passenger journeys on its three routes during its 11-week season this summer, compared to 41,877 in 2014. This saved around 187,000 private car miles and contributed an estimated £562,000 to the local economy.
- The Beach Bus attracted 6,436 passenger journeys during its five week season to Hythe, Lepe, Beaulieu and Lymington, compared to 7,993 in 2014. This was supported by New Forest Ice Cream and Exxon Mobil.
- 8,432 passenger trips were made on Forest Bus Baby, a new weekend service from May to October linking Hythe, Beaulieu, Brockenhurst, Burley, Ringwood and Moors Valley Country Park.
- The Summer Service X24 to Paultons Park ran from Southampton to Paultons Park, via Romsey, attracting 3,794 passenger trips from May to September during weekends, banks and school holidays.

The New Forest Travel Concierge also gave travel advice to 7,134 visitors and residents from Brockenhurst rail station and campsites during the summer, up from 4,441 people last year. Two of the travel concierge staff are now delivering a programme of guided walks and bike rides aimed at local people and visitors over the autumn/winter period.

In spite of a challenging summer for weather, we are in a strong place commercially to continue our work on visitor bus services in future years thanks to the support of passengers and our commercial partners.

In October we launched the *New Forest Walker and Cyclist Approved* accreditation scheme for local accommodation providers to improve the welcome and facilities for visitors looking to walk or cycle. It has been developed in partnership with New Forest Tourism Association and

New Forest District Council. It will provide walkers and cyclists with the confidence that they are booking quality New Forest accommodation, which meets their particular needs, allowing them to enjoy a stress and hassle free trip; one that is more likely to be repeated. Accommodation meeting an agreed set of activity-specific criteria will be allowed to display *New Forest Walker and Cyclist Approved* badges at their accommodation and online. We have worked with the NFTA and local businesses to try and make the process of becoming accredited not overly onerous, whilst remaining relevant to guests' expectations. The scheme has been well received by the business community and is also an opportunity to encourage local businesses to promote our key 'caring for' messages and the New Forest Cycling Code.

#### *New Forest Family Cycling Experiences programme (NFFCE)*

We recently opened the new off-road cycle route between Marchwood and Eling, which was completed in September. The 2km off-road path joining Marchwood to Totton means cyclists no longer have to use the dangerous Bury Road and cope with the large number of lorries travelling to and from nearby industrial estates. The work was paid for with £195,000 from our cycling fund from the Department for Transport, with Marchwood Aggregates Ltd contributing £120,000 for construction and materials. New Forest District Council gave £25,000 from its 'Section 106 agreement' planning levies and £10,000 came from an anonymous benefactor. The Barker-Mill Estates provided the land and Hampshire County Council managed the project and connected it to the road.

Work on the Ashurst to Lyndhurst cycleway and the cycleway adjacent to the A35 at Totton has also been completed and re-signposted. This work has been delivered by Hampshire County Council's Operation Resilience team with £330,000 of funding from the programme.

Hampshire County Council's Countryside Service has completed three major bridleway improvements, and the Forestry Commission has completed upgrades to 26km of gravel cycle routes across the Crown lands. Work has started on the new Cyclexperience centre at Brockenhurst station and this is on track to be completed by the end of March 2016.

#### *Transport Policy*

Officers recently had a very productive session with staff from Highways England to discuss issues relating to the M27, A31 and the A36 for which they have responsibility. Topics included Heavy Commercial Vehicles (HCV) parking at Picket Post, safety at the Rufus Stone junction, the lack of signage of the HCV weight limit in the north of the National Park from the A31, vegetation management and litter. Highways England are now using a different road surfacing treatment on their whole network which creates less noise as part of their Noise Action Plan, being rolled out up to 2021. This will eventually come to the New Forest and deliver significant benefits to the tranquillity of the area.

The Authority has been asked to respond to the Department for Transport consultation on the South Western Railway franchise which we will complete in the new year. We are also working with colleagues across England's National Parks to respond to changes which are likely to emerge through the Government's Buses Bill, likely to be launched next year which is expected to have implications for transport in rural areas.

### **3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities**

#### *Sustainable Communities Fund*

To date, funds of £52,104 have been approved to five sustainable transport projects bringing in match funds of £125,617 as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme. Just over £15,000 is still to be awarded and we are expecting this to be agreed by the end of March 2016. A further 11 projects are currently ongoing from the main fund.

Two projects that received funding from the SCF were recently successful in the annual Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Hampshire Countryside Awards. Winner of the Green Buildings category was the Shipwrights School at Buckler's Hard, which received a £20,000 SCF grant and is now home to students on rotation from the International Boatbuilding Training College in Portsmouth. It is hoped that the school will also help visitors to the attraction near Beaulieu to gain a better understanding of the industry which gave the village a place in British naval history. Pondhead Conservation Trust won the Community and Voluntary category for its volunteers' work to manage Pondhead Inclosure near Lyndhurst using traditional woodland skills. The charity received £23,000 from the SCF and aims to encourage a greater diversity of wildlife and plant life in the inclosure, as well as making the area more accessible for local people. The CPRE Hampshire Countryside Awards was established in 2007 to recognise projects that enhance the environment and quality of life in the county.

## **4 Aiming for Excellence**

### **4.1 Providing the highest quality of service**

#### *Planning*

One hundred and thirty eight applications were registered, 93% registered within three working days and available to view on the web site within five working days.

#### *Meetings and Authority membership*

Support to Members and teams across the corporate structure has included support to the Authority and committee meetings, Members' days, Task and Finish group meetings and briefings (Developing the Tourism Economy of the National Park on 1 October and Local Plan Review on 1 December), Executive Board, All Staff team meetings and Managers Forum. Arrangements have been made for new members to attend the NPUK induction course. Officers have also been liaising with Defra to facilitate the recruitment of a new Secretary of State member whose appointment will take effect in March/April 2016.

#### *Review of the records management system*

The new electronic records management system has now been in operation for 6 months and is operating well. Redundant and duplicate files have been removed resulting in a considerable saving in memory space and a more efficient and effective system.

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

We continue to respond to and arrange requests for public speaking by local organisations on a range of topics – this process has recently been reviewed to increase the pool of possible speakers. Support is provided for parish quadrant meetings, external partners such as the New Forest Marke, Access Forum and Consultative Panel (which, at its last meeting considered a presentation from the National Grid on potential underground cabling at Hale Purlieu).

## 4.3 Using available resources effectively and efficiently

We continue to explore opportunities for savings and efficiencies wherever possible. At the last meeting of the Consultative Panel on 5 November our officers (who provide the Secretariat for the Panel), submitted proposals intended to lead to considerable savings and efficiencies for the Panel. These proposals were adopted by the Panel resulting in a saving of approximately £5,000 to the Authority.

Requests made under the Freedom of Information Act and complaints against the Authority continue to be dealt with effectively and efficiently. The Authority's complaints process has recently been reviewed to strengthen the NPA's ability to deal with vexatious and/or serial complaints.

### *Human Resources*

As at 31 December 2015 the total staff headcount was 80 or 72.85 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Core funded	67*	60.04*
Funded by external projects	13	12.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>72.85</b>

\*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.

In the last few months we said goodbye to Sion Donovan (Communications Officer), Helen O'Brien (Corporate Partnerships Officer), Jolyon Whaymand (Inclusive Cycling Officer) and three seasonal staff; Kathy Troke-Thomas, Vicky Inglis and Diana Collett. We wish them every success in their future ventures

We also said goodbye to Paul James (Building Design Officer) as he retired after a career spanning over 40 years. Paul started his local government career at New Forest District Council more than 30 years ago before joining the Authority in 2006. We thank Paul for his valuable contribution and wish him well in his much deserved retirement.

Welcome to:

- **James Palmer** – Tree Officer
- **Jonathan Dean** – Education Officer (maternity cover until August 2016)



The recent funding received from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the 'Our Past, Our Future' Landscape Partnership Scheme has created some new opportunities. These fixed-term roles range from one to four years and two of the posts were successfully filled by internal candidates whilst the others have been filled by new staff who will join the Authority in January 2016.

- **Community Archaeologist** – James Brown (transfers in March)
- **Interpretation and Outreach Project Officer** – Gareth Owen (transfers in February)
- **Administration and Finance Assistant**
- **Volunteer, Training and Mentoring Co-ordinator**
- **Communications Assistant**

We have also appointed a second Communications Assistant on a part-time basis to assist the team for the coming year.

Recruitment is currently underway for:

- **Project Co-ordinator–A Shared Forest** – (part-time and fixed-term for 3 years)

### *ICT Services*

The software hosting the planning pages on the web site has been upgraded, allowing the pages to present well when using a mobile phone or tablet. The hardware inventory is now complete and up-to-date, with work commencing on updating the software inventory. An initial meeting has been held to discuss options for the Microsoft licence renewal. Following the recent IT Audit, Officers are in the process of updating all IT policies which will enable audit recommendations to be followed through. Officers are also looking at current email configurations and have commenced internal training.

## **5 Members**

### **5.1 Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events**

- 1 October - Countryside Landowners Association Members Day
- 20 October – Planning Development Control Committee
- 5 November – Consultative Panel
- 17 November – Planning Development Control Committee
- 19 November – New Forest Centre Members Day
- 7 December – Resource, Audit and Performance Committee
- 10 December – Finance Members Day
- 15 December – Planning Development Control Committee
- 11 January – Standards Committee
- 19 January – Planning Development Control Committee

### **5.2 Forthcoming activities include:**

- 1 February – Resource, Audit and Performance Committee
- 16 February – Planning Development Control Committee
- 2 March – Members Day
- 3 March – Consultative Panel
- 7 March – Resource, Audit and Performance Committee

- 15 March – Planning Development Control Committee

### 5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- M3 Rural Action Group, 29 September
- HLS Board meeting, 7 October
- NE Quadrant meeting, 7 October
- Management Plan Leadership Group meeting, 8 October
- HIOW CX update on Devolution, 9 October
- National Parks Conference, 14-16 October
- NPPL Board meeting, 20 October
- Our Past, Our Future launch event, 26 October
- Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee, 3 November
- Business South Corporate Social Responsibility event, 4 November
- HIOW Devolution Partnership meeting, 5 November
- HIOW CX Update on Devolution, 6 November
- CLA meeting, 9 November
- NFA meeting, 11 November
- Meeting with Havant Borough Council, 13 November
- Meeting with Natural England, 16 November
- Speaker at Clinical Commissioning Group Seminar, 17 November
- National Parks Officers Video Conference, 18 November
- Members Day, New Forest Centre, 19 November
- Speaker at Regenerate South Conference, 20 November
- Beaulieu Estate Dinner, 20 November
- NPPL Board meeting, 24 November
- Natural Environment Strategy Group meeting, 25 November
- Landscape Institute Awards, 26 November
- HIOWLGA & HIOW Devolution Partnership meeting, 27 November
- Meeting with Christchurch Borough Council, 2 December
- E-NPOG meeting, 3 December
- Public Health England meeting, 3 December
- Resources Audit & Performance Panel, 7 December
- Chief Executives Steering Group, 11 December
- Meeting with Cllr S Woodward, 11 December
- Devolution update, 14 December
- NFDC / FC / NPA Liaison meeting, 17 December
- National Park Officers Video Conference, 17 December
- HIOW CX update on Devolution, 18 December
- Meeting with HCC, 18 December
- Meeting with Ageas Bowl, 6 January
- Meeting with HCC, 11 January
- Meeting with Dame Fiona Reynolds, 12 January
- E-NPOG, 19 January

### 5.4 Chairman's engagements

- Desmond Swayne MP meeting, 25 September
- Chief Executive annual appraisal panel, 6 October
- Planning Committee, 20 October
- Our Past, Our Future launch event, 26 October
- South Downs NPA Chairman and Chief Executive Video conference, 28 October

- RMS Steering Group, 4 November
- Opening of Marchwood cycle track, 6 November
- NPE Chairman's meeting, 12 November
- Planning Committee, 17 November
- Members' Day, 19 November
- South Downs NPA Chairman and Chief Executive Video conference, 24 November
- Defra SoS selection panel teleconference, 26 November
- RAPC, 7 December
- Local Plan joint working group, 7 December
- Members' Day, 10 December
- Meeting with Deputy Surveyor and Official Verderer, 10 December
- RMS Steering Group Chairman's briefing, 11 December
- Meeting with Cllr Woodward, HCC, 11 December
- Opening event, Ashurst to Lyndhurst cycleway, 18 December
- Meeting with the Leader, HCC, 18 December
- Chairman's briefing, 11 January
- Devolution Partnership meeting, East Hants BC, 14 January
- Planning Committee, 19 January

## **6 Recommendation**

**To note the report.**