

NFNPA 526/17

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 13 JULY 2017**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 23 March 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
<i>Our priorities:</i> <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	<i>Our priorities:</i> <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	<i>Our priorities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy▪ Promoting sustainable transport▪ Encouraging sustainable communities
Aiming for Excellence		
<i>In all we do:</i> <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

Contact: Alison Barnes
Tel: 01590 646633, Email: alison.barnes@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Equality & Diversity Implications:

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.

NFNPA 526/17

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 13 JULY 2017

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

This quarter has seen a very important milestone being reached - the main statutory organisations with a remit for caring for the Forest and helping people enjoy and understand it have asked us to lead on the 'Future Forest' consultation. The way we collectively manage recreation in the Forest is key to the National Park's future and many agree we're at a crucial moment in the Forest's history, particularly as communities continue to grow and change around us. Together we want to understand how we can provide the best recreational experience for local people and visitors whilst protecting the very thing people come to see – the spectacular, yet fragile landscape which is a haven for many rare wildlife species.

The first stage for this important debate began in mid-June with a call for views asking people to look at the Recreation Management Strategy published in 2010 and to help us review it by giving their views on what priorities we should take forward. This will inform a further, more in-depth public consultation on an updated strategy next year. Over 400 responses were received in the first week and we hope as many people as possible will give their views, particularly groups and individuals who don't normally engage in such consultations.

Important work to support commoning has progressed on several different fronts this quarter:

Nearly 70 commoners were helped by the Land Advice Service to submit their Basic Payment Scheme applications - payments that are vital in ensuring the continuation of commoning in the New Forest. This is a complex process here as commoning is different from farming elsewhere in the country. As part of the Our Past Our Future Heritage Lottery scheme, we have also worked with the Commoners Defence Association to encourage businesses to help spread safe driving messages to commuters and delivery drivers in the hope of reducing animal accidents. We also celebrated the end of the first year of a mentoring scheme matching new commoners with experienced commoners, resulting in six families being paired up. Next year is already over-subscribed, with a waiting list operating. In addition, we are working closely with commoner Lyndsey Stride to increase awareness and understanding of the commoning community through a 'Commoners Voice' project.

We were particularly pleased with the progress that has been made in reaching marginalised groups this quarter. The Big Lottery Fund awarded £300,000 to further develop the PEDALL project, which provides cycling sessions for people with disabilities. Our work to engage young people with the Forest and improve health and wellbeing has also taken a leap forward - we have been contracted by the National Citizenship Service to provide sessions to 750 16-17 year olds, have delivered activities for The Prince's Trust and several groups of young people have been awarded their John Muir conservation awards.

Since April our education team has worked with 15 schools to deliver our 'Litter Heroes' assemblies and follow up 'Caring for the Forest' sessions, reaching 3,825 children. In addition, 28 schools (1,147 pupils) have been supported in education sessions on the Open Forest.

Work has continued on our Local Plan Review to ensure we have an up-to-date local planning framework in place to help guide our planning decisions in the future. We are presently consulting on some alternative housing sites following some updated advice from Natural England. At the same time, we have commissioned a wide range of supporting evidence in support of the plan review including an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment; an updated Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment; an assessment of employment and business needs; and most recently a Local Plan Viability Assessment. This latter assessment will inform the final draft planning policies on affordable housing and rural exceptions sites within the National Park.

In early June we began our celebrations to mark the 800th anniversary of the Forest Charter by joining with partners to deliver the second annual New Forest Arts Festival; over 60 events ranging from storytelling, poetry, sculpture and theatre at Blackwater Arboretum explored the theme of trees. The Forest Charter anniversary theme will be carried through into content for the New Forest Show stand, for which preparations are in final stages. We are also moving into the visitor season in other ways – the New Forest Tour started on 8 July, concierge services at both Brockenhurst Station and the New Forest Centre are in place and our two seasonal rangers are now sharing 'care for' messages at Open Forest campsites. The Beach Bus returns on 28 July.

We have welcomed three new Members following the local elections and are anticipating confirmation of a further four new Secretary of State Members by the Environment Secretary in the near future. We look forward to working together on the challenges ahead and to building on the many contributions of outgoing members, for whose service I would like to extend my thanks on behalf of the staff team.

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

A successful second season of archaeological work has been undertaken by Winchester University's Archaeology Department led by Dr Paul Everill on the potential Royal Lodge site at Denny Inclosure. The excavation is part of a larger research project on New Forest Royal Lodge sites and the first time in a hundred years that this type of site has been excavated. Last year, the excavations produced fragments of medieval pottery, and charcoal that was radiocarbon dated to the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries AD. The current excavations benefiting from modern scientific analysis.

We have helped install new interpretation and public art at Buckland Rings on the outskirts of Lymington. This was developed by local charity SPUD youth with help from the NPA, Hampshire County Council and St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery. The interpretation includes

two trails, seating, sculpture and information about the site's little known Iron-Age heritage. A successful open day took place in April which saw hundreds of local people visit the site, many for the first time. Activities included guided walks and 'have a go' surveys led by National Park staff, re-enactment displays and stalls from local organisations.

The site at Denny is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and has required working with Historic England to obtain necessary approval for work from the Secretary of State and the project is in collaboration with the New Forest National Park.

The excavations have revealed evidence of an underlying prehistoric enclosure, indicating that the site, on a low ridge overlooking the open forest, had been an important focal point at different times in the past several thousand years. The current excavation is investigating both the medieval and prehistoric evidence from the site and work on the archaeological finds will potentially reveal more information in the months to come.

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

Initial results from the borehole and trial pit tests that took place in February, at the west and east end of the preferred route of the proposed undergrounding of the high voltage lines that cross Hale Purlieu, are being analysed by National Grid's specialist contractors. National Grid is arranging a meeting in the New Forest on 19 July to discuss these results with both national and local representatives of Natural England and the National Trust as well as National Park officers.

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative funding for the submitted project at Warren Copse, Holbury, (woodland management, wildplay and trail) has successfully passed the scrutiny of the LEI panel. It will now go before the final OFGEM panel in October 2017. National Grid has confirmed that it will inform us whether OFGEM has approved the funding after that meeting.

We are looking at the feasibility of other projects along the high voltage pylon line that could qualify for the LEI funding. A page has gone onto our website explaining the LEI fund and calling for any project ideas that could be put forward.

Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Landscape Partnership Scheme

All partners are continuing to progress their projects as part of the scheme. Key progress in the last quarter includes the following:

- Volunteer task days to remove Himalayan Balsam along the Avon Water, Cadnam and Lymington rivers have started and will continue throughout the summer.
- The practical work on habitat restoration stopped in March at the end of practical work season and the projects are now busy planning work that will recommence at sites in the autumn.
- The Freshwater Habitats Trust has been working with three landowners/managers in the Beaulieu catchment to improve sediment runoff from their properties and 30 volunteers continue to undertake water quality monitoring.

- The Forestry Commission's Conserving the Forest Fringe project has completed works in Redlynch, Bramshaw and Woodgreen Parish Councils and is starting to work with Ellingham, Ibsley and Harbridge Parish Council as one of its year two areas.
- A trip to the National Archives was organised for volunteers to learn how to undertake heritage research and to look behind the scenes of the centre and a third Heritage Forum was held in June for local heritage groups.
- Volunteers have been recruited to the Historic Routes project and they have received initial training at the Hampshire Records Office to enable them to start their research into the historic significance of their local rights of way.
- Numerous courses have been held on land management and traditional building skills, including an introductory evening on developing a rural business and marketing your produce and deer stalking.
- An event was held in Minstead to recruit new commoners for the Mentoring Scheme and to hear feedback from those that were mentored in the first year.
- A Veteran Trees course is planned to take place in 2017.
- New Forest Knowledge portal is in final stages of development and second conference for October 2017 is planned. Over 5,000 items from the Christopher Tower Library have been scanned and catalogued by volunteers.
- Verderers Hall renovation is complete and they are now working on finalising the interpretation and security elements of the project with a launch event planned for September.
- The Commoner's Defence Association has developed a local business partnership to spread advice about safe driving on the roads across the open forest, aimed at commuters and delivery drivers. Six local employers are engaged with a Forest-wide launch planned for the New Forest Show.
- We are working closely with commoner Lyndsey Stride to develop a 'Commoners Voice' project aimed at raising awareness and understanding of commoners and commoning amongst the general public.
- Planning is well under way for this year's exhibition and activities at the New Forest Show (25-27 July) which will be celebrating the 800 year anniversary of the Charter of the Forest and welcoming the Woodland Trust's Charter for Trees, Woods and People. In the autumn the exhibition will continue at the New Forest Centre.
- Interpretation has been installed at the National Trust's Foxbury site and further cabins are planned for installation.
- The new interpretation at Bolderwood was launched during the Easter Holidays.
- Wildplay events were held during Easter 2017.
- The Arts Festival took place from 10 – 25 June with over 60 events across the Forest.
- A Members Day is being planned for 11 October with a focus on commoning.

- The Annual Review of the scheme for the first year has shown the following:
 - Most projects are on schedule and within budget
 - In some cases projects started later than January 2016, therefore had not run for a full year. However in most cases the targets will be met by the end of the project and the work programmes and budgets will continue to roll forward year to year
 - The non-cash contributions and the volunteer time show that more has been achieved than planned
 - The matched funding contributions are on track. The Scheme started with a £138,000 gap in matched funding, this has been reduced to £72,372. A strategy is in place to source the remaining funds including a bid to the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative, income from training courses, applications to Trusts etc. This will be reviewed in winter 2017.

Project work – OPOF (Our Past, Our Future)

New Forest Rural Skills Project

June marked the end of the first year of the Commoners Mentoring Scheme which we have been running in partnership with the Commoners Defence Association as part of our New Forest Rural Skills Project. We held an event at the Trusty Servant in Minstead for all the mentors and mentees from the first year and new people wanting to be mentored during the coming year. The scheme is proving very popular and is oversubscribed again for year two.

Several courses have been run through the Rural Skills project during this period including;

- three chainsaw courses
- Marketing your Produce (a four-part evening course) run in partnership with the New Forest Marque
- Cattle breeding and management
- Two safe use of pesticide courses
- Tree safety and surveying
- First aid for farmers.

Nature's Stepping Stones Project and Better Boundaries Project

A mixture of follow up work from the winter (e.g. spraying, fencing), survey and monitoring of sites (e.g. birds, butterflies, bats, botanical) and preparation for next winter's contract work, has been carried out during this period. Pipistrelle bats, which were not recorded in the area previously, have been recorded this spring using one of our newly planted hedgerows in Hyde.

Working Woodlands

Tom Murphy (Project Co-ordinator - Working Woodlands) is mainly focused on finding and visiting new sites for year two and preparing felling licences and management plans for the coming winter.

Historic Routes and past pathways project

Short talks about the project which aims to establish five new trails in the Park using existing Rights of Way, have been delivered to two parish quadrant meetings and an annual parish meeting with mixed response. Some see this as a much needed project to research into our Rights of Way and promote responsible use as well as highlighting the potential wealth of

history within the Park. Other views include concerns about inappropriate parking by trail users, more visitors and the increased use of Rights of Way already in poor condition. Work continues to connect with parishioners to hear concerns and to find positive solutions to any issues raised.

Twenty-three volunteers have signed up to take part in this project. The first of the volunteer training sessions was held on 30 May at the Hampshire Records Office in Winchester. Eight volunteers took part and were shown some of the range of official maps (i.e. Ordnance Survey), estate and enclosure maps, wills, sale documents and much more that they could use as part of their Rights of Way research. Another training session is being planned for later in the year.

New Forest Land Advice Service

Core NFLAS work

April and May were very busy for Rhys Morgan who advised 68 commoners at Lymington Town Hall across 19 days on their Basic Payment Scheme applications, as well as carrying out seven home visits to other commoners. Commoners' applications for BPS, which is the direct payment all farmers are eligible for in the UK through the EU Common Agricultural Policy, are very complex and different from elsewhere and NFLAS support hundreds of commoners every year to ensure their forms are correctly filled in and work with the Rural Payments Agency to try and solve the problems with their claims which many of them experience.

The National Trust has asked NFLAS again to help administer its Small Grant Scheme for commoners who turn out on the Northern Commons. This is a £6k pot which supports a minimum of six commoners each year to carry out capital works on their holdings which benefit the management of the National Trust's commons.

NFLAS has been asked to host the annual Farmer Liaison Officers Group Meeting where all the National Parks' land management advisors meet for two days at one of the National Parks. This will take place in October and we have chosen commoning as a theme for the day of site visits.

The Wildlife and Conservation Manager, Julie Melin-Stubbs was asked to deliver a presentation at the Commoners Defence Association AGM to give an update on the New Forest Rural Skills project work and other relevant NFLAS initiatives. In addition she has also been asked to sit as an honorary member and advisor on the Young Commoners Group.

NFLAS carried out a small contract for the Commoners Defence Agency, working with the Rural Payments Agency and commoners to rectify some of the issues which are causing problems with claims across the Forest. This is ongoing.

Growing the Forest and Ecology

May saw the 25th anniversary of the Solent Forum and members of the Forum and the public were invited to participate in a number of events across the area, including a guided walk around the Forest's coast. We were also represented at the Forum's 'Solent Matters' conference which received presentations from a range of experts including Associated British Ports, the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership.

The period also saw participation in the Solent European Sites Management Scheme with feedback being provided by us on plans, projects and activities in the protected coastal zone.

We have been assisting Bournemouth University which is conducting a short research project into heathland management and cultural heritage which may develop into a larger INTERREG project application later in the year.

We have also been working with Hampshire County Council, Hampshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Hampshire Local Nature Partnership to develop approaches to Ecological Network Mapping. This mapping defined core wildlife resources and areas which offer the best potential for the maintenance and enhancement of wildlife corridors and habitat stepping stones. Planning authorities are required by law and policy to reflect networks in their policies and plans.

We held a meeting with New Forest District Council (NFDC) to review performance of the Ecology service level agreement for the provision of ecology advice to NFDC. In the last year our ecologist was involved in over 190 requests from the District as well as providing support to their applicants. The Council welcome the current arrangement and quality of service, although the volume of work against the time funded (44 days a year) was recognised as limiting the input to some applications, particularly in the light of large scale developments currently proposed which require several days' input. Currently there are no proposals to increase the service. The agreement has been in place since 2012 and is to be renewed in 2018. In line with its requirements it is anticipated that we will seek an indication of intent to renew later in the autumn to assist our budget setting.

We continued our catchment co-hosting role and have been successful in securing more funding for delivery in the local area. During the period we also assisted the Environment Agency in its invitation for bids to the government's Natural Flood Management grants.

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

Development Management

The team has received 211 new planning applications since the last meeting (up to 26 June) and in the same period, determined 191 applications with an approval rate of 87%. No major applications were determined during this period but 82% of minor applications and 92% of householder/other applications were determined within eight weeks.

Twelve appeal decisions were reported to the Planning Committee during the period with nine appeals being dismissed and three allowed. One of the appeals allowed was for 24 new apartments for older people on the site of the former Watersplash Hotel in Brockenhurst. How we meet the future housing needs of older residents in the New Forest is just one of the planning issues to be addressed in the current Local Plan Review.

Enforcement and Trees

During this quarter we have secured compliance with two Enforcement Notices and commenced investigations into 54 allegations of planning breaches during April and May alone. We have also been able to conclude 65 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 three-day Public Inquiry was also held where enforcement action had been taken against an unauthorised

residential mobile home. The enforcement training event for local parish and town councils was held in March and was attended by over 50 councillors. This enabled us to highlight our current investigations which are the subject of enforcement action and give talks on dedicated subjects such as fences, advertisements, the collection of developers' contributions and court proceedings.

During April and May we registered 143 tree works applications for the National Park and surrounding New Forest District areas. We had cause to make 12 Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees of high amenity value that were otherwise under threat from new development or inappropriate works. We also organised and held an OPOF funded training workshop for 35 local tree contractors about veteran and ancient trees, in order to promote their importance and highlight best arboricultural management.

Policy

The main focus of the Policy team's recent work has been the Local Plan Review. The responses received during the public consultation held late last year have been considered and the team is working on revisions to the document ahead of the final period of public consultation timetabled for later this year. A wide range of supporting evidence base studies are in progress or have recently been completed, including an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment; an updated Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment; an assessment of employment and business needs; and a Local Plan Viability Assessment. This latter assessment will inform the final draft planning policies on affordable housing and rural exceptions sites within the National Park.

We have continued to liaise closely with Natural England throughout the Local Plan Review process. This includes consideration of the potential impacts of development on the Natura 2000 sites that cover over 50% of the National Park. In May 2017 we received updated advice from Natural England on this and as a result we are currently running an informal six-week public consultation on potential alternative housing sites within the National Park. This consultation runs until late July 2017 and the feedback received will inform the preparation of the Authority's Submission draft Local Plan later this year. Updates on the Local Plan review have been sent to everyone who has engaged in the process to date, as well as statutory consultees. At the same time, the team continues to work closely with colleagues at New Forest District Council regarding the emerging redevelopment proposals for the Fawley Power Station site.

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, New Milton and Hythe & Dibden have been progressing this work over the last couple of months and the Policy team continue to support the local steering groups with technical advice (alongside colleagues at New Forest District Council).

Holger Schiller has joined the team as the Partnerships & Community Officer and will be leading our work on the delivery of the Partnership Plan for the New Forest National Park.

1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life

Design advice and guidance

The spring and early summer months have seen a steady flow of consultations with advice requested on various listed building, conservation area and historic building matters. In the

period there have been several listed building appeals which have been dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate.

Our Past, Our Future Traditional Building Skills Courses

A further two traditional building skills courses have been held for professional agents who work within the National Park. A day on understanding timber framing was held in May and a day on lime renders, plasters and mortars was held in June. 28 people with backgrounds in architecture, surveying and engineering attended both courses which were held at Buckler's Hard.

Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

The Western Escarpment Steering Group met in June in Woodgreen to trial a template for recording features of local distinctiveness in the village. The meeting was attended by a number of parish councillors and the feedback received will be used to revise the template for future work.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park

Volunteering

We facilitated a volunteering day with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Twelve people from their Southampton HQ spent a day balsam pulling as part of the OPOF scheme on the Lymington River. This followed a meeting to discuss joint volunteering opportunities and it is hoped this will be the first step in closer collaboration in championing volunteering locally.

Outreach, health and wellbeing

The healthy walks quarter four results showed that the project is still progressing well, with 13 regular weekly walks during which there were 1,381 episodes of walking totalling 1,482 hours. There were 38 new walkers joining up.

The New Forest hosted a meeting between the four southern National Parks (Exmoor, Dartmoor, South Downs and ourselves) and colleagues from Public Health England (PHE) to discuss how we will work to implement the accord between PHE and National Parks England. First steps are to collate case studies of health and wellbeing projects and develop better communications and understanding between the organisations. In the longer term this will help National Parks meet the health agenda, and provide opportunity to collaborate on funding bids for example.

Rangers continue to build on their work with under-represented groups, especially young people. A contract has been secured with National Citizenship Service (NCS) for delivery of five spring and 30 summer ranger led sessions increasing engagement with and the understanding of up to 750 16-17 year olds about the National Park and its special qualities.

Sixteen students doing Uniformed Public Services Diploma from Brockenhurst College, 15 from Priestlands School and 12 from The Prince's Trust successfully completed their John

Muir Award with guidance and sessions led by National Park and Forestry Commission rangers. Craig Daters attended events to present the awards held by each organisation.

In April we hosted a successful John Muir workshop at Ferny Crofts for members of the New Forest Educators Forum about how they can integrate the Award in to activities and opportunities they currently deliver.

Rangers planned, co-delivered and evaluated programmes for two cohorts of 16-23 year olds from The Prince's Trust which included partnership sessions with Hampshire County Council maintaining tern rafts at Normandy Lagoon and scrub clearance with Blackwater Conservation Group.

The Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund panel has awarded the Authority £300,000 over the next three years to further develop our PEDALL Inclusive Cycling project. The project will help tackle the lack of exercise and associated health problems among young people with disabilities. This can include poor physical fitness, poor mental wellbeing and social isolation, which all contribute to a reduced quality of life. Recruitment has commenced for a part-time project manager and a full time ride leader to deliver the project.

2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park

Public and community events / rangers

There were 6,045 ranger contacts during this period.

Rangers supported the work of the Shared Forest OPOF project by attending a conflict management session relating to feeding of the ponies and then took the mobile unit out over the Easter holidays to allow participants to put the theory into practice, talking to the public on the ground.

Easter saw lots of people out enjoying the Forest and rangers out and about with the mobile unit attending events such as the National Trust's Easter Egg trail as well as Wild Wednesdays at the Reptile Centre and New Forest Toddle. The focus of engagement was promoting ground nesting birds and increasing understanding of potential disturbance by Forest users.

In April we welcomed two Assistant Seasonal Rangers. With funding from habitat mitigation, we have been able to extend our opportunity for seasonal rangers to include three months promoting our ground nesting bird messages. They were able to engage with an additional 1,053 people through events and sessions out in car parks with the mobile information unit. From the beginning of July they will be working with Camping in the Forest and Forestry Commission to promote responsible use of the Forest by campers and visitors.

A successful Wild Play day was held at Hurst Spit with over 250 attendees undertaking activities delivered by us, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Hampshire County Council and Milford Conservation Volunteers.

Interpretation projects

Work continues on the planned new interpretation at Avon Tyrrell, part of the Nature Stepping Stones Project. Following the interpretation plan that was submitted to aid further discussions and planning an Avon Tyrrell staff workshop has been arranged (14 June) to develop the initial ideas further.

The New Forest Remembers Portal covering the first and second World Wars continues to be well used by a worldwide audience. During this period (23 March to 31 May) the portal has received 13,582 page views; and 350,597 page views since it started on 23 March 2013.

One outstanding bit of news was the donation, by his grandson Mr P Simmons, of a WWI RFC pilot's (Arthur G Simmons, RFC 4975) photographic archive taken in the New Forest during 1918-1919 whilst at East Boldre (then RAF Beaulieu). Mr Simmons got in touch with us after finding an article on the Portal. The collection is now safe and has now been deposited at the New Forest Centre.

Work continues on the content for this year's New Forest Show. As part of the OPOF Scheme our theme this year is trees and ties into the 800 year anniversary of the issuing of the Charter of the Forest in 1217 and a new Charter for Woods, Trees and People to be launched on the 1217 anniversary on 6 November. This links together work being done as part of this year's Arts Festival and much of the outputs from these will form a temporary exhibition at the New Forest Centre later this year. In addition members of the public attending the New Forest Show will also have an opportunity to take part in the RMS consultation.

We have completed training support days for Lepe Country Park staff.

Interpretation and information boards about the National Park and how to get around the Forest in a sustainable way have been installed in Burley Youth Hostel. Guests can also try walks, runs and cycle rides from the hostel. The project has been developed in partnership with YHA and Ordnance Survey.

Communications

With our partner organisations, we launched the Future Forest 'call for views' consultation on recreation management, including a new web section, online survey, video, posters, leaflets, social media posts, exhibition panels and drop-in sessions.

The New Forest Arts Festival saw over 60 events across the National Park on the theme of trees to mark the 800 year anniversary of the Forest Charter. Events ranged from storytelling at a Ringwood café to playwrights workshops at the Observatory studio at Buckler's Hard; a wide-ranging programme at Furzey Gardens; interactive performances and clay art workshops at Exbury Gardens; poetry from the Headway brain injury charity; as well as a performance of The Crucible at Blackwater Arboretum. The Festival is organised by a steering group of all the main arts organisations in the Forest and events are supported by a small grants scheme, which we fund with New Forest District Council.

Media releases included the launch of an informal consultation on the Local Plan; the £300,000 Big Lottery Fund award toward the PEDALL inclusive cycling project; a press release The University of Winchester worked with us on publicising the Denny Wood archaeological excavation; a commoner's mentoring scheme; open art competition with the New Forest Centre and the national launch of the NPUK's partnership with the outdoor clothing apparel company Columbia.

The team also arranged a seasonal snaps photography competition on Facebook; a Tree of the Year competition to further highlight the Forest Charter; nominations and judging for the New Forest Show awards joint with the CLA; and the annual Date with Nature webcams and Reptile Centre activities with the RSPB and Forestry Commission.

Formal education

University and college groups studying Countryside Management, Habitat Management and Tourism dominated the beginning of the quarter, with primary schools investigating national parks or habitats and adaptations as part of their geography and science curriculums occupying much of the second half of the quarter.

The majority of the education sessions at this time of year take place on Crown Land in the New Forest National Park; for many of our young pupils, this is their first experience of the New Forest, even though the majority of the schools travel just a few miles. 1,147 pupils or students from 28 education establishments, mainly from within the National Park or the outskirts of Southampton, were taught by the education team during April, May and June.

The education team were saddened to learn that the review of the HLS Education Access Agreement for the New Forest has resulted in the number of education visits supported by the agreement being cut by half in the future. The CEO will be raising this at the next HLS Board meeting to see if any further support of valuable education work could be made available.

We have continued to visit schools in and around the national park delivering our 'Litter Heroes' assemblies and follow up sessions on Caring for the Forest, reaching 3,825 children in 15 schools since April.

The first of this year's work experience students have successfully completed their placements; special thanks to the Tree Team for their time, support and encouragement for one young tree enthusiast, who didn't want to go back to school after spending a week with them.

2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park

Recreation Management

At the last Authority meeting Members accepted the proposal that it should lead a public 'call for views' consultation to inform an update of the New Forest National Park Recreation Management Strategy 2010-2030 in partnership with the other organisations on the Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group. This consultation is now live, and will run through till 13 August, a total of eight weeks spanning both 'work' and holiday seasons.

All the background information, consultation questions and publicity has been prepared with the support of the other organisations on the RMS Steering Group (Forestry Commission, Natural England, Verderers, Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council). This has involved meetings of the Steering and Advisory Group, and the Access Forum. Drop-in 'roadshows' are planned and we will feature the consultation at the New Forest Show. In the first week of the consultation, 400 responses were received.

Our overall aims are to:

- provide the best recreational experience for local people and visitors
- protect the very thing people come to see – the spectacular, yet fragile landscape which is a haven for many rare wildlife species
- ensure limited resources are spent wisely.

At this stage in the process, the Steering Group is not making any proposals – we want to hear which topics the public and other organisations think should be prioritised and why. Draft

proposals will be drawn up during the autumn and winter, followed by public consultation about these next year.

We recently met with NFDC and Hampshire County Council officers to discuss the joint work that derives from NFDC's habitat mitigation strategy, especially the work of our People and Wildlife Ranger (Dawn Rayment). The work includes both helping to improve sites for recreation within the NFDC planning area (outside of the designated New Forest SPA) and a range of ways to reduce impacts when people choose to spend time on the SPA. There is a strong focus on promoting responsible dog walking (in positive ways), since uncontrolled dogs pose a clear risk to ground nesting birds. Following on from the training workshops we ran in March which were attended by various local organisations, commercial dog walkers and a representative from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, we have been asked to host a similar event open to all UK National Parks. This is being planned for November and should help us share expertise and resources and promote common messages. Dawn was invited as a guest to Crufts for the official publication of research on increasing dog walker access to urban woodlands to benefit their health.

Recreation Management and Learning officers are working with the planning policy team as our habitat mitigation strategy is updated alongside the emerging Local Plan. As the number of new homes being built increases we will need to do more to ensure the protected areas are not harmed.

Natural England has almost completed its work to develop the route proposal for the England Coast Path through the National Park and we anticipate there will be public consultation on the proposals from the end of July. We understand that many of the original concerns have been overcome, but there are likely to be some objections from land owners and some parts of the proposed route may not provide the best experience for walkers.

We were pleased that the issue of equestrian access to Plaitford Common via the A36 that we reported at the last Authority meeting was resolved when the National Trust decided to issue local horse riders with keys to the access gate.

Educational campaigns

With partner organisations we had further opportunities to raise awareness about animal accidents when Radio Solent ran a week-long series of interviews on the subject. Thankfully, and as is normal with the longer summer day-length, the rate of accidents has dropped in recent weeks. We have done a fresh analysis of the accident data collected by the Verderers and produced reports for the Animal Accident Reduction Group and for use on websites. This now includes an updated map of which roads are most prone to accidents. This data enables the Group to adopt evidenced-based approaches wherever possible.

We will be one of the six founding organisations for the Shared Forest Business group – a new scheme led by the Commoners Defence Association as part of the OPOF project – when it is launched at the New Forest Show. Participating organisations sign up to a charter which lists 10 things they can do through their business to reduce animal accidents.

Recent large cycle events have received a mixed response, with justifiable criticism and commendation for event organisers. We attended a Safety Advisory Group meeting at which UK Cycling Events accepted a number of recommendations following their event of 8 and 9 April.

The last quarter has seen the peak months of ground nesting bird activity, with the ranger team, boosted by seasonal rangers, speaking to all users about how they can reduce the impact of their recreational activities on these birds and their habitats.

Litter assemblies have continued through the education officers, and at a joint meeting with NFDC and FC staff, it was agreed that the annual Spring Clean had gone well. The primary and most serious sources of litter are fly tipping and waste thrown from vehicles. We plan to collate some data on types of roadside litter to give us fresh angles for educational campaigns.

New Forest Access Forum

The Forum met on 12 June in Lymington and received a presentation from Jonathan Woods, the Countryside Access Team leader at Hampshire County Council about progress in delivering the Countryside Access Plan. They also heard about BirdAware, the new name for the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership which was well received. The Forum has a busy few months ahead responding to the consultation on the Recreation Management Strategy and the England Coast Path.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy

We recently met with the new owners of Sandy Balls Holiday Park in Godshill (Away Resorts) to discuss opportunities for improved on-site interpretation, ranger engagement as well as support for the New Forest Tour and events.

3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

It is hoped that an agreement to purchase some land in Burley to provide two affordable homes and a local heritage centre (subject to planning permission) will be completed by the time of the Authority meeting. At the same time, consideration is being given to bringing forward another site in Burley for affordable housing and the acquisition of another site in Hordle.

The Bransgore affordable housing scheme was shortlisted for a national RTPI planning award in the 'Excellence in Planning to Deliver Housing' category. The awards ceremony was held in London on 15 June and whilst we were not the overall winner for this category we were nonetheless presented with a 'Finalist' Certificate.

3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

Visitor bus services

The New Forest Tour returns on the 8 July this year, the team have been busy refining the commentary and promotional activities for the season. Based on extensive customer research last summer we've been able to make some useful alterations to the timetable to improve connectivity between routes. Concurrent with the launch of the New Forest Tour, our Travel Concierge resumes operations at both Brockenhurst station and within the New Forest Centre at Lyndhurst. Our three sustainable travel ambassadors have been in post since early June preparing for the season. The Beach Bus between Lymington and Hythe returns on 28 July.

We are grateful to all our commercial partners and sponsors for their support of these visitor bus services. We've opened up a new income stream for the New Forest Tour through the bulk sale of tickets to some larger hotels who are including them within guest packages.

Transport policy

We recently received some cycle counter data for the Ashurst to Lyndhurst cycle route, which we supported Hampshire County Council to upgrade to a smooth tarmac surface in 2015. Results show that the average total number of bikes using the route per day has increased from 36 per day in 2014 to 77 per day in 2016. The same data shows that the number of bikes using the road has decreased by 50% over the same period. This is really positive news and this data could be important in developing the business case for new cycle infrastructure adjacent to the highway in other areas of the National Park.

We facilitated a discussion between Natural England, Forestry Commission and Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust about the possibility of a partnership bid to Highways England's Designated Environment Fund. At present the most pressing priority is for a good ongoing management plan for the habitats adjacent to the A31 which is ineligible for this round of capital funding. We will continue to engage with partners to explore what might be possible in the future. We will also be engaging with Highways England regarding proposals to widen the A31 just outside the National Park boundary at Ringwood.

3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities

Sustainable Communities Fund

Between 2009 and 2016 we offered a range of organisations the opportunity to receive a fully funded energy audit to support the introduction of energy saving measures for a range of community buildings and facilities. To date, 31 audits have been carried out and a review has recently been undertaken to ascertain the benefits of the audits in supporting communities to lead more sustainable lives.

Feedback from organisations taking part in the review highlighted a number of areas:

- Professional advice (both technical and practical) enabled organisations to make a significant number of changes including draft proofing, insulation, double glazing, solar thermal.
- Installation of a new air source heat pump and LED lighting enabled Hyde War Memorial Parish Hall to make annual savings of up to £1,000. Similar technology enabled Little Dears Nursery to save £2,500 over three years.
- Decisions are often made based on the rate of return on investment or lowest implementation cost.
- The report is a credible tool for unlocking further funding. Organisations who achieved most success in attracting additional funding were those who had expertise in this area.
- There is an appetite to make further changes and some organisations were starting to see implementation as a continual process.

We continue to offer energy audits through the Sustainable Communities Fund.

4 Aiming for Excellence

4.1 Providing the highest quality of service

Meetings and Authority membership

Support to Members and teams across the corporate structure has included support to the Authority and committee meetings, Members' days and briefings, Executive Board, All Staff team meetings and Managers Forum. We have assisted in the induction of three new local authority members: Richard Clewer from Wiltshire Council (replacing Julian Johnson) and Mel Kendal and Neville Penman from Hampshire County Council (replacing Ken Thornber and Andy Moore on the NPA). Russell Wynn resigned from the Authority on 23 June 2017 owing to unexpected work commitments and therefore we now have three current Secretary of State vacancies.

Officers have assisted in elections for the North East Quadrant representative on the Authority and Richard Taylor was elected to this vacancy created by the sad passing of Sally Arnold in March. We have requested that the Minister confirm this appointment and the appointments to the three current Secretary of State vacancies on the Authority will be confirmed by the Minister towards the end of July.

Review of the records management system

We are in the process of setting up our new intranet using SharePoint 2013. Ultimately all the Authority's records will be migrated across to the intranet significantly streamlining our records management and document storage. Officers are also conducting an information audit of all information held by the Authority which will assist in reviewing our document retention and compliance with FOI requests and the new General Data Protection Regulation.

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

Working with Partners

We continue to respond to and arrange requests for public speaking by local organisations on a range of topics. Support is provided for parish quadrant meetings, external partners such as the New Forest Marque, Access Forum and Consultative Panel (which, at its last meeting considered presentations on low flying training in the New Forest by the Ministry of Defence and discussed public consultation processes by the Forestry Commission, the continuing work with the Local Plan, the Fawley Waterside and the 'call for views' consultation to gather information from the public on recreation in the New Forest which would in turn form the basis of an updated Recreation Management Strategy).

4.3 Using available resources effectively and efficiently

Freedom of Information

We received 48 requests for information between 1 April 2016 and 30 March 2017, which is marginally less than the same period last year (51). All requests were responded to within the statutory deadline of 20 working days, with the average response time being 14.5 working days.

In 38% of requests the information was disclosed fully, with a further 30% of requests being disclosed with only minor redactions, the most common reason for withholding information was because the information was or contained the personal data of a third party. Seventeen percent of requests were for information which was not held by the Authority and the requester was redirected to the relevant public authority. Fifteen percent of the requests were withheld.

The majority of requests (58%) related to the planning function including enforcement matters, trees and policy. Over the past few years we have had an increase in the number of requests relating to how the Authority is managed in areas such as procurement, ICT, staff policies, finance etc. and this pattern continued and this type of request accounted for 21%.

Only one request was referred to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). However in the intervening time between the request being received and the appeal to the ICO, the consultation process to which the information related had progressed and subsequently more information was in the public domain. Consequently we were able to release the information to the requester and the case was closed before the ICO had concluded their investigations.

Data Protection

The new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will become law on 25 May 2018. The ICO is constantly reviewing its guidance to support organisations and to help them to prepare and be compliant with the new requirements. Staff training will be delivered through an e-learning programme and we are currently reviewing our existing practices and consents to ensure they are compliant. We have started a process of data audits by department to ensure we know what data we hold and our reasons for processing it. This will lead to a review of all the relevant policies, such as Access to Information Policy, Records Management Policy, Data Protection Policy etc.

Complaints

We received 12 complaints last year, six of these were from one individual. All complaints were related to planning matters including enforcement, trees and the planning committee. 100% of the stage 2 complaints were responded to within our target of 20 working days.

Four complaints were referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), of which three have been determined and one is still under investigation. The LGO did not uphold the three complaints it has determined, although in one they found that despite there being no evidence of fault in the way we considered the alleged planning breaches, we did fail to provide a full explanation of our decisions. However no further action was required as the investigation had provided the clarity on the matter.

Human Resources

As at 30 June 2017 the total staff headcount was 90 or 79.73 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	FTE	Variation from previous report
Core funded	70*	0	62.11*	-0.81
Funded by external projects	20	+5	17.62	+4.81
Total	90	+5	79.73	+4

*Of the core funded roles, 9 staff (8.31 FTEs) are working in shared services, 23 are part-time and two are on a fixed-term contract to provide maternity cover.

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

Name	Job title	Contract type	How funded
Simon Ludlow	ICT Technical Officer	Permanent	Core funded
Holger Schiller	Partnerships and Community Officer	Permanent	Core funded
▪ Rosie Bowman ▪ Maddy Evans	Seasonal Assistant Ranger	Summer seasonal	Jointly funded by the Authority, Camping in the Forest and the Forestry Commission
▪ Diana Collett ▪ Daniel Hipkiss ▪ Julie Sims	Sustainable Travel Ambassador	Summer seasonal	Part project/grant funded, part reserves

Recently we said goodbye to Deborah Slade (Senior Planning Officer) and to Liz Beckett (Tree Officer). We wish them well in their future ventures.

Recruitment is currently underway for:

Job title	Contract type	How funded
Building Design and Conservation Officer	Maternity cover (1 year)	Core funded
Principal Planning Officer	Permanent	Core funded
New Forest Apprentice Rangers x 2	Fixed-term (13 months)	Partnership between five organisations; the Authority, the Forestry Commission, the National Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Hampshire County Council.
Inclusive Cycling Project Manager	Fixed-term (3 years)	Grant funded (Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund)
Inclusive Cycling Rider Leader	Fixed-term (3 years)	Grant funded (Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund)

ICT Services

New PCs and monitors have now been ordered, with roll out taking place in June. Following extensive testing of Windows 10, we have now expanded this to include some key user testing. Users will be upgraded to Windows 10 as part of the PC roll out. The introduction of the new intranet will go live as part of the PC roll out. The IT team have also been testing Office 365 and One Drive.

5 Members

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

- Planning Development Control Committee – 18 April

- Planning Development Control Committee – 16 May
- Consultative Panel – 1 June
- Resources, Audit and performance Committee – 5 June
- Planning Development Control Committee – 20 June

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Development Control Committee – 18 July
- New Forest Show – 25-27 July
- Planning Development Control Committee – 15 August
- Consultative Panel – 7 September
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 11 September
- Planning Development Control Committee – 19 September
- Standards Committee – 2 October
- Members Day – 11 October

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- Meeting with Deputy Chief, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services – 24 March
- Attendance to Go New Forest CIC launch event – 27 March
- Forest Services Board dinner – 27 March
- Green Halo Steering Group – 28 March
- Meeting with new Chief Executive Exmoor NPA – 30 March
- Regenerate South Conference – 31 March
- Meeting with Rt. Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP – 31 March
- Meeting with Brockenhurst College Principal – 3 April
- Partnerships and Community Officer interviews – 4 April
- HLS Board and AGM – 5 April
- NFA meeting – 6 April
- Exbury Gardens new railway extension opening event – 11 April
- Meeting with Corporate Director, Wiltshire Council – 13 April
- Attendance to Verderers Court – 19 April
- NFU Liaison meeting – 21 April
- Introductory meeting with new Official Verderer – 24 April
- Meeting with Homes and Communities Agency – 24 April
- Green Halo Steering Group – 25 April
- GLNPC Trustees meeting – 26 April
- Meeting with Paultons Park Commercial Director – 28 April
- Observatory closing celebration – 28 April
- E-NPOG dinner – 9 May
- E-NPOG meeting – 10 May
- Meeting with RSPB – 10 May
- Devolution South: Getting back on track conference – 11 May
- Breakfast network meeting – 12 May
- Meeting with new CEO of Southern Water – 15 May
- Meeting with Maritime and Coastguard Agency – 16 May
- Meeting regarding New Forest Commoning – 16 May
- Management Plan Leadership Group – 17 May
- Job Evaluation Training – 18 May
- Meeting with Forestry Commission – 18 May

- Forest Farming Group – 19 May
- Exbury House Celebration – 19 May
- Columbia and NPs partnership launch event – 23 May
- National Grid teleconference – 25 May
- GLNPC Trustees meeting – 25 May
- Chief Executive's Performance Panel – 26 May
- Speaker at Qin Ling Forum – 5,6 June
- GLNPC Trustees meeting – 21 June
- NP Branding meeting – 21 June
- SE FWAC meeting – 27 June
- Green Halo Steering Group – 28 June
- Meeting with RSPB – 28 June
- Meeting Brockenhurst College Principal – 29 June
- Meeting with Friends of Brockenhurst – 29 June
- NPA AGM Chairman's briefing – 30 June
- Meeting newly appointed NPA members – 3 July
- Rural Forum Steering Group – 4 July
- Meeting Deputy Director, Defra – 5 July
- Landscape Management Leadership Forum – 5 July
- J-NPOG – 6, 7 July
- Visit with the High Sherriff – 11 July
- HLS Board meeting – 12 July

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- Meeting with Rt. Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP – 31 March
- NPE Board meeting – 5 April
- Special decision making – Resources, Audit and Performance delegation -11 April
- Panel meeting for SoS appointments – 12 April
- New Forest Association AGM – 22 April
- Meeting with new Official Verderer – 24 April
- RMS Steering Group pre-meeting – 8 May
- Chaired RMS Steering Group – 11 May
- Interviews for SoS appointments – 18 May
- Chaired Forest Farming Group – 19 May
- Interviews for SoS appointments – 24 May
- Chief Executive's Performance Panel – 26 May
- RMS consultation filming – 2 June
- NF Arts Festival launch – 2 June
- Media briefing, RMS consultation – 12 June
- Chairman's briefing for NPA AGM – 30 June
- Meeting with newly appointed members – 3 July

6 Recommendation

To note the report.