NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 29 OCTOBER 2009

REVISED DRAFT OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Report by: Nick Evans, Park Plan and Community Planning Officer

Summary: Following the decision to prepare a separate Management Plan and Core Strategy for the National Park, a fully revised National Park Management Plan has been produced, and is attached as Annex 1. It aims to provide a strategic and partnership-based approach for the management of the National Park over the next five years and beyond. The Plan takes into account the response to the public consultation in 2008 and the subsequent discussions with a wide range of interested organisations and individuals. The document is currently the subject of a three week period of further public feedback, before any final amendments are considered by members in December.

Recommendation:

To approve the approach and substance of the revised National Park Management Plan, subject to any final amendments agreed by members following the period for public comment

Paper:

NFNPA 320/09: Cover paper
Annex 1: New Forest National Park Management Plan: revised draft

Background Material:

1. New Forest National Park Plan Consultation draft (August 2008)
2. Consultation responses
3. Notes and background papers of Working Groups and meetings with Parish & Town Councils and Ward Councillors

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1. Introduction

1.1 The public consultation on the draft National Park Plan took place between August and November 2008. There was widespread concern about the structure of the plan, its overall approach and a number of the specific policies it proposed.

1.2 It was clear that a major re-think of the Plan was needed, and that an important part of this would be to differentiate between (a) aspirational policies guiding future management of the Park and (b) planning policies guiding new development.

1.3 The revised Management Plan, the subject of this paper, has therefore been separated from the Local Development Framework Core Strategy which will include planning policies. The latter will be considered at the Authority meeting on 10 December 2009.

1.4 In response to the comments made during the public consultation, a large part of the text, a number of the objectives and the overall structure of the Plan have been fully revised.

1.5 The overall aim has been to produce a simpler and clearer document and to arrive at a balanced direction for the Park, taking into account the many, and sometimes very different, views expressed on a number of topics.

1.6 The revised Management Plan is attached as Annex 1. In order to allow any further amendments and to keep costs to a minimum the Plan has been produced as a simple text version. The final version will incorporate professional layout and design, with the aim of making the Plan more attractive and easier to read.

2. The purpose of the Management Plan

2.1 All National Park Authorities must produce a Management Plan for their area. The central role of the Plan is to help guide and co-ordinate the work of all those with an interest in the Park in delivering the National Park purposes and duty.

2.2 The Management Plan sets out the overall approach for managing the area, and attempts to tackle some of the major issues that affect the Park now, or are likely to influence it in the future.
2.3 The Plan, therefore, does not attempt to cover in detail every topic or issue relevant to the National Park, nor does it include a costed programme of actions or ask for a specific commitment of resources from partner organisations.

2.4 It does however suggest the broad direction that should be taken and proposes a number of high-level priority actions. Further work will be needed to develop the detail of the objectives and actions in discussion with the relevant organisations and local communities, and to find the necessary resources needed to implement them over time.

2.5 In part this will be achieved through the various more detailed plans currently being prepared by the National Park Authority with the help of partner organisations and stakeholders. These include a Recreation Management Strategy, Landscape Strategy, Biodiversity Action Plan and Cultural Heritage Strategy.

2.6 The Management Plan places great emphasis on partnership working and the need to develop closer working relationships with all interested groups, organisations and communities. The Plan can only be taken forward through the support, commitment and action of all those who manage, use, work or live in the National Park, as well as the nearby authorities and regional decision-makers.

3. Summary of consultation process

3.1 The preparation of the Management Plan has involved significant consultation with partner organisations, interest groups, communities and individuals within the New Forest and the wider region, together with the contributions of specialist officers and the members of the National Park Authority.

3.2 Consultation on the key issues for the area was carried out jointly with New Forest District Council and the New Forest Local Strategic Partnership through the ‘Future Matters’ consultation in 2006/2007. Building on this, more than 115 individuals from 71 local and regional organisations worked together to develop initial ideas for the Plan at the New Forest, New Chapter stakeholder events in 2007/2008.

3.3 The public consultation on the draft National Park Plan in 2008 was widely publicised and over 2,000 copies of the Plan were distributed. The draft Plan attracted extensive media attention and in total just under 10,000 responses were received. Following the end of the consultation period the Authority embarked on an extensive programme of further engagement to take forward work on revising the Plan. This included:

- working groups on five key topics, involving organisations directly involved in each area of work and resulting in a series of recommendations for changes to the Plan
- meetings with parish and town councils and ward councillors focusing on the issues that generated the most interest during the consultation
- meetings with many of the key organisations in the National Park to discuss proposed revisions
- a major public meeting in September 2009, attended by about 200 people, to discuss the final stages in the preparation of the Management Plan and Local Development Framework Core Strategy
• a series of five informal sessions with National Park Authority members between May and September 2009 to provide a steer on key policies and give overall comments on the working draft of the Plan.

4. Major revisions made to the Plan

4.1 Changes have been made to all parts of the Management Plan in the light of consultation comments and the further involvement of stakeholders. However the following revisions are highlighted in particular, to show what has been done to address some of the matters of greatest concern.

4.2 The scope of the Plan

The consultation draft attempted to integrate both aspirational management policies and planning policies. This led to considerable confusion amongst both the public and organisations, and also influenced the tone and overall feel of the plan.

Two separate documents have therefore now been produced:

• the revised Management Plan (considered here) contains a strategic and aspirational approach designed to guide the future management of the National Park. It is aimed at all those with responsibilities or influence over the area, and can only be taken forward by partnership working.

• the revised Core Strategy (to be considered at the meeting on 10 December 2009) will include policies for spatial planning and more detailed development management policies. It will be implemented primarily by the National Park Authority as the local planning authority.

4.3 The structure of the Plan

A number of comments were made about the length, readability, structure and balance of the draft plan.

The revised Management Plan therefore contains:

• shorter introductory chapters and a more concise vision

• ten topics, all of which are of equal importance

• a more straightforward structure for each topic, with an introduction setting the context, followed by an objective (with the broad approach for taking it forward) and a series of priority actions for the next five years.

4.4 The overall tone of the Plan and the roles of different organisations

The general tone and feel of the Plan was an issue raised by many responding to the draft. There was also a related concern that the plan did not take into account the roles of the many other organisations with responsibilities for the area.

The revised Management Plan therefore contains:
4.5 Changes to the policies

Five of the policies and accompanying text in the draft plan gave rise to the majority of comments and objections. These were the policies for zoning, the economy, service villages and affordable housing, transport and recreational horse-keeping. Following meetings with the main interest groups and with National Park Authority members, all of these policies or approaches have either been fully revised or entirely removed.

The revised Management Plan therefore contains:

- **A different approach to transport**, focusing on education and information and current traffic management techniques. The reference to possible future road pricing and road closures has been removed from both the Management Plan and Core Strategy.

- **No policies on zoning.** The concept of zoning has been removed from both the Management Plan and Core Strategy. There was a strong consensus from respondents that the New Forest is already sufficiently ‘zoned’ for management and planning purposes (e.g. SSSIs, Conservation Areas, Flood Risk Zones to name but a few) and that any further zoning would create confusion and a geographical hierarchy inappropriate to a National Park.

- **No policies on service villages.** Revised policies on the settlement hierarchy and affordable housing percentages will be included in the Core Strategy. It is proposed to drop the term ‘service village’ from the Core Strategy.

- **A more positive approach to the economy,** catering for a wide range of business opportunities, not only those that make a contribution to the Park’s purposes but also supporting those that do not conflict with them. Further more detailed economic policies will be included in the Core Strategy.

- **No policies on recreational horse-keeping.** A revised policy (more closely aligned to the ‘saved policies’ of the New Forest District Local Plan) will be included in the Core Strategy. The revised policy follows detailed discussions with the horse riding and equestrian interest groups through the recently formed New Forest Equine Forum.

- **No policies on car park closures affecting dog walkers.** Dog-walking was also raised by many people during the consultation. This was largely in response to policies in the draft Recreation Management Strategy, and will be fully considered during the revision of that plan. However, as mentioned at the public meeting in September 2009, there are no plans to introduce dog free car parks.
through the Recreation Management Strategy, instead the emphasis will be on encouraging and promoting responsible dog ownership.

5. **Response to the revisions to date**

5.1 A number of organisations have given initial views on the working draft of the Plan. These include the Forestry Commission, Verderers of the New Forest, Hampshire County Council, New Forest Business Partnership, New Forest Tourism Association, New Forest Association, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Test Valley Borough Council, Natural England and individual officers from New Forest District Council. National Park Authority members were given the opportunity to make comments at the informal meeting on 24 September and over the following week.

5.2 Overall the comments have been very positive and most matters of detail have already been incorporated into the Plan. The only real issue apparent to date is the relationship between recreation and conservation and the emphasis given to each in the Plan. The approach taken has been to seek a reasonable balance between the two, taking a positive approach to the enjoyment of the Park, while stressing the need to safeguard the special qualities.

6. **Independent assessments**

6.1 A Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment) and a full Appropriate Assessment (under the Habitats Directive) are required for the Management Plan. Both are nearing completion and it is not anticipated that they will require any significant changes.

7. **Next steps**

7.1 There is a period of three weeks public feedback on the revised Plan between 22 October and 12 November 2009. This has been publicised through Park Life and press releases. To save print costs and to help the environment, interested parties are being encouraged to view the Plan online (available from 22 October). Printed copies have been sent to the key organisations listed in Chapter 3 and further printed copies are available on request.

7.2 Members will be asked to approve the text of the Management Plan at the Authority meeting on 10 December 2009, following consideration of any final amendments, and to agree the broad design, format and timescales for publishing the document.

7.3 The main partner organisations involved in implementing the Plan will be asked to endorse the final document.

Recommendation:

To approve the approach and substance of the revised National Park Management Plan, subject to any final amendments agreed by members following the period for public comment.