NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 10 DECEMBER 2009

FINAL DRAFT OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

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

Summary: Following a three week period of public feedback, a final draft of the National Park Management Plan has been produced, shown at Annex 1, including a number of amendments marked in red. The changes take into account the main points raised during the consultation, where these add important substance or clarity to the plan. Extensive consultation has taken place with interested organisations and groups over the last year, and the majority are now supportive of the revised plan. Therefore any further major changes to the tone, balance or meaning of the document have been resisted at this late stage in the plan’s production.

Recommendation:

To approve the final draft of the National Park Management Plan, subject to officers assessment of any further comments from Hampshire County Council, and agree that the design of the document should be pursued, for publication early in 2010.

Paper:

NFNPA 326/09: Cover paper
NFNPA 326/09 Annex 2: NFNPA paper 320/09 (29 October 2009)

Background Material:

1. Revised National Park Management Plan (October 2009)
2. Responses to the revised National Park Management Plan
3. Notes and background papers of Working Groups and meetings with Parish & Town Councils and Ward Councillors

Contact:
Nick Evans
Tel: 01590 646679
nick.evans@newforestnpa.gov.uk
1. **Introduction**

1.1 At the National Park Authority meeting in October, members approved the approach and substance of the revised Management Plan. Since then there has been a final period for any further public comments on the content.

1.2 This paper outlines the response to the revised plan, summarises the main points made and discusses the resulting amendments to the plan.

1.3 The overall response to the document has been very positive and it has received widespread support. In considering any amendments necessary, officers have therefore resisted making major changes at this late stage, especially where these would alter the balance and tone of the plan, and risk losing the hard won support achieved over the last six months.

1.4 All amendments suggested are shown in red in the final draft of the plan, attached as Annex 1.

1.5 As background, members are referred to the National Park Authority paper from the meeting in October 2009 (Annex 2), which explains the remit of the National Park Management Plan and outlines the exhaustive consultation over the last two years which has led to the production of this final version of the plan.

2. **Overview of the responses**

2.1 A total of 57 responses were received during the three week feedback period. Of these, 32 organisations and individuals specifically supported the plan overall or noted that it was a major improvement on the original draft. Those who gave overall support to the document include New Forest District Council, Forestry Commission, Natural England, Test Valley Borough Council, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, RSPB, New Forest Business Partnership and a number of parish and town councils.

2.2 These organisations, together with other respondents, did make specific suggestions for improving the plan. The majority were detailed comments relating to specific sections of text, the inclusion of partners or grammatical / factual errors.

2.3 Three organisations expressed particularly strong concerns about the plan. The New Forest Association and the Campaign to Protect Rural England felt that the conservation focus of the original draft had been lost and that too much emphasis...
was now placed on the interests of local communities. A number of their specific suggestions have been incorporated into the final document, but it is considered that some of the points made would markedly alter the tone and balance of the plan and move it back towards the approach of the original draft.

Hampshire County Council made informal comments on the transport-related sections, expressing concerns that the plan did not sufficiently take into account their role as the highway authority for the majority of the National Park. A number of changes have been made to the transport section, and reassurance given by letter on the detailed points raised.

3. **Approach taken to amending the Plan**

3.1 A large number of specific comments were made by those responding to the plan. The approach has been to include changes where these would:

- add important substance to the document, without altering its overall balance or approach
- improve the clarity of the plan
- address points made in the Habitats Regulations Assessment
- correct errors of fact or grammar, or add missing partner organisations

3.2 Comments have not generally been included where these would affect the balance of the document, introduce a different tone or approach, add undue emphasis to a particular topic or complicate the plan with additional detail.

3.3 *The more detailed comments that met the above criteria are all included in red in the final draft of the plan, attached.*

4. **Summary of the main comments, with suggested changes to the plan**

4.1 There were four main comments expressed by a number of those responding, as outlined below.

4.1.1 **The Management Plan should include the Sandford Principle**

The inclusion of the Sandford Principle was suggested by nine organisations and individuals, encompassing both conservation and recreation interests, and was the only suggestion on which there was wide consensus.

*The Sandford Principle has been added to the introduction to the Plan in view of the general support,* although it has rarely, if ever, been used in National Parks as a means of deciding conflicts, To avoid misinterpretation the wording used reflects the 1995 Act and the formal guidance in Circular 12/96.

4.1.2 **The plan should include a fuller Vision, context to the Park and more detailed commentary on the special qualities**

This suggestion was made by a number of organisations, including the New Forest Association and the Campaign for National Parks.
It is accepted that some of those reading or using the plan will be from outside the local area, and that the document could usefully provide a pen picture of the New Forest and give more details about the qualities that make it special.

A longer and more descriptive section on the special qualities has therefore been included, incorporating some aspects of the ‘Portrait of the Park’ in the original draft. In addition a brief pen portrait of the area has been added at the beginning of the plan to set the scene for the general reader. The Vision in the revised plan has not been expanded, in order to keep it brief and to the point.

4.1.3 The plan should give more details about managing recreational pressure, particularly relating to the designated nature conservation sites

A broad approach to managing recreational pressure is outlined in the plan, both under ‘Enjoying the Forest’ and ‘Enhancing landscapes and habitats’. The importance of the designated sites is fully recognised here and throughout the plan. The document refers to the Recreation Management Strategy as the appropriate place to examine more detailed policies and actions.

However, an addition has been made relating to recreational pressure and the designated nature conservation sites (the second bullet point in the objective for ‘Enhancing landscapes and habitats’). This has been included to meet the requirements of the Habitats Regulations Assessment.

4.1.4 The plan should make clear the role of Hampshire County Council as the highway authority for most of the National Park

Hampshire County Council made detailed informal comments on transport-related issues in the document. They felt the plan did not sufficiently recognise their role, or the funding limitations for transport, and noted that the plan implied that the National Park Authority itself would be taking forward the objectives and actions for this area of work. The wording introducing the objectives throughout the plan has therefore been amended to further clarify that these are objectives for the National Park, and will need to be taken forward by a number of partners, not just the National Park Authority.

Wording has been included in the transport section to re-emphasise the role of the highway authorities and to recognise the difficulties in funding new initiatives. Changes have also been made to the wording of the bullet points of the transport objective to indicate the partner / influencing role of the National Park Authority.

5. Steps towards publication of the Management Plan

5.1 Once approved by the National Park Authority no further process of formal endorsement is required for the Management Plan, other than notifying and depositing a copy of the Plan with the Secretary of State.

5.2 Hampshire County Council will not be able to provide formal comments on the Plan until the end of December 2009, and it is suggested that these are assessed and incorporated by officers where necessary.
5.3 The design work for the document is already underway and it is proposed that an informal meeting is arranged in January to ensure members are happy with the design ideas.

5.4 Once published the Management Plan will be widely distributed to interested organisations and individuals within the National Park, regionally and nationally. It will be available on the National Park Authority website, together with the final reports of the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Recommendation:

To approve the final draft of the National Park Management Plan, subject to officers assessment of any further comments from Hampshire County Council, and agree that the design of the document should be pursued, for publication early in 2010.