NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 27 MAY 2010

CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

Report by: Barrie Foley, Interim Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 25 March 2010 except for Development Management which reviews work undertaken by the Development Management team during 2009/10 and an update of work from 1 April 2010 to 7 May 2010.

Recommendation:

To note the report

Paper:

NFNPA 342/10: Cover paper

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New Forest National Park Authority Meeting
27 May 2010

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1 Introduction and overview

- This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 25 March 2010 except for Development Management which reviews work undertaken by the Development Management team during 2009/10 and an update of work from 1 April 2010 to 7 May 2010.

- Community engagement has continued in the period since the last report with a number of new initiatives occurring. This included the Greener Living Show, a community garden in Tiptoe, Landford woodland restoration for public access and enjoyment, and a 350 people event at Pennington for the Spring Wildlife Day. Officers have also had success with introducing the Land Management Advice Service for the farming community promoting sustainable land management practices.

- A new scheme called Forest Watch was launched with Hampshire Constabulary and a number of partners to address the issues of rural crime including environmental and wildlife crime. It targets issues such as fly tipping and unlawful use of the Forest addressing both civil and criminal action. The Authority’s value-add is to bring together stakeholders and partners and make certain that this is a long term initiative protecting the National Park from unacceptable behaviour.

- Following approval by the Authority of funding for the remaining two years of the five year legal agreement with the Ninth Centenary Trust to support the running of the New Forest Centre, work has continued with the Centre team to build on the successful partnership. This includes production of a Centre Development Plan closely modelled on the Authority’s own 5 x 5 style Corporate Plan.
Following acceptance by the members at previous Authority meetings the Recreational Management Strategy is now being printed. The Corporate Plan is also finalised following approval and the final printed document will be handed out at this Authority meeting. All of the major documents are now complete and officers are concentrating on implementing the actions associated with them. There are still some sub documents, including a Biodiversity Plan, to issue over the next few months.

The first members workshop to discuss the format of a new Recreation Steering Group took place in the period. It identified the importance of getting the right stakeholders together to make certain that the right balance between conservation and recreation is implemented. Stakeholders will be contacted within the next month to discuss their input and contribution.

The planning team are having some excellent results in addressing planning applications due to their pre-application advice service. However enforcement cases are currently unacceptably high with the number of ‘live’ cases at just below 400. Extra resource has been injected into the team to address the workload and cover is being provided to address a long term staff sickness absence within the team. A formal report will shortly be presented identifying solutions that include priority setting in line with the Corporate Plan.

The New Chief Executive Officer, Alison Barnes, will start on 1 June with a one month handover from the Interim Chief Executive Officer. During the handover period Alison will be introduced to many individuals and organisations in the Park. Alison went through a rigorous recruitment program to make certain that the Authority made the right choice. She has a wealth of experience and is keen to engage with all parties.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

2 Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

Coastal Heritage Project

The desk based assessment phase of the project has been completed and the work has resulted in over 900 additional sites and landscape features having been identified. The desk based assessment was informed by the National Mapping Programme undertaken by the Historic Environment Service of Cornwall County Council funded by the Minerals Aggregates Levy. The tenders for the projects education resources and for phase II field work and reporting have been awarded to Wessex
Archaeology. Volunteers are an essential component of the fieldwork phase of the project. So far 107 volunteers have expressed an interest in being involved with the project and a number attended briefing meetings in April. Further details on this project can be found at: www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/coastal

Conservation Areas

- The conservation area character appraisals adopted following the review of all conservation areas in the Park are now in published form.

- The Authority will be developing Conservation Area Management Plans for all conservation areas and the Western Escarpment Conservation Area has been chosen as the pilot project for the process. Work on the framework for the management plans is in progress with a view to public consultation on the issues affecting the Western Escarpment conservation area in the autumn.

New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme

- A project manager has now been appointed and will be in post from early June. The manager’s priorities for the first three months will include developing project structures and processes and re-convening working groups for the five pillars of the scheme Biodiversity, Historic Environment, Resource Protection, Landscape, Access& Education and Monitoring to enable new ideas to come forward for Board consideration which satisfy the schemes conservation objectives.

- The programme of work for habitat restoration and the Verderers’ Grazing Scheme for the first year has been agreed.

- The Authority will be the lead for the Historic Environment special projects and will be undertaking conservation work on industrial and Second World War structures on the open forest in 2010-2011. A number of sites have been identified and agreed and detailed specifications for the works are now being prepared.

Historic building grants

- A grant has been offered to support the first major phase of essential restoration of the cornice at Hale House, a grade I listed building built in 1715. The cornice is made up of a number of timber elements and also a final moulding on the vertical wall surface which has been run in Roman Cement. The timber cornice has failed dramatically at the external corners, but there is also
decay for the whole length and the south elevation, due to its extreme exposure to the weather, is in the most parlous condition.

**Landscape Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan**

- These will be daughter documents to the Management Plan. Work has continued on the development of preliminary drafts in preparation for public consultation in June in locations around the Forest. The aim is to reach as many people as possible in the New Forest and to encourage them to come and look at the Landscape Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan and give their views and opinions. The draft documents will also be placed on our website with an accompanying questionnaire.

**Funding**

- A full application to the Access to Nature funding programme for a project aiming to overcome the barriers that specific groups have in engaging with the natural environment of the National Park has been submitted. The project will involve a range of partners including the Forestry Commission, Avon Tyrrell Activity Centre, Calshot Activity Centre, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Lepe Country Park and the New Forest Centre. If successful the Authority will employ an officer whose role will be to bring together and build strong links between the key environmental and recreational organisations in the New Forest and four identified groups (young people, black and minority ethnic groups, people from deprived areas and people with disabilities) who are not engaging with the national park at present. The project also includes a range of capital improvements which will increase access for disabled people. These include footpath improvements at Avon Tyrrell and Lepe Country Park, the purchase of a mobility vehicle for Lepe Country Park and the purchase of a specially developed catamaran for Calshot Activity Centre which will allow groups of people with disabilities to enjoy the at-sea field study activities. The Authority should be notified in early September about whether the application has been successful or not.

- Work has commenced on the development of a Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application for a World War II project which aims to:
  - comprehensively survey the New Forest area to ensure that all wartime sites are recognised, recorded and interpreted:
  - record memories and collect photographs and artefacts from those New Forest residents (past and present) who can still remember Forest life during the wartime, those who were
evacuated to the New Forest, those in the air force or navy and those working in one of the many airfields or boatyards:

- engage the interest of residents and visitors in the wartime stories and sites so that they are understood and remembered by future generations.

- The Authority is assisting the New Forest Archival Film Group, headed up by the New Forest Centre, to develop a funding application for a Your Heritage Grant which would allow them to run a project to collect and archive films about the New Forest and run a series of events across the Forest, showing the films to members of the public.

- An updated funding bulletin has been produced listing many of the funds available at present for community based projects. These will be circulated to all parish councils and community groups known to be seeking funding.

**Greener Living Show 2010**

- The New Forest's first ever Greener Living Show took place on Sunday 25 April at Brockenhurst College. 51 individual community groups, businesses and charitable organisations held a stall, plus there was face painting, a story teller and junkanoo to provide children's entertainments. For refreshments the New Forest Marque producers Newhouse Venison and Yum took the lead and The Art House Café also came along to provide a selection of exclusively vegetarian and vegan refreshments. Over the course of the day there was an estimated 800 visitors above the age of four and, as can be seen in Figure 1, their feedback was extremely positive.
Figure 1. Responses to the first four questions on the visitor feedback form for the Greener Living Show – x axis; question, y axis; number of responses

- Assuming all those visitors who provided feedback follow through with their intentions the information demonstrates that the Greener Living Show is likely to meet its original objectives of:
  - Decreasing the ecological footprint of the New Forest National Park by prompting individual and community action; and
  - Supporting and fostering local businesses and organisations that produce or promote solutions for greener lifestyles by generating a demand.

Access

- Time has been spent with the two local access forums in Hampshire (Hampshire Countryside Access Forum and New Forest Access Forum) and Hampshire County Council to begin work on the PATHH (Providing Access To Hampshire’s Heritage) project. The project has been awarded £46,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to recruit and train volunteers how to research historic evidence for unrecorded paths. The project will research paths that meet needs identified in the county’s Rights of Way
Improvement Plan. The PATHH Steering Group will shortly be letting a contract for the management of the project.

“BioBlitz”

- A number of meetings and actions have been initiated relating to the forthcoming BioBlitz event. The free events on Friday 21 May to Saturday 22 May celebrate the start of the International Year of Biodiversity and aim to get as many people as possible involved. Experts from the Natural History Museum, Southampton’s Oceanography Centre, Hampshire County Council, the Wildlife Trust and the National Park’s own tree officer, ecologist and bird expert will be among the specialists helping people of all ages to discover the Park’s wide variety of species. The data will then be used to inform the National Park Authority’s work on how best to look after the New Forest wildlife. [http://bioblitzthepark.blogspot.com](http://bioblitzthepark.blogspot.com).

Open Forest Advisory Committee

- The Authority attended Open Forest Advisory Committee. The Forestry Commission reported on the schedule of works carried out in the autumn/winter period. Despite the poor weather a large proportion of the cut and burn programme was completed. The completion of some restoration works and extraction of timber has been affected by wet conditions and will be carried out in the late spring/summer to avoid damage.

- The Forestry Commission also briefed the meeting on a proposal to agree a Design Plan for the Open Forest. We also attended two meetings to discuss Felling Licence issues and liaison within regulatory frameworks with the Forestry Commission.

Non native plants project

- Officers attended the Steering Group of the Non-native Invasive Plants Project. The project is continuing to deliver an impressive range of actions on the ground. [http://www.hwt.org.uk/pages/new-forest-non-native-plants-project.html](http://www.hwt.org.uk/pages/new-forest-non-native-plants-project.html)

New Forest Land Advice Service

- The primary aim of the service is to enable landowners and managers to access a range of advice, support, training and grants to promote sustainable land management practices. Advice had been given to a number of landowners. Work has continued on the development of the service with the steering group and on the protocol for the small grants scheme. There are currently 24
people interested in applying for funding for a range of projects, mainly hedgerows but also fencing, tree planting, Japanese knotweed removal, species rich grassland restoration and eyesore removal.

3 Information and Visitor Services

Communications

- The Corporate Plan and a filofax aide-memoire have been printed to enable members to have the key aims and priorities close to hand. The Recreation Management Strategy has been designed and printed.

- A weather station based at Buckler's Hard is now live on the website.

- Press releases have been issued about the greener living show, spring wildlife day, Bioblitz, Authority hybrid pool car, photo competition, healthy walks coordinator, and sponsorship of a horse at the Fortune Riding Centre.

Visitor and Recreation Services

- Officers have worked together to devise an excellent ‘past, present and future’ teaching programme involving archaeology (past), coast (present) and climate change (future). This was successfully trialled with year 6 students at Highcliffe St. Mark Primary School. Education Officers also worked with partner organisations to deliver teacher training to over 50 science teachers, encouraging them to teach science outside the classroom in the National Park.

- Three hundred and fifty people attended the Spring Wildlife Day at Pennington marshes. Despite challenging weather this was a successful event with excellent joint working with Hampshire County Council and the Wildlife Trust staff and very positive feedback.

- Replacement interpretative panels have been installed at Stoney Cross, and will shortly be in place at East Boldre, explaining use of these sites at airfields in the past.

- The Recreation Officer is facilitating community projects in Tiptoe and Landford. Tiptoe Community Garden has achieved charitable status to enable development of community greenspace within the village. The Maybush Copse ecological and tree surveys have been completed and the community, local businesses and schools
have discussed options for the community woodland at a Public Meeting.

- As part of the partnership working with Community First New Forest, NFDC and the PCT Hampshire, the Health Walks Co-ordinator post has been advertised across all organisation’s websites.

4 Strategy and Planning

Planning Policy

- Following the conclusion of the statutory consultation period for the Authority’s Submission draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document, all of the representations received have now been logged and formally acknowledged. Each respondent has been informed of the next stages in the process to independent examination and adoption. As set out in a separate paper for this meeting, a number of minor amendments to the document are proposed and following the submission of the document and all the representation received to the Secretary of State, an examination is likely to be held in September 2010.

- Work is on-going on the State of the Park Report which will provide baseline information on the condition or ‘state’ of the National Park.

- The Policy and Plans Team has represented the Authority at a number of meetings in April and May. Officers attended the Landford Village Design Statement working group meetings in April and May; the South Wiltshire Community Strategy Working Group; the Shoreline Management Plan meeting at the National Oceanographic Centre in Southampton, and the Minerals and Waste Officers' Group meeting in Winchester in mid May.

- The Authority continues to work constructively with planning colleagues at New Forest District Council. The Authority is represented at officer level on the working group for the District Council’s Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document, which met in mid April to discuss progress on the identification of development sites in the District.

Development Management

2009/10 Overview

- At the end of 2009/10 the Development Management team met the government’s eight week target for householder applications (88%)
and minor applications (81%). 70% of all major applications were determined within the 13 week target period.

- During 2009/10, planning application numbers remained stable with 1058 applications registered during the year (1057 were registered in 2008/09).

- In this time (2009/10) the Authority approved 83% of all applications determined, up from 74% in 2008/09, which suggests that the time invested in pre-application advice is beginning to pay dividends. At the year end there were 330 ‘live’ planning applications.

- There were fewer appeals in 2009/10 (71) compared to 2008/09 (81) but the incidence of an applicant appealing following a refusal rose to 56% (up from about a third in previous years). The number of appeals allowed at the year end was 36% which whilst higher than the previous year (31%) had shown a marked improvement in the number of appeals dismissed during the second half of the year (September to March).

- Enforcement activity remained high with some 550 complaints received during 2009/10 whilst the number of enforcement notices issued stood at 12, down from 25 served in 2008/09. There were 386 ‘live’ enforcement cases as of 31 March 2010.

- Members will be aware that this year’s Corporate Plan seeks to deliver a more targeted and pro-active enforcement service. A review of the enforcement processes and procedures has commenced within the last month. In particular, the team are looking in detail at the timetable for progressing enforcement complaints, together with a review of the types of complaints that require a higher priority in terms of seeking satisfactory resolution. It is hoped that the review will be completed during the summer, with a subsequent report to an Authority meeting later in the year.

Work since 1 April 2010

Since 1 April and up to 7 May the Development Management team carried out the following work:

- 103 planning applications were registered, 106 applications were determined. As of 7 May (and since 1 April 2010) 82% of householder applications and 73% of minor applications had been determined within the eight week target. The approval rate for this period stands at 79%.
So far, five new appeals have been received and four appeals determined; with two appeals dismissed and two allowed. One of the appeals dismissed upheld the Planning Committee’s decision to refuse planning permission for a residential caravan for a gypsy at land to south of Bashley Post Office. In dismissing the appeal, the Inspector concluded “that development of the type proposed can be acceptable in principle in a National Park but in this instance there would be some conflict with the Park’s statutory purposes because of the change in the site’s use and appearance [which] would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area”.

56 new enforcement cases were opened and 40 cases were closed. Two enforcement notices have been issued and there are currently just under 400 ‘live’ enforcement cases. In April, officers attended a public meeting convened by Copythorne Parish Council to hear and answer local residents’ concerns about a long standing breach of planning control at land adjacent to Copperfields, Pollards Moor Lane, Copythorne. This is the subject of a report to the Planning Development Control Committee on 18 May 2010.

A Planning Agents’ Meeting was held on 11 May 2010 at which there was a very good turn out, with some 30 agents attending. Feedback at the event was generally very positive, with a number of agents appreciative of the availability and help offered by planning staff.

A members’ (Planning Committee) Planning Tour is being arranged for 24 May 2010 and as on previous occasions, members and officers from Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities have been invited.

5 Corporate Services

Human Resources

As at 30 April 2010 there are 77 members of staff or 69.98 full-time equivalents, of whom 20 are part-time and nine are on a fixed-term contract. For comparison purposes in May 2009 the Authority had 67.83 full-time equivalents and in November 2009 the Authority had 68.13 full-time equivalents.

Following the recruitment process for the Authority’s permanent Chief Executive, Alison Barnes will commence in the post on 1 June 2010.

In April 2010, we said goodbye to Richard Reeves who ended a short-term contract as the Historic Rural Settlement Project Officer.
Recruitment for a part-time Local Development Framework Programme Officer (approximately six-months fixed-term) commenced in March. The Programme Officer will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the Examination into the Core Strategy of the New Forest National Park. Interviews took place in April and the post is currently under offer.

Recruitment for a part-time ICT Systems Developer (two-year fixed-term) also took place in March. The successful candidate will be commencing employment in June 2010.

**ICT**

Recruitment to the ICT Systems Developer post was a slow process, but the post has now been offered to a potential candidate. Work is progressing to start the pilot testing of the Corporate File Plan project, but has been delayed due to the problems in recruiting to the Developer post.

Work is progressing on the new web-based GIS package that will provide planning searches on line. The GIS team are working with the third-party suppliers to prepare the systems and data for testing of the new system.

**Performance and Administration**

**Efficiencies**

Work continued on finalising the 2010/11 Corporate Plan. The final document is now available on the internet and hard copies will be given to members at the May Authority meeting.

Preparations for compiling the 2009/10 annual report for the Authority are now underway. Key performance indicator results has been collated and shared with other National Parks as part of our benchmarking study. A validation of these shared Key Performance Indicators is to take place between English National Parks to ensure data quality and consistency. The Head of Performance and Administration is coordinating this exercise on behalf of the Southern National Parks.

A meeting has been held with the Audit Commission to further assist in their audit of our Use of Natural Resources. This audit opinion will feed into the Authority’s final Use of Resources and Value for Money assessment.
A procurement strategy, focusing on sustainable principles of purchasing, has been drafted for approval by Management Board and Resources and Performance Committee.

The Business Support Officer has spent time training the newly recruited Administration Assistant on relevant tasks of the Business Support Office, including use of the Agresso financial system.

The Head of Performance and Administration attended a meeting of the Records Management Society public sector group. The meeting focused on record retention in public sector organisations and performance measures suitable for records management. Best practice advice from this group will be used to help build the Authority’s approach to records management.

Future headquarters accommodation

Members will recall that the government (DEFRA) has given initial approval to fund the necessary works for a new headquarters for the Authority in shared premises with New Forest District Council (NFDC) at the Town Hall in Lymington (as reported in the Chief Executive’s report to the Authority Meeting on 10 December 2009).

Since then discussions have been taking place between officers of the Authority, NFDC and DEFRA with regard to the issues related to sharing accommodation.

More recently (March 2010), it became apparent that in order for DEFRA financial support to be secured, substantial progress would need to be achieved in the current financial year (2010/11). All parties have therefore been working hard to agree a proposal that will deliver the necessary refurbishment works to the Town Hall by the end of the financial year. To achieve this, work will need to be started on the Authority share of the Town Hall by October 2010.

The proposal, including a full business case and its impact for NFDC staff, is being presented to NFDC’s cabinet meeting in June. It is therefore hoped that a formal decision will be reached in June for Authority staff to share the Town Hall with NFDC and for refurbishment work to commence in the autumn.

In the meantime, architects and surveyors appointed by DEFRA are working closely with the Authority in preparing plans for a redesigned and refurbished share of the Town Hall (in anticipation of a favourable formal decision).
6 Member Services

- The Member Services team has been involved in providing support to meetings of the Authority and its Committees including the first meeting of the newly established Lawful Development Certificate Panel which sat following the Planning Development Control Committee meeting on 18 May 2010. The section, which also acts as the secretariat to the New Forest Consultative Panel, provided support to a meeting of the Panel on 6 May 2010 which included a very informative and well-received presentation on the Forest Watch initiative by Sergeant Louise Hubble. Member Services also followed up on actions arising from the above meetings and is currently identifying meeting dates for 2011.

- Member Services has assisted with arrangements for the annual planning tour by members of the Planning Development Control Committee. During the period, the team has provided general support to members and has also assisted the Member Services Officer at the South Downs National Park Authority with setup information and advice she had requested.

- The team monitors and assists in responding to requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations and the Data Protection Act. This period has been a particularly busy time with the section having successfully concluded several complex appeals considered by the Information Commissioner and one by an Information Tribunal Panel. The team is currently preparing the annual complaints and Freedom of Information request reports which will be considered by the Management Board before being sent to members for comment and/or input.

- Member Services has also drafted a report on members’ meeting attendance for consideration by the Standards Committee and is preparing the relevant reports and documentation ahead of the Annual Authority meeting on 24 June 2010. Advanced preparations are also being made towards the review of members’ allowances by an Independent Remuneration Panel which will take place towards the end of the year.

7 Members

Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:

- Official opening of the Lyndhurst Community Centre, 26 March
- English National Parks Authorities Association meeting, 31 March
1. **Pre-meeting with officers from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) about member development, 1 April**
2. **Launch of the New Forest Mountain Rescue Team (fund-raising venture), 1 April**
3. **Association of National Park Authorities members' workshop on sustainable transport, 14 April**
4. **The AGM of the New Forest Association, 17 April**
5. **Member roles and responsibilities workshop facilitated by IDeA, 19 April**
6. **Meeting with Philip Marshall, National Trust, 19 April**
7. **Hampshire Rural Forum Annual Conference, 20 April**
8. **Planning Development Control Committee, 20 April**
9. **Meeting/walk with officers from the RSPB, 21 April**
10. **Presentation to Godshill Annual Parish meeting, 27 April**
11. **New Forest Consultative Panel, 6 May**
12. **Working group to discuss the RMS Steering Group, 11 May 2010**
13. **North Solent Shoreline Management Plan - Elected Members Group meeting, 13 May**
14. **Meeting with Wanda Fojt and Rachel Green from Natural England, 14 May**
15. **Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing, 18 May**
16. **Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 May**
17. **Brand New Forest Launch and New Forest Breakfast, 20 May**
18. **Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group, 20 May**
19. **Planning Development Control Committee tour, 24 May**

**Forthcoming activities include:**

1. **Interim Chief Executive final review, 27 May**
2. **All officer team meeting, 2 June 2010**
3. **Meeting with Cllr Ken Thornber, 2 June**
4. **Hampshire and Isle of Wight Association meeting, 4 June**
5. **Roosevelt/Grey Centenary Walk, 9 June**
6. **Resources and Performance Committee, 14 June**
7. **Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 15 June**
8. **South East England Councils Leader Board, 16 June**
9. **Float judging, Netley Carnival, 19 June**

**8 Recommendation**

To note the report.