

NEW FOREST CONSULTATIVE PANEL

Minutes of the Meeting held in the Pine Room, Lyndhurst Community Centre on THURSDAY 7 MARCH 2019

Those present: Harry Oram (Chairman)
David Stone (Panel Secretariat)
Vicki Gibbon (Panel Secretariat)

Members as shown on the Official List, with the exception of those listed below for whom apologies were received

Also in attendance:

1 Apologies for absence

- 1.1 Gerald Lewis (Sopley Parish Council)
Patricia Banks (Milford Parish Council)
Chris Harrison (Hythe and Dibden Parish Council)
Rob Dewing (New Forest Business Partnership)

1.2 Substitutes

1.3 New Representatives

Barry Olorenshaw was introduced as the new representative for the Hampshire Chamber of Commerce.

2 Election of Chairman

- 2.1 Panel Members voted to appoint Harry Oram as Chairman of the Consultative Panel for the forthcoming year.

3 Approval of Minutes from the meeting held on 6 December 2018

- 3.1 The minutes from the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4 New Forest National Park Authority Update – Steve Avery

- 4.1 Steve Avery advised the panel that the Local Plan examination was complete, however Inspectors had requested that the Authority reconsider the Ashurst Hospital site, which was deliberated in a stand-alone hearing and consultation. The Authority anticipated that the Inspectors' final report would be received in June / July and the Local Plan would be ready for adoption in September.
- 4.2 Steve explained that that the Authority would be faced with some complex planning applications this year including the Fawley Waterside proposal which was due to be submitted towards the end of spring. Hampshire County

Council would be submitting proposals for work on the A35 shortly which would include proposed diversions across the Forest and the Authority was anticipating a re-submission of the Lyndhurst Park Hotel planning application.

- 4.3 Mr Avery advised that the Authority had secured funding for four new apprentice rangers and that Defra would soon be recruiting to fill the two Secretary of State vacancies the Authority was carrying, this would be publicised on the Authority's website.
- 4.4 Finally Steve concluded his report by letting the Panel know about the 'Year of Green Action' (YoGA) which was a year-long drive to help people connect with, protect and enhance nature. It would also enable the public to apply for grants for projects which would help and improve the natural environment, 60 grants had been applied for so far.

5 Forestry Commission Update – Bruce Rothnie

5.1 Conifer reduction in the New Forest

Brian Tarnoff (Friends of the New Forest) referred to minute 4.4 of the minutes of the last meeting and advised that he had drafted a rebuttal to the comments made by Martin Fletcher on behalf of Mark Carter of the Institute of Chartered Foresters at the last Panel meeting expressing concern about the reduction in conifers in the New Forest in terms of proposals in the New Forest Design Plan consultation (this had been circulated to members via the Panel Secretariat).

- 5.2 Panel members discussed the results of the consultation on the Forest Design Plan 2017-2027 which, under the response category analysis, showed that 53% of respondents had listed their main concern as the threat to the 'Working Forest'. Mark Carter asserted that this was an important fact and could be described as a 'Demographic deficit'. Brian Tarnoff questioned the validity of the above figure as no analysis had been done to weight responses that had been made on behalf of groups/organizations or evaluate the arguments made in the responses.

- 5.3 Mr Rothnie then responded to the statement made at the last meeting by Martin Fletcher. He opened by emphasising the huge importance of the Forest in terms of its nature conservation features for which it is designated at both UK and European levels. It is often forgotten that the collection of wildlife and plant life in the New Forest is of exceptional quality when judged in the context of the wider UK and Europe. There are features in the Forest that you will simply not find anywhere else on this scale and quality. One of the main reasons why the Forest carries these exceptional features is because it has been managed under a pastoral system of grazed habitats, largely unchanged, for a thousand years. This continuity has allowed certain ecological features, which only develop over very long periods of time, to be present – and this is why the New Forest is so exceptional. If these features were lost it would take centuries to re-establish.

- 5.4 The legislation that protects these features requires Natural England to produce a management plan which guides owners of the land on how to protect and enhance those special features. The Forestry Commission, as the principal landowner, carries obligations to deliver land management consistently with that management plan. As the designations have only existed for 30-40 years it is a very new form of protection of the landscape within the long history of the Forest and the Inclosures which were all established before designation.
- 5.5 Before the first Inclosures were established on the Forest in the 18th century the landscape would have been an open grazed landscape of heathlands, wetlands and pasture woodlands. It is these habitats that are special and have driven the designation of the Forest.
- 5.6 The Forest Design Plan process has created a long term (250 year) vision for the Forest landscape which aims to restore and reconnect fragments of the habitats for which the Forest is designated. This long term vision does not completely eliminate Inclosure woodlands. It identifies where grazed habitats are most logically restored to reconnect fragments (which will make them more robust to future changes in the climate and environment).
- 5.7 The Forest Design Plan under consultation now only seeks approval for the management actions planned within the next 10 years – it is simply the next small steps along a journey towards the long term vision which will take many decades to achieve fully. Every 10 years the plans are reviewed in light of new knowledge and policy changes and the next phase of actions presented for approval.
- 5.8 One of the simplest changes we can make to achieve our long term vision is to remove conifer planted relatively recently (1950s and 1960s) on former heathland. The heathland habitats restore quickly once these trees are removed because the heather seed source already exists within the soil. The Forestry Commission has been undertaking a phased removal of these areas over the last 20 years as part of previous Forest Design Plans. Many of the areas proposed for removal, in this 10-year Forest Design Plan, are simply the next phase of that transition to restore heathland identified on the 250 year vision. We have planned this work to remove the trees close to their economic maturity so that their timber value is recovered.
- 5.9 In other Inclosures the Forest Design Plan does include some removal of conifer from amongst woodland where it is mixed with broadleaves – this corresponds with where the long term vision is seeking to reconnect fragmented pasture woodlands. So we are converting mixed woodland into native broadleaved woodlands. In other areas conifers will remain a feature of Inclosure woods for many decades to come. As part of our planning we forecast the future levels of timber production. These forecasts show that there is no reduction of conifer production over the next 50 years. This means that there is no change in our supply of timber into the processing markets or the employment required to deliver that program. It is important to remember that even grazed habitats require some management by man and we would

expect our employment on the Forest to be sustained in the future even if some of the skills need to shift from servicing one management regime to another.

- 5.10 The removal of trees to create heathland can appear contrary to national messages about the need to retain or extend woodland cover in the country. The value of trees in supporting how society copes with climate change effects and provides places for public recreation is important. There are incentives to private landowners to plant new woodlands and woodland cover has been expanding nationally. It is also wider policy to support creation of open habitats from woodland where the biodiversity value of these habitats is exceptional – this is the case in the New Forest. The Forestry Commission is constantly seeking opportunities to extend its estate across England with new woodlands.
- 5.11 Bruce Rothnie advised that the Forestry Commission was still awaiting the determination of the Environment Impact Assessment for the deforestation elements of the Forest Design Plan for the Inclosures of the Forest. There would then be an opportunity for anyone to respond to the determination and he would advise members once the response period opened.

5.12 *FC Rebranding*

Mr Rothnie advised that from 1 April 2019 a number of changes were taking place in terms of how the Forestry Commission was being organised due to devolution. The Forestry Commission in Scotland would separate from England and report to the Scottish Government whilst the Forestry Commission in England would change to Forestry England with a new visual brand and would continue to report to the Parliament in Westminster. The part of the Forestry Commission in England that is responsible for managing land and forests, such as the New Forest, will become Forestry England from 1 April 2019 and will have a new Board of Commissioners. Although this means relatively little change with the way land management operates in the Forest members will see a gradual change to signage and vehicles with the new branding. This will be a phased change over many years as items are only replaced at the end of their life.

6 Flood and Coastal Risk Management Maintenance Programme – Rob Waite Environment Agency

- 6.1 Adam Hammerton, (Maintenance Engagement Advisor, Flood and Coastal Risk Management Function, EA) updated members on the EA's flood and coastal risk management maintenance programme and engagement strategy. Referring to the EA's community engagement he said that key focus areas were increasing transparency regarding the Agency's decision making, managing expectations around its programme of work and seeking opportunities to work with others towards a more co-ordinated approach.
- 6.2 He said that the EA's maintenance programme was categorised into works requiring frequent maintenance, intermittent maintenance and the carrying out of asset inspections. He then illustrated examples of the type of work

undertaken within each category and the funding sources for the programme. Maintenance works were prioritised according to where there was greatest risk, team resources and any environmental and weather constraints. Specific care was taken not to undertake any works which would impact on local habitats such as ground nesting birds.

- 6.3 Mr Hammerton said that a significant amount of information on individual planned works was published on the Agency's website. He added that any slippage in the maintenance programme could be due to unavoidable factors such as to bad weather or difficulties in seeking permission from land-owners.
- 6.4 He then concluded his presentation and responded to a number of queries from Panel members. (a copy of the EA presentation made at the meeting is available on the Panel website).

7 Any Other Business

- 7.1 There was no further business on this occasion.

8 Date of the next meeting

- 8.1 The Panel noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 6 June 2019 at 7.30pm at Lyndhurst Community Centre

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm