

NFNPA 570/19

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 March 2019

REVIEW OF THE PARTNERSHIP PLAN FOR THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Report by: Steve Avery, Executive Director

Summary:

All National Park Authorities are required to have a Management Plan for their area to help guide the collective work of all those with responsibilities or an interest in the National Park. It is arguably the single most important document for the National Park, setting out the overall vision and approach in delivering the two national park purposes and duty. The New Forest National Park Management Plan – now known as the Partnership Plan – is due to be updated in 2020.

This report sets out the relevant background, provides a high-level overview on the progress of the current Partnership Plan and asks Members to note and agree the review process for updating the Plan.

Recommendation:

Members note the report and agree the review process for updating the Partnership Plan (2020 – 2025).

1 Relevant Background

- 1.1 The Environment Act 1995 requires all English National Park Authorities to prepare and publish a Management Plan for their area. It is the overriding strategy document that directs and monitors the work of the Authority and its partners in delivering the two statutory national park purposes and associated duty. Importantly, it is a Plan for the place and not specifically for the national park authority or any other particular organisation. The same Act prescribes that “*every national park authority shall review its national park management plan at intervals of not more than five years*” and submit the Plan to the Secretary of State.
- 1.2 The first New Forest National Park Management Plan was published in 2010 and followed a comprehensive public consultation over several years. It includes a summary of the special qualities of the New Forest and describes a Vision for how the New Forest should look and function in 20 years’ time. There is a strong emphasis on working together with partners and the Plan sets out ten key objectives (which are largely strategic and aspirational) supported by more detailed actions planned over five years. Major issues identified in the 2010 Plan included:
 - the impact of climate change on the Forest
 - the gradual loss of local distinctiveness
 - threats to traditional land management including commoning; and
 - increasing development and recreation pressures

1.3 The 2010 Plan was updated in 2015 through the Partnership Plan which was designed to form a supplement to the original 2010 Plan with a much greater focus on actions for the next five years. The same ten objectives are retained but the actions are grouped around the now familiar themes of Protect, Enjoy and Prosper, reflecting the two purposes and duty. The Partnership Plan was also subject to a full public consultation and produced jointly by the nine statutory partner organisations, whose logos are included on the front cover of the published document, underlining the partnership approach to the management of the Forest. These include:

- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Hampshire County Council
- Natural England
- New Forest District Council
- New Forest National Park Authority
- Test Valley Borough Council
- Verderers
- Wiltshire Council

1.4 The Partnership Plan was also informed by contributions from a host of other Forest based and national organisations.

2. Governance arrangements

2.1 The New Forest Leadership Group was established in 2013 to oversee the review of the 2010 Management Plan and comprises senior management representatives from each of above-mentioned statutory partner organisations. As a statutory document, the Plan had to be formally approved by each of the statutory partners prior to its publication. The Authority's Business Plan and annual work programmes take their cue from the Partnership Plan, incorporating those actions for which the Authority has direct responsibility. Progress against these actions are then regularly reported to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee (RAPC) meetings.

2.2 The New Forest Leadership Group also retains a strategic oversight over the implementation of the updated 2015 Partnership Plan, and this has included publication of annual progress reports and convening the first Partnership Plan event last September. The Group meets quarterly and meetings are chaired by the Authority's Chief Executive, supported by the Authority's Executive Director and Partnerships and Community Officer. The Group has a key role to play in leading the review of the current Partnership Plan.

3. The current Partnership Plan 2015 - 2020

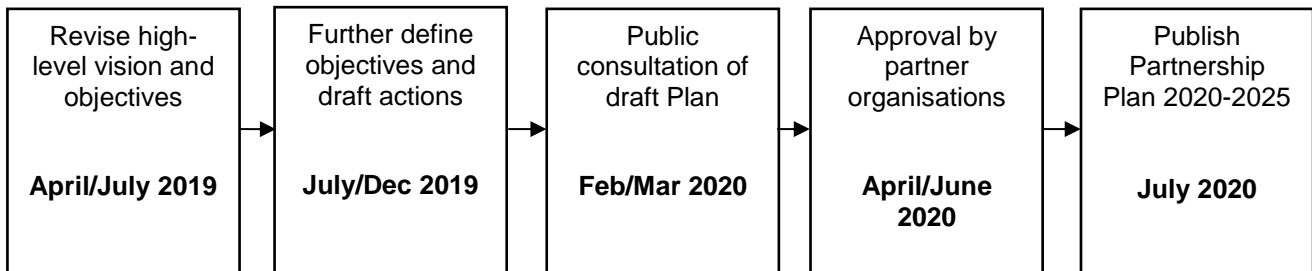
3.1 Launched in November 2015, the new Plan coincided with the award of the £4.4 million Heritage Lottery funded 'Our Past, Our Future' (OPOF) partnership project, which has made a significant contribution to the successful implementation of many of the actions in the Partnership Plan. Together with OPOF, the Partnership Plan heralded a new era of even closer partnership and collaborative working and this is borne out by the fact that over 50 organisations contributed to the drafting of the Plan and that most of them are still involved in its implementation. The Partnership Plan benefits from being relatively concise and focused on actions, relying on the former Management Plan to set the overall strategic direction.

- 3.2 A mid-term monitoring and progress report was produced in November 2018 which showed that over 60 Partnership Plan actions had either been achieved or were in progress to achieve their original objective. Examples include:
- Restoration of nine miles of New Forest streams and wetland habitats
 - Securing £250,000 of Government funding to support habitat mitigation work
 - Establishment of three permanent 'wild play' sites (in Holbury, Sway and Ashurst)
 - The New Forest Catchment Partnership "Living Waters" project which has successfully restored freshwater wildlife in the River Beaulieu
 - Training over 500 people in specialist skills such as land management, hedge laying and repair of historic buildings
 - Acquisition of 1,000 acre site at Franchises Lodge for nature conservation
 - c120,000 New Forest related records archived online through New Forest Knowledge
- 3.3 Some of these examples featured in the Partnership Plan event last September which was attended by over 50 representatives from the different partner organisations (including several Authority members).
- 3.4 Other actions are still in progress but are unlikely to achieve their original target whilst a smaller number are unlikely to be pursued further. The pressure on resources (both staffing and financial) was the main reason cited by partners for lack of progress on actions.
- 3.5 Conversely, further evaluation of the Partnership Plan actions showed that over 20 actions that overlap with the Heritage Lottery funded OPOF work have progressed especially well, showing what can be achieved when the necessary resources are available.
- 3.6 A number of actions in the current Plan only have one lead partner organisation responsible for implementation. Whilst assigning a lead partner is helpful from an accountability point of view, there is already a sense amongst partner organisations that the actions contained in next iteration of the Plan should be more focused on partnership work; i.e. actions that can only be taken forward by collaborative working.

4. Review of the Partnership Plan

- 4.1 Previously it took about 18 months to review the 2010 Plan which included a number of workshops and a public consultation. Steps now need to be taken to progress the next iteration of the Partnership Plan before the current Plan expires in 2020.
- 4.2 The review will be guided by a revised vision and agreed set of objectives which will be discussed and refined by the Leadership Group over the coming months.
- 4.3 Members will also have the opportunity to shape the drafting of the vision, objectives and actions of the new Plan through future Authority and RAPC meetings as well as Member workshops (not dissimilar to those convened for the Local Plan Review). Once the vision and objectives have been agreed by the Leadership Group there will be a period of engagement with a wide range of New Forest organisations culminating in a multi-agency workshop later in the year. It will also be important to engage with the neighbouring authorities and communities in Dorset to reflect the cross-boundary

issues in the west of the Forest and beyond. A public consultation is planned for early next year which will further inform the draft Plan. The aim is to have the new Partnership Plan 2020 - 2025 published in time for the New Forest Show in 2020. An indicative timetable is shown in the table below:



- 4.4 The Partnership Plan review is also a timely opportunity to integrate and connect several new initiatives that have emerged since the current Plan was published in 2015, in particular the work on the Green Halo Partnership and the Recreation Management Strategy (with the potential to incorporate the higher level 'RMS' actions into the new Partnership Plan rather than in a stand-alone RMS document).
- 4.5 Other important national initiatives, such as the 25 Year Environment Plan, natural capital and the outcome of the Glover review, will equally need to be reflected in the new Plan. As a result of the findings from the Partnership Plan's mid-term monitoring and progress report, the Authority's own response to the Glover review consultation called on Government to

"...restate the importance of a Plan (Partnership Plan) for the National Park that is shaped and owned by all, in pursuit of the purposes and duty for which it is designated. The Review needs to enshrine the delivery of the Plan in law, policy and practice to secure the commitment and the alignment of skills and resources of all parties."

5. The approach taken in other National Parks

- 5.1 Not surprisingly, the structure and size of the various Management / Partnership Plans across the UK's 15 national parks varies considerably, often reflected by their unique local circumstances. The size of Plans range from anywhere between 21 and 398 pages whilst actions span between 16 and 111 actions. However, common themes in the more recently published plans include a focus on ecosystem services, natural capital, health and wellbeing, better access by the public, loss of biodiversity and climate change. The level of consultation and involvement of partner organisations in reviewing the plans is similarly varied.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Members are asked to endorse the approach set out above. In due course, a more detailed programme and timetable for the next stages will be shared with Members. In addition, all formal stages of the Plan preparation process will be reported to future Authority meetings for Members' consideration.

RECOMMENDATION

Members note the report and agree the review process for updating the Partnership Plan (2020 – 2025).

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Equality Impact Assessment: No impacts have been identified.