

## NFNPA/PC 267/18

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### PLANNING COMMITTEE – 19 JUNE 2018

## PLANNING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

**Report by:** Steve Avery, Executive Director

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The English National Parks have agreed a set of performance indicators (PIs) to provide a consistent way to benchmark suitable areas across different Parks. One of the PIs relates to the percentage of planning applicants satisfied with the service they received.
- 1.2 In order to ascertain how satisfied planning applicants are with the planning service undertaken by the Authority, as well as to meet the requirements of reporting against this indicator, each National Park undertakes a survey of applicants.
- 1.3 The results of the last survey for the New Forest National Park were reported to the Planning Development Control Committee in December 2013.
- 1.4 This report sets out the main findings of the most recent survey, comparing the results with the last survey, and how the responding applicants/agents felt the planning service could be improved.

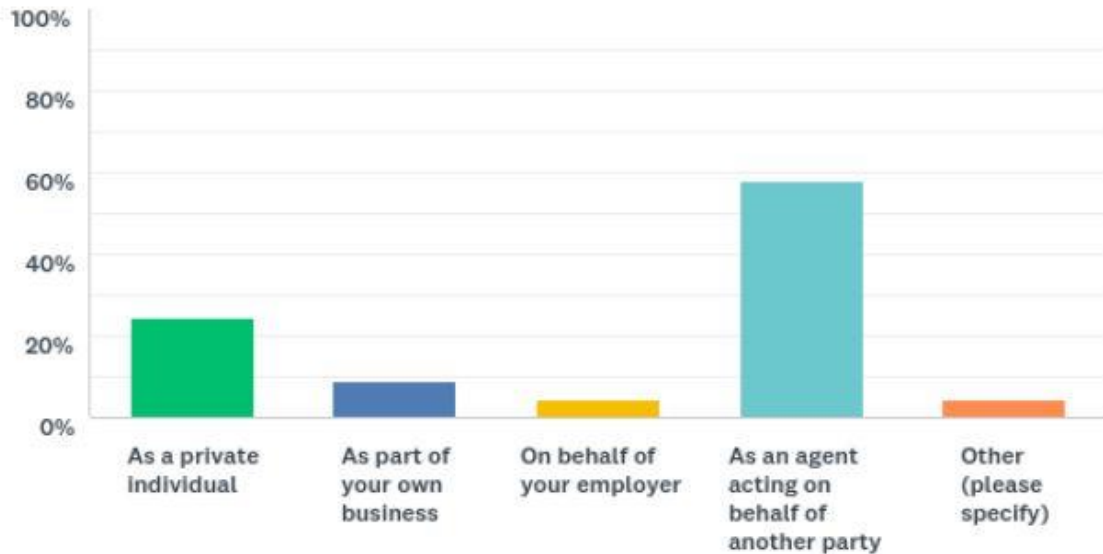
### 2 Carrying out the survey

- 2.1 The Authority employs the same questionnaire and methodology as that used by the other English National Parks. To ensure statistical validity, Authorities have to issue a sufficient number of questionnaires to obtain responses from at least 5% of applicants over a 12 month period.
- 2.2 We therefore undertook a survey of all agents and applicants who had submitted a planning application between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. Of the 409 questionnaires sent out 45 were returned, representing a response rate of 11%, which was less than that achieved in 2013 (17%). A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Annex 1.

### 3 Summary of the results

3.1 The responses to each of the nine questions are set out below.

#### Q1 When you made your most recent application, in what capacity were you acting?



Of the responses received, 58% were agents acting on behalf of another party (compared to 47% in the 2013 survey).

#### Q2 What type of application were you submitting?



47% of respondents were householder applications (compared to 55% in the 2013 survey).

**Q3 Please indicate how many times you have applied to the Authority for planning permission/consent?**

The majority of respondents had applied for planning permission at least 1-5 times in the past three years (no change from previous years).

**Q4 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your most recent experience of the Authority's handling of your planning application in the last year**

71% of respondents agreed they were given the advice and help they needed to submit their application (compared to 68% in the 2013 survey).

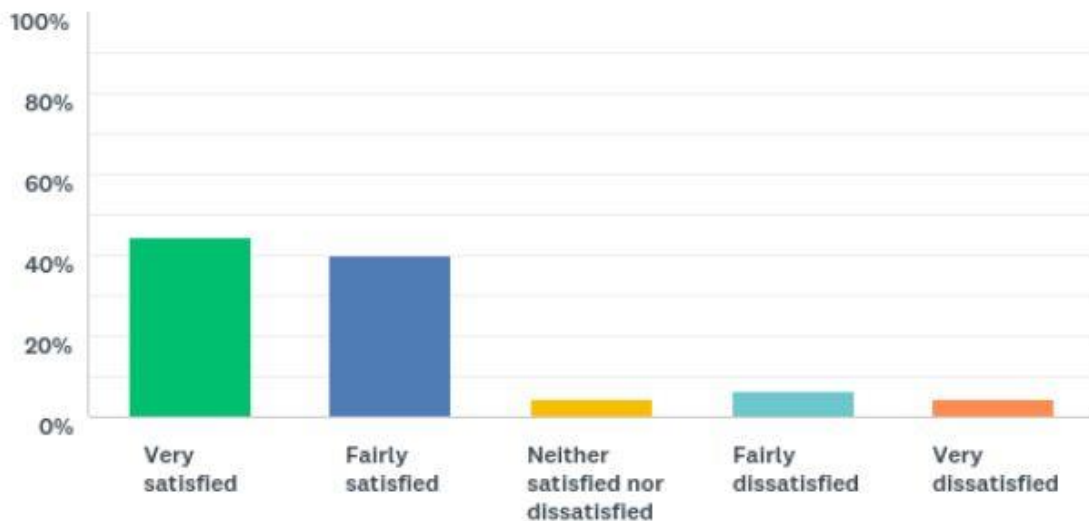
64% of respondents felt the Authority had kept them informed about the progress of their application (compared to 64% in the 2013 survey).

78% of respondents felt the Authority dealt with all their queries promptly (compared to 63% in the 2013 survey).

76% understood the reasons for the planning decisions made regarding their applications (compared to 83% in the 2013 survey).

71% felt they were treated fairly and that their viewpoint was listened to (compared to 77% in the 2013 survey).

**Q5 Setting aside whether any individual application was successful or not, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the Authority in processing your application?**

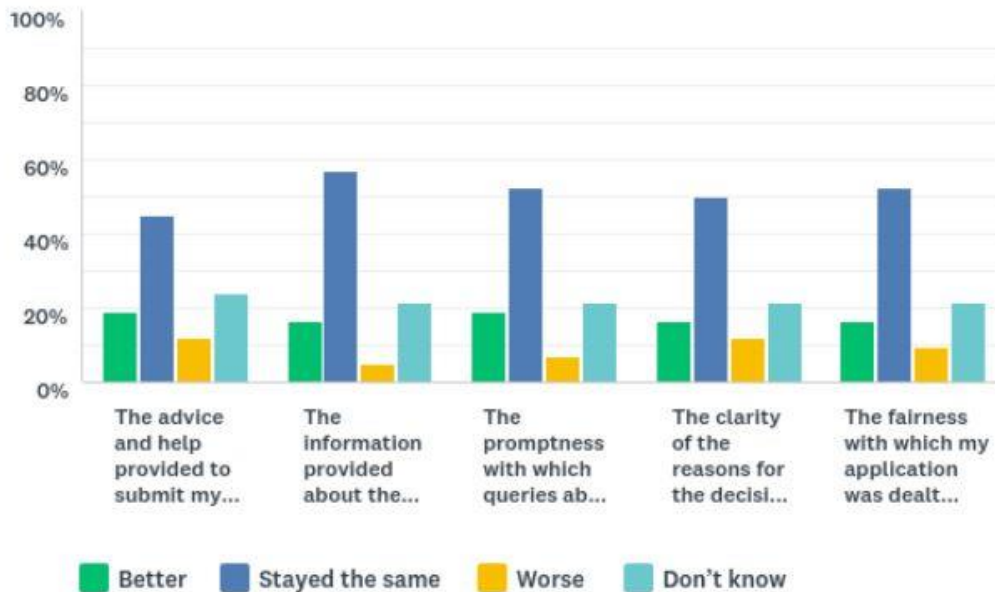


84% of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service provided (compared to 79% in the 2013 survey).

**Q6 Was your most recent application granted or refused?**

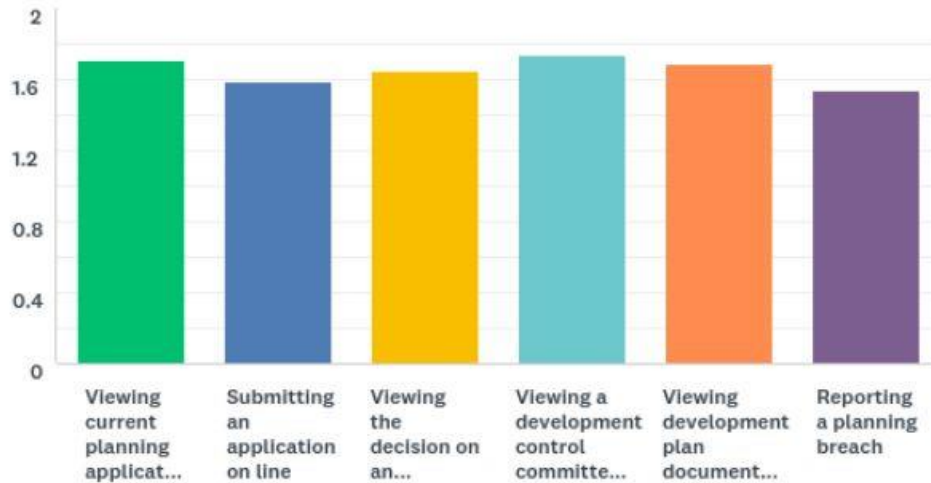
Of the responses received 39 (87%) had been granted planning permission and 6 (13%) had been refused. In 2013, 89% had been granted and 11% refused.

**Q7 For each of the following elements of the planning service provided by the Authority please indicate whether you think the service has got better or worse over the last three years, or has it stayed the same?**

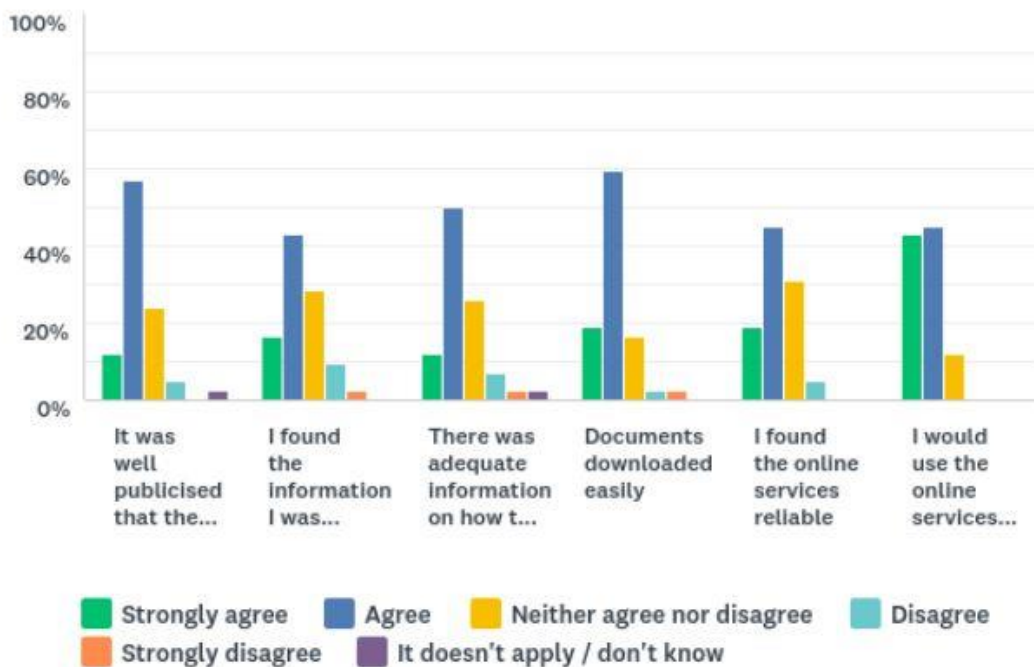


Taken as a whole, 18% of respondents felt the service had got better, 51% thought it had stayed about the same and 9% said it had got worse.

**Q8 The Authority web site offers the following online planning services. Please indicate (a) which of these online services you were aware of and (b) whether you have used the service, or might use it in the future.**



**Q9 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your experience of the Authority's online planning service.**



## **4 Main findings**

- 4.1 This survey saw more agents (as opposed to applicants) responding than last time, with the sample including a marginally higher number of refusals (13%) and a lower proportion of householder applications.
- 4.2 Most respondents (84%) were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service provided, representing a higher level of satisfaction than in 2013 (79%). Those expressing dissatisfaction (11%) was lower than in 2013 (14%).
- 4.3 It was encouraging to note that many respondents felt service standards had been maintained or improved (69%) but a smaller number (9%) did express a view that the service had got worse.
- 4.4 The questionnaire included a section for qualitative feedback and comments and 15 (33%) respondents chose to make comments. Some of the positive comments include:
  - Good service
  - Helpful staff
  - Favourable comparison with other local authorities
- 4.5 Some of the negative comments include:
  - Improved availability of documents on website needed
  - Better information needed on format of information required
  - Too many hurdles
  - Consistency/accuracy of advice

## **5 Conclusions and next steps**

- 5.1 The survey has once again been very informative and we are grateful to everyone who took the time and trouble to respond to the questionnaire. The survey results will help us to focus on those areas that need improvement.
- 5.2 We shall also review the consistency of our advice in light of the comments received and continue to look at ways of reducing any avoidable delays in the planning application process.
- 5.3 Following this meeting, the results of the survey will be made available on the website and discussed at the next annual Agents' meeting in 2018.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the information in this report be noted.**

**Annex 1:** A copy of the questionnaire

### **Background Documents**

Completed questionnaires

List of applicants surveyed

### **Contact:**

Steve Avery

Tel: 01590 646659

[Steve.avery@newforestnpa.gov.uk](mailto:Steve.avery@newforestnpa.gov.uk)