

NFNPA RAPC 373/18

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 10 SEPTEMBER 2018

LOVE THE FOREST VISITOR GIVING SCHEME UPDATE

Report by: Andrew Brennan, Sustainability Officer

1. Summary

In 2016, the New Forest Trust (the Trust) approached the Authority with a request to assist with the running of the Love the Forest Visitor Gift Scheme (the scheme). The Authority commissioned an independent report to look at the potential of the scheme and subsequently agreed to support the scheme for two years (RAPC paper 317/16). The purpose of this paper is to update RAPC on progress during the initial 12 months as requested by members (RAPC minutes, November 2016).

2. Background

2.1 Visitor giving is a way of offering visitors the opportunity to contribute to the upkeep of places they love to visit by providing a mechanism for collecting donations; typically customers are asked to donate on a room stay, meal or product. The Trust has operated the scheme since 2006. The funds raised through the scheme are used to support the Trusts own projects and provide grants to other groups and organisations which meet its charitable aims:

- To promote and support the conservation, protection and improvement of the New Forest landscape and general environment.
- To promote and support the conservation and protection of the commoning livestock, the deer and other flora and fauna of the New Forest.
- To promote and support the education and understanding, by the public, of the commoning of livestock, the deer and other fauna and flora and the general environment and landscape of the New Forest.

2.2 In early 2016 the Trust approached the Authority to seek assistance with planning for the future of the scheme and form a closer working relationship. As a result the Authority agreed to help run the scheme on a two year trial and resolved to:

1. Develop the Love the Forest Visitor Giving Scheme using existing staff
2. Agree a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the New Forest Trust to determine the future arrangements of the scheme
3. Agree how the funds will be awarded
4. Agree how the scheme will be monitored
5. Bring the draft MoU to the full meeting of the Authority on 19 January 2017 for approval.
6. Review the effectiveness of any support provided in 12 months

3. Progress

- 3.1 The Authority became formally involved in the running of the scheme in October 2017. This was later than planned as the staff member leading this work was required to develop and initiate the PEDALL project, which had been awarded a grant from the Big Lottery earlier in the year.
- 3.2 Since October the focus has been to reinvigorate the scheme after 22 months without a manager and retain the current businesses that support the scheme. The table below summarises progress against the Authority resolutions.

Table 1 – progress against resolutions

Resolution	Progress
<p>1. Develop the Love the Forest Visitor Giving Scheme using existing staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Sustainability Officer is responsible for developing the scheme, allocating approximately 40-50% of his time, supported by a limited amount of the Communications teams' time. ▪ All businesses supporting the scheme have been contacted and face-to-face meetings held with over 65% in order to gauge levels of support and to find out views on how the scheme operates. ▪ As a result there was a complete re-draft of the New Forest Trust website (www.newforesttrust.org.uk) with a greater focus on the projects supported and the Love the Forest pages ▪ There has been some work done to clarify/update the branding as there was confusion between the New Forest Trust and the Love the Forest scheme ▪ 250 potential businesses have been identified and initial contact made ▪ Seven new businesses have joined the scheme which will raise an estimated £4,000 (41 businesses now actively supporting the scheme) ▪ It is estimated that the scheme will generate £30,000 income in the next 12 months.
<p>2. Agree a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the New Forest Trust to determine the future arrangements of the scheme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The MoU was agreed at the Authority meeting in January 2017 ▪ The MoU established the steering group to oversee the development of the scheme and award grants. ▪ The group consists of three representatives from the Trust, three from the Authority and two from businesses supporting the scheme (this is the first time the businesses have been represented)

3. Agree how the funds will be awarded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Authority has taken over administration of the 'Love the Forest grant scheme'. Application, claim and monitoring forms have been drafted and the scheme publicised.
4. Agree how the scheme will be monitored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The steering group make recommendations either to approve or reject grant applications ▪ Three grants have been awarded, totalling £6,500. The grants will support smooth snake research, fund after school sessions to learn more about the history and wildlife of the New Forest and support the publication of archaeological research and provide survey equipment
5. Bring the draft MoU to the full meeting of the Authority on 19 January 2017 for approval.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Trust chair the steering group to maintain independence in their decision making as a charity and an officer attends trustee meetings to provide a link to the Authority. ▪ The MoU details that the Authority will use 25% of the income raised through the scheme to help offset costs. ▪ The scheme has also been included in the Authority business plan 2018-2021 and as such is reported on in quarterly updates to RAPC ▪ The accounting for the scheme has been re-organised to clarify which money comes from businesses and which falls outside the remit of the scheme i.e. personal donations and funeral donations, general fundraising etc.

4. Lessons Learnt

- 4.1 Retaining businesses in the scheme is as essential as recruiting new businesses as they fund the schemes existence and the charity/grant projects. Both processes rely on building personal relationships, which can be time consuming. Availability of business in the tourism sector fluctuates with the seasons; there is very little response from businesses during the Christmas period and since June very little progress in recruiting new businesses.
- 4.2 The Authority's involvement in the scheme has been warmly received with several of the businesses stating that it gives them confidence that the scheme is being well run and managed.

5. The Next 12 Months

- 5.1 The focus going forward is to recruit as many businesses as possible to increase the revenue the scheme is generating. In order to achieve this the following actions will be implemented:
- Identify and contact other potential businesses
 - Improve marketing and communications
 - Provide high quality support for businesses in the scheme
 - Continue to generate new projects through the grant scheme
 - Recruit volunteers to build capacity and reduce costs
 - Undertake a full review the scheme

6. Cost

- 6.1 It was originally estimated that the cash equivalent cost to the Authority of the staff time needed to support the scheme would be £35,000 per annum (RAPC paper 317/16). This has been revised to £22,000 as the New Forest Trust has continued to provide administrative support for 10 hours a week.
- 6.2 25% of the income raised by the scheme is returned to the Authority to help offset costs. Under this arrangement the Authority received £2,700 for the period October 2017 – March 2018.

7. Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

Papers:

NFNPA/ RAPC 373/18 – Love the Forest Visitor Giving Scheme Update

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Equality Impact Assessment:

There are no specific equality or diversity implications arising out of this report.