

**Recreation Management Strategy Advisory Group  
Brockenhurst Village Hall, 4 June 2015**

Attendance:

Mark Adams, Cycle Working Group  
Graham Baker, New Forest Association  
Rachael Bowen (notes), New Forest National Park Authority  
Bob Chapman, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust  
Ruth Croker, Ringwood & Fordingbridge Footpath Society  
Heather Gould, New Forest Dog Owners Group  
Steve Lorton, New Forest Tourism Association (from Agenda item 5)  
Nigel Matthews (facilitator), New Forest National Park Authority  
Ann Sevier, Commoners Defense Association  
James Young, Equine Forum

Apologies:

Alastair Duncan, New Forest Access Forum (Ruth Croker, as the newly elected Chair had agreed to represent the Access Forum as well as the Footpath Society/walking)  
Jake White, National Trust

**1 Welcome / Introductions**

Nigel welcomed everybody to the third meeting of the RMS Advisory Group, especially those who were present for the first time. Steering Group members had decided that it would be best for them not to attend this meeting.

**2 RMS Steering Group**

Nigel gave an update on the various groups that had worked on recreation management since the Recreation Management Strategy had been finalised in 2010. In 2013 the former RMS Working Group had split into an RMS Steering Group comprising six organisations with statutory responsibilities for aspects of recreation and an RMS Advisory Group comprising the same six organisations, plus the other organisations that had been on the Working Group.

The Steering Group is now ready to receive the Advisory Group's advice on the draft Memorandum of Understanding (Agenda item 8). This meeting is also a good opportunity to report back on three other areas of work (items 5, 6 and 7).

**3 Election of Chairman for this meeting**

It was proposed and agreed that a formal chair was not necessary but that Nigel would facilitate the meeting.

#### **4 Minutes of the last meeting**

Those present at the last meeting (19 September 2013) confirmed that the minutes were an accurate record.

The only action had been for Nigel to prepare a vision for the group and develop a list of priorities. This had resulted in the agreed Priority Task for recreation management that had proved a useful summary statement of the overall aim for recreation management. Since it had originally been framed, it had been modified only through the addition of a phrase about avoiding inadvertent damage to the special qualities.

#### **5 Tranquillity map**

Nigel expressed thanks to those on the research sub-group of the RMS Working Group that had been involved at an early stage. The map is now completed; it clearly shows the road network, railways, overhead power lines and residential areas. The main recreational facilities (e.g. large car parks) do not show up because they are close to roads.

It can now be used:

- to track any changes to tranquillity in future years
- within planning policies, noting that the National Park core strategy is to be updated in next 18 months
- to guide recreation management – e.g. to highlight tranquil areas in which it would be inappropriate to encourage or enable an intrusive recreation facility route or activity

The GIS data layer is available from Sarah Kelly on request.

The Group discussed the map and noted that:

- it does not attempt to show areas heavily used for recreation except in respect of car parks and cycle routes (and the latter only show up if they cross the most tranquil areas)
- it does not show unscheduled flights (though an area vulnerable to light aircraft has been identified)

#### **6 Ground nesting birds research**

In 2013 and 2014 breeding territories of the following species had been mapped, using standardised methodologies: nightjar, Dartford warbler, woodlark, redshank, snipe, lapwing and curlew. Some species seem to be stable; others are declining probably due to several factors.

The same species will again be surveyed towards end of the Verderers Higher Level Stewardship scheme. As with tranquillity, the maps may also be useful in guiding recreation management.

A consultant has been commissioned to provide advice on how it might be possible to show to what extent different types of recreation impact on ground nesting birds in the New Forest, compared with other factors. This will include recommendations (or options) on the length of study needed, which species would be most suitable, what techniques would work best, who should do the research and what the costs might be.

The Group discussed the work on ground nesting birds, including:

- the sensitivity of birds to disturbance and the need to avoid this where possible
- four car parks are closed each year to reduce disturbance, and signs are put out asking people to keep to tracks during the breeding season
- if at high density, grazing animals may trample some nests, but their grazing also creates the habitats the birds need
- some sites away from the New Forest have higher densities of ground nesting birds

## **7 Rights of Way and SANGs**

Nigel confirmed that recreation management is not just about Crown Lands, but needs to include the wider National Park and the areas beyond the boundary. There needs to be links with green infrastructure plans of local authorities and their habitat mitigation strategies (funded by developer contributions) which address potential impacts of new residents on protected areas and species. HCC and NFDC staff are liaising to ensure improvements are made to Rights of Way and Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces which meet the needs of local people and where possible contribute to the agreed Priority Task for recreation management.

The NPA has also been contracted by NFDC to provide a ranger who will both talk with local residents visiting protected areas and help the district council as it improves its public open spaces.

There is therefore a high expectation of a joined up approach and delivery.

Discussion included mention of development in Dorset and likely impacts on the Forest. The NFA would like to see a more ambitious search for alternative sites for recreation away from the New Forest.

## **8 Recreation Management MoU for the New Forest**

Nigel explained that this draft document has existed in different forms and with different names, especially as a 'route plan'. It doesn't say how recreation management will be changed but does explain by what criteria any proposals will be judged. It is not a policy: more a way of working.

The RMS Steering Group is keen to receive advice about the MoU from the Advisory Group so that it can take this into account when it next meets on 26 June. Comments are welcome at this meeting and by e-mail afterwards.

There was general agreement among the Group that the MoU provided a useful framework. Some felt that certain aspects could be improved. For example, Mark felt it is too negative towards recreation. He thinks there should be better maps and signage for cyclists, and a more joined up network of routes. Others felt the document did allow for these positive measures and felt the balance is about right.

The Group felt that we need to move on to the next stage, where options for changing aspects of recreation management are put forward, including consideration of car parking and cycle routes. The aim is to benefit both recreation and the wildlife and tranquility of the Forest. The Peak District was mentioned as a place where cycling is well managed.

Nigel explained that the Steering Group intends to gain unanimous support for the MoU (within the Steering Group, but if possible also among members of the Advisory Group). Some phasing or piloting of actions may be possible and opportunities for making improvements may arise outside of any wider plans.

Several comments reflected the fact that the demand for recreational access to the New Forest will grow and that 'doing nothing' is not an option. Also, most people will continue to arrive by car, so plans need to respond to this.

In response to a comment by James, Nigel confirmed that there is no intention to restrict horse riding access.

**Action:** RMS Advisory Group members to send comments on the MoU to Nigel by Monday 15 June

## **9 AOB**

Nigel raised the fact that Ruth Croker had represented two different organisations at this meeting. The Group decided that there is currently no need to recruit a new representative either for walking or the Access Forum, but that this could be reviewed again in the future.

## **10 Date of next meeting**

This will be confirmed when the Steering Group has further questions for the Advisory Group.

Meeting closed: 8.00pm