

**Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group  
The Library, Queen's House, 23 November 2016**

Attendance:

Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre (Chairman), New Forest National Park Authority  
Richard Burke, Forestry Commission  
Jenny Thomas, Natural England  
Colin Read, New Forest District Council  
Nigel Matthews, New Forest National Park Authority  
Jonathan Woods, Hampshire County Council  
Bruce Rothnie, Forestry Commission  
Rachael Bowen (notes), New Forest National Park Authority

**1 Welcome**

- 1.1 OCE thanked everybody for attending. Apologies were received from Dominic May.

**2 Minutes of the last meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes from the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

**3. Matters arising**

- 3.1 None were raised.

**4. Progress on reviewing options for car parking and cycle routes**

- 4.1 Since the last meeting, a range of options for improving the management of parking and across the New Forest had been considered. The pattern of parking provision has changed very little since the mid-1970s but with increasing use of the Forest it is important that these key access points are managed to both accommodate people (and improve their 'visitor experience') and protect the Forest's special features.
- 4.2 Accommodating cycling provides a different but equally important challenge because the current network of permitted off road routes doesn't match with cyclists' expectations, and it is difficult for many local people to access the network safely without first using their car. Various desire lines for new cycle routes have been considered, the aim being to improve connectivity without harming wildlife, tranquillity etc.
- 4.2 Natural England could not support any changes without evidence that there would be no likely significant effect on the wildlife. Legislation is in place to stop activity damaging the Forest, so we need to be confident that each site has been assessed for potential effects to each of the protected features.
- 4.3 The Group discussed at length various aspects of the potential options including grazing land gains, impacts of any necessary surface treatment to routes, understanding and reducing the impacts of different kinds of recreation, public consultation and increased visitor numbers.

- 4.4 The Group does not yet have clarity about the best way to assess the recreation management options against the Habitats Regulations. There are a lot of existing data and evidence, and further data could be collected so it should be possible to show if there would be any likely significant effects without new, long-drawn out research programmes. However, it may be necessary to engage a consultant to provide advice on the Habitats Regulations Assessment process.

## **5. The wider context of the Recreation Management Strategy 2010-2030**

- 5.1 Although much of the Group's recent discussion has focused on Crown Lands the work derives from the Recreation Management Strategy 2010-2030 Strategy. The work is also clearly referenced in the recently agreed Partnership Plan for the New Forest National Park.

## **6. Engagement and consultation**

- 6.1 The Group agreed that it should ideally progress to the first stage of a public consultation in which we would raise awareness of what the problems are, what we want to achieve and why it is important to address this now. Individual people, user groups and organisations would be asked about their views and invited to suggest locations where changes could be implemented on the ground to improve the recreational experience and protect the Forest.
- 6.2 Suggestions would be collated onto a map, so that in a subsequent consultation stage, people would be invited to comment on options that have widespread support.

## **7. England Coast Path**

- 7.1 Discussions between land owners and Natural England are progressing and this phase should be completed by the end of the year. Maintenance of the path is likely to fall to a Trail Partnership that has responsibility for a significant length of the path along the south coast. Initial work on the next part of the Path (from Calshot northwards) is now starting.

## **8. Funding**

- 8.1 There was no further discussion about funding.

## **9 Liaison with Advisory Group**

- 9.1 No specific liaison was needed at this time.

## **10 Date of next meetings**

- 8.1 To be set for early February 2017.

## **11 AOB**

- 11.1 The New Forest Association is planning a survey of informal parking locations; it may be desirable to extend this to include some work on car parks at the same time.