

**Chief Executive****Executive Head:** Bob Jackson

Alison Barnes, Chief Executive  
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My Ref: RJ/db/letters  
Your Ref:

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Dear Alison

**IMPROVED WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

Many thanks for our recent meeting with both our Planning senior management teams. I think it was a very useful meeting in exploring opportunities to see how we could improve working arrangements between our organisations. Following the meeting, I agreed to set out proposals for consideration by the National Park Authority and the Council on areas where I believe improvements could be made for the benefit of our shared community.

We both understand that we have different statutory responsibilities but that there are many areas in which our organisations have a common interest. This is not surprising given that 94% (206 square miles) of the National Park Authority area is within the boundaries of the District Council, 71% of the total District.

One of our most important common interests is the community of 35,000 district residents and numerous businesses that operate in our shared area. This community expects and deserves clarity of responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness in how both organisations operate to discharge their responsibilities.

At our meeting I set out three areas where improvements could be made.

**1. The formal leadership engagement between both organisations**

- Since the creation of the National Park Authority with full statutory functions in April 2006 there has been no formal engagement between leading District councillors and Park Authority members to discuss their respective areas of interest and provide an opportunity for improved cooperation and challenge, where appropriate.
- Currently 8 of the 22 members of the National Park Authority are District Councillors. Four are appointed by the District Council and four by the County Council. However, it must be recognised that issues which affect the District Council may affect the National Park Authority in a different way and members have to put the interests of the particular body, on which they are sitting at any given time, first and foremost. Members cannot be reasonably expected to

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represent the views of one organisation when they are present in the other. Members who sit on both authorities need to be mindful of which “hat” they are wearing.

- It is proposed that a new forum is established for NFDC Councillors and NFNPA Members to come together to discuss and agree a strategic approach to ‘big ticket’ items. This includes securing greater formal engagement on areas of common interest i.e. Planning delivery, Health and Wellbeing (Recreation Management), Housing need and Economic Development. As well as bringing about a more formal approach to existing joint working arrangements, building on the successful Duty to Cooperate work at officer level (that has already taken place). This could lead to real and tangible benefits for our wider communities. One example of this could be a Memorandum of Understanding to guide joint working on the delivery of more Affordable Housing in the National Park.
- This would be an additional forum to the engagement which is currently taking place with the Officer Leadership Group which is currently overseeing delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan. This forum involves other partners including Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire Council, Test Valley Borough Council, Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Environment Agency. As I have raised at the group this I believe also needs to develop a democratic engagement to help ensure both support and delivery of the many tasks set out in the Plan.

## **2. Working together**

It is clear that with greater development in the district area over the next 20 years including the progress of the “Green Halo”, that there is the need and opportunity to work more closely together, both formally and informally.

It is envisaged that the areas of closer working together, include the following projects and developments:

- Fawley Power Station and the wider Waterside
- Developments where strategic cross-boundary master planning between both organisations would improve outcomes.
- Joint monitoring for example of air quality (ammonia and acid deposition on the Natura 2000 sites) – an indicator in our local plans
- The creation of a ‘New Forest Habitat Mitigation Strategy’ to manage recreation pressures arising from new development within and outside the National Park (not dissimilar to the strategic approach adopted by the PUSH authorities for the Solent)
- A new joint Supplementary Planning Document on provision and management of SANGs
- Commissioning joint evidence / surveys (some of which has already taken place to good effect in preparing our respective local plans)

- Joint 'locally led' CPD events for NPA & NFDC planning staff (promoting better understanding and sharing knowledge between planning teams).

It is proposed that both organisations should agree to work together in the areas identified (and others that are identified in the future) based on a common interest.

### 3. Shared Services

Services are currently shared, but there remains significant scope for a greater sharing of services in the future. The drivers for sharing services remain economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

To date the following services are shared by the two organisations:

<b>Service</b>	<b>Provider</b>	<b>Value (£)</b>
Human Resources (inc. Payroll)	NFDC	33,486
Finance Support (inc. Audit)	NFDC	34,700
ICT – GIS	NFDC	55,150
ICT – Agresso Support	NFDC	5,800
ICT – Hosting of File Servers	NFDC	5,000
Courier	NFDC	500
Ecology Service	NFNPA	11,200
Ranger Services	NFNPA	39,830
Building Conservation	NFNPA	89,800
Tree Service	NFNPA	110,000

As we move forward, both organisations will be facing the challenges of increased development. The tables below give some key information on the current and anticipated numbers of planning applications and existing numbers of staff:

<b>Annual Planning Applications</b>	<b>NFDC</b>	<b>NFPA</b>
Current	1700	1000
Future	1850/1900*	1100*

\* whilst future application numbers show an increase on current numbers, there will likely to be more significant/major applications following adoption of the respective local plans and the allocation of new housing sites. The complexity of the planning caseload will increase in the foreseeable future for both authorities.

## Current Planning Staff

FTE's	NFDC	NFPA
Head of Planning		1
Service Management	2	
Environmental Design	3	
Strategic Planning (Policy)	7.5	3.6*
Development Control	13	6
Enforcement	3.5	3
Planning Administration	7	5
Conservation and Building Design		3.5 (shared resource with NFDC)
Trees		3.5 (shared resource with NFDC)
Other Specialist Services		3**

\* includes Partnerships & Community Officer (limited input to strategic planning work)

\*\* includes other shared services with NFDC (ecology and archaeology)

## Current requirements

There is a need to review & renew existing SLAs for ecology, archaeology, trees, & conservation and to discuss how these will be resourced in order to respond to greater levels of planned development.

There is also a shared need to improve and modernise planning ICT in both organisations. This could include a shared planning/ICT database (as part of procurement of new planning software).

## Current challenges

The District Council is facing significant financial challenges like all other local authorities as central government funding is reduced.

We have experienced difficulties in recruiting planning officers. Local Housing costs make recruitment more difficult at a time when there is greater national demand for planning officers given the Government's housing delivery requirement of 300,000 homes per annum.

## Proposal

The Council's proposal is to create a single managed planning service across the NPA and District Council, with one Head of Service working for both organisations. Both organisations would still be responsible for discharging their statutory responsibilities as they do now. However, they would have a joint Planning Head of Service working across both authorities. With this proposal, staff would still operate from their current locations for their existing employer. The new joint Head of Service would be responsible for staffing matters on Planning in both organisations and attend the Senior/Executive management teams of each organisation, reporting to the respective Chief Executives. It is proposed that the Head of Service's performance would be managed by a Joint Board from both organisations consisting of two members from each

organisation and both Chief Executives. Savings to each organisation of this approach are estimated at £35,000 to £40,000 per annum.

The District Council is firmly of the view that the above proposal would not only meet the aspirations of the community for joined up and efficient delivery of planning services, but also goes a long way in addressing the challenges presented by the current financial climate.

I very much look forward to hearing from the Authority.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RJ', with a horizontal line underneath.

Bob Jackson  
Chief Executive

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