

NFNPA RAPC 409-19**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY****RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 4 NOVEMBER 2019****LOVE THE FOREST VISITOR GIVING SCHEME – TWO YEAR REVIEW**

Report by Andy Brennan, Sustainability Officer

Summary

The New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) has been running the Love the Forest Visitor Gift Scheme (the scheme) in partnership with the New Forest Trust (the Trust) since October 2017. The Authority agreed to support the scheme with 18.5 hours of officer time for an initial two years (RAPC paper 317/16), an update of progress was provided after 12 months (RAPC paper 373/18). This paper provides an update after the agreed two-year trial.

Recommendation

To consider and if thought appropriate recommend to the full Authority that:

- 1. it continues to support the Love the Forest Visitor Gift Scheme and develops the relationship with the New Forest Trust;**
- 2. and that the MOU is extended by two years (October 2021).**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Visitor giving is a way of offering visitors the opportunity to contribute to the up-keep 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 funds raised through the scheme are used to support the Trust's projects and enable the Trust to provide grants to other charities and organisations which support 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.

2.0 SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

- 2.1 When the NPA was approached to take over the running of the scheme there had been no manager since January 2016, businesses were leaving the scheme, income was falling and there was a risk that the scheme could collapse. Since the NPA took over 12 new businesses have joined the scheme and income has stabilised (table 1).

Table 1: Amount raised and number of businesses supporting the Love the Forest Scheme over the last five financial years

Financial Year	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Total Donations (£)	42,663	39,126	26,479	27,651	30,454
Total no. of businesses	51	46	40	36	41
No. of new businesses (inc. in the total above)	26	2	4	2	10

- 2.2 The money raised is used to support the Love the Forest Grant scheme; charities and other local organisations can apply for grants of up to £5,000. During the time that the NPA has been running the scheme £11,151 has been awarded to four projects supporting education, archaeology, wildlife and commoning. Some funding has been used to support the Trust's work such as producing the 'A-Z guide of commoning and the New Forest' booklet and contributing towards animal accident reduction campaigns. In addition, £40,000 had already been committed to Our Past Our Future projects.
- 2.3 A steering group was formed to oversee the development of the scheme and included businesses who support the scheme for the first time. A good relationship has been built with the board of Trustees and the businesses involved in the scheme; both value the support the Authority offers.
- 2.4 Businesses have received training about the scheme, how it works and what the donations are used for. These NPA-led sessions provide an opportunity to explain more about the history and wildlife of the New Forest and the importance of responsible behaviour. This is particularly relevant as the majority of staff who attend these sessions work on reception or in a front of house role. In total 75 staff across 10 hotels have received this training.
- 2.5 During 2019 a Love the Forest Ambassador training course was trialled with the aim of providing staff with more detailed information about the Forest that could be shared with customers and other staff. The participants undertook 16 hours of training which involved a visit to a commoners' holding, Beaulieu Road Sales Yard, Bolderwood, the Reptile Centre and walks about the history, ecology and management of the Forest.
- 2.6 Feedback has been positive with one of the hotels describing it as revolutionising their front desk conversations and others citing how they have been able to answer guests'

questions, as well as sharing information with other staff and promoting messages such as the importance of not feeding the ponies.

3.0 PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH

- 3.1 The NPA took over running the scheme in October 2017, income stabilised during 2017-2018, then rose to £30,454 in 2018-2019 representing a total growth of 15% (table 1). Prior to the NPA supporting the scheme an independent report was commissioned looking at the potential of future growth. It forecast that there was scope to increase the level of donations to £160,000 per annum by 2020-2021. It is highly unlikely that this will be achieved at its current rate of growth of circa 10% per annum.
- 3.2 There are a several factors that have emerged that slow the growth of the scheme. Baseline donations are not constant, businesses leave the scheme for a variety of reasons (table 2 below). Primarily this is because they want to support a different charity but change of management and not being able to administer the scheme also caused baseline donations to drop. The overall effect can be seen that as new businesses are added, they replace the lost donations rather than increasing the overall income of the scheme.

Table 2: Why businesses left the scheme since 2014, excludes businesses where no reason was given

Reason for leaving	Support a different charity	Change of management/ ownership	Could not administer scheme	No donations received/	One-off donation	No longer trading
Percentage %	32	18	18	14	9	9
Number	7	4	4	3	2	2

- 3.3 Donations are not currently tracking inflation, when the scheme was set up in 2006 the suggested donation was £1. There is a reluctance to raise the amount; the majority of businesses feel that the levels set work for their customers and they do not want to increase it further. The majority of income (77%) over the last three years of the scheme has been raised by six businesses (one has four hotels so equates to 10 outlets); only one of these businesses has increased its donation to match inflation.

4.0 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- 4.1 Approximately £20,000 of staff time was put towards raising £30,454 in 2017-2018. The Authority receives 25% of money raised to help offset staff costs (circa £7,600), giving a net cost to the Authority of about £12,400. This equates to a return on investment of 84%, i.e. for every pound it cost the Authority an additional 84p was raised.
- 4.2 Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority is in the process of setting up a visitor gift scheme and forecast a return on investment of 60% once the scheme is up and running - year 3 of operation. CareMoor (Exmoor National Park Authority) supports its scheme with 18.5 hours of officer time. During 2018-2019 it raised £34,232. However only 26% (£9,192) of this was through visitor giving.

5.0 FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS

- 5.1 Fundraising campaigns can raise good levels of funding in a relatively short period. Research also shows that people are more willing to donate to specific causes¹. CareMoor raised £8,500 (25% of income) through campaigns in 2018-2019. One campaign for conserving dormice aimed to raise £2,000, they surpassed their target and raised £5,000. The Lake District Foundation has run fundraising campaigns as part of its visitor gift scheme and return 128% for every pound spent (this includes a range of activities i.e. grant applications, legacies etc.).
- 5.2 There is scope to grow this area of the scheme. The NPA is looking at the funding needs for both current and future projects and some of these projects that resonate with the public will be suitable for fundraising campaigns. As Our Past Our Future Heritage Lottery project and the Higher Level Stewardship scheme end then the need for funding will increase.

6.0 GOING FORWARD

- 6.1 Although the scheme is unlikely to reach the numbers forecast for growth it provides money for conservation and education projects which is very useful to many small, local charities as well as supporting the work of the Trust. The NPA has built a positive relationship with the majority of large hotels in the area as well as smaller providers and our support is well regarded.
- 6.2 All the National Parks with the exception of the New Forest now have a charity that they have set up themselves or one that they work closely with. This enables them to capitalise on opportunities when they occur i.e. being able to accept a charitable donation, run a fundraising campaign for a specific project or work in partnership to access funding that would not be available to a public sector body.
- 6.3 It would make sense for the NPA to develop the relationship with the Trust rather than set up a new charity that would more than likely compete. This has been discussed with the Trustees and they are happy with this proposal – to work together on other aspects of charitable giving alongside the visitor giving scheme. It would not be an

¹ Visitor Giving Payment for Ecosystem Service Pilot, February 2014

exclusive relationship and both the NPA and the Trust would be free to work with others to deliver the best outcomes for the New Forest.

- 6.4 There is interest from the businesses to continue the Love the Forest Ambassador Training. The Trust is very keen to grow its education work and there is an opportunity to work with businesses in the scheme to run events such as an afternoon tea with a guided walk or an evening meal with a talk.

7.0 NPA RESOURCE

- 7.1 The Authority currently supports the scheme with 18.5 hours of officer time. It was initially hoped that as the scheme grew over five years then it would become self-funding as more income was generated. This seems unlikely as the growth of the scheme has been limited.
- 7.2 There is a need for additional communications support; although the website was revamped and the social media channels are more active, better use could be made of them. A regular newsletter would help keep businesses better informed and specialist input would improve the general marketing. If officer time is reduced to 15 hours a week and 5.5 hours of a communications assistant provided there would be no overall increase in cost to the NPA.
- 7.3 The Love the Forest Ambassador training has been well received and there is interest from businesses and a willingness to pay. A rate of £150 could be charged, (discounted to £100 for businesses in the scheme) to cover costs and buy in time such as a ranger or commoner to run the sessions. This model could also be used to run walks/talks from hotels to increase the education work of the Trust.
- 7.4 It is envisaged that any fundraising campaigns or joint grant applications would be additional to the resources above as the Authority will need to invest time and money in seeking funding for these projects anyway.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION:

To consider and if thought appropriate recommend to the full Authority that:

- 1. it continues to support the Love the Forest Visitor Gift Scheme and develops the relationship with the New Forest Trust;**
- 2. and that the MOU is extended by two years (October 2021).**

Equality Impact Assessment:

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