

**AM 564-20**

## **NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **AUTHORITY MEETING – 9 JULY 2020**

#### **NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PARTNERSHIP PLAN REVIEW**

**Report by:** Steve Avery, Executive Director

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At the last Authority meeting in January, Members considered a report setting out what we were already doing with our partners to align our work programmes to the recommendations of the Landscapes (Glover) Review, and how other areas highlighted in the Landscapes Review could be reflected in the new updated National Park Partnership Plan, such as nature recovery, our response to the climate emergency and supporting health and well-being.
- 1.2 It was agreed at the January meeting to convene a series of Member workshops to help inform the Partnership Plan Review and to explore options for establishing a new partnership group with strategic oversight for the delivery of the new Partnership Plan. Today's report updates Members on the work undertaken since the January meeting and considers the 'recovery' role of the Partnership Plan in responding to the Covid-19 (C19) pandemic.

#### **2. Work undertaken since January**

- 2.1 As noted in the Chief Executive's Report, two workshops have been held since January, the first was in February (**climate change**) and the second in March (**traffic and transport**). Both workshops were well attended by Members and representatives from Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, Forestry England, the Verderers and Natural England. Feedback provided by attendees was positive and the notes of the discussions were shared with all those attending.
- 2.2 The remaining two workshops (**connecting people with nature** and **nature recovery**) had been scheduled for April and May but these had to be postponed due to the pandemic. They have now been re-arranged to take place on 15 and 24 July respectively.
- 2.3 In the meantime, officers have started to prepare a skeletal draft of the new Plan, informed by the first two workshops, meetings of the New Forest Leadership Group, wider NPA staff involvement and liaison with external organisations. Other workstreams and groupings, such as the Wildlife Roundtable, Green Halo Partnership and the Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) Steering Group, continue to feed into the process. Progress though has inevitably slowed as a result of C19, with partner organisations having to respond to the immediate challenges of the pandemic. Many organisations in the Forest and beyond are preparing their own

'recovery plans' as we ease out of lockdown and putting measures in place to deal with some of the more immediate impacts. Through the Partnership Plan process, there is clearly an opportunity to bring this work together and to set out a recovery plan for the National Park, its communities, its businesses and its wildlife. This is likely to become a more prominent feature of the updated Partnership Plan although it should be stressed that recreation management and nature recovery were already key areas of focus before the pandemic took hold.

2.4 Broad discussions on the emerging themes for the new Partnership Plan have also featured in the recent Parish Council Quadrant meetings, with more specific actions also considered, such as a new Country Park on the eastern side of the Forest, lowering speed limits on Forest roads and supporting volunteers to help manage and respond to visitor pressures.

2.5 With regard to establishing a new partnership group, we are presently looking at how similar groups work in the Lake District and Peak District National Parks. The 'Lake District National Park Partnership' is made up of representatives from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors whilst the Peak District's 'National Park Management Plan Advisory Group' includes a similar membership. Both groups are supported by the NPAs but are nonetheless independent bodies with their own appointed chairs. The groups have significant roles in leading the review of Partnership/Management Plans and overseeing the implementation of agreed actions. In particular, the groups also act as "think tanks", catalysing flagship and 'game changing' projects with 'breakthrough' actions. We hope to bring a proposal for a new partnership group for the New Forest National Park to the next meeting.

### 3 Emerging key themes

3.1 The new Partnership Plan will need to address important changes affecting the Forest and set out an overall ambition of what will be achieved within the next five years. At the 'heart' of the new Plan will be four guiding themes and a strategy of how they will be achieved through specific actions. These are consistent with the recommendations of the Landscapes Review, the Government's 25-Year Environment Plan, as well as nationally and locally important issues for the National Park. The emerging impacts of the pandemic will also need to be taken into account in every theme. The exact wording will be determined later in the process, but the themes will address:

- **Climate and nature emergency:** mitigation, adaption and resilience; reversing loss of biodiversity
- **People and the National Park:** managing recreational pressures, connecting and inspiring local communities/visitors; diversity and inclusion; awareness and understanding;
- **Living in the National Park:** economic and social activity; cultural heritage; vibrant communities through jobs and affordable housing; transport and more sustainable ways of accessing and moving through the National Park
- **New ways of working:** a stronger partnership which can achieve more with shared resources and coordinating its work – especially as a result of C19

- 3.2 The Wildlife Roundtable has continued to develop a framework for long term nature recovery in the National Park. The focus has been on agreeing the broad areas of opportunity for expanding the high-quality habitats that underpin the special qualities of the National Park and also looking to identify opportunities for providing quality green spaces with wildlife interest near to where people live. Obtaining the support of key partners from across the conservation sector for a nature recovery strategy for the National Park is a key objective of the Wildlife Roundtable. The Partnership Plan is being drawn up at a time of considerable change in national environmental and agricultural policy and both the Wildlife Roundtable and Forest Farming Group are important networks to help identify actions that will deliver our “Net Zero with Nature” ambitions set out in January.
- 3.3 The RMS Steering Group is meeting on 2 July 2020 and in addition to the 22 RMS actions already agreed, partner organisations are focusing their priorities on urgent matters to deal with the new C19 related challenges over the coming months, such as verge parking, litter, fire risk and unauthorised overnight camping. Through the quadrants, local communities have volunteered to assist the statutory organisations in managing these pressures and a ‘summit’ of local councils and Forest organisations has been scheduled for 8 July 2020. Recent months have highlighted the importance of New Forest organisations and the local communities working together and the revised Partnership Plan presents an ideal opportunity to harness this collective work in delivering the two statutory National Park purposes and related duty. The recent success of the joint BBQ campaign is an illustrative example of what can be achieved when the Forest organisations work together.
- 3.4 Beyond the immediate short term, C19 has brought to public and political attention the huge value that the public places in accessing green spaces. Coupled with the prevailing climate emergency, there have been calls on Government to lead a national ‘green recovery’. As reported to the RAPC meeting on 1 June 2020, the 10 English National Parks have formed a National Park Recovery Planning Group to consider how national parks can aid the recovery after lockdown, both nationally and locally.

#### **4. Next steps**

- 4.1 In addition to the rescheduled workshops and the meetings referred to above, further liaison meetings with other stakeholder organisations, charities and interest groups are planned over the coming weeks and months. It remains our intention to hold a single period of public consultation on the draft Partnership Plan, which is now planned for the late autumn 2020. This will be dependent on how far current C19 restrictions are relaxed over the coming months, especially in regard to public meetings and ‘drop-in’ events, which are a normal feature of a public consultation on such a key strategic plan.
- 4.2 Subject to the timing of the public consultation, the revised timetable is to have a draft Partnership Plan ready for formal approval by the Authority and partner organisations by the end of March 2021. In the interim, further progress reports and updates will be reported to Members.

**Recommendation:**

- 1. To note the report and endorse the overall proposed approach to the updated Partnership Plan review.**