

**AM 574-20**

## **NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **AUTHORITY MEETING – 15 OCTOBER 2020**

#### **ESTABLISHING A NEW PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

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

#### **Summary**

Members will recall from previous reports and updates on the Partnership Plan Review that we have been looking into the feasibility of establishing a new partnership group to oversee the implementation of the new Partnership Plan and to lead the review of future updates of the Plan. Similar groups have been established in the Lake District and Peak District National Parks which are supported by the National Park Authority but are nonetheless independent bodies with their own appointed chairs.

This report sets out the current arrangements for progressing the Partnership Plan, how a new partnership plan board might function and the issues for consideration in setting up such a group for the New Forest National Park.

#### **1. Current arrangements**

- 1.1 The Partnership Plan is produced jointly and overseen by a wide range of organisations that include the five constituent local authorities, Natural England, Forestry England, the Verderers and the Environment Agency.
- 1.2 In advance of preparing the 2015 Partnership Plan, a new Leadership Group was established comprising senior officers from each of the five local authorities, NE, EA whilst the Verderers are represented by the Official Verderer and Forestry England by the Deputy Surveyor. The Leadership Group retains strategic oversight over the implementation of the 2015 Partnership Plan and this has included mid-term monitoring and evaluations as well as approval and publication of the annual progress reports. The Group meets quarterly and meetings are chaired by the Authority's Chief Executive, supported by the Authority's Executive Director and Partnerships and Community Officer.
- 1.3 More recently, Partnership Plan 'tours' were held in 2018 and 2019 to review partnership projects 'on the ground' and these were successful in engaging councillors from the constituent authorities in the management and conservation of the Forest. However, senior councillors/leaders of the constituent authorities have no other direct input to the Partnership Plan except through appointments to the National Park Authority itself and/or ratifying updates of the Partnership Plan through their own committee structures at the end of the review process.
- 1.4 Aside from the Leadership Group, various other partnership groups exist in the Forest such as the Recreation Management Strategy Steering and Advisory Groups, the New Forest Access Forum and the Wildlife Roundtable which all consider various strategic interventions and actions on matters affecting the Forest. During lockdown, additional ad-hoc partnership groups were established to respond to a range of Covid

related recreational issues that included camping provision and re-opening visitor facilities.

- 1.5 In addition to these single purpose partnership groups, there is of course the New Forest Consultative Panel, a hugely important and long standing forum for bringing together the myriad of stakeholders in the Forest to discuss issues and share concerns affecting the National Park. The Panel has an independent chair with the secretariat provided by the NPA.

## **2. Establishing a New Partnership Group**

- 2.1 The Glover Review (2019) called for new ways of working in National Parks with strengthened management plans, suggesting that all public bodies need to be doing more in our national landscapes to recover nature, to meet the challenges of climate change, to better coordinate public transport and to build more affordable homes. With the advent of a new Partnership Plan, coupled with the findings of the Glover Review, now is an opportune time to consider establishing a new Partnership Group to initiate and drive forward meaningful change in the Forest. Such a group could also act as a “think tank” and be a catalyst for flagship and ‘game changing’ projects. The creation of a bespoke Partnership Group to oversee and guide the work of the new Partnership Plan would also emphasise that it is a Plan for the whole of the National Park - not the National Park Authority – and potentially create greater accountability.
- 2.2 It is considered particularly important that any new Partnership Group should include senior elected members from each of the constituent authorities to ensure ‘political buy-in’ and to foster collective leadership and responsibility for delivering and reviewing actions agreed through the Partnership Plan. As issues and opportunities arise in the future that were not anticipated in the Partnership Plan, the pandemic being a good example of an unforeseen event, then a new Board that includes senior politicians is likely to be well positioned to be able to respond more quickly, more joined up and more effectively.
- 2.3 To help Members envisage how a new Partnership Board might be constituted and operate in the future, the terms of reference for the Peak District National Park Management Plan Advisory Group are attached as appendix 1. The stated purpose of the Group is to:
- Act as a champion for the National Park Management Plan.
  - Provide strategic focus and help develop a long term view of the National Park.
  - Provide a forum for the on-going review of implementation of the Management Plan through shared monitoring of its actions and outcomes.
  - Help to drive implementation of the plan by advocating the importance of National Park outcomes and to support action.
  - Provide independent specialist advice and recommendations to the NPA and any relevant delivery partner to help improve actions for delivery and resolve conflict.
  - Providing view points from a range of sectors that potentially impact on the National Park
- 2.4 It is suggested that a Member Task and Finish Group be established, supported by the Executive Director, to investigate the feasibility of, and terms of reference for, a new Partnership Board. This work would entail looking in more detail at how similar groups operate in the Lake District and Peak District National Parks, liaising with the chairs of existing local partnership groups and taking soundings from partners and senior

politicians. It will also be important to consider the relationship between any new Partnership Board and the National Park Authority Board, as well as the other existing groups referred to in 1.4 and 1.5 above (especially the New Forest Consultative Panel). If upon further investigation it is considered feasible and desirable to establish a new Partnership Board, then it would be helpful to coincide the establishment of a new Board with the adoption of the new Partnership Plan next Spring/Summer.

### **3. RECOMMENDATION**

**That a Member Task and Finish Group, supported by the Executive Director, be established to investigate the feasibility of, and terms of reference for, a new Partnership Board, the recommendations of which would be reported to the Authority meeting in March 2021.**

#### **Papers:**

**Contact: Steve Avery**

#### **Equality Impact Assessment:**

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.