

NEW FOREST CONSULTATIVE PANEL

Minutes of the Meeting held via Microsoft Teams Live Event on THURSDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2020

Those present: Bruce Rothnie (Chairman)
Steve Avery (NFNPA)
Alison Hoare (NFDC)
David Stone (Panel Secretariat)
Vicki Gibbon (Panel Secretariat)

Members could log into the virtual meeting but no record was possible of those present. The following members provided apologies in advance.

1 Apologies for absence

Gordon Bailey (Test Valley)
Purgle Linham (Natural England)
Peter Brown (Camping & Caravanning)
John Korbey (Brockenhurst Parish Council)

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone watching the meeting and advised that due to the last meeting in May being cancelled owing to Covid19 restrictions we convened this virtual meeting to provide updates from the NFNPA, NFDC and Forestry England. As no facility was available for members to ask questions during the proceedings, they were invited to submit follow up questions in writing to the Secretariat by 10 September to ensure responses could be included in the minutes.
- 1.2 The Chairman passed on his condolences to Harry Oram's family. Harry sadly passed away earlier in the year. The Chairman expressed his sadness at losing such a dear friend and colleague who had been very committed to his role as Chairman as well as his important contributions as a local parish councillor and member of the National Park Authority. Harry was a well-respected member of the Panel and the Chairman wanted to thank him for his contribution.
- 1.3 The Chairman went on to explain that a new Chairman would now need to be elected, however as a face to face meeting would be required to conduct the voting process we may need to continue with interim arrangements while Covid restrictions remain in place. therefore, The Deputy Surveyor would continue as interim Chairman for the time being as per the constitution of the Panel. The Secretariat has received applications for the Chairman post and details would be sent to Panel members ahead of the first meeting that can be convened face-to-face – hopefully at the next meeting.

2 Approval of Minutes from the meeting held on 5 March 2020

- 3.1 As members were unable to participate it was agreed the minutes from the last meeting would be approved as a true and accurate record unless any members raised any point with the Secretariat in the next week.

4 NFNPA Update – Steve Avery

- 4.1 Mr Avery paid tribute to Harry Oram and his invaluable work in the Forest in a variety of roles including as Panel Chairman.
- 4.2 He reported that since the start of lockdown, NPA staff had been largely working from home and the offices currently remain closed to the public. Despite this, the Authority had still been able to deliver most of its work program including operating a full planning service. Meetings have been held virtually and the NPA was the first planning authority in Hampshire to hold a virtual Planning Committee meeting and these have been convened monthly since April; in addition, an extraordinary Planning Committee meeting was held in July to consider outline planning applications for the Fawley waterside site.
- 4.3 At the end of August, Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre's appointment as a Secretary of State member on the NPA and Chairman came to an end, a new Chairman would be appointed at the next Full Authority meeting in October. New members on the Authority include Stephen Tarling representing the South West Quadrant and a new Secretary of State appointment, Victoria Mander. HCC Councillor Alexis McEvoy had been appointed to the NPA earlier in the year.
- 4.4 Mr Avery commented that the early weeks of lockdown had witnessed an extraordinary period of tranquility and calm in the Forest, however, this changed dramatically in mid-May when the Government started to relax its lockdown restrictions for outdoor recreation. This had an immediate impact on the Forest with significant increases in the number of people visiting the Forest and all the associated problems of litter, verge parking, wild camping etc. The NPA immediately deployed its rangers following the Government's announcement and worked closely with Forestry England in managing these exceptional pressures. This work included campaigns over the summer culminating in the successful removal of disposable BBQs from a number of retail outlets and joint ranger patrols of known visitor 'hot spots'. However, resources were stretched to the limit and demonstrated the practical difficulties and inadequacy of the New Forest bylaws in taking action against inappropriate activities in the Forest.
- 4.5 In response, the NPA launched the New Forest Ambassador scheme in partnership with a number of local councils which mobilised hundreds of volunteers out and about in the Forest interacting with the public and giving out clear messages and promoting the New Forest Code.

- 4.6 He referred to the adoption of the outline planning applications for the Fawley Waterside as mentioned earlier in his presentation – these had been approved at the extraordinary Planning Committee in July. The Secretary of State had since indicated that he did not intend calling the applications in so, as soon as the necessary legal agreements had been completed, the outline planning permissions would be granted, most likely by early November. Further significant planning applications were expected later in the year including the redevelopment of Lyndhurst Park Hotel and sites in Sway and Ashurst.
- 4.7 The Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme had been adopted at the Authority meeting in July which allowed the NPA to levy more contributions to offset the associated impacts of recreation from new residential and visitor accommodation.
- 4.8 The NPA had worked with HCC and NFDC on a “Vision for the Waterside” to help secure additional funds for green infrastructure. The draft Vision document was being taken through the various committee meetings of each authority for members’ endorsement. He said that he would sign post the Panel to the document in the minutes which can be viewed via on the NPA website using the following link - <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/documents/planning-committee/planning-committee-15-09-20/> It was likely that further changes would be made to the document as a result of members’ input.
- 4.9 Mr Avery referred to the latest set of planning reforms put forward by Government with a public consultation running until 29 October. These reforms were wide ranging and proposing fundamental changes, the Government’s aim being to introduce a whole new planning system for England. Officers would be taking a paper on the reforms to the Resources Audit and Performance Committee on 7 September and he would provide a link to this paper in the minutes which can be viewed using the following link - <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/documents/rapc/resources-audit-and-performance-committee-07-09-20/>. This report would provide information on how the Authority intends to respond to the consultation and how communities and individuals could get involved. There would be a National Parks England response but the NPA was also planning its own response to the proposals. He would update the Panel on developments at the next meeting.
- 4.10 He updated members on the New Forest Partnership Plan whereby the organisations responsible have to set out a clear and shared action plan as to how the New Forest will be managed over the next five years. This would be taken forward in the coming autumn and winter.
- 4.11 A further important area of work which was currently being developed was the Authority’s Nature Recovery Plan. This follows on from the 25-year

Environment Plan to benefit wildlife conservation. A round table had been set up of relevant organisations, chaired by the retired CEO of the RSPB bringing together partners looking at key areas which would promote nature recovery in the New Forest.

- 4.12 The Government's response to the Glover Review and recommendations was still awaited. The Agricultural and Environment Bills would be an important future focus for the Authority. These were currently going through Parliament and these will influence the content of the Partnership Plan.

5 NFDC Update – Alison Hoare

- 5.1 Alison Hoare also paid her respects to Harry Oram saying it had been a pleasure to work with him over the years. She then gave an update on the pressures that NFDC had faced since the beginning of the Covid19 pandemic.
- 5.2 Alison explained that like most businesses when lockdown first started many of NFDC's staff were working from home. It was first thought that the food hygiene team would have very little to do due to pubs and restaurants being closed, however many of these businesses became take-aways and officer time was spent helping these adjust to new ways of working whilst complying with Covid19 regulations. Over the last four months the team had received 640 enquiries from employees, customers and the public with 55% being Covid19 related. During this time the team had served two prohibition notices to establishments who had consistently broken the rules. The team had also been very heavily involved in the food hub at Applemore ensuring that food was stored safely and helped with deliveries. The New Forest had one of the highest number of people shielding - 7500 and of those that were registered they had all received weekly food parcels.
- 5.3 Alison advised that since bars and restaurants had been allowed to open NFDC had been working with them to give advice and guidance on Covid19 regulations. Throughout the Forest there had currently been three establishments where a staff member had tested positive for Covid19 and had to close for deep cleaning.
- 5.4 The Environmental Protection team had found that during lockdown there had been a significant increase in noise and bonfire complaints, 138 noise and 79 bonfire complaints all of which were required to be investigated. As lockdown was now being eased, they were bringing back services including issuing more permits and licences for outdoor seating and events.
- 5.5 Alison explained that during lockdown it was difficult to keep going with refuse services and complying with Covid19 regulations, therefore new staff had to be hired along with bringing staff in from other areas of the Council. During this time garden waste collections were stopped to ensure black bag refuse was collected. There had been a particular problem with refuse on coastal areas where the public had left their rubbish. This had included items such as deckchairs, BBQ's and rubber rings. Fly tipping had increased quite significantly due to the household waste sites being closed, NFDC were

working closely with the police and Forestry England to ensure this was cleared away within 24 hours and that fly tippers were prosecuted.

- 5.6 It was highlighted that the Covid19 pandemic had cost New Forest District Council £1,000,000 per month during the first three months, mainly due to loss of income from the closure of Leisure Centres and beach huts and car parking fees. This was combined with the cost of extra equipment such as PPE, vehicle hire and employing extra staff to comply with government regulations. Alison stressed that whilst all this was going on the Council were continuing with their normal work including litter picking, grass cutting and overseeing the work that was required to rebuild the coastal wall at Milford.

6 Forestry England Update – Bruce Rothnie

- 6.1 Bruce Rothnie gave a PowerPoint presentation on the impact Covid19 had on Forestry England. He began by giving a timeline of events from March 2020. Highlighting that from 17 March Forestry England offices were formally closed and staff that could work from home did so with working practices revised to meet the new guidelines. Towards the end of March in response to government guidelines all recreation facilities were closed including campsites and toilet facilities. Following on from this from 24 March carparks with barriers were closed in response to the national guidelines that asked the public not to travel and to stay local for exercise.
- 6.2 During early April, FE was forecasting an income loss of £19m nationally. During negotiations with Defra of this funding position Forestry England were instructed to take advantage of the furlough scheme and to protect jobs. About 40% of staff were furloughed from 1 May 2020. On the 10 May the Government announced that people were allowed to drive to reach places for exercise. With entertainment and leisure venues still closed the number of people accessing the countryside across the country was unprecedented and sustained. FE immediately recalled some furloughed staff to deal with this extra pressure. Due to the dry weather the Forest was also in high fire risk and staff were having to deal with a high incidence of disposable BBQ's, wild camping, wild fires and litter. Subsequently a BBQ ban was imposed but staff, with support of the Fire Service, were dealing with over 100 incidents per day. At the beginning of July most hospitality businesses could re-open under restrictions, including campsites. Camping in the Forest, who operate the campsites on the Crown Lands, took the decision not to open at all in 2020. This led to much concern for potential wild camping on the Forest. Bruce advised that Forestry England worked closely with the NPA and Go New Forest to limit these impacts by promoting positive messages regarding the opening of tourism businesses and only encouraging visitors who had pre-booked their accommodation. Since the opening of retail, restaurants and pubs pressure had begun easing on the forest and we expect this to ease further once schools return shortly.
- 6.3 Bruce Rothnie reminded the Panel that at the end of 2019 a group was established to review the way Forestry England residential properties in the New Forest could best support staff and commoners whilst ensuring that the

property portfolio, as a whole, remained financially sustainable. He was pleased to announce that the Minister approved, in August, the recommendations of the Review Group.

- 6.4 Finally Mr Rothnie advised that Forestry England are working on a five-year project with the Roy Dennis Foundation to re-introduce White tailed Eagles on the Isle of Wight after an absence of 240 years. In 2019 the first six eagles were released and another seven have been released last month, all of which were fitted with a satellite tracker to monitor their movements. More information on this can be found at <https://www.roydennis.org/category/sea-eagle/isle-of-wight-sea-eagles/>

A copy of this presentation can be found on our website.

7 Any Other Business

- 7.1 The Chairman advised that a question had been raised by Martin Fletcher; asking whether the quiet period that happened at the beginning of lockdown had any impact on wildlife in the forest. In response Bruce Rothnie said that there had been a lot of anecdotal evidence that there had been a better response by wildlife. However, with restrictions in place, Forestry England itself has been unable to gather firm evidence from field work. There may be some local groups who have compiled their own information. **A response from Natural England would be attached to the minutes.**
- 7.2 Barry Olorenshaw also raised a question in advance of the meeting concerning how the current Covid crisis has highlighted the importance of good broadband in the Forest, both for businesses and home workers. This point was acknowledged and would be raised as a key issue for further discussion at a Panel meeting.
- 7.3 Alison Bolton sent a letter into the Panel Secretariat regarding fire risk in the New Forest, a copy is attached.
- 7.4 The Chairman asked Panel members for their suggestions for topics to be discussed at future meetings that would be of general interest to all members and relevant across the whole Forest. The Chairman invited members to email the Secretariat with any suggestions in advance of the next meeting.

8 Date of the next meeting.

- 8.1 The Panel noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 3 December 2020 venue and time to be confirmed pending the status of the pandemic at that time.