

AM 590-21

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 29 APRIL 2021

PARTNERSHIP PLAN UPDATE

Report by: Steve Avery, Executive Director

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the review of the Partnership Plan and in particular, seeks Members' approval to carry out a public consultation on the emerging Vision, Issues and Objectives for the new Partnership Plan, as set out in the attached draft consultation document (Annex 1). The report also updates Members on the work of the Task and Finish Group who have been looking into the feasibility of establishing a Partnership Board to oversee implementation of the new Partnership Plan.
- 1.2 Members have been involved in the Partnership Plan review since the first Member workshops in early 2020 and have subsequently been kept updated through regular reports to earlier Authority meetings in July, October and December 2020. Some Members are also currently engaged in the work of the aforementioned Task and Finish Group.
- 1.3 The Covid-19 pandemic has inevitably had an impact on the timescale for developing the new Plan. However several remote meetings and workshops with partner organisations have taken place over the last 12 months and more recently a 'snapshot survey' at the end of last year sought the public's views on how they would like to see the New Forest managed in the future.
- 1.4 At the same time, meetings and updates have continued through other forums such as the Leadership Group¹, Parish Quadrants and the Consultative Panel. Staff have equally been kept informed of the review through their managers and staff meetings and were invited to comment on a first draft version of the new Plan at the beginning of February 2021. An initial draft version of the new Plan was also sent for comment to the nine statutory stakeholders represented on the Leadership Group.
- 1.5 The attached consultation draft document has been prepared following input and comment received from staff and partner organisations over the last few months, and seeks to address the wider aims and objectives set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan, the Landscapes ('Glover') Review and several other national strategies and plans. Even though an official Government response to the Glover Review has still to be published, the emerging new Partnership Plan responds to the

¹ Key partners of the New Forest Leadership Group are senior representatives from NFDC, WC, TVBC, HCC, FE, FC, NE, EA, Verderers. There are about four meetings a year and it is chaired by the NPA.

findings and recommendations of that review.

2. Evaluation of the previous Partnership Plan 2015-2020

2.1 A mid-term review of the previous Partnership Plan was undertaken in 2018, following updates and input from the lead partner organisations. The report included an overview of actions achieved, in progress or not being carried out. It also analysed reasons for good performance or lack of progress of individual actions. Overall, almost 70% of the 90 actions had already achieved their objectives or were at least on track to achieve them, which signalled good progress in delivering the Plan, even at two years before its end date.

2.2 A final evaluation report is currently being finalised once all partners have provided input for their actions. There is already an indication that over 80% of the 90 actions have either achieved or exceeded their original targets. Nonetheless there have been a number of lessons learnt which have informed the drafting of the new Partnership Plan and these include:

- A heavy reliance on a single delivery 'partner' - for more than half of the 90 actions there was only one organisation responsible for implementing an action. This was often the case when the action was part of a statutory remit that might have been carried out regardless of being included in the Partnership Plan. Those actions had a high success rate but were missing the 'partnership' element.
- Well funded projects succeeded - the 'Our Past Our Future' (OPOF) project delivered a quarter of all actions (22).
- Many successfully implemented actions were carried out by partnerships that existed well before the Plan (e.g. the Land Advice Service and the Catchment Partnership), and consequently had a higher chance of success.
- Lack of both human and financial resources were the most cited reasons for actions not progressing well. Many actions were in addition to an organisation's core remit and hence did not have a high enough priority.
- Other reasons for some actions not progressing were unrealistic targets or actions that were initially submitted by individual staff who had since left the organisation without follow-up support.

3. The new Partnership Plan

3.1 It has been agreed through the Leadership Group that the next Plan should be more succinct, with fewer actions and a much greater focus on partnership projects and collaborative working. This aim has been carried through the review process and should culminate in a much shorter, more strategic Plan. The new Plan will provide a framework to achieve ambitious but necessary outcomes over the next five years. In order to be able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances and priorities, it is proposed to support the Plan with an annual work programme.

3.2 The annual work programmes will cross-reference specific outcomes in the new Plan and define those objectives further in terms of relevant (lead) partners, timelines and resources for each action. The first year's work programme is currently

being drafted and will be finalised following feedback from the public consultation.

- 3.3 The format and design of the new Plan will reflect the intention to be read predominantly online, although downloadable pdf documents will also be available.
- 3.4 Many aspects of the original Vision for the National Park, first published in the 2010 Management Plan, remain relevant for the next decades, but some pressures that have emerged in recent years now need to be addressed appropriately. These include the impacts of climate change, the nature emergency and growing visitor pressures on the Forest. This has been reflected in a slightly adapted Vision for the New Forest from the original version. The Special Qualities have not changed since the National Park was established and remain in the new Plan with some very minor amendments to their descriptions. Similarly the role of the Partnership Plan has not changed but an added emphasis on the 'Sandford Principle' has been included. In order to demonstrate to the reader how the Plan fits together with existing plans and strategies, a diagram will illustrate the various connections between them.
- 3.5 The main part of the new Plan will address the principal challenges and opportunities facing the New Forest before setting out a shared ambition and an agenda for action, where the focus will be on achieving outcomes in five key areas:
 - **Nature Recovery** – habitats are restored, expanded and maintained to enable wildlife to thrive, both within and around the National Park
 - **Net Zero with Nature** – significant cuts in land-based carbon emissions are secured through restoring natural habitats and carbon capture
 - **Thriving Forest** – a living, working Forest is sustained through support for commoning, local produce, sustainable tourism, access to affordable homes and helping to attract high-value businesses and employees
 - **An inclusive National Park** – people within reach of the New Forest, of all backgrounds, abilities and socio-economic groups, value the National Park as an important part of their lives and seek to care for it
 - **Team New Forest** – communities, businesses and organisations work together as a team to deliver the vision of the Partnership Plan, sharing knowledge, ideas and resources to deliver the best for the Forest

These five key themes are then explained in more detail, including a summary of why they are important, with key strategic objectives that will guide the actions in the annual work programmes. A number of areas still need to be worked up in more detail, especially the 'key state-of-play indicators' for each theme.

4. **Review process for the remainder of this year**

- 4.1 Subject to Members' consideration and further input to the emerging draft document, a public consultation is planned to take place in early summer (mid June). This will include the use of social media to raise public awareness of the Partnership Plan review and to invite comments on the draft Plan.
- 4.2 In advance of the formal public consultation in mid June, we shall seek further input and comment from partner organisations and local associations/groups and work up

the supporting detailed annual work programme for years one and two. The attached working draft consultation document is therefore likely to be subject to further change and amendment prior to the formal public consultation in June.

- 4.3 At the conclusion of the consultation in July, all representations received will need to be considered by the partner organisations and further revisions incorporated into the draft document. It is anticipated to have a final version of the new Plan ready for adoption by all the partner organisations in time for the Authority meeting in October.

5. Establishing a new Partnership Board

- 5.1 Following a report to the Authority meeting last October (AM 574-20), a Member Task and Finish Group was convened to consider the merits of establishing a new Partnership Board to oversee the implementation of the new Plan. Members will recall that the Glover Review called for new ways of working in National Parks with strengthened management plans, suggesting that all public bodies need to be doing more to deliver the two statutory National Park purposes and associated duty.
- 5.2 The Task and Finish Group has now met on three occasions to discuss the 'pros and cons' of establishing a new Partnership Board and to consider how it might work to best effect. The Group has approached the task with a healthy degree of scepticism and does not wish to simply create a new 'talking shop'. Key points to emerge from the Group's deliberations can be summarised as follows:
- The key determinant for the success of the new Board will be its ability to present a shared New Forest position 'up and out' to key influencers and decision makers both at the regional and national level.
 - High level buy-in from the statutory partner organisations is seen as essential if it is to be an effective Board.
 - Board membership would be relatively small, drawn principally from the statutory partner organisations.
 - It must not duplicate the work of existing groups but there will need to be provision for these groups to contribute ideas and information to the Board.
 - The Board will only come into effect once the new Partnership Plan has been approved.
 - The role of the Board will be to oversee and help secure resources for implementation of the new Plan. The exact terms of reference of the new Board will be discussed with partner organisations over the coming months.

Recommendation:

1. **The Authority undertakes a formal a public consultation on the emerging new Partnership Plan in June 2021, based on the attached draft document (Annex 1) and subject to (i) the receipt and consideration of any further comments from the statutory partner organisations and (ii) any subsequent changes to the draft document that are agreed between the Executive Director and the Chair of the Authority (prior to the consultation); and**

- 2. The Authority works with the statutory partner organisations to establish a Partnership Board to oversee implementation of the new Partnership Plan.**

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Equality Impact Assessment:

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