

## **Recreation Management Strategy Advisory Group Tuesday 25 May 2021 via Microsoft Teams**

### Attendance:

Steve Avery, NFNPA	Claire Lambert, NE
David Bennett, NFD OG	Charlotte Lines, CDA
Rachael Bowen (notes), NFNPA	Nigel Matthews, NFNPA
Richard Burke, Forestry England	Leanne Sargeant, Forestry England
Anthony Climpson, Go New Forest	Brian Tarnoff, New Forest Association
Ruth Croker, New Forest Access Forum	Richard Taylor, NFNPA
Barry Dowsett, Verderers	Philip Thomas – New Forest Cycle Working Group
John Durnell, HIWWT – from Item 5	Claire Upton-Brown, NFDC
Tim Dyer, NFDC	
Louise Evans, NFDC	
David Illsley, NFNPA	

### Apologies:

Renny Henderson, RSPB  
Dylan Everett, National Trust  
Nick Wardlaw, FE  
Graham Smith, Test Valley Borough  
Council  
Jenny Thomas, NE

## **1 Welcome / Introductions**

1.1 Richard Taylor welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

## **2 Minutes of the last RMS Advisory Group meeting (21 January 2021)**

2.1 The minutes were agreed as a true record.

## **3 Matters arising from both RMS Advisory Group and RMS Steering Group (26 April 2021) meetings**

3.1 Timescales relating to the England Coast Path – small section north of Calshot should be established late this year or early 2022.

3.2 Verge parking – This work is ongoing with consultants looking at whether a Traffic Regulation Order could work in the New Forest. A report is expected in time for the next Steering Group meeting planned for July. Now that Covid-19 restrictions are easing, site visits to progress feasibility work on the Local Development Order will restart.

3.3 The web page on positive and negative impacts of recreation is now live on the NPA website.

#### **4 2021 Action Plan update (Caring for the Forest, caring for each other) – Nigel Matthews**

- 4.1 Nigel Matthews gave a presentation, explaining the actions being carried out in preparation for the expected increase in visitors as Covid-19 restrictions continue to ease. The five areas covered are: commoning, community, capacity, New Forest Code and cooperation. The presentation highlighted lots of ongoing initiatives and joint working with many New Forest organisations.
- 4.2 In response to a question about signage in alternative languages and people for whom English is not their first language, Nigel confirmed that the New Forest Code and a lot of signs use symbols to help with this issue.
- 4.3 The New Forest Code has been added to Go New Forest's 30+ visitor information panels around the Forest and to its website and businesses are proactively sharing the Code. Signs asking people not to feed or pet the animals are on order and will be deployed at 'hot spots', and the NFNPA and Forestry England have both taken on additional seasonal rangers. It was suggested that people should be encouraged to go to places like Longdown Activity Farm if they wanted to pet animals.

#### **5 Strategic Actions – achievements since 2019 – Nigel Matthews**

- 5.1 The Strategic Actions report demonstrates that a huge amount of recreation management work is happening.
- 5.2 Some members of the Group suggested that greater recognition could be given to achievements of all Advisory Group organisations (not just the 'managing agencies') to show their collective action. This could be through the Advisory Group meetings, an event (perhaps annually) or/and through additional content on the NPA website.
- 5.2 In answer to a question, the consortium referred to in Action 5.3 was the Forest Farming Group established to help influence the direction of Government grants like the forthcoming ELMS funding. Group members thought that clarity on this funding may not emerge before 2023, with applications allowed a year or two later. Brian Tarnoff suggested that the Access Forum should have opportunity to discuss use of the funds with the Forest Farming Group.

#### **6 Partnership Plan for the National Park – Steve Avery**

- 6.1 All National Parks are required by statute to produce a Management Plan, showing how statutory organisations have committed to deliver National Park purposes. The New Forest's Plan (Partnership Plan) is due to be updated and will be built around five themes: Nature Recovery, Net Zero with Nature, Thriving Forest, an Inclusive National Park and Team New Forest. A full draft document will be available for consultation from mid-June, with a final Plan being published in the autumn. Officers from the NFNPA are happy to attend meetings on request to discuss the Plan and the emerging objectives. Detailed actions for delivery in the first year or two will be developed during the summer.

Action: Steve Avery to send to the Group the working draft Partnership Plan that went to the April Authority meeting - *done*

- 6.2 The Group discussed various topics arising from the presentation, including issues around coastal areas, restoring and extending natural habitats and how this would work in relation to recreation (both within and outside the National Park), and the importance of demonstrating that nature has recovered through solid evidence and agreed performance indicators.

## **7 NFDC's Green Way habitat mitigation scheme – NFDC**

- 7.1 Tim Dyer gave a detailed presentation about NFDC's Green Way habitat mitigation scheme, showing improvements to specific sites and routes designed to provide additional recreation opportunities local to new development. Along with work by a ranger, this aims to ensure there is no increase in recreational pressure on designated habitats in the 'core' of the Forest resulting from the development.

## **8 A strategic approach to habitat mitigation – David Illsley**

- 8.1 David Illsley then updated the Group on work towards a more strategic approach to mitigating the recreational impacts of planned new development. Currently, local planning authorities with habitat mitigation strategies (such as NFNPA, NFDC and TVBC) develop them independently. However, a successful joint bid for Government funding had enabled a consultant (Footprint Ecology) to do extensive research to inform how all nearby planning authorities could work together efficiently and effectively to protect the New Forest's designated habitats. Recreational visits to these habitats in the New Forest are predicted to rise by 11% by 2036 as a result of planned new housing development. The research resulted in huge amounts of data and information about how both local people and visitors from further afield use the New Forest for recreation.
- 8.2 All neighbouring authorities are now involved in these discussions (including planning authorities from Wiltshire and Dorset), with a current focus on defining an agreed 'zone of influence' within which new development would need to provide mitigation (as in other strategic schemes such as Solent Bird Aware and the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership).
- 8.3 NFDC's work to improve recreation sites and routes was commended, and NFDOG offered to help promote them. However, there was a desire for planning authorities to work together to create larger areas and bigger projects with greater ambition. Some felt that the evidence being used is more focused on people than on their recreational impacts on wildlife. There was a discussion about whether the alternative sites provided for recreation were relieving pressure on the SPA/SAC or just drawing people away from other nearby suburban locations, although it was pointed out that the Footprint Ecology research supported the adopted approach.
- 8.4 NFDC confirmed that the new/improved sites were not intended to replicate the wider New Forest and attract people in cars, but to cater for people close

to where they live. The mitigation strategy had been supported at a Planning Inquiry and by Natural England.

- 8.5 Some NFDC developer contributions have been reserved to fund ecological surveys of the designated site and proposals for monitoring work are welcome.
- 8.6 Concern was expressed that some neighbouring authorities (e.g., Southampton and Bournemouth/Poole) do not currently have habitat mitigation strategies to address the impacts of their development on the New Forest. Planning authorities for the neighbouring urban areas are represented on the project steering group for the strategic New Forest mitigation work and the evidence base highlights the frequency of visits to the New Forest's designated sites from these areas.
- 8.7 Some sites provided for local recreation have great potential for increased biodiversity alongside increased footfall, especially as most plants and animals are not affected by people or dogs using the sites.
- 8.8 Natural England staff are supporting planning authorities to develop monitoring programmes, measure success and revise mitigation strategies.

## **9 AOB**

- 9.1 The next meeting could be virtual or in person.
- 9.2 Topics could include giving greater recognition of collective actions and successes of all the organisations on the RMSAG (see 5.2 above). Anthony Climpson offered to explain the benefits of tourism and highlight the work done by businesses to reduce recreation impacts.

## **10 Date of next meeting**

- 10.1 Early September.