

RAPC 499/23

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 6 February 2023

Team New Forest - Authority partnership working in support of local produce through the New Forest Marque

Report by: Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy

1 Summary

- 1.1 The Re:New Forest Partnership Plan highlights the need for a culture of collaboration to deliver key policies and measures to enhance the National Park landscape, economy and communities. The Authority has a number of existing partnerships in place that illustrate the Team New Forest approach. This paper looks at our work with New Forest Produce Limited, which manages the New Forest Marque local food and produce scheme.

Recommendation:

Members are requested to note the content of the report

2 Background to the New Forest Marque

- 2.1 New Forest Produce Limited (NFPL) is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, which was set up in 2003 with support from New Forest District Council to help protect and preserve the New Forest's unique environment and its farming and commoning way of life.
- 2.2 The New Forest Marque has grown from its original format – 'Forest Friendly Farming' – to encompass all aspects of artisan and rural business and has also forged strong ties with retail and hospitality sectors which also have interest in preserving and promoting the New Forest and championing local fare produced within the New Forest Marque boundary which encompasses the National Park and New Forest District Council area
- 2.3 New Forest Produce Limited is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors and Chair. An Operations Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Marque, supported by a part-time Communications officer; both are paid posts.
- 2.4 Membership of the Marque is open to businesses who can meet relevant eligibility criteria:
 - All produce must be grown, reared, caught, brewed or produced within the scheme boundary.
 - All producers/businesses must operate in accordance with Trading Standards, Environmental Health, Animal Welfare Standards, and any other relevant UK and European licensing and legislation.
 - Further specific criteria depending on the category of business.

2.5 The number of members in the Marque scheme varies year-on-year but is regularly between 150-160 across the categories of Food and Drink, Craft, Retail and Hospitality. Associate membership is available to those local New Forest based enterprises who do not meet the full criteria for Marque membership but who wish to show their support for local produce.

2.6 All Marque members are licenced to use the New Forest Marque logo.

3 National Park Authority support for the Marque

3.1 The National Park Authority (NPA) has a long history of supporting the New Forest Marque, which is regarded as a key means by which the NPA can deliver our economic duty.

3.2 An NPA member is a voting Director of the NFPL Board, supported by the Head of Environment and Rural Economy in a non-voting role.

3.3 For many years the NPA provided a cash grant to the Marque, along with in-kind administrative, and occasional accountancy support. The size of the grant support has varied between £15–25k per annum with some additional support for specific projects from the Sustainable Communities Fund. Since September 2021, at the request of the NFPL Board, the support from the NPA has been the equivalent of £25k per annum, made up of a seconded part-time Communications post and a small cash grant. A small amount of additional staff support is provided to assist with engagement with existing Marque members. This arrangement has helped develop the profile of the Marque, particularly through events, social media and the Marque website [The New Forest Marque® - The Sign Of True Local Produce](#).

3.4 The role of the New Forest Marque in supporting local producers, many of whom are micro and small enterprises, and the NPA's ongoing investment has been regularly showcased within the National Park family and highlighted to Defra officials as key means by which the NPA can encourage local businesses who, through their produce, strengthen the cultural landscape of the New Forest.

4 The future for the New Forest Marque

4.1 Trading for Marque businesses has been challenging through the Covid pandemic, especially as many rely on sales to tourists and visitors to the National Park. For those whose business is primary production and local food products these challenges have been exacerbated by changes in government support for agriculture and the rural economy since the departure from the EU in 2020.

4.2 The Chair of NFPL, who has held the post for three years has worked to ensure the Marque provides a supportive network for its members, with the result that membership numbers have remained relatively stable despite the tough economic conditions (160 at the end of 2022). The board has developed clear goals for the period up to 2025, aiming to reach 200 members and increase revenue to the point where it is a freestanding organisation that is not reliant on a sole source of funding.

4.3 A flagship project for 2023 will be the launch of a new membership category – New Forest Inspired – which will be open to people who create authentic and original art

or crafts and trade within the New Forest. It will welcome people who currently do not meet the criteria for the Marque, but who create art and crafts inspired by the New Forest and uphold the values and ethos of the Marque. The new category will aim to attract a minimum of 30 new members in the first year.

5 Ongoing involvement in the Marque by the NPA

- 5.1 The NPA recently helped prepare a bid to the Arts Council National Lottery Projects grant fund in support of the Inspired project and is awaiting the outcome of the application.
- 5.2 It is intended that the NPA will continue to financially and non-financially support the New Forest Marque, which has a key role in delivering the aims of the *Re:New Place Thriving Forest* element of the Partnership Plan. The Marque provides a key means of engaging with the micro and small producers who represent much of the culture of the National Park. The changes in agricultural support that will be in place through the Environmental Land Management scheme in 2024, and the new Rural Shared Prosperity Fund that is available from April 2023, has the potential to provide significant opportunities for many of the Marque businesses.

Recommendation

Members are requested to note the content of the report

Contact:

Paul Walton
Tel: 01590 646631
Email: paul.walton@newforestnpa.gov.uk