

NEW FOREST CONSULTATIVE PANEL

Minutes of the 248th Meeting held in the Forest Hall, Brockenhurst Village Hall, Highwood Road, Brockenhurst on THURSDAY, 5 November 2015

Those present: Clive Chatters (Chairman)
David Stone (Panel Support Officer)
Jo Murphy (Panel Secretariat)
Frances Connolly (Panel Secretariat)
Rachael Bowen (Panel Secretariat)

Members as shown on the Official List, with the exception of those listed below for whom apologies were received.

Also present: Hector Pearson (National Grid)
Sarah Kelly (NPA Landscape Officer)

22 Apologies for absence

22.1 Apologies for absence were received from:

Jo Florance – NF Dog Owners
Gerald Lewis – Sopley Parish Council
Kate Crisell – Totton Town Council
Peter Brown – Camping and Caravanning Club
Alan Harmeet - Wellow Parish Council

23 Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2015

23.1 Robert Clarke clarified that the comments attributed to him in minute item 16.6 were the opinions of Burley Parish Council and not his personal views as stated. He also requested that the minutes record the view that questions remained unanswered and that he had proposed that a forum be established to discuss the outstanding questions.

23.2 Sue Bennison clarified that the logs referred to in minute item 20.4 were stumps that had been placed on the verge in order to define the verge and perhaps discourage parking.

23.3 Subject to the above clarifications the minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

Action: The Secretariat to make the above amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2015. Completed.

24 Matters arising

24.1 Minute item 16.7 stated that Professor Shepherd's slides could be found on the website; however Mr Clarke said that he had been unable to locate them.

Action: The Secretariat to investigate and upload any missing information to the website. Completed.
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24.2 Mike Moriarty (Copythorne Parish Council) enquired about the progress made with regards to inviting a representative from the Environment Agency to address the Panel on flooding raised under minute item 12.1. The secretariat agreed to approach the Environment Agency and the Chairman requested that this matter also be included under the 'Panel agenda setting' item later in the meeting.

24.3 This matter was subsequently raised under agenda setting (see item 29.1 of these minutes)

25 National Park Authority (NPA) update

25.1 Alison Barnes, the NPA's Chief Executive explained that the Management Plan had now been ratified by all the partner organisations. She reminded the Panel that it was a partnership plan and that 40 organisations had pledged actions within it.

25.2 She stated that she was pleased to announce that the NPA had secured a £2.8 million lottery grant for the New Forest. She explained that the £4.4 million scheme would be shared across 21 projects involving 10 organisations and be known as Our Past, Our Future (OPOF). She reminded the Panel that only about 50% of the New Forest was made up of Crown Lands and that the projects would be focussed outside the Crown Lands.

25.3 Ms Barnes informed the Panel that work was now well underway on updating the NPA's Local Plan and that the consultation period was open. She said that the timing coincided with a number of other neighbouring local authorities, such as East Dorset District Council and Southampton City Council, who were also reviewing their local plans.

25.4 Ms Barnes gave a brief overview of other activities that were currently ongoing, such as the NPA's involvement in the Hampshire County Council's devolution bid, the Lidar exhibition at the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst and the annual Volunteer Fair to be held in January. She also updated the Panel on the recent Navitus Bay planning decision and the successful Walking Festival which took place during half term.

25.5 Ms Barnes informed the Panel that she had recently attended the biennial UK National Parks Conference in Dartmoor. She said that some very insightful discussions had taken place which included a 'question and answer' session chaired by Jonathon Dimbleby. She drew members' attention to the Dartmoor National Park website which contained a number of clips from the conference including a short recording made by HRH Prince Charles.

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/index/conference>

26 National Grid – Potential Underground Cabling at Hale Purlieu

26.1 Sarah Kelly introduced Hector Pearson the Visual Impact Provision Project Manager for the National Grid. She explained that the National Grid had a fund set aside to reduce the visual impact of electricity pylons which run through protected landscapes. She explained that a section at Hale Purlieu had initially been shortlisted and that this list had now been reduced down to just four sites; the New Forest, Snowdonia, the Peak District and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Dorset. She said that the project had now reached the feasibility stage and that the NPA would be facilitating meetings and the consultation process between the National Grid, the public and Forest groups.

- 26.2 Hector Pearson gave a detailed presentation on the role of the National grid, how the fund came about, the process by which the sites were selected and the timescales involved. He said that a survey of customers had revealed that they would be happy to pay a little more for their electricity to improve the visual impact of the supply in protected landscapes and that, in consultation with Ofgem, the regulator, £500 million had been set aside for Visual Impact Provision (VIP). He emphasised that this was a significant sum, however stated that it was a very expensive process and would only fund around 30-40 km of high voltage undergrounding.
- 26.3 Mr Pearson outlined the details of the engineering process, and gave reassurances that the landscape would be restored to its original condition after completion of the works, although there would be some inevitable local disruption during the works. He also emphasised that there needed to be a net benefit and that the support of the local community was crucial. Mr Pearson's presentation can be found on the NPA's website and by following this link.
http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/meetings/committee/8/new_forest_consultative_panel
- 26.4 A number of Members raised questions about the impact of the works and were pleased to see that a consultation process was planned that would ensure the local community supported the scheme. In response to questions Ms Kelly explained that there were a number of differences between the objections to the Navitus Bay decision, which would have created a scar across the New Forest landscape to accommodate cables and this scheme. She explained that in the case of the Navitus Bay proposal there would have been a detrimental impact on ancient woodland which could not be restored after the works were completed and that in this instance it was recognised that there was already a detrimental element by the existence of the pylons within the landscape so a net benefit was envisaged.
- 26.5 A number of Members commented that this was a once in lifetime opportunity for the New Forest and that this level of funding was unlikely to be available again in the near future. Clive Chatters thanked Mr Pearson for his time and recommended that he familiarise himself with the area and also the New Forest Acts, under which the New Forest operates. More information could be found at www.nationalgrid.com/vip and Mr Pearson could be contacted by email at visualimpact@nationalgrid.com

27 Forestry Commission Update

- 27.1 Bruce Rothnie, Deputy Surveyor, summarised the works which were ongoing or had recently been undertaken by the Forestry Commission, these included the contribution to the Walking Festival by the Ranger Team, including several Volunteer Rangers; fencing repairs throughout the inclosures; safety inspections of trees along the roadside and the removal and burning of Rhododendron. He also spoke about the wetland restoration projects which continued at a number of sites, explaining that flora and fauna surveys had been conducted throughout the summer and autumn and that Latchmore Brook was now subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment.
- 27.2 Mr Rothnie explained that the Forestry commission had very recently reviewed the information collated regarding instances of fungi picking and explained that there had been 148 occasions when pickers had been intercepted. He said that on the whole these instances were not largescale but that vehicle registration numbers and locations were logged in order to map out the activity and understand the scale and impact the pickers were having.

- 27.3 He alerted the Panel to the increase in deer poaching activity and expressed concern about firearms being discharged at night. He also advised the Panel that the Forestry Commission had secured some lottery funding to restore the Verderers Hall and to increase public access.
- 27.4 In response to a query regarding the accuracy of the Lidar data used for the Pondhead Wetland Restoration scheme, Mr Rothnie explained that he had asked the consultants to relook at the information in question.

28 Panel Savings and Efficiencies

- 28.1 The Chairman, in advance of the presentation, reminded the Panel that Defra were making cuts across the board and the time was right to consider Panel meetings and to put in place any changes for 2016.
- 28.2 David Stone explained that the National Park Authority had faced budget cuts of 40% in recent years and that all public bodies were expected to make savings and become more efficient. Jo Murphy added that only 10 responses had been received back as a result of the recent consultation to Panel members. Jo reminded members of the purpose of the Panel and summarised the proposed changes:
- 4 meetings a year
 - Electronic distribution of papers
 - Alternative technical support

Explaining that each meeting currently costs approximately £1500 to run, David gave a detailed financial breakdown of using Lyndhurst Community Centre as a possible alternative venue, and Brockenhurst Village Hall, running through the benefits and costs for each site.

- 28.3 The presentation also provided figures for member attendance which was currently running at less than 50% attendance.
- 28.4 A number of members expressed their opinion regarding the location of future meetings. Following a vote for each item, the following was agreed:
- Agenda to appear on screen during the meeting
 - 4 meetings per year (4 against, 2 abstentions)
 - Agenda and papers to be distributed by email (2 against)
 - Meetings to be held in Lyndhurst Community Centre (5 against)

29. Panel Agenda Settings

- 29.1 A number of suggestions were made regarding future agenda setting. Members supported the recommendation for a strategic annual agenda setting group to be formed and the following suggestions will be considered under that process.

Subject	Notes
Request made to the Environment Agency to provide an update on measures undertaken to reduce the risk of flooding within in the National Park	Suggested early 2016
Management of ragwort	Deferred from September meeting (see minute item 20.1)
Request that BT Openreach provide an update on the roll out of superfast Broadband	Progress made against 95% target
Management of litter within the National Park	

Underground cabling – follow up presentation by Southern Electric on burying of low voltage cables	Suggested early 2016
Deer management – consider concerns around poaching	

30. Any Other Business

30.1 *Fungi picking in the New Forest*

30.1.1 Graham Baker (New Forest Association) drew the Panel's attention to the fact that the *Hercium erinaceus* mushroom at Rufus Stone had been taken for the fifth year running and added that it was legally protected.

30.1.2 He then mentioned that, at the Authority meeting of 24 September, the question of fungi picking was discussed and that one action under Developing an Educational Campaign was that NPA officers would work with relevant New Forest Marque restaurants, pubs and hotels to develop a better understanding of the conservation issues associated with the supply of mushrooms from the Forest to the table. He queried what action had been taken to date. Alison Barnes advised that Paul Walton (Head of Environment and Rural Economy, NFNPA) was currently liaising with restaurants, foragers, etc and that a meeting had been scheduled with the New Forest Association for 11 November to report back on what progress had been made. She invited Panel organisations to feed any suggestions into this process by contacting either Paul Walton or herself. When pressed for a more detailed update on progress by Alison Bolton of Boldre Parish Council, she advised that she would liaise directly with Paul Walton and forward a full response to both Graham Baker and Alison Bolton. *The following is an extract of the response sent after the meeting is attached below for information of all Panel members.*

You will be aware that the issue of fungi collecting was discussed at the National Park Authority meeting on 24 September where the Authority resolved to:

- 1 welcome and fully support the measures proposed by the Forestry Commission to disrupt large scale commercial picking;*
- 2. work with others to develop an educational campaign to raise awareness of the ecological importance of fungi and to encourage people to enjoy and study them in situ; and*
- 3. engage with the Forestry Commission and Natural England towards updating and strengthening the current code of practice for fungi picking and, together with local landowners, develop a specific code of practice for the New Forest.*

These resolutions set the context for our work on fungi picking.

With regard to contact with pubs and restaurants, which was a specific enquiry at the Consultative Panel, I see this as coming under 2) above. I will be using our involvement with the New Forest Marque to approach 21 hotels who are Marque members, aiming to engage them in a discussion about fungi picking and the provenance of the mushrooms they have on their menus. We will also be working with Park and FC rangers to develop an education campaign but this will not be in place for this autumn / winter season.

Since the Authority meeting we have continued to work with the Forestry Commission and they are sharing their information on commercial scale picking with us so that we can get a better understanding of the extent of the activity. We have worked with the

National Trust following their decision to curtail all picking on the Northern Commons and I have met with John Rentsen, who runs organised fungal forays, predominantly on private land in the National Park.

The issue of applying a personal fungi picking limit will now also need to be reviewed following the British Mycological Society's decision to withdraw the 1998 Wild Mushroom Pickers' Code of Conduct and I will be meeting Natural England and others to consider the implications of this development for the New Forest.

Lastly, given the close interest in the subject of fungi picking I intend to set up a stakeholder group as a means of keeping interested parties up to date with progress on our work and that of others. I will let you know the details of the first meeting, which I hope will be in December or January.

30.1.4 Dylan Everett (National Trust) commented that, as with other areas, the New Forest was seeing a large increase in foragers. The Trust supported a voluntary code of conduct with clear areas of responsibility to restrict indiscriminate fungi picking, particularly in sensitive areas such as SSSI's. He said that the discussion at the November meeting would provide local organisations with an update on developments to limit commercial picking and what could be done in providing a more co-ordinated approach and enhanced awareness of the problem.

30.2 *Flooding under Beaulieu to Brockenhurst railway bridge*

30.2.1 Alan Glass (Fawley Parish Council) advised that during the current heavy rains, a vehicle had become stuck in the flooding under the railway bridge at Balmer Lawn Road. As this was an on-going problem, he had hoped Mr Bastow from Hampshire County Council Highways would be present at the meeting to comment on measures to avoid flooding. Edward Heron advised that depth markers were clearly visible at the bridge but that the cost of undertaking any engineering works to alleviate the flooding was prohibitive.

31. **Date of the next meeting**

31.1 In line with the decisions taken under 'Panel Savings and Efficiencies' and detailed in minute item 28, the Panel noted that the next Consultative Panel meeting would now take place **19.30 hours on 3 March 2016** in the **Lyndhurst Community Centre**.

The meeting closed at 21.50 hrs.