

RAPC 539/24

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 3 JUNE

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Report for Approval

Report by: Hilary Makin, Communications Manager

1. Summary

- 1.1 Communication plays a vital role in everything we do at the New Forest National Park Authority. This Communications Plan highlights the direction NPA communications will take to help deliver the joint Partnership Plan, the NPA business plan and our new annual work programme for 2024-25.
- 1.2 The plan will ensure we tell a consistent and compelling story about the National Park as a place and where it is going, and the role of the National Park Authority, partners and communities to help the place achieve its potential.
- 1.3 It is intended to offer a strategic overview of where we should concentrate communications resources; of areas where the NPA needs to undertake more work to ensure it is reaching its full potential; and to offer an insight into how the communications team is working to deliver the NPA's communications goals for the life of the Business Plan.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to approve the Draft Communications Plan at Annex 1.

2. Scope of the plan

- 2.1 Communications is an ever-evolving area of work with both proactive and reactive elements. As a result, this plan does not set out to prescribe the exact nature of all our communications but provides a framework and principles to help us develop and prioritise our work.
- 2.2 The NPA communications team provides support not only for NPA work but also for partnership projects and schemes including the Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme; the New Forest Marque; the New Forest Tour and partnership funding schemes led by the NPA such as the youth for climate and nature 'YouCAN' scheme. These partnership projects and schemes have their own separate communications plan and are not dealt with in detail in this overall NPA communications plan but are interlinked.
- 2.3 Officers, Authority board members and, to some extent volunteers, all share responsibility for communicating our aims and objectives effectively, listening to our

audiences and adapting our services and messages according to the outcomes of that engagement.

3. Context

- 3.1 Communications work is rapidly changing. The role of the traditional media is in decline with print journalism in particular seeing a dramatic drop in circulation. Mainstream TV and radio do not have the same reach, resonance and authority they once did, particularly with younger people. This has provided us with challenges and opportunities in connecting with different audiences.
- 3.2 Increasingly we are our own publishers and broadcasters, talking and engaging directly with our audiences rather than through the filter of the media. Unlike traditional media, online media allows us to target specific messages at specific audiences, track how we're doing, and amend campaigns as we go. However, while embracing online channels, we must be mindful of the local demographic when aiming to reach local audiences, many of whom still rely on traditional media as a main source of information.
- 3.3 In a wider context, reducing public sector resources also mean a greater need to make our communications work even harder, to be more targeted and effective, which can mean difficult choices in what we choose to prioritise and what we may have to say no to.

4. Current status

- 4.1 The NPA is believed to be the biggest online brand in the National Park, other than the tourism body Go New Forest and attractions such as Paulton's Park and Beaulieu; with over 140,000 followers on our main social media accounts; a popular email newsletter which reaches 26,000 and is our most engaged audience; and includes a number of websites.
- 4.2 It continues to publish a bi-annual residents newspaper Park Life within the Lymington Times newspaper, with additional copies distributed at events and community outlets. A Pocket Guide is distributed each year to visitors through tourism outlets with 250,000 copies in circulation. Around 100,000 Essential Guide magazines are produced in conjunction with Forestry England which are available in its car parks and other outlets. Leaflets, posters and a range of other publications are produced for corporate requirements such as the annual review, as well as for projects and events.
- 4.3 Over 40 press releases are issued each year and a similar number of press enquiries are handled, as well as a number of interviews and media opportunities.
- 4.4 The small communications team handles a series of NPA events including promoting the Volunteer Fair; the Awakening Festival on climate and nature emergencies; the Green Halo Conference; the NPA's presence at the New Forest Show; and the Walking and Cycling Festival – all organised in conjunction with other NPA teams.
- 4.5 Behaviour change campaigns are run on an annual basis with a wide range of partner organisations, primarily on recreation management issues and focussed around the New Forest Code.

- 4.6 Awards schemes include the Building Design Awards and National Park Awards with the CLA are organised by the team to recognise and celebrate best practice and people going above and beyond to support National Park communities and the New Forest way of life.
- 4.7 Visual communications are prioritised by social media and enable our messages to get across quickly to a wide range of audiences. Our graphics requirements are outsourced to a number of agencies and freelancers, ensuring brand consistency. The team oversees photography requirements and maintains a media library for staff and external contacts. Video is an increasingly important medium and the team has prioritised this as an output, which is particularly useful in reaching younger audiences.
- 4.8 The team ensures compliance with our responsibilities in terms of accessibility, data protection, copyright etc.

5. Input

- 5.1 The plan has been informed by a recent staff session and a members' session which were well-attended.
- 5.2 The sessions considered the five Partnership Plan themes and looked at key priorities and projects, target audiences and messages.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 If agreed by Members, the plan will be implemented through a delivery calendar developed to support the coming year's work programme. Communications updates are regularly provided to Members at Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meetings and through the Chief Executives' report taken to the full Authority.
- 6.2 The Communications Plan will be reviewed at the end of this Business Plan period.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to approve the Draft Communications Plan at Annex 1.

Contact: Hilary Makin: hilary.makin@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Annexes attached to the report:

Annex 1 - Draft Communications Strategy

Annex 2 – Examples of key messages

Annex 3 – Joint Communications Campaigns Calendar

Equality Impact Assessment: The Strategy includes a number of principles of engagement designed to ensure both equality and equity in engaging with as wide an audience as possible.