

## CONSULTATIVE PANEL MEETING – 6 December 2024

### CHAIR'S REPORT

**Report by:** Brian Tarnoff, Chair, New Forest Consultative Panel

#### **1 Chair's Notes on the Previous Meeting**

I would like to thank the Panel Members again for bearing with what was both one of our longest but best attended meetings in recent memory. Over the course of roughly two and a quarter hours, with more than half unusually devoted to guest presentations and questions, the usual panel business with statutory partners was shoehorned into an hour. While my goal has been to re-invigorate attendance, I'll readily admit that this was likely due to the interest in the controversial Exxon Pipeline proposal.

##### **1.1 Exxon Pipeline**

While I could report on the extensive Q&A, as this particular local project has been dropped. The interest and vigour of engagement is heartening, even if it may now be viewed as time wasted. The only downside, along similar lines, is that the planning process for the project, had it gone forward, would have been a rehearsal for local engagement with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, which we'll likely face when ABP bring forward Dibden Bay.

##### **1.2 New Forest Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)**

I'm very grateful to Jim Mitchell substituted for Ben Kennedy, of HCC, very much at the last minute when my plan to include the presenter remotely fell over technological hurdles (upside, this has since been resolved for future occasions).

The public consultation ran from 9<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024. It will be hosted on HCC's website which will include a large-scale interactive map to fully understand the routes.

.The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- Lyndhurst to Brockenhurst has route: have Verderers and NE been consulted
  - Route has been audited, but not decided on until feasibility.
- Have tranquil areas been taken into consideration. One route goes through tranquil area.
  - Most routes on roads / existing gravel tracks, any others will be subject to permissions that will include tranquillity assessment.
- Future funding?
  - A strategic overview to set priorities, there are funds for active travel, having the plan helps garner that funding.

- Encourages members to respond to LCWIP Consultation from the Chair of the Cycle Working Group
- Lymington Pennington have done their own cycling route, will this be included?
  - There is a bigger piece of work being done in the south of the Forest. The submission of additional routes to the process through the consultation along with relevant background information is encouraged.
- Will there be cycle paths, or just signage?
  - There will be a mix, and signposting .
- Noted route by A338 Fordingbridge, would land have to be purchased?
  - Would be part of feasibility. HCC own some of the verges.

### 1.3 Forestry England

Sam Jones represented FE. The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- Bridge around New Park, as observed entering the New Forest Show
  - Sam said bridge would factored into civil engineer program.
- General issues with Bridges and maintenance very briefly discussed
- A perceived lack of deer culling. Deer in our gardens.
  - The keepers are taking significant numbers, perhaps higher than usual.
  - FE responsible for deer on their land, not your garden.
- Signage helps, dispiriting sight of dogs disturbing ground nesting birds, Signage gives basis to challenge the behaviour of dog walkers, fly tipping, fires, acknowledged huge task to secure responsible behaviour.
  - Concise, targetted signage is used, and reviewed.
- Will you be consulting on Cycle Network proposals?
  - the Cycle Network proposal was being brought forward via the RMS, and that it would be consulted upon through the RMS Advisory group. It's a position in principle that hasn't been locked down. The next stage is going to the Verderers, and from that considered view we'll take it from there.
- Is the only option gravel paths, not so conducive to riding?
  - New Forest has exceptional access to equestrian, almost unprecedented compared to other areas.
- Government ending badger culling in 2029, is there culling in the NF before that date
  - Different process from culling deer, which is based on health of herd and protection of landscape. No further info on Badger program.

## 1.4 National Park Authority

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- Have PSPO fines been issued.
  - One fine for fires has been issued.
- PSPO are rangers in uniform, when questioner challenges public in “civvies” gets abuse.
  - They are in kit identifying them as National Park Rangers. In the instance when the fine for fires was issued, police were on hand. Steve offered PSPO signage
- Can Rangers take car reg?
  - Only police can. [Chair notes: based on what speed camera volunteers may do, anyone can take down the reg, but only the police can look them up or take that forward, which may be negligible in this instance]

## 1.5 NFDC

Derek Tipp added to Steve's notes on the Local Plan Review.

## 1.6 Combined NFNPA NFDC Local Plan Review Q&A

To avoid repetition (although not necessarily hesitation or deviation), we combined Q&A on the local Plan Review.

- Grey Belt (or Green) guidelines
  - At least 50% Affordable housing
- Previously brought forward sites, not developed
  - Generally, will be brought into new plan
- Fawley Waterside.
  - As previously noted, has been withdrawn, new application has not been made or seen by NPA
- How are greenhouses / glass houses classed
  - Considered agriculture, if in countryside / green belt would still be green belt, but might depending on scale be considered grey to be reused for housing. Example given near Cadnam would likely not be permissible.

Steve took pains to point to current quoted figures as “policy off “ figures, which are a starting point which the local authorities may put a case against not delivering or pushing a lower number. There are credible reasons for an area like the new Forest to say this is not achievable. The Chair interjected about the 2018 NFDC Local plan which the council had stated had set a target 3-4 times above the previous rate. The Chair reported that the Wildlife Trust and RSPB representatives at the Environment day of the Plan's Examination had stated that NFDC had failed to show adequate mitigation for the existing level of development, let alone the

increased rate (worrying that the new numbers may represent a 2-3 fold increase beyond that).

## **1.6 Verderers**

Graham Ferris noted the issues with the chopping and changing of the agri-environment funding schemes exacerbated by the change of Central Government. Work being done should still be useful once that has settled. Graham mentioned the Commons open meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> September to discuss the various agri-environment schemes in the New Forest and gauge opinions on future schemes.

## **2 Updates**

### **2.1 Passing of Roly Errington**

Roly Errington, Consultative Panel member, Chairman of Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council, and all-around Forest Champion, died after a brief illness on 15th October 2024. A memorial and thanksgiving service is planned for 15 February 2025 at Ringwood Parish Church.

## **3 Statutory Member Updates and Current Presentations for December Meeting**

### **3.1 National Park Authority – Steve Avery**

Steve will be able to give an update on our Local Plan Review, and Biodiversity Net Gain.

Further information on [Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system) which consultation closed in September, there may be a Government response by Christmas.

Responses to the consultation from these organisations:

[Campaign for National Parks](#)

[New Forest National Park Authority](#)

[\(Report to Members: NPA Consultation Responses - Changes to National Planning Policy and the Proposed Solent CO2 Pipeline\)](#)

For those of you who long for the convenience established and an upside of Lockdown, that was then walked back post pandemic: enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings is under a Government Consultation: [open until 19 December 2024](#).

### **3.2 Forestry Commission – Craig Harrison**

Craig did not provide a preview of his presentation for December's meeting. However, in anticipation of some discussion of the cycle network proposals (see attempt at summary

below), I've added this to the Agenda. That said, given the ongoing nature of the issue, I'll try to keep Panel business brief rather than rehash discussion held elsewhere.

### 3.3 NFDC – Derek Tipp

Derek shared this summary of his likely talking points (and some useful links):

**NFDC Car parking strategy and the current survey**

[Public consultation on district-wide parking strategy - NFDC](#)

**The Local plan - call for sites -**

[Welcoming ideas for potential sites for future development - NFDC](#)

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) bids**

[CIL bids and expenditure - NFDC](#)

And here: [How CIL is spent](#)

**The first Biodiversity Net Gain and Nitrate Mitigation scheme in the New**

**Forest:** [First Biodiversity Net Gain \(BNG\) and Nitrate Mitigation scheme in the New Forest](#)

### 3.4 Hampshire Countryside Access Plan

The Countryside Access Plan (CAP) includes the statutorily required Rights of Way improvement Plan (ROWIP) which is designed to set out how the authority can manage the Rights of Way network to enhance it to meet the public's current and future needs. I hope we will learn more about the timeframe for the consultation (likely Q1 2025) on the new plan in our presentation in December. This is the publicly available information at present:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/countryside/accessplan>

### 3.5 Go New Forest

Many of you will know about Go New Forest, a major hub for promoting the Forest as a destination, originating from a joint effort of New Forest Tourism Association and New Forest District Council's tourism service. At our December 2024 meeting Nicola Carass, their Business and Membership Manager, will give a short presentation on their current efforts and direction.

Go New Forest site for tourism promoters and partners:

<https://gonewforest.com/about-us/>

Visit The New Forest (tourist portal) site:

<https://www.thenewforest.co.uk/>

### 3.6 Cycle Working Group Proposals

The Proposal from the Cycle Working Group for changes to the off-road network on the Crown Lands under FE management, and requiring Verderers consent, was launched by presentments at the Verderers Court on 18<sup>th</sup> September, introduced by the Deputy Surveyor. There have been many presentments at both the October and November Courts. At the latter, one of the longest Courts of recent years, the Official Verderer announced their decision would not be made until February 2025, at the earliest.

The Proposals as currently published:

<https://www.verderers.org.uk/announcements/forestry-england-presentment-18-09-24/>

Map of Route Extensions dated 11<sup>th</sup> September presented at September Court

[https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/09/Cycle\\_Network\\_Proposal\\_September\\_2024.pdf](https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/09/Cycle_Network_Proposal_September_2024.pdf)

Map of Route Extensions dated 20<sup>th</sup> September now linked on website

[https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/09/Forestry\\_England-Proposed\\_New\\_Forest\\_Cycle\\_Network\\_Sep2024.pdf](https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/09/Forestry_England-Proposed_New_Forest_Cycle_Network_Sep2024.pdf)

Supporting information, other proposed cycling improvement initiatives.

[https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/09/Supporting\\_Information\\_for\\_FE\\_Deputy\\_Surveyor\\_Presentment\\_to\\_Verderers\\_Court\\_18-09-24\\_latest.pdf](https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/09/Supporting_Information_for_FE_Deputy_Surveyor_Presentment_to_Verderers_Court_18-09-24_latest.pdf)

Court Minutes of September and October

<https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/10/Verderers-Court-Minutes-Sept-2024.pdf>

<https://www.verderers.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/11/Verderers-Court-Minutes-October-2024.pdf>

(November's Court minutes will be made available after they are approved 18<sup>th</sup> December 2024)

Along with the extensions to the cycle network, initiatives to promote responsible cycling have been proposed, which are not in any way dependent on network changes.

- Digital Mapping
- Revised Waymarking and Paper Mapping
- Revised New Forest Cycle Guide
- Cycle Ambassadors

The first three are about improving and distributing information about the network. In 2016, when the National Park was Partnering with Garmin for their mobile cycling map assistance, I pushed for similar improvement including releasing the GIS information on the route and waymarkers (this data has since become Open Source and is available digitally through the OpenCycleMap site amongst other).

The proposal for cycling ambassadors, as peer influencers, is a welcome idea, and fits in with initiatives from the National Park's Ambassador scheme, and other user groups (NFDOG act as peer influencers for responsible dog walking on the Forest). What they might achieve may be limited by concerns pertinent to any Forest volunteer who might be called upon to challenge other members of the public.

In attempting to wrangle a summary of the current debate, I am not trying to untangle the history of recreation issues, or cut this particular Gordian knot. Where I'll be critical of some points here, I am not attempting to presume monolithic opinions, or to debunk one "side" or the other. My concern with weaker arguments, where I'll note them, is that they either do not service the discussion, or of greater concern, feed a narrative of grievance which poisons the debate. I accept that brevity on this subject may be taken as glib. I do invite those interested in the detail to review the proposals and the Presentments made.

### **Supporting Arguments:**

The existing network is not functional / dysfunctional – While clearly in need of improvement, the network includes 170 kilometres of tracks, stretches of which are incorporated in the Sustrans/National Cycle Network Route 2 (a basic interactive view is available [here](#)). Provision for safe off-road routes between Forest settlements, where practicable, is a priority.

Cycling is beneficial exercise to health and well being and part of sustainable transport – while this is undeniable, it doesn't address the particulars of the proposal, it and other similar statements seem to deny that access exists at all ("I can only appreciate nature if I can experience it"). Green groups supporting the proposal presume their green credentials also translate to conservation.

### **Unhelpful Supporting Arguments:**

Cyclists will go there anyway, out of need or frustration – there is no reliable end point to that, it suggests if their demand is met, they'll only push further.

Cyclists are frustrated that they can't go where other users go and it's unfair/illogical – poor examples given include not being able to go where cart drivers or where Forest machinery has chewed up the tracks (given that pony and cart driving is done under a permit £79 for one year, £140 for two, and Forestry work is part of the Forest AND more to the point, Forestry England and third parties are obligated to make good that damage, the inequity is in another direction). This argument drifts into whataboutism, a deflection onto other user groups that is a denial of responsibility for the consequences of your own. Cycling takes me to where I might spend money helping the local economy –again, there is no clear example of how the proposal actually achieves this.

### **Contrary Arguments:**

Tranquillity impact – Identified as one of the National Park's special qualities, most responses citing this issue have singled out specific route extensions in areas included in

previous tranquillity mappings. While a cycling supporter opined this as subjective, another cyclist felt that cycling does impact on tranquillity, so much so he leapt to the conclusion that the whole proposal be rejected.

Habitat impact – Certain route proposals have been singled out for their specific impact on the area, i.e. upgrading a sandy exposed area to gravel track will impact on protected invertebrates (Dark Blood Bee *Sphecodes niger* (Red List), Heath Potter Wasp *Eumenes coarctatus* (Nationally Scarce) and Bee-wolf *Philanthus triangulum* (Red List, RDB2)), while others on the precautionary principle that by bringing more visitors/activity to tranquil wilder areas creates more disturbance will further degrade the habitat.

Commoning impact – concerns that some routes will impact ability to manage livestock, example: use of underpasses, natural shading sites which temporary closure for drift and other management activity is necessary. Also increased risk of interactions with Forest livestock / liability to commoners.

Distance from settlements, car parks and used routes is the crude tool used to spatially retain wilderness quality in the Forest. From that perspective, Cycling is that much more impactful as it allows more visitors greater range.

### **Recreation Management Strategy**

Many of those issues are common to all recreation on the Forest. Without a coherent strategy, any proposals for increased recreation will be undermined. The National Park and its partners recognize that our infrastructure of car parks and campsites is outdated, and have long promised a review of this with a spatial strategy for which parameters and evidence have yet to be defined. If certain car parks may be phased out, planning routes to and from them only increases an arbitrary demand for what might be necessarily lost.

### **Forestry England Responsibilities**

The route extension proposals are further undermined as brought forward by the Deputy Surveyor. The standard of the submission should have been in keeping with Forestry England's responsibilities to habitat and amenity, both in law and in the Minister's Mandate. However much work and consideration the Cycle Working Group put into these routes, this is not apparent in the submission which is not sufficiently detailed, digestible or publicly available. Focussing on Verderers consent implies they are the sole gatekeepers. Further consultation with partners and public should be required.

For each of the proposed extensions to the existing network there should be detailed:

- A rationale for each route.
- A description of the current condition of the route (is the ground already suitable, is the path wide enough to accommodate all users, will investment be needed etc).
- Risk, habitat and tranquillity impact assessments.
- A readable map.



Some of the proposed routes will be vetoed by overriding needs of the National Park's Special qualities, habitat and tranquillity, the operational needs of Commoning and Forestry, or the absorption cost and habitat impact required to upgrade a route for cycling purpose. Not gaining those routes is not a compromise, they cannot be included. If those factors had been in some way estimated for the proposal, that would be understood up front. My concern is that given the false expectation that most imagined routes are on the table to be negotiated, a narrative that these are compromises which entitle compensatory actions may be spun, with grievance led arguments to follow.

I hope the network may be sensibly improved, but I don't imagine that it will be perfectly designed as, with any recreation on the Forest, the Forest isn't built for that. This may lead to further frustration and disappointment from the cycling community. I hope that better understanding may be promoted so that successful, practical, sustainable, and well considered review of cycling provision on the Forest may be achieved.

## **4 Other Pertinent Information**

### **4.1 New Welsh National Park Consultation**

Perhaps too far afield for most, but perhaps of interest.

<https://ymgynggori.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/north-east-gogledd-ddwyrain/new-national-park-proposal-information-page-wales/>

### **4.2 Updated Ashurst and Colbury Village Design Statement**

This has the status of a Supplementary Planning Document and will be taken into consideration for planning consents within those villages. Consultation runs from Friday 25 October to Friday 6 December 2024.

Consultation version: [Revised Ashurst & Colbury Village Design Statement](#)

Paper provided to the NFNPA Planning Committee:

[PC 470/24 - Revised Ashurst & Colbury Village Design Statement](#)

Consultation link: <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-design-guidance-for-ashurst-and-colbury/>

### **4.3 Southern Water Perceptions Audit 2024**

Make of this what you will. It really only asks one pertinent question "Why has your perception of Southern Water got worse? (Tick all that apply)"

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SWAudit2024>