

## **NEW FOREST CONSULTATIVE PANEL**

**Minutes of the 204<sup>th</sup> Meeting, held in the Council Chamber, New Forest District Council offices, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst, on THURSDAY, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007**

Those present: Tim Greenwood (Chairman)  
Nick Evans (Panel Technical Officer)  
David Stone/Carolyn Hoole (Panel Clerk/Secretary)  
Members as shown on the Official List, with the exception of those listed below, for whom apologies were received.

Charlie Knight, Beaulieu Parish Council  
Olivia Keith, Breamore Parish Council  
Lord Montagu, English Heritage  
Ian Mason-Smith, Hampshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services  
Kevin Fuller, Hampshire Highways  
Robert Giddings, Netley Marsh Parish Council  
Brian Chapman, New Forest Access for All  
Olive Collins, New Forest Shops Association  
Christine Ames, New Forest Tourism Association  
Michael Womersley, Redlynch Parish Council  
Robbie Roberts, RSPCA

### **ITEM 1**

#### **ELECTION OF PANEL CHAIRMAN**

- 1.1 David Stone informed the Panel that one nomination had been received, this being for the current Chairman. No other nominations were put forward from the floor and Tim Greenwood was subsequently re-elected on a show of hands.
- 1.2 The Chairman thanked the Panel for the opportunity to continue in his role for the following year.

### **ITEM 2**

#### **APOLOGIES**

As above

#### **Substitutions**

Geraint James	representing Copythorne Parish Council
Ian Bradwell	representing the National Trust
David Dickenson	representing New Forest Dog Owners' Group
Sue Thompson	representing Ramblers' Association

### **ITEM 3**

#### **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** (4 January 2007)

- 3.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

**ITEM 4**  
**MATTERS ARISING**

**Southampton Laser Gateway**

- 4.1 Steve Trotter (New Forest National Park Authority) gave an update on this issue. A Cabinet meeting was held at Southampton City Council on 5 February to discuss plans for the proposed Laser Gateway. During the meeting representations had been made by several bodies opposed to the plans. Plans had been approved to carry out trials which would assess any adverse effects of the beams on ecology and tranquillity (through light pollution). The Habitats Regulations 1994 require an “appropriate assessment” to be carried out to determine any impacts on sites of European nature conservation importance. The trials would entail testing different levels of intensity, but it is unclear when these will take place or how the results will be dealt with. The National Park Authority will be keeping a close eye on developments.
- 4.2 Jenni Tubbs (New Forest Friends of the Earth) said that she was present at the meeting and was very concerned that the Cabinet did not appear to take the comments from objectors seriously enough.

**ITEM 5**  
**FORESTRY COMMISSION**

**a) Rural Fire Safety Partnership Project**

- 5.1 After a brief introduction by Mike Seddon (Forestry Commission), Jim Green from the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service gave a detailed presentation on the role of the Rural Safety Team (part of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service) and the importance of their newly established partnership with the Forestry Commission.

Jim Green introduced the Panel to the core aims of the Rural Safety Team. These included:

- To raise awareness among the rural community about fire safety on farms and equine establishments and to offer help and advice on how to comply with the new Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order.
- To raise awareness on how to deal with animal rescue operations safely. Hampshire Fire and Rescue carry out 160 animal rescues per year and across Hampshire around 50% of all large animal rescues occur in the New Forest.
- To build partnerships with other agencies in order to share resources and skills and therefore improve the service to the community.

Jim Green explained that the Rural Safety Partnership with the Forestry Commission will focus on raising awareness for the prevention of wildfires and dealing with anti-social behaviour and fire-setting. The partnership will allow better sharing of resources and cross agency training and will lead to the production of an up to date New Forest Fire Plan. He told the Panel that the Forestry Commission have recently supplied the Rural Safety Officer with a Land Rover which will aid the team in their work. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service are visiting all Forestry Commission tenanted properties for home fire safety

visits. The Team hopes to act with the New Forest National Park Authority in a similar way and proposes the production of a National Park Fire Plan, which will encompass private landowners.

The team has provided training to the Agisters in animal rescue and the RSPCA have supplied equipment to aid in carrying out safe rescues. They will also work to resolve small animal rescues and will run campaigns to raise awareness for animal road safety.

The team are also working in partnership with the Police in a scheme called "Police Country Watch" so that resources and knowledge can be shared in order to reach the rural community and provide a better service to the public. In the future they hope to set up a Community Rural Safety Centre at the fire-station in Lyndhurst which will deal with a wide range of community issues. They have support from a variety of other organisations including: LEADER+, SCATS and Pet Plan Insurance which are to provide funding and various other resources.

5.2 The following questions and comments were raised:

q) What is the scale of the area burnt by wildfire in the New Forest?

a) Fires occur over small areas of heath-land. The scale of fires in the New Forest is not well documented. The Forestry Commission plans to plot instances where fires occur in the future and this information may be used to get funding from the EU. The scale of damage caused by fires is far more when considered in an ecological sense. Fortunately last year there were a relatively small number of fires on the Open Forest, although there have been considerably more instances in previous years.

q) Is the issue of fly tipping dealt with by The Rural Fire Safety Team?

a) Partnerships between the Forestry Commission and the Police will help in finding ways to solve this type of problem.

q) Are the activities of "youngsters" playing in the forest a major cause of fires?

a) Not really, arson is more of a problem. Education will help raise awareness of fire safety among young people.

q) How do you get in touch with the Rural Safety Team?

a) The contact number for the Rural Safety Officer is: 07918 887832; further contact details can be found on the Rural Safety Team information leaflet.

The Chairman thanked Jim Green for a very informative and entertaining presentation.

## **b) Crown Lands Management Plan**

5.3 Jane Smith (Forestry Commission) gave a presentation on the Crown Lands Management Plan and informed the Panel that an "Issues, Policies and Actions" paper will be sent out to them over the next three weeks on which they will be asked to give feedback.

5.4 The following questions and comments were raised:

q) When talking about woodlands, does that include heathland and other types of forest habitat too?

a) Yes.

- q) Who does the work on the ground?
- a) A number of different colleagues: Ecologists, Foresters and the Open Forest Team; they all communicate with each other.

## **ITEM 6**

### **PRESENTATION ON A NEW FOREST BAT PROJECT**

- 6.1 Colleen Mainstone from the Hampshire Bat Group gave a detailed presentation on a current project involved in surveying the distribution of two bat species within the New Forest (*Bechstein's* and *Barbastelle*). She explained the importance of volunteers in the success of the project and encouraged anyone who was interested in volunteering to contact the group via their website: [www.hants.gov.uk/bats](http://www.hants.gov.uk/bats)
- 6.2 The following questions were raised:
- q) Would you be involved with providing advice to owners of farmyards with regard to appropriate alterations to their buildings to ensure that bat roosts are protected?
  - a) All bats and roosting sites are protected by law. If anyone has any problems relating to bats then they should contact Natural England for advice. If anyone wishes to convert a barn or similar building which contains bat roosting sites then they will be advised to approach an ecological consultant and Natural England.
  
  - q) Is the owner obliged to contact the planning authorities if this is the case?
  - a) Yes.
  
  - q) How does the presence of bats affect the Forestry Commission Management Plan?
  - a) It dramatically affects the Forestry Commission as the presence of bats always has to be considered when carrying out felling, thinning or any other type of management. The work in this survey will help the Forestry Commission manage the Forest as they will be aware of where the bats are.
  
  - q) Are there many other species of bat in the New Forest?
  - a) A wide range has been recorded, although the Forest has not been fully surveyed. It can probably be assumed that there is a full complement of British species, with the exception of the Lesser Horseshoe bat.
- 6.3 Peter Frost (Natural England) said that he was very pleased that this type of work is being done, which illustrated the benefits of National Park funding. He also thanked Colleen for her very interesting presentation.

## **ITEM 7**

### **'FUTURE MATTERS' CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Nick Evans (New Forest National Park Authority) gave an update on the joint consultation on New Forest issues produced by New Forest District Council and New Forest National Park Authority. There had been a good response rate - 429 individuals and about 150 organisations had given views on a wide range of

issues and a series of options for addressing them. The results are currently being compiled and will be posted on the District Council and National Park Authority websites in the near future. Hard copies will also be available on request.

## **ITEM 8**

### **WHAT MAKES THE FOREST SO SPECIAL?**

- 8.1 As part of the New Forest National Park Authority's "Special Qualities" consultation, Steve Trotter gave the Panel the opportunity to raise and discuss any issues regarding the special qualities of the New Forest National Park. He explained that it is vital that the National Park Authority finds out what people think. He informed the Panel that there had been over 200 responses so far.
- 8.2 Peter Sopowski (Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council) said that the preservation of "wild" areas should be considered when introducing new access and signage within the Park. Julian Evans (Institute of Chartered Foresters) commented that, on the other hand, footpaths are necessary in areas like this to ensure they are not destroyed by people straying from the paths.
- 8.3 The Chairman commented that it was interesting to note that in the 1960s there were generally fewer restrictions to access, particularly to vehicles and camping on the Open Forest.

## **ITEM 9**

### **NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING REPORT**

- 9.1 Steve Trotter took the Panel through the report from the Authority meeting on 22 February 2007. He informed the Panel that there had been little response from Parish Councils to a recent consultation by the Authority and asked the Panel for suggestions on how the Authority could improve the amount of feedback they receive from Parish Councils.
- 9.3 One comment was that the documents sent out are often large and use technical language, a summary sheet highlighting the key objectives would make the document more understandable for Parish Councils. Steve Trotter said that he would inform other National Park Authority officers of this suggestion.

## **ITEM 10**

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 10.1 The Chairman drew attention to the Pocket Guide from the New Forest National Park Authority and a DVD about commoning entitled 'New Forest Drift' by Sally Fear which had been distributed to Panel members. He thanked the New Forest Trust for donating copies of the DVD.
- 10.2 Nick Evans told the Panel that the National Park Authority had recently published a "Practical Guide to Affordable Housing" which has been sent out to Parish Clerks.
- 10.3. Steve Trotter updated the Panel on the decision in the Meyrick appeal. Defra's appeal had been dismissed and part of the south west boundary of the National Park would be redrawn accordingly. The area of land affected by this is a very small percentage of the total area of the Park.

Peter Frost (Natural England) told the Panel that the loophole used had now been rectified through legislation and the lawful definition of 'natural beauty' had been changed as a result.

- 10.4 Peter Sopowski (Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council) expressed a concern relating to the design of proposed vehicle safety barriers along the bridges adjacent to the railway line at Ashurst. He asked that Hampshire Highways keep members informed about this and ensure that the barriers are acceptably designed. The Chairman said that he would pass these comments on to Kevin Fuller at Hampshire County Council.
- 10.5 Peter Sopowski also raised concerns about the level of fly-posting in the New Forest. He asked who was responsible for dealing with this and whether the New Forest National Park Authority could do anything about it. Steve Trotter said that the New Forest National Park Authority shared these concerns and would investigate the matter. Mark Abbot (Lyndhurst Parish Council) noted that he spent a considerable amount of time removing illegal posters in and around Lyndhurst.
- 10.6 Referring to the presentation on the New Forest bat project earlier in the meeting, Ian Taylor (newforce) commented that there was a lack of co-ordinated data on wildlife in the New Forest and that relatively small-scale studies were being undertaken on an ad hoc basis. He suggested that representations be made to Natural England or the New Forest National Park Authority to commission more co-ordinated and sustained studies.

Steve Trotter agreed that there was a need for such studies but pointed out that, at the present time, funding for this type of work was very difficult to come by. He added that the New Forest National Park Authority would be working closely with its partners and stakeholders to produce a biodiversity action plan for the New Forest in the coming year or two and that research and survey was an important area that should be looked at. Ian Taylor responded that an initial case needed to be made to funding bodies and there was currently no evidence that any such preliminary work was being undertaken.

The Panel supported the need for greater co-ordination and then discussed the quality and application of research data. Ian Durnell (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust) pointed out that there was no such thing as perfect data and it was necessary to make informed decisions on the balance of probabilities, while building on existing data wherever possible.

## **ITEM 11**

### **DATE OF NEXT PANEL MEETING**

- 11.1 The next Consultative Panel meeting will be held at **7.30 pm on THURSDAY, 10 May 2007** in the Council Chamber, New Forest District Council offices, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst. Please note this is the second Thursday of the month in view of the local elections on 3 May.

The meeting closed at 21.30 hours.