

18 MARCH 2002

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 18 March 2002.

p Cllr S A Hayes (Chairman)
e Cllr M J Kendal (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

p P C Greenfield
p Mrs M D Holding
p B Rickman

Councillors:

p T M Russell
p C A Wise

In Attendance:

Councillors:

K F Ault
G Beck
F J Bright
J E Coles
Mrs A M Howe
B D Dash
M H G Fidler
Mrs L C Ford

Councillors:

F R Harrison
J M Hoy
Mrs B M Maynard
B M F Pemberton
Mrs M J Robinson
D N Scott
D B Tipp
Mrs P A Wyeth

Also in Attendance:

Mrs P White, Tenant Representative

Officers Attending:

D Yates, Ms E Malcolm, Ms J Bateman, L Moore, Miss G O'Rourke, J Ward.

185. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations of Interest were made.

186. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

187. PROPOSED NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK (REPORT A)

The New Forest National Park (Designation) Order was published on 21 February 2002. Objections or other representations to the Order had to be made no later than 25 March 2002. Following consideration of representations, the Secretary of State would then decide whether to confirm the Order or whether a public inquiry was needed. It was noted that it was likely that there would be a public inquiry held locally in the autumn/winter of 2002.

In addition, but separately the Countryside Agency had submitted advice to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on special administrative arrangements for the setting up and running of a National Park Authority.

Members discussed in detail the issues arising.

Members noted that clearly the decision to proceed with a standard National Park Authority was contrary to the preference previously expressed by the Council for special legislation to meet with the unique needs of the New Forest.

It was noted that any National Park Authority was likely to have five parish council representatives to cover all 37 parishes within the district. Members agreed that it was important to emphasise to any new Authority the need to ensure that good working relationships were established with all affected parish councils in the district.

Concern was expressed that if a standard National Park Authority was agreed this might mean a loss of planning control at local level. This would be further exacerbated if the County Council lost the power to agree structure plans and could mean that the special qualities of the New Forest were not given the priority they required.

The Cabinet noted that the Council as a whole had always been of the view that a "tailor made" National Park was the best option for the New Forest but, in the absence of this option, the Council strongly supported the Countryside Agency's advice on special administrative arrangements as an essential component. It was noted that while the Council had made representations that the administrative arrangements should be discussed at any forthcoming public inquiry, it was a procedural matter over which the Council had no control. It was hoped that the Secretary of State would confirm, before the start of any public inquiry, that any Order to set up a National Park Authority would take this into account.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That responses to the New Forest National Park (Designation) Order 2002 be made as set out below:-
 - (i) That the District Council has consistently, with strong cross party agreement initiated and supported measures intended to help the New Forest adapt to changing circumstances while securing its sustainable long-term protection. This aim is embodied in "The Heart of the Forest", our corporate plan.

This Council led the way in promoting a recognised designation of the New Forest through the New Forest Heritage Area; and was instrumental in setting up the New Forest Committee to co-ordinate better the work of statutory and other bodies with New Forest responsibilities. We have pressed successive ministers properly to designate the New Forest as a national park or equivalent status area in order to provide long-term certainty. We have worked with the Countryside Agency (and its predecessor, the Countryside Commission) over a long period to try to secure a specially constituted and fully recognised statutory co-ordinating body to replace the voluntary arrangements of the New Forest Committee.

- (ii) That Designation of a New Forest National Park would go a long way to meeting our objective of securing an appropriate permanent statutory designation, but it is disappointing that the Countryside Agency have not been persuaded that the unique circumstances of the New Forest warrant recommending to the Secretary of State that there should be special legislation. This would secure proper representative membership of a statutory co-ordinating body, while also retaining local accountability through existing local authorities for their statutory functions.

The Secretary of State should be advised that New Forest District Council:

- Welcomes the recognition that the New Forest meets National Park designation criteria and requires statutory designation in order to provide this important area with long-term definition and protection.
- Generally supports the proposed boundary set out in the Designation Order, but objects to the exclusion of Milford-on-Sea and some western parts of the Avon Valley and, draws to the attention of the Secretary of State the other minor points about the boundary previously made to the Countryside Agency.
- Believes that a tailor-made New Forest Authority would be preferable to a standard National Park Authority, is disappointed that the Countryside Agency has not recommended that there should be special legislation, and for these reasons objects to the Designation Order.

- (iii) That the Secretary of State should also be informed that in the absence of its preference for tailor-made legislation, the District Council strongly supports the Countryside Agency's advice on special administrative arrangements. These should be embodied in a Government Circular that is specific to the New Forest. The District Council seeks early confirmation from the Secretary of State that any confirmed Orders for the New Forest would be accompanied by such advice. The Council also emphasises the need for the National Park Authority to establish good working relationships with affected Parish Councils;

- (b) That the District Council continues to work actively in partnership with New Forest bodies to try to secure the best outcomes for the long-term protection of the New Forest; and will co-operate with and support the Countryside Agency and Secretary of State in achieving this aim.

CHAIRMAN

(DEMOCRAT/CB180302/MINUTES.DOC)