

## **NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY: RECREATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY CONSULTATION DRAFT**

### **1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 The New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) has published a consultation draft Recreation Management Strategy (RMS). This seeks to:

“Guide and influence recreation and spatial planning policy and implementation across the whole of the National Park and adjoining areas (insofar as the latter influences recreation within the New Forest National Park)”.
- 1.2 It is presented on two levels – being strategic and long term, setting a direction for the next twenty years and a second target to review the impact of the Strategy in five years time. It has been drawn up in parallel with and to support, the first National Park Plan (which is also out for consultation and is the subject of a separate paper). The intention is to produce a “daughter” document that is short and strategic. Action planning will be developed with key partners in 2008 and 2009.
- 1.3 Therefore the RMS also reflects the National Park purposes to:
  - a) Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, and
  - b) Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public,In pursuing these purposes the Authority has the Duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities.
- 1.4 This report sets out a recommended response to the consultation on the RMS draft National Park Plan. The Council is comprised of elected members, representing wards which, in many cases, are wholly or partly within the National Park. The Council has responsibilities relating to social, economic and environmental well-being over the whole area of New Forest District, which includes most of the National Park. There are also specific services affected by the Strategy where the Council is a direct provider or core partner in their enabling their delivery. In proposing the response set out in the paper, the intention is to further develop joint working with the National Park Authority and other agencies. In this way, mutually agreed objectives can be defined and outcomes can be achieved which realise a truly sustainable future for this area.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Authority has produced the Strategy to enable recreation within a sensitive and fragile environment. The ten part Vision and seven part Principles set a framework for what follows as Objectives and Policies within subject areas.

- 2.2 One of the key features of the RMS is its focus on outdoor recreation and in particular four principal recreation pursuits: walking (including dog walking); horse riding; on and off road cycling and camping and caravanning. From one perspective this is creditable in directing attention to the key contentious issues. From another perspective it is an inherent weakness as it does not provide appropriate breadth of coverage to effectively support the Management Plan.
- 2.3 New Forest District covers more than 75% of the National Park. The District Council is the lead authority for tourism and many recreation functions that pertain to the whole District and beyond, as well as being directly relevant within the Park. A clearer recognition of that role and indeed those of other partners, would better reflect the realities of delivery. There are good working links with the NPA and it will be important that they continue into the future.

### 3. COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT RECREATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- 3.1 Detailed comments on the Strategy are set out in the attached Appendix. It follows the structure of the consultation form provided by the NPA. The section that follows, brings forward the key matters from that draft response. Overall there is much to commend in the desire to address key issues of long standing. However, the text should do more to indicate the involvement of other agencies in the content of the listed policies and themes, both historically and into the future. The words used to express policies and objectives often lie between very general principles and some more definite language. As a result, some text can seem to suggest that initiatives are already decided, when the theme is about exploration or investigation. This position is re-inforced by the lack of referencing commentary throughout the document. Therefore, in revision, closer attention must be made to how ideas are expressed. This is particularly so if the Authority continues to postpone action planning until post production of the Strategy. This approach does seem more likely to engender disquiet than it is necessary to do.
- 3.2 **A wider view of recreation:** It is to some extent understandable that the NPA have chosen to focus on the four key activities: walking [including dog walking]; horse riding; on and off road cycling and camping and caravanning. This is a drawback however when considering the needs of the locality and the people that live there. The lack of coverage for formal recreation and children's play and amenity open space in settlements means that there is a lack of direction for those elements of recreation. Among the implications are:
- a) Not addressing the needs of the people living in the settlements
  - b) A lack of this form of provision will lead to the Forest being used, which creates additional pressures
  - c) If need is not evidenced then the prospect of any form of developer's contribution is significantly weakened. If the NPA anticipates covering these aspects in other ways, it would be useful to have that detailed in this Plan.
- 3.3 **The description of zones:** The principle of zones is supported. The Park is initially described as having three zones, which provide the basis of policy. In the RMS (but not in the Management Plan) the concept of "b" sub zones is added as a way of providing sites where more intensive development or facility provision might take place. This concept is in fact, providing for a similar function to the "Fourth Zone" proposed by this Council in the response to the Management Plan. This response seeks explicit recognition in the RMS of zones where more intensive development or

facility provision takes place. This could be done either by a clearer description of what the RMS draft currently describes as “b” sub-zones, or through the introduction of the fourth zone. A similar clarification should be made with the concept of “service villages” which is in the Management Plan but not the RMS. These matters do not appear to be fully or consistently carried through into policy and must be developed in finalising the strategy.

- 3.4 **Key messages and “hearts and minds”:** with so much of the vision and principles being about how behaviour is managed, there is surprisingly little about the approach to winning the hearts and minds of local people and visitors. The draft is less than generous in recognition of the historic partnership working which is characteristic of relationships between agencies. The RMS might be more effective and encouraging if it were to exhibit a greater spirit of adding energy, resources and invention to existing efforts, rather than seeking to find new ways to express issues already evident in many other strategic planning documents.
- 3.5 **Transportation:** much of the principle behind what is suggested is sound and to be supported – if it is taken forward in the context of exploration and investigation. There is certainly scope for continued change, if there is a genuine engagement with stakeholders. To start that off, revision of the RMS to more clearly express that exploration, the desire to engage and to recognise the real parameters that often apply, would be beneficial and help avoid false expectations.
- 3.6 **Walking and dog walking:** a subject with plenty of potential for all managers of outdoor recreation. As with transport, much of the principle is a sound place to start. With an apparent emphasis on education over legislation the RMS could set a clear action agenda that promotes effective engagement of users and those agencies that provide the actual delivery of informal recreation. Attention in any re-write to clear expression would assist in taking matters forward.
- 3.7 **Camping:** it is understandable that the location of campsites in the more sensitive areas is a subject for further work and potentially change. This is to be supported if it is set in the context of a strategy for camping which, as well as accounting environmental factors, also includes transport, access, economy and tourism factors. Without this there will be a series of piecemeal decision and actions which will be very unlikely to yield the best outcome. An understanding of impacts (across all elements of sustainability), demand, sites and so forth should be gained through an expressed intention to produce a camping strategy

#### 4. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS /CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 These are all integral to the report and referred to where appropriate.

#### 5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

#### 6. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 6.1 The Portfolio Holders principally affected are supportive of the recommendations contained in this report.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 That New Forest District Council:**

- (i) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Recreation Management Strategy;
- (ii) aims to continue to work with the National Park Authority with the intention of an outcome that both authorities are able to support each other's and partner agencies plans which relate to this subject area; and
- (iii) asks the National Park Authority, in finalising the Recreation Management Strategy, to take on board the comments made in Section 3 of this report.

#### **For Further Information Please Contact:**

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#### **Background Papers:**

Published reports

## DETAILED COMMENTS ON THE STRATEGY

The comments are ordered to follow the structure of the consultation form. The headings of the form are summarised.

### 1/How readable?

Poor use of text printed over a tint so it can be hard to read.

### 2a Structure easy to follow?

By and large. Some comments below.

### 2b How could the structure be improved?

Easier to pick up where chapters begin and end eg: put it in the heading at start / use different colours / make more obvious

It can be difficult to follow how objectives and policies emerge from the text (ie what the rationale is). Chapter 6 is a good example of short text and then objectives and policies without really much substance to argue for their existence.

There are a number of Objectives and Policies where implementation falls to other bodies and not the NPA. This might be made identified in the text so as to be clear over expectations about outcomes.

### 3a Is the Structure overall

Helpful                      Middling – yes                      Unhelpful

### 3b Specify reasons for major changes needed.

The focus is understood but there are other issues – principally formal recreation / sport where there is a need for the strategy to provide evidence which support the Management Plan / Core Strategy and related documents in interpreting PPG17 for future provision. It's disappointing there is no reference to children's play or facilities for young people. The Principles may not fit a wider interpretation as and when that comes. It will always be a limitation.

An example illustrating this weakness occurs in Chapter 5 strategic aim 3 which mentions "attractive alternatives for everyday recreational activities" – since these may well be types of provision outside of the current focus.

## 4. Agree with vision aspirations (10 statements), however:

Statements 2 and 10 – there is a need for care here – some activities need "quality facilities" to provide "quality opportunities" – this might be seen as conflicting with other principles – eg floodlighting of sports training areas which are important to local communities. "Quality" means substantially different things depending on the context.

### 4b Any changes or additions?

As above

## **5 Agree with Principles (10), however:**

5a Comments on particular Principles; Payback – this is too hard – it suggests full cost recovery, which may not be intended. Seeking to gain contributions is a route for the future but not all activities in all situations. There may be good reasons for subsidised activities (which the NPA has been party to already). Even taking the point at the introduction that it is not necessary for all principles to apply all the time – this one reads as if it does.

There is no reference to deliverability. Much of the document that relates to transport, especial modal shift away from the car, is aspirational at this time given:

- the lack of practical and viable existing alternatives to the private car (there is a realistic reference on p26)
- the means of securing funding for transport related proposals such implementing the new walking and cycling routes etc. to achieve a significant increase in walking and cycling is not identified (in the NFDC “planning area” it is anticipated that developer funding will fund many such proposals. The anticipated low level of development in the NPA area means developer funding will be limited in the NPA area)

## **5b changes or additions**

Maps on p15, 17, 46 & 59 should include A326.

## **6. Chapter 3 - changes to improve (p15-29)**

Generally – it would be useful for the Authority to present its strategic approach to Visitor Centres. The current strategic approach seems to be based on a central key delivery point to act as The Centre for New Forest interpretation. As a starting point we would support this as a strategic view, with perhaps developments related to outreach / hub and spoke delivery, as the remainder of the strategy.

In a chapter entitled Influencing Behaviour and Maximising Enjoyment there should be a stronger focus on engaging with local people and visitors to achieve a strong attachment to the key issues (“hearts and minds”).

P15 – better map to make boundary easier to interpret

P16 – special qualities – local to people for use....and recognise this on p19 in fact

## **7. Chapter 4 – changes to improve (p29-32)**

P29 – earlier in the document the economic importance of recreation is stated. There is no recognition of this in the issues and challenges – it might be part of a revised (ii) to enable economic benefit alongside managed demand.

## **8. Chapter 5 – changes to improve**

Zones

P33 related to the point above – Aim 1 reads as “minimise pressure on .....local communities” when for aspects of local communities (i.e, the Duty to facilitate the economy) the patronage of visitors is key.

P34/35 – zones are an appropriate concept

Zone 1 – there is some work needed on the idea of their being nodes within zones as well as sites as a development of the zone 1b idea. So – for example there may be value to a focal point for transport / access points.

Zone 2 – principle is fine – Keyhaven is neither Zone 2 nor Zone 2b – yet it does have a role to play which would be important as a gateway to that part of the coast, which whilst sensitive, is also well managed. There is no desire to add to the pressures there yet it is very likely there will need to be need particular approaches

Zone 3 – there is an argument to extend the nodes principle into this zone too. In fact the policy approach suggests this with “with careful location” – so there should be a zone 3b concept in here – even if the practicalities will not be clearer until later in the action planning process.

Zone 4 – in place of the introduction of the “b” sub-zones, the Authority should consider the introduction of Zone 4 as the location where more intensive development takes place. Such zoning will appear within each of the three other Zones.

## **9 Chapter 6 – changes to improve / new themes**

P39 – the reference to information being the result of “little co-ordination” and “leading to confused messages” is not supported. Scope for improvement certainly but the text is too dismissive and the NPA is a partner already in the majority of them. P40 – the NPA is a partner in the “5 ways” leaflet and provides information to the “Where to Stay Guide” as two examples.

Objective B1 & B2 – all fine, be careful of re-inventing material that is already there and may just need additional profile (eg the Codes produced under the PROGRESS Project and replicated in NFDC print and website material)

Policy B2.1 Improving signage of recreational facilities from main road (p42) – this conflicts with HCC’s policy on tourist (brown) signs which has deterred extensive signage within the Forest. Suggest NFDC strongly objects to this part of B2.1.

Rationale (p43) – reference should be made to:

- NFDC’s Public car parks which are both within and near the National Park (also on p45)
- Reasons why designated car parking areas were created – e.g. the problem with parking on Crown Land.

Railway Stations (p46) – It should be noted that Brockenhurst and Ashurst Stations are served by one of the main cross Forest bus services (readily accepted that this is not a high frequency service and that evening/Sunday services are lacking). More prominence could be given to the Brockenhurst-Lymington Community Rail line which has been adapted to carry bikes.

Policy T1 (p47) – Reference to public transport this policy is highly aspirational at the time given the lack of practical and viable public transport alternatives to the private car

Objective T2 – good principle and whilst a contentious subject we agree with the exploration of innovation in transport management with communities and the relevant authorities. The current wording however suggests this is already decided as the way forward and the NPA can deliver this on its own – which it can’t – so it is a hostage to fortune. The introductory text does not present the evidence which says this is the “right” technique to apply. (Objective T3.3 is an example of more appropriate drafting)

Policy T2.1 (p48) - Any selective road closures should only be progressed following extensive community involvement including road users and adjacent authorities.

Policy T2.2 (p48) – The “other potential options” should be described in more detail in the supporting text or omitted.

Objective T3 and Policies T3.1-4 (p49) – Closing car parks could result in additional on-road & verge/Crown Land parking. There is doubt that traffic regulation orders for control on-road parking will enforceable without lines (signs also required for most restrictions). Local traffic management advice is that Parking Zones can be enforceable with only minimal signage provided the zone is small.

Objective T3.5 what evidence is there that this is better than nodes from which to set out?

Overall in these objectives, it is not clear what specific role the NPA will take and what resources it will apply.

F1.1 – “no net overall” may mean some are bigger (eg car park strategy mentioned above) – need the detail of the prescription as follow on work. Term “informal visitor facilities” almost needs definition – many readers will have differing perspectives on what that means for them

There is a lot of exhortation of others – again which is beyond the delivery of the NPA – this might be more clearly explained in the text.

Objective W1 - Dog walking is a contentious subject. The policies and objectives as written suggest, in the main, an approach based on education and promotion of tailored provision, rather than legislating for controls and restrictions. This is an approach to be supported. There will be some disquiet in the expression “through a range of mechanisms” – which may be taken by some to hint at the possibility of regulation. Hopefully the NPA would undertake a specific programme to explore what these mechanisms might be. It would be preferable if the document pointed to that work and that intention to have engagement of stakeholders. The current wording may lead to “positions” being taken.

Objectives W1 & W2 and Policies W1.1, W1.2, W2.1 (P60-61) - Suggest NFDC strongly supports these given the potential walking has to reduce unnecessary short journeys.

Cycling: support the principles behind this and the reference to the New Forest Strategic Cycle Network on p64 is welcomed.

Objectives C1 & C2 and Policies C1.1, C1.2, C2.1-C2.3 (P65) - . Suggest NFDC strongly supports these given the potential cycling has to reduce unnecessary short journeys except that, referring to C1.2, it is not reasonable for buses on the general network to be specially adapted to carry bikes (fine for special services like the New Forest Tour).

Objective C2 may be ambitious for the whole of Zone 2 and a pilot area with consideration given to access points, might be more workable.

Speed Limit Diagram (p64) – As lower speed limits are part of this Plan the areas:

- covered by 30 mph limits
- where HCC are progressing 30 mph limits (they are implementing their “Village 30” initiative) should be shown.

Car Parks Diagram (p64) – NFDC’s public car parks should be shown

Horse riding: agree direction



Camping and caravanning: agree with the principle of considering re-location, involving partner agencies. Policy CC1.2 – there should be a strategy within which to apply the first three bullet points. It might well be that the extension of one site could maintain capacity but allow reductions elsewhere. Left as they are, these will be applied piecemeal and may actually obstruct the intentions of the Plan.

Research & monitoring – there is reference in some sections of the Plan to evaluation on a project level but this could be added here as an overall intention – that is where the NPA institutes a change in management practice there is an evaluation element to that change.