

NEW FOREST CONSULTATIVE PANEL

Minutes of the 252nd Meeting held in the Pine Hall, Lyndhurst Community Centre on THURSDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2016

Those present: Clive Chatters (Chairman)
David Stone (Panel Secretariat)
Jo Murphy (Panel Secretariat)
Rachael Bowen (Panel Secretariat)

Members as shown on the Official List, with the exception of those listed below for whom apologies were received.

21 Apologies for absence

21.1 Apologies for absence were received from:

Gerald Lewis (Sopley Parish Council)
Cllr Still (Hordle Parish Council), now replaced by David Horne
Peter Brown (Camping & Caravanning Club)
Penny Jackman (Lymington and Pennington Town Council)
Patricia Banks (Milford on Sea Town Council)
Hannah Thacker (Natural England)
Alan Clarke (Wellow Parish Council) – represented at the current meeting by Gordon Bailey

22 Minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2016

22.1 The minutes from the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

23 Matters Arising

- 23.1 The Chairman reported back to the Panel regarding the meeting which had taken place to consider river and wetland restoration.
- 23.2 He advised that the above meeting had taken place on 11 November 2016 in Lyndhurst. Nine members of the Panel were present together with representatives of the Forestry Commission and Natural England, Jonathan Cox Associates (author of the report on wetland restoration in the New Forest) and Dr Janes (River Restoration Centre and co-author of the report).
- 23.3 He briefly summarised the discussions and outcomes of the meeting and advised that circulation of the Chairman's draft minutes of the meeting had produced some lively debate from amongst those who had been present which in turn lead to discussions on the way forward.
- 23.4 The conclusion of these discussions was that the critical issue governing the success or failure of wetland restoration schemes was project management and monitoring, as well as effective consultation and engagement and agreement that one size does not fit all in the approach to different schemes. There therefore needed to be a

clearer process to big projects and a greater emphasis on consultation and engagement with local communities.

- 23.5 Monitoring of projects would ensure that timely adjustments could be made when issues were identified with input from local interest groups who should be effectively linked to the monitoring process.
- 23.6 The Forestry Commission would therefore consider processes for consultation and monitoring with regard to future local wetland restoration projects and the involvement of the Consultative Panel in these processes.
- 23.7 With regard to reliance on data and evidence, the Chairman advised that there were shared concerns as to the adequacy of baseline data which was difficult to interpret in identifying long term trends. There therefore needed to be common understanding on what information was needed to make informed decisions. He advised that the issues raised in his report went wider than wetland restoration schemes and cut across many other areas involving major projects.
- 23.8 In conclusion, the Chairman advised that the Forestry Commission would consult the Panel on:
- how it proposed to engage with Parish Councils, local communities and interest groups when planning major projects;
 - how it proposed to monitor the delivery of major projects; and
 - its approach to making adjustments in response to changing circumstances and community input as the projects progressed.
- 23.9 He then invited comment from those Panel members who were present at the 11 November meeting.
- 23.10 Robert Clarke of Burley Parish Council advised that some hard hitting facts had come out of the meeting particularly concerning the report produced by Cox Associates which he said lacked robustness and was a rough and ready approach with no clear assessment of facts and was not comparable to the work done in 2006 in respect of the LIFE 3 Wetland Restoration project in the New Forest. He then referred to the conclusions of the report which illustrated the lack of baseline data and the need for more work to be done, particularly on the monitoring of the Harvest Slade scheme where he said the monitoring promised by the Forestry Commission in 2014 had not materialised. He re-iterated the critical need for accurate baseline data and monitoring to be produced for future schemes so that these could be measured appropriately.
- 23.11 Following further brief debate, it was generally agreed that the Chairman would take the matter forward with the Forestry Commission on behalf of the Panel as suggested and report back accordingly.

24 National Park Authority (NPA) update

- 24.1 Steve Avery advised that the consultation on the draft Local Plan closed on 28 November. There had been a number of public drop-in sessions which had been well attended with 350 representations being received on the draft plan, including a number of representations on behalf of landowners promoting new housing sites in the New Forest.

- 24.2 The comments received would now be assessed and a second consultation draft local plan would be published in autumn 2017 taking account of these comments.
- 24.3 He said that a number of significant planning applications were expected over the next 12 months and a Government Housing White Paper was currently being drafted with a view to speeding up the delivery of new housing across the country which could have implications for the New Forest.
- 24.4 Together with other local people and organisations, the Authority had responded on the recently published Associated British Ports, Port of Southampton draft Master Plan which will cover the period up to 2035.
- 24.5 He referred to the National Park Partnership Plan which included 90 actions planned over the next 5 years. The Authority was currently working with relevant partners to produce an update on the progress against these actions.
- 24.6 The Authority had been in discussions with 9th Centenary Trust regarding the closure of the Visitor Information Centre located in the New Forest Centre at Lyndhurst and were exploring other opportunities to help promote key Forest messages to the visiting public.
- 24.7 Mr Avery updated members on the projects supported by the Our Past our Future scheme which include the appointment of two apprentice rangers to promote the engagement of young people in environmental conservation.

25 Forestry Commission Update

- 25.1 Bruce Rothnie reported that the planning application for the wetland restoration at Latchmore had been refused by the Authority's planning committee and this had flagged up the need for the Forestry Commission to refresh its approach to community engagement in the future. He would be meeting with the Panel Chairman in the coming weeks to discuss proposals for consideration by the Panel.
- 25.2 He mentioned that wetland restoration was only part of the work undertaken by the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme through the Forestry Commission. By way of example, he reported that a programme of work was on course to eradicate invasive rhododendron from the majority of the New Forest. He also reported that the Forestry Commission was working on verge restoration in various parishes where wear and tear on road edgings had been identified. Currently this remedial work was taking place in Woodgreen and plans were being developed for East Boldre but would progress to other areas as resources became available.
- 25.3 Restoration work had commenced on the Verderers Hall. This included enhancements to the floor of the Hall, restoration of former stained glass windows, new heating and improvements to allow increased public access in future. New education and interpretation exhibits were being planned to increase people's awareness and understanding of the New Forest, commoning and the functions of the Court.

26 New Forest Design Plans – John Stride Forestry Commission

- 26.1 Mr Rothnie referred to the Forestry Commission's Design Plan for the Forest Inclosures which was part of the long term strategic plan for the New Forest woodland management over the next 200 years. He said that further work was

needed before John Stride would be in a position to give a full update on the plan and accordingly the report would be made in March 2017.

He then took the opportunity to update the Panel on the following issues:

26.2 *Partnership with Butterfly Conservation*

The Forestry Commission had set up a partnership with Butterfly Conservation to encourage and support butterfly species on Forestry Commission landholdings with Butterfly Conservation monitoring populations and providing encouragement, management advice and support as required.

26.3 *Timber harvesting*

There had been an increase in harvesting of hardwood timber during the autumn and record prices had been received at a recent auction. The proceeds of the sales provide income to support delivery of larger programmes of land management work.

26.4 *Retirement – Graham Wilson*

Graham Wilson would be retiring shortly after 52 years' service with the Forestry Commission as Keeper on the Waterside. Mr Rothnie paid tribute to the work undertaken by Mr Wilson, particularly his dealings with the public. His comments were echoed by several members who knew Mr Wilson and wished him well.

26.5 *Fungi picking*

Mr Rothnie referred to the 'look but don't pick' campaign by the Forestry Commission in collaboration with other groups and organisations to highlight the importance of the New Forest for fungi and the appeal to people to support a 'no-picking' code. Good progress had been made with the campaign and Mr Rothnie advised that these messages were proving successful with fewer incidents of commercial picking. There has been a lot of anecdotal reports of more fungi in the Forest this year.

26.5 *Chalara Ash Dieback*

Bruce Rothnie ran a short video - <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara#Symptoms> on Chalara Ash Dieback and its potential impact on ash trees. He illustrated the main areas in the UK where the disease had taken hold and explained that the disease was spreading westwards from the initial infections in the eastern counties. The disease is now present in areas to the west of the Forest (e.g. Cranborne Chase). Fortunately ash is not particularly suited to the soils of the New Forest so is not extensive here as compared to other areas outside. Once a mature tree is infected the disease may not be fatal but it does place the tree under additional stress that allows other pathogens to take hold. Younger trees can quickly succumb to the disease.

There are no current ways of stopping the spread of the disease and the Forestry Commission and its partners are currently hoping that the natural genetic variation will provide some ash trees that prove resistant to infection, and these can be used as the seed source for future generations of tolerant ash trees. So far one tree showing resistance has been identified in Norfolk woodland. Further information on symptoms and current advice for woodland owners is available on the Forestry Commission's website - <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara>

27 Broadband Update

- 27.1 Edward Heron (New Forest District Council) updated members on the number of broadband cabinets approved within the perambulation boundary of the New Forest in terms of a two phase process with 6,000 premises being connected to broadband this year and 9,000 next year. He mentioned that Hampshire County Council was now leading on the project and were taking the work forward with the New Forest District Council, National Park Authority and other partners.

28 Any Other Business

- 28.1 In response to a query from Sue Bennison (Bramshaw Parish Council) in connection with bramble clearance, Bruce Rothnie advised that clearance was in accordance with a programme of work to open areas for improved grazing but was often done adjacent to roads to reduce cover and reduce risks of animal accidents.
- 28.2 In noting that the planning application for the Latchmore wetland restoration project had not been approved, David Horne (Hordle Parish Council) queried the status of other similar projects in the Forest such as Wootton and Pondhead. Bruce Rothnie confirmed that other schemes would continue but some work had been paused while weather conditions improved.
- 28.3 In response to a further query from the Panel, Steve Avery elaborated on the Latchmore scheme which had been considered by the Authority's Planning Development Control Committee on 15 November 2016 and mentioned that the Committee's normal speaking procedures had been extended to accommodate increased input and evidence from both parties which had been considered and debated by members before a decision was taken to refuse the application; the reasons for which were recorded in the decision notice. He added that this decision did not mean that other restoration projects could not proceed.
- 28.4 Members noted that a meeting of the agenda setting group of the Consultative Panel which was chaired by the Chairman of the Panel, had taken place on 2 December to plan the agenda items for the year ahead.

29 Date of the next meeting

- 29.1 2 March 2017, 7.30pm Lyndhurst Community Centre

The meeting closed at 9 pm and the Chairman wished all those present a Happy Christmas and New Year.