

REPORT TO PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
10th October 2008

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK – National Park Management Plan and Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Development Policies

1. The National Park Authority has embarked upon a series of consultations on a number of draft strategy and policy proposals. These strategy and policy documents are intended to guide the National Park body in its management of the New Forest. Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee has already considered the Draft Recreation Management Strategy. This report deals with the management plan, local development framework core strategy and the development policies.
2. Regrettably, none of the documents have been made widely and generally available as user friendly 'word' documents, although all have been issued in a quality hard copy form. The full document is 180 pages. Attached as Appendix 1 are the Annexes 1 and 2 to the document which sets out in tabular form the main Park Plan policies and Strategic Policy Framework. The full document can be viewed on the National Park's Website. Alternatively, a photocopy can be provided from the office on request.
3. The underlying message within this consultation document, as with that related to recreation, is that the National Park must be protected at all costs, that visitor numbers, including cars, should be restricted and many of the long established activities within the park should be reduced. Effectively it is proposing a virtual halt to any type of development within the Park generally and acknowledges that the policies will have the effect of reducing the total population. For example, the National Park covers about 220 square miles and has a population of about 34,000 people. The development control policies proposed will provide for just ten new properties a year to be constructed within the National Park, with a general proviso that these should be located within the four service villages of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway. Any new dwellings within the remainder of the park, up to the total of ten, should be restricted to local people, including Commoners. The overall effect of this type of policy is a complete stop on the construction of larger houses for sale, the effect of which will simply be to push up the price of existing properties.
4. In terms of employment, there is little prospect of quality jobs being provided and with the underlying emphasis on reducing economic activity within the National Park, the wealth of the area will inevitably reduce, which will call into question the long term future of service industries.
5. As Members are aware, there has been considerable publicity about the content of both plans issued by the National Park Authority. This has led to the Chairman of the Authority issuing a strongly worded document denying that the Authority is considering, amongst other things, the imposition of road tolls, the banning of dogs in certain areas and a reduction in horse riding activities. However, the consultation document is a very cleverly and carefully worded publication. If the

final document adopted is based exactly upon the Draft, the National Park body, an unelected quango, will be in a position and at its own discretion to press for road pricing, including road tolls, the banning of vehicles and people from certain parts of the Park and imposing wide ranging restrictions of access to the general public. If the Statement issued by the Chairman of the Authority is supported by all of that Authority's Members and Officers, and of the Government's controlling departments, then the National Park Authority will act in good faith and withdraw those parts of the Draft Consultation proposals that give the Authority such draconian powers. The test of their good faith will be whether they choose to make the amendments that are being demanded by the public.

6. The Draft suggested responses prepared by Officers in Appendix 2 are based on the general views expressed above, comments made to Officers by Members and the general feeling that the public do wish to continue to have good access to the National Park. The responses are also based on the fact that the National Park was designated directly as a result of its unique characteristics and management policies followed over the past centuries. The proposals in the Draft Consultation Papers change those practises and policies which have proven to be very well founded. There is no evidence in any of the documents that the alternatives now being proposed will improve the Forest or the public benefit to be gained from this unique area.

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