

New Forest National Park Plan First Draft

Response Form

The New Forest National Park Plan has been produced as a consultation draft. **We now need your views** on the Plan to make sure it is factually accurate, covers all the important issues for the National Park and includes effective policies and actions.

Please give your comments using the form below, using additional sheets if required. Alternatively you can make your responses on-line at: www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/consultations.

Please feel free to complete all the questions or to focus on those areas of particular interest to you. When making specific comments please always state the **policy number** or the **heading and page number** that you are referring to.

This form should be returned by **31 October 2008** to:

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Your nameTerry Simpson, Town Clerk
.....

Organisation (if applicable)...Ringwood Town Council
.....

Address.....'Greenways', 71 Christchurch Road, Ringwood, Hants, BH24 1DH
.....

Please tick here if you would like to receive a copy of the final National Park Plan

Please note that the information you give on this form will be used as part of the National Park Plan process. Details and comments on the form therefore cannot be treated as confidential and will be available for public inspection.

Overall comments on the draft National Park Plan

The Plan describes a wide range of complex issues and suggests how they should be addressed. It should do this in a straightforward and logical way and be easy for everyone to use.

Q1 How readable did you find the Plan?

(please tick one of the below)

- Very readable
- Quite readable
- Difficult to read
- Very difficult to read

Q2 (a) Is the structure of the Plan easy to follow?

(please tick one of the below)

- Very easy to follow
- Reasonably easy to follow
- Difficult to follow
- Very difficult to follow

(b) How could the structure be improved?

Q3 (a) Overall do you feel that the draft Plan is:

(please tick one of the below)

- A generally clear and useful document which will help guide the long-term management of the National Park
- Helpful in parts, but with some chapters / subjects needing amendments
- Unlikely to help conserve the special qualities of the New Forest or aid their understanding and enjoyment by the public
- Likely to result in the decline or loss of the special qualities of the area

(b) Please specify and give reasons for any major changes needed to improve the Plan

The underlying premise on which the Plan is based is flawed. The National Park has achieved its current condition and its unique characteristics as a result of existing policies and practices. Current proposals are subjective, untested and will undermine this existing uniqueness and lead to economic decline, an ageing, but wealthy population and fewer residents with a real interest in the Forest.

Vision for the New Forest National Park

This is set out on pages 6-8. It describes what the National Park should be like in 30 years time.

Q4 (a) Overall do you agree with the aspirations set out in the Vision ?

(please tick one of the below)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

(b) Are there any changes or additions to the Vision that you wish to suggest?

(please specify and give reasons)

Generally, much of the Vision can be supported. However, the underlying message is that people are not welcome, cars are unnecessary and the whole area should move back several centuries. The Vision seems to suggest that interventionist policies should be followed so that heathland, mires, etc. are managed and, yet, the coastline is to be allowed to manage itself. Is this not double standards? In addition, it cleverly paints a picture of a thriving economic unit, but on careful analysis is actually describing a Vision where stagnation and backward looking policies have precedence. If the Vision is for the latter, then the Authority should not attempt to dress it up with fine words and try to fool the public with a different picture.

Chapters 1 and 2 - Portrait of the National Park and the pressures, trends and opportunities

Chapters 1 and 2 (pages 9 to 25) describe the National Park as it is now and the issues and future trends which are likely to affect it.

Q5 Are there any changes or additions that would improve these chapters?

(please specify and give reasons)

These chapters paint a very clear picture of a declining economic unit, of an ageing population and, whilst not said, will inevitably lead to a greater decline in public services, shops and an increasing remoteness of villages within the Park. The portrait attempts to suggest that whilst there is economic growth outside the National Park, none of the growth is necessary within the Park and policies should look to maintain the status quo or simply increase 'green' qualities. This is unrealistic and will not serve the residents of the area at all well.

Chapter 3 - Strategic policy approach

Chapter 3 (pages 26 to 37) sets out the overall approach for tackling the major issues, including the location of land uses, recreational activities and new development.

Q6 (a) Do you agree with the overall approach taken, including the zoning of activities and development?

(please tick one of the below)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

(b) Are there any changes or additions to the strategic policy approach that you wish to suggest?

(please specify and give reasons)

The area covered by the National Park has, for many centuries, been a living, working place in which people live, work and play. The century old practises have served the area well. Whilst there can be benefits in identifying zones where different levels of activity are permitted, great care needs to be taken in fixing the final boundaries of those zones. In addition, the levels of control in the zones need to be treated with great care. The prescriptive nature of the policy approach for each zone is far too hard. Adoption of the policy approach suggested will force relocation of well established activities which, over many years and in some cases decades, have been shown to define and improve an area rather than damage it, as suggested within the Policy. A lighter touch is required than that suggested.

Chapter 4 - Priority objectives

Chapter 4 (pages 38 to 51) includes three priority objectives and the policies associated with them.

Q7 The objectives:**(a) Overall do you agree with these objectives?**

(please tick one of the below)

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

(b) Are there any changes or additions to the objectives that you wish to suggest?

(please specify and give reasons)

The objectives are unattainable and people unfriendly. It is unacceptable to press ahead with conservation and enhancement of inland areas and yet leave coastal areas to the vagaries of nature. The section seeks to introduce controls outside the area of the National Park and interfere with the responsibilities of other statutory bodies within the Park. It is presumed that the local character should be preserved at all costs and that change should always be resisted. There is a general lack of understanding that it is possible to enhance and preserve the physical and natural uniqueness of the area within the modern society with machines. More effort should be made to make man and nature inclusive, rather than exclusive.

Q8 The policies:**Are there any changes to the policies in this chapter that you wish to suggest, or any new policies that should be included?**

(please specify and give reasons)

The policies seek to further extend control mechanisms over people's lives and what they can do in the Park. They seek to create employment opportunities for people to advise others on how they should run their lives, their homes and their communities. They seek too to interfere with existing good practice and open the opportunity for road tolls, additional taxation for the right to drive across the Forest or charging for driving across the Forest by modern satellite technology. Such policies are intrusive and unnecessary and seek to impose control for control's sake. If the Authority is not looking to raise additional revenue through road pricing, then it should remove all such references to this from its policies.

Q9 Would you like to see any changes to the background text of this chapter?

(please specify)

Increasingly, office bound people and members of committees seem to believe they can control every eventuality. Nature is not predictable and it is arrogant of anyone to believe they can do so and the background text to this Chapter should recognise that fact.

Chapter 5 – Conserving and enhancing the National Park

Chapter 5 (pages 52 to 64) includes three objectives for conserving and enhancing the National Park and the policies associated with them.

Q10 The objectives:**(a) Overall do you agree with these objectives?**

(please tick one of the below)

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

(b) Are there any changes or additions to the objectives that you wish to suggest?

This seems to be an attempt to introduce some people's perception of how the Park looked 200 years ago. It fails to acknowledge that natural landscapes change through natural phenomena. Those landscapes move with the times. The National Park must move with the times.

Q11 The policies:

Are there any changes to the policies in this chapter that you wish to suggest, or any new policies that should be included?

(please specify and give reasons)

Providing the policies are implemented with sensitivity and not in strict accordance with the objectives, most of the policy framework items could be supported. However, CP2.4 again seeks to isolate the Park from the real world and should, at the very least, be amended to acknowledge that infrastructure is needed within the National Park as it is required elsewhere. In relation to the policy framework under objective C3, the Council welcomes the support proposed for existing farming units and the support for the future viability of communing.

Q12 Would you like to see any changes to the background text of this chapter?

(please specify)

The Council does not believe that some of the Statements within the background text have a basis in fact.

Chapter 6 – Understanding and enjoying the National Park

Chapter 6 (pages 65 to 76) includes three objectives for understanding and enjoying the National Park and the policies associated with them.

Q13 The objectives:

(a) Overall do you agree with these objectives?

(please tick one of the below)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

(b) Are there any changes or additions to the objectives that you wish to suggest?

(please specify and give reasons)

Whilst all three objectives in this section can be supported in overall terms, all of them lack any recognition of the economic realities of life. There should be some reference to these economic factors within the objectives.

Q14 Are there any changes to the policies in this chapter that you wish to suggest, or any new policies that should be included?

(please specify and give reasons)

The policies appear to be one's which could be supported until close examination of the wording is undertaken. On the one hand, there are references to additional, improve the relocated facilities and, on the other, there are Statements of the need to avoid any increase in overall activity levels. In other places, it is clear that the Authority is looking to move visitor attractions to outside of the Park to neighbouring areas and also to stop any major development within the Park. Yet, elsewhere, it discussed the development of a culture that welcomes and values visitors. But, that is contradicted by another Policy that clearly states that there will be an emphasis on provision of services and facilities for visitors within the four defined service villages. In general terms, the public come to the National Park to visit the National Park and not to visit the four service villages. What message is the Authority trying to give? To most, it will be the visitors are not welcomed and this will be a people free National Park.

- Q15 Would you like to see any changes to the background text of this chapter?**
(please specify)
No.

Chapter 7 – Living and working in the National Park

Chapter 7 (pages 77 to 87) includes three objectives for living and working in the National Park and the policies associated with them.

- Q16 The objectives:**
(a) Overall do you agree with these objectives?
(please tick one of the below)

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

- (b) Are there any changes or additions to the objectives that you wish to suggest?**
(please specify and give reasons)

The general objectives L1 and L2 should provide a valuable stimulus to the area. However, objective L3 shows a lack of understanding of the importance of the motor car in modern day society. It is not acceptable to believe that public transport will replace the motor car. Lifestyles mean that won't happen. And, as with climate change, the National Park Authority must plan to accept and accommodate car access to the Park.

- Q17 The policies:**
Are there any changes to the policies in this chapter that you wish to suggest, or any new policies that should be included?
(please specify and give reasons)

As freestanding Statements, most of the policies appear reasonable and acceptable. However, in the overall context of the Strategy, the policies contradict what are said to be overarching conservation policies and strategies. Which will have priority? There needs to be a clear focus on whether tourism is important to the local economy or whether the economy is to be allowed to drift and the Park turned into a museum of century old practises without regard to the economic realities of the world. The policies under objective L3 relating to transport within and to the Park are unattainable. The reference to the use of various tools such as road user pricing, single track roads, car park location, and car free zones are not supported by the general public. These are the dreams of those who live in yesteryear. Comment has previously been made about road pricing, road tolls and satellite tracking. Existing practises show that single track roads lead to greater erosion of road sides. Car free zones mean people free zones because the public will, as a general rule, only walk limited distances from car parks. The Park needs to learn to live with different modes of transport. This may mean that more roads should be fenced and additional underpasses provided for animals. That single policy would significantly reduce animal accidents. The Park Authority must stop the practice of trying to ensure that everyone believes is the worst innovation of all within the National Park.

- Q18 Would you like to see any changes to the background text of this chapter?**
(please specify)

Be honest and add that local people will no longer be able to live and work within the National Park. The policies and practices being followed by the Authority are forcing outward migration of young people and with this, employment and housing policies is creating an area where only the wealthy can afford to purchase a property. Those persons are likely to be people who have moved into the area from the conurbations in the later part of their lives and will not have a strong sense of affinity with the National Park.

Chapter 8 – Working together

Chapter 8 (pages 88 to 101) includes the approach to working with different kinds of organisations, a series of priority actions for the next 5 years and headline indicators and targets. The actions, indicators and targets need further development and detailed comments are on these are particularly welcomed as part of this consultation.

Q19 Would you like to see any changes to the text of this chapter, including the approaches to partnership working?

(please specify)

Generally, the Council supports close partnership working.

Q20 Priority actions:

(a) Which priority actions do you particularly support or feel should be taken forward urgently?

(list up to 10 of the actions, using the reference numbers in the Plan; please also indicate whether your organisation would be willing to take the lead on any of these actions)

PA1, PA 2, PA3, PA4, PA5, UA2, UA3, UA4 & UA9.

(b) Are there any other specific actions, relevant to the objectives of the National Park Plan, that you would like to see included as priorities?

(please specify and also indicate whether your organisation would be willing to take the lead on any of these actions)

No

Q21 Indicators and targets:

Are there any changes or additions that would improve the indicators or targets?

(please specify and give reasons)

Target driven indicators of this type should be dropped entirely.

Chapter 9 – Development Control Policies

Chapter 9 (pages 102 to 125) sets out the detailed planning policies to control development.

Q22 Are there any changes to the policies in this chapter that you wish to suggest, or any new policies that should be included?

(please specify and give reasons, stating the relevant policy number)

It is time for the National Park Authority to be honest. The policies proposed will mean that the only new properties built within the National Park will be ten per annum and that these will be for Commoners or of affordable housing, ie. Rented or low cost home ownership arrangements. There is no provision within the policies for any new homes for other people. This will mean economic reality will bite into the housing market. The effect will be that only the wealthy will be able to move into the National Park. The Park will no longer be a place in which ordinary people can afford to live. That is not to say that huge new development should be permitted. However, the Authority should look to adopt more realistic arrangements that will make a genuine contribution to the housing requirement of the area in a way which does not compromise the fundamental principles underlying the designation of the area as a National Park.

The policies relating to recreational horse keeping ignore the fact that horse ownership and horse riding have been fundamental to the unique character of the National Park for many centuries. These policies should be adjusted to recognise that fact and acknowledge the important contribution that horses make to the National Park.

Whilst supporting the principles underlying policy DC17, the Town Council would like to see some similar provision within the document supporting and encouraging retail units in other village centres within the Park.

Annex 1 – Consideration of policy options

Annex 1 (pages 126 to 158) sets out all the policies included in the draft National Park Plan together with the possible alternatives which were considered as the Plan was being produced.

Q23 Do you have any comments on the consideration of policy options?

(please specify and give reasons)

None other than those stated previously.

Annexes 5 and 6 – Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment Reports

Annexes 5 and 6, included on the accompanying CD, include the two appraisals which test policies in the draft Plan against a range of sustainability and environmental criteria.

Q24 Do you have any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal or Habitats Regulations Assessment Reports?

(please specify and give reasons)

None other than those stated previously.

Thank you for your time

Please return this response form to the address given on the front page.