NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK (DESIGNATION) ORDER 2002

INQUIRY REPORT – SUMMARY OF INSPECTOR’S RECOMMENDATIONS

PROVIDED TO
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS
PART 1: ISSUES OF PRINCIPLE AND ADMINISTRATION

INSPECTOR’S CONCLUSIONS

1.220 I set out my conclusions under the following headings:

(1) Does the New Forest meet the statutory criteria for designation as a National Park?

(2) Is some form of National Park Authority the best vehicle for administering a designated area in the New Forest?

(3) How should a National Park Authority be ‘tailor-made’?

(4) Should changes be made to the terms of the Agency’s advice to the Secretary of State?

(1) Does the New Forest meet the statutory criteria for designation as a National Park?

1.221 I can deal with this question very briefly. From Dower onwards, those asked by Central Government to consider the issue have consistently recognised the merits of the New Forest in this respect, although this is the first time that the current level of detailed consideration has been given to precisely what land may fulfil both of the statutory designation criteria. Few suggest that there is no core of land meeting the criteria although there has been plenty of disagreement about the extent of the qualifying ‘extensive tract’. That issue is dealt with in detail in parts 2-6 of this report. I do not consider it further here.

(2) Is some form of National Park Authority the best vehicle for administering a designated area in the New Forest?

1.222 Some accept that an area meeting the statutory criteria can be identified and that there is a need to protect and enhance agriculture (especially commoning) and local wildlife, to support sustainable levels and forms of recreation, and to bring relief from pressures resulting from inadequate powers and resources and conflicts between competing interests. However, they see designation of an NFNP as a potential impediment to those objectives. They would prefer the Forestry Commission, the Verderers (complemented by the actions of the commoners), the Local Authorities, and other statutory agencies such as English Nature to continue to act as now, perhaps with more resources diverted to them using funds that would otherwise be devoted to the NPA.

1.223 A factor of importance here is the range of perceptions about a number of matters. I found that many views expressed at the inquiry and in writing echo the perceptions and misperceptions identified at paragraphs 12-14 of the analysis of the
In some cases these perceptions are based on misunderstandings. For example, some incorrectly assumed that the NPA would act like a tourism authority with a duty to encourage and provide for as many new visitors (and new forms of mass tourism) as possible, regardless of the effects on the primary statutory purpose (conservation).

Other misunderstandings centred on the powers and responsibilities of an NPA and their interaction with those exercised by existing bodies. Some believed that an NPA would take over many or even all of the functions of the District Council rather than the narrow range provided for in the legislation. Others feared that there would be a major conflict of powers between an NPA and the Forestry Commission and the Verderers, or that the powers of the existing bodies would be usurped. However, the content of Appendix VI of CD111, laying out the duties, functions and powers of the bodies, demonstrates that this is not the case.

Although some appeared to assume that the standard NPA model would lead to competition, disputes and friction between the Authority, the Forestry Commission and the Verderers, it does not appear to me that it would lead inexorably to the creation of irreconcilable problems. The three bodies will certainly require to work closely on some issues but in my view the establishment of an NPA would create a positive opportunity to tackle issues touching on the individual roles and responsibilities of the bodies by making use of the additional skills, powers and resources brought by the Authority. Both the Commission and the Verderers will be bound up in the process of preparing the NFNP Management Plan, which will provide them with the opportunity of ensuring that it furthers their interests rather than competing with them.

Another problem of perception is that the term ‘New Forest’ clearly means very different things to different people in different contexts. The perceived geographical extent of the New Forest can range successively outwards from (a) the Crown Lands to (b) land within the perambulation, to (c) land within some version of the NFHA, to (d) land within some version of a wider ‘historic dispersed pastoral system’ and (e) in some cases even beyond that. Many of those suggesting the ‘little or no change’ option restrict their consideration of the New Forest to the lands within the perambulation (or even just the Crown Lands). This is understandable because the perambulation represents the extent of the New Forest in the eyes of many local people and visitors. However, the area of land meeting the designation criteria goes wider than this (albeit in my view considerably less widely than the area included in the Designation Order).

If this wider area is worthy of designation it must be capable of being managed in a coherent way capable of meeting the statutory purposes of designation across its whole area, ie conservation and the appropriate provision and management of opportunities for open-air recreation. In my view this is unlikely to be achieved without the creation of some form of dedicated, area-wide body which has the
resources to act effectively in matters of development planning and land management. I consider these in turn.

Planning arrangements

1.229 It seems to me that most respondents wish in some way to hold onto the ‘National Park-equivalent’ status currently afforded to the NFHA in planning terms because this is seen as affording protection from undesirable development pressures threatening the New Forest, however this is defined.

1.230 Retaining National Park-equivalent status for development control purposes could be achieved without designation by continuing with the NFHA and the South Hampshire Coast AONB which has the same status as a National Park for planning control purposes. If necessary a differently defined extent of land could be recognised in a future development plan as having this type of protection. However, some, including the Agency, see the potential for regular review of the extent of the NFHA via the statutory development plan/local development framework as a destabilising factor which introduces too much uncertainty into the system. This is an understandable view which I support. Certainly, it would be an uncomfortable mix to continue with a regularly-reviewed NFHA and an AONB which has not been reviewed since designation in 1967. However, if the Secretary of State were to prefer the NFHA-type option to National Park designation, it would probably be necessary to confirm the South Hampshire Coast AONB Revocation Order and allow a differently-defined equivalent of the NFHA to be identified through the development plan and afforded National Park-equivalent status.

1.231 I recognise that New Forest District Council has undertaken important planning initiatives to recognise and protect the value of the NFHA, supported by the other local planning authorities, parts of whose areas overlap it. However, continuing with a Heritage Area would not provide a single-tier local planning authority focused on achieving the statutory National Park purposes (and subject to the duties introduced by Section 62 of the 1995 Act). In my view a full National Park planning regime is much to be preferred as a means of providing the level and quality of protection sought by most organisations and individuals expressing views to the inquiry. Even with ‘National Park-equivalent’ protection the NFHA delivers a dispersed, incomplete National Park planning system, in that development control is administered by a number of authorities, including at present the County Councils for minerals and waste matters. Development plan matters are covered by parts of 3 District-wide plans plus the County Councils’ structure plans and minerals and waste local plans. Thus from the planning standpoint I consider that full designation is the most appropriate option.

Land management

1.232 A New Forest National Park would be unique in having such a large percentage of its core occupied by an area with the character of the perambulation, so long managed for farming, forestry and recreation under the interlocking powers of the Forestry Commission and the Verderers. The perambulation occupies 55% of the land in the designation order (as made by the Agency), while the Crown Lands within the perambulation occupy 40%. Those percentages would increase quite significantly if the area of the National Park is reduced in accordance with my recommendations.
1.233 With regard to recreation, those opposing the principle of designation express strong fears that a National Park would exacerbate the harmful effects of too much visitor activity and the development pressures that this can bring. I accept that the existing bodies have done much to encourage responsible use (and discourage irresponsible exploitation) of the New Forest. However, neither the Forestry Commission nor the Verderers have any role in the management of conservation and recreation outside the mostly highly vulnerable habitats of the Crown Lands (ie on private or other publicly owned land within or without the perambulation). These bodies cannot act across the whole of the area meeting the designation criteria and can only seek to combat the more negative impacts of recreation by acting within what are generally the most fragile and sensitive areas in conservation terms.

1.234 Wider approaches, taking in the whole of the NFHA, have been introduced though the efforts of the member bodies of the New Forest Committee. These have resulted in some important initiatives and increased integration of effort. A major example is the Strategy for the New Forest, a form of management plan setting out ways in which the member organisations will work together on a voluntary basis to achieve shared aims. However, valuable as it is, this form of co-operative working does not bring the additional resources and powers that would be attached to a National Park. For instance the budget of the New Forest Committee in 2002/03 was about £183,000 (CD 176) whereas the Agency indicated to the inquiry that the annual budget for the NFNP would probably be in the region of £2-3m.

1.235 The conservation and recreation pressures on this relatively small, fragile, but highly accessible area have increased immeasurably in the 50 years or so since the New Forest was first considered for designation and they continue to do so. In my view there is now an important need to introduce the additional ingredient of an NPA. This will enable the twin statutory purposes to be addressed throughout the area as a whole through the preparation of a well-resourced statutory management plan by a properly empowered authority. It will also impose the Section 62 (1995 Act) duties on all public bodies in the area.

The Conservation Board proposal

1.236 As described earlier, the proposal by Minstead Parish Council and Minstead Manor Commoners is that an AONB be designated, covering whatever area is considered to qualify on natural beauty grounds, and that the area be managed by a Conservation Board under the CROW Act. However, a Board would not have its own planning powers whereas I have indicated above that I consider it necessary for a full National Park planning regime to be introduced, provided by a single-tier local planning authority focused on achieving the statutory National Park purposes. Having regard to the national budget for AONBs it would also not have access to the same level of Central Government resources dedicated to the achievement of the two National Park purposes, including recreation. In the circumstances of the New Forest, where recreation pressures are in need of more positive management across the whole of the designated area, this proposal would not serve the area well.
Conclusion

1.237 I conclude that a National Park Authority is the appropriate organisation for administering a designated NFNP and so turn to consider the views expressed about the appropriate form of such a body.

(3) How should a National Park Authority be ‘tailor-made’?

1.238 From Dower onwards those reporting to Government on the New Forest as a possible National Park have consistently recommended that it is, in effect, ‘especially desirable that the necessary measures be taken’ to uphold the statutory purposes of a National Park. The major reason why designation has never followed any of these reports has been the equally consistent conclusion that the special circumstances of the area (the statutory responsibilities of the Verderers and the Forestry Commission, the importance of commoning, the area’s very high nature conservation interest, and the large areas of Crown Land managed by the Commission) require non-standard, tailor-made administrative arrangements to be devised rather than the establishment of a standard National Park Authority.

1.239 Until the Agency’s current proposals it has always been concluded that this would require legislation. However, as described by the Agency at p34-51 of Position Paper 2 (CD156), it now considers that appropriate tailoring to New Forest circumstances can be achieved by means of the advice to the Secretary of State.

Suggested models for a tailor-made authority for the NFNP

1.240 The evidence to the inquiry demonstrated the wide variety of views held by various organisations and individuals about the way in which a New Forest National Park Authority should be formed. Many of the suggestions for tailor-made models centre on membership issues. I deal with these separately below. First, I deal with alternative bodies proposed by some objectors.

1.241 The tailor-made authority suggested by New Forest District Council draws considerably on the model consulted upon by Government in 1992 when a statutory form of New Forest Committee was proposed. Like the body suggested at that time, the model now put forward by the District Council would be a body whose executive functions would largely be limited to preparing a statutory park-wide management plan.

1.242 The Council’s representative said that a New Forest Authority of this kind would ‘pour strong glue’ into the gaps between the existing bodies serving the Forest, providing a common focus to their individual programmes and activities. However, since the body would not be an NPA under Section 63 of the Environment Act 1995 it would lack the powers and resources attached to such a body. Although ‘economy’ was said to be one of the advantages of the Council’s proposal it seems to me a weakness that the body would be able to do little more than co-ordinate the efforts of others without bringing more resources to the issues to be tackled by the Park management plan. Importantly, the Council’s proposal would also leave the new authority without the necessary dedicated full planning powers discussed at 1.229 to 1.231 above.
1.243 Hampshire County Council has two main suggestions. The first is that DEFRA and its agents should commit themselves to joint working with the NPA on preparation and implementation of aspects of the National Park Management Plan. It is a matter for the SOS whether or not it is necessary to make such a statement within the Circular suggested by the Agency. In my view the NPA could reasonably expect all public bodies with responsibilities in this area to work with it on relevant aspects of the management plan if invited to do so.

1.244 The Council’s second suggestion (that all Forestry Commission functions, staff, budgets, accommodation and land should be transferred to the NFNPA to form the basis of its operation) is much more radical. It seems to me somewhat unlikely that amputation of an important part of the Commission and its activities could be achieved by minor amendments to the Local Government Acts as suggested. In any case, an NPA does not seem to be a suitable organisation to engage in forestry on this scale. Such activities are not consistent with the statutory purposes of an NPA and could unbalance its work and divert attention from its primary purposes. Clearly, the Commission and the NPA would have to work together very closely on matters concerning recreation on the Crown Lands and both would need to have regard to their S62 duties (1995 Act) concerning the recreational purpose. However, overall, it could be beneficial to both parties and the area as a whole for the two bodies to tackle recreational and other issues across the whole Park in a complementary way.

1.245 I agree with the County Council that there would be justifiable concern if the advent of an NPA were to be taken as an opportunity for the Commission to reduce its commitment to funding of recreation provision and management in the Crown Lands. This would significantly limit the purpose and potential of designation. However, the Commission would still be bound by the terms of the Minister’s mandate, which would no doubt be amended if there were matters that the Crown wished the Commission to handle differently in its relationship with the NPA. It is for the SOS to consider whether the Council’s concern needs to be met by some form of commitment in the Circular. I do not make any recommendation on this matter.

1.246 The Verderers’ suggestions for a tailor-made solution revolve around (i) the perceived loss of their veto on inappropriate recreational development on the Crown Lands and (ii) membership issues. I cover the second matter below. As far as the veto is concerned, the Verderers have provided an amendment to Section 65 of the Environment Act 1995 that would satisfy their concerns. Alternatively, they provide an amendment to paragraph 23 of the advice to the Secretary of State that ‘would go quite a long way’ towards meeting them. A number of other objectors, such as the New Forest Commoners Defence Association and Desmond Swayne MP, associate themselves with these views.

1.247 In the light of the view expressed by the Minister in the correspondence referred to at paragraph 1.40 above it may be possible to give more reassurance to the Verderers and other parties than is currently given by the Agency’s advice. However, I accept that this is a difficult matter and that (as the Agency pointed out) the SOS would have difficulty in giving advice appearing to fetter her powers under primary legislation. I have recommended one possible form of wording which is slightly different from that submitted by the Verderers and indicates that such development ‘will not be permitted unless there is demonstrated to be a very exceptional case for
doing so’. This is intended to pose a stronger test than that set for confirmation of a CPO, which requires a ‘compelling case in the public interest’. I am less convinced by the need to amend Section 65 to provide specifically for what may be a very unlikely eventuality simply because one could not necessarily be certain that in all circumstances and for all time a very exceptional case would not occur.

An additional statutory purpose concerning commoning

1.248 As indicated at paragraph 1.48, some suggested that commoning is of such importance to the New Forest that special legislation is required to make ‘protection of commoning’ a third statutory purpose for the NFNP. I am not convinced that this is necessary. In my view the references to commoning in the Agency’s advice to the Secretary of State leave no room for doubt about the special importance of this activity.

1.249 Some objectors pressed the point further, suggesting that commoning should be given statutory protection similar to that enjoyed by crofting. This is a very wide issue going beyond the scope of designation issues and I do not comment upon it.

NPA membership issues

1.250 The membership composition of a standard NPA gave rise to the greatest single area of concern among objectors. However, suggestions on tailor-making the membership mix of the NFNPA cover a wide range. There is no clear preference among objectors for any particular departure from the standard arrangements.

1.251 At one extreme is a suggestion to institute 100% direct election of members by an electorate confined to those living (and/or working) within the boundaries of the designated area. At the other are suggestions that Section 7 of the 1995 Act should be amended to increase the proportion of Secretary of State (non Parish Council) appointees from the standard 25% to 40%, as recommended in the DEFRA review, or even to 50% as suggested by the Verderers and the New Forest Committee. The underlying motive of all these suggestions (from both extremes) is to reduce the influence of members seen to be in some way ‘remote’ and lacking familiarity with the needs of the Forest. Those seeking a higher proportion of directly elected members seek to overcome this ‘remoteness’ by eliminating or diminishing the number of appointees (who are seen as detached and democratically unaccountable). Those wishing to increase the proportion of appointees see this as the best way of counterbalancing the excessive influence of councillors lacking sufficient knowledge of Forest requirements and answerable to electorates with largely urban and suburban mindsets.

1.252 I note that similar themes about the relative merits of local versus national appointments emerge in discussion about the size and mix of membership in the report of the DEFRA review of NPAs. This includes the comment that ‘...there is little consensus about what changes should be made.’

1.253 The DEFRA review comments that the hybrid status of NPAs as special purpose statutory authorities ‘brings advantages by providing a genuine mix of people with different experience and skills and legitimately different views. Where the combination works well there is rounded and balanced decision-making. But,
crucially, it depends to a large degree on the goodwill and constructive working relationships between…..members’

1.254 It also observes that ‘In most parks the current mix of members seems to be working reasonably well’ and that ‘It is perhaps inevitable that there is sometimes tension between those members who see themselves as promoting local interests and those appointed by the Secretary of State to represent national interests’.

1.255 These comments (and the guidelines on membership appointments set out in paragraphs 33-41 of Circular 12/96) reflect the need for NPA members, however they are appointed, to act together with good will in the best interests of the Park and its statutory purposes. Local authority appointees are to be chosen with regard to the ‘desirability of appointing members who represent divisions or wards situated wholly or partly within the Park’. Secretary of State appointees should have a capacity to present a wider national viewpoint and experience with direct relevance to the character and responsibilities of the particular National Park preferably combined with local associations. Moreover, they are to be ‘selected for their personal qualities and experience and not as representatives of specific groups or organisations’.

1.256 The membership of any New Forest NPA clearly needs to be tailored to the unusual circumstances of the Park. It is of central importance that Secretary of State appointees can (together) bring a thorough understanding of the roles of the Forestry Commission, the Verderers, the commoning community, and a range of other interests of vital relevance to the area. In my view the advice to the Secretary of State sets out all the relevant areas of expertise in a straightforward and unambiguous way. However, although many organisations and interest groups seek representation as of right on behalf of themselves or others I do not consider it appropriate to provide for that, either through specific legislation or amendments to the advice. To do so would be contrary to the approach in the Circular that Secretary of State appointments are made in recognition of the individual’s own personal qualities and experience rather than as representatives of particular organisations. I note from CD110 (para 77) that the Forestry Commission does not itself seek membership of the NPA.

1.257 I do not know if Secretary of State appointments are made after the receipt of information about local authority appointments (and therefore in full knowledge of the skills and experience of those members). If this is the case I consider that it would be beneficial to indicate in the Circular that SOS appointments will be made with a view to completing the best overall balance of experience across the membership as a whole by concentrating on filling any perceived gaps in experience and skills. The Agency indicated that it would agree with this.

1.258 Turning to the percentage of SOS non-Parish Council appointees required to give the right membership balance for an NFNPA, if the NPA had about 26 members (a typical number among the smaller English National Parks) there would be about 7 national appointees. If, in the longer term, Recommendation 22 of the DEFRA review is implemented the number could rise to about 8-10 (ie 40% of some 20-25 members). This may be a more comfortable number to give good representation of the wide spread of areas of national interest needing to be reflected in an NFNPA. However, I do not consider that 7 would be too few to do so or that designation should await legislative changes of this nature. Consequently I am not convinced that
any departure from the standard NPA membership pattern is required. In my view sufficient provision for ‘tailoring’ of membership can be achieved through the Agency’s advice.

Conclusion

1.259 My overall conclusion is that the circumstances of the New Forest, though unique, can be adequately addressed through a standard NPA complemented by appropriate New Forest-specific advice issued by the Secretary of State. This would enable the long-awaited designation of the NFNP to take place and provide suitable advice for the establishment of an NPA.

1.260 I am not convinced by the suggestions that designation should await a future legislative opportunity so that a more ‘tailor made’ NPA can be put in place adopting some of the preferences put forward at the inquiry. There has not been any great consensus about how such a body would differ from the standard model and I am not confident that it would be possible to achieve such consensus, so this option would probably be a recipe for yet more delay. In general it seems to me that the various alternatives put forward would be less well-equipped in terms of their powers and resources to tackle the needs of the area worthy of designation.

1.260 I have reported that some are concerned that advice issued in the form of a Circular can too easily be changed by an individual Government or Secretary of State, whereas tailor-made proposals expressed in terms of legislation are likely to carry a greater guarantee of commitment and longevity. However, both legislation and circulars have to change from time to time to respond to evolving circumstances. In my view the advice generally contains good sound common sense reflecting the current needs and circumstances of the New Forest and nothing would be gained by taking an alternative route, especially when there is so little consensus about what that should be.

(4) Should changes be made to the terms of the Agency’s advice on special measures for the establishment and administration of a New Forest National Park Authority?

1.261 I do not consider it necessary for me to comment on paragraphs 1-15 of CD102 which contain introductory background material. Nor do I need to comment further on paragraph 16, with which I have agreed. My comments are therefore confined to paragraphs 17-29 which address matters that would be covered in the Secretary of State’s guidance.

Special guidance (Paragraph 17)

1.262 It was generally assumed at the inquiry that this would take the form of a Circular specific to the New Forest National Park. I have no comments to make on this content of this paragraph except that, to stress Government-wide responsibilities, I would suggest adding at the end of the second sentence ‘…..authority and other government-funded bodies with S11A (2) [1949 Act] duties towards the New Forest National Park.’ Alternatively, this matter could be addressed within the advice at paragraph 23.
1.263 I have discussed membership issues at paragraphs 1.250 to 1.258 above and have no comment to make upon paragraphs 18-20 of the advice, which I endorse.

1.264 I have taken it that the reference, in paragraph 19, to a ‘statement’ by the Secretary of State refers to coverage in the Circular of matters relating to SOS appointments to the NPA.

Relationship between a New Forest National Park Authority, the New Forest Verderers and the Forestry Commission (Paragraphs 21-23)

1.265 Again, I have taken it that mention of a ‘statement’, in paragraph 21, is a reference to the Circular.

1.266 I am recommending that, after paragraph 23, an additional paragraph be inserted concerning the Verderers’ veto on inappropriate development on the commonable Crown Lands, as discussed at paragraph 1.247 above.

1.267 I also suggest that the factual information on the respective statutory powers of the 3 bodies (set out in Appendix VI of CD111) be appended to the Circular.

1.268 Otherwise, I consider that the advice sets out clear guidance on the relationships that will have to be forged between the bodies concerned.

Planning arrangements (Paragraphs 24 and 25)

1.269 The Review of English National Park Authorities (CD14) has recently considered the statutory planning responsibilities of NPAs under the Environment Act 1995, concluding that the arguments for retaining Park-wide planning powers are strong, and recommending that the present position should remain unchanged. I have not heard any convincing arguments for departing from that arrangement in the New Forest for both the development plan and development control functions. Effective consultation will be required with neighbouring authorities about matters of cross-border interest, but that is not unique to the NFNP and applies in the case of every National Park. Like those carrying out the DEFRA review of NPAs, I was informed about the example of The Broads, where delegated development control has not always proved satisfactory. It seems to me highly desirable that the NPA should retain the ability to make consistent decisions on all applications within its area and be plainly recognised as doing so without the complication of delegation arrangements which are likely to confuse the public and potentially produce inconsistent decisions. If the NPA encounters occasional issues requiring specialist input I consider that such matters would be better dealt with by staff secondment or service agreements rather than delegating the actual decision. In the case of minerals and waste planning I recognise that it could make for economy to prepare a joint local plan with Hampshire County Council, but in my view this is a decision best left to the future NPA and does not need to be covered by advice from the Secretary of State.

1.270 Of course I recognise that no system of organisation involving National Parks will avoid a certain amount of confusion to the public about which body is responsible for decisions about particular matters (including, for example, the split between
bodies dealing with planning control and building control). The geographical circumstances here can be seen as adding to the difficulty of this issue because the NPA would assume planning powers over an extensive rural area in the centre of New Forest District leaving the District Council to administer such powers over a surrounding ring of urban, suburban and rural areas. However, my recommendations with respect to the NFNP boundaries would remove some areas from the National Park, including the towns of Lymington and Ringwood and the sizeable village of Bransgore. This would increase the area left with the District Council for planning purposes and relieve the NPA of the financial and professional burden of dealing with the planning issues of urban and suburban areas unconnected with National Park purposes and together containing a population of over 32,000. Much of this work would involve relatively minor proposals of no significance to the NFNP of the kind that the Agency’s proposal for delegation was designed to cater for. A benefit of omitting these areas would be to avoid the additional development control workload otherwise arising from the need for planning permission to be sought for very small developments under the more restricted GPDO rights applying within the National Park.

1.271 In short, if National Park-level planning protection is to be afforded to the designated area, I agree with the Agency, objectors such as the CNP, and the DEFRA Review of English National Park Authorities that the model of a dedicated local planning authority provided by the Environment Act 1995 is the most appropriate for the New Forest. However I do not support the concept of delegating decision making to the District Councils.

1.272 I therefore consider that the terms of the special advice relating to planning can be simplified and the opportunity taken to bring it up to date with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill. I recommend accordingly.

Land management (paragraphs 26-27); Visitor management (paragraph 28); and Involving local expertise and working in partnership (paragraph 29)

1.273 In general I see no requirement for change to these paragraphs. However, I recommend one change to point up the importance of the NPA developing close working relationships with the Port of Southampton and the Lymington Harbour Commissioners. My boundary recommendations greatly reduce the areas of these ports included in the NFNP although small areas of both are still retained within it. Nonetheless, there is still a need for greater recognition of the particular issues raised by the harbour authorities than is accorded by the existing advice.
PART 2: NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

Description of the boundary of the National Park, as recommended for modification by the Inquiry Inspector

From the Ower roundabout at the meeting of the A36, A36(T) and A3090 the recommended boundary runs southwards along the western edge of the A36 to its junction with the A326. It then continues along the western edge of the A326 to a point just north of the Hardley roundabout. From there it follows the boundary shown in the Designation Order around Holbury and Blackfield as far as Roughdown Lane. The recommended boundary then follows Roughdown Lane to the edge of the perambulation and follows the latter until it meets the boundary in the Designation Order at Kings Copse Road. It then continues along the boundary in the Designation Order as far as the objection site known as The Ruffs, omitting that land together with the small area of open space associated with the housing estate to the south. The recommended boundary then follows that shown in the Designation Order around the Blackfield and Fawley urban areas as far as the A326.

From the A326 the recommended boundary follows that of the New Forest Heritage Area as far as the car park west of Ashlett Mill. It then follows Ashlett Creek to the MLW mark where it turns to follow the Designation Order boundary south to the end of Calshot Spit. The island of excluded land at Fawley Power Station is reduced at its north-west end so that it follows the outer (northern) edge of the planted tree-screen to the north-west of the power station buildings.

From the end of Calshot Spit the recommended boundary follows the Designation Order boundary as far as the landward end of Hurst Castle Spit. From here it turns east along the MHW mark as far as a point near Salt Grass Cottages. The recommended boundary is then drawn tightly around the village of Keyhaven (as described in more detail in the third descriptive section of paragraph 4.141 of this report). After this it follows the ditch running northwards to the west of the Avon Water, before crossing the river and returning south down the ditch to the east of the river. The recommended boundary then includes a triangle of restored land before following the byway eastwards to the end of Lower Pennington Lane. From here it follows Lower Pennington Lane as far as the AONB boundary and a footpath going north-west from Sadlers Farm. Just north of here it turns east, following another path which crosses Lower Pennington Lane and continues to Ridgeway Farm. The recommended boundary then follows Poles Lane to the junction with Normandy Lane before following the boundary of the built-up area of the town along Viney Road to Delaware House, turning east along All Saints Road and then following Westfield Road. From the end of Westfield Road it follows bunds and footpaths passing around the marina before crossing the river to the NFHA boundary.

The recommended boundary then follows the NFHA boundary around the eastern, northern and western sides of Lymington as far as the A337. It then returns up the western side of the valley, still following the NFHA boundary as far as a point south of Broadmead where it then continues up the north-south track as far as Silver Street. The recommended boundary then follows Silver Street as far as the built-up edge of Hordle. From here it again follows the NFHA boundary for a considerable distance
past New Milton, Beckley, Hinton and Hinton Admiral Station. West of the station it follows the NFHA northwards around Burton Common but near Waterditch it extends slightly further west than the NFHA, following a small north-south running stream marking the county boundary to a point near Waterhouse Farm.

The recommended boundary then excludes the whole of the built-up area of Bransgore as defined in the Local Plan together with the playing fields and public open spaces associated with the village. North-west of Bransgore it follows the NFHA boundary as far as Ripley Wood. The recommended boundary then turns west to include the Bisterne Manor parkland, meeting the B3347 near Lower Bisterne Farm. It then crosses the road skirting woodland including Lower Side Copse and Alder Bed Copse before returning in an easterly direction to the B3347 via the minor road. The recommended boundary then skirts the north side of the Bisterne Manor parklands, excluding an extensive arable area south of Dragon Lane, before rejoining the NFHA boundary and following this northwards as far as Cross Lanes at the north-east edge of the Blashford Lakes complex.

The recommended boundary then follows a line defined around and to the west of the linear settlements of South and North Gorley to the Hungerford T-junction. It then follows the NFHA boundary through Stuckton to the B3078 near Criddlestyle. From here it continues to follow the NFHA boundary along the east bank of the Avon to Lower Burgateon the A338 where it joins the Designation Order boundary for a short distance to Burgate Cross. The recommended boundary then departs from the Designation Order boundary to follow the raised embankment of the disused railway line to a point north of Breamore where it again joins the Designation Order boundary south of South Charford Farm and continues across the floodplain to a point opposite Searchfield Farm.

From here the recommended boundary continues to follow the Designation Order to Redlynch except that a small excluded woodland area south of Searchfield Farm is taken into the National Park. From Redlynch it follows the Designation Order boundary via Grove Lane and Moor Lane nearly as far as Newton. From a point opposite the southern end of Lowdens Copse the recommended boundary leaves Moor Lane to turn east following a footpath to the A36, but departs from the Designation Order boundary to take in a small nib of land within a mire lying about half way along the footpath and exclude a north-pointing triangle of land at the eastern end bounded by two paths and the A36. The recommended boundary then follows the A36 back to Ower.
INSPECTOR’S OVERALL CONCLUSIONS ON THE TWO DESIGNATION CRITERIA

BOUNDARY SECTIONS 1 & 2

The above objections can be most conveniently considered under the following sub-areas:

- land north of Totton, east of the A326/A36(T)
- land west of the A326/A36(T)
- Totton urban area

In addition, I deal here with an objection by Minstead Manor Commoners since Minstead (although well within the perambulation) is probably closer to these boundary sections than any others.

Natural beauty

2.116 I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions on natural beauty.

Opportunities for open-air recreation

North of Totton

2.117 The landscape quality of this transitional area (crossed by major roads and pylon routes) is not high enough to offer scope for a markedly superior recreational experience derived from the ‘special qualities’ of the area. In any case, existing open-air recreation opportunities are few. Wade Hill Drove crosses two major roads and degraded countryside between Loperwood Lane and the M27 and has no attraction as a footpath with any sense of tranquillity until one reaches Wade Hill Farm, near the boundary of the Designation Order. More attractive options for longer walks are available nearby to the south-west in more Forest-like areas or to the north east in the Test Valley. This conclusion is supported by the survey material showing low usage of Wade Hill Drove and by the poor state of the path underfoot during any period of wet weather. The footpath near Calmore Croft has something of an urban fringe character and is adversely affected by the tunnel under the elevated road. The path near Hillstreet is also short and does not make strong links between destinations although there will soon be a better link with Testwood Lakes.

2.118 The facilities at Testwood Lakes offer a variety of good local open-air recreational experiences for the public and guided school parties from nearby parts of Totton and Southampton. The quality of these may well increase further as the new landscapes and habitats mature (depending upon any future decisions about further water supply requirements). However, these experiences take place within an environment that is highly transitional between the last slope of the outlying New Forest topographical ridge and the flat Test Valley. Moreover, as one moves around this site there are constant reminders of its urban fringe nature, exemplified by the many nearby industrial buildings, the site and sound of the M27 – depending on season and wind direction – the presence of pylons and views from the rising ground.
to tall buildings and dock structures in Southampton. In my view the recreational experience here has very little to do with the New Forest.

Land west of the A326/A36(T)

2.119 There can be no doubt that Paulton’s Park offers substantial existing opportunities for open-air recreation. I accept that their theme park nature may not be of the type suitable for an exposed location within a National Park. However, the site is very well contained within the landscape and the overall quality of the landscape is not reduced in a way that warrants exclusion of Paulton’s Park from the NFNP. Likewise, the M27 corridor is largely in cutting between J1 and J2 and does not warrant exclusion for the same reason.

Totton Urban Area

2.120 Totton is the largest town in New Forest District (27,400), substantially bigger than Lymington and Ringwood both of which I have recommended for exclusion. There may be some attractive open areas around it such as Testwood Lakes, Lower Test Marshes and Eling Great Marsh and Tide Mill but I have not supported the inclusion of any of these in the NFNP. The town itself and the other features mentioned by Cllr Randall come nowhere near presenting the necessary outstanding natural beauty of national importance or opportunities for open-air recreation offering a ‘markedly superior recreational experience’.

The Manor lands of Minstead

2.121 The pattern of generally small fields and contrasting larger-scale parkland and woodland, together with a dispersed pattern of hamlets and isolated buildings, many of traditional character, set along generally quiet lanes, is typical of the kinds of enclosed landscapes found within the perambulation. This highly attractive environment can be appreciated by the visitor from the lanes and footpaths that provide routes through intimate wooded valleys and direct links onto open land within the perambulation. There are also other relevant points of interest such as a field studies centre and Furzey Gardens. In my view the unique legal status of the Manor Lands is a factor that adds to, rather than detracts from, the intrinsic interest of the area for visitors seeking to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the area within the Designation Order.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION (Boundary sections 1-2)

2.122 I recommend that the NFNP boundary for this section be modified as shown on the attached map and described in the summary of recommendations.

(at pages 12-13 above)
BOUNDARY SECTIONS 3 to 10

For brevity of reporting I set out the cases under the following sub-areas:

- Land between Eling and Marchwood;
- Land between Marchwood and Hythe;
- Land at Frost Lane, Hythe;
- Sites at Holbury
- Sites at Blackfield
- Land between Fawley and Calshot
- Land between Calshot and Lymington River, incorporating representations about land between MHW and MLW.

Natural Beauty

3.290 I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions about the extent of land meeting the natural beauty criterion in boundary sections 3-10 except in the case of the area between the Dibden reclaim and the A326. This report generally recommends that the busy, noisy A326 corridor represents a firm and obvious eastern limit to the tract of land meeting the criterion of outstanding natural beauty. In my view this also holds true in the Dibden area. Although elements of the Ancient Forest Farmland landscape character are strongly and attractively present in some places, the urban fringes of Marchwood and Hythe (and in places Southampton and the Docks) exercise powerful influences and a considerable amount of residential and commercial ribbon development is strung out along the busy local roads. In my view there is a marked contrast between the area in question and the much more rural and peaceful countryside to the west between the A326 and the perambulation. This results in landscape and scenic quality (and any sense of tranquillity and relative wildness) falling below the necessary qualifying level to the east of the A326.

3.291 In addition, I would add a few remarks on (a) boundary-related planning issues in relation to the land at the Dibden Reclaim, (b) planning issues concerning the Defence Estates land and (c) the issue of boundaries along Southampton Water and the coast in relation to land between MHW and MLW.

3.292 Referring to (a), I have concluded that the Dibden reclaim does not meet either of the designation criteria. In addition, successive structure plans have effectively long safeguarded this general area as a site for port development. The current plan reflects this through policy EC6 which provides criteria for determining any such planning applications, including impacts on the NFHA. Although a precise site for any such development is not identified in any local plan, I consider that it would be somewhat perverse to interpret the term ‘allocated’ in boundary-setting criterion 2(i) in such a way as to ignore the obvious long-term implication of the structure plan that port development here is acceptable in principle, provided that the criteria are met. The quotations produced from Dower and Hobhouse show that it was their intention to avoid the head-on conflicts inherent between major industrial development allowed
for in a development plan and the inclusion of land in a National Park. The Agency’s criterion 2(i) clearly has the same aim.

3.293 Turning briefly to (b), I have concluded that the Defence Estates land does not meet either of the designation criteria. In any case, it seems to me that on any common sense approach there is clear conflict between the development plan’s long-term recognition that the land is part of the Military Port and its inclusion in the NFHA/NFNP. Sensible application of the obvious objectives behind boundary-setting criterion 2(i) should lead to the exclusion of this land from the NFNP. I do not consider that there is any comparison between this site (which is never open to the public for recreation) and open land in other National Parks, such as training areas subject to time-separated dual use.

3.294 Finally, dealing with the issue of boundaries in the intertidal areas, it seems to me that precedent from other National Parks is not particularly clear. As emerges from my note following paragraph 3.239 above, MLW has commonly been taken as the boundary, presumably both because it represents the outer edge of any landscape unit and accords with the geographical limit of an LPA’s powers. However, there are cases where other lines such as MHW or administrative boundaries have been followed, not always for reasons that are immediately apparent.

3.295 I support the general use of MLW here, both for the ‘natural beauty’ reasons described by the Assessor and on pragmatic administrative grounds. I am not convinced that the policy conflicts feared by the fisheries bodies are in any way inevitable and see no reason why the NPA would not be able to work with these bodies on any matters of common concern.

3.296 I understand the concern that the line of MLW will alter over time from that defined both on the Designation Order Map and the OS map current at any point in time (as may MHW). However, this practical difficulty is inherent in all coastal boundaries and will increasingly have to be coped with and accommodated in administrative processes. I do not regard it as sufficient reason from departing from the most logical concept of MLW.

Opportunities for open-air recreation

Eling to Marchwood,

3.297 I saw that the waterside scenes at Eling (available from the paths through the inland marshes on the urban fringe passing the bridge at the tide mill and onwards to Goatee Point as well as within the open space alongside the River Test below Eling Church) offer interesting views of the creek and the main channel. However, many views are backed or framed by urban features of highly variable quality. Some seen at close quarters are the marina and waterfront houses at Eling, containers stacked at Eling Wharf, and the vast panorama of stored cars, large vessels and tall cranes at Southampton Container Terminal. There are greener views looking south-east towards this land from the Redbridge road and rail bridges and the somewhat inaccessible local open space at Redbridge Wharf Park. However, these, too, are framed by development at Eling Wharf and the Container Terminal and substantial lines of pylons marching across the landscape from Eling Great Marsh up the slope towards the outlying ridges of the New Forest plateau.
3.298 This waterside landscape setting is locally interesting in itself and provides for pleasant short excursions from nearby urban areas, but hardly offers an opportunity for a markedly superior recreational experience within a landscape of national importance. Nor is it linked in any meaningful way with the Forest, being isolated by busy roads such as Jacobs Gutter Lane, the A326, and the link from the latter into Totton.

3.299 South of Jacobs Gutter Lane the open-air recreation opportunities are limited. One footpath links two roads across unremarkable countryside while another route crosses countryside currently being worked for gravel extraction and due to be restored to an acceptable (but again unremarkable) condition. There is no markedly superior recreational experience available in this area.

Marchwood to Hythe

3.300 From the experience of my accompanied visit to the Reclaim I saw that this is an extensive, flat and generally featureless area except at the north-west end where mounds of dumped material have been covered by naturally regenerated trees and other vegetation. I was able to appreciate that walks along the 2km waterside wall and the few straight tracks leading directly inland could potentially offer a certain feeling of tranquility and semi-remoteness gained from factors such as exposure to the weather and an absence of people, vehicles and buildings within the reclaim itself. However, this experience is tempered by the constant sight and occasional sounds of passing vessels of all sizes and clear wide views to the centre of Southampton about 1km distant across the River Test.

3.301 This is an unusual environment and would have considerable attraction as a recreational experience if the tracks were accessible to the public. However, they are not. Moreover, there seems to be no realistic prospect that the landowners will permit access to be established in the foreseeable future, bearing in mind the purpose behind the creation of the land, the owners’ view of its ongoing potential to meet that purpose at some stage in the future, and its resulting asset value. Consequently I do not consider that the Reclaim offers realistic opportunities for a markedly superior open-air recreational experience.

3.302 Turning to the remainder of the Marchwood – Hythe area, the footpath along the old shoreline from Veals Farm to Hythe Marina offers interesting views of a series of different environments including the gently sloping fields of the Ancient Forest Farmlands, the streamside and reedbed habitats at the foot of the reclaim, the old grazing marshes below West Cliff Hall, and the grounds of the hall itself running down to the remains of the former sea wall. The existence of the reclaim blocks sea views for most of the length of the route except at some points near the eastern end but this imparts a sense of secretiveness and enclosure which provides a quiet and peaceful recreational route.

3.303 However, other than this somewhat isolated footpath, opportunities for open-air recreation are rather limited, not well linked with the more rural areas west of the A326, and fall far short of providing a markedly superior recreational experience. The former footpaths at the Marshwood Lane have become blocked and discontinuous. The Dibden Golf Centre does not provide a golfing landscape of
particularly unusual type or quality, consisting mainly of well-manicured fairways and green roughs set among trees. The course is situated on a ridge with eastwards views across the River Test towards Southampton and the Docks while, on the west-facing slopes, the presence of the noisy A326 corridor is often apparent (for example from locations near the car park and on the short footpath near Holly Lodge Farm, north of the Tesco Store).

3.304  No doubt there is potential for improvements to the rights of way network to create better links between the old shoreline, the nearby urban areas, and land west of the A326. However, in view of my conclusion that the landscape does not reach a qualifying level of natural beauty, I cannot support inclusion of this area in the NFNP.

**The Frost Lane area**

3.305  The only open-air recreational resources of any note in this area are the small parking and picnic areas near the interpretation board on the waterside and the length of the Solent Way running between Hythe Nature Reserve in the north and the perambulation in the south. In my view the facilities by the waterside are essentially local in nature. Climbing away from the waterside the Solent Way follows a minor surfaced lane offering occasional views over the wooded valley to the east such as that near the public house. It then becomes a rutted unsurfaced track passing neglected arable fields with strong urban fringe qualities, a disused pit, and the locally attractive Holbury Mire, before passing through industrial premises at Hardley and making an awkward connection with the perambulation involving the crossing of two busy roads and further skirting of substantial industrial premises.

3.306  A further footpath runs from the Solent Way, crossing neglected fields, skirting a derelict sports ground and some unsightly pony paddocks before following a rubbish strewn route to the public open space at Denny Lodge Walk.

3.307  The 2.5km length of marshes running south-east from Hythe between the railway line and MLW can be seen but not readily or probably legally accessed from the point where the road meets the waterside. I saw that there is some extremely low-key open-air recreation in the form of shooting in the woodlands at the back of the marshes but the marshes do not add anything meaningful to the opportunities for open-air recreation in the Frost Lane area.

3.308  On an overall judgement the recreational opportunities offered by the Frost Lane area do not occur within a landscape of outstanding natural beauty and fall well below the standard required to offer a markedly superior recreational experience. An exception to this could be the small Forest Front Nature Reserve, which includes facilities for the disabled. However, this is isolated from the main part of the perambulation by the busy A326. Since the other parts of the small triangular area of the perambulation north of the A326 consist of a children’s playground and kick-about area and a sub-station I consider that the logical boundary of the NFNP is the A326.

**Sites at Holbury**

3.309  I support the Agency’s judgements here with respect to the second designation criterion. The small enclave of developed land (of which the SMS Skips site forms
part) makes no contribution to open-air recreational opportunities in its own right but is a generally well screened area which is absorbed into the wider landscape and close to the former Manor grounds. The latter forms a varied and attractive area of copses, ponds and grassy areas to which the public has access and provides a choice of pedestrian routes leading from Holbury to the footpath north of the industrial land and onwards to the perambulation. In addition, pedestrian use of the area immediately around SMS Skips could increase if the proposed north-south path in the Local Plan is implemented.

3.310 I therefore find no reason to exclude the site from the NFNP since it is part of a tract of land forming a definite link between the perambulation and nearby residential areas. However, I cannot support the designation of the developed area of Holbury Manor since this land is part of the built-up area and does not contribute to the second statutory criterion.

**Land at Roman Road, Blackfield**

3.311 The broad track along Roman Road passes under a canopy of tall mature trees and provides a highly attractive route at all seasons of the year, intimate and shaded in summer and with a wilder, more challenging feel in wet and windy weather when there are leaves and heavy mud underfoot. This route forms a direct link between the urban area of Holbury and the perambulation. The land to the east of the path has not been found to have qualifying natural beauty by the two Local Plan Inspectors or, now, by the Landscape Assessor. Although, from the standpoint of the recreational experience, that land’s openness contributes to the quality of the walk along Roman Road (partly for the contrast it affords with the land to the west), I consider that the natural boundary of the NFNP is the line described by the Assessor.

**The Ruffs, Blackfield**

3.312 Since there is no access to this land on the edge of the urban area it has no present recreational function except for the important wooded edge which it presents to Blackwell Common, thereby enhancing the quality of the recreational experience in that part of the perambulation. The landowner has suggested a boundary along the new woodland track within the site but this route is not yet public. Nor is it complete, since it lacks any outlet at the southern end. Moreover, this very short diversion from the firm edge of the perambulation would be difficult to define as a clear National Park boundary. In view of the Landscape Assessor’s conclusion on the natural beauty criterion I concur with her recommendation on the boundary in this area.

**The Fawley to Calshot area**

3.313 I find no reason to support the inclusion of any part of Fawley village since it has no ‘opportunities for open-air recreation’ offering a ‘markedly superior recreational experience’.

3.314 However, the remainder of the area of contention contains a great variety of opportunities for open-air recreation which together combine to make a worthy extension to the qualifying ‘extensive tract of country’. The Ashlett and Stonehills area was described by the First Local Plan Inspector as ‘an attractive remnant of small scale pastoral landscape with an irregular field pattern and hedgerow trees, the traditional forest pattern of which is enhanced by its close relationship with the sea’.
In landscape terms this area retains that character and is the one best able to demonstrate a clear continuity of relationship between the New Forest and Southampton Water. At Ashlett the small quay, pub, mill, mill pond and marina combine to present a pleasant scene, and the adjacent green is managed under a grazing regime and has a strongly forest-like character. From the quay one path leads across the green back to the B3053 and then on via Badminston Lane to the many paths around Badminston Common and Sprats Down. Other routes follow the coast, past the regenerating former construction compound, and then on to Calshot Spit between the power station buildings and the edge of the coastal marshes. I saw that the marsh-side route, with its varied panorama and sense of openness to the elements, is popular with walkers at all seasons.

3.315 Visitors to Calshot are able to take part in a great variety of formal and informal recreational opportunities – Calshot Marshes Nature Reserve; indoor and outdoor activities based at the Activities Centre and the shingle beach, including sailing, sea kayaking, windsurfing and kitesurfing; visits to buildings associated with national defence (Calshot Castle and the flying boat hangars); observation of shipping on one of the world’s busiest waterways; appreciation of the views across the Solent to the Isle of Wight; and field studies based on the coastal geomorphology.

3.316 The power station is a dominant presence in this area (and there are some substantial buildings on the spit itself) but the maritime landscape around the Calshot area has a considerable sense of spaciousness while these large structures have their own intrinsic interest. In particular, the power station is notable for the way in which it has been designed and painted to reduce some of its intrusiveness. Overall, I consider that this area offers a markedly superior recreational experience in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

**Calshot to Lymington River**

3.317 The areas between MHW and MLW from Calshot to Lymington River (such as those at Calshot Beach, Lepe Country Park and Lower Exbury) are an integral part of the coastal scene at the moving water’s edge, forming the foreground to attractive views across the Solent to the Isle of Wight. They are part of the very high quality recreational experience obtained by the many visitors to these areas, whatever activity they may be engaged in.

3.318 Further west towards Lymington River there is more limited access to the coastal edge but the intertidal areas are more extensive and these much quieter areas still offer a superior recreational experience. These intertidal areas also contribute very significantly to the highly attractive wider views obtainable at more elevated points further inland along the Solent Way.

**OVERALL RECOMMENDATION (Boundary sections 3-10)**

3.319 I recommend that the NFNP boundary for these sections be modified as shown on the attached maps and described in the summary of recommendations.

*(at pages 12-13 above)*
BOUNDARY SECTIONS 11 & 12

The objections within these sections can be most conveniently considered under the following sub-areas:

- the town of Lymington and surrounding areas
- the ‘Barton-Milford gap’
- land between Barton and Mudeford
- land west and north of New Milton
- land at Hinton Park
- Cranemoor Common

Natural Beauty

4.171 With two small exceptions I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions on the applicability or otherwise of the natural beauty criterion within the various areas of contention in boundary sections 11-12. I deal with these exceptions in paragraphs 4.183 – 4.186 below, in which I cover both of the designation criteria together for ease of reference.

4.172 There are also two other areas about which I need to make some comments in relation to natural beauty.

4.173 Firstly, Lymington would be by far the largest town in any English National Park. While it may contain limited aspects of ‘natural beauty’ an urban area of this size does not (and probably could not) meet the designation criterion to anything like a sufficient extent. It is not a small town blending into or penetrated by the surrounding countryside like Lyndhurst or Brockenhurst and in my view its inclusion would be manifestly inappropriate, as well as requiring too much of the NPA’s resources to be devoted to urban planning issues irrelevant to proper National Park purposes. In my view none of factors raised by the Agency under boundary-setting criteria 2d and 2g (or the accompanying footnotes) concerning the inclusion or exclusion of towns (see table 2 of CD104) come near to outweighing these fundamental points.

4.174 Secondly, the area south of Lymington is one where particularly careful judgement is needed as to whether the area should be included in the NFNP or excluded from it. I have no doubt that the area meets both of the designation criteria, but its remaining connectivity with other areas qualifying for inclusion in the NFNP is much more open to question.

4.175 This area is physically isolated from other areas recommended for inclusion except for its loose attachment (across the mouth of Lymington River) to similar Coastal Fringe and Coastal Plain Estates type landscapes on the eastern side of the estuary within the NFHA/AONB and the NFNP designation order. However, although this link is somewhat tenuous (and inclusion of the land south of the town would result in a long projection from the main body of the National Park) I
recommend that this coastal land is included in the NFNP. This would have the pragmatic merit of taking into the NFNP all the land within the South Hampshire Coast AONB which the Assessor and myself still consider to qualify on natural beauty grounds, thus enabling the AONB to be revoked in its entirety. If this area is not included in the NFNP its current level of landscape protection would be undesirably reduced since it could hardly be feasible for such a small area to be retained as a separate AONB in its own right.

Opportunities for open-air recreation

The town of Lymington

4.176 Lymington is clearly a popular visitor destination for recreation based on coastal pursuits such as sailing and more casual enjoyment of its scenic waterside and attractive town centre. It is also a starting point for walks along the marshes. However, the developed urban area as a whole does not provide a markedly superior recreational experience based on landscape resources of National Park-standard natural beauty.

Land north of Lymington

4.177 The area in contention north of Lymington, recommended for exclusion by the Landscape Assessor, is penetrated by footpaths but I found that these cross a generally flat plateau of unremarkable, somewhat degraded countryside. Some paths appear to be little used and the recreational experience here is certainly not ‘markedly superior’.

Land south of Lymington

4.178 I consider that the area considered by the Landscape Assessor to warrant inclusion and exclusion south of Lymington on natural beauty grounds coincides with the extent of the area meeting the second designation criterion.

4.179 The coastal area comprising the on-shore marshes and salterns (and the quieter pastoral areas behind these approaching the southern edges of Lymington) contains a network of quiet lanes and rights of way passing through tranquil countryside with occasional traditional buildings. Hurst Castle (accessed on foot along the lengthy spit or by boat from Keyhaven, and representing a historic feature right in the middle of the Western Solent) offers an additional point of very great interest, as does the highly attractive coastal village of Keyhaven. Overall, this area provides ‘markedly superior’ recreational opportunities for walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, bird-watchers and more casual visitors.

4.180 By contrast, the recreational experience available elsewhere south of the town is inevitably affected by the different (much lower) quality of the evolving landscapes found on the extensive former and current extraction sites and the large-scale arable landscapes west of the Avon Water. In my view the open-air recreational opportunities in these areas, though pleasant in places, are not ‘markedly superior’.

The Barton-Milford gap

4.181 I have agreed with the Landscape Assessor, and the Countryside Agency, that this tract of land (between the coast to the south, Barton and Ashley in the west, and
the Designation Order boundaries in the north and east) does not have sufficiently consistently outstanding natural beauty to merit inclusion in the NFNP. As a result, this sizeable tract of land (taken as a whole) does not provide the opportunity to experience sufficiently continuous episodes of ‘markedly superior recreational experience’.

4.182 The cliff-top walk from Barton to Milford is certainly an uplifting experience in any weather, and full of great interest, and there are a number of sub-areas where lanes and other rights of way pass through pleasant countryside, providing short interludes reflecting aspects of the New Forest. However, too often the presence of the generally encircling built-up areas (Barton, Ashley, Hordle, Everton and Milford) and other detractors such as caravan sites, busy roads, Efford Research Station, and areas of extensive arable cultivation, break up the continuity of the available open-air recreational experience, reducing it below the level required for National Park designation.

4.183 I now turn to the areas where the Landscape Assessor has suggested small-scale additions to the NFNP. First of all, I agree with her (and the Agency) that it is difficult to draw hard and fast boundaries in this area where the quality of the landscape and the available recreational experience is in gradual transition away from designation quality from north to south.

4.184 Dealing with the Arnewood House/Arne Wood area, it seems to me that the literary associations of the House are unproven. More particularly, even if they exist, there appears to be little about the present house to bring these associations alive to visitors, were they to have access to the house, which at present they do not. Arne Wood offers an attractive footpath through woodland but this is only a short length in a wider route most of which passes through countryside that is not of outstanding quality. The paths leaving the wood to the north and west pass over land which (although partly within the NFHA) appear to me to be less intact, well-maintained or high-quality than would be necessary to merit inclusion in the National Park. To the south of the wood the recreational experience undergoes a change in character. The paths from Arne Wood to Batchley Farm and then onwards to Everton via Icehouse Plantation appear to be popular and provide a very pleasant route but the landscape here is opening out into a larger scale than that found along the north-south path along the western side of the valley of the Avon Water.

4.185 Turning to the second area, the triangle based on Cottagers Lane, I agree that this area would be more appropriately characterised as being of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape character type but it seems to me that its ability to meet the natural beauty criterion is at best marginal. Also, there is no public access to this area and although part of Cottagers Lane has a pleasant rural character I do not consider that the addition of this triangle to the NFNP could contribute to the necessary ‘markedly superior recreational experience’.

4.186 My overall conclusion in this area is that land south of Silver Street between (in the west) the built-up edge of Hordle and (in the east) the north-south footpath along the western rim of the valley of the Avon Water (passing the development known as Broadmead) does not meet the two designation criteria. Silver Street is a busy straight road used by a considerable amount of traffic and fronted (especially on
the south side) by a considerable amount of development, much rather utilitarian in quality and including commercial uses. There is little opportunity to see into the land within the NFHA on the south side of Silver Street and the only footpath into this area (opposite Marlwood Nurseries) does not afford a markedly superior recreational experience. Silver Street therefore presents an obvious robust boundary to the NFNP at this point.

**Land between Barton and Mudeford**

4.187 This is an attractive coast with considerable appeal to visitors but the inland setting is urban, most of the land between the sea and the railway being developed. Although the urban area contains pleasant open areas such as the grounds of Highcliffe Castle, a number of remnants of former New Forest-related commons, and Chewton Bunny this is primarily a developed tract not offering National Park-type opportunities for open-air recreation.

**Land west and north of New Milton**

4.188 As described by the Landscape Assessor, this area does not provide a landscape resource of National Park quality. Moreover it is one to which there is little public access. Walkford Lane falls far short of providing a ‘markedly superior recreational experience’. The same is true of the paths extending north from the railway line towards the Designation Order boundary.

4.189 However, the Dark Lane area is a quiet backwater where recreational links on foot or cycle can begin to be made between the urban areas to the south and the New Forest landscapes which have begun to emerge strongly in this area. On balance I recommend the inclusion of this land within the NFNP.

**Land at Hinton Park**

4.190 Turning to the large area of contention based on Hinton Estate, I agree with the Landscape Assessor that this area meets the natural beauty criterion. From our extensive accompanied visit I am satisfied that the area has a very high quality, intact, well-maintained landscape containing considerable elements of variety from broad parkland to intimate wooded valleys to the well-ordered woodland-fringed fields of the dairy farms.

4.191 This area of Heath-associated Estates landscape is extensive and forms an important and integral part of the highly attractive ring of landscapes immediately surrounding the perambulation. The various elements of this landscape provide the foreground for those travelling through the area on the A35 and the various other minor roads, including that leading to Forest Lodge, and there are also occasional longer distance views into the landscape. These visual opportunities all add greatly to public enjoyment of the area by considerably extending the experience of being in the Forest.

4.192 Although there is little public access to this particular section of the area within the Designation Order south west of the perambulation it is not necessary for such access to exist across every part of a qualifying tract. The estate has a track record of granting and considering access to other nearby areas within the same tract of ‘heath-associated estates’ landscape type although it has expressed a current desire
not to provide access to the area in contention other than, as now, to the Hinton Admiral parklands on special occasions. However, circumstances can change and, given the quality, scale and tranquillity of the landscape resource here, I do not consider it unreasonable to conclude that the general question I have posed in relation to ‘potential opportunities’ for open-air recreation offering a markedly superior recreational experience (at paragraph 15 of Appendix 2) could be answered in the affirmative.

4.193 Overall, therefore, I recommend inclusion of this area in the NFNP.

Cranemoor Common

4.194 I agree with the Landscape Assessor that this remaining open area south of the robust boundary formed by the railway embankment is of local value rather than meriting inclusion in the NFNP on natural beauty grounds. Similarly, while it forms a valuable recreational resource for local people, the tunnel under the railway does not appear to link with any legally established rights of way on the north side and this small site does not offer a markedly superior recreational experience of national importance.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS (Boundary sections 11-12)

4.195 I recommend that the NFNP boundary for these sections be modified as indicated on the attached maps and described in the summary of recommendations. 
(at pages 12-13 above)
BOUNDARY SECTIONS 13-15 (The Avon Valley)

The objections in these boundary sections can most conveniently be reported under the following sub-areas:

**Proposals to retract the boundary**
- retraction to the present western boundary of the NFHA;
- the exclusion of Ringwood and nearby land;
- the exclusion of land at Breamore;
- the exclusion of land at St Catherines Hill/Town Common/Blackwater Hill.

**Proposals to extend the boundary**
- land west to the Moors River;
- land to the west of the Avon between Town Common and Fordingbridge;
- sub-area between Town Common and Ashley;
- sub-area at Ashley, east of the A338;
- sub-area between Ringwood and Fordingbridge;
- land in and around Fordingbridge;
- land between Fordingbridge and Downton;
- land east of Burton;
- Christchurch Harbour and Hengistbury Head

**The Lower Avon Valley from Ringwood to the coast**
( between the NFHA boundary in the east and Moors River in the west)

5.329 I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions on the extent of the land meeting the natural beauty criterion for inclusion in the NFNP. The wide flat river terrace farmlands (mainly used for extensive arable cultivation and dairying) do not have sufficient scenic and landscape quality to merit designation.

5.330 As for the ‘links’ between the New Forest core to the east and the adjacent terraces and floodplain to the west, CD 237 represents the Agency’s response to my invitation to give a full account of what it saw as the factors binding these landscapes together and justifying the inclusion within the NFNP of landscape types not previously considered to be an integral part of the New Forest mosaic.

5.331 The paper sets out the links in terms of various topographical, ecological, historical and socio-economic factors discussed in the ‘Links Paper’ (CD237). The paper undoubtedly establishes some links in terms of aspects of the historic dispersed pastoral system, occasional fragments of former commons, fords, and possible drove roads but from my extensive visits to this area I find them to be overwhelmed by the current reality of large-scale farming within a flat landscape which is not of outstanding natural beauty. Map 2 in CD237, showing the geographical distribution
of the “landscape and socio-economic/cultural links”, serves only to demonstrate the lack of impact of these features within the present day landscape.

5.332 In my view the Agency also overplays the ‘landscape archaeological’ significance of the parliamentary enclosure fields found on the river terraces, since any remaining traces of connections with former more heath-related landscapes are so infrequent and patchy, and this is a common national field type.

5.333 Turning to areas west of the terraces, there are some areas of considerable natural beauty within the floodplain and on some of the surviving Dorset Heaths and plantations, but these areas also fail to merit inclusion individually or collectively as part of any coherently definable “extensive tract” of qualifying landscape. This is because of the varying effects of intrusion by urban influences and other detractors, the existence of noisy features such as the A338 and Bournemouth Airport, fragmentation, distance from the New Forest core, and lack of sufficient connection in terms of history and/or land management. Consequently, there is little point in my assessing in any detail whether or not the very extensive areas both within and beyond the Designation Order meet the second criterion.

5.334 However, considering the matter briefly (and moving successively from east to west away from the Assessor’s recommended NFNP boundary line), the extensive river terraces contain a network of minor roads, byways, bridleways and footpaths, including the Avon Valley Path. These collectively provide plenty of (often very quiet) links between the Forest core, some attractive Avon Valley villages and the coastal towns but for most of the time these routes pass through a generally rather featureless farming landscape with sometimes only very distant views of the New Forest slopes or the heathy land on the west bank of the river. The recreational experience here can sometimes be very pleasant but on the whole it is unremarkable and far from ‘markedly superior’ on any national scale.

5.335 Referring briefly to Ringwood, I do not consider that this substantial town qualifies for inclusion under either of the criteria, both on the grounds referred to above by the Assessor and for the reasons I have already set out in relation to the similarly-sized town of Lymington at paragraphs 4.173 and 4.176.

5.336 Turning to Bransgore, according to the Local Plan this village has a population of about 4,300, making it the 10th largest settlement in New Forest District. As it is a substantial village situated right on the edge of the qualifying tract and cannot really be said to meet the designation criteria in its own right I consider that it should be excluded from the NFNP, with the boundary drawn around the built-up edge defined in the Local Plan. As in the cases of the larger towns of Lymington and Ringwood, this would allow the District Council to continue to address the planning issues arising here, most of which have little relationship with National Park purposes. Brockenhurst (3,400), Sway (3,400) and Lyndhurst (3,000) would then be the largest villages in the National Park. All of these are more truly embedded within the centre of the NFNP, fulfil more obvious visitor functions related to National Park purposes, and more properly warrant planning control exercised by the NPA.

5.337 The next major landscape element within this overall area is the water meadows, which are at their widest in the section below Ringwood. I saw from my
accompanied visits that they have considerable attraction but very little access in the area south of Bisterne. While this corridor would never be suitable for large-scale access in my view the difficulties of providing at least some carefully-managed, time-limited access were probably over-stated by some objectors. Such access could potentially be markedly superior but (as discussed above) the floodplain corridor here does not fall within a sufficiently coherent extensive tract of New Forest countryside.

5.338 Across the River Avon there are some attractive landscapes with good open-air recreation opportunities at Town Common, Ramsdown Plantation, Sopley Common, Week Common, Matchams View, Avon Country Park and Hurn Forest. However, as described above, I have agreed with the Assessor that these do not represent a coherent extensive tract of sufficiently outstanding natural beauty and the same is true of their potential for open-air recreation. Some areas afford opportunities for quiet recreation within a reasonably extensive ‘natural’ environment with some sense of remoteness and tranquillity, but these are usually at the more extreme western edges of the areas in contention. Nearer to the Avon the quality of the experience on the heathlands and commons between Town Common and Leybrook Common is notably diminished by the very noisy corridor of the A338 dual carriageway. Here, the sound of traffic is a constant detraction to enjoyment of the areas open to public access to the west of the river and also reaches far into the flood meadows at those points where sound-eroding features are less present.

5.339 To sum up, I support the Assessor’s view that departures from the NFHA boundary are only justified in very limited cases in the lower section of the valley. The first is a minor amendment west of Godwinscroft and Neacroft where the stream at the foot of the slope beyond Waterditch represents a clearer boundary on the ground. The second is the exclusion of Bransgore for the reasons already described. The third is an extension of the NFHA boundary west of Ripley Wood to include the manor, parklands and church at Bisterne and a small area west of the B3347 where the Avon Valley Path runs through an arable field to reach an interesting area of mixed wooded and heathy character leading down to the ancient Wattons Ford. Although I do not recommend inclusion in the NFNP of the meadowland immediately adjoining the ford, this area is the only one of its type near the floodplain in the lower valley that retains sufficient connectivity with land of New Forest character and quality to justify designation. Inclusion could bring some criticism that this is a somewhat narrow westward projection of the designated area. However, in my view incorporation of the land into the National Park provides an opportunity to demonstrate and explain ancient connections between the Forest and the limits of its ‘Large Bounds’ that are elsewhere hard to appreciate in any meaningful way on the ground.

The Avon Valley between Ringwood and Downton
(between the NFHA boundary to the east and Boveridge Heath, Cranborne Common, Fordingbridge and Breamore to the west)

5.340 As in the case of the valley below Ringwood, I concur with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions on the geographical extent of land which both meets the natural beauty criterion and displays a firmly established ‘New Forest’ character. Although there are some highly attractive areas west of the floodplain with landscape
characteristics similar to those found in some areas of the Forest, these are not sufficiently extensive or continuous to justify stretching the boundaries of the NFNP across non-qualifying areas such as Blashford Lakes and the river terraces.

5.341 Referring briefly to Fordingbridge, I recognise that the town has long historic and cultural links with the Forest which in some senses are still retained and valued today. The attractive centre of the town (around the High Street, the bridge, and the riverside gardens) also acts as something of a focus for visitors to the general area of the New Forest, although the quality of the open-air recreational experience of visiting Fordingbridge (if it can be truly described as such) is pleasant, rather than ‘markedly superior’ on a national scale.

5.342 I agree with the Assessor that the town does not immediately abut land with qualifying outstanding natural beauty. In addition, the elevated A338 forms a substantial firm barrier that would be difficult to cross merely for the purpose of including the town. Even if Fordingbridge did lie next to qualifying rural land, I would not support the inclusion (and still less the partial inclusion) of this settlement of 6,100 within the designated “extensive tract”. For reasons similar to those already set out in relation to Lymington, Ringwood and Bransgore I do not consider that inclusion of Fordingbridge within the NFNP would lend greatly to the statutory National Park purposes. Rather, it would result in further deflection of the NPA’s efforts away from those purposes. Exclusion of all these urban areas would leave the NPA freer to concentrate its activities and resources on the issues of smaller centres like Lyndhurst, Sway and Brockenhurst (all with populations of 3,400 – 3,000) which are truly embedded within and permeated by land meriting designation against both of the statutory criteria.

5.343 In view of the above conclusions (and as in the case of the Lower Avon Valley), there is little point in my assessing how far the second statutory designation criterion is met on other land outside that with the requisite natural beauty.

5.344 Briefly however, the Blashford Lakes complex offers good opportunities for angling, sailing and other quiet water sports, and bird watching on those lakes retained for conservation. Nonetheless, similar complexes of water-filled gravel pits used for these purposes are found in many areas of lowland England and so the recreational experience is not unusual or markedly superior on a national scale. Although some lakes have close views of the lower New Forest slopes, the recreation experience here is not particularly New Forest-related.

5.345 Turning to the river terraces, there are relatively few paths here and those north of Ibsley pass through countryside that is adversely affected by current mineral extraction and the presence of many low-grade scattered buildings used in connection with horsiculture. There are better paths in the Stuckton area but even here some are affected by field amalgamation through hedgerow removal, and most pass across pleasant but unremarkable countryside.

5.346 Moving further west I saw that there are some excellent recreational experiences available on and near the Avon Valley path in the Ibsley Bridge, Turmer, Harbridge, Kent Hill, and Bickton areas. However, the ‘high points’ of these experiences can be sometimes be disconnected from one another when the routes pass
through pockets of lower quality land, thus reducing the overall recreational experience. Moreover, they do not link well with land within the Forest core. There are also some long quiet walks available in areas progressively further west in parts of Ringwood Forest and Cranborne Common. However, as explained by the Landscape Assessor, none of the areas mentioned here can be justified for inclusion in a qualifying part of the NFNP extensive tract. Thus, overall, the landscape does not provide the basic resource required to provide a markedly superior recreational experience.

5.347 Within the areas of the valley in contention here (Ringwood to Downton) the Assessor and myself have found that the natural beauty criterion is only met within the Avon floodplain west of the Godshill slopes, Woodgreen and Hale Park. Although this area was included in the NFHA only on grounds of the back-up grazing criterion applied to that exercise, I consider that both the slopes and the floodplain are high quality landscapes meeting the designation criterion. Moreover, the immediate juxtaposition of the floodplain (which here has both width and a relatively wild atmosphere) with the high quality characteristic New Forest landscape types creates an ability to appreciate the former close interrelationships between these two elements that has been lost or seriously reduced elsewhere.

5.348 I have no hesitation in concluding that this area also amply fulfils the open-air recreation criterion. There are excellent opportunities to experience the tranquillity of the floodplain (and its changing seasonal character) via the Avon Valley Path between Burgate Manor Farm and Folds Farm, the Woodgreen to Breamore road, and the footpath from Hale House to South Charford Farm. The two paths in particular offer good links with rights of way through fine scenery at Castle Hill and Hale Park and there are opportunities for circular walks through these diverse but interrelated landscapes which could potentially be greatly enhanced by the provision of access along the disused railway, which forms the recommended NFNP boundary here. The footpath leading south from Folds Farm below Frankenbury also takes a route which offers the opportunity to experience both the fringing woodlands and the edge of the quiet pastoral floodplain.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION (Boundary sections 13-15)

5.349 I recommend that the NFNP boundary for these sections be modified as shown on the attached maps and described in the summary of recommendations. 
(at pages 12-13 above)
BOUNDARY SECTIONS 16-17

The objections here can be most conveniently reported under the following headings:
- Land north of Hale
- Redlych, Bohemia and Lover
- Land at The Earldoms
- Land near Whiteparish Village
- Area of contention between the A36 and A27

**Land north of Hale**

6.125 I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions and recommendations on the natural beauty criterion and find no reason to support either (a) an extension of the boundary as suggested by the Ramblers Association and the CNP or (b) retraction of the boundary as suggested by J Woolley, Mrs K Wormington and P Newman.

6.126 As was generally accepted, it is difficult to draw a really firm boundary related to strong features on the ground in this corner of the NFNP. However, in my view the boundary in the Order (with the minor amendment suggested by the Landscape Assessor) reasonably clearly defines the edge at which land of New Forest character and quality shades off into land having more relation to the chalk downs. Although there is attractive quiet countryside to the north of the Designation Order boundary I do not support the inclusion of further lengths of the Avon Valley Path. After dropping down into the Lodge Farm valley (where another path going west has strong downland character) the Avon Valley Path quickly rises to a point near Woodfalls Farm where the horizon opens out to clear downland countryside with extensive views over Downton, the Avon Valley and (beyond these) the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire AONB. Nor is it appropriate to include the suburbanised villages of Woodfalls and Morgans Vale which have no relation to the second designation criterion.

6.127 Turning to the objections concerning land within the Designation Order boundary, the north-sloping land between the Hale Park, Home Farm and Hatchet Green forms part of the immediate and highly attractive setting to the Avon Valley Path and the other byway climbing from the valley to Home Farm. In my view this land contributes to the markedly superior recreational experience obtainable by users of these paths.

**Redlynch, Bohemia And Lover**

6.128 I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions on the natural beauty of the area surrounding these three almost interconnected small villages within heavily wooded countryside forming part of the ‘heath associated smallholdings and dwellings’ landscape type on the edge of the Designation Order.

6.129 Recreational facilities in this relatively small area are limited to the path descending from Woodfalls, paths in and around Tinneys Firs with its new woodland
car park, and the path descending from the cemetery. However, there is considerable variety of experience in this attractive undulating area. Walks along the lanes and paths present a constantly changing scene of mainly small fields and wooded valleys threaded with the linear villages containing many simple traditional Forest-style cottages. In addition, the recreational opportunities mesh well with others nearby at Hatchet Green, Hale Purlieu and the deeply wooded areas to the east of the villages. I therefore conclude that they merit inclusion in the NFNP against the second statutory criterion.

Redlynch To Newton Crossroads, Including The Earldoms

6.130 I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusions and recommendations concerning the natural beauty of this area.

6.131 The NFNP boundary generally follows Moor Lane between these two points. The area south of Moor Lane, as far as the perambulation, mainly comprises plantations and ancient woodlands clothing undulating countryside feeding some of the tributaries of the Blackwater. I saw that this is a quiet area crossed by few roads and with a number of opportunities for lengthy walks offering a prolonged sense of contact with the natural world and ‘getting away from it all’. In my view there is no case to support the objection suggesting exclusion of The Earldoms and Bagfield Copse since these areas are an integral part of this area (and partly within the New Forest cSAC), albeit relatively near the edge of this tract. The apparent fears of the objector about take-over by ‘public recreation’ seem to be based on misunderstanding of National Park purposes and the role of an NPA.

6.132 South of Newton Farm the Designation Order boundary follows a footpath between the A36 and Moor Lane. This path follows a poorly defined (but interesting and mildly adventurous) line across a very boggy area forming an SSSI, including some parts of it and excluding others. In my view it would be more logical to include the small area of land within the mire to the north of the notional line of the path, creating a more logical and recognisable boundary. I also support the Landscape Assessor’s recommendation for a minor boundary change at the eastern end of the Moor Lane to A36 footpath.

6.133 I do not support the Ramblers Association’s suggestion of inclusion of the neglected triangle of fields and farm buildings north of the mire (except insofar as the boundary footpath runs along the edge of some of the fields).

Land Between The A36 And A27 (Newton Crossroads To Ower Roundabout)

6.134 The submitted objections place into contention the whole of the area between the A36 and the A27/A3090 from Newton Crossroads in the west to Ower Roundabout in the east.

6.135 The Landscape Assessor has explained her view that most of this extensive area does not meet the natural beauty criterion consistently enough to merit inclusion on natural beauty grounds. She recommends only (a) the continued inclusion of land centred on Whiteparish Common at the northern end and (b) the extension of the boundary to include land at Embley Wood at the southern end.
Central areas (Plaitford Green to West Wellow and Woodington)

6.136 Leaving aside for the moment the two areas at the extreme western and eastern ends of boundary sections 16-17 (and therefore considering the areas recommended by the Landscape Assessor for exclusion from the Order on natural beauty grounds), I find that the extensive central areas between Plaitford Green and West Wellow/Woodington do not meet the second designation criterion any better than they do the first. West Wellow is a large low-density suburban area and does not provide open-air recreation opportunities relevant to National Park purposes. North of the village, there are some footpaths and quiet lanes but this part of the Blackwater Valley and the Woodington area are dominated by arable cultivation within a landscape of unexceptional quality and the open-air recreational opportunities are well below the level required to merit recognition as a markedly superior recreational experience of national importance. For example, while the footpath from Chapmans Lane to Kitts Merries Farm has a continuous length of nearly 4km it passes no points of really substantial interest or quality, other than the valley near East Wellow Church (with the Florence Nightingale Grave).

6.137 In the more northerly area, towards the A27 (near Sherfield English and The Frenchies), there are notably few footpaths other than short disconnected lengths. Some quiet lanes wend through undulating countryside with an attractive intimate quality (such as found at Dandys Ford) and there are many isolated (often traditional) farms and houses, but elements of strong New Forest character and associations are becoming weaker. Where south-facing views become available towards the main New Forest plateau this seems to be a considerable distance away. Overall, this area does not qualify against the second criterion.

Western areas (Plaitford Green to Whiteparish)

6.138 Returning to the western end of boundary sections 16-17, beyond the road running from Plaitford to Sherfield English, there is a large block of quiet countryside stretching as far as Whiteparish with relatively few roads and many footpaths. This is an area presenting a number of opportunities for walks through countryside of varied character. This includes a patchwork made up of Melchet Park and the extensive arable fields which surround it; some medium scale pastures and arable fields south of Park Water between Landfordwood and the Blackwater; former pasture woodlands at Whiteparish Common and Cowesfield Green; some more recent plantations; and an area of farmland between the A36 and Whiteparish. However, I agree with the Landscape Assessor that much of the landscape resource in this area is not of strong enough quality and/or New Forest character, which of course has an impact on the quality of the recreational experience. Within most of the landscape types in this area it is in varying degrees pleasant rather than markedly superior.

6.139 Focussing particularly on the area recommended by the Assessor as meeting the natural beauty criterion, this can be considered in two sections, firstly the agricultural land north of Whiteparish Common and secondly the common itself together with Barnsell Copse and other nearby woodland. Dealing with the former, I am not convinced that the agricultural land bounded by the A36 to the south-west and Whiteparish Common to the south-east has New Forest natural beauty to a sufficiently
Turning to Whiteparish Common and the other nearby wooded areas recommended for retention in the NFNP by the Landscape Assessor, the common itself is ancient wood pasture forming an outlying part of the New Forest cSAC. The paths branching out from the A36 to the common, Barnsell Copse and the other woodlands and the attractive countryside at Landfordwood can be seen as a further extension of the long routes available through The Earldoms, Langley Wood, the Hamptworth area and the woodlands south of that linking up with the perambulation. In short, I consider that an area bounded by the western and northern limits of the Whiteparish Common cSAC, Park Water, and the boundary recommended by the Assessor in the vicinity of Landfordwood can be considered to meet both of the criteria. However, on balance, I recommend that this area should not be included in the NFNP. This is because the busy A36 (which is in cutting along some of this length) forms such a robust and clearly identifiable boundary between the extensive tract of qualifying land to the south and the land to the north which (with the exception of the relatively small area described above) does not meet the designation criteria.

Eastern areas (West Wellow to Gardeners Lane)

6.141 I now turn to the extreme eastern end of the land between the A36 and the A27. This includes (a) the Embley Park area, north of Ryedown Lane, (b) the Gardeners Lane triangle and (c) the Ham Down/Shelley Common/Embley Wood area, the last being an area recommended by the Landscape Assessor for inclusion in the NFNP on natural beauty grounds.

6.142 I agree with the Landscape Assessor’s conclusion that the Embley Park area, north of Ryedown Lane, does not have the required degree of natural beauty even though the original designed parkland and associated structures can still be discerned in places and the school’s trustees are working to retain and enhance important aspects of these features where possible. However, there is no public access to this area other than to the raw landscape of the golf course and a very small area identified on the draft CROW map. As for the Gardeners Lane triangle, this mainly comprises a flat arable plateau without public access. Although the wood-topped hillside overlooking Romsey at Pauncefoot Hill is highly attractive this seems to have no connection with the New Forest and is also without public access.

6.143 Turning to the Ham Down/Shelley Common/Embley Wood area, Ham Down and the former Shelley Common lie within countryside of the Heath Associated Smallholdings landscape type but in my view are of unremarkable quality. Ham Down is bounded by ribbons of varyingly consolidated development on all sides and offers little in the way of recreation appropriate to National Park purposes. The Shelley Common area is affected by some intrusive detracting features, as identified by the Landscape Assessor. The only recreational resource here is the footpath
running from a point south of Wellow Mill to the A36, emerging as Shelley Lane. From my visit I concluded that it ran through countryside of only moderate quality. Thus, overall, the Ham Down/Shelley Common area cannot be described as providing a markedly superior recreational experience.

6.144 I agree with the Assessor that Embley Wood provides a high quality landscape and a remarkable ecological stronghold of New Forest-related habitats and species although its historic connection with the New Forest-related historic dispersed pastoral system seems weak. There is no access to this area for the general public (and indeed this, and the careful management by its owners) is partly what has given it its immense interest and diversity. Nonetheless, it is possible to conclude that the area centred on Embley Wood has the potential to offer a markedly superior recreational experience at some stage in the future if it is managed under a regime that permits limited and carefully controlled access subservient to its nature conservation interest.

6.145 However, even under those circumstances, Embley Wood would still be separated from the more Forest-like areas south of the A36 by the Ham Down/Shelley Common area which in my view do not meet either of the designation criteria. Tempting as it may be to stretch the qualifying ‘extensive tract’ to embrace Embley Wood I do not consider that it would be appropriate to do so, particularly as it lies beyond the Blackwater which has traditionally been seen as the limit of the New Forest in this area, from the Large Bounds onward.

Overall conclusion

6.146 My overall conclusion is that, with the exception of the area between Whiteparish Common and Landfordwood, none of the land north of the A36 meets both of the designation criteria sufficiently consistently to reach a qualifying standard for inclusion in a National Park. However, even in the case of the Whitechapel Common-Landfordwood area, I do not recommend inclusion. The busy A36 trunk road forms such a strong potential boundary to the NFNP between Ower and the recommended boundary south of Newton that I consider it inappropriate to extend the NFNP beyond this very strong feature to include this limited extent of land located quite a distance from the core area of the New Forest.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION (Boundary sections 16-17)

I recommend that the NFNP boundary for these sections be modified as shown on the attached maps and described in the summary of recommendations. (at pages 12-13 above)