The New Forest National Park – What does it mean for the New Forest area and local people?

Frequently asked questions
Background Information

• The New Forest National Park was announced on 28th June 2004, by the Rt Hon Alun Michael MP, Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality. In summary the announcement confirmed that:

  ➢ there is to be a National Park in the New Forest

  ➢ there is to be a National Park Authority for the new Park, to be created under the Environment Act 1995

  ➢ in consequence the South Hampshire Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is to be revoked

• The announcement followed a lengthy period of discussion and consultation, culminating in a public inquiry which ran for 7 months, heard 115 witnesses, undertook site visits on 23 days, and produced a report of some 300 pages.

• Three small areas of the proposed Park (amounting to about 73 hectares in total) remain subject to further consultation. However the rest of the boundary is decided and will be as set out in the decision letter.

• This is the first National Park to be created in England since the 1950’s although the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, which enjoys much of the same status as a National Park was designated in the 1980s

• The New Forest has been recognised as having a special status for almost a thousand years. Designation as a National Park confirms that status and ensures that it will continue to be available for future generations to enjoy.
Q. What is a National Park?
A. National Parks are designated under the provisions of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. This Act defines National Parks as extensive tracts of country in England and Wales which are to be designated because of:
   a) their natural beauty; and
   b) the opportunities they afford for open air recreation, having regard both to their character and to their position in relation to centres of population.

Together with ‘Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ (AONB), National Parks are considered to be the nation’s finest landscapes.

Q. What does designation mean?
Designation as a National Park is a formal recognition of the New Forest’s special qualities in terms of natural beauty, cultural heritage and opportunities for open-air recreation. It means that:

- A National Park Authority will be established (under the Environment Act 1995) and funded by Government. The New Forest National Park Authority will be a single forest wide body dedicated to the purposes of National Park designation.
- the area has the highest level of protection under the planning system.
- there is a defined boundary for the area.
- public bodies and others are required to have regard to National Park purposes when operating in the area.

Q. What is the purpose of the National Park Authority?
A. A National Park Authority is guided by the two purposes of designation:

(1) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park
(2) to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

The New Forest National Park Authority will work to ensure that the two purposes of designation are complementary and that the National Park is sustainably managed for today and future generations.

If a conflict between the two purposes occurs, ‘The Environment Act 1995’, states that greater weight should be attached to the first purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. In practice, such conflicts have seldom, if ever, arisen. In carrying out its responsibilities a National Park Authority has a duty to seek
to foster the economic and social well-being of the Park’s local communities.

Q. How is the National Park Authority formed?
A. The rules for membership are set out in existing legislation (the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Environment Act 1995) and explained in Department of the Environment Circular 12/96 – Appendix IV. This requires that the majority of members of a National Park shall be locally elected. For the New Forest, the Government proposes an Authority of 22 members which, in accordance with the legislation, would be made up of:

- 12 elected councillors of County and District Councils appointed to the National Park Authority by those local authorities.
- 4 Parish councillors or Chairmen of Parish Meetings within the National Park area, nominated by the Parish Councils and appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- 6 individuals who have knowledge, expertise and experience in areas relevant to the purposes of the National Park and are appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Q. What powers will the New Forest National Park Authority have and what will it do?
A. National Park Authorities are regarded as special purpose local authorities. They are the planning authority for their area but the existing local authorities retain responsibility for such matters as education, transport, social services, housing, waste collection, and economic development.

Other priorities for the National Park Authority will include:

- Landscape, nature and heritage conservation.
- Supporting sustainable land management and commoning practice.
- Ensuring a joined up approach to the National Park by working closely with local people and communities and existing Local Authorities.
- Countryside management services
- Information and Education
- Promoting sustainable recreation and tourism and working with Tourist Authorities and promoters.

Q. How can I apply to be a member?
A. Defra will be advertising in the near future for Secretary of State appointees to the New Forest National Park Authority. Members appointed by the Secretary of State are not paid but they are eligible for travel and other expenses. They are expected to commit a minimum of two to three days per month, most of which is within normal working hours.
Q When will it happen?

A. The Government will be consulting on three small additions to the boundary, which means that the New Forest National Park (Designation) Order 2002 cannot be confirmed until that consultation is complete and a decision has been made on the additional areas. This means that the Park may not be formally created until late in 2004 or in the early part of 2005.

Although, the processes of creating a New Forest National Park and establishing a National Park Authority are separate, they will be running in parallel. It is expected that the National Park Authority will exist from April 2005, but will not take on its full range of statutory powers, functions, and responsibilities until April 2006.

Q How long does designation last?

A. There is no time limit and the assumption is that designation is permanent. Most of the existing Parks were designated about 50 years ago and are still in existence. However the legislation does allow for the boundary to be moved (subject to a full consultation process) if circumstances change.

Q. How will people notice the difference?

A. Designation is not about changing the Forest but more about ensuring that it will continue to be well-managed and protected in the future. So residents or visitors should not expect to see big changes in the appearance of the area.

Q. How does it affect land ownership in the Park?

A. It doesn’t. Land will continue to be owned and managed by whoever owns or manages it at present.

The role of the National Park Authority is to set the direction of how the land is to be cared for in the long-term.

Q. What will it do to house prices?

A. It is possible that designation could lead to some increase in house prices within the Park. But bear in mind that the attractiveness of the area to house buyers means there is already a premium and so designation of itself may not have any further impact.

Many National Park Authorities have developed policies for affordable housing and the need to address this has already been identified as a priority proposal in the ‘Strategy for the New Forest’ requiring action by the planning authority in conjunction with a range of partners., The Strategy can be viewed on www.newforestcommittee.org.uk
Q. Why is the South Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) being revoked?

A. It is inappropriate for an area to be designated as both an AONB and a National Park. The majority of the AONB now comes within the New Forest National Park and National Park status provides the same strong landscape protection as for an AONB. Therefore, designation as an AONB is no longer necessary. A small area that is currently within the AONB is not included within the National Park because it no longer meets the criteria for natural beauty. That area will not, therefore, have any national designation when the AONB is revoked.

Q. What becomes of the New Forest Heritage Area?

A. The majority of the Heritage Area will be within the New Forest National Park and so will have the high level of protection provided by National Park status. Responsibility for land outside the park will lie with the adjoining local authorities.

Q. How does it relate to the New Forest Countryside Stewardship Scheme Mr Morley announced recently?

A. The two are separate but both reflect the importance of the New Forest area and means that extra resources to support land management are available.

Q. Will it mean more tourists and won’t the Forest becomes a theme park?

A. Tourism is already vital to the area. The strategy for the New Forest reports that it is worth about £156 million annually and provides about 30% of all jobs in the Forest. A key task for the NPA will be to make sure that recreation and tourism are compatible with the landscape and culture of the forest.

Q. Does this mean the Forest cannot evolve but must remain frozen as it is in 2004?

A. The area has been subject to planning protection equivalent to that in a National Park, ever since the introduction of the New Forest Heritage Area in 1994. There will now be a single authority acting as a champion for the New Forest. Designation as a National Park does not mean that things must remain frozen in time, but that the essential character, culture and vitality of the New Forest is supported for future generations.
Q. What will happen to the recently produced ‘Strategy for the New Forest’ that local people contributed to and were consulted upon?

A. The New Forest National Park Authority has a duty to produce, review and lead the implementation of a New Forest National Park Management Plan.

The existing ‘Strategy for the New Forest New Forest 2003’, produced by the New Forest Committee will provide a basis for a New Forest National Park Management Plan. This strategy can be viewed on www.newforestcommittee.org.uk

The Management Plan is the strategic document for the National Park, which looks at the needs of the whole area and balances conflicting interests within the overall requirement to conserve and enhance the areas natural beauty and cultural heritage. The National Park Authority will engage widely with local people and organisations and encourage participation in the process of producing and implementing a Management Plan. Public bodies, local authorities, statutory undertakers and those holding public office have a duty to take account of the National Park purposes when making decisions or carrying out their responsibilities in a way that affects the Park.

Q. What will the effect be on commoner’s rights and the role of the Verderers.

A. None. The designation as a National Park will not affect the rights of common, New Forest Acts, nor the role of the Verderers. The National Park Authority will work closely with commoners, the Verderers and local communities to ensure that the National Park and its communities benefit.

Q. What about the Forestry Commission’s responsibilities?

A. The Forestry Commission currently manage the Crown lands in the New Forest in accordance with the New Forest Acts 1877 to 1970 under a mandate from Defra Ministers. These arrangements will remain unchanged as a result of the New Forest National Park designation. The Forestry Commission will work closely with the New Forest National Park Authority.

Q. What is the future of the New Forest Committee?

A. The New Forest Committee has provided guidance and co-ordination for the New Forest Heritage Area and matters in the New Forest in partnership with local people and organizations. Within the New Forest National Park, this role will be the responsibility of the National Park Authority and the New Forest Committee will therefore no doubt wish to review its role once the National Park Authority is established. In the interim, the New Forest Committee and its staff provide an important source of information and expertise for the emerging National Park Authority.
Q. What will be the impact on business?

A. The National Park designation provides a national status representing a unique and high quality environment which businesses of all kinds can benefit from. This represents an opportunity for the rural economy.

Q. What is the size and population of the New Park compared to the other National Parks?

A. The New Forest National Park will be the smallest English Park by area, though one of the largest by resident population, as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Park</th>
<th>Size in square km</th>
<th>Approximate Population 000s*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dartmoor</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exmoor</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake District</td>
<td>2,292</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North York Moors</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>1,049</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak District</td>
<td>1,437</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire Dales</td>
<td>1,773</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Forest</strong></td>
<td><strong>571</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on 2001 census results.

Q. Will the National Park be expensive to run and who pays?

A. Establishment costs:

There are no additional costs to local people arising from the designation of National Park status. The one-off cost of establishing the National Park and the Authority is provided by Government. This investment is dedicated to ensuring the long-term protection of the environmental and heritage assets of the New Forest, once and for all clarifying the value of the whole area in policy and practical terms.

A. Annual running costs

The funding of the New Forest National Park will be calculated in the same way as existing Parks and provided by Government. This will not be known until the National Park is fully established but funding for Parks of a similar size is about £3 million per annum.

The National Park Authority will seek to manage the National Park in an economically sustainable way and will where appropriate secure opportunities for income generation.

Q. How will people have their say and participate?
A. The following mechanisms will ensure that people can participate and influence the National Park Authority and the management of the National Park:

- By representation of the Local Authority, Parish Councils and other local members of the National Park Authority.
- Contact with a dedicated staff team and National Park Authority members.
- Establishment of links between Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Plans and New Forest Management Plan.
- Establishment of advisory and working groups to ensure local expertise.
- Full participation and involvement of stakeholders in development and implementation of the New Forest National Park Management Plan based on processes established to produce the ‘Strategy for the New Forest’.
- Establishment of web site and electronic communication facilities.
- Consultation with a wide range of interests such as those represented on the New Forest Consultative Panel (a forum with representatives of more than 75 organisation which meets in public every two months to discuss and respond to issues affecting the conservation of the Forest.)
- Development of a consultation and participation programme.

Q. How will people be kept informed?
A. In the first instance, the National Park Authority will need to establish a communication programme. This is likely to include the production of a newsletter, establishing a National Park information point, creating a web site and developing ideas for the promotion of the National Park.

Q. Will there be employment opportunities as a result of the New Forest becoming a National Park?
A. The National Park Authority will employ a staff team to help carry out its functions. Opportunities for countryside management and specialist staff will arise as implementation of the existing strategy and development of the New Forest National Park Management Plan gets underway.

Q. Who is leading the preparations for a New Forest National Park Authority?
A. Defra is appointing an Interim Chief Executive to lead the process of establishing a National Park Authority and to speak on their behalf in the meantime.

The interim Chief Executive Officer will start work in October and remain in post until April 2005 and, unless authority members decide otherwise, for
such time after that date as it takes the new authority to recruit its own, permanent, National Park Officer / Chief Executive.

In the meantime, John Kilner, the head of Defra’s National Parks branch, is acting as interim Chief Executive. He may be contacted at Room 1/04, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Bristol, BS1 6EB, Tel: 0117 372 8877. 8877 or at The Interim Chief Executive for the New Forest National Park Authority, Queen’s House, High Street, Lyndhurst, SO43 7BD. Tel 023 8028 6821. Emails may be sent to newforestnpa@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

A group comprised of officials from Defra, Local authorities, The Countryside Agency, English Nature, The Forestry Commission, Government Office South East, Dartmoor National Park and The New Forest Committee has been established to advise on the preparations.

Produced by the New Forest National Park Authority Preparations Group.
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