What Future for the New Forest?

The Association's 150th anniversary launch event

'A foot in the past and an eye to the future'

An evening all about where the New Forest is going and the challenges before us today

Keynote presentation: Clive Chatters,
Council member of the Association

Followed by responses from:

Alison Barnes,
Chief Executive of the New Forest National Park Authority

Bruce Rothney
Deputy Surveyor for the New Forest,

Dominic May
Official Verderer

and participants from the audience of 200 people
2017 will be a year of celebration for the New Forest Association marking our 150th anniversary, but is also a
time for reflection on the present day state of the New Forest, its future prospects and the main issues on
which our Association should focus our campaigning efforts.

Do we accept that we might be able to slow the process, but the fate of the Forest is to suffer a steady decline
of its unique special qualities as the National Park is inexorably reduced to being a Suburban Park hemmed in
on all sides by development and just too small not to be overwhelmed by too many people with too much
activity and too many vehicles?

Or, can the New Forest be saved from a multiplicity of cumulatively harmful impacts so that our vision of the
New Forest might yet be sustained?

"A unique naturally beautiful yet living and changing place in which strong elements of tranquillity and
wilderness are maintained despite the increasing pressures from the demands of local population,
recreation and infrastructure.

It is a vision of countryside and coast free from pollution, with a minimum of intrusion; an ancient
unenclosed landscape set in a wider matrix of diverse, unspoiled countryside including historic settlements
and character villages, with long-term ecological and cultural ties to the Forest.

Our vision of the Forest requires a viable commoning community as a vital part of our cultural heritage and
an essential element to maintain the ecological habitat of the Forest. A strong rural community must be
sustained by commoning, forest management and appropriate local trades and industry.

We visualise the unenclosed landscape as a functioning biological system whose component heathlands, bogs,
woods and other habitats are protected against abrupt change, while responding slowly to the grazing of
commoners’ animals and deer which shape their distinctive character. It is a landscape maintained by
sensitive land management, restrained from overuse and where damage in the past is reversed by remedial
action.

It is a vision in which there are opportunities for public enjoyment of the Forest, but this is not the dominant
management consideration. Education of the public to understand the unique quality and fragility of the
Forest is important.

Our vision expects all who are privileged to live or work in this special place to share some responsibility for
its guardianship, accepting the benefits and limitations this requires."

The presentations and discussion at the inaugural evening event are the beginning of this conversation and
they are reproduced on the following pages.
Keynote Presentation
Clive Chatters
Council Member of the New Forest Association
Chairman of the New Forest Consultative panel

The New Forest: a foot in the past and an eye to the future

My brief this evening is to entertain and inform.
Our Chairman has asked three things of me:

• to describe the Forest in the year of our foundation,
• to consider the state of the Forest today and
• to look forward to the challenges of the coming decades.

John’s guidance to be ‘a bit provocative’ grants me a certain licence. I trust you’ll take any such provocation in the spirit of healthy debate.

A man my age, joining The New Forest Association in the year of its foundation, must have been either rich or lucky, or both. By rights he’d be dead; the average life expectancy for a man was a little over 40.

That venerable 55 year old of 1867 would have witnessed a lot of changes; in his youth most of his compatriots lived in rural communities, by his middle years they were mostly urban; over his lifetime industrialisation had massively increased the nations’ prosperity supporting a doubling of the population to over 20 million. In 1867 there was a great deal for him to worry about, there were terrorist threats (both domestic and colonial), expanding foreign empires and aggressive competition for world trade, there were constitutional crises at home and revolutions abroad. It was an age of uncertainty.

Closer to home, that man in his youth could have walked across a New Forest that stretched from Romsey Abbey to Christchurch Priory. There were villages and farmsteads en-route but nothing to fragment the open country until he crossed the valleys of the Test and Avon. At that time unbroken heathlands extended far beyond those bounds to encircle Southampton and the infant Bournemouth. By his middle age this landscape beyond the Forest had all but gone, industrial farming and timber plantations had broken up the commons, the dispossessed poor were forced to emigrate to the towns or seek a new life overseas.

In 1867 the open country of the New Forest faced extinction, it had already shrunk by half and now there were plans to complete its destruction through conversion into a timber farm.

The founders of our Association were far-sighted people. They understood the Forest was special and worthy of conservation for its beauty and for its place in the local economy. We have a great deal to thank them for in securing the New Forest Act of 1877 and in doing so setting the foundations of the Forest we have today.

However, the New Forest today is a very different place to that known by our founders.

In celebrating the Forest we rightly give emphasis to its timeless qualities. It is true that there are places which our forebears may recognise. There are ancient trees and heaths and bogs, as there were in 1867, and as there were in earlier centuries and back through the millennia.

Today, even within the most sequestered parts of the Forest we can enjoy the benefits of modernity; Broadband links are improving, our skies are crossed with vapour trails and low flying aircraft; at night the horizon glows orange and isolated homes crave security in a blaze of halogen. Should we shut our eyes to such things the soundscape is of distant (and not so distant) traffic, the twenty-first century sustains an aural barrage against the still small voice of the wild. The New Forest is very much a part of the modern age.
The timeless scenes we promote as the Forest are, by relative area, subsidiary components of this, Britain’s smallest, National Park. The majority of the land bears the commonplace hallmarks of an urban fringe landscape supporting conventional farming and plantation forestry as well as abundant leisure plots and private amenities. In contrast the landscapes for which the Forest is rightly lauded are the products of centuries of extensive communal livestock farming, of pastoralism; not rural poverty at its most extreme but of communities getting by through reliance on ancient rights. Today those traditions of Forest life sit incongruously amongst conspicuously affluent communities; we are surrounded by successful cities whose continued growth contributes to one of the richest nations on earth. There is no rural hinterland to the Forest, the pastoral economy that created and maintains its character is now a minority way of life in a peri-urban Park.

In considering the state of the Forest today I’ll explore three themes:

• The Forest’s rural economy
• The fabric of the Forest
• How we relate to the Forest

Commoning is at the heart of the rural economy that defines and sustains the Forest. Before coming to live in the Forest I took an interest in the history of my local commons in Suffolk, then in Kent and after that on the Island; in all those places commoning was long dead; as the standard reference book put it:

‘The story of commons...[is a] tale of old customs outliving social change. It belongs to the past.’
Denman et al. 1967

Consequently my awakening on coming to work here was rude! I was thrown into committees where commoners argued with passion for the drainage of wetlands with a similar belligerence as one now sees from amenity interests who resist their restoration. Once it was clear that I was not just a fly-by-night conservationist a far-seeing commoner decided to teach me a lesson, one I remember to this day. She took me to visit her neighbours, all fellow commoners, all of whom were welcoming and whose priorities were far from the passions expressed in committee; that day I met people who were ill because they were poor. I met people who maintained one of the nation’s most cherished landscapes but who were living on its economic margins. There was a profound contrast between their circumstances and the affluent, articulate suburban communities that dominated those Forest villages.

I believe that over recent decades commoners and conservationists have grown together to share an appreciation of the things that really matter; access to a home, to fields, to a fair reward; and, above all, hope for the future. In the meantime we still go through the traditional pantomimes and confrontations, it would not be the Forest if that was not so.

The importance of commoning in the New Forest is now recognised not only as the means by which the landscape is managed, but also as a cultural institution of importance for its own sake. Today it would be inconceivable for a person in authority to describe New Forest commoning as 'a custom which has outlived its usefulness'.

Over my short years the Forest’s commoning economy has gone from famine to feast. Currently there are considerable rewards for turning out livestock, an investment that benefits us all.

Inevitably all subsidies bring bureaucracy and unexpected distortions, by nature all subsidies are short-lived as shifting political morés redirect demands on the public purse. In our uncertain world it is unclear what fate awaits these funding streams as they spring from Europe, from the contradictory demands of the Common Agricultural Policy and Environmental Directives. In the meantime more than just proverbial hay is cut and the sun shines. The commoning economy has a strong base from which to move onto whatever comes next.
Turning to the fabric and state of the Forest

All landscapes change, this part of England is no exception. Local aspirations for urban growth are such that within the foreseeable future the National Park is at risk of being comprehensively built up along its eastern boundary. The same is happening to the south and west, albeit at a slightly slower pace. The growth of housing around the Forest is measured in multiple units of tens of thousands. As well as all that comes with housing growth we are also looking at the possibility of a new port at Dibden and the redevelopment of Fawley Power Station. This desire by some to block-in the Forest with concrete does not have to be our destiny. When the National Park was established in 2005 Ministerial Guidance was offered to the National Park Authority and to adjacent local authorities. It’s well worth re-reading that guidance and considering how we have responded to it. In opening his guidance the Minister emphasised the importance of planners cooperating across the boundaries of the National Park to safeguard what makes the Forest special. I'm sure that I'm not alone in my disappointment that the existence of the National Park does not appear to have changed the aspirations of our neighbours to grow right up to our boundaries and even into the Park itself. If anything the Park appears to be assumed by some neighbouring communities as an inexpensive greenspace that is freely available to service their demands, with no obligation on their part to respect the Forest's sensitivities or make a contribution to its upkeep. The National Park was established to address such challenges, in the Minister's words this challenge was to be met not by:

'obstructing progress or going for the lowest common denominator'

but by:

'establishing dynamic and creative partnerships'.

The Forest includes a significant stretch of coast, one which changes, as it always has. We have a saltmarsh coast, one that is destined to migrate inland, should we permit it.

Through the lifetime of the Association saltmarshes initially expanded in the Solent but have been receding since the 1920s. Along the Lymington River the sheltering shore formerly reached far out into the Solent. Much of today's leisure industry of yachting and marinas grew up in these quiet waters. Established in the boom years of saltmarsh growth many coastal developments are now challenged by the bust. Within our lifetimes the Forest's saltmarshes are predicted to recede to a point where they will only persist along tidal rivers and behind seawalls. The natural protection offered to people by the wilder parts of the coast is fading fast. Such changes are natural but will challenge our ingenuity if we are to avoid converting a National Park coastline into a series of engineered cells.

The landscape of the Forest within its hedges is similarly undergoing significant changes. A colleague and I recently wrote a paper on how land has been used over the last 150 years in the southwest of the Forest. At the time the Association was founded this landscape comprised numerous small farms, each having a mixture of arable and grass, each balancing their books by drawing on the Commons of the Forest for extra forage for their stock.

Over time the growing cities supported the development of high-value market-gardening and dairying so entrepreneurial farming families did well. It was not really until the second half of the twentieth century, within living memory, that the local economy shifted towards the suburban. Farms that were already small started to be fragmented, they were subdivided then subdivided again to meet the needs of the new settlers; this is a trend that accelerated through the 1980s supporting a boom in land prices. A quarter of our study area was of land ‘between management’; like fashionable houses in Knightsbridge one does not need to live and work in a property for its value to carry on rising. Land values in the Forest reflect the wealth of its
resident communities and the intense competition for paddocks. We found land prices here to be regularly 10 times more than that of the best productive farmland elsewhere in England, rentals are similarly hugely inflated. The long-term consequences of such changes on the landscape and pastoral economy of the National Park are profound.

And so we arrive in the Open Forest, that extraordinary landscape where ponies, cattle and pigs (and ourselves) are free to roam and is the vibrant core of what everyone loves about the New Forest.

The astonishing thing about the Open Forest to me, as a naturalist, is its resilience. The Forest remains outstanding even where it has been mauled by drainage schemes and forestry plantations with its safeguarding legislation being overridden at times of national peril. Within a human lifetime concrete weathers away and places that were dug for victory are subsumed back into the heath. The wartime scabs and scars of my parent's generation are now natural memorials for those who have the eyes to see them. Back in 1867 our founders were motivated by the iniquity of plantation forestry displacing the open country of the Forest. Where the Forestry Commission have reconciled themselves to removing plantations to restore unenclosed landscapes the results are startlingly successful.

Current legal and policy obligations require much more of the same, a point made by the Association when commenting on the Forestry Commission's latest design plans. Over the years I've grown to appreciate that Forestry Commission officers are not dispassionate public servants dryly interpreting messages from Whitehall, they are enthusiasts attached to an institution with a deep philosophical commitment to timber growing. I hope that the Association may yet melt their wooden hearts and work alongside them in rejuvenating what makes the Forest special. Timber plantations currently mask more than 3,000ha of grazed ancient woods and 4,000ha of Forest heaths; our founders fought this attrition to the Forest. I would like to think that our generation can rejuvenate these landscapes and make the Forest fitter for the future. As with so many of the decisions that really make a difference this future is in the hands of government funded agencies. With one sweep of the administrative pen the Open Forest landscapes for which the National Park is rightly renowned could be extended by half as much again.

The Forest has so many wounded landscapes, the marks of abuse still livid but not without signs of healing.

In starting with the Crown land I have committed the error I caution other against. The New Forest is a great deal more than the land under the care of the Deputy Surveyor. Apart from all the other owners of the Open Forest (there are some 50 people and institutions who own that land) we must not forget common rights are also property rights. This is something all too easy to overlook whenever we are expressing what we want for ourselves from the Forest. Unless we are one of the rare few who are the owners of the land, we then find ourselves here as guests. As guests we have both rights and responsibilities and I hope a shared aspiration that we show the same courtesies to our hosts as we hope to receive. I recall, a few years ago, a particularly vigorous single-interest group pressing their case with the phrase 'it's our Forest' in their campaigning, and in all sincerity, they had mentally appropriated the property of others.

Which brings me to that most sensitive of subjects, how we, each and every one of us, including me and my family, relates to the Forest.

To many of us the Forest means freedom, freedom to roam in whatever direction we choose, freedom to let the dogs off the lead and thrill at their joy in running wild, there are hundreds of car parks and unlike nearly elsewhere that parking is free. If a formal car park isn't available then no one will stop you to establishing your own and with luck someone will follow on by filling in the potholes and improving the surface. When visiting the Forest we know it's a safe place, a welcoming place, we are free of the risk of being confronted by the
resident farmer should we accidentally disturb their livestock, we feel free from restrictions such as dog control orders and seasonal car park closures that constrain so many other public places.

The value we place on this sense of freedom, the value of our personal amenity, is priceless.

But in reality the Forest is not, nor has it ever been a free-for-all. The very name 'Forest' reflects a landscape being subject to both Common law and Forest law. Looking to the Crown Land our enjoyment is managed through bylaws in addition to following common courtesies. If you really want to spoil your next walk then do read the bylaws and play 'by-law bingo', taking note of each breach you witness until you get a full house. Over the last few weeks I've had the misfortune to have been forced to slalom through dog shit, been buzzed by mountain bikes and model aircraft, witnessed livestock being harassed, seen metal detectorists on ancient monuments and ad hoc memorial gardeners and informal parking destroying the very fabric of the Forest. I'm sure we can all add something of our own experience to the list. It is sad to reflect there are too many parts of the Forest which are looking rather shabby, they are worn out, there are too many places where we are loving the Forest to death.

My report on the state of the Forest today is therefore one of paradoxes, of a landscape derived from pastoralism now set in a suburban matrix, of unparalleled natural wealth being overwhelmed by affluence. We live at a time when there are unmanaged and unchallenged expectations that the Forest can be everything for everyone, and I regret to say, in some case suffering from the selfishness of a minority of users - with their lack of respect for others, with their view of the Forest as a cheap freebee, theirs for the taking.

Yet, it remains a landscape full of wonder and beauty, a tonic for the soul, a cathedral to nature, but it is a wounded landscape and what we decide to do next determines its prognosis.

Let me move on to my third and final theme and look to the future.

In the foreseeable future the challenges of today are likely to continue and intensify. I foresee familiar challenges in an unfamiliar world. We can be certain that the context in which the Forest will be managed will change, it always has. So far I've deliberately avoided the acronym soup that underpins aspects of Forest management, SINCS, SAMs, SSSIs, SACs, SPAs, Ramsar (not an acronym). We are an extraordinarily densely designated landscape within the National Park, to illustrate this point through drawing on a small spoonful of acronyms, the Forest is covered by nine Natura 2000 designations that support 60 separately identified features of international importance. Elsewhere in England places with far fewer designations have been accompanied by strenuous conservation efforts; maybe the sheer scale and complexity of the Forest helps explain why the combined forces of local and central government have been slow in taking on the accompanying obligations. In the Forest we have a landscape of exceptional wildlife importance without parallel in the lowlands of Britain and North-west Europe; our responsibilities for one of the gems of Planet Earth are manifold. Whatever the acronyms and regulatory regimes of the future may be, it is reasonable to expect any actions by public bodies to be compliant with law and policy; but I'd like to think we are not here just to aspire to adequacy, the Forest deserves better than that, we should be aspiring for excellence.

Setting aside rhetorical flourishes what practically can we look forward too?

In the late 1960s the New Forest was at the forefront of countryside management. The infrastructure we still use today was royally opened by Her Majesty in 1979. Like a lot of infrastructure from that period the Forest's car parks and campsites are now looking rather tired. Outside the timber plantations the most extensive damage to the Forest's ancient woods is centred on campsites, a problem that the Association and its partners have invested in quantifying, but the statutory bodies have yet to act on. If anything in recent years the
problem has intensified with the establishment of the Forest Holidays partnership leading to the business becoming deeply embedded in these fragile sites rather than being re-located elsewhere. It is not only the campsites where there are problems. We have some car parks set in locations where the very vegetation and soil of the Forest has eroded away and protected species are being lost. What was a sensible, or just pragmatic, site for a car park in 1960 may not be a suitable site today. The circumstances and context that informed recreation management in the 1960s & 1970s have changed; we urgently need to refresh how recreation is to be managed in the future. This is a job that only government bodies can deliver.

From 1970 onwards part of the package for recreation management was the intention to provide attractive alternative destinations. The idea has been that by providing public open spaces around the Forest the daily needs of people can be met at greater convenience to themselves and with better facilities than are found on the Open Forest. This strategy seeks not only to continue to welcome people but also to offer a choice. Since 1970 this policy commitment has appeared in numerous statutory plans and strategies under a range of guises; the current planning lingo for such places is an acronym, SANGs, set within the softer words of a Green Halo. Having had policies in place to deliver alternative green spaces for people since 1970 we would reasonably expect to have, by current policy metrics, about 250ha of such land around the Forest. Successive local authorities within and around the Forest have delivered precisely no hectares, none, not a single site meeting SANG criteria. There are suitable sites but many of these have been, or are being, built on. Opportunities to deliver this laudable policy commitment have been squandered. There is a huge backlog to catch up on with few funding opportunities to secure acquisition and management. In the meantime the Forest’s most sensitive landscapes are not so much a destination of choice, they are the only choice, and they are suffering from our inaction.

Chairman; before I conclude I’d like to make an observation on the changing nature of debates.

For most of my career I have been a lobbyist, there was then a period when I helped to established the National Park when I was lobbied, currently my role with the Consultative Panel is to support effective communications between those two camps. My perception is that the nature of lobbying is changing. We retain relics of the old style, which I’d describe as the presentation of a rational case in support of, or challenging, a proposition. Worthy, if a little dull.

We are beginning to see a growth in what the Oxford English Dictionary has recently named ‘Post-Truth’ debates. To illustrate this; a technical report addressing an issue is declared ‘fatally flawed’ if it confounds another’s aspirations, the case as to why it is flawed rarely comes forward. Inconvenient experts are dismissed out-of-hand as ‘patronising’ or ‘arrogant’ if they offer uncomfortable advice or are alternatively welcomed as ‘overwhelmingly convincing’ if they are supportive of an established point of view. No amount of evidence is persuasive if it runs counter to what one wants to hear. In the age of social media the merits of a case are not so much considered as reviled. The lexicon of lobbying has shifted from being a little dull into degrees of belligerence ranging from the discourteous, through to being downright rude into extremes of misinformation and abuse. I have seen quite enough of the invective that some people feel is reasonable to use in pressing their case through the anonymity of the internet. My heart goes out to those in the statutory sector at the receiving end of such misbehaviour as they are limited in making their responses to old fashioned courtesies.

The need to address how recreation is managed in the Forest is urgent, we cannot afford to dither while the world around us changes. It beholds all people of goodwill to ensure the coming debates are well informed and courteous and selflessly seek out what’s best for the Forest. We need to look to those responsible for managing these challenges to remind themselves of the New Forest Acts, the purposes of a National Park and the founding Ministerial Guidance. In the Forest we need excellence in policy and practice, the lowest common denominator is not good enough.
Who may be responsible for managing the Public Forest Estate in the New Forest in the future is a mote point. The attempt at privatising the Forestry Commission in 2011 was kicked into touch by Parliament, not least through the good offices of Julian Lewis MP. It’s all change in Whitehall at present and who knows what the fall-out will be for any of the statutory bodies. At present the most stable statutory organisation appears to be the Verderers, thank heavens for the Court and the New Forest Acts.

I cannot recall a time of such uncertainty in the future of the Forest. Britain’s relationships with the wider world are changing; it is likely that shortly, as an independent nation, we will take on direct responsibilities for how we care for our natural world. With Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union the regulatory regimes and funding streams that have supported the Forest will change, but we don’t know how. Irrespective of how the world of administration turns we are faced with managing significant changes be those of accelerating development pressures, the physical realignment of our coastline, securing continuity for commoning or addressing the backlog in recreation management.

It is now our turn to rise to the challenges of the day:

In 1867 the founders of our Association knew that the Forest was worth it, it was then and remains so today.

The Forest needs Friends like never before.

This generation’s responsibility to secure the future of the Forest now lies with us.
Response from the New Forest National Park Authority
Alison Barnes
Chief Executive New Forest National Park Authority

The New Forest: a foot in the past and an eye to the future

It is a privilege to be invited to respond on such an important occasion as the anniversary of 2nd oldest conservation body in the UK. Clive has presented a wide-ranging and reflective speech which could prompt many hours of discussion and debate about the topics raised, yet I have the challenge of responding in just a short time. I will do this by:

• Reflecting broadly on Clive’s words
• Exploring how the National Park Authority is working to meet some of the challenges raised, especially urban growth and impacts of recreation, and finally
• Reflecting on the future and the role of the ‘Friends of the New Forest’

Clive’s ‘narrative’ is one of remarkable attributes that have secured the Forest as the amazing place it still is today - despite centuries of change - in fact he describes a Forest where ‘customs have kept a pace with social change’.

Some very special ‘ingredients’ have come together to secure this position:
The diversity within communities of interest as well as between them – the Forest being a complex place where collaboration and a way of finding a sort of equilibrium between everyone has always been a way of operating

• The passion and engagement of people – which far exceeds anything I’ve experience anywhere I’ve worked The strength of the Forest community and the determination to persist and secure investment in commoning and traditional ways of life
• The remarkable resilience of the Open Forest itself – like a boxer that keeps getting up round after round
• But most importantly for tonight – the ‘far sighted’ people who have consistently over the Forest’s history put the Forest First, prepared to defend and act beyond personal interests for the future; not least the founders of the NFA.

When I began my role here in 2010, amongst his many words of counsel, Clive as then Chairman and my boss, gave his view on where I needed to focus:
‘you will be in support of the Open Forest, but crucially you must also, stand at the edge of Open Forest and look outwards to the boundary of the National Park and beyond’ - toward the ‘peri-urban’ areas Clive refers to.

In his words tonight, Clive has spoken of a number of challenges as we look across the Forest to its hinterlands; Urban Growth, the changing relationship between people and the landscape and the degree to which, in an age of social media, communications are directing behaviour in unprecedented ways – and of course now EU exit. In the words of the late and eminent naturalist Colin Tubbs:
‘the Forest cannot be all things to all people for all time’.

Tonight, Clive urges us to think about our individual and collective responsibility and ability to act to secure the New Forest as a living, working Forest for the future.

So what is this ‘Team New Forest’ (as I call it) – and by which I mean NFNPA and the range of organisations and individuals we work alongside – doing to turn these challenges both within and beyond the National Park into opportunities for a positive future?
The New Forest: a foot in the past and an eye to the future

Everything we do at the NPA is shaped by our purposes and duty as a National Park:

- **Protect** - to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area
- **Enjoy** - to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park by the public
- **Prosper** - to seek to foster social and economic well-being of the local communities within the national park

Or ‘PEP’ for short.

The UK’s national parks are exceptional, not only because are they our premier landscapes, but also are places where people live, work and visit. The way we work together deliver on ‘PEP’ is key and I believe as a ‘Team Forest’ we have laid positive foundations to respond to the challenges ahead, not least through the Partnership Plan agreed in 2015 for the National Park.

I couldn’t hope to cover everything that has or is happening in this short slot, but I want to look back to last financial year as an example of the broad number of ‘fronts’ across which we are working to ‘PEP up’ the Forest. We have annual reviews* available for you to refer to at your leisure and I have a few slides that summarise progress in 15/16 to give you a flavour.

So, there is much more to do but we are not starting from scratch and have a clear track record; there is a ‘Team Forest’ out there of passionate people working skilfully and with determination, at a time of diminishing resources (NPA has seen 40% cuts since 2010). We are all working to ensure we are greater than the sum of our parts.

I wanted to respond to the points Clive has raised about Urban Growth in more depth - such pressure for growth has been the reality for the last decade at least and is not going away.

The National Parks family have ensured that the National Planning Policy Framework gives the highest possible protection – hosting the Chief Planner and Ministers here in the New Forest to demonstrate how we are working to deliver schemes that deliver across PEP. We have had an influence on ensuring permitted development rights (for conversion of barns into dwellings) were not applied in National Parks. We have worked with our neighbours advocating their duty under S62 of the Environment Act (1995) to: ‘have regard to’ the statutory purposes of National Parks in ‘exercising or performing their functions.’ We have mitigation schemes (e.g. along the Waterside) and SANG - Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces – on our boundaries.

But I agree with Clive - we don’t need to ‘block’ the Forest in - we are only scratching the surface of what could be achieved by renewed commitment to work strategically and not on a site-by-site basis solely through the planning system. In our hinterlands we need to think of delivering a kind of ‘Green Halo’ for the Forest, where Green Infrastructure complements the grey infrastructure. There are some great examples of planning for Green Infrastructure across the UK and worldwide, where partnerships of public, private, 3rd and community sectors are bringing forward project - creating great places to live and work by providing spaces for nature and recreation as well as benefits for health and wellbeing, climate and pollution control and flood amelioration.

We have a choice as new plans are discussed for the Waterside to our east, South Wiltshire to our north and Dorset to our west to engage as Clive puts it ‘in dynamic and creative partnerships’– within and beyond our boundaries.

In Whitehall and amongst land management professionals, the value of the benefits of nature is now being described as Natural Capital and being used in accounting systems which calibrate public benefit with public

* Available on NFNPA website at http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/info/20016/our_work/54/annual_review
investment. In and around the Forest – we have Natural Capital in ‘vault-loads’. We need to describe these Natural Capital benefits - the demand to identify and enhance this resource needs to come bottom up - as much as through Government bodies - from communities and across sectors – arguably it is too important to leave to developers, governments and local authorities – we all have a stake and an interest.

To realise the huge opportunity to shape this area as an exemplar – where a **world class environment delivers a world class economy**.

In his speech, Clive highlights the important of this green infrastructure in offsetting recreational pressure, providing alternative spaces for people to enjoy - think Moors Valley Country Park. It is to this I will briefly turn now.

The New Forest is the smallest of the 13 National Parks and the second most densely populated after the South Downs. It sees over 13.5 million day visits a year - as populations grow around us. There are already 16 million within a 90 minute drive.

Clive’s words about the priceless value we attach to our personal amenity and how this is inadvertently meaning we are ‘loving the Forest to death’ ring true from my experience; yet I have no doubt that most people would be horrified to think this was the case. Most are acting out of love for the Forest. So how do we ‘love the Forest to life’ rather than to death? This was a subject about which our Chairman (Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre) spoke at the Beaulieu Estate dinner in November. He reflected on the moments in Forest history where bold decisions had been made on the occasion where threats have presented themselves:

- The Deer Removal Act of 1851 that was successfully repealed following the actions of the newly formed NFA (to give way to the Great New Forest Act of 1877)
- In 2011 the resistance to the sell-off of the public Forest estate, including by Dr Julian Lewis MP who spoke eloquently and bravely against, voting against his government with Caroline Noakes and Zac Goldsmith.

Oliver reflected that it definitely feels like one of those moments for bold decision making with respect to recreation, where, as our forebears did, we need to ask ‘is it good for the Forest’ – to apply the ‘Forest First’ philosophy. To get the right answer we need to heed Clive’s counsel about working selflessly together, putting aside our personal preferences and thinking holistically and on a broad front: ‘what would we want our children’s children to inherit as a result of our actions?’

The recreational infrastructure that was put in to protect the Forest over half a century ago needs to be fit for modern circumstances as does the way we plan the places round the Forest to cope with pressure. It is a highly complex subject, but working together under Forest First principles we have the opportunity to make sure that our infrastructure supports long term resilience. At the NPA, we have a key role as facilitators. We have been discussing recreation management with a range of partners. The statutory bodies of the Verderers, FC, NE, NFDC and HCC in particular are considering how we can come together to better protect the special qualities of the Forest and help people to enjoy the Forest in the right places and in the right way. It will be a key test for Team New Forest and our ability to work selflessly, courteously and courageously to put the Forest First.

So to the future. We must heed Clive’s call for ‘excellence’ and not just ‘adequacy’ when it comes to the future of one of the ‘gems of our planet’. It is important to remember that National Park status confers the highest level of protection for landscape and natural beauty – it serves as a clear standard for us to maintain and enhance. The Natural Environment White Paper of 2011 gives an undertaking from Government that: ‘we will be the first to pass on our natural environment in a better state than we inherited it’. The forthcoming 25-year plan will give further detail on plans for this in the context of Brexit. Successes such as ‘Our Past Our Future’ (OPOF) with its 21 projects led by 10 organisations and 250 active volunteers, our HLS scheme, Partnership Plan and grass roots projects all demonstrate partnership. We have many things we are doing as
an effective Team for the New Forest – whether as NGOs, Government, businesses, communities and individuals taking action to turn challenge into opportunity.

So, now is time to redouble our collective efforts, draw on our skills and reach out to find more Friends of the New Forest – just as your fantastic new branding suggests:

• all ages, sectors and backgrounds
• with branches of Friends of the New Forest (NFA) in Southampton and Bournemouth
• increasing volunteering time
• unlocking resources, ideas and creative partnerships.

We must make it simple, make the Forest’s future a challenge that can be owned and shared, show people how they fit in and what they can do, activate their emotions to broaden the constituency of actors.

The test for this generation of ‘Friends of the New Forest’ will be at the bi-centenary in another 50 years.

So looking ahead to 2067 – the 200th anniversary – what will the Friends of the New Forest be celebrating?

• A Forest that will have changed – more tranquil thanks to the rise in quiet electric cars and improved public transport.
• New species ushered in by climate change.
• A thriving rural economy with local food favoured for its local provenance.

But there will be a Forest - because of our combined efforts.

• The Forest will be a place worthy of the National Park designation, where we are proud to tell our grandchildren what we did in 2017 to secure its future.
• The citizens of 2067 will be as passionate about the New Forest National Parkas we were because of all our efforts to protect what we had in 2017.
• We will have succeeded in bringing neighbouring councils with us in protecting a special place that isn’t within their boundaries but which is loved and enjoyed by their residents.
• We will have persuaded successive governments that the New Forest National Park is a place worth protecting and with the full support of our local population and the many considerate visitors who enjoy the benefits it provides.

It will be clear that we loved the Forest to life and not to death.

I cannot end without reflecting on Clive’s reference to where the ‘post truth society’ leaves us in this mission. I take this to mean the emerging realisation that the way people feel about things guides their decisions as much as evidence – people’s conviction. I think the way we work in the Forest resonates well with this, we have much evidence and knowledge, but we also have passion and the ability to champion the Forest and its future with utmost strength and conviction.
Response from the Forestry Commission
Bruce Rothnie
Deputy Surveyor for the New Forest

The New Forest: a foot in the past and an eye to the future

I would like to add my congratulations to the Friends of the New Forest (New Forest Association) on their 150th anniversary. The Association is a fantastic example of consistency of cause and passion over the long term. I have had the pleasure of working with many of your members over the years and I am always learning from their knowledge and expertise.

Clive has set out a perceptive analysis of the past and the current state of affairs for the Forest and I would like to touch on a few areas and probe the concept of responsibility for the future of the Forest.

There is no question that the Forest stirs deep emotions in many people and for many different reasons. These emotions are driven by our beliefs and values, which, in turn, are shaped by our experiences and our knowledge - whether this is gleaned increasingly from an information-rich digital world or from everyday conversations and encounters.

But relatively few of us carry the responsibility of managing the Forest, making choices about how to use limited resources and delivering practical action.

The Forestry Commission has acted as custodians of the Crown Lands for 94 years. The way we manage the land is governed by legislation but also by that long experience. We are fortunate to have staff who are dedicated countrymen and many are also commoners. Their practical knowledge is derived from careful observation over many years of how the Forest and nature has reacted to past activity. But the Forest is a complex place. No one individual or organisation can genuinely claim to understand all the complexities of this landscape, the way it functions and how it is used. But there is no shortage of opinions! As you investigate the complexity, very often, even more complexity is revealed. But that’s what makes it fascinating and what inspires many to invest in growing their knowledge.

So, to get our choices right for the future benefit of the Forest, we will increasingly need to rely upon knowledge from a wider network of people. We will need to openly share our expertise and experience and utilise our inherent skills of creativity and innovation. We all will need to take responsibility, share solutions and celebrate passing on to our descendants a Forest in better condition and more resilient to future changes.

Perhaps I can paint a picture of the way current society reacts to the challenge of influencing the future shape of the Forest.

At the core sits the Forest itself, the nucleus and focus of our affections.

Close to it are a number of organisations that carry the responsibility of managing the Forest (the Forestry Commission, National Trust and other landowners) or policing those land managers to act in accordance with legislation shaped to protect it (Natural England, Environment Agency, National Park Authority and the Verderers). In practice these regulators and the land managers do work well together to marry ambition with the reality of what can be delivered with the available resources.
In the wider community, beyond these organisations, people come together to form groups. Each group forms because they have a common interest and share beliefs and values. At last count there must be over 100 of these interest groups that have a stake in the Forest. These groups span an enormous range of interests ranging from nature conservation, public recreation, social and economic wellbeing. But these groups rarely communicate between themselves wary that others may erode their beliefs.

Beyond these interest groups lies the extensive community of the wider public, who are often occasional visitors or have a passing interest in the Forest. Most are not yet sufficiently motivated or have the time to form or join an interest group. Most of these groups will “open their doors” and broadcast their messages to the wider public, hopeful of attracting more members who share their interest. Membership will fluctuate depending on perceived threats to their beliefs at the time.

Some groups decide that the only way to further their interests is to start to communicate and influence the organisations that carry responsibility for the Forest. The usual approach is to try and persuade these organisations that the knowledge and beliefs of their group are the most informed and to dismiss the views being broadcast by other groups. The organisations with responsibility become middle-men for conversations between different groups. These organisations then seek to rationalise the opinions placed before them.

Unfortunately the groups rarely want to cross the threshold into the arena of responsibility, happy to broadcast from the security of the group. They do not expose themselves to the challenge of other groups. Groups broadcasting their counter arguments across digital networks is the normal mode of engagement.

A more positive action is to step across the threshold and work collaboratively to define the positive outcomes we want, set ourselves ambitious targets, listen openly to our respective interests and find common ground.

We have to be realistic about how collaboration can be managed. With the level of staff numbers now available to us (only 30 front line staff in the New Forest) we cannot deliver an extensive programme of one-to-one dialogues with groups. By drawing together a range of interest groups into one place we can use our time more efficiently and we can draw on the expertise of a broad range of people at the same time.

One component of responsibility lies in how we secure and deploy funds to deliver work in the Forest. Many people are very ignorant of the scale and costs of delivering work.

In summary the resources to manage the New Forest are:

- Total Expenditure = £5.77m per year
- Total Income = £2.95m per year
- Annual Net Cost = £2.82m
- Annual Net Cost per hectare = £80
- Annual contribution of every taxpayer = 10p
To put it in words, in the New Forest the Forestry Commission has a budget of around £5.8M a year (2014/15) to employ staff, buy materials and pay for contracts. We are fortunate that we are able to reduce our call on public funds by generating income from our business. In an era when public funds are being severely squeezed this ability to generate funds to support our work is vital to sustain the level of work.

In 2014/15 this was just under £3M, resulting in a net call on public funds of £2.82M. With these funds we are managing the open forest habitats, the woodlands, and the provision of facilities such as car parks, the management of our housing, offices and machinery.

Looking at it another way, this is equivalent of spending £80 per year for every hectare of land using public funds - or about 10p for every taxpayer in the country.

The concept that public bodies must pay for everything people want or expect is no longer realistic. Our funds are limited and we have to make choices and prioritise spending. We will do our best to secure other external funding and to work in partnership with other organisations to share resources and align activities.

The area of land I am responsible goes far beyond the New Forest and covers over 200 other woodlands across the seven counties of central Southern England. To help support the costs of managing the New Forest we can seek to grow business opportunities across these other assets, particularly from provision of recreation facilities and hosting third party businesses.

Clive has set out some significant challenges for the New Forest and rightly points to the impacts we are having on the fabric of the Forest, often to the detriment of its long-term health. Now is the time to face up to those challenges and share responsibility for this place we cherish.

Let us use our networks of knowledge to fuel our creativity and innovation, and take responsibility to deploy our shared resources to best effect.

Let us not settle for inaction and stagnation but be courageous together and be bold with our ambitions.
Response from the Verderers of the New Forest
Dominic May
Official Verderer of the New Forest

The New Forest: a foot in the past and an eye to the future

It gives me great pleasure to be here tonight to mark the 150th anniversary of the New Forest Association. After the 1851 Deer Removal Act, it slowly became apparent that the New Forest, with its ancient system of pastoral farming, was threatened with extinction. Due to the enlightened actions of the founders of your association, the Court of Verderers was re-constituted with new powers 10 years later under the New Forest Act of 1877. In fact, some of your founders went on to become Verderers. That sequence of events saved the New Forest and it is now the largest remaining area of lowland heath in Europe.

For 140 years, the Verderers have fought for the preservation of our landscape and for the continuation of communing that has created that landscape. Each generation of Verderers fights to stop the latest threat. In the early years, the Verderers took a stand in the infamous sawing engines case. During the First World War, the Verderers’ clerk was sent out to report back on military activities. After the Second World War, the Court struggled to ensure that the airfields were restored to open forest. Then in the 1980s the Verderers and the NFA worked closely together to thwart firstly oil drilling at Denny, then the proposed Lyndhurst bypass.

Today there is a constant skirmish to make sure that the inexorable increase of utilities such as electricity, telephone, water and sewage, gas, broadband are controlled so as not spoil the landscape. And of course the biggest problem today is that the New Forest is overflowing with too much recreation.

The New Forest suffers over time by a ratchet affect. No one activity will by itself ruin it, and each disturbance taken in isolation may on the face of it appear negligible. But add up every human intervention, such as artificial drainage, car parks, gravel tracks, utilities, illegal cycling, and incrementally over time we see the significant loss of grazing, loss of landscape amenity, loss of habitat. This ratchet effect can be illustrated by the following two real examples.

First, imagine a small forester’s cottage, all activity contained within its curtilage. Originally the commoner would use a horse, or be on foot. Over time a car becomes affordable, probably a Land Rover to cross the forest to the gate. Eventually the older generation dies out and the property is sold. The new owner gets a licence from the Forestry Commission to secure the right to the historic access, digs up the turf and lays gravel on the open forest. Then he starts to park his car on the open forest. And so does his wife. His children come of age and park their own cars on the forest. In a very short period we have gone from idyllic forest landscape to suburbia.

Secondly, take a pristine stretch of undulating heathland, wild and lonely, ponies and cattle quietly grazing, with unspoilt views to the Isle of Wight. A car park is built. Ice cream sales are permitted. Picnic tables. Litter bins. A lavatory block. An interpretation board. A walking trail morphs into a cycle track, with marker posts. We have now lost that area of unspoilt heath.

The Verderers believe that the New Forest should be available for everyone without restriction for quiet informal recreation. So we must control the creeping damage from recreational overuse and the subsequent pressure for “facilities”. Any such facilities should be provided where they do not conflict with the unique qualities of the Forest. Just because the Forest looks large and empty compared to the urban environment, that does not mean it should be ruined by the latest fad. In fact it is full: full of grazing animals, rare insects, scarce birds. Full of innumerable plants, landscape trees. Full of beauty, tranquillity.

I implore that both the Forestry Commission and National Park Authority consider this in all their decision-making. And it is vital for the New Forest Association to carry on its good work in supporting the conservation of the New Forest for at least another 150 years.
Contributions from the Audience (from audio recording)

The New Forest: a foot in the past and an eye to the future

PETER HEBARD, Brockenhurst Flood Action Group:

Brexit has resulted in devaluation of the pound. That actually means the small amount of timber that you actually sell, Bruce, is going to be worth a bit more. Is that going to make a significant amount of difference to getting rid of your deficit?

Bruce Rothnie, FC:

No. We do quite detailed forecasts of our forward production of timber and it is in gradual decline. That is because the plans that we have now put in place and certainly those that are now emerging are about restoring more open habitats. So we will be losing some trees in certain locations. So if you look at it longer term, the contribution that timber will make to help my net position will decline - not significantly, and we can balance that by getting cleverer at our marketing and looking at new market opportunities for those that we sell.

PETER ARMSTRONG, Resident:

I'm sure we're here because we really care about the Forest individually and as groups. Last year, there were five hundred people across the whole of the district who got involved in 'Clean for the Queen'. The pristine forest has been touched upon. People still leave litter everywhere around and this year I know that those in the National Park and others are committed to this and the District is supplying all the litter bags for picking up the rubbish. Every single one of us can get involved in the litter pick this year under the Great British Spring Clean, which is the big national campaign again this year. That's something we can all do to keep the Forest really pristine because people don't care - they leave litter, they leave stuff, and we know it's not good for the ponies, not good for the wildlife. That's something practical we can all get involved in. I go out litter picking regularly, I have been doing it for five years. It's something we can all do and make a difference and work together on.

ANDREW SUTHERLAND, Lymington and Pennington Town Council:

I moved down here five years ago. Ever since I've been here I've thoroughly enjoyed walking through the Park and cycling through the Park. Before that I used to go regularly to the Brecon Beacons and enjoy the facilities of the wide-open spaces there. What I'm concerned about tonight is that I have heard no reference to how we can encourage more people to come into the Park and manage them. The Park is not to be kept in aspic. It's a facility for everybody and I appreciate you don't always want lots more car parks here, but we must think how we can bring more people in. Because we've got an obesity problem in our country, we want more people to walk in the Park, to cycle in the Park, and we've got this fantastic facility on our doorstep. It's just not something that we've got to hog just to ourselves. More people should be encouraged to come and use it as far as I'm concerned, but obviously I do appreciate that we've got to manage those people and I think we've got to think carefully about how those people are filtered through the Park and don't cause too much damage to it.

Alison Barnes, NFNPA:

I'm glad you brought up health and well-being, because I couldn't talk about that in detail, but we're working closely with Public Health England to pick up on mental and physical health benefits. Does your doctor prescribe a walk in the National Park or send you to the gym? I think that is an important point. I think the 'more people' point is a particularly difficult one that we have to have a conversation about.

We noted that the National Park is at least another fifty percent of area beyond the open forest and also if we play our cards right, it will link into its hinterlands and they will be even better in the future. So hopefully we can do some of what you say, but in a sensitive way, but certainly respond to the health and well-being opportunities that we have.
FRIENDS of the NEW FOREST 150th ANNIVERSARY INAUGURAL EVENT 24th January 2017

The New Forest: a foot in the past and an eye to the future

TRACY THEW, resident:
I think we should charge for people to come to the Forest. We need the money to manage it and it's a Catch 22. If you don't have the money, we can't manage. So why don't we charge?

Bruce Rothnie, FC:
I think this is going to be one of the big challenges for the Forest, about how we sustain it. I tried to give you an impression of the scale of the costs, and the money that we're currently using, you'll be aware, is not sufficient to maintain it to the quality that we would want. And we have to be realistic about how much the public purse can support that and how much in the future others may have to support it. But the challenge is how do you do that and how do you get people to buy into it and be motivated that it is a positive contribution. And that for us is a challenge about how we are open about how we use the money that we have, and ensure that people recognise and see the benefit of the money that they may invest in the Forest.

Clive Chatters:
I think the lady raises a question that is going to need to be debated. It reminds me of when New Forest District Council started to debate, do they charge for their car parks. And there was a little bit of pain and then a very practical solution was found. I think this is one of the discussions that we are going to have to have in the Forest and with that a much wider debate as to what sort of car parks do we need where and how, and what facilities, because things have grown like Topsy over fifty years. And if you were designing it, you certainly wouldn't design what we've got now.

Alison Barnes, NFNPA:
I just think it plays into that point - it isn't just about government any more because we've had a real terms 40% cut, for example. That does foster great partnerships. But the next thing that needs to follow from that is what all the different sectors can do together to pool our resources. So we've got to change the traditional models and we'll have to see how that happens but there are lots of other different sectors apart from government that perhaps we need to look towards.

BRIAN INGRAM, Commoner:
I am concerned about the Forest and the future of the Forest. How much more pressure can we take on the Forest? We're at breaking point now. There are more activities taking place in the Forest every weekend. It doesn't matter where you go, there's activities at night, people with lights on their heads riding their bicycles all across the Forest. There's people exercising their dogs at night with torches. Surely this Forest should be asleep at night, not disturbed by everybody using the Forest for activities. I can tell my grandchildren about the past but I don't know what I'm going to tell them about the future.

JOHN BEAUMONT, Beaulieu River and founder of the Beaulieu History Society:
There is a threat, ladies and gentlemen, which hasn't been mentioned yet - the Coastal Access Plan. Now I would very much like to suggest that if these Coastal Access Plans come to fruition, there are going to be a lot of car parks, a lot of lavatories. I believe the current government wants to see another five million people visiting the National Parks. They don't understand the first thing about recreation. Controlled recreation is the message from this meeting as far as I see it. The Park planners do a brilliant job stopping all these rich b......s from putting up their nasty places on the Solent, but we must be careful about this Coastal Access Plan.

Clive Chatters:
We actually had a presentation about this by Natural England to one of the New Forest Consultative Panels and I've asked them to come back when their proposals are clearer. At the moment my understanding is that there is a very interesting ongoing debate. The actual line of the footpath seems to be something that can be negotiated. There seem to be some solutions to be found. The difficulty is that the current rules are that the Ordnance Survey map says everything on the seaward side of that line is there for unrestricted public enjoyment, which would be absolutely appalling. There are real challenges - it's a major here and now risk, and I hope we can make sure the debate is held at an appropriate level with the landowners and with everybody else who is interested in the case. But that's up to Natural England and I know this message will get back to them. They've got a friend here tonight.
GEORGINA BURROWS, resident:

I live in the Forest. Just quickly on the subject of paying, I'm one of the few people who do have to pay to have access to the Forest because I attach a carriage to the back of my horse and I therefore have to pay an annual fee to drive my horse in the Forest, whereas I could ride it or ride a bicycle absolutely free. I don't mind paying that money because I think it goes to helping the maintenance of the tracks and so on, but I don't entirely understand why other people don't have to pay as well. My issue is with numbers of people. I am out in the Forest almost every day, and some of the car parks are so overused now that it's not dog poo that's an issue but human. I really wouldn't relish more buildings in the Forest but I do wonder whether composting loos in some of the car parks might possibly be a solution. And there's no shortage of sawdust in the New Forest.

Bruce Rothnie, FC:

There were a few things there. You mentioned toilet blocks - they are a huge cost to us to maintain, they get vandalised, there's no mains water. They are just a nightmare to manage. So I would be nervous about providing any facility that we couldn't maintain appropriately without a lot of cost.

But I think what I'm looking for is more responsibility from the people who come to the Forest and should have respect for it. We have a collective challenge about how we get that message across to people, and my staff are dealing with that on a daily basis and receiving quite aggressive abuse from individuals who think that their selfishness is appropriate. So we have a collective challenge about how we get the right messages over. We don't want to clutter the Forest with lots of extra litter bins, lots of extra facilities, when actually what we're trying to do is retain that tranquillity, that quietness.

MARY MONTAGU-SCOTT, New Forest Centre:

One of the things I bring away from the very interesting and challenging debate this evening is that one of the things we really need to do is improve education and the way that we tell the stories of the New Forest and its great importance nationally and internationally. We're trying at the New Forest Centre to make that accessible to all through free entry, which we've done this year. And we have increased our numbers coming into the Centre so that people can come to the Forest and get an understanding of how to behave, where to go, and help to manage that huge recreation problem that we all have in dealing with the huge numbers of people that are coming to the Forest. So I'm just interested to know from the panel how they think we can all work together to improve our communication, because I think that's very key to solving some of the problems of the future and getting young people involved and really well educated.

Clive Chatters:

Education is a long-term thing. It's something where success is measured over the generations, and we need to understand more. None of us understands enough. Just as a personal reflection, I found that people who travel a distance to come to the Forest seek out information, and having the Centre is wonderful because there are people they can talk to there and there's a very practical display of what the Forest is about. They are a very important target audience. But then there's another equally, possibly greater, important target audience and that's us, those of us who live here and use the Forest daily, and we've got a lot to learn too. Education needs to go across the audiences and nobody really knows enough yet.

Alison Barnes, NFNPA:

At the National Park our wonderful education team is working with the New Forest Centre and we appreciate that greatly. I think we reach out to about ten thousand children a year through one-and-a-half officers. I think they need huge recognition for that and I was actually talking to them about the question of litter the other day. They do litter assemblies - it's all about what motivates someone to chuck their McDonald's wrapper out of the window. But it's tapping into the psychology of that, maybe it's having discussions about why certain behaviours happen - through the education side is one way forward. I don't think there's one solution. I think the other thing is about caring about the challenge ahead. So it's our problem - all of our problems - but if we got my nieces and nephew, your children, your grandchildren, in here today, how
motivated would they have felt from what they heard tonight to actually do something different and behave differently? Probably greatly, but I'm not sure how we communicate with different generations and even our own generations. It's changing. So I haven't got all the answers, but I do think we have a great partnership, we've got the Educators Forum as well, and any ideas - please come forward.

Bruce Rothnie, FC:
We have a ranger team who have a long history of running events in the Forest, but I think we need to be realistic about where we do tend to fall into traditional ways of communicating, thinking that the way we like to do it is the way that the next generation want to do it. Actually that is just not right and we need to be a little more on the cutting edge in the way in which we communicate with the next generation. They do it in a very different way to the way we always did it. So let's try to meet that challenge because I think we need to listen to them about how they pick up their information. The technological advances these days are rushing far faster ahead than we're keeping up with at the moment.

IAN THEW, resident:
I live in Burley Rails cottage which some of you will know is deep within the Inclosure. I'm also a Forest licensee so I'm out and about on the Forest more than most people. And I would say for over the last ten or twelve years we've seen a tremendous decline in the wildlife on the New Forest. We've seen a massive increase in litter, the Forest is scarred with bicycle tracks all over the place. I've been out there today - there are bicycle tracks where they should never be. It occurs to me and to many of my colleagues that this beautiful place we call the New Forest is too small and too close to major conurbations to be called a National Park.

We have a problem with some of our visitors, my wife and I, who has already spoken to you. Some of our visitors regard the Park as being equivalent to Thorpe Park or Paultons Park - it is somewhere to come and do as they wish. I would totally disagree with that - I'm sure most of the people in this room would disagree with that. It begs the question, do we need to be a National Park? Mr Rothnie was telling us how very hard up the Forestry Commission are. From memory the Forestry Commission looked after this Forest very well for many many years. Would there be any merit in losing that designation National Park and giving that budget to Mr Rothnie, so that he and his worthwhile staff can manage this Forest as it should be managed.

Clive Chatters:
Other people might not know, but when I volunteered to help set up the National Park Authority, I ended up being the chairman. And so I see myself as almost a midwife of the New Forest National Park - there was quite a lot of effort, quite a bit of shouting, a little bit of blood, but it was it was born and it is with us and it's well established.

The purposes of the National Park - you know. They're set out in law but it is very useful in talking to government. What we care about in this tiny little corner of southern England, we care about passionately, and there's a lot of people here for whom the New Forest is almost their life. It's so important - you get up to Whitehall and we mean nothing. We are just not on their radar at all. One of the ways of getting seen by government, having our issues considered well and thoughtfully by government is to be part of that family of National Parks. When I was involved in the Park, doors in Whitehall were opened and we were able to go and talk about the things that really mattered to us in the Forest. Alison mentioned the advice I gave when I put on the panel to employ her. One stands in the Forest, one looks outwards, it's what goes on out there that really matters the most to our future, and the National Park gives us a tool to do that.

So if you love the New Forest, see it as a useful tool in the toolbox. It can do some things that others can't do, so my view is we concentrate its money, its time and its efforts on doing the things that only it can do for the benefit of the New Forest.
JANE HORTON, local resident and parish councillor:

I’ve been a resident more than sixty years. Also a teacher in the area for a long time, and now a councillor for Denny Lodge Parish Council. So I’ve seen lots of changes. The people you’re talking to here tonight are already committed to caring about the Forest. So are their children and so will their grandchildren be, because they’re here because they care and because they do understand what the Forest is about. The people that we need to reach out to are the people who are visiting the Forest, the people who don’t know the bylaws. The bylaws are there to protect the Forest and I think we need more of a stick than a carrot and I want to know if there’s anybody who can provide that stick. Because I’ve tried to talk to people and explain drones are not allowed and suffered verbal abuse. Cyclists - try to talk to them – same sort of attitude, verbal abuse. I just think we need something stronger. I don’t know what it is but someone needs to provide it.

Bruce Rothnie, FC:

This is a big challenge for us - the staff who are dealing with this on a daily basis, who are having those conversations that you're having, are very skilled in how to deal with those situations. I've personally been out with some of my staff and have been enormously impressed how the way you're going to change attitudes is not through a stick method because that just simply aggravates them, and either drives it underground or they become more aggressive and will go away. What our staff do is try to reason with them to some degree but they're very skilful at it.

Yes, we have potential powers for enforcement but actually the challenge of doing that in reality is always very difficult, to get sufficient evidence to take those cases forward. So our tactic is one of just a gentle approach. But with thirty people in my team to police the Forest, where we have thousands of access points and we have a Forest that is active twenty-four hours a day, we have to be realistic about what the authorities can do to enforce it consistently. So there's another challenge for us in terms of combining the education, combining the subtlety of how you change the behaviour of people in the future and how you direct them to places where the Forest will be a little more robust in those locations.

SUSAN HARMAN, resident:

I like Jane have been in the Forest nearly seventy years. I was born in Lyndhurst and several generations before me, plenty of history in Lyndhurst. I'd like to point out to Mr Chatters - I believe you said you'd been here since 1985. My late mother was a very capable local councillor. We had a strong local council, strong MPs, a very good relationship with them, and believe me, before we had the interference of the National Park Authority, they were very capable of fighting their corner. That was before we were turned into a great big play park for outsiders who didn't know how to behave and all they wanted to do is abuse our way of life, spread litter, abuse local people and take advantage of our lovely surroundings. Quite frankly my children are not interested in staying in the National Park and I never believed that I would lose interest in being a part of the New Forest, but quite frankly I've got to the stage where I'm thoroughly disheartened with the New Forest and the way it's gone downhill in recent years. I'm sorry to have to say that.

GRAHAM BAKER, New Forest Association:

I want to talk to the Deputy Surveyor. What we’ve heard today is that Recreation Management should be the cornerstone of all we try to do, and it should be the number one policy going forward. We shouldn't be frightened to say that's what we're trying to do because we often give the impression that we are frightened to try to manage recreation. So I'd like to ask the Deputy Surveyor if he'd like to make one of the facets of the Forest Design Plan the control of recreation and one of the facets of the wetland restoration program the control of recreation by creating natural barriers that protect parts of the Forest of greater ecological value.
For those of you who may be less aware of what the Forest Design Plan is, they are effectively our approach to the long-term management of the Inclosures of the Forest, and they're going through a review at the moment and we have already had some consultation. But they are principally looking at the structure of those enclosures and what sort of make up those woodlands will have, or what proportion may be returned to open habitats in the longer term, and it is a very long term view. So Graham's point is where does the layer of Recreation Management sit over the top of it? I think for us, and it's a view expressed very forcefully by many of you tonight, it is the challenge of how we manage the landscape to help us manage the recreation pressure. I think there are practical things that can be done and that may be about relocating some facilities to different places, and it may be about how you construct routes that are more favourable in certain areas.

There is the need to mesh together - what would drive our landscape in the longer term is principally about the legislative drivers around the quality of the natural environment. But we then have to manage recreation positively around that, so that becomes the priority. Then we look to manage recreation thereafter. A number of people already said today that there may be a point in time now where we need to make a big step in terms of changing how that structure is formed and I think that is a positive thing for the future, and it's just how we collectively agree that, because it will mean change for people. But we've got to see that as a positive change for the longer term health of the Forest.

Thank you very much to all the speakers. I don’t live in the Forest, so I'm a tourist. But I do visit the Forest quite regularly. And in my job, I'm here to champion wildlife in nature and I just wanted to pick up on the gentleman who talked about the word Park and I have to say I agree the word Park does give us certain connotations. Now the National Park as a mechanism, Clive is right, is incredibly useful in government and elsewhere, and I wonder whether collectively what we need to be thinking about is marketing. If you think about other National Parks, say Dartmoor, that's marketed very much as a wilderness, it's a wild rugged landscape. Because we're in southeast England, perhaps we're too scared of using that phrase ‘wilderness’. ‘Wildness, re-wilding’ - there's a phrase that might generate some discussion. But let's think about putting the ‘wild’ back into the Forest, and I just want to offer my support from the Wildlife Trust to help with that. Let's make it a ‘wilder’ place, be proud of that ‘wilderness’, because actually there's so little in the southeast. So maybe that will help in the way we market the Forest, the way we talk about it. Put the ‘wild’ back and we’ll help you do that.

It's really great to have the support of the Wildlife Trust in that. The National Park family - we’re one of the newest. There will be a seventieth anniversary of the 1949 act in 2019. I try to allude to the fact that not Park but National Park is a very high designation. I know everyone has views on it here, but whilst we've got it here we need to use it to protect the Forest as much as we can. I can assure you that that label is not just used nationally, it's used internationally for the most important and protected places on our planet, gems of the planet, I think you called it. So I understand and appreciate people's views. But I think it's incumbent on us to work with people like Debbie to make sure the real meaning of National Park is understood, particularly around the nature conservation side of it.

Years ago I was on the lecture circuit and I lectured on national parks and I looked at the highest ranking, and we were on the global scale the lowest ranking. The highest ranking is so anti-people it isn't true. The New Forest is a wonderful place where people, particularly that pastoral rural economy, has moulded a landscape over centuries, even millennia. And I love that, I celebrate that, it has wildness which we can enhance. But we must never forget we are a landscape of people.
RICHARD DEACON, Commoner:

Born and bred on the Forest, sixty-seven years. Traffic - no one's mentioned traffic tonight. The New Forest Association got involved with traffic - Lyndhurst bypass has been mentioned, and the Lyndhurst bypass became the A31 in the end. The A31 suffers dreadful congestion already and within five to ten years we're going to see work at Ringwood and even further congestion. I live at Linwood on the road that the police euphemistically call the A31 bypass. My reason for standing here now is to appeal to the heads of the National Park and the Forestry Commission to help us alleviate Linwood's through traffic dilemma. We are a hamlet of 44 homes, two pubs, two Forest car parks, a 160-pitch campsite and 40 holiday park homes - quite a community. We are served by an unfenced single track C class road but suffer daily rat-run traffic avoiding the congested A31. Traffic volumes reach 500 to 700 movements per hour on bad days, mostly exceeding the 40-mile an hour limit. Linwood is not permitted any roadside signage to advise of our village name or presence, no 30 mile an hour restriction, no child warning signs and no animal or livestock reminders. Traffic pounds through the village just as if it were out on the open Forest road.

In just two years on 1,000 metres of road in the village, we've had seven serious accidents, four ponies destroyed, two cows badly injured, with five accidents occurring in daylight, not after dark as is the norm in the Forest. Two vehicles written off, one a 14-seat school bus with children on board at the time. The Red Shoot campsites enjoyed 8,500 child day visits with many playing next to this road, unsupervised as mum and dad enjoy a pint outside the Red Shoot Inn. We need help with traffic management and with safety, but will the two heads please give some direction to their respective organisations to help alleviate the risks we all face. Someone in authority is going to have to answer to a distraught bereaved parent before very long.

Alison Barnes, NFNPA:

I'll let Bruce discuss the particular road but I just wanted to point out that the Partnership Plan has been signed up to by Hampshire County Council, which is the Highways Authority for the area, and of course we do have Wiltshire Council as well in the north for those of you from Wiltshire. You'll read in there that they have actually committed to taking account of the special circumstances of the Forest roads in what they do. Now they have committed to it, but it wouldn't hurt for us all to remind them of that. So thank you Richard for reminding them in public. I will take that to them.

Bruce Rothnie, FC:

Richard, you've come to the Verderers Court on a number of occasions with that request, and I must defer to Dominic May, the Official Verderer, who has actually done a huge amount of work to take this forward. If it's all right, Dominic, I can maybe share a little bit of the outline of some proposals that have come largely through Dominic's persistence with Hampshire County Council Highways. We've had now a number of site visits to talk about the design of that road to reduce its potential, shall we say, as both a speeding road and as a part bypass for the A31.

All I can say is that we are working up those proposals - we will do our bit in terms of making the edges of the road defensive so people are not overrunning. But it's a joint project with the Hampshire County Council. So I just want to publicly thank Dominic for his persistence in trying to get some movement on this and hopefully, Richard, after all your persistence. I hope to see something happening which will be positive for the Forest and alleviate some of your concerns for the community that you represent.

NIGEL CHALLIS, resident:

I've lived here for 56 years and have seen a great number of changes in that time as I'm sure you can appreciate. Clive, you moved here in 1985. You know that's a good amount of time. But you don't have the experience of seeing quite a few changes as I do. All I'd like to say is that I recall that it took three hours twenty-one minutes for someone to actually refer to the people and it's the people who are equally as important.
Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre, President of the Association:

What a great evening! We've all heard a lot of points of view and some really very interesting talks from our guest speakers, and as the President of the Association on behalf of all the members and everyone else who came here this evening, I'd like to say thank you to you all, to Alison, to Bruce, to Clive, for taking the trouble to come here and place yourselves in front of an at times quite challenging audience, and of course, most importantly, to talk to us. I'd like to invite everyone to join me in saying a big thank you to them for coming to us this evening.

The remark ‘the New Forest needs all the Friends it can get’ I think is the one that stuck in my mind. That's what this Association is all about. It's about, as it says there on that banner, Protecting the Forest, and we've heard tonight from our three guest speakers, and of course from yourselves, the many, many problems and challenges that you yourselves see the Forest facing both now and in the future. Having heard all that, I would say the importance of our Association is bigger than ever and if you haven't thought of becoming a Friend of the New Forest, if you aren't already, please do give it very serious thought.

An Association like ours is highly respected because of the membership it has, because of the work that it does, by the statutory bodies before whom it appears and to whom it writes and with whom it meets on a regular basis to protect the Forest. So we need, and most importantly,

the New Forest needs all the Friends it can get.