

New Forest Association (Registered Charity No: 260328) Annual General Meeting 2021

We postponed our 2020 AGM because of Covid19 and, like many other organisations, in consultation with the Charity Commission we resorted to an online virtual process finally being held in January this year. Thank you to those who participated, including voting online or by post. All who were proposed for election or re-election were elected with no dissent. With the continuation of the Covid19 pandemic there is little or no prospect of holding our 2021 AGM in the form of a public meeting. The 2020 Annual Reports of Trustees and Council, and of the Hon. Treasurer are published below and we will separately inform all members of the date and arrangements for the Association's 2021 AGM. Again like many other charities, the Board of Trustees will be proposing resolutions to amend our constitution so as to enable e-mail and similar communications within the Association and to all members.

Trustees and Council Report 2020

Friends of the New Forest, like every other organisation in 2020, found its scope for meetings and events severely curtailed. Again like many others we came to recognise that 'working from home' instead of travelling to meetings was the new way of life in a pandemic and we too turned to tele and video conference meetings (coming to both love and loathe 'Zoom') for meetings of Council, the Board of Trustees and our committees. The Association's 2020 AGM was postponed and finally only held as a virtual event in January 2021.

During the year we lost two stalwarts - Peter Roberts retired and our former magazine editor and hardworking Council member Graham Long sadly died. Jacob White resigned because he moved away - having been furloughed he took up other employment in Wales. At the end of 2020 there were six trustees and twelve non-trustee members of Council. It would be good to gain some new members on Council and to join the Board of Trustees during the coming year.

We have continued to share issues and experiences with other National Park Societies and as a Council member of the Campaign for National Parks (CNP). We have participated in Webinars and attended their on-line AGM and Council meeting. We have also have collaborated with CNP to co-ordinate responses to government and other national consultations and draft proposals that will affect National Parks. Examples with possible implications for the New Forest that have crossed our desks in 2020 include:

- Government White Paper on 'Planning for the Future'
- Defra consultation on an 'England Tree Strategy'
- Ofgem consultation on 'draft determination for RIIO-2' (Visual Amenity Allowances)
- Department for International Trade and H.M. Treasury consultation on Freeports
- Joint letter to the Environment Secretary about 'National Parks and AONBs' (Glover Report)

We have managed to keep up our contact with members of local organisations around the Forest despite the pandemic. The slide show presentation telling the story of the Association and the New Forest from the mid 19th century until today continued to be popular and was given to 5 groups before we were hit by 'Lockdown'. Having adapted the talk for on-line video presentation, later in the year we gave presentations to 3 more groups. Our second talk, 'The New Forest Coast' was launched with a video presentation in December.

After three previous successful years, a Friends of the New Forest keynote address and panel discussion was arranged to cover issues of 'Climate Change and the New Forest' as our 2020 theme. Unfortunately although fully booked this was a casualty of Covid19. Having first postponed the event from Spring to Autumn we then had to cancel. We hope to come back to this in the not too distant future because, as

our keynote speaker said, we all hope to get beyond Covid19, but the climate change crisis and species extinction will still be before us.

Life in the Forest was very much a year of two different halves with Covid19. Initially with Lockdown in force the Forest was unusually quiet and undisturbed, with breeding wildlife enjoying a less disturbed existence than usual. But then Lockdown restrictions were relaxed and suddenly the Forest was hit with an unprecedented deluge of uncontrolled and seemingly unstoppable recreation activity. Local fire fighters, police, conservationists, rangers and commoners were among those who reported repeated incidents of unacceptable behaviour by some visitors who ignored the measures in place to protect the fragile habitats of the area. Cars were found parked irresponsibly, blocking gateways that are used by the emergency services, park rangers, and commoners accessing their livestock. Grass verges that have international conservation designations upon them were driven over or used for parking. Visitors were found wild camping, lighting fires or using disposable barbeques, and some of the New Forest's most important ponds for wildlife were used for swimming, kayaking and even paddle boarding.

We feared that this might be a glimpse of things to come as the Forest becomes ever more closely encircled by a growing urban population. Is there anything to be done, or are selected areas of the Forest to be written off as visitor concentration areas?

Chair - John Ward

Planning and Transport Committee Report

Our committee have continued to function during this difficult year while observing the Covid 19 restrictions; the NFNPA weekly planning lists are circulated and considered via email and there has been no noticeable reduction in the number of applications despite the current circumstances. Most have been of a domestic nature.

The Government's white paper 'Planning for the Future' published in July 2020 proposes a radical overhaul of the planning system. It has some merit in attempting to streamline the overall process but at the expense of meaningful local involvement. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will be the governing document setting out general development policies at national level with Local Plans becoming less detailed and almost secondary.

The White paper gives serious cause for concern and National Parks are not specifically mentioned. We responded to the initial consultation stating that the New Forest National Park must be a 'Protected Area' and with the benefit of greater protection as the pressures of increased recreational activities are already causing harm to this fragile wildlife habitat and landscape. We regard as vital the retention of NPPF para.172 in any new legislation, "*great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks....which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues*".

Following public consultation and pressure from 'shire' MPs and environmental bodies it seems as though for the moment the greater emphasis will be on job creation and additional housing in the northern cities and in developing brownfield sites. However, as a note of caution the Government will be encouraging more housing wherever possible, not least to help the economy recover from the pandemic.

This should be an important opportunity for the Government to implement key proposals from the Glover Review to help strengthen the existing protection for designated landscapes; and we are maintaining contact with Campaign for National Parks (CNP) to co- ordinate our actions leading to the Planning Bill, which is expected in Autumn 2021.

Creeping urbanisation of volume housing outside the NP boundary continues to threaten the fabric of the Forest, which we should be doing our utmost to protect. The adoption of NFDC and NFNPA Local Plans as well as those of neighbouring Authorities will significantly increase day visitors, with adverse effects on the Forest that are only too apparent.

Outline approval for the redevelopment of Fawley Power Station and land to the south was granted in August 2020. Although we continued to object, the matter having been included in the new Local Plans was more or less a *fait accompli*.

Proposals have been made by Hampshire County Council for the reconfiguration of Ipley crossroads. This work has progressed without due diligence regarding necessary habitats assessments legally required for work on the Forest's SSSI. While we recognise the importance of addressing the serious and fatal road-traffic accidents here, we have stressed that the challenge is to find an effective solution that improves safety and is also in the best interest of the Forest.

With the planned high level of housing and commercial expansion at Fawley and along the Waterside the increase in traffic on the A326 will inevitably result in additional traffic using the C97 and C93, both unfenced roads. A possible alternative would be the closure of one or more of the carriageways to some or all classes of traffic and although we support the principle of junction improvements, this must be subject to a fully compliant Habitats Regulations Assessment. However what is really needed in the longer term is a road strategy for the Forest to include; reviewing the number of access points, possible closure of some roads, lowering of speed limits and innovative physical measures. While radical ideas will be controversial and may be too late to be a feasible option for Ipley, they will need to be considered for the safety of walkers, cyclists and livestock and to enhance the Forest environment.

Two other unconnected applications were made for dog exercising areas at Fawley and Woodgreen. On the face of it there are benefits of alternative recreation areas to reduce pressure on the Forest, particularly from dog walking, but we have reservations about how this change of use can be controlled to avoid setting a damaging precedent by widespread commercialisation of the Forest with random dog parks.

Chair Planning and Transport Committee - Bernie Austin

Habitat and Landscape Committee Report

The lack of face to face meetings this year hampered networking and those informal conversations where consensus with other stakeholders is often forged. but we have continued to focus on consultations affecting the Forest.

Defra Environmental Land Management (ELM) – This consultation was much more about defining the paperwork and laying out different tiers of projects than any useful detailed criteria for the projects to be funded, or notion of funds available. This will be the post-Brexit environmental subsidy, replacing the previous Stewardship Schemes and is very important to the future resources for the management and restoration of Forest habitat. The Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme was extended by a year in February 2020, and whether further extensions will be made while ELMs are being hashed out is not known at this time. We will press for built-in funds to monitor target outcomes to show, where possible, public good for public money. Also, where livestock grazing is funded it should be tied to a mechanism not based bluntly on headcount but recognising nuanced stewardship.

New Forest Visitor Research - We and other key stakeholders were shown the completed report on Forest usage by Footprint Ecology at the end of February, ahead of its publication in May 2020. While the report brings together discussion of the protected features, the majority of the work is drawn from original surveys administered in Forest Car Parks and by phone, asking about individuals' recreational use of the Forest. The work was commissioned by a partnership of local authorities whose population is the most significant proportion of recreational users here, and the focus on their activities reflects that. This helps form a picture of location, frequency, distanced travelled, etc. which should be a useful input in developing a strategic spatial strategy for future recreation infrastructure on the Forest. However more detailed surveys of our habitats will also be necessary.

Committee members Clive Chatters and Russell Wynn produced our report "A Contribution To Understanding The Relationship Of The Recreational Use Of The New Forest With Its Special Qualities."

This identified both extant habitat research and key gaps in knowledge which, if filled, would be the minimum required to advance actual strategic recreation management on the Forest.

England Tree Strategy - This consultation from Government is meant to address climate change, yet proposes doing so in a less sophisticated way than its own 25 Year Environment Plan within which it will sit. Throwing resources only into tree planting for carbon sequestration while ignoring other options would compete with the broader Environment Plan proposals. The New Forest is home to grasslands, heathlands, woodlands, and peatlands that are very good carbon sinks. That important mix of habitats should not be lost chasing a media friendly policy goal.

Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme - This revision was a small improvement over the previous one, but has no clear plan for showing its effectiveness. We objected as this represented a missed opportunity to correct fundamental flaws:

- Lack of a mitigation model fit for purpose for the unique high value and distinct morphology of the New Forest, instead relying on the formula developed by Natural England for Thames Basin Heaths, which does not scale appropriately to the Forest.
- Lack of evidence of the efficacy of the current mitigation scheme, along with lack of criteria or monitoring to validate the scheme which should be essential to any basis for continuing, with or without the modifications.
- Lack of specificity about the initiatives promised from the Recreation Management Strategy
- Proposed Ranger roles within the scheme do not include enforcement powers, falling short of the Glover Report's proposed National Landscapes Ranger Service, leaving us with a handful of people distributing leaflets to those creating millions of annual day visits to the Forest.
- Lack of joined-up thinking with the Habitat Mitigation scheme for the NFDC despite the co-dependencies between the Park and its enveloping neighbour, New Forest District.

Effluent Discharge into New Forest waterways – This became an issue raised by one of our Council members, Russell Wynn. Southern Water are allowed by the Environment Agency to discharge untreated waste into the Beaulieu River and Bartley Water. Through his great work with Wild New Forest he got the news on the BBC. Our friends at the Freshwater Habitats Trust, with their “Say No to the Overflow” campaign are calling for strict measures to stop water companies discharging sewage into rivers in the upcoming Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill (second Commons reading 22/01/2021). We will be pushing this agenda forward in 2021.

To end 2020 on an up note, we congratulated Jenni Tubbs who earned The New Forest Trust's Diamond Jubilee award for being “a true unsung hero and defender of the Forest”. In addition to other volunteer roles in the Forest, Jenni is a member of our Council and the Habitats and Landscape Committee. She is our representative on Forestry England's Open Forest Advisory Committee. She also represents New Forest Friends of the Earth on the New Forest Consultative Panel, and is a member of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's Conservation & Science Committee.

Chair Habitat & Landscape Committee - Brian Tarnoff

Treasurer's Report 2020

Income - Our total income of £13,741 is lower than last year's income of £19,008. The difference is all due to the amount of gift aid received. In 2019 we received two years (2018 and 2019) claim together. This year's receipt of £124 also relates to 2019. In 2020 we have made a claim of £1,764, however this has not yet been received. Excluding gift aid, our receipts of £13,616 are roughly in line with the £13,917 received last year. Membership subscriptions and donations are stable. The key change from last year is no income from event tickets. No events were held in 2020 due to the Covid crisis.

Payments - Our payments of £8,550 are much lower than the £12,034 spent in 2019. All expenses have

been lower this year due to a slowdown in activities as a result of the Covid crisis. This included a reduction in printing and postage as we printed one less copy of our magazine Forest Matters.

Grants given - In 2020 no grants were given. The 3 year sponsorship schemes of NFNPA (Apprentice Rangers and Restoring Lost Landscapes) that we supported finished in 2019.

Net Surplus - Our net surplus for the year was £5,191.

Statement of Assets and Liabilities - Our cash funds increased by the surplus of £5,191 to £10,4134.

M&G charity bonds increased in value from £97,926 to £99,054

Gift Aid receivable of £1,764 is our claim for 2020 ,which has not yet been received.

We closed our Barclays account as there was no sense with having accounts with both Barclays and Lloyds.

Overall, the charity's finances remain stable. Thank you for your support and stay safe.

(Detailed year end 2020 tables for the charity's receipts and payments and for assets and liabilities will be published on the Association's website and will be available before the AGM.)

Hon. Treasurer - Brandy Gill