

## **NFAF 32/1**

### **Item 3 – Annual Report**

The Annual Report content, using the Natural England report proforma, for calendar year 2012 was agreed at the last NFAF meeting.

Natural England asks that all LAFs submit Annual Reports for the period covering April to March. Therefore, to meet this requirement, the 2012 Annual report has been amended slightly to cover the extended period of January 2012 to March 2013.

The revised Annual Report is attached overleaf for the approval of members at this meeting.

## Local Access Forum (LAF) Annual Report Proforma

* Reporting year	January 2012 – March 2013
* Name of LAF	New Forest Access Forum
* Name of LAF secretary	Sarah Manchester

### Review of Current reporting year

**Were you successful in meeting the achievements set out in your Annual Report or LAF work programme? Please provide supporting information.**

We succeeded in the creation of greater transparency in the management of the £16m Higher Level Stewardship Scheme for the New Forest. We engaged with the Board of Management and as a result they have now instituted an Annual Report and public meeting.

We have succeeded in re-establishing a close connection with the county CAP management programme and have a direct input into this.

We are represented on the key decision making committees convened by the National Park Authority to promote recreation and implement the Recreation Management Strategy.

e.g. the Recreation Management Strategy Working Group, the Cycle Working Group, and the Research sub-group.

**\* How many Open Access Restriction cases have you been informed about/involved with?**

None

**\* Give up to three examples of advice given by your LAF to section 94 bodies:**

- We were actively involved in the design of a programme for the visit to the New Forest of the Independent Panel on Forestry. We also took part in hosting the visit, and in particular were able to demonstrate the involvement of the community in the protection, conservation and enjoyment of the Forest.
- We joined with New Forest Access for All in making representations to New Milton Town Council on recommending improvements to access to a recreation ground, with particular emphasis on mobility scooter access.
- We took part in a site visit to advise on planned works relating to improvement and reinstatement of an original water course which affects a valley mire in the New Forest. The visit was hosted by the Forestry Commission, who are managing the work under the £16m Higher Level Stewardship award. The valley mire and surrounding land has area-wide public access rights.

**Give up to three examples where you have encountered difficulties; explain what mechanisms could be put in place to alleviate this issue:**

- The Forum has supported an initiative to re-examine the existing network of approved cycle routes within the New Forest, with the aim of creating improved connectivity. As part of this aim a proposal was made to the Verderers Court to trial two routes under close supervision and monitoring. This application was turned down by the Verderers. Due to the de facto powers of veto held by the Verderers little can be done to move forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century without a significantly more pro-active stance being taken by the Forestry Commission, which is sadly lacking.
- The Forum is frustrated by the limited amount of funding allocated to access issues in works being funded under the £16m Higher Level Stewardship 10 year grant. The Scheme is administered by a joint board of management consisting of the Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, the Deputy Surveyor for the Forestry Commission (South England) and the Official Verderer. Representations have been made to the Board to address this issue but so far to no avail.
- We are disappointed at the lack of effectiveness of the Recreation Management Strategy Working Group administered by the National Park Authority. We will be making representations to the Chairman to improve its performance.

**Do you have any issues with recruitment of members from particular interest groups? Does this hinder your work in any way?**

No. We have maintained a buoyant membership drawn from a wide range of interests. Although we have lost valuable members in the past year we have been able to attract equally experienced and dedicated replacement members. We believe that the exemplary service provided by our support officer (provided by the National Park Authority) and her knowledge of the legal framework within which we work hugely facilitates informed and constructive debate within the Forum. This makes taking part a rewarding activity and one to be enjoyed.

**Comments from appointing authority**

The Forum meetings are generally very well attended and the Forum has committed members, many of whom are long-standing and very experienced.

Agendas are always very full, and it can sometimes be difficult for the Forum to do justice to every item. The possibility of holding longer or more frequent meetings has been discussed, but is not feasible due to members' commitments and appointing authority resources.

The National Park Authority holds the Forum in high esteem and has chosen to use Forum members' satisfaction with the support given by the Authority as one of its local Performance Indicators.

**Forward Look**

**What are your priorities for next year (list up to 3)**

- To take a close interest in and support for the implementation of the recently awarded £4m Local Sustainable Transport Fund
- To continue to press for access benefits within the spend of the HLS Scheme referred to above
- To continue active involvement in the planning, monitoring and implementation of the Hampshire CAP
- To seek to influence the National Park Authority in the re-launch of its Steering Group for Recreation Management, following acknowledgement of the failure of its predecessor

**\*What support/training will you need to be able to deliver these priorities?**

- Members have agreed in principle that short training courses on a range of relevant subjects would be welcome.

**Do you perceive any barriers to delivering your priorities?**

We enjoy excellent relations with Hampshire County Council, Forestry Commission and National Park Authority personnel, and with a number of local special interest groups. We believe the Access Forum is held in high regard by these bodies. Relationships with our local District Council, and some other local special interest groups are less strong and need to be strengthened . There are a number of well established local groups representing particular interests who are bitterly opposed to enhancement of recreation, particularly cycling on the Crown Lands. Sadly, compromise will not be countenanced

**Any other comments**

We believe the design of this Annual Report pro-forma has some draw-backs. It creates restraints on what can be reported and recorded. Whilst it may give Natural England/Defra the narrow band of information it requires to monitor the performance of LAFs, it is a poor vehicle for displaying the wider range of activities and issues addressed by a LAF throughout the year