

NEW FOREST
NATIONAL PARK

Mrs S Baillie
One Voice
Blue Cedar
Wootton Road
Tiptoe
Lymington
Hampshire
SO41 6FT

Our ref: LC/hb

2 March 2009

Dear Mrs Baillie

In advance of your meeting with Clive Chatters tomorrow, Tuesday, 3 March, I undertook to respond to you on three issues you have raised recently with the Authority.

Information on the Authority's website

At the Authority meeting on 29 January, you suggested that the wording of the Authority's Website page on the page entitled "New Forest National Park Authority forthcoming public meetings" was misleading because it implied that they are public meetings. You added that the page does not make it clear that public speaking is **'subject to the Authority's public speaking procedures'** and "reasonably ask[ed] the Authority, as a gesture of goodwill, to amend the title to include reference to the public speaking procedures; or to remove the word "public" from the title.

I have reviewed the material on our website, along with any other information which is conveyed in the material we produce for these meetings. The website does contain all of the information that a member of the public needs to know if they wish to speak at an Authority or Committee meeting. However, whether this would be referred to on the first page they accessed would depend on which of the relevant pages they read first. I have concluded therefore that some minor modifications are needed to the presentation of the information on Authority meetings to give greater prominence to the fact that they are open to the public, and to the procedures for public speaking. While you are the only person to raise this issue with us, it is always helpful to have suggestions for improving the accessibility of information on our website. I will discuss the best way to make the changes with our Website Manager, and ask her to put them in place as soon as possible and well in advance of the next scheduled meeting.

New Forest National Park Authority

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Lists of people invited to each of the Park Plan Working Groups

On 18 February, you asked Steve Trotter to provide you with a list of those people invited to the Working Groups you were not attending.

We have considered your request carefully but regret that we will not be able to provide those lists to people who were not invited, before the Working Group meetings take place. We will however be producing summary conclusions of the issues discussed and any conclusions reached shortly after each Working Group meeting and these will be posted on the website along with a list of the organisations that were represented at the meeting. In inviting people to attend the Working Groups we did not seek their agreement to supplying the information you have sought so it would be wrong to do so without seeking their clearance in case they have reservations about the information being made public. Moreover, in some cases it would be possible to identify individuals, either by inference, or directly, and to release the information without their agreement would be contrary to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Allowing observers to attend the forthcoming National Park Plan Working Groups

In an e mail to me of 20 February you commented as follows :

"I understand from Richard Lemon that the upcoming working group meetings are not open to observers. I am finding it difficult to understand why. My intention to raise this at the public question time during the February Authority meeting has been denied me because the meeting has been cancelled, and the March Authority meeting will be too late. I therefore ask you to please reconsider this decision. I feel it would be a small gesture of goodwill on behalf of the Authority and it would be a positive step in showing the general public that you (the authority) are open to bridge-building."

I have discussed your request with the Chairman and the team organising the Working Groups and can confirm that the Working Groups will not be open to observers.

As I have indicated above, a summary of the discussions, and a list of the organisations that were represented at each Working Group, will be posted on the website. This summary will be agreed by all those attending at the end of each meeting. So any member of the public will have a clear account of the issues raised at the meetings. We believe this provides the transparency that you are seeking.

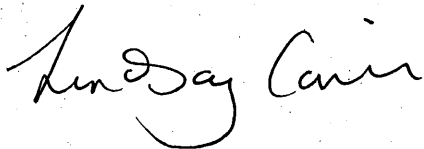
Taking this into account, we feel it would be both inappropriate and potentially impractical to accede to your request. As the title suggests these are *Working Groups*. In other words they are a forum for free ranging and frank discussion of the topics under consideration. We are very keen for all those invited to express their views, without constraint, in a genuine attempt to take the agenda forward in the light of concerns expressed through the formal consultation. Some participants may feel less able to contribute if they know that their words or actions are being observed or possibly recorded.

There are also practical considerations. If, as you request, the Working Groups are effectively open to the public, we would not be able to restrict attendance. The venues have been chosen to accommodate the expected level of participation and to encourage an informal exchange. They were not designed with public attendance in mind and venues would have to be changed to accommodate a public audience of unknown size.

Could I suggest therefore that you suspend judgement on the process until you have had an opportunity to participate in one of the Working Groups yourself, and also considered the formal, and no doubt informal, feedback that you receive.

I hope this helps clarify matters in advance of your meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lindsay Cornish".

Lindsay Cornish
Chief Executive

