

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

GAGS THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The New Forest National Park Authority is the eighth national park in England, the first in the south-east of England and the first to be created for nearly 50 years. It is the smallest yet most populated (34,000 residents).

"It is unelected, unrepresentative, unaccountable and a government quango" He said the plan "had alienated many, many people". – *Councillor Ken Thornber, Leader, Hampshire County Council; Daily Echo, 27 October 2008.*

The NPA's deputy chairman, Barry Rickman, referred to draft plans for preserving the Forest as "bureaucratic tosh". Cllr Rickman criticised the authority at a parish council meeting, saying it was "exactly what everybody feared it would be". He added: "It's just another layer of bureaucracy that seems to fail to recognise that this is a living, working forest." – *Daily Echo, 4 October 2008.*

NPA member Maureen Holding, who is also a district councillor, said: "The National Park was supposed to bring benefits but people feel it's bringing a dictatorship. They're telling people what to do rather than conserving what we've got. The NPA must look at the plan, ask if it's heavy-handed, and realise that they're supposed to be working with people - not dictating what they should do. The district council is accountable but the NPA isn't - and it's the unaccountability that people don't like." Cllr Holding praised some of the proposals in the document but said they had been overshadowed by what she described as "nanny-stateism". *Daily Echo, 4 October 2008.*

MP for New Forest East, Dr Julian Lewis, has reaffirmed his long-held position. "The New Forest is a jewel and if there are going to be changes, they ought to be slow changes so that they can be tested as they go along," he said. The MP added that the park authority proposals were just the sort of plans that the protesters had been afraid of. "The national park model was not suitable for an environment in which so many people reside and conduct their private lives and businesses. "The fact is that bureaucracies have to justify their existence. Up until now, this bureaucracy has made very little visible difference to the Forest. "They are treating it like a park and trying to govern it like a park – not a living, breathing populated community. "It is for the people who live and work in the Forest and those who have looked after it for generations." - *Daily Echo, 28 September 2008.*

The leader of Hampshire County Council said: "At the very least the jury is out in terms of the national park as to what it has contributed to the New Forest. "There were a number of people at the beginning – and I was one – who opposed it on the grounds that it was another tier of government bureaucracy. "I go before the electorate every four years – the NPA does not, ever. It is an arm of central Government with no accountability. The members are not elected and are not accountable. I would welcome elections so that everyone on that board is accountable. "We are dealing with 900 years of tradition here. The New Forest evolves, but it does so through the people of the New Forest and the population in general. If the NPA takes a view against the traditional way of life here, they are going to find considerable opposition." - *Daily Echo, 28 September 2008.*