



## New Forest National Park Partnership Plan 2021-2026 Issues, Vision and Objectives.

New Forest National Park Authority are running a public consultation on a refreshed vision for the Forest, since the heightened focus has been on green spaces for sport, leisure and welfare in the last 18 months. This is also in the wake of calls to redouble efforts globally to preserve and enhance nature whilst mitigating climate change. This report is a summary of the document named above. The consultation, deadline for which is 3 September, can be found at

<https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/partnership-plan/partnership-plan-2021-2026/>

**Introduction** - The New Forest has been recognised as one of the most important areas for nature conservation in Europe; formally designated in 2005 it covers the smallest area for a UK national park at just 220 square miles with 16 million people living less than a 90-minute drive away. It houses 34,000 people and over 2,500 local businesses.

The government commissioned the 'Landscapes Review' in 2019 and stated that National Parks should lead responses to climate change and recovery of nature, plus improvement of physical and mental wellbeing yet noted their many challenges including affordable housing. This plan sets out the challenges and key drivers and methods of addressing them for the authority, partner organisations and communities. The plan has been created by the partner organisations which are statutory consultees and an amount of public engagement has taken place, including a snapshot survey for the public to voice how the Park can recover from the last 18 months and be enhanced beyond.

**The Proposed Vision** - There are 8 aspects to the vision, which include people living and working in a sustainable way, keeping tranquillity and naturalness to large areas of the forest, distinctive habitats and landscapes having been conserved and enhanced, facilities in the right places with education for users.

**The Special Qualities of the New Forest** - These are the aspects considered to define the area and make it unique from all other areas: Outstanding natural beauty; diversity of plants, habitats and animals of national and international importance; unique historic, cultural and archaeological heritage; historic communing; iconic New Forest pony; tranquillity; opportunities for quiet recreation; healthy environment and distinctive local communities.

**The Role of the Plan** - Statute requires all National Parks have a management plan so that responsible and interested parties can be guided, and this plan is for the place itself, **not the Local Authority**.

The two purposes of a National Park are to

- a) Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and
- b) To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities by the public.

The authority is also obliged to use these purposes in seeking to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities. The interaction between the purposes is known as the 'Sandford' principle so that efforts should be made to reconcile conflict between them but if this is not possible, conservation and enhancement is paramount.

**Challenges and Opportunities** - The plan was drafted before release of domestic legislation that is expected to have a distinct effect on the Parks management, so a separate more detailed work programme will be developed alongside the plan in the next 2 years. The revised work programme for years three to five, plus review document will be published after this point.

<i>53.22% of SSSIs in favourable condition</i>	<i>44ha grassland and heathland restored</i>
<i>Sharp decline in ground nesting birds (more than 50% in some cases)</i>	<i>Over 90% of public respondents to survey want to see improvements made during last 18 months continue.</i>
<i>33% decline in breeding waders</i>	<i>12.5km of wetland channels and drains restored</i>

Since 2019 when the Climate Emergency was declared, the Landscapes Review called on National Parks to be at the forefront of the response. Greater than 2/5 of UK species have seen significant decline in the last few decades.

In 2019 a 'State of Nature' report was produced which pitches against monitoring from the 1970's with no slowing down of net losses, with intensive agriculture methods being the main driver and an increase of 1c in temperature since 1980s.

**Managing Recreational Pressure** - Prior to 2020 estimated figures show over 15-million-day trips annually per year with 75% being from the approx.300,000 people that live in reasonable proximity. The remaining 25% were by just over 1 million holiday makers. The most fundamental actions from 2019 consultation 'Future Forest' have been brought forward to this document. It is expected that more UK holidays will be required post-2020 and that travelling out of the area will be limited. There is due to be an 11% increase in recreational access from new housing within a 25km radius, with 130,000 new dwelling planning which is a 16.4% increase of housing within a 25km radius.

**Traffic and Transport** - This is one of the greatest issues with the area as not only does congestion affect residents and businesses but has a long-lasting impact on welfare of the livestock, climate change and integrity of the park itself. Other issues include noise, animal collision and verge parking. Hampshire County Council is currently preparing a Local Transport Plan which focusses on sustainable travel and reduction in car dependency. Only 7% of Forest visitors do it car free, with over 100km off road cycle paths but the network is not joined up effectively. 50 commoners' animals were killed in 2020.

**Commoning, Farming and Land Management** - The Forests ancient common grazing system is critical in its survival as a unique cultural landscape, at a time of the Agricultural Transition of UK from Europe. Farmers direct payments become a new Environmental Land Management Scheme from 2024 and until then farmers and land managers will have specific support. 22,919 hectares of land are classified as high importance for pollinators, with only 20 new dwellings built for commoners since 1992.

**Affordable Housing** - This is one of the greatest challenges for the area and a major barrier to sustainable communities as the average house is 15 times average earnings, making it the least affordable place in the UK. The Pandemic has exacerbated this issue, as more move from urban areas and take more rural accommodation that supports home working, therefore prices inflate further. Average house costs £643,371, only 51 new affordable units completed since 2006 and over 200 eligible applicants on the housing register.

**Connecting People** - National Parks were challenged by the Landscapes Review to make greater strides in reaching ethnic minorities, those living in deprived areas and first-time visitors. National Parks were created after the World War II for a healing space both physically and mentally and the pandemic has raised further life balance questions. National Parks should be at the forefront of accessible spaces for all.

**Shared Ambition** - Five theme-based 'agendas for action' are detailed below.

***Nature Recovery*** – Produce a recovery plan to restore and expand habitats, helping wildlife thrive and ensure recreation takes place in the most resilient areas

***Net Zero with Nature*** – Develop programmer with partners and communities to ensure the area is carbon neutral by 2050. Promote and develop best practice in nature-based solutions to meet climate and nature goals. Help communities act on climate crisis.

***Thriving Forest*** – Support cultural heritage, communing and local produce to sustain landscape for future generations. Invest in green skills and jobs, with Centre of Excellence for future green economy. Provide more affordable housing.

***Inclusive National Park*** – Create a 'Natural Health Service' through a programme of measures provided by communities, health and environment sectors. Help new and diverse audiences connect with nature, discover the special qualities and how to care for the Forest. Foster a sense of great pride.

***Team New Forest*** – Establish new ways of engaging communities and grassroots action. Ensure a lead in environmental agenda through regional and national work. Develop Centre of Excellence for data and evidence to underpin decisions and actions using technology to manage the area more effectively.

***Members*** - The rest of the Partnership Plan is a list of the methods to make the 'Agenda for Action' happen and can be viewed using the link at the top of this summary. I have drafted answers to the survey, which pose questions of importance level to each of the challenges faced. If you wish to view the draft survey response please request it prior to the meeting, **as the response will be posted online straight after the meeting has ended on 26 August**. The survey needs to be read in conjunction with the 10 pages of methods.