

Pressures, trends and opportunities

There are a number of major issues and trends that will fundamentally affect the National Park and its Special Qualities over the next 20 to 30 years. Most will be driven by complex interactions between environmental, social and economic factors at the national and global level. Although many of these trends are by their nature difficult to predict accurately in detail, there is sufficient evidence to suggest the broad changes likely to occur in the medium term.

Climate change will alter the character of large parts of the National Park over the next 20-50 years and beyond, modifying landscapes, habitats, biodiversity and the way the Park is perceived and used. There is a strong scientific consensus that human influence is causing an increase in global temperatures, widespread melting of glaciers and polar ice caps and a rise in global sea-levels. It seems increasingly likely that unless there is a major and continuing reduction in carbon dioxide emissions over the next few decades, by the end of this century there will be huge impacts on the ecosystems and human societies of the planet.

Clear predictions relevant locally include:

- **a substantial rise in sea-levels affecting coastal habitats and recreation**
- **increased summer droughts causing the decline of important wetland and woodland habitats**
- **warmer winters allowing the spread of plant and animal diseases**
- **changes to traditional land management**

Climate change does bring the opportunity for focusing minds and resources on what is really valued and must be conserved in the National Park as it adapts to the changing environment, and also provides an imperative for making lifestyles and business practices as sustainable and carbon-free as possible. The New Forest could reduce its environmental footprint, become more self-sufficient in food and energy and create robust and high quality natural habitats which are as climate-proof as possible.

Local distinctiveness is the sum of all the individual features of the landscape and built environment which create the particular character of the National Park. Although the Park is still clearly different in many ways from its surroundings there has been a gradual and continuing loss of character, including:

- **suburbanisation of the villages**
- **use of standard highways infrastructure**
- **mediocre building design**
- **decline in traditional rural crafts and land management**
- **the general ‘tidying’ of the landscape**

These trends are likely to continue unless local distinctiveness in the New Forest is much better understood, valued and conserved through the actions of local residents, businesses and organisations. There are opportunities for very visible improvements across the National Park, for instance by agreeing highways signs and road maintenance appropriate to the area. At a local level community-based projects can enhance the character of particular settlements and better protection can be given to buildings of local interest.

Traditional land management, which has created the landscape of the New Forest over the last 1000 years, is already under threat from the high cost of land and property and the uncertainties facing agriculture and forestry. Smaller holdings, which characterise the National Park, have always been marginal economically and many may cease to be viable in the near future. Traditional woodland management and modern forestry both need to develop new markets to remain competitive. Some of the characteristic landscapes of the New Forest have been undermined by relatively recent large-scale changes in management, including intensive crop production, softwood forestry, drainage schemes, mineral workings and coastal defences.

Trends over the next 20 years are likely to include:

- **Reduction of food production subsidy and a change towards an open market economy**
- **Increasing pressure for more intensive food production and the use of marginal land in response to global food shortages**
- **A continuing niche market in high quality local produce**
- **Increasing competition from different land uses, including private recreational uses (including horse-keeping), bio-fuels, tourism and natural resources**
- **Long-term threats to the pastoral economy, including commoning, from climate change – especially poor grass production due to long periods of drought**

- **The need to create revenue for the continued good management of publicly owned land**

There are opportunities to address many of these issues through local policies and initiatives, such as continued support for local food production, provision of farm advice relevant to the National Park, better availability of housing for commoners and guidance on adapting land management to climate change.

Economic growth within the Park and in the surrounding areas brings both pressures and opportunities for the area. Easy access from the large conurbations nearby is already creating a high recreational demand and potential conflicts with the conservation of internationally important habitats and species. There are major pressures on the road network from local commuters, visitors and through traffic. Several routes are now close to capacity and many villages are dominated by traffic during the summer. There is a continued demand for new development, both within and immediately adjacent to the Park, with implications for the rural character of the area, its visual setting and the conservation of its rich historic and natural heritage.

Trends over the next 20 years are likely to include:

- **Major housing growth in South Hampshire and South East Dorset, bringing increased traffic and recreational pressure**

- **Economic development in and around Bournemouth and Southampton, including expansion of both airports, adding to both car and air traffic and the consequent erosion of the tranquillity of the New Forest**
- **Continued pressure for small-scale development within and adjacent to the Park, causing gradual loss of the distinctive character of the built environment**
- **An expansion of 'green businesses' and a more sustainable approach to transport and building design**
- **Increased interest in 'green tourism'**

Close working with neighbouring authorities is needed to mitigate the adverse impacts of development and to find ways for the National Park to benefit positively from the buoyant economy of the region. The development of new green technologies, the strength of the New Forest 'brand' and the interest in green tourism all give the potential for the National Park to support business development and sustainable transport which contribute to its special qualities.

Society and social expectations can change rapidly over a few decades. The National Park is already an attractive place for the wealthy and the retired, and although there is still a strong local culture, the skills, knowledge, traditions and rural life of previous generations is rapidly being lost. Property prices are extremely high and affordable housing for local people is a major issue. Both residents and surrounding communities have clear, and often varying, expectations of what the Park should provide for their enjoyment and recreation.

Over the next 20 years trends are likely to include:

- **An increasing proportion of retired or older people**
- **A rapid decline in the self-sufficiency of local communities and the loss of local skills, knowledge and cultural identity**
- **The threat of increasing social tensions and polarisation on the grounds of wealth, income and background**
- **Increasing tensions between residents and visitors over the use of the New Forest for recreation and the measures needed to conserve its qualities of remoteness and tranquillity**
- **A continuing and strong culture of private car use, despite increased fuel costs and taxation, with consequent pressure for an improved road infrastructure to deal with the demand**

Local policies can help to influence the provision of local services, housing, food production and energy sources, which will all help to create more sustainable communities. Communities can be encouraged to play a greater role in decision-making for their area, become more involved in local projects and to keep alive skills and traditions. The National Park does have the potential to meet many of the physical, mental and spiritual needs of its communities, but this will need carefully considered, positive and flexible management of recreation both within and outside the Park.

European, national and regional policies have an increasing influence on many aspects of the National Park. The most important of these over the next 20 years are likely to include:

- **economic development within the adjacent regions and sub-regions**
- **transport policies and proposals**
- **European environmental legislation**
- **reform of the Common Agricultural Policy**
- **climate change and sustainability policies and guidance**

It will be essential to develop stronger relationships with the relevant bodies and influence decisions made at the national, regional and sub-regional level. This will be helped by a better understanding of the Special Qualities of the National Park and of the positive contribution these can make to the quality of life, rural economy and sustainability of the region.



