

Conserving and enhancing the National Park

Objective C1

Restore, extend or enhance large-scale landscapes and semi-natural habitats of the New Forest, where character or condition has been lost or degraded

The natural beauty and quality of the whole landscape of the New Forest is recognised by National Park designation. This is a cultural landscape with variety of distinctive but interlinked landscapes, habitats, land uses and historic features which have evolved with largely unbroken continuity over the last two millennia.

In some parts of the National Park landscape quality, habitat condition and archaeological value has been lost or diminished, often over relatively large areas, due to changes in land use or management practices over the last two centuries. Currently less than 60% of the National Park overall is managed according to specific conservation objectives⁶. Although mechanisms are in place to help enable favourable or recovering condition for a high proportion of the nationally and internationally important habitats (Sites of Special Scientific

Interest) by 2010, nevertheless currently less than 11,000 hectares (about one third of all SSSIs by area) is in favourable condition. Considerable resources are needed to achieve and maintain the high conservation value of these primary sites.

The major reasons for the loss of quality of the landscapes of the National Park include:

- **ploughing of previously uncultivated land and general intensification of farming**
- **large scale planting of conifers (both on the Crown Lands and on private estates)**
- **gravel extraction and waste sites**
- **drainage schemes affecting hydrology and natural drainage patterns**
- **engineered coastal defences**
- **increase in recreational land uses, including horse keeping**
- **simple lack of management**
- **urban fringe influences.**

⁶ Judged according to a number of criteria, including the area of: SSSIs in favourable or recovering condition, National Nature Reserves, statutory Local Nature Reserves, Environmental Stewardship Schemes (including Countryside Stewardship), Woodland Grant Schemes, Organic Farming Schemes.

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A great deal of large-scale landscape restoration and enhancement work has already been undertaken, notably through the LIFE projects, Forest Design Plans and the Verderers' Countryside Stewardship scheme. The focus has been very largely on the protected habitats of the Crown Lands and Open Forest, resulting in marked improvements in the condition of SSSIs over the last five years and a gradual change in the Inclosure woodlands towards more typical Open Forest habitats. Further work is, however, still needed to improve condition of the Inclosure woodlands, wetlands and coastal habitats and to conserve the archaeology intrinsic to the landscape.

On the enclosed lands a number of larger estates and farms have shown an interest in the new higher level agri-environment schemes and woodland grant schemes. These have clear conservation benefits, although few include the whole farm or estate and most have not yet been finalised and implemented. Private land owners, land managers and local communities should be encouraged to help develop a wider vision for the cultural landscapes of their area and be directly involved in externally funded enhancement projects with public sector and other partners.

The approach will be to:

- **Agree priorities for the different landscapes and habitats across the whole of the Park**
- **Extend the area of typical Open Forest habitats**
- **Identify specific areas and projects on the enclosed lands where major enhancement or restoration is required, and seek funding opportunities to take these forward.**

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Policy framework

CP1.1

Develop a shared vision and agree priorities for the different landscapes and habitats of the National Park

This will include agreeing future direction and identifying areas where restoration is required, involving key organisations, estates and land managers, in order to conserve and enhance the range of landscapes, habitats and archaeological features which are distinctive and typical of the New Forest.

CP1.2

Extend the area of typical Open Forest habitats by reinstating common grazing

This should include, for example, continuing the process of de-fencing Inclosure woodlands, reinstating grazing on commons and coastal areas outside the Perambulation and seeking new opportunities for creating semi-natural habitats with extensive grazing elsewhere on the enclosed lands.

CP1.3

Improve and sustain the quality of nationally designated habitats (SSSIs) where these are not currently in favourable condition

There is a strong onus on the major land managers, such as the Forestry Commission and National Trust, to sustain their commitment to improve SSSIs which are 'recovering' but not yet in favourable condition. Particular focus is needed on riverine and wetland habitats and on the Inclosure woodlands. Coastal habitats will alter due to sea-level rise and sites for the creation of similar habitat should be identified and agreed with land managers.

CP1.4

Encourage integrated land management on the enclosed lands which enhances the characteristic landscapes, habitats and archaeological features of the area

The aim will be for large private estates and farms to be managed 'holistically' with conservation objectives in mind, working towards the agreed Vision for that landscape area. Where possible complementary management should be extended across adjacent estates.

Protect the cultural landscapes, biodiversity and character of the built environment from the impacts of development pressure within and beyond the National Park

Objective C2

Protect the cultural landscapes, biodiversity and character of the built environment from the impacts of development pressure within and beyond the National Park

The New Forest lies between two of the major growth areas in southern England. The South Hampshire sub-region (including Southampton, Portsmouth, Totton and the Waterside) has a target of 80,000 new houses by 2026. An additional 2,400 houses are proposed in New Forest District outside the National Park. The south east Dorset conurbation of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole has a planned total of 34,000 houses over the same period, the creation of 42,000 new jobs and the major expansion of Bournemouth airport.

This represents a significant increase in population and economic activity which will have impacts on the fabric of the National Park, its visual setting and people's enjoyment of the area. There will be an estimated 12% increase (an additional 1.6 million visitor days) in people using the National Park for recreation by 2026⁷, together with a substantial growth in commuter and through traffic. The latter may well lead to pressure to improve the existing road and service infrastructure.

While development is inevitable, and may in some cases have positive benefits for the National Park, much greater effort is needed to manage the increasing demands made on the Park and create a better understanding of its sensitivities, as well as its positive benefits, in nearby authorities. Working together, practical mitigation measures must be agreed and become an integral part of new development proposals, including new green infrastructure close to centres of population. The quality of the surrounding landscapes, visual impacts from outside the Park and the requirement for back-up land for commoning beyond the boundary should also be considered as neighbouring authorities develop their land use and development proposals.

⁷ Changing patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park (Footprint Ecology, 2008)

Protect the cultural landscapes, biodiversity and character of the built environment from the impacts of development pressure within and beyond the National Park

Within the National Park the desirability of the area has created a strong demand for new housing, business development and associated services and infrastructure. Strong planning policies are needed to prevent impacts on the rural character of the villages, the setting of historic buildings and sites of nature conservation or archaeological importance.

In a number of cases traditional local buildings have been demolished to be replaced by larger dwellings and there is continued pressure for the removal of large trees with high amenity value, both from established properties and speculatively in advance of planning applications. Sites of local importance for nature conservation, non-scheduled archaeological sites, historic gardens and unlisted buildings are particularly vulnerable, since by definition they do not receive statutory protection.

The Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and New Forest National Park Minerals and Waste Core Strategy has recently been approved (2007). No new large-scale mineral extraction or waste disposal sites will be developed within the Park boundary, other than in exceptional circumstances. There are few active sites within the National Park, but the waste transfer site at Pound Bottom is operational and has no agreed closure date. The site generates heavy goods traffic on unfenced roads north of the A31. The Avon Valley and New Milton area remain major areas for mineral extraction in the county

context and will have impacts on the Park in terms of traffic, noise and loss of existing habitats.

The approach will be to:

- **Work with nearby authorities to reduce the impacts of development outside the National Park**
- **Safeguard the rural character of the area by controlling the design and scale of development**
- **Strengthen the protection of sites of local importance for biodiversity and the historic environment.**

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Policy framework

CP2.1

Work with surrounding authorities (and regional decision makers) to maintain the integrity and value of the Special Qualities of the National Park, through:

- **improving awareness of “Section 62” responsibilities, the requirements of European nature conservation legislation and the need for protection of the setting of the National Park**
- **influencing external policies and development proposals at an early stage**
- **providing the necessary infrastructure close to the development itself (such as green space, community facilities and local services)**

CP2.2

Protect locally important sites and features, including local vernacular buildings, archaeological sites, designed landscapes, geological sites and habitats and species of biodiversity importance

This will include strong local planning policies, including new management plans for Conservation Areas, the promotion of guidance relating to features of special interest in the New Forest context, improved liaison with land and property managers and financial encouragement, such as the historic buildings grants, where appropriate.

A range of mitigation measures should be developed to minimise the impacts of agreed development on the Special Qualities of the Park, including design considerations, green infrastructure and traffic management. Where appropriate developer contributions will be sought for visitor management and sustainable transport to offset development impacts.

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CP2.3

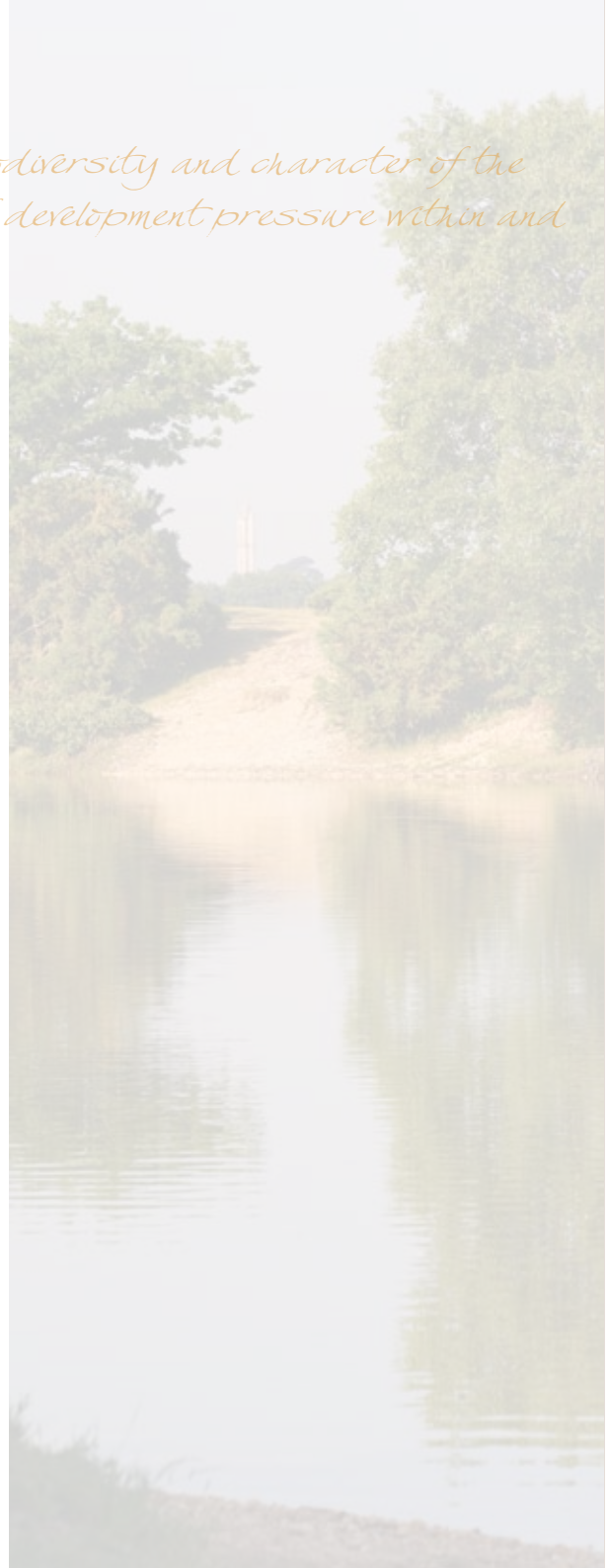
Require the highest standards for the design, location and landscaping of new development within the National Park

The focus will be on design (whether traditional or modern) which is sympathetic and in context with its surroundings and on new buildings with a low (or no) carbon footprint. New development should make a positive contribution to the National Park in visual, landscape, biodiversity and sustainability terms.

CP2.4

Resist further development of the road network or major new service infrastructure

Other than in exceptional circumstances the expansion of the existing road network and other major services will not be supported within the National Park. Every effort will be made to influence, and where necessary mitigate, regional or sub-regional proposals which will affect the Park.



Support land management which sustains the Special Qualities of the National Park

Objective C3

Support land management which sustains the Special Qualities of the National Park

Commoning, farming and the management of trees and woodland have been essential to the rural economy and the shaping of the landscape of the New Forest throughout historic times, and they continue to be of fundamental importance today. Without these activities, carried out in a ‘forest-beneficial’ way, the primarily pastoral and woodland landscape of the National Park could not be managed sustainably. Nevertheless many organisations and local people still do not fully appreciate the ‘working’ nature of the Forest and the part this plays in the history, cultural identity, local employment and the conservation of the National Park.

The Open Forest is maintained primarily by the grazing of commoners stock. The numbers of active commoners and stock depastured have remained at good levels in recent years, but there are serious concerns over the longer term viability of commoning. The New Forest Countryside Stewardship Scheme and various other external support schemes will end within the next five years, there is a continuing rise in the cost of suitable housing for young commoners, the availability of back-up land is threatened by competing land uses and there is a need for a buoyant local rural economy to provide part-time employment (commoning has always been a part-time occupation).

In the past there were strong cultural and economic links between farming and commoning, including the seasonal movement of stock and the sharing of labour and equipment, which helped the viability of both. Commoning also has close links with forestry and woodland management and the general management on the Open Forest, all of which provide flexible employment and a source of additional income.

Farming on the enclosed lands, as elsewhere in the country, has been governed largely by European policies and agricultural subsidies. The recent change away from subsidies for food production and the introduction of conservation related schemes will bring benefits to the National Park, provided these are adequately funded and can be tailored to address the particular circumstances of

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the New Forest. At present they have less relevance for the smaller holdings that are already facing the greatest risk economically. The National Park has a very high proportion (80%) of holdings less than 20 hectares (49 acres).

Softwood forestry has become the dominant form of woodland management over the past 150 years and now supplies an important local industry. Many of the plantations replaced, or were created around, older native broad-leaved woodland. Nevertheless nearly 10,000 hectares (24,700 acres) of ancient woodland have remained, both within the Open Forest and on private estates, forming an extremely important historic and wildlife resource. There are opportunities to both restore the typical broad-leaved woodlands of the National Park and to create new markets for wood products locally.

New forms of land use are becoming significant as a wealthier population moves into the area and land prices rise. The use of land for private recreation, particularly for horse-keeping, has increased, and often at the expense of agricultural land. Further research is needed to assess the extent and speed of change, but in particular areas it is having a considerable impact on the local landscape.

If the landscapes and habitats of the National Park are to be conserved it will be essential to influence the way national policies are applied locally, to develop good and lasting relationships with private land managers and to provide consistent

New Forest-relevant advice as economic and environmental circumstances change. In particular advice must include appropriate ways of adapting to climate change and of addressing the likelihood of the demand for more intensive food production in the future.

The approach will be to:

- **Develop the vision for the enclosed landscapes with local land managers**
- **Safeguard the pastoral and woodland economy of the New Forest**
- **Adapt to economic and environmental change in ways which benefit the Special Qualities of the National Park.**

Support land management which sustains the Special Qualities of the National Park

Policy framework

CP3.1

Ensure the future viability of commoning through:

- support schemes to maintain Open Forest grazing, tailored to the specific needs of the New Forest
- affordable housing for commoners, including land suitable for holdings
- a safeguarded stock of back-up land on the enclosed lands and adjacent to the National Park
- reciprocal links between farming and commoning across the boundary, particularly the Avon Valley and the coast
- understanding of the importance of commoning among visitors, local people and organisations

This will include ensuring externally funded schemes such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme are extended or replaced after 2013 (when the current scheme ends) and continued support for marketing commoners products. Stronger collaboration between farmers and commoners will be encouraged where this is of mutual benefit, and links with Open Forest and woodland management (providing supplementary income) will be sustained.

CP3.2

Support farming that is directly beneficial to the Forest through:

- farm diversification where this helps sustain the existing farm business and is either
 - agricultural diversification based on an extensive system of land management, or
 - non-agricultural diversification, including the re-use of redundant farm buildings, where the new use has a connection with the National Park and a low environmental impact
- the co-ordinated provision of long-term land management advice relevant to the New Forest
- influencing the design and targeting of government land management support schemes to ensure these are relevant to the circumstances of the New Forest

Farming and farm diversification will be given particular support through advice and planning policies where this enhances or reinstates the characteristic landscapes and habitats of the area, provides local produce, encourages greater public access or provides local employment in rural

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businesses. Diversification which replaces the farm business or which entails intensive production methods will not be supported. Farm advice should be easily accessed through a first stop service for land managers, covering both business and conservation advice and utilising the various schemes already in place.

CP3.3

Encourage sustainable forestry and woodland management, in particular where this:

- restores the ancient woodland resource
- increases the area of broad-leaved woodland types typical of the area
- supplies wood products for the local economy, including wood-fuel energy systems

Particular support will be given to the reinstatement of coppice management in enclosed woodlands (formerly managed in this way), the removal of conifers from broad-leaved, and particularly ancient, woodland and the creation of a range of woodland habitats. Initiatives will also be encouraged where these provide improved public access and opportunities for informal recreation in robust areas.

CP3.4

Resist the loss of agricultural land and back-up grazing through development or change of use

This includes changes to private recreational use, including recreational horse keeping, but does not preclude the restoration of semi-natural habitats on former agricultural land.

