

Understanding and enjoying the National Park

Objective U1

Achieve a shared understanding and recognition of the Special Qualities of the National Park by local people, visitors and organisations

Understanding the Special Qualities of the New Forest is the basis for a fuller enjoyment of the area by residents and visitors. It will help engender greater respect and a sense of responsibility for the National Park and also underpins the good management of the area by local organisations.

A great deal of work has been undertaken to identify and agree the qualities which help define the area and create a clearly recognisable sense of place (see Special Qualities, page 19). These now need to be interpreted by local organisations in a consistent way, emphasising their importance and sensitivity, in published information, on websites and in day to day contact with the public.

Relevant web-sites are often the first point of contact for staying visitors. Strong emphasis on the Special Qualities given here will influence who decides to choose the area as a holiday destination.

Local visitors and residents are, in general, less likely to use sources of visitor information and may feel they already know the area well. To reach this important audience (making up about 60% of all visits made the National Park) will require a degree of lateral thinking, for instance by including key environmental messages in materials with other more familiar day to day uses.

Messages which are related to behaviour or conduct are more likely to be effective if clearly linked to the Special Qualities and carefully incorporated into useful information about what to see and where to go in the National Park. Basic practical information is also needed for particular social groups (for instance people with disabilities or young people), who simply may not be aware of the opportunities available to them, or who feel the New Forest has little to offer.

Environmental education is of particular importance for younger people in the area. They have a unique learning resource on their doorsteps and some may be inspired to contribute to the conservation of the New Forest in the future. There are a number of organisations offering outdoor education for children and young people of all ages. Several also run courses and events for adults. 71 schools are located in the National Park or within about 4km of the boundary, including those in Totton and the Waterside parishes, the southern coastal towns, Ringwood and Fordingbridge. Good co-ordination now exists between the various outdoor education providers, but access (including cost)

Achieve a shared understanding and recognition of the Special Qualities of the National Park by local people, visitors and organisations

to their services is an issue for some schools and individuals.

Local organisations hold a great deal of unpublished technical information about the features of interest which together create the Special Qualities of the area. A shared and easily accessed means of data exchange is critical to enable research and monitoring and to ensure that land management, development or new infrastructure does not affect the Special Qualities.

The approach will be to:

- **Be consistent in communicating key messages about the Special Qualities of the whole National Park**
- **Target different audiences in ways which are appropriate to them**
- **Prioritise environmental education about the New Forest for young people**
- **Incorporate positive behavioural messages into wider information about the National Park**

Policy framework

UP1.1

Publicise key messages about the Special Qualities of the New Forest in a consistent and co-ordinated way, and in particular:

- **develop creative and innovative ways of communicating messages to less easily reached groups, including local day visitors, residents and under-represented groups**
- **ensure the Special Qualities are fully emphasised in tourism information to guide those considering the New Forest as a holiday destination**

Information about the special qualities should incorporate the concept of a shared sense of stewardship for the area, cover the whole National Park and be disseminated by all the major organisations. Web-based tourism information should clearly emphasise the special environment of the Park and appeal to people with a particular interest in the environment, local products and local culture.

Achieve a shared understanding and recognition of the Special Qualities of the National Park by local people, visitors and organisations

UP1.2

Incorporate behavioural messages, linked to the Special Qualities, into a wide range of informative publications about the National Park targeted at different visitor groups

The approach will be to integrate behavioural 'Forest first' messages carefully into publications which are designed primarily to give wider information about the area. This should include published and web-site information.

UP1.3

Encourage environmental education and study "about the Forest in the Forest" both for academic purposes and enjoyment

Young people, in particular, should have better access to outdoor environmental education within the National Park and be involved in learning first hand about the special environment and cultural heritage of the New Forest.

Improve people's enjoyment and the quality of their experience of the National Park

Objective U2

Improve people's enjoyment and the quality of their experience of the National Park

Visitors to the National Park seek a variety of different experiences from its special qualities. Simple enjoyment of the scenery and views, the naturalness of the landscape, peace and quiet, and the wildlife and ponies are the aspects of the Park that are stated as the 'most liked' by the majority of all visitors. In addition many specific groups come to the National Park to participate in organised events, such as orienteering, scouting and guide activities, charity events and school field trips. Clearly local people also wish to enjoy the place in which they live and work.

Although recent survey work⁸ appears to indicate a high level of visitor satisfaction, further clarification is needed from a wider spectrum of groups and individuals. Certainly some groups do feel there are barriers to their enjoyment of the area. Workshops involving young people have shown that they find the Park difficult to access easily and feel there are few facilities and activities designed specifically for their needs. Other groups with particular requirements, such as people with disabilities, those from different cultural backgrounds or those living in surrounding communities, may feel unsure about visiting the New Forest for various reasons, such as lack of specific information or anxiety about an unfamiliar environment.

The context for everyone should be a natural and built environment of consistently high quality, the ability to enjoy the Park safely and healthily without the use of a car and interpretation which is friendly to both the visitor and the landscape. However it is often the small things which affect people's perceptions of a place, such as the level of litter, the availability of good local produce, the quality of accommodation or the ability to find places that are quiet and peaceful.

There is undoubtedly a degree of tension between those who live and work in the National Park and those who come here as visitors. Nonetheless visitors are the mainstay of the local economy,

⁸ A Survey of Recreational Visits to the New Forest National Park (Tourism South East, 2005) noted that 79% of staying and day visitors were satisfied with their visit.

Improve people's enjoyment and the quality of their experience of the National Park

and can contribute very positively in a variety of ways to the management and conservation of the Forest. Visitor management is essential, but a positive attitude by local people can greatly add to the enjoyment of the area by visitors as well as helping in their understanding of the National Park.

The approach will be to:

- **Improve the quality of visitor services and facilities in the larger villages**
- **Enable safer and more enjoyable access by foot, cycle, horseback and wheelchair**
- **Increase 'on the ground' contact with members of the public**
- **Overcome barriers which prevent the enjoyment of the Park by specific groups**
- **Involve visitors more directly in the conservation of the Park**

Policy framework

UP2.1

Provide opportunities for safer and easier access to and within the National Park on foot, cycle, horseback (and other non-motorised means), for enjoyment, health and well-being by:

- **making existing rights of way and roads safer and more user friendly**
- **creating new access links to join up current routes and provide a more coherent network**

This will include developing safe crossing points on main roads, introducing traffic and demand management which gives priority to non-car transport on specific roads and promoting walks and activities for health and well-being. New links will be developed where required to provide more coherent and usable footpath and cycle route networks, both integrated with public transport and enabling easier non-car access from settlements outside the National Park. Location and design will take into account the need to conserve the Special Qualities of the Park and protect the integrity of the European sites for nature conservation.

Improve people's enjoyment and the quality of their experience of the National Park

UP2.2

Actively involve groups who feel the National Park provides few opportunities for them, or who feel excluded due to cost, lack of transport or other barriers

Groups include young people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, surrounding communities and those without access to transport. Some groups, especially people with particular access needs or those from different cultural backgrounds, may initially require specific outreach work to help build confidence and improve understanding of the National Park.

UP2.3

Develop sensitive and innovative forms of interpretation which add to the appreciation and enjoyment of the National Park, while minimising the need for additional signage

A basic approach to interpretation needs to be agreed by all major partners, in order to enable people to gain more from their visit to the National Park, while avoiding the visual intrusion of on-site signage. The emphasis will be on remote information, new technology and improved 'on the ground' contact with rangers and other trained staff.

UP2.4

Provide a high standard of services and facilities for visitors within the four defined Service Villages of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway

The emphasis will be on encouraging local businesses that offer visitors high quality New Forest-based products and a high standard of services, while open space and street design should draw inspiration from the Special Qualities of the National Park. The adjacent towns (including Ringwood, Lymington, Fordingbridge and New Milton) also have a particular role as centres for accommodation and visitor information and in providing a greater range of services and cultural facilities.

UP2.5

Maintain a clean and litter-free National Park

This should include regular litter clearance of particular trouble-spots (including the coast and road verges) and litter management around waste sites. Litter awareness campaigns should be based on individual responsibility for not dropping litter from cars, taking litter home from sites, the dangers of garden rubbish to stock and the enforcement on fly-tipping.

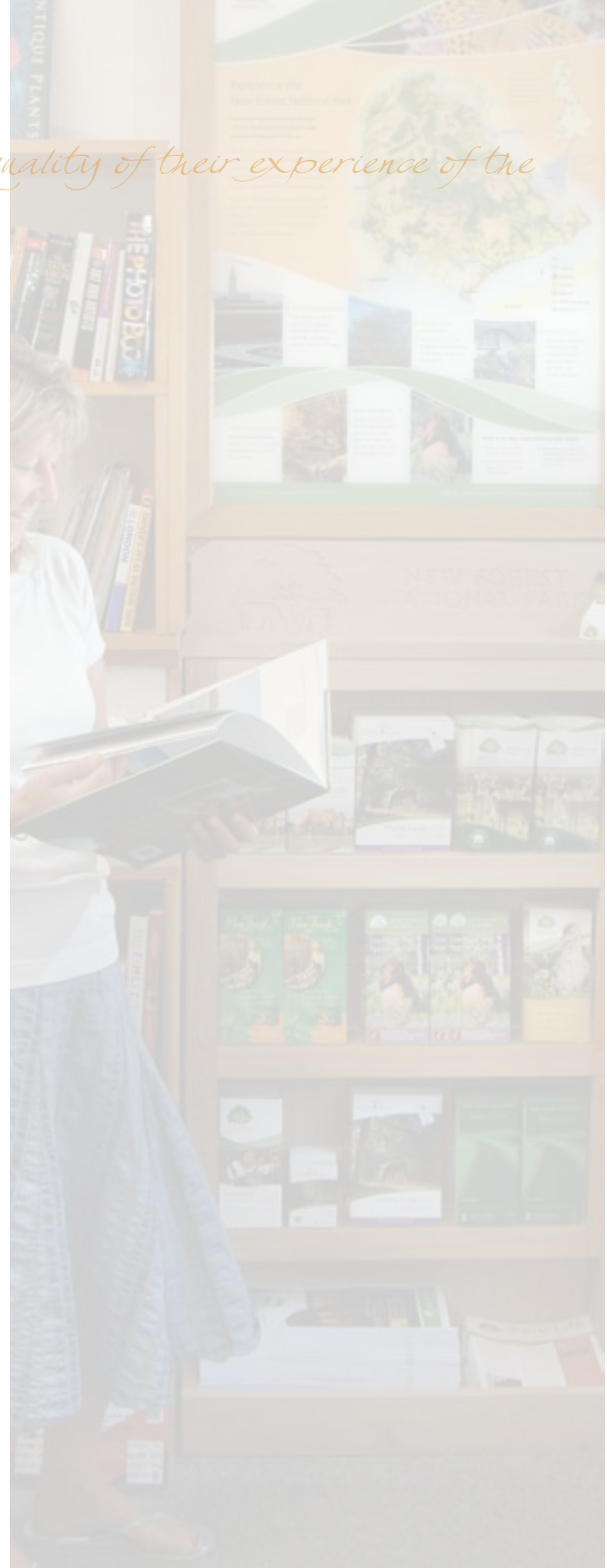
Improve people's enjoyment and the quality of their experience of the National Park

UP2.6

Develop a culture that welcomes and values visitors

There should be a better understanding by both visitors and local communities of each others needs and the mutual benefits derived by both parties. This could include:

- **better support for community tourism groups**
- **encouragement of first hand experience of life in the National Park (such as working holidays)**
- **conservation activities for visitors**
- **a range of mechanisms for visitors and local users to contribute directly to the conservation and management of the Park**
- **a better understanding of the economic benefits of tourism.**



Manage the impacts of recreation on the environment and communities of the National Park

Objective U3

Manage the impacts of recreation on the environment and communities of the National Park

The management of recreation has been a major issue in the New Forest for more than 50 years. The present system of car parks and campsites on the Crown Lands was developed in the 1960s and 1970s in response to a growing awareness of the international nature conservation importance of the area, concerns about loss of tranquillity and the widespread physical damage caused by unrestricted access to the Forest by vehicles and campers.

However there are still widespread concerns and perceptions locally about the effects of visitor pressure on the fabric of the New Forest, its wildlife, sense of remoteness and on the day to day lives of residents. The area receives more than 13 million visitor days each year and it is estimated that this will increase by about 12% (or an additional 1.6 million visits each year) by 2026, due to increases in population in the surrounding areas.

The impacts of recreation are difficult to evaluate, but there is growing evidence indicating that levels of disturbance do have adverse effects on at least some species of ground nesting birds. A number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments are at risk primarily or partly due to damage by recreation⁹ and physical erosion, especially immediately around popular locations, is clear from aerial photographs. Even more difficult to quantify are the effects on tranquillity, but there is no doubt that large group activities in the more remote areas do have a visual and, sometimes, a noise impact.

Recreational impacts are largely due to the concentration and frequency of visits, rather than by the activities in themselves, which are generally quiet recreational pursuits like walking, dog walking, cycling and riding. Currently a large proportion of visits are made to the most sensitive locations and protected habitats of the Open Forest, the Crown Lands and the coast, including some of the most tranquil and remote areas of the National Park.

These areas will continue to provide the essential New Forest experience that many people come to enjoy. Nevertheless the designation of the National Park does give the opportunity to review the management of recreation across the whole area, address the demand on the most sensitive parts of the Forest and improve access and enjoyment in more robust and sustainable locations.

Manage the impacts of recreation on the environment and communities of the National Park

The approach will be to:

Adopt a broad zoning approach which guides the level of recreational activity and provision of facilities in different geographical areas, based on the sensitivity or relative robustness of different landscapes and habitats.

Very broadly, the most sensitive areas include the nationally and internationally designated habitats, the most tranquil areas of the National Park and the coast and its hinterland. The more robust locations include a variety of enclosed landscapes. Some discreet areas which are more robust lie within the most sensitive areas (such as Inclosure woodlands) and vice versa. For more detail on the character and general policies for different zones see the strategic policy approach, Chapter 3.



Manage the impacts of recreation on the environment and communities of the National Park

Policy framework

UP3.1

Improve understanding of the current and likely future recreational demand, and the impacts of recreation on the National Park's Special Qualities

This will include refining visitor survey methodology to provide a practical means of monitoring trends in visitor numbers, destinations and types of activity, together with levels of visitor satisfaction. Particular emphasis will be placed on determining the impacts of recreation on the Special Qualities, including effects on a range of habitats, species and features of conservation concern.

UP3.2

Provide additional, improved or relocated facilities and infrastructure for outdoor recreation appropriate to the National Park in more robust areas within the Park

and

Avoid any increase in overall activity levels and the provision of recreational facilities and infrastructure within the most sensitive and fragile landscapes and habitats, seeking opportunities to relocate existing facilities where these are damaging or undermining the Special Qualities

Any new or relocated facilities should be carefully sited and designed following a full evaluation of environmental impacts, including impacts on European Sites for nature conservation. Sites close to main transport routes will be preferred.

Manage the impacts of recreation on the environment and communities of the National Park

UP3.3

Work with nearby authorities and land managers to identify and establish countryside sites outside the National Park, close to population centres

This should include country parks or similar sites located in particular to the north east of the National Park, close to Southampton, Totton and the Waterside. New sites should provide a high quality countryside experience and form part of a wider green infrastructure network of informal open spaces for use by local people.

UP3.4

Prevent major development of new or existing visitor attractions or accommodation within the National Park

Further large scale development to create new visitor attractions is not appropriate in the National Park. It will result in a substantial increase in traffic, is likely to have visual impacts on the immediate area and affect the overall character of the National Park.

