

Living and working in the National Park

Objective L1

Strengthen the well-being, identity and sustainability of National Park communities and the pride of local people in their area

The rural communities of the New Forest are changing rapidly as the area becomes an increasingly desirable place to live, property prices continue to rise and there remains a general lack of local well paid employment. Many local young people are forced to move away from the area and an increasing proportion of residents do not have direct connections with the New Forest, and are retired or commute to jobs well beyond the National Park.

Most communities retain a strong sense of local identity, but traditional rural life is no longer the mainstay of the local economy or culture. Over the last few generations there has been a rapid loss of local knowledge and traditions which contribute a richness and sense of history to the area. Skills and crafts are, in general, no longer transferred between generations or from established to new residents.

Community facilities and access to key services are essential in providing a focus and vibrancy in community life. Although many villages do still have some services, such as a pub and village hall, many of the smaller settlements do not have schools, play grounds, village shops or other facilities which together help sustain the rural communities. The greatest concerns are:

- **the general decline in village shops and post offices, which act as a hub for social life, with shops lost from an estimated one third of settlements over the last five years**
- **the proposed changes towards a more centralised health service and the loss of cottage hospitals**
- **the lack of a local policing**
- **the lack of practical public and community transport services.**

Despite the apparent wealth of the area, there are pockets of deprivation in many of the more rural communities within the National Park, based on low incomes, poor public transport, lack of access to local services and in some cases lack of basic amenities (such as mains water).

Affordable housing for people with a strong connection to the New Forest is a particular issue, especially affecting younger people who wish to remain involved in the traditional land-based economy (including commoning) and other rural

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businesses. The gap between house prices and local earnings has widened considerably over the last 10 years and the average house now costs about £360,000 (32% higher than the average for the South East). These figures are well beyond the reach of nearly all local people.

The challenge is to maintain mixed communities in which people are able to work together, participate in local decision-making and continue to have a sense of pride in the distinctiveness of their area. The parish plan process and village design statements are important ways of achieving this, together with specific projects which bring communities together to enhance the character and enjoyment of the area and celebrate local culture.

While limiting development to a scale appropriate to the National Park, the approach will be to:

- **Provide more affordable housing for local people**
- **Enable employment development and community facilities in the four service villages**
- **Allow facilities to meet local community needs in the other rural settlements**
- **Support community-led initiatives which strengthen community identity and contribute to local knowledge and distinctiveness.**

Policy framework

LP1.1

Provide for small-scale development to meet National Park needs, including employment, retail and main community facilities within the four defined Service Villages of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway

The larger centres of population within the National Park should be maintained by providing some employment opportunities and a good range of shops and facilities to meet the local needs of each Service Village itself, other nearby villages and visitors to the National Park. Communities within the Park will continue to look to nearby towns to provide wider shopping, housing and leisure needs.

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LP1.2

Allow the provision of essential local community facilities within villages outside the defined Service Villages where the proposal is of clear and direct benefit to the local village or rural community

In the rural settlements essential local services and facilities will be supported where these meet the immediate needs of the local community, allow greater social cohesion and improve the overall sustainability of the settlement.

LP1.3

Restrict residential development to the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs through development within the four defined Service Villages of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway or through the release of "exceptions" sites within or adjacent to other villages

Affordable housing will predominately be social rented housing but may include "intermediate housing", such as shared equity and shared ownership housing. Its occupation will be restricted to people who have a defined local community New Forest connection as well being in housing need. Dwellings essential for agriculture or forestry workers will be permitted with restrictions like agricultural ties. The particular requirements of commoners will be addressed through specific schemes and restricted tenancies.

Effective delivery of affordable housing will need a partnership approach involving both the housing authorities and the major land managers and estates holding stocks of rented properties. Continued support will be given to those working closely with communities to identify the level of local need and agree appropriate sites.

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LP1.4

Encourage village communities to develop proposals for their area, undertake practical enhancement projects and celebrate their cultural heritage; and support the role of voluntary and community sectors in contributing to economic and social well-being

This should help empower, bring together and strengthen the identity of communities - for example through the parish plan process, village design statements, village welcome packs, local conservation projects, village archives, stronger community-voluntary sector networks and advice on project funding available.

Objective L2

Develop a sustainable local economy which makes a clear contribution to the National Park

A healthy local economy is essential in maintaining the life and vibrancy of the National Park, providing local employment and sustaining its rural communities. Flexibility is needed to respond to changes in the wider economy, but without compromising the special qualities and essentially rural character of the area.

The land-based economy and traditional rural businesses have generally declined in economic importance, and now provide only a small proportion of local jobs. However farming, commoning, woodland management and local trades are of primary importance in maintaining the overall character and cultural identity of the National Park. Specific issues for land management are discussed in more detail under objective C3.

Many smaller farmers, and entirely new businesses related to the rural economy, have benefited from the growing importance of the local produce market. This reflects a strong public interest in

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good quality and locally sourced food and other products. There is widespread recognition of the New Forest Marque and an increasing number of small businesses, farmers markets and farm shops are making use of this New Forest brand. Long term commitment and support will be needed to establish the local produce, small rural industries and rural skills sector as a viable and continuing part of the local economy – including providing training opportunities, encouraging new local business start-ups, and giving on-going support to the marketing and promotion of existing businesses.

The tourism industry has expanded considerably over the last 20 years and makes the single most important contribution to the local economy. In addition to developing the competitiveness and economic success of the tourism sector, a great deal of work has been undertaken to promote sustainable tourism in the New Forest, based on bringing together the interests of visitors, the tourism industry, local communities and the environment. If current policies are effective there may be a move towards higher value tourism and a greater visitor contribution to the local economy and the management of the National Park. There is still a need to raise the profile of tourism businesses as examples of good environmental practice and be bolder in developing the image of the National Park as a ‘green tourism’ destination.

The National Park is becoming increasingly attractive to large corporate businesses seeking a regional or national base. While these may have some benefits for the overall local economy a balance must be found between demands for economic development and the essentially rural character of the area. Support will only be given to businesses that have a low environmental impact and encouragement given to those that have a direct connection to the National Park or its purposes.

In the future strong economic growth in the areas surrounding the National Park may lead to a further decline in locally-based employment and traditional skills. It will be a challenge for the National Park to find ways of making positive use of the sub-regional economy without losing its own rural economic identity. There will certainly be an expansion in green technology and related businesses over the next decade and beyond, which should be of benefit to the economy of the National Park in particular.

The approach will be to:

- **Maintain a locally-relevant economy**
- **Provide employment and services which meet the needs of local communities**
- **Encourage existing and new businesses that enhance the environmental quality of the area and help achieve National Park purposes.**

Develop a sustainable local economy which makes a clear contribution to the National Park

LP2.1

Retain existing employment sites and community facilities throughout the National Park where these contribute to the sustainability of local communities, encourage their promotion and use and prevent their loss through redevelopment or change of use

For details of relevant Development Control policies see Chapter 9. In addition there should be close working with communities, for instance through the production of parish plans, to ensure facilities and services remain viable and well used. This could be achieved, for example, through new community uses for pubs and halls and local campaigns to promote small businesses to residents.

LP2.2

Support employment development in redundant buildings and home-working in order to broaden the rural economic base, providing it has a low environmental impact in terms of design, scale, transport impacts and environmental practices

In general business development will be focused within the four defined Service Villages, but limited small-scale development will be appropriate in the rural areas to provide local employment and services or allow the re-use of redundant buildings of architectural or historic value.

Particular support will be given to businesses that help to maintain the land-based economy and cultural heritage of the National Park or contribute to the understanding and enjoyment of the National Park's Special Qualities. However a wide variety of employment opportunities for local people will also be encouraged where these do not have an adverse impact on the Special Qualities of the National Park, including home-based businesses, high value small businesses and those with a low carbon / environmental footprint.

Develop a sustainable local economy which makes a clear contribution to the National Park

LP2.3

Invest in local training and business advice, in particular catering for those wishing to:

- **develop new businesses or markets using New Forest produce or products**
- **continue rural skills and trades**
- **develop innovative sustainable technologies giving direct benefit to the National Park**

This should include a more co-ordinated approach by the range of agencies involved in business advice and funding, improved links between businesses and local colleges and the encouragement of a more adventurous and entrepreneurial spirit locally. Sufficient medium-term support is needed to make sure new businesses succeed beyond the first few years and continue to contribute to the New Forest economy.

The successful local produce market can be further developed by introducing the added benefit of quality assurance, encouraging wider sales outlets and increasing the use of local produce by local hotels and B&Bs. Greater development is needed of the wood product market, with the opportunity for small businesses to create high quality specialist goods related to the New Forest aimed at both visitors and local people.

LP2.4

Strengthen the New Forest's role at the forefront of sustainable tourism through:

- **continued emphasis on a partnership approach to tourism involving the visitor, industry, community and environment**
- **clearer emphasis on the Special Qualities of the National Park in tourism destination management**
- **support for practical sustainability projects within the tourism sector**

Community tourism initiatives and the links between tourism and a high quality natural environment should be developed further. The image of the National Park as a unique destination with particular Special Qualities should be placed at the forefront of tourism information and marketing. There should be a particular focus on sustainability also including encouraging new (and more visible) sustainability initiatives by local tourism businesses, such as greater use of renewable energy, local products / produce and integrated non-car transport.

Reduce the impacts of traffic on the Special Qualities of the National Park and provide a range of real and sustainable transport alternatives within the Park

Objective L3

Reduce the impacts of traffic on the Special Qualities of the National Park and provide a range of real and sustainable transport alternatives within the Park

Road traffic is a major issue for many residents and visitors, affecting quality of life in local communities, the quiet enjoyment of the National Park, the welfare of stock and the integrity of the Forest's landscape and habitats. It is also a local contributor to climate change. The most heavily used route is the A31, carrying up to 77,000 vehicles daily. It effectively bisects the National Park, severely limits access between the north and south and is the major contributory factor to the loss of tranquillity over large parts of the Forest (see policies on tranquillity under Objective P3).

There is also a more general concern about the domination of motorised traffic throughout the National Park and about the proportion of people who use Forest roads without modifying their driving behaviour. This deters both visitors and local people from using even the minor roads for

walking, cycling, horse riding and (in the villages) prevents the use of streets and pavements for community activities or simply places to sit and socialise. There is a higher level of traffic accidents within the National Park than the average for Hampshire, and accidents involving animals on the Open Forest have remained at over 100 annually during recent years.

Large parts of the National Park now have weight restrictions to limit Heavy Commercial Vehicle (HCV) use, following concerted pressure from local communities. However there are concerns about the effectiveness of these measures (which allow exemptions for access), the lack of resources for enforcement, and about those parts of the minor road network which still have no restrictions on freight traffic.

In recent years the scheduled bus network has declined and now focuses on the through-routes between settlements on either side of the National Park (such as linking Southampton and Christchurch). Consequently many rural communities are very poorly served. The infrequency of buses on many routes, and the fact that most people have access to a car, means that many bus services are not well used and are increasingly difficult to justify commercially. The New Forest Tour (an open top bus marketed as a visitor attraction) serves as the sole visitor transport system operating in National Park. The service has proved popular as a summer venture, but has a limited circular route in the south east of the Park.

Reduce the impacts of traffic on the Special Qualities of the National Park and provide a range of real and sustainable transport alternatives within the Park

The network of public rights of way and cycle routes is variable, with gaps in provision particularly in southern parts of the National Park and close to the Waterside parishes. The Strategic Cycle Network for the New Forest was agreed in 2005, indicating existing routes and the potential for developing a more comprehensive linked network. Several schemes have been implemented to date (including the Ashurst to Lyndhurst cycle route). However, in general, there is still limited access to attractive and well-maintained paths and cycle routes which would enable people to travel between villages or to local employment, and which would provide an alternative to the use of the car.

Two regional airports at Southampton and Bournemouth are located just outside the National Park, to the east and west respectively. Plans for the expansion of both of these will have major impacts on the tranquillity of the Park.

The contentious nature and cost of tackling road traffic issues has resulted in little major action over the past 10 years. Far-reaching solutions are now needed at the local level if traffic issues are to be tackled seriously and the vision of a National Park which is not car-dominated is to be achieved. This must go hand in hand with major improvements to public transport and better provision for cyclists and walkers.

The approach will be to:

- **Make regional decision makers fully aware of the particular issues of transport in the National Park**
- **Introduce strong traffic and demand management measures to address traffic impacts**
- **Develop an integrated public and non-car transport system for visitors and local people.**

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Policy framework

LP3.1

Influence regional and sub-regional transport policies and development proposals with transport implications (including air transport) to minimise impacts and, where possible, achieve benefits for the National Park

This requires the development of closer relationships with nearby and regional authorities, based on a clear and accepted role for the National Park in the national and regional context (see Working together, Chapter 8)

LP3.2

Create a distinctive and different experience when travelling within the National Park which clearly indicates its special and protected status

Various visual and physical cues can be used to encourage appreciation and modify driver behaviour, such as reduced speed limits, road narrowing, boundary signs, appropriately designed highways signs, changes in road classification, 'natural' road edge design, changes in mowing regime of verges and avoidance of lighting.

LP3.3

Reduce the impacts of road traffic on the tranquillity and environmental quality of the National Park through traffic and demand management, road design and landscaping

Various tools may be used, such as quiet road surfaces, reduced speed limits, road user pricing, weight and width restrictions, single track roads, selected road closures (including temporary and seasonal closures), revised road hierarchy, traffic routing, car park location and size, control of verge parking, car-free zones (only accessed by non-car transport) and landscaping for noise and visual screening. Planning policies will be used to control new development which increases private vehicle use.

Reduce the impacts of traffic on the Special Qualities of the National Park and provide a range of real and sustainable transport alternatives within the Park

LP3.4

Improve the quality of life within the villages by reducing traffic and giving greater priority to pedestrians, cyclists and community use; and develop a safe and integrated network of public and community transport, footpaths and cycle routes designed to meet the needs of both residents and visitors

Residents and visitors will both benefit from villages which are less dominated by traffic, where streets in village centres can be used for events and community activities and by the provision of attractive alternatives to the car for local day-to-day transport. This could include safe footpaths and cycleways linking residential areas and main village centres and schools, a wider network of routes and local public transport linking villages to nearby towns, more effective management of car parking, improved traffic management for areas with particular congestion problems and reduced speed limits through all villages.

There are also possibilities for introducing new public transport schemes linking villages, accommodation, places of interest and key entry points to the National Park. This could incorporate non-car transport for parts of the Open Forest, enabling car-free zones to be introduced. All schemes will require careful assessment to ensure they are viable and can cater for the different needs of local people and visitors.

LP3.5

Reduce the number of animal accidents on unfenced New Forest roads

The focus will be on innovative awareness-raising campaigns aimed at local people, improved (but not increased) warning signs and better enforcement of speed limits, including consideration of the use of average speed cameras on high-risk routes.

