



Join the debate

about recreation in the New Forest

Draft actions consultation 19 June – 12 August 2018



Welcome

... to an important debate about recreation in the New Forest National Park and surrounding area.

Some big issues are facing the New Forest in the coming years.

The organisations with the main remit for both protecting the National Park and enabling people to enjoy it need your help to develop a new and updated suite of focused actions so that, across the National Park and beyond we can achieve a net gain for the working and natural landscape and for the recreational experience, by:

- protecting the spectacular, yet fragile, wildlife-rich landscape that people come to see
- managing recreation for local people and our visitors.

We also need to use limited resources wisely.

The Forestry Commission, Natural England, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and the Verderers have asked the National Park Authority to conduct the joint consultation.

To keep up to date with the debate, go to our website at www.newforestnpa.gov.uk, sign up for [email updates](#), follow us on social media @newforestnpa and keep an eye out in local newspapers.



Future Forest draft actions consultation 2018



The current approach for managing outdoor activities is described in the [Recreation Management Strategy 2010-2030](#).

New Forest organisations with a remit for protecting the fragile landscape while enabling people to enjoy it sustainably are now working up proposals to ensure the Forest is fit to face the future.

With the help of feedback received in a previous round of consultation (see ‘Call for views’ below), seven distinct objectives for managing recreation in the New Forest have been identified.

Now we’re asking for your views on how to put them into practice with a set of 25 draft actions in the survey.

As you take part in the consultation, please share your thoughts about what would be best for the long term future of the New Forest as a whole, as well as your personal interests.

The survey closes at 11.59pm on 12 August.

Timetable

- 18 June 2018 – 12 August 2018: Public consultation on the draft actions
- Autumn 2018: analysis of responses
- Early 2019: publish Recreation Management Strategy update with lead organisations for agreed actions
- 2019/2020: progress with actions.

Call for views consultation 2017



Over 1,500 individuals and 50 organisations responded to an initial 'call for views' consultation in summer 2017 to help us prioritise the main tasks. We also considered other information, including feedback from user groups and forums, available data and evidence, and assessments of existing work programmes, policies and regulations.

This first phase resulted in seven objectives being identified:

Raising awareness and understanding – ensuring recreation is sustainable, wherever it takes place

- Objective 1: Convey the things that make the New Forest special to both visitors and local people in more consistent and effective ways, so that they understand the importance of making responsible recreation choices.
- Objective 2: Address significant and/or widespread negative impacts caused by recreation in the most appropriate, proportionate and effective ways.
- Objective 3: Reduce the barriers that limit participation in beneficial outdoor recreation among those who need it most.

Sustainable recreation in the right places – managing where it happens

- Objective 4: Achieve a net gain for the New Forest's working and natural landscape and for the recreational experience by influencing where recreation takes place.

Finding funding – and using it effectively

- Objective 5: Increase the level of funding available for recreation management so that it is sufficient to address both existing and upcoming needs.

Data and evidence – to help guide the work

- Objective 6: Collate data and evidence to help inform the ongoing management of recreation.

Adaptive monitoring and implementation – keeping the strategy alive

- Objective 7: Regularly review progress against agreed recreation management actions and adapt forward plans to protect the special qualities of the National Park and enable people to enjoy and benefit from them.

Draft criteria for judging recreation facilities, routes or organised activities



Judgements about the relative merits of different recreation sites, routes or organised activities (throughout and beyond the National Park) need to be based on agreed criteria.

The following lists are taken from a Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the six RMS Steering Group organisations in 2015.

A site, route or activity is **more likely to be supported** if at least some of the following apply, i.e. if it:

- a) is already popular, well-used, accepted and adequate for demand
- b) is close to a residential area, campsite or public transport access point
- c) is accessed via a good road network
- d) has a short access track or robust surface in good condition
- e) is well-maintained or easy to maintain
- f) has no access limitations (e.g. steps/stiles) and few, if any, gates
- g) already has facilities on site such as tracks, parking, buildings
- h) has nearby services (power, water, phone) if these are needed
- i) already has or is ideal for picnic area
- j) is adjacent to or links with visitor spend opportunity
- k) has toilets, shops, pubs etc. on site or on route
- l) links different parts of the Forest or links settlements to each other or to places of interest or/and follows a natural desire line (resulting in little or no digression)
- m) is within robust habitat (e.g. within a conifer plantation rather than ancient woodland or heathland)
- n) has something of natural, cultural or landscape heritage interest nearby (e.g. view, building, ancient tree, monument, water body)
- o) is screened by trees, scrub or physical features
- p) has dual use for commoning activities (e.g. parking for drift)
- q) has little or no history of anti-social behaviour, theft or vandalism
- r) has security provided by nearby residents
- s) has a long lease or agreement in place
- t) serves a need not replicated nearby.

A site, route or activity is **less likely to be supported** if at least some of the following apply, i.e. if it:

- a) encourages access to habitats where physical damage is likely (e.g. bog or mire, Forest pond or stream)
- b) is likely to result in significant disturbance to wildlife, especially protected birds (e.g. on vulnerable coastal mudflat and saltmarsh, or open heathland)
- c) causes impacts on rare and threatened species (e.g. wild gladioli, smooth snakes and southern damselflies)
- d) has significant negative impacts on commoning activities
- e) encourages intrusive impact on remote tranquil areas
- f) is inappropriately expensive
- g) has poor accessibility.

Note that the examples given above are not meant to be exhaustive and can be supplemented. For any new facilities, consideration would also be given to potential impacts during construction.

The unique New Forest



The New Forest has a long and proud history that dates back almost 1,000 years.

Since its creation by William the Conqueror in 1079 for the pursuit of the 'beasts of the chase' (wild deer and pigs) many historical events have shaped the Forest's landscape, cultural heritage and sense of identity.

The role of the [commoners](#) who turn out animals to graze the open Forest has been central to this ongoing process.

Today the New Forest National Park has a wonderful mosaic of internationally recognised [habitats](#) including lowland wet and dry heaths, mires and bogs, ancient pasture woodland, coniferous plantations, acid grasslands, mixed farmland and a wide range of coastal habitats.

This combination of natural environments is unmatched in western Europe.

The landscape is beautiful, tranquil, rare and fragile: shaped by man, by history and by the animals that still graze it today.

The New Forest also attracts many people, both local and from further afield, to enjoy [outdoor recreation](#), especially walking, cycling, horse riding and camping.

Why ask for views now?



In the 1960s and '70s Forest guardians saw that the New Forest was in trouble – people could drive, park and camp anywhere.



[Photo: unrestricted parking at Balmer Lawn, Brockenhurst, 1971]

The damage was obvious and over 150 free-roaming animals were being killed each year (three times the current levels).

So they came together to install cattle grids, fence off the main roads and ditch the verges of others, and create campsites and car parks. This has stood us in good stead for some time.

But that was 40 years ago, before we knew which areas were richest in wildlife, and the facilities weren't designed for their current level of use – which looks set to increase even further:

- Around 34,000 people live here
- Sixteen million people now live within a 90 minute drive of the Forest
- It is estimated that we receive over 13 million day visits a year
- In response to housing needs, neighbouring local authorities are currently progressing Local Plans which will provide for around 50,000 extra homes (about 110,000 people) in areas close to the New Forest in the next 15-20 years.

The Forestry Commission, Natural England, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and the Verderers have now asked the National Park Authority to lead on this Future Forest consultation.

Putting the Forest first



The Forest infrastructure put in place in the 1960s and '70s was a significant and pivotal moment in the Forest's history. Many believe we're now at that point again.

If they aren't well managed, outdoor activities (such as walking, cycling, horse riding, camping or parking a vehicle) can accidentally cause damage to the very places that people want to enjoy.

Over time this harm could:

- cause erosion of sensitive habitats such as ponds, stream banks, lawns, bogs, mires, chalk streams, coastal mudflats and ancient woodlands
- disturb rare breeding, feeding and roosting birds on coastal mudflats and saltmarsh, or open heathland
- impact on other rare and threatened species such as wild gladioli, smooth snakes and southern damselflies
- erode paths and grazed verges
- reduce the tranquillity in remote areas
- cause more litter
- interfere with important Forest management such as commoning or forestry operations.

Instead, we want to find ways to work together to encourage and enable people to enjoy the New Forest and nearby areas in ways and in locations that minimise these negative consequences.

It's time for all of us who use the Forest to take responsibility and acknowledge these challenges. This is why we need your help to agree the way forward.

Much has already been achieved and many of the 61 actions in the [Recreation Management Strategy](#) (2010 – 2030) are still relevant. We have identified seven distinct objectives to focus on following feedback from the first consultation and are now asking people for their views on draft actions to put them into practice.

However, from the remaining 55 actions aimed at managing recreation, we need to agree a small number of high priority tasks that will make a real difference (above the 'business as usual' work), including some that will doubtless require further public debate.

Achievements to date



Since the [Recreation Management Strategy](#) was published Forest organisations have been working hard to help people enjoy outdoor activities and also protect the Forest.

Most of the actions are ongoing rather than completed and some have yet to be started in earnest. This consultation will help us decide where to put most effort with declining public resources in the coming years.

Here are some examples of the work so far by the [Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group](#) (the National Park Authority, the Forestry Commission, Natural England, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and the Verderers) and other organisations across the Forest:

Safer, sustainable activities and travel

- The open-top buses of the [New Forest Tour](#) encourage around 40,000 car-free journeys annually around the National Park giving a different view of the Forest.
- A new cycle route was created between Totton and Marchwood and the [Ashurst-Lyndhurst](#) track beside the A35 was resurfaced.
- Several footbridges have been replaced by Forestry Commission and Hampshire County Council.
- The 40mph New Forest speed limit was extended to cover the Wiltshire areas of the National Park.

Improving visitor facilities

- Support has been given to develop facilities at cycle hire businesses including the new [Cyclexperience hire centre](#) at Brockenhurst station.
- Lepe Country Park visitor facilities are currently being redeveloped.
- Camping in the Forest and the Forestry Commission have paid for [two seasonal National Park rangers](#) each year to encourage campers to walk, cycle or use the New Forest Tour and they provide family activities on the campsites.
- A new '[walkers and cyclists welcome](#)' scheme has proved popular with local accommodation providers.

Reducing the risk of inadvertent harm

- Surveys of rare and vulnerable [ground nesting birds](#) (woodlark, Dartford warbler, nightjar, curlew, redshank, snipe and lapwing) have taken place to help us manage the Forest for their benefit. More detailed surveys of breeding curlews and the factors that may be affecting their decline are now being done.

- Ditches, banks and 'dragon's teeth' posts have been installed to prevent parking on verges which damages grazing and protected wildlife habitats.
- A '[Caring for the Forest](#)' code is widely promoted by rangers, on information boards, in leaflets and publications and by social media.
- People are working more closely together to encourage 'Forest friendly' behaviour, discuss the issues and find solutions. Established forums include the Access Forum, dogs forum, equine forum, cycling working group, joint litter working group and outdoor educators forum.
- Local authorities are using developer contributions to fund a range of activities that enable people to enjoy the outside close to home and to reduce negative impacts when new residents explore the Forest's protected areas.
- There are ongoing [campaigns](#) to protect the Forest - reduce animal accidents, stop people from feeding ponies, reduce litter and the disturbance of rare ground nesting birds. Picking fungi on the Forest is now actively and strongly discouraged.
- A cycling code and an event organisers' charter were developed to encourage safe and responsible cycling and to minimise disruption from large cycling events.
- Walks leaflets and a [routes website](#) have been produced to steer people towards interesting routes with good visitor facilities and away from fragile wildlife areas.

Increasing health and well-being

- Over 200 people with disabilities now explore the Forest on adapted bikes each year, available through a new local group called [PEDALL](#).
- Over 350 people now regularly join [Healthy Walks](#) close to where they live, led by 35 trained volunteer walk leaders – and easy access walks have been developed and promoted.
- Hundreds of families have attended '[wild play](#)' events, encouraging young children to enjoy the outdoors.
- Projects to inform and involve the next generation have included [school](#) assemblies for thousands of children each year about preventing litter and using the Forest as an outdoor classroom for studies linked to the curriculum including recreation impacts.

Recent changes affecting the Forest



Since the [Recreation Management Strategy](#) was published in 2010, various things have changed that will affect the way we manage recreation in the New Forest.

Examples include:

- National Planning Policy places a strong emphasis on meeting identified housing needs and has removed regional planning constraints. New and emerging Local Plans produced by neighbouring planning authorities include allocations for many thousands of **new homes** close to the New Forest National Park.
- The Government produced an [Eight Point Plan for National Parks](#), which among other things confirms that national parks should be ‘thriving natural environments’, help improve health and wellbeing and be ‘everyone’s national parks’.
- The Government has recommitted to protecting England’s wildlife and natural resources through a new strategy called [Biodiversity 2020](#).
- In the [Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement for England](#), the Government has committed to keeping the public forest estate, which includes the Crown Lands of the New Forest, in public ownership.
- Locally, there is a renewed interest among planning authorities, businesses and other organisations to work together to protect and enhance the **natural environment in areas surrounding the National Park**, and encourage access to it.
- **Organised events** for cyclists and runners are becoming more popular.
- After being relatively stable for several years, rises in **road traffic** are now predicted.
- **Brexit** has created uncertainty over funding of land and access management that has hitherto come from the EU.
- Public sector organisations with responsibilities for providing recreation facilities have had substantial **cuts in their Government funding**
- Natural England is due to publish a proposed route for the [England Coast Path](#) through the New Forest.