

3 Statement of Significance

3.1 Introduction

Since prehistoric times the New Forest has been shaped by the interaction of the land, climate and man. It's a haven for wildlife and rare plants, but it's also a working forest with vibrant communities, and a place to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of nature. National Park status helps ensure the New Forest's fragile landscapes will be protected and appreciated by future generations.

The New Forest National Park is 10 years old in 2015 and to mark this the Environment Minister, Lord de Mauley was quoted:

'The New Forest National Park may only be 10 years old but the stunning scenery stretches back centuries, boasting some of the richest wildlife in Britain and many of the oldest trees in Europe. It's unique heritage is the cornerstone of the Park's thriving economy and something of which we should all be proud.'



Figure 33 - by Frederick Golden Short (1836 – 1936) in New Forest Centre Collection

The following key 10 facts have been developed to help celebrate 10 years of the New Forest being a National Park and they summarise the key significance of the area.

- The New Forest was the first National Park to be designated in Britain for nearly 50 years, since the Brecon Beacons in 1957

- Covering an area of only 220 square miles, the New Forest is the second smallest national park in the UK
- In total 56% of the National Park is designated as being of international importance for nature conservation – a far higher proportion than any other UK National Park
- It has the highest concentration of ancient trees in Western Europe, with some yew trees believed to be over 1,000 years old
- The most extensive area of lowland heath remaining in Europe can be found in the New Forest (over 10,000 hectares) – which is rarer than rainforest
- The New Forest is one of the few places in Britain which is home to all six of the UK's native reptile species and 17 out of 18 UK bat species
- The tallest trees are the coastal redwoods and giant sequoias on Rhinefield Ornamental Drive at about 56 metres (183ft) – that's taller than Nelson's Column
- The New Forest has a rich built heritage with 214 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 622 Listed Buildings and 20 Conservation Areas
- The New Forest National Park receives an estimated 13.5 million visitor days a year.
- There are more than 500 commoners in the New Forest who turn out more than 9,000 ponies, donkeys, cattle, sheep and pigs as part of their traditional 'common rights'.

"It is only in the New Forest that a pastoral economy based on the exercise of common rights over unenclosed common land truly survives"
Colin Tubbs, 1986

3.2 Key Qualities

The New Forest National Park has a number of qualities which were identified through public consultation in 2007 which make it unique and immediately recognisable.

3.2.1 New Forest's outstanding natural beauty:

The sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland with large veteran trees, heathland, bog and mire. The National Park encompasses a wide variety of different landscapes, from the woodlands and rolling heaths in the centre of the Forest to the farmed landscape of small fields, hedgerows and narrow lanes. Together these form an extensive area of ancient countryside with hidden villages and hamlets, which has largely been lost from other parts of lowland Britain.

The New Forest helped inspire Reverend William Gilpin who originated the idea of the "picturesque", as a new way of appreciating the landscape. He wrote:

"From Vicar's-hill, we passed Boldre-bridge, and ascending the opposite bank, we had a beautiful view of the estuary of Lymington river; which when filled with the tide, forms a grand sweep to the sea. The curves of the river are marked by long projections of low land, and on one or two of them some little

saltern, or other building is erected. The distance is formed by the sea, and the Isle of Wight. All together the view is picturesque. There is a foreground, a middle-ground, and distance—all harmoniously united.”

3.2.2 An extraordinary diversity of plants and animals and habitats of national and international importance:

The mosaic of lowland heath, mire, ancient pasture woodland and Forest lawns that forms the Open Forest is unique in Britain and Europe. The interconnection and scale of these habitats allows many rare and restricted species of plants, birds, animals and insects to thrive, as well as the commoner species that are in many cases declining elsewhere in the country.

John Wise, one of the Forest’s most famous historians wrote of the Forest in *The New Forest – Its History and Scenery* (1883):

‘The New Forest is, perhaps as good an example as could be wished of what has been said of English scenery, and its connection with our history. It remains after eight hundred years still the New Forest’.

‘The Forest is more than an assemblage of internationally rare and important habitats. Its biological wealth is greater than the sum of its parts. Woodland, glade, parkland, holms, heath, gorse brakes, acid grassland, lawn, bracken, throng thickets, and mires intermingle to form intimate mosaics sprinkled with abundant springs, flushes, ponds and pools, and drained by a dense network of streams.’ - The New Forest by Colin R. Tubbs published in 2001 – an updated edition of the 1986 New Naturalist book

3.2.3 A unique historic, cultural and archaeological heritage, from royal hunting ground to ship-building:

The cultural landscape of the New Forest has developed continuously from prehistoric times to the present. A wealth of features have survived to indicate this long use by human society, including more than 340 Bronze Age barrows, a number of fine Iron Age hill forts and many Roman pottery production sites. Throughout the area there are numerous remnants of medieval buildings, enclosures and other earthworks associated with the Royal Forest. The main rivers and timber industry supported a boat and ship-building industry and the coastal salt-workings were amongst the most important in the country during the 18th Century. The National Park has 214 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, constituting almost 10% of all scheduled monuments in the South-East region, together with a huge number of important unscheduled sites. These unscheduled sites are added to continually through new technology, fieldwork and discoveries by land managers and the public.

Historian Dan Snow has quoted:

“The story of places like Beaulieu, Buckler’s Hard and particularly the Second World War is of interest to us because it’s local history. But by quirk of fate and geography, what happened here in the New Forest matters not just for us but is globally significant”

3.2.4 A historic commoning system:

The unique commoning system maintains so much of what people know and love as the "New Forest", forming the heart of a working landscape based on farming and forestry. Although common rights were once widespread in Britain and Europe, they have been lost in many areas due to the enclosure of common land and the disafforestation of former royal forests. The New Forest remains one of the few extensive lowland commons where rights are still widely practised and a strong commoning culture continues. Over the centuries commoning has largely been responsible for shaping the distinctive landscapes and habitats of the Open Forest and is key to the types of village settlement and field patterns and is core to the areas cultural heritage. There were six traditional rights of common, several of which are still practised today including the right of mast which allows the turning out of pigs to feed on the acorn crop and common pasture which allows the grazing of ponies, cattle and donkeys. The grazing of ponies and cattle has always been central to the pastoral economy of the New Forest. In 2013 a total of 9928 animals were depastured on the Forest. They are one of the most obvious and distinctive features of the area and for many visitors, they are undoubtedly a very important part of their experience of the New Forest National Park.

‘The commoning system and way of life has remained a central part of the social fabric of the Forest (that) has undoubtedly played a major role in creating the present cultural landscape.....’.
Paula Freeland ‘Cultural Heritage of the New Forest’. NPA report to the Cultural Heritage Workshop, January 2013, p2.

3.2.5 Tranquillity

The tranquillity and remoteness that can still be found in many parts of the National Park, albeit in the midst of the busy, built up south of England, is a quality of importance to both visitors and residents alike. The relative peace and naturalness, combined with the open and unfenced landscape of much of the area, gives a sense of space and freedom. This contrasts with the increasingly built up and intensively managed landscape of southern England and provides a means of release from the pressures of modern life.

3.2.6 Wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation and discovery

The New Forest National Park has open access on foot or horseback to more than 116 square miles in the centre of the National Park and an extensive network of

footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths across the rest of the area. These provide many opportunities for quiet recreation and the exploration of the landscape.

Simon King, wildlife film maker was recently quoted:

‘Ever since I was a child, the New Forest has held an unparalleled magic for me. The remarkable mix of ancient, natural and human history is a compelling cocktail for all lovers of the outdoors. It’s made all the more tangible through giant relics in the form of mighty trees and swathes of heathland. This patchwork of habitats offers wild creatures a broad choice of homes and resources, enriching the New Forest with an extraordinary variety and density of life. This wild community, together with a working model of sustainable human use of forest resources, makes the Forest a shining jewel in Britain’s natural crown.’

3.2.7 Strong and distinctive local communities

The New Forest National Park communities traditionally have a strong cultural identity, with a wealth of local traditions and a thriving commoning community. Many local people have a strong sense of New Forest history and are deeply committed to the protection of the local area. Local dialect, unique place names and traditional events still continue, although community life is now constantly evolving and adapting to modern ways of living and working.

The OPOF Scheme will aim to ensure that these special qualities remain for future generations to work in and enjoy (**Table 6**).

These apply to the National Park as a whole; however they also apply to the OPOF scheme core area.

Table 6: New Forest special qualities and how the OPOF supports them

Key Qualities	New Forest National Park area	Core OPOF area
Outstanding natural beauty	Wide variety of different habitats helps to make up the mosaic of different landscape types which contribute to the natural beauty.	Areas such as the villages and private farmland and estates help to make up the mosaic of different landscape types which contribute to the natural beauty.
Designated habitat & Species	50% of the National Park has national and internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance	There are numerous areas under private ownership that have local nature conservation designations that provide corridors and help buffer the nationally and internationally designated sites

historic, cultural and archaeological heritage	The National Park has 214 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, together with a huge number of important unscheduled sites.	The areas surrounding the open forest contain important sites which require further investigation to fully understand their significance.
Historic commoning system	The New Forest is an extensive lowland commons where common rights are still widely practised and a strong commoning culture continues	The Commoners who exercise their rights on the open forest often live in the surrounding areas, where they also have 'back up' land. The commoning culture therefore is not limited to the open forest.
Tranquillity	Approx 20% of the National Park falls into the 'most tranquil' category and are mainly in the most rural areas of the North West and fragmented areas along the the south east.	A large proportion of the most tranquil areas are outside of the open forest.
Recreation and discovery	The National Park has open access for many forms of recreation and discovery	The areas surrounding the open forest have more limited opportunities for recreation, although footpaths and areas of public space do occur.
local communities	The New Forest is made up of a variety of local communities.	Most of the communities are adjacent to the open forest.