Nature in the New Forest: action for biodiversity

New Forest National Park Authority

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1 Introduction

The New Forest supports a rich and diverse complex of habitats and wildlife. It is one of the most important areas for nature in England and millions of visitors come each year to enjoy it.

Biodiversity is one of the New Forest’s ‘special qualities’. The special qualities are those that define it, make it unique and recognisable, and distinguish it from all other places in the country. In the New Forest the special qualities include:

- Outstanding natural beauty
- Extraordinary diversity of plants and animals
- Opportunities for quiet recreation, learning and discovery.

Biodiversity is important for its own sake and we have a duty to conserve it. Biodiversity also has many hidden values that underpin the health of society and the prosperity of the economy. Yet in England the picture for biodiversity is one of overall decline: pressures from competing land uses, pollution and climate change are some of the challenges that have led to a 30% decline in the services that we get from nature over the past 60 years (ref UKNEA).

“Actions taken and decisions made now will have consequences far into the future for ecosystems, ecosystem services and human well-being.”

http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/uknea/

This plan of action for biodiversity in the New Forest considers the state of nature at present and the strategic activity required to conserve and enhance biodiversity to 2020. Achieving this ambition will depend on delivery by organisations, businesses, communities and individuals who share the vision of the New Forest as a unique and inspiring place to live, work and enjoy.

**Biodiversity – the variety of life**

- Biodiversity is the planet’s life-support system and sustains the complex web of life
- The natural environment provides ecosystem services such as flood defence and catchment management, filtering of wastewater and polluted air, maintenance of productive soils
- Biodiversity helps to mitigate the effects of climate change through locking-up carbon, providing low-carbon sources of energy and moderating temperature extremes
- Biodiversity provides food, medicines and materials for building and industry
- The natural world contributes to physical and mental health through providing relaxation, enjoyment and inspiration and underpins tourism and recreation
- Biodiversity is valuable in its own right – there is a moral dimension to conserving nature
Nature in the New Forest

The New Forest is rich in biodiversity and includes a complex mosaic of habitats. Historic land uses such as commoning and forestry have shaped the landscape over many centuries and human influences continue to shape the natural environment of the Forest today:

- Over 50% of the National Park is designated for its international importance for nature
- It is the largest area of ‘unsown’ vegetation (such as lowland heath, fen and ancient pasture woodland) in lowland England
- About 1/3 of British wildflowers grow in the New Forest
- The Forest is home to the largest breeding population of Dartford warbler in the UK
- The woodlands are the richest in epiphytic lichens of any lowland woodland in Europe
- 73% of British dragonflies species breed here
- Of 18 British species of bat, 13 are found in the New Forest
- It is home to all 6 of the UK’s native reptile species: adder, grass snake, smooth snake, sand lizard, common lizard and slow worm
- 46 nationally and internationally rare plant species are found in the New Forest, and for many it may be their most important remaining British locality.

Nature’s services

Nature provides many services to society and the economy. This ‘hidden value’ of nature is fundamental to sustainable economic growth and wellbeing. Recent assessments have begun to put a monetary value on nature to help policy leaders take the value of natural capital into account in decision making (see pg xx).

Maximising and valuing the services provided by nature is central to the sustainable management of the New Forest and to the national park purposes of ‘protect’, ‘enjoy’ and ‘prosper’. Many social and economic benefits accrue from a high quality environment.

“Natural capital, along with built, human and social capital, is an important component of the wealth of a nation. Ecosystem services are essential to human well-being and sustainable development. The value of ecosystem services in both monetary and non-monetary terms must be recognised in decision making.” [http://www.naturalcapitalinitiative.org.uk/](http://www.naturalcapitalinitiative.org.uk/)

Ecosystem services

The services we receive from the natural environment include supporting services such as ecological processes, soil formation, photosynthesis and nutrient cycling; provisioning services such as food, water and wood; regulating services which help us to control climate, floods, waste disposal, air and water quality; and cultural services which include recreational, educational, aesthetic and spiritual benefits we receive from the environment.

Adapted from: Sustaining a Living Wales xxxxxxx
The action plan

This is the first action plan for biodiversity in the New Forest. It covers both the New Forest National Park and the wider New Forest District Council area – see map. It brings together information and collective aspirations for biodiversity, and links other important management plans and strategies and the work of many partners who already deliver outstanding nature conservation projects. It is a fresh approach that focuses on conserving and enhancing biodiversity through landscape scale, ecosystem management and the many services provided by nature. It is an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive approach that will sustain and enhance important habitats and link habitat networks both within and beyond the national park.

The New Forest National Park Authority has been working with partners and the public to develop this action plan and an initial draft was produced in 2010. Significant shifts in biodiversity policy bring exciting opportunities to re-shape the plan. The aims are:

- To develop a strategic framework for biodiversity action in the New Forest to 2020
- To identify challenges, opportunities and priorities for protecting and improving the natural environment and supporting ecosystem services
- To bring together, or signpost to, information on landscapes, habitats and species
- To engage organisations, businesses, communities and individuals in taking action for biodiversity
- To contribute to national ambitions and targets for biodiversity.

The plan provides a framework to inspire action by all partners, stakeholders and the community. It builds on current initiatives and helps to guide future activity, sets strategic priorities and promotes widespread awareness. The plan promotes shared vision, adding value through cooperation and collaboration. The objectives and strategic actions outlined in this plan will require the identification of detailed action by partners and stakeholders.

Strategic action in this plan is divided according to key themes of the Natural Environment White Paper (ref):

- protecting and improving our natural environment
- growing a green economy
- reconnecting people and nature.

The New Forest National Park Authority is coordinating this action plan for biodiversity on behalf of all stakeholders. The Plan marks the beginning of new collaboration and partnership for ensuring the long-term prosperity of biodiversity in the New Forest.

[Insert map of entire area covered by action plan – NFNPA]
2 National ambitions, local actions

There have been substantial changes in biodiversity policy and practice in recent years at international, national and local levels. These changes reflect widespread concern about the global economy and scarcity of natural resources. Government and business leaders understand that developing a sustainable green economy means putting an appropriate value on protecting nature and the services that it provides.

In recent years the central approach to protecting and enhancing the natural environment has evolved into a ‘large area’ or ‘landscape scale’ approach. The purpose is to look after and improve the natural environment in large areas that respect ecosystem function and the links between habitats. Preserving nature in designated sites alone has proved insufficient to halt the loss of biodiversity.

International context

International initiatives underline the continuing need to halt biodiversity loss and the monetary value of nature to society and the economy:

The Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty to conserve the natural world. Since the Earth Summit in 1992, signatories to the treaty have met regularly to review the status of biodiversity. A revised and updated global agreement setting out the world’s commitment to reduce biodiversity loss was agreed in 2010 – the **Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020**. It sets out goals and targets and aims to inspire individual countries to take action⁷. The United Nations has declared 2011-2020 the **UN Decade for Biodiversity** to promote the vision of living in harmony with nature⁸.

**Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020** was adopted by the European Commission in 2011. The main purpose is to reverse the continuing trend of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation across Europe. This ambitious strategy acknowledges the enormous challenge in the European Union where 1 in 4 species is currently threatened with extinction and each year 3% of GDP is lost due to the loss of biodiversity – costing the EU €450 billion annually. The loss of biodiversity “has devastating economic costs for society which until now have not been integrated sufficiently into economic and other policies”³.

**The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity** (TEEB) is a major international initiative led by economists that demonstrates the global value of nature and the economic and human cost of degrading it. The TEEB programme has shown that protecting the natural environment delivers economic returns that are one hundred times greater than the cost of protection. The size and scale of losses of natural capital from losing biodiversity at the current rate is estimated at between 2 and 5 trillion dollars each year⁴.

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1 The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity includes 5 goals and 20 ‘Aichi Targets’ [http://www.cbd.int/sp/](http://www.cbd.int/sp/)
National context

The link between a healthy natural environment and the fundamental services provided by nature is shaping environmental policy in England:

An independent review of England’s wildlife sites was published in 2010. The ‘Lawton Review’ *Making Space for Nature* concluded that our wildlife sites are too small and too isolated and therefore insufficient to meet the increasing challenges of climate change and other pressures on the land. The report gives recommendations for achieving a healthy natural environment: more sites for nature that are bigger, better managed and more joined up. The review also makes clear that improving the wider landscape outside designated sites is equally fundamental to enriching the natural environment.

The *UK National Ecosystem Assessment* (UKNEA) published in 2011 is the first time an individual country has undertaken a complete assessment of the services that nature provides. It builds on the 2005 global *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* and analyses the UK’s natural environment in terms of the monetary and non-monetary benefits it provides. The assessment demonstrates that 30% of the services that we get from nature are currently in decline.

The Natural Environment White Paper 2011 *Natural Choice: securing the value of nature* sets out the Government’s vision to put natural capital at the heart of economic decision making. The White Paper outlines initiatives to restore the natural environment, new programmes for connecting people and nature, and proposals for capturing the economic value of nature and measuring green growth alongside Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Major initiatives include the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), the creation of Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs), taking a strategic approach to planning for nature through the reform of the planning system.

*Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services* builds on the Natural Environment White Paper and sets out a framework for delivering international biodiversity commitments and national aspirations for biodiversity to 2020. The four key areas for action are: a more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea; putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy; reducing environmental pressures; and improving our knowledge. The status of biodiversity will be monitored through assessing indicators such as the extent of protected areas, the pressures on biodiversity, the status of priority species, ecosystem services and public enjoyment.

The *Localism Act 2011* brought a major shift in responsibility for strategic planning from regions to local authorities and communities. Local councils have a new ‘duty to co-operate’ with other councils and public bodies in planning for the sustainable development of land. The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) published in 2012 aims to streamline the

planning system, protect the environment and promote sustainable growth\(^9\). Planning policies and decisions “should include an assessment of existing and potential components of ecological networks” and strategic planning priorities should “enable delivery of sustainable development in consultation with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships”\(^10\).

**Local action**

In the New Forest there are many long-standing initiatives for biodiversity conservation but also some important new developments. As a protected landscape with large areas designated for nature conservation value, the New Forest has been the subject of many land management plans. These important plans are central to activity already being carried out to secure the diversity of nature, and several are summarised in table x on pg xx. Local Nature Partnerships are a recent important development in translating national policy ambitions to local action for biodiversity.

**Local Nature Partnerships**

The Natural Environment White Paper recognised that partnership working is the best way to embed natural value into local decision-making and advocated the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships (LNP). The Hants and Wight Local Nature Partnership will bring together a diverse range of organisations, with an outstanding set of experience and skills, that will work together in the counties of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Although most of the wider New Forest area is in Hampshire, a small proportion is in Wiltshire, and here there is also an evolving LNP that will drive forward links between the natural environment, society and the economy – the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Partnership.

Protecting the natural environment and maximising wellbeing and economic return require an integrated way of working. The multi-sector Local Nature Partnerships will:

- Develop plans that link improving the environment with economic and social priorities
- Improve the multiple benefits generated by the natural environment by working at a landscape scale
- Work closely with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Partnerships
- Be an important part of the statutory consultation process for planning in their areas (note - check latest position in July)

The new LNPs will build on the work of former county biodiversity partnerships in Hampshire and Wiltshire. The two county partnerships leave a legacy of detailed plans of action and strategic aspirations for biodiversity that will play an important part in informing the work of the new LNPs. There is an exciting opportunity for the new partnerships to adopt a broader vision of the role that the natural environment plays in supporting a healthy society and economy.

This action plan for biodiversity in the New Forest will assist local LNPs in securing their ambitions for nature and the services it provides in the New Forest.


\(^{10}\) See section 165 and section 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework
The table below illustrates the links between key themes and priorities for action at a national scale with the priority areas for action in the New Forest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National ambitions, local action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural Environment White Paper</strong> (The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting and improving our natural environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services**

- A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and sea
- Reducing environmental pressures
- Improving our knowledge

**Nature in the New Forest: action for biodiversity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Priority Areas for Action</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land management: a landscape scale and integrated approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data and information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Biodiversity of the New Forest

The biodiversity of the New Forest can be broadly divided into 4 areas or landscape types:

- Open forest
- Forest fringe
- Avon Valley
- Coastal plain

Each area includes a stunning mosaic of habitats, many of which are designated internationally for their value for nature conservation.

[Insert map showing 4 landscape types - NFNPA]

Open forest

Central, and occupying most of the National Park, is the Crown Land of the New Forest. This ‘open forest’ landscape, dominated by heathland and pasture woodland, is the largest area of semi-natural vegetation in England and is of international importance. The value of this area for wildlife is derived from a pastoral economy which has been in existence for hundreds of years.

Most of the open forest landscape is Crown Land managed by the Forestry Commission. The open forest consists of a mosaic of heathland, mires, grassland, ancient pasture woodland, riparian and bog woodland, rivers and streams and permanent and temporary pools. The interest of this area has derived from the long-standing rights of common, with commoners stock grazing freely over extensive areas. The Crown Land also includes land enclosed for forestry – known as ‘inclosures’. The New Forest supports an exceptional variety of mosses and lichens, flowering plants and invertebrates, and is one of the largest areas for breeding waders in southern England, including curlew, snipe and redshank. The Forest is also well known for its birds of prey including goshawk, hobby and honey buzzard.

The mosaic of habitats is unique in lowland Europe and includes 13 habitats of European importance and many species of European importance listed in the EU Habitats Directive (ref). This is reflected in its designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive, a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, and a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EU Birds Directive (ref).

The value and richness of the open forest derives from several factors: its location, climate and geology; the long continuous history of pastoralism and sustained management practices such as heathland cutting and burning; the complex variety and association of habitats at a landscape scale; a wide variety of micro habitats; and dynamic change and variation provided by human and natural processes including extensive grazing, succession, fire and flooding.
**Forest fringe**

This enclosed landscape of fields, hedges and woodland extends around most of the open forest and includes the eastern border of the Avon Valley. The ‘fringe’ is functionally linked with the open forest as stock graze both the open forest and some of the lanes, village greens and commons of the fringe. The area is used as back up grazing land for the forest, particularly to support stock in the winter. (This landscape type, shown on map xx also includes coppice enclosures and woodland set within the open forest as these have more in common with the biodiversity of the ancient coppice woodland in the forest fringe.)

The forest fringe is rich in biodiversity and includes agriculturally unimproved grassland, ancient coppice woodland, ponds, hedges and veteran trees. Some of the unimproved grasslands are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and many are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and it is likely that survey could reveal many more meadows and pastures of great value for nature. Woodland and trees in the fringe support a rich fauna of birds, bats – including the rare Barbastelle and Bechstein bats – and invertebrates including the woodland fritillary butterfly.

Ponds here are more nutrient rich than the acidic ponds of the open forest, and support amphibians such as the nationally protected great crested newt, and dragonfly and other invertebrate species not found within the open forest ponds.

Many rivers cross the forest fringe, draining the open forest. They support populations of several European protected species, including otter, bullhead, lamprey and migrant sea trout. Floodplains are narrow, but support an important assemblage of wet meadow, reedbeds and reed-lined ditches, and provide habitat for bats, invertebrates and birds including water rail, grey wagtail and kingfisher.

**Avon valley**

On the western edge of the New Forest is the Avon Valley, which again supports internationally important habitats including the chalk river and associated fen vegetation. The River Avon is fed from a chalk aquifer, but downstream of Fordingbridge is influenced by water chemistry and hydrology arising from the acidic Dorset Heaths and New Forest. The River is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and supports 27 species of fish in addition to important populations of Atlantic salmon, sea trout and brown trout. Some 66 species of aquatic plant have been recorded in the river channels and associated dykes.

The river’s wide floodplain is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) due to its internationally important assemblages of breeding and wintering birds including large flocks of gadwall, wigeon, teal, shoveler, golden plover and black-tailed godwits. The Avon Valley is the last river valley in Hampshire that retains a viable population of breeding wading birds. To the north of Ringwood are Blashford Lakes – a nature reserve created by gravel extraction that attracts a large number of wintering wildfowl and is included in the Avon Valley SPA and Ramsar Site. The valley supports the largest and most species rich floodplain grassland in the New Forest and is one of the largest in England.

In the north-west lies a species rich chalk downland landscape which reaches into the downs of Wiltshire and Dorset. Important chalk downland here includes the extensive Martin Down and
Tidpit Down SSSI. The chalk flora is exceptionally rich and includes at least eight orchid species. There is an outstanding assemblage of 36 butterfly species recorded in this area, including Adonis blue, marsh fritillary, Duke of Burgundy and grayling. Arable farmland on the chalk supports threatened birds such as skylark and corn bunting and rarities such as stone curlew and Montague’s harrier.

Also in this north-western area are some of the richest woods in Hampshire: Boulsbury Wood is the most species rich in the county for vascular plants, including meadow saffron and wood vetch, both found nowhere else in Hampshire. The woodlands are particularly rich because of diverse geological strata and are traditionally managed as hazel coppice, in turn supporting good populations of dormice.

**Coastal plain**

Bordering Southampton Water and the Solent is the coastal plain. Here habitats include grazing marsh, saltmarsh, intertidal flats, saline lagoons, vegetated shingle and soft rock cliffs and slopes. Much of this habitat is included within international conservation designations – the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site; the Solent Maritime SAC; and the Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC. In places the coastal plain extends inland to include estuarine rivers and enclosed pastures used by wintering birds such as brent geese.

The coastal grazing marshes have a distinctive vegetation including variations between grassland, saltmarsh and swamp. They are important for wintering waterfowl and breeding birds, and support varied and rare invertebrate communities. Within the grazing marshes are saline lagoons with specialised plants and invertebrates including the lagoon shrimp, the starlet sea anemone and foxtail stonewort.

Saltmarshes represent a transition from mudflats to a variety of terrestrial habitats and are variably inundated by tidal waters. They provide nesting places for sea birds and waders, including nationally important colonies of breeding terns. Intertidal flats consisting of muds and mixed sediments and eelgrassbeds support a rich invertebrate fauna and provide a rich feeding resource for wintering and migrant waterfowl.

Vegetated shingle is a nationally rare habitat that supports scarce plant species such as the little robin which is endemic to the Solent and is well developed on Hurst Spit, the Beaulieu Estuary and Calshot Spit. Soft cliffs and slopes occur west of Hurst spit and erosion and slumping are providing a range of open and vegetated habits supporting rare invertebrates and reptiles including common lizard and adder.

Additional habitats are provided by the rivers and streams that cross the various landscapes of the New Forest, including the Lymington, Keyhaven and Beaulieu rivers, which eventually enter the Solent. The New Forest coast has very interesting transitions of habitat from estuary to ancient woodland, swamp and grassland. These occur particularly in the Beaulieu estuary, where estuary edge oak woodland contain scarce species such as the narrow-leaved lungwort.
Extent and status of habitats and species

The importance of the New Forest for biodiversity is illustrated by the extent of ‘Habitats of Principal Importance’ and the large area of land designated for nature conservation. Habitats of Principal Importance are those listed by Government, under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, for particular conservation attention in the UK. These habitats are the main components of statutory designated sites of national and international importance, and where not legally protected most of these habitats are included within the locally identified Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Hampshire or County Wildlife Sites in Wiltshire.

### Habitats of principal importance in the New Forest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total area of priority habitat (ha)</th>
<th>% of area of NFNP or NFD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Forest National Park (NFNP)</td>
<td>29,099</td>
<td>51.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Forest District (NFD - outside the NFNP)</td>
<td>5,236</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34,335</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Appendix ?? for extent of each individual Priority Habitats (table 16.1/17.1 HBIC).

Source: HBIC

### Nature conservation designations in the New Forest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statutory designations*</th>
<th>Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area (ha)</td>
<td>% of area of NFNP / NFD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Forest National Park</td>
<td>32,262</td>
<td>56.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Forest District</td>
<td>2,519</td>
<td>10.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34,781</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statutory designations include SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar, LNR, NNR. The area of statutory designations excludes overlaps of these designations. Approximately 87% of Priority Habitat in the New Forest National Park is within designated sites. Approximately 66% of Priority Habitat in the New Forest District (outside the NP) is within designated sites. (table 16/17D, HBIC) A list of the statutory designated sites within the NFNP and NFD is given in Appendix ???? (table 17C/D, HBIC)

Source: HBIC
Habitat condition

It is estimated that in 2011 48% of the 375 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation within the NFNP and 37% of the 221 SINCS in the New Forest District outside the NFNP were being managed in a way that will retain or improve their nature conservation interest. The condition of the remaining SINCs within the New Forest is either ‘unfavourable’ or unknown (HBIC).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest(^1) (2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (ha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favourable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavourable recovering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavourable no change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavourable declining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)The international conservation designations, SACS, SPA and Ramsar are also SSSIs and therefore included in these figures (tables 16/17E, HBIC)

Species

(Additional text to be provided by NFNPA)
4 Securing the value of nature in the New Forest

This framework for biodiversity action in the New Forest builds on key themes of the Natural Environment White Paper:

- protecting and improving our natural environment
- growing a green economy
- reconnecting people and nature

Under each theme the main concepts are introduced and key objectives are identified to guide action in the New Forest. This is followed by a summary of current activity, the main challenges and opportunities. Exemplar projects and case studies are highlighted. Key strategic actions are identified that take account of the core objectives and the key issues identified under each theme. The actions are strategic areas for delivery and form a framework from which partners can identify detailed action and set priorities.

Protecting and improving our natural environment

Government have not only pledged to stem the loss of biodiversity but have the ambition to improve the quality of the natural environment, moving to a net gain in the value of nature. The planning process is fundamental to ensuring that biodiversity is not lost to development and that development contributes to the enhancement of the natural environment.

The quality of the natural environment is also dependent on how it is managed, whether specific management for nature conservation or, as is mostly the case, land use practice such as farming being sensitive to the conservation of nature.

This central theme ‘Protecting and improving our natural environment’ is sub-divided to encompass strategic action related to:

- land management
- planning and development
- data and information

Up-to-date information on the natural environment is essential for supporting both land management and the planning process.

Land Management – an integrated landscape scale approach

To successfully achieve a natural environment that is rich in biodiversity, contributes a wide range of services to society and is resilient to pressures such as climate change, land management needs to be considered over large geographical areas and take account of a wide variety of economic and social factors.
A landscape scale approach

Conservation is best addressed at the landscape-scale. Conservation and management over large areas maximises the quality and robustness of the natural environment. For example the management of one part of a water catchment can have profound influence elsewhere in the catchment. Land managed over wide areas with habitats connected helps to allow species to adapt to climate change. The landscape scale approach also enables full consideration of the relationship between economic land-use practices and the environment.

The core of the New Forest is a good example of integrated landscape scale conservation in action. The open forest is extensive and its varied habitats are dependent on the grazing economy. Management is guided by a series of comprehensive management plans and programmes and is well resourced compared with surrounding landscapes.

However, the core of the Forest cannot be viewed in isolation. It has a relationship with a much wider area: for example, the open forest is sustained by a pastoral economy dependant on grazing land in the forest fringe and beyond. The open forest is also linked to the surrounding landscape types by its rivers and streams and their catchments.

Emphasis of this plan is on achieving biodiversity conservation on a landscape scale, across the varied, yet related, landscapes of the wider New Forest area as a whole.

Integration

To achieve landscape scale conservation an integrated approach is required, taking account of issues that cross administrative boundaries, and economic and social factors that interact with the management of the natural environment. There are substantial links between land management and other themes covered by this plan: for example, land-use planning (pg x) can support habitat restoration; housing development can lead to recreation pressure on sensitive areas; local communities can be engaged in the management of the local environment (pg. x); economic enterprise such as management of woods for woodfuel can support the management of the natural environment (pg x).

Guiding ecological principles

Ecological networks

Bigger, well-managed and connected habitats support more wildlife and provide a more robust natural environment, in turn securing essential services for society (ref). Maintaining habitats in good condition and restoring, expanding and connecting habitats to form ecological networks is also the best way of allowing nature to successfully adapt to climate change (ref). This ‘network’ approach to land management will help species move to more suitable areas and adapt to changing conditions. The principles of restoration, expansion and connection of habitats are central to the objectives of this plan.
Climate change and biodiversity

Climate change could have both direct and indirect effects on the biodiversity of the New Forest:

- Loss of coastal habitat to sea level rise
- Stress and reduction of wetland habitats and associated wildlife eg. breeding waders
- Changes in water flow, temperature, chemistry and quality in rivers and streams eg. fish migration and spawning affected by low flows
- Risk of expansion of invasive species eg. bracken
- Improved conditions for pest and diseases eg. affecting woodland trees
- Increase in incidence of fire in hot dry summers
- Changes in the range of species as they move to areas of more suitable conditions
- Changes in land use driven by climate change eg. changes in agriculture, tourism and forestry may impact on biodiversity

Key adaptation principles*

- Conserve existing biodiversity
- Conserve protected areas and all other high quality habitats
- Reduce sources of harm not linked to climate
- Conserve range and ecological variability of habitats and species
- Maintain existing ecological networks
- Create buffer zones around high quality habitats
- Take prompt action to control invasive species
- Make space for the natural development of rivers and coasts
- Establish ecological networks through habitat restoration and creation

* xxx taken from the England Biodiversity Strategy

Biodiversity opportunity

In 2010 the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership identified 42 ‘Biodiversity Opportunity Areas’ (BOAs) in Hampshire to promote the maintenance and restoration of biodiversity at the landscape scale. These areas contain the major concentrations of priority habitat defined in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan xx and embrace significant areas of land with potential for habitat expansion and re-connection.

Six Biodiversity Opportunity Areas are located wholly or partly in the New Forest. The table below shows the relationship between the 4 landscape types described in this Plan and the BOAs.
## Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in the New Forest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscape type</th>
<th>Biodiversity Opportunity Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Forest</td>
<td>New Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ringwood Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Fringe</td>
<td>New Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Test Valley (small part extends into the Forest fringe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avon Valley</td>
<td>Avon Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martin Down / Boulsbury / Toyd Down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Plain</td>
<td>New Forest Coast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source xxxxxx*

## Opportunities for restoring and creating habitats in New Forest BOAs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Habitat</th>
<th>New Forest</th>
<th>New Forest Coast</th>
<th>Avon Valley</th>
<th>Ringwood Forest</th>
<th>Martin Down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowland dry acid grassland</td>
<td>3285</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowland fen</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowland heathland</td>
<td>9005</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td>695</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowland meadows</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowland mixed deciduous woodland</td>
<td>9917</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple moor grass and rush pasture</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet woodland</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood-pasture and parkland</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reedbed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>612</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltmarsh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>751</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetated shingle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertidal mudflat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saline lagoon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowland calcareous grassland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*comprehensive ‘Habitat Opportunity Mapping’, derived from analysis of a range of factors, shows the potential to restore and create habitat within each BOA.

*Source xxxxxx*
Species

Achieving good management of habitats and ecological networks should provide the appropriate conditions for most species of biodiversity importance in the New Forest. Emphasis in this plan is therefore on habitat and landscape scale management, though it will be important to review where specific action is required for individual species. There is a huge body of expertise on species found in the New Forest, their status and requirements. For example projects are in place for the management of plant species by Plantlife, the RSPB undertakes work for vulnerable bird species and Butterfly Conservation have produced detailed reports on the status of butterflies and moths. In addition, the Hampshire Wildlife Trust in partnership with the National Park Authority, Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England are undertaking a major project to control the invasive non-native species in the New Forest.

Land management: Objectives

- Sustainable and integrated land management that maintains the natural environment and its contribution to society and the economy
- Habitats in favourable condition, restored, expanded and connected within ecological networks at a landscape scale
- Biodiversity successfully adapting to climate change

Land management in the New Forest

Open forest

The core of the open forest is Crown Land managed by the Forestry Commission in association with the Verderers of the New Forest who oversee the grazing under the rights of common. Because of its international status for biodiversity the overarching objectives for the area are set by the Special Area of Conservation Management Plan (ref). Detailed action is set out in the Forestry Commission’s Crown Lands Management Plan 2008-13 (ref), which forms a component part of the SAC Management Plan.

Key objectives are the maintenance and achievement of favourable condition of the SSSI which underpins the international designations. This relies on sustainable grazing and a range of management practices including cutting and burning of vegetation to maintain the open forest and restoration of wetlands following past watercourse modification and drainage.

Management of the forestry inclosures (plantation areas) is set out in the Forestry Commission’s Inclosure Forest Design Plans which include provision for restoration of former wood pasture, heathland and valley mire. Issues include the retention of deadwood, the balance of natural extension of woodland on open forest habitat and decline of woodland through lack of regeneration.

Considerable progress has been made in achieving favourable conservation status through the European Funded Life II Project (1997 – 2001) (ref) and Life III Project (2002 – 2006) (ref). The latter focussed on watercourse and wetland restoration and produced the New Forest Wetland
Management Plan 2006 – 2016 which guides current action to restore streams, mires, lawns and riverine woodland.

Currently maintenance and restoration of habitats continue under the specific Higher Level Stewardship Scheme for the New Forest ‘The Verderers Grazing Scheme’ (see below). This scheme, under agreement between the Verderers and Natural England, will operate from 2010 to 2020. The Verderers are responsible for delivery through a formal partnership with the Forestry Commission and NFNPA. Funds enable sustainable commoning and wetland restoration.

### The Verderers Grazing Scheme

The Verderers Grazing Scheme for the New Forest is a unique approach to the provision of support under the national Environment Stewardship Scheme – the agreement is between Natural England and the Verderers of the New Forest rather than the usual single land owner and covers an extensive 20,000 ha of open heathland. The prime objective of the scheme is to ensure that grazing by commoners is sustained to preserve the New Forests rich and complex habitat, and the scheme is considered a major step forward for encouraging young commoners.

The scheme covers:

- Payments for grazing
- Wetland restoration
- Capital projects
- Survey and research
- Educational access
- Supportive projects eg. Contribution to the Non-native Species Project

Beyond the perambulation of the New Forest – the historic boundary governed by Forest Law, where commoners’ stock roam freely, now within the cattle grids – are other commons and wood pasture which would benefit from grazing. Similarly there are village greens and lanes within the forest fringe (see pg xx) once grazed by cattle, which would benefit from re-establishing extensive grazing.

Currently recreational impacts on the habitats of the open forest are localised. However the National Park is situated between the expanding conurbations of South Hampshire and Bournemouth. Recent studies estimate that the number of visitor days to the Park could rise by 1.6 million by 2026. The New Forest National Park Recreation Strategy 2010-2030 (ref) identifies the need to plan for recreation management at the site level and at the strategic level by providing alternative green infrastructure to deflect visitor pressure (see pg xx Planning and Development).

The continuation of grazing is fundamental to the open forest habitats, but grazing is not an economically viable activity. There are also other aspects of socio-economic change which threaten the continuation of commoning. For example land and house prices are a significant barrier to young commoners becoming independent of their parents. Schemes such as the Verderers HLS, the Commoners Dwelling Scheme and farm diversification are helping to maintain the livelihood of the commoners and need to be sustained. A New Forest Commoning Review undertaken in 2007 made
recommendations to guide future action and support (ref) (see Appendix?) (See pg Economic Development).

**Forest fringe**

The forest fringe is intimately linked with the core of the New Forest as commoners livestock have access to some of the verges of roads and lanes and many enclosed pastures are used as back up grazing for stock. However access for stock is now limited, and small commons, verges and village greens once grazed, are no longer grazed and have lost their biodiversity interest. Many of these areas have become invaded by scrub or have been incorporated into urban mowing regimes. There is potential to allow grazing again to some of these areas or to manage these grasslands through mechanical cutting, which in turn could provide composting or chipping products.

The amount of back up grazing land within the forest fringe has declined as pastures are improved with fertilizers and put to other non agricultural uses. This not only restricts the land available to commoners, but has resulted in the loss of botanically rich grassland. This grassland is also being lost through the use of artificial fertilizer or herbicides and mowing. The extent of botanically rich pasture and meadow in the forest fringe has not been comprehensively surveyed and further survey is needed to plan for the conservation of the mosaic of important grassland in the forest fringe.

Restoration of coppice woodland in the forest fringe and the conversion of planted woodland back to semi-natural woodland is a conservation priority, both on Crown Land and private land. Biodiversity and the local economy would benefit from promoting and developing initiatives for wood products such as woodfuel.

Ponds occur throughout the forest fringe, often on village greens, commons and road verges, but many are neglected and overgrown with scrub and woodland. There are probably many ponds that are not yet recorded and further survey is needed to locate these and determine their condition. (pond project and WFD project?)

The biodiversity of rivers and streams crossing the forest fringe have suffered from previous river engineering including dredging, straightening and bank re-enforcement. Water quality can be poor in lower reaches particularly where elevated nutrient levels are exacerbated during periods of low flow. Associated floodplain grazing marshes have declined in quality through agricultural improvement, abandonment and drainage and would benefit from restoring their management and hydrological regime.

Compared with the investment in the management of the open forest, the forest fringe habitats have been neglected. The network of habitats is of considerable importance and would benefit from targeted action and action that integrates its management with the other landscapes of the New Forest. This has been recognised in the establishment of the New Forest Land Management Advice Service which provides advice and support to private landowners in the forest fringe, Avon valley and coastal plain.

The Hampshire Wildlife Trust have recognised the connection between the forest fringe and the grazing economy of the New Forest with ideas for a grazing exchange, putting commoners looking for back up land in touch with landowners in the fringe who have land of conservation value that
would benefit from grazing. The Trust is also developing ideas for landscape scale projects within the fringe, such as floodplain improvement along the River Blackwater.

### New Forest Land Advice Service

The New Forest National Park Authority, in partnership with Hampshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England, provides a land management advice and support service to farmers, land owners, graziers and community groups across the New Forest.

The Service provides:

- Advice on the management of a wide range of habitats, with a focus on Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
- Habitat management plans
- Support in applying for Environmental Stewardship grants and sourcing other grants
- Provision of a small grant scheme supporting restoration and creation of hedgerows and species rich meadows, introducing grazing to unmanaged land and removal of invasive species such as scrub and bracken
- A link to a wide range of organisations, initiatives and projects in the area
- Training and events

### Avon Valley

The Avon Valley supports the pastoral economy of the New Forest, provides an ecological link with the heathlands of Dorset and is part of a river system extending northwards into Wiltshire.

Maintaining and improving the biodiversity of the Avon valley within the SPA and SAC has proved a significant challenge. The extensive un-improved grassland is dependent upon hay cutting and grazing to maintain its floristic richness and to support exceptionally important breeding wader and wintering wildfowl populations. The valley has suffered from changes in the agricultural economy including intensification of dairy farming and lack of grazing, resulting in loss of habitat and coarser vegetation. Populations of wintering wildfowl and breeding waders have substantially declined: for example, populations of Bewick swan and white-fronted goose, two of the species for which the SPA was designated, no longer meet qualifying levels and breeding birds such as redshank and lapwing have substantially decreased.

Water level management is crucial both to maintain wet habitat, but also to control excessive flooding in certain areas. At present 52% of the River Avon SSSI is managed under an appropriate water level management regime. Cessation of the traditional practice of weed cutting in the river, coupled with climate change, could lead to higher river levels causing more flooding of the valley floor in summer, exacerbating the difficulties of the agricultural economy and the viability of the land management practices so fundamental to the valley’s interest. If grazing became less economically viable this could have a knock-on effect on the New Forest, as cattle grazing in the valley also graze the Forest, and hay from the valley supports Forest grazing. Other issues include appropriate ditch management and removal of encroaching scrub.
Issues for the river itself are water abstraction, past channel management causing degraded river habitat, bank management, encroachment by non-native species and increased water temperature due to climate change – which could affect salmon migration and spawning.

A wide range of conservation programmes and initiatives have focussed on the Avon Valley in recent years including the Strategic Framework for Restoration of the River Avon, the ‘River Avon Valley Initiative’, the ‘Wessex Chalk Streams Project’ and ‘Avon Valley Grazing Project’. Issues and management practices in the valley are complex, as are the range of bodies who have interest or administrative responsibility in the area, including water companies and the minerals authority, in addition to the land owning and farming community. A co-ordinated approach to consideration of issues and integrated solutions is required.

The Downs

Martin Down is managed as a National Nature Reserve by Natural England and Hampshire County Council. 58% of the Martin Down Biodiversity Opportunity Area is under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme and 90% of the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation within the BOA in positive management. However, chalk grassland in this area is very fragmented resulting in small isolated patches. There is potential for chalk grassland creation to reconnect fragments, create more viable grazing units and connect with chalk grassland in the neighbouring counties. Maintenance of the significant biodiversity interest of the Boulsbury Wood complex is also a key priority and mechanisms to support sustainable economic woodland management are needed.

Coastal plain

One of the most significant issues facing the New Forest is the loss of coastal habitat to sea level rise. As sea levels rise against hard sea defences, habitats such as mudflats and saltmarsh will be lost through ‘coastal squeeze’. To maintain coastal habitat their migration in land will need to be allowed and encouraged wherever possible.

The North Solent Shoreline Management Plan (ref) provides a large-scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal processes, including flooding and erosion. The policy for much of the New Forest coast is to ‘hold the line’ of defences, for example, where there is risk to development and industry or indeed risk to important habitat behind defences such as the grazing marshes and saline lagoons between Lymington and Keyhaven. Recreation of habitat elsewhere to compensate for habitat lost in front of sea defences is being considered under the Environment Agency and Natural England Regional Habitat Creation Programme?? Policy for currently undefended frontages will allow evolution of the coast under natural processes and favour habitats such as mudflats and saltmarsh. The fate of shingle within the Solent under rising sea levels is not precisely known, but it is likely that erosion of saltmarshes will result in accretion of shingle. Hurst Spit is an important stronghold for this habitat.

A long-term vision is required to take account of potential loss of grazing marsh, much of which in the medium term will be protected by the sea wall between Lymington and Keyhaven. Loss would require compensating through permitting landward migration of the terrestrial and upper saltmarsh habitat. Any repositioning of saline lagoons would require very advanced establishment of the new resource.
There are opportunities for supporting the evolution of habitat up river valleys as sea levels rise, for example in the Beaulieu, Lymington and Avon Water. The Hampshire Wildlife Trust and Environment Agency have produced a water level management plan for the Lymington that will provide a more natural tidal regime within the valley by adapting sluice gates at the mouth of the river. This is part of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust’s Living Landscape Project for the Lymington valley, an excellent example of an integrated landscape approach to land management, connecting the sea with the New Forest.

Living landscapes – Lymington Valley

The Hampshire Wildlife Trust has a long-term vision to enable the Lymington River and valley to function as a natural unit. This will provide links for wildlife from the coast to the open forest and provide mitigation for loss of coastal habitats.

Key issues being tackled include coastal squeeze, establishing a more natural tidal regime in the river, non-native species, unfavourable condition of habitat, loss of lay-back land for commoners and loss of flower rich meadows.

The scheme is helping species including otter, sea trout, nightjar and the rare Bechstein’s and barbastelle bats, as well as both the pearl and small pearl bordered fritillary butterflies, whose UK populations have declined alarmingly in the past 20 years.

The project centres on several of the Trust’s nature reserves, and working with partners, provides advice and support to landowners and aims to extend support for the management and restoration of 2000 hectares of wildlife habitat.

In addition to sea level rise, threats to coastal habitats include potential proposals for port development (see pg xx Planning), potential increased recreational disturbance of coastal birds from substantial development in South Hampshire, and nutrient loading in the water from development, which can impact on the food resources for birds in the coastal muds and sediments.

The Solent European Marine Sites Management Scheme (SEMS) (ref) sets out the conservation objectives for the internationally designated coastal sites and the SEMS Management Group takes an overview of the wide variety of activities on the coast potentially affecting these sites and the action required to meet the conservation objectives. The Solent Forum, comprising all relevant local authorities, statutory agencies and interested parties provides a platform and network for partnership working, information dissemination and discussion of coastal issues. The Forum commissioned a study to investigate recreational disturbance of birds to assess and plan for potential impacts from increasing development and housing in South Hampshire – The Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project (ref). The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (ref) sets out policies and guidance for the protection and management of areas of land outside the statutory designated sites that provide a feeding and roosting resource for the birds.

Significant areas of the New Forest coast are being managed for nature conservation: Lymington and Keyhaven Marshes (Hampshire County Council / Hampshire Wildlife Trust), Lymington Reedbeds (HWT) and the Lepe foreshore and Calshot Spit and Marshes (HCC).
**Land management: Strategic actions**

- Monitor the achievement of favourable conservation status of the New Forest SSSI and revise plans and programmes as appropriate. Review any additional opportunities for the restoration of habitat in the open forest and inclosures.
- Maintain and develop initiatives that achieve biodiversity conservation at a landscape scale, focusing on habitat connectivity, integrated sustainable management and linking the core of the Forest with surrounding landscapes. Examples include:
  - River catchment management (e.g. Lymington and the Blackwater)
  - Re-introduction of grazing to commons, village greens and road verges beyond the Perambulation of the Forest
  - A programme to link the requirement for back up land for stock grazing the open forest, with land of nature conservation importance that would benefit from grazing in the forest fringe, coastal plain and Avon Valley
  - A programme of action for the maintenance and restoration of habitats in the forest fringe including ponds, road verges, hedges, and unimproved grassland
  - Review of key issues affecting habitat management in the Avon Valley and the contribution of past and current support schemes and development of a co-ordinated land management strategy for the valley.
- Identify specific conservation measures for species above and beyond that provided within habitat management schemes and programmes
- Continue to control the extent of invasive species, and consider expanding the Non-native Plant Project to additional areas of the New Forest
- Maintain and develop the Land Management Advice Service with particular emphasis on provision of support in the forest fringe, coastal plain and Avon Valley
- Monitor the effectiveness of funding streams that support land management, including the Verderers HLS scheme and grants provided under the Land Management Advice Service, and plan for continuity of such funding in the future
- Review the implementation of the New Forest Recreation Strategy to ensure avoidance and mitigation of pressure on sensitive areas. Monitor and manage recreation pressure on vulnerable sites.
- Work in collaboration with neighbouring districts and counties to support landscape scale provision for biodiversity over administrative boundaries
- Continue to improve the condition and status of water bodies in the New Forest in accordance with the Water Framework Directive including .....Ponds scheme??
- Maintain an active role within the Solent Forum and Solent European Sites Management Group to review the range of issues affecting the coast and take specific action as needed
- Review and develop provision for replacing habitat lost to sea level rise, including habitat creation both within and beyond the New Forest coast.
- Identify early action to support coastal adaptation to climate change including opportunity for evolution of habitat within river valleys and working with private landowners where adjustment to defences may be possible.
Planning and Development

Development can have both direct and indirect impacts on biodiversity. Habitat can be lost to built development or development can result in pressures on the natural environment such as recreational disturbance to sensitive areas nearby or changes to hydrology.

National legislation and policy have set standards for taking account of the conservation of biodiversity within the land-use planning process including:

- Protection of international, national and local designated nature conservation sites
- Protection of species of European and national importance
- Conservation of Habitats and Species of Principle Importance for Nature Conservation (BAP Habitat and Species) (Lists in Appendices.) identified under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and irreplaceable habitats and features such as ancient woodland and veteran trees.
- The need for avoidance, mitigation and compensation of ecological impacts
- An expectation for development to result in enhancement of biodiversity
- Conservation of ecological networks

The National Planning Policy Framework introduced in March 2012 (ref) takes account of all of the above. But it also adds emphasis to the need for certain provisions within the planning process including taking account of ecosystem services (see...), no net loss of biodiversity, the identification of ecological networks (see ....) and the provision of green infrastructure (see below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Planning Policy Framework*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government’s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should:

- plan for biodiversity at the landscape scale across local authority boundaries;
- promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species

Local planning authorities should:

- set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure

*source xxx
**Green infrastructure** includes parks and natural spaces, trees, water bodies, green corridors (such as vegetation along waterways, road and rail side and footpaths), sustainable urban drainage, vegetation within building design and use of renewable energy.

The benefits provided by green infrastructure include: improved air quality, reduced temperature extremes, storage of flood water, storage of carbon, reduction of noise, habit enhancement and increased wildlife, improved physical and mental wellbeing through access to green space, and improved community cohesion.

The *Natural Environment White Paper 2011* (ref) promotes the need to secure no net loss of biodiversity within the planning process. To support this Defra is trialling the concept of ‘Biodiversity Offsetting’. Biodiversity Offsets are compensatory measures for unavoidable residual impacts of development on biodiversity after appropriate prevention and mitigation measures have been taken. The concept is based on the application of rigorous metrics to measure biodiversity loss and to identify ‘equivalent’ compensatory provision. The process allows for offsite compensation, which can be used to maximise gains in building ecological networks and takes account of all biodiversity habitat, not just loss within designated sites or national priority habitat.

National changes to the planning process will also influence how planning is conducted in the New Forest, including neighbourhood planning – where local communities can draw up plans for their area, proposals for a new Green Areas Designation to give local people the opportunity to protect green spaces and Integrated Coastal Zone Management which requires integration of land and marine planning regimes.

**Planning and development: Objectives**

- No net loss of biodiversity
- Restoration and enhancement of biodiversity
- External pressures on the natural environment minimised
- Sustainable development – green infrastructure enhancing the natural environment and supporting wellbeing and the local economy

**Planning and development in the New Forest**

**Pattern of development**

Settlement and industry in the New Forest is concentrated along the ‘waterside’ of Southampton Water, including the settlements of Totton, Hythe and Holbury and the petrochemical refinery and power station at Fawley. Settlement in the National Park is very limited. The larger of the scattered settlements are Lyndhurst, Ashurst, Brockenhurst and Sway. The main settlements on the south coast outside the National Park, include Lymington, Milford-on-Sea, Barton and New Milton, all of which lie within the South West Hampshire Green Belt?? The main settlements in the Avon Valley are Ringwood and Fordingbridge.
The scale of any future development in the New Forest is limited by the modest extent of existing settlement, the National Park designation, the South West Hampshire Green Belt, the international conservation designations and the risk of flooding within the floodplains and along the coast.

Planning and future development

The planning policy and development allocations for the New Forest are set out in several development plans which include a range of specific policies for the conservation of biodiversity:

- New Forest District Council Local Development Framework, Core Strategy (New Forest District outside the National Park), October 2009
- Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton, New Forest and South Downs Minerals and Waste Plan: Submission February 2012

The NFDC has prepared a draft Green Infrastructure Strategy which has identified green infrastructure improvement, enhancement and opportunities for inclusion in the Sites and Development Management DPD.

The NFNP Core Strategy proposes very minimal development, focussing on the socio-economic needs of local people. Small scale housing and employment development is supported in the defined villages of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway. Rural exception schemes provide affordable housing elsewhere within the Park and provision is made for the land-based economy including commoning, agriculture and forestry, by supporting farm diversification and the conservation of back-up grazing land (see pg xx economy section). Tourism development is supported within the defined villages and as part of diversification schemes elsewhere. All permitted development is in strict accordance with maintaining the special qualities of the National Park.

The New Forest District Council aims for restrained and modest growth outside the National Park up to 2026 with provision for 3,920 new dwellings, including greenfield development at Totton and Ringwood and housing adjoining the main towns and larger villages. Similarly employment development at industrial estates and parks are identified in the waterside settlements and Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood and Fordingbridge.

Development is concentrated in the waterside. Other potential future development includes land reserved at Fawley for petro-chemical uses, re-development at Eling Wharf, and proposals may come forward again for port development at Dibden Bay where previous proposals were refused because of impacts on international nature conservation designations.

Proposed minerals development is concentrated in the Avon Valley, including extraction of sand and gravel reserves at Ringwood, Ringwood Forest, and Harbridge. Additional mineral sites are at Sopley, Milford-on-sea and Hythe. The Minerals and Waste Plan also safeguards the Port of Southampton and Marchwood Military Port for potential minerals and waste wharf infrastructure.
Any such development will require rigorous assessment under the Habitat Regulations. The restoration of mineral sites provides a good opportunity for habitat restoration and re-creation, including heathland at sites such as Ringwood Forest.

**Development pressure**

It is estimated that expansion of housing and economic growth in south Hampshire, south east Dorset and south Wiltshire could result in an additional 1.05 million visitor days per annum to the National Park by 2026. This would put substantial pressure on the character and environmental quality of the National Park and could lead to significant disturbance of birds using the New Forest and Solent and Southampton Water SPAs. A *Green Infrastructure Strategy for South Hampshire* includes proposals for absorbing recreation pressure that would otherwise be exerted on the New Forest. The NFNPA and NFDC are working together and with other local authorities in PUSH xx to minimise potential impacts. The NFDCs proposals for green infrastructure and the National Park Recreation Strategy will also assist.

**Contributions from development**

New housing proposed within 400m of the New Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) will be required to show that measures are put in place to avoid or mitigate potential adverse effects on the ecological integrity of the SPA. A financial contribution from such developments will be used to fund a suite of management measures including access management, education, and enhancement of alternative areas for recreation. Similar contributions may be required for development outside the 400m zone that may have an adverse effect.

Policy CP1 of the NFNP *Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document*  
draft LDF Development Standards SPD 2012

**Development control**

The potential impacts of development on biodiversity require rigorous assessment. The NFDC *Sites and Development Management DPD* and Minerals and Waste Plan identify ecological constraints and requirement relating to specific allocated sites for which planning applications will come forward. All planning applications require screening for potential effects on biodiversity. Some will need screening to determine whether full Environmental Impact Assessments are required and comprehensive assessment under the Habitat Regulations will be required for any development proposals likely to impact on international nature conservation designations. The conservation of bats, all European protected species, requires rigorous appraisal in the development control process, even for small developments, such as modification of domestic property.

**Opportunity**

Managing development provides an opportunity, through habitat restoration and enhancement and careful design of green infrastructure, to maximise environmental, social and economic benefit.
Provision of green infrastructure beyond the boundary of the New Forest in South Hampshire and Dorset together with planning for open space in the waterside area will help the National Park bear the pressure of a substantially increasing population in coming years.

**Planning and development: Strategic actions**

- Adopt the principle of no-net loss of biodiversity within the planning process and require compensatory provision for unavoidable impacts on biodiversity.
- Maximise the opportunity for habitat enhancement and restoration within development schemes eg. mineral development in the Avon Valley
- Support the implementation of green infrastructure strategies outside the New Forest to minimise the potential impacts of recreational pressure on the national park.
- Ensure high standards of green infrastructure in new development
- Take account of studies and strategies designed to guide the planning process on biodiversity matters eg. Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project (recreational disturbance to birds) and Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy
- Develop the use of developer contributions to support conservation management, including the mitigation of recreational pressure
- Maintain high standards of environmental impact assessment including rigorous assessment in accordance with the Habitat Regulations for any development that may have a potential impact on sites or species of international importance for biodiversity.
- Continue to work with developers and their agents to support their understanding of requirements for biodiversity.

**Data and Information**

Data and information is essential for managing the conservation of the natural environment and underpins action for biodiversity. An effective system of obtaining and managing data and providing it in forms to suit a wide variety of needs is required for:

- Monitoring the extent and status of habitats and distribution and population of species
- Informing land-use planning and the control of development
- Identifying and monitoring influences on the natural environment such as climate change
- Monitoring the condition of habitat to inform land management
- Identifying priority areas for action such as the targeting of land management schemes
- Education and research
- Provision of information to stakeholders, communities and the public

Local planning authorities need sound information and evidence to support policies and planning decisions. Information should also be accessible to the public, interested parties and local communities. Data is vital for understanding and demonstrating the services provided by the natural environment to society, from contributions to the local economy to harnessing the natural environment to minimise flood risk.
Policies, strategies, plans and projects all require monitoring to determine whether they are achieving their purpose. For example it is important to monitor the influence of planning decisions on the natural environment. There is also an expectation that partnerships and statutory organisations, including National Park authorities, report ‘local’ action and outcomes for biodiversity to assist national monitoring of biodiversity goals.

Survey, research, data management, data analysis and presentation to suit a wide variety of needs are key requirements of a data and information system. Nationally, a network of local biodiversity information centres – supported by local authorities, public bodies, voluntary conservation organisations and local recorders – provide this vital information.

**Data and Information: Objectives**

- Up-to-date information on the biodiversity of the New Forest and State of Biodiversity reported
- Appropriate monitoring of plans and strategies influencing the natural environment
- Information on biodiversity accessible to the public and local communities and available for education and research
- Integrated data management systems supporting efficient access and use of data

**Data and Information in the New Forest**

The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) is the central repository for biological records in Hampshire. The Centre is hosted by Hampshire County Council and is supported by all local authorities in Hampshire, the New Forest National Park and South Downs National Park authorities statutory agencies, and the voluntary sector. HBIC holds extensive records and mapping of habitats, species and designated sites and provides a wide range of data and information services to its partners. The Centre runs a comprehensive habitat survey programme and a large proportion of data on species is supplied by voluntary recording groups. The Centre co-ordinates state of biodiversity recording in Hampshire, oversees the identification and recording of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and co-ordinates projects, such as the identification and mapping of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas.

In addition to the data system provided by HBIC many other organisations manage comprehensive biodiversity datasets: for example, the GIS based Open Forest Management System is used by the Forestry Commission to manage the maintenance and restoration of habitats in the New Forest; Natural England holds detailed records of SSSI Condition Assessment and take up of the Environmental Stewardship Scheme; the Environment Agency holds data on .......... In Wiltshire xxxxxxxxxx

In all, there is a huge amount of data and information available on the biodiversity of the New Forest. Co-ordinating and making best use of this information and identify gaps and further data requirements is challenging: separate systems are in place for recording information for separate purposes or by different organisations. Review of the various data systems and records and consideration of further co-ordination or integration is required. It will be important to consider a data system that captures both the National Park and the wider New Forest Area.
The Forest is a magnet for academic research and there are a wealth of local ecologists and wildlife recording groups. This enthusiasm could be harnessed and channelled to help meet specific and priority data needs and to engage communities in better understanding their local wildlife (see pg people section). How best to provide information on biodiversity to the public and for educational purposes, and involving the community in looking after their local environment, will rely on easy access to information. Many projects in the New Forest have shown the potential for engaging the public in survey and collection of information (see pg xx people section).

Although there is a huge amount of data, there are gaps in the information needed to support land management. For example there is an un-recorded wealth of botanically rich grassland in the forest fringe. There is also a continuing need for specific research to support land-use planning, land management and adaptation to climate change. Recent examples have included the assessment of potential effects on increased development in South Hampshire on birds using the coast xx and assessment of the management requirements associated with the River Avon xx

### Data and information: Strategic actions

- Continue to support the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre to share data and receive strategic data and information services to inform conservation work
- Support and engage voluntary groups and individuals who record and supply data on the distribution and status of species
- Identify gaps in knowledge of the extent and condition of habitat and conduct surveys to guide future action eg. extent of unimproved grassland in the forest fringe
- Identify priority areas for restoration, creation, expansion and re-connection of habitat using HBICs comprehensive mapping of areas of potential for habitat creation and restoration (Habitat Opportunity Mapping)
- Monitor the condition and state of habitats and species and produce a State of Biodiversity Report
- Review overlapping biodiversity databases, information management and mapping systems used by different organisations and consider the benefits of integrating / linking these systems to establish a comprehensive data system on the natural environment for the National Park and wider New Forest area
- Develop links with academic institutions to take advantage of research undertaken on the natural environment of the New Forest and help guide their research towards topics that are of priority importance for the management of the New Forest.
Growing a green economy

The natural environment and its services underpin the economy and can be harnessed to support economic growth and the profitability of business. Business can contribute to the conservation of the natural environment, which in turn provides business opportunity. Support can be required to sustain marginal land-based economies that maintain the health of the natural environment.

The economic value of nature’s services

- Direct contribution to economic activity – crops for food production, fish landings, timber and water
- Indirect contributions to economic activity – pollination for agriculture, cleaning and recycling of water
- Avoidance of costs to the economy – carbon sequestration by forests, flood control by wetland, trees that moderate city climates
- Welfare enhancing services – nature-based amenity and recreation, health benefits from greenspace

A quality natural environment is good for business in many ways. It has the overall economic advantage of providing an environment that can attract inward investment and make an area a desirable place to live and work. Government has set out an ambition in the Natural Environment White Paper for:

‘growing a green economy which not only uses natural capital in a responsible and fair way, but contributes to improving it’.

Business opportunity

Individual businesses depend on natural materials and services from the UK and overseas. Many companies are already assessing the sustainability of their supply chain to help future-proof their business. Managing energy, water consumption and waste will also benefit the natural environment and can reduce costs.

Businesses can gain by demonstrating corporate sustainable responsibility. Businesses can benefit by taking account of the natural environment within their environmental management systems and reporting. This can be attractive to investors and insurers who are increasingly looking to see that businesses actively manage natural resource risks and grow green markets. Business can also benefit by marketing their environmental credentials to consumers.

Businesses owning land can take advantage of managing it to enhance wildlife and to provide benefits for the local community. Involving staff in managing land and providing attractive environments can retain a well-motivated workforce. Managing land in an environmentally sensitive way can reduce maintenance costs, for example through reduced mowing and less use of herbicides and pesticides.
Supporting a land-based economy

In rural areas the economics and profitability of farming and forestry can be marginal. To be sustainable, land management needs to be economically viable and this requires adaptation to changing markets and government financial support such as payments under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme.

Opportunities for enhancing markets for the products of sustainable land management include woodfuel sourced from the environmental management of woodland, premiums for quality grade products such as meat from conservation grazing, or sustainably sourced woodland craft products. Encouragement and support is required for the diversification of rural businesses to help supplement incomes from otherwise uneconomical, but environmentally beneficial, land management practices.

Payments for ecosystem services

Government is exploring the principle of payments for ecosystem services – where individuals or communities contribute to the upkeep of the natural environment. These can include payments from Government, such as agri-environment payments, but also include the potential for businesses to make appropriate contributions to the cost of land management.

Growing a green economy: Objectives

- Business and industry demonstrating corporate responsibility for the natural environment
- A land-based economy that maintains the natural environment of the New Forest
- Green tourism where recreational impacts on the quality of the New Forest are mitigated

Environment and economy of the New Forest

The New Forest is clearly an asset for attracting business and tourism to the region. However growth of development in New Forest District, and particularly within the National Park, is being limited to help maintain the special qualities of the natural environment.

There is untapped potential to encourage development, business and industry to adopt corporate sustainable responsibility and where they have land, to manage it for wildlife. The Hants and Wight Local Nature Partnership is developing an approach to promote business responsibility and involvement in the conservation of Hampshire’s environment, and this could be particularly suitable for promotion in the New Forest.

The tourism industry makes a major contribution to the economy of the New Forest and comprises about 600 businesses. The National Park Authority encourages sustainable tourism and has identified potential for enhancing the image of the Park as a ‘green tourism’ destination. The National Park Authority is also considering the option of payback schemes for development and business to contribute to the costs of managing the natural environment of the National Park, particularly in view of the management required to mitigate recreational pressure.
Land-based business including agriculture, forestry and commoning play a substantial role in the local economy of the New Forest. The very fabric and importance of the natural environment of the Forest is dependent upon these businesses and in particular the pastoral economy associated with commoning. Commoning and agriculture are linked through seasonal movement of stock between the open forest and surrounding farmland. Commoning is also linked with forestry and woodland management and management of the open forest including cutting, burning and bracken control which provides additional employment.

There is strong concern over the viability of commoning and support is being provided in a number of ways such as provision of affordable housing (Commoners Dwelling Scheme) and the Verderers Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (see pg xx). Planning policies also make provision for diversification, to enable other sources of income, as long as new development is compatible with the conservation of the environment. The New Forest Commoning review makes a variety of recommendations for supporting the viability of commoning.

Agri-environment support is essential for farming beyond the open forest, yet the many small holdings in the forest fringe cannot easily take advantage of national schemes such as Environmental Stewardship Scheme. The New Forest Land Advice Service provides environmental support to landowners and has a small grant fund to assist.

Forestry and woodland management in the New Forest needs to respond to changing markets and there are opportunities to benefit sustainable woodland management, such as woodfuel sourced from woodland restoration. The National Park Authority is investigating the socio-economics of the forestry and woodland management sector.

The New Forest Marque scheme managed by the Park Authority and New Forest District Council provides a brand to help promotion of local produce. This can be used to promote products that make a contribution to the conservation of the New Forest environment such as beef from conservation grazing.

**Growing a green economy: Strategic actions**

- Continue to provide support for commoning including the Verderers HLS Scheme, support for affordable housing, maintenance and provision of back-up grazing and review of the recommendations of the New Forest Commoning Review
- Review the potential to develop markets for products from sustainable land management eg. woodfuel
- Review the potential to award brands for local produce that involve conservation management eg beef from conservation grazing
- Continue to support diversification of land-based industry which will help support the viability of land management practices that sustain the natural environment
- Raise awareness within business and industry of the benefits of adopting measures that demonstrate corporate responsibility for the environment and how to contribute to the conservation of the natural environment
• Work with Local Nature Partnerships to engage business
• Review the potential for income derived from tourism to help support land management and in particular the mitigation of recreational impact
• LEADER / Sustainable Development Fund ??
Reconnecting people and nature

Protecting and enhancing the natural environment requires widespread involvement of communities and individuals to maximise success: people are more likely to value nature if they have direct experience of it. Modern life has increased the ‘disconnect’ between people and the natural world, leading to a lack of knowledge of the value and services nature provides. The natural environment of the New Forest provides excellent opportunities for reconnecting people and nature.

“Ultimately, conservation efforts can only truly succeed with society’s support” ref England Biodiversity Strategy pg3

The natural environment supports health and wellbeing in a variety of ways, from provision of clean air, water and medicines, to food and natural resources. But nature also makes a direct contribution to better mental and physical health and improved social engagement. Nature benefits everyone, from young to old, and can help to reduce health inequalities in society.

Nature, health and wellbeing

Mental health

Contact with nature can help to prevent, alleviate and assist recovery from mental health problems: about 1 in 4 people in the UK suffer from some form of mental illness (ref). Natural environments help to lower levels of stress, enhance mood, increase concentration and boost self-esteem. Many researchers conclude that people have an innate need to experience nature, and lack of interaction with nature and the outdoors is a growing problem amongst children (ref).

Research shows that benefits of nature to mental health accrue from:

- Viewing nature – at home, at the workplace, in hospitals, from prison;
- Contact with nearby nature – in urban parks, gardens or the rural countryside;
- Green exercise – synergistic benefits of physical activity and exposure to nature;
- Green care – nature as therapy for vulnerable groups of people.

Adapted from: UK Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, chapter 23: Health values from ecosystems, pp. 1159-62.

Physical health

Many prevalent chronic diseases are linked to lack of physical activity. These include common health problems such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, some cancers and osteoporosis. Measures of physical activity in England consistently show that most people do not reach the nationally recommended levels for adults of 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity 5 times per week.

Access to nature can encourage participation in physical activity. Going out for a stroll or to ‘get some fresh air’ inspires people of all ages to be active. Evidence suggests that being outdoors in nature is an important factor that helps to maintain people’s motivation to keep fit. ‘Green exercise’ – physical activity undertaken in the outdoors – connects people to nature and their local...
People with easy access to nature are three times more likely to participate in physical activity (ref).

**Contact with nature – benefits throughout life**

**Children**
- Satisfies children’s innate curiosity and need for nature and generates a sense of freedom
- Provides an incentive for healthy outdoor exercise
- Reduces anxiety and disruptive behaviour
- Improves development, cognitive function and independence

**Adults**
- Stimulates and sustains interest in outdoor activity
- Provides relaxation and reduces stress
- Offers free or low-cost enjoyment

**Older people**
- Provides an incentive to remain active
- Offers opportunities for social engagement
- Helps maintain connection with the wider world

**Nature in the community**

Access to nature on an everyday basis helps to secure quality of life. Provision of places to access nature is important for giving everyone the opportunity to take advantage of the benefits that nature provides. Nature is a free commodity that should be available to all.

The ‘Big Society’ seeks to strengthen people’s connection with their community and their motivation to take action. One way to take action for the natural environment is conservation volunteering; this has the dual purpose of managing a nature area to improve its value to wildlife at the same time as offering health benefits to volunteers.

**Accessible natural greenspace**

Standards for the amount of greenspace in communities are increasingly used in local planning. Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) aim to ensure that people have adequate access to green areas near to where they live: for many people the best opportunity to engage with nature is when it is available on the doorstep (ref). ANGSt applies to those areas that are a combination of natural, accessible and attractive to visit – see diagram below.

Yet many people in urban areas do not have access to local greenspace nor the means to visit areas of countryside nearby (ref): In England only 13% of homes in urban areas are within 300 metres of a natural greenspace of at least 2 hectares in size – one of the ANGSt standards. This is particularly common in areas with high levels of deprivation. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment concluded that the health benefits of living close to a green space are worth up to £300 per person per year (ref).
Addressing health inequalities in society is a key concern of public policy and it is widely accepted that inequalities are strongly linked to a range of social, economic and environmental factors which includes access to a healthy environment (ref).

Green infrastructure (GI) provides a good opportunity to bring nature into the heart of communities and enhance biodiversity (see pg xx). Access to nature is a fundamental objective of GI and the design and management of GI should incorporate areas important for wildlife, linking and expanding them to improve their function and robustness against environmental and other pressures.

Localism and volunteering

Through the Localism Act, the National Planning Policy Framework and the new Green Space Designation, the Government aim to give people greater access to nature and more opportunity to help protect and improve the natural environment. Communities and individuals are encouraged to take an interest and be actively involved.

Volunteers bring enthusiasm and skills to the management of green areas. Many organisations depend on the time that volunteers give and the associated economic value is considerable. Volunteers also play a major role in recording habitats and species and their status, and without them our knowledge of biodiversity in the UK would be much poorer. Volunteers can act as ambassadors for nature in the community.
Education and awareness

The Government has an ambition “to see every child in England given the chance to experience and learn about the natural environment” (ref). A key reform will be action to get more children learning outdoors, removing barriers and increasing teacher confidence to teach outside the classroom xx.

There are significant benefits to learning outdoors:

- Better educational attainment
- Development of natural science skills and environmental awareness
- Improved health, social cohesion and attitudes to other children xx

Despite these benefits children are spending less time in nature and schools are not prioritising learning in natural environments.

Yet England is a nation of nature enthusiasts. There are more than 9 million members of the main nature conservation charities and collectively they have more than 700,000 active volunteers. Some 54% of the adult population visit the natural environment every week (ref). In recent years there has been a succession of mass participation programmes to encourage the public to get out in nature, from the BBC Springwatch and Autumnwatch series watched by millions of viewers since 2005 to the RSPB’s Big Garden Birdwatch that attracted nearly 600,000 participants in 2012.

People’s enthusiasm for nature and the need to protect it is a significant force for taking action for biodiversity. The challenge is to turn this widespread interest in nature into a deeper understanding of the effect that everyday actions may have on the natural world.

Reconnecting people and nature: Objectives

- Nature accessible to all
- Nature used to support mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Local communities and individuals engaged in looking after and enjoying the natural environment
- School children learning outside the classroom

People and nature in the New Forest

Most people come to the New Forest to experience the natural environment. A large proportion of visitors come to enjoy the ‘tranquil scenic environment’ and the ‘good access to the countryside’ xx.

The New Forest provides excellent opportunities for reconnecting people and nature in one of the most densely populated areas of southern England.

Nature, health and wellbeing

The National Park Authority and District Council promote the importance of outdoor recreation for healthy living and encourage all sectors of society to participate.
The ‘Breaking Down the Barriers’ project was designed to encourage young people and vulnerable adults to access, protect and learn more about the National Park. Over 180 young people and 60 adults took part in a range of practical conservation tasks on nature reserves within or adjacent to the National Park (ref).

The Eco Health project based at Avon Tyrell outdoor activity centre in the New Forest is run by UK Youth. The project offers places for 8 young people recovering from long-term mental distress to get involved in conservation and gardening. Eco Health works closely with Solent Mind and has had substantial support from the Ecominds project (ref).

Many visitors who come to the New Forest do so to take ‘green exercise’. Although this can include any outdoor activity from kite-flying and orienteering to canoeing or playing football, surveys show that most visitors to the Forest (90%) spend at least part of their time walking or cycling. Self-guided walk routes are available from the Forestry Commission, and New Forest National Park Authority (ref).

‘Health walks’ are specifically designed to improve health, are undertaken on a group basis and are affordable, widely available and socially inclusive. A ‘Healthy Walks Coordinator’ for the New Forest is funded jointly by Community First New Forest, New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council, New Forest NPA, NHS Hampshire and Natural England. Priority is given to individuals and communities at risk of major health conditions, in areas of high deprivation or at risk of social isolation. Encouraging a greater understanding and enjoyment of the environment of the New Forest is one of the aims of the walk programme. Health walks aimed at new mums, known as ‘pushchair walks’, are also supported by Park authority rangers to help reach local health targets.

Access to nature

All households within the national park boundary have good access to open space using Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) (ref) as settlements are generally small and located in open areas of countryside.

Outside the Park boundary there are larger towns such as Totton, Hythe, Marchwood, Blackfield and Fawley on the eastern waterside; New Milton, Milford-on-Sea and Lymington on the south coast; and Fordingbridge and Ringwood in the Avon Valley. These more urban populations tend to have more limited access to the open areas of the New Forest. The NFDC draft Green Infrastructure Strategy (ref) proposes improvements to provide networks of open space to give residents local access to nature whilst protecting the sensitive nature of the New Forest’s internationally important wildlife areas.

One of the main objectives of the Park Authority is to encourage all sections of the community to enjoy the National Park. A fundamental principle of the Recreation Strategy xx is to ensure that groups with particular requirements are fully catered for. For example only 2% of park visitors are members of a minority ethnic community. The Park Authority has been working with people from black and minority ethnic communities through the Mosaic project and 20 ‘community champions’ have agreed to help raise awareness and understanding about the New Forest amongst their communities (ref).
Nature in the New Forest: action for biodiversity
New Forest National Park Authority

Community action

Volunteers play a vital role in nature conservation management and in recording the state of biodiversity. The National Park Authority organises an annual ‘Volunteer Fair’ to encourage volunteering and there are 16 organisations such as the Forestry Commission, Hampshire Wildlife Trust, Pond Conservation and National Trust that organise volunteer work directly relevant to the conservation, public understanding and enjoyment of the Park (ref).

The Park Authority has supported many projects that engage volunteers to record wildlife. These include: the People’s Trust for Endangered Species project on the noble chafer; the Hampshire Wildlife Trust project to monitor Europe’s rarest fungus (a nail fungus) which grows in the New Forest; the Ancient Tree Hunt with the Forestry Commission/Woodland Trust?; and the annual BioBlitz. Other conservation initiatives that incorporate volunteer work include the Hampshire Wildlife Trust’s Shore Search project and the New Forest Non-native Plants project.

BioBlitz

A BioBlitz is a 24 hour search to record as many species as possible and one is held in the New Forest each year in spring. Naturalists and volunteers work together, through the night, to identify common and rare species from birds and bats to amphibians, insects and many types of plants. The event has a festival atmosphere and encourages adults and children to join in. In 2012 over 300 people took part and they recorded more than 425 species of plants and animals.

A BioBlitz encourages people to meet local experts and helps to spread awareness of the rich biodiversity of the New Forest.

http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/looking-after/wildlife/biobltzv

Mosaic

Mosaic is a national project, led by the Campaign for National Parks that aims to build sustainable links between black and minority ethnic communities, National Parks in England and the Youth Hostels Association. The Mosaic Project’s aims in the New Forest National Park:

- Establish a network of Community Champions in Southampton – people who will promote the National Park within black and minority ethnic groups in the city.
- Ensure the National Park Authority and other New Forest organisations are welcoming and have positive links with black and minority ethnic communities.

“Everyone should have an opportunity to discover our natural environment and the associated health benefits of being in the outdoors as well.”

http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/looking-after/partnership-working/mosaic
New Forest non-native plants project

It is estimated that over 2,700 non-native plant species have established themselves in Britain and the vast majority of them pose little or no threat to our native wildlife. However, there are a number of species that are having a very serious negative effect on our native wildlife. In the New Forest these include *Crassula helmsii*, parrots feather, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed.

The non-native plants project aims to address the problem across the entire National Park area including the open forest, enclosed landscape and river valleys. The project delivers large scale practical management work, improved data recording and collection and extensive volunteer and community involvement. The project is being led by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and is a partnership with the Environment Agency, New Forest National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Defra and Natural England.

http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/looking-after/partnership-working/non-native-plants-project

Community groups in parishes throughout the New Forest are mapping out plans for wildlife in their area. With funding from the European Leader programme and assistance from a project officer, 5 parishes will develop a community wildlife plan to identify and help conserve their local habitats and species. Community wildlife champions and teams of volunteers will map the location of wildlife sites, habitats and opportunities for enhancement, and carry out conservation management.

Learning outside the classroom

The New Forest National Park Educators’ Forum brings together the work of 23 organisations that provide high quality outdoor education. Many of these offer formal education focused on raising understanding of the natural environment and the importance of sustainability. Outdoor education work takes place in local schools, environmental centres or out in the Forest.

A barrier for some schools that would like to study nature in the Forest is the cost of transport. Through grant support the Park Authority has enabled 2000 young people from deprived communities to access outdoor education facilities in the Forest. Some funding for education visits to the Crown Lands is also available through the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

Blashford Lakes

Blashford Lakes is a 500 acre nature reserve on the western edge of the New Forest. Managed by Hampshire Wildlife Trust working in partnership with water companies and New Forest District Council, the lakes provide excellent environmental education opportunities for schools, youth and community groups. The reserve includes a well-equipped outdoor classroom, bird hides, wildlife cameras, and a live web-broadcast. In addition to providing environmental education the centre provides information to over 20,000 visitors each year.

http://www.hwt.org.uk/pages/blashford-lakes.html
Reconnecting people and nature: Strategic actions

- Develop and support initiatives for public and private health providers to use the natural environment to improve mental and physical health
- Participate in the work of the Hants and Wight Local Nature Partnership and Wiltshire and Swindon LNP to promote the use of the nature in public health provision
- Identify communities with particular health needs and develop programmes to increase access to nature
- Continue to develop opportunities for volunteering in the management of the natural environment
- Engage local communities in landscape scale conservation projects and inspire and support community based conservation activity
- Continue to use the New Forest National Park Educators’ Forum to develop opportunities and support for outdoor education
- Continue to actively engage the public and schools in the recording of wildlife eg. Bioblitz
- Promote awareness of the environment of the New Forest to visitors of the National Park, to encourage public interest in the natural environment and involvement with nature
- Implement the New Forest National Park Recreation Strategy to facilitate enjoyment of the natural environment, while providing for mitigation of recreational pressures
5 Governance and measuring success

This plan will guide efforts for conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the New Forest to 2020. It provides the framework to inspire action by organisations, communities and individuals who are committed to protecting the rich diversity of the Forest.

The National Park Authority has the statutory purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the park and its wildlife and promoting opportunities for the public to enjoy it. In this context the Park Authority has coordinated the development of this biodiversity action plan following discussions and consultations with many organisations and individuals.

Successful implementation of the strategic aims and objectives of this plan depend on partnership. The New Forest benefits from a committed body of organisations that have long pursued the aim of conserving the Forest’s special biodiversity. Working together has been a hallmark of conservation activity in the Forest to date and is vital for maximising future success.

The ‘Growing the Forest’ Partnership came together in 2011 to build a vision for enhancing large areas of the Forest on a landscape scale. The Partnership aims to reconnect core areas of the Forest with the surrounding landscape, and link communities more closely with their natural environment. The Partnership shares many objectives with this action plan and will formulate a detailed suite of initiatives and activity to deliver the key strategic actions.....?????? oversee the delivery....?????? Act as a focus....?  Steering group??? Coordinator???

(Additional text to be supplied by NFNPA)

Monitoring and reporting

The plan sets out strategic actions for the New Forest in line with the Natural Environment White Paper themes ‘protecting and improving our natural environment’, ‘growing a green economy’ and ‘reconnecting people and nature’. These strategic actions will help to guide activity for biodiversity in the New Forest to 2020.

International ambitions and obligations for biodiversity have been translated for delivery in England in Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services. This national strategy builds on the White Paper and sets out priority activity to both contribute to international targets and deliver the needs of wildlife in this country. Success will be dependent on action at the local level.

An assessment of delivery against the strategic actions set out in this plan is required to both contribute to national monitoring and to understand progress in the New Forest. Contributions to national outcomes will be made through the redeveloped Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) 2. BARS 2 will record specific actions, particularly habitat gains and losses, and these will be mapped spatially.
There will be a need to develop a detailed suite of activity and a delivery plan under the strategic actions given in this plan. This could be a rolling 2-year delivery plan that is flexible to respond to challenges and opportunities. The New Forest National Park Authority will play a lead role in developing a detailed delivery plan with the Partnership? Will there also be a need to review this strategic framework in 5 years?

(additional text to be supplied by NFNPA)

**Governance and monitoring: Strategic actions**

- Build on existing partnership work and support for a biodiversity action plan for the New Forest, and in particular the ‘Growing the Forest Partnership’, to establish a forum for developing and overseeing the landscape scale and integrated approach to biodiversity set out in this plan.
- Identify detailed action and priorities for delivery using the strategic action framework provided by this plan.
- Identify targets to steer and monitor the effectiveness of action.
- Report progress on implementation of action, including reports to Defra as part of their national framework for monitoring progress against national targets for biodiversity to 2020.
- Work in partnership with the Hants and Wight LNP and Wiltshire and Swindon LNP.
## 6 Summary of objectives and strategic actions

### Protecting and improving our natural environment

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<tr>
<td>• Habitats in favourable condition, restored, expanded and connected within ecological networks at a landscape scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biodiversity successfully adapting to climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic actions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor the achievement of favourable conservation status of the New Forest SSSI and revise plans and programmes as appropriate. Review any additional opportunities for the restoration of habitat in the open forest and inclosures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain and develop initiatives that achieve biodiversity conservation at a landscape scale, focussing on habitat connectivity, integrated sustainable management and linking the core of the Forest with surrounding landscapes. Examples include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• River catchment management (eg. Lymington and the Blackwater)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Re-introduction of grazing to commons, village greens and road verges beyond the Perambulation of the Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A programme to link the requirement for back up land for stock grazing the open forest, with land of nature conservation importance that would benefit from grazing in the forest fringe, coastal plain and Avon Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A programme of action for the maintenance and restoration of habitats in the forest fringe including ponds, road verges, hedges, and unimproved grassland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of key issues affecting habitat management in the Avon Valley and the contribution of past and current support schemes operating in the valley, and development of a co-ordinated land management strategy for the valley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify specific conservation measures for species above and beyond that provided within habitat management schemes and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to control the extent of invasive species, and consider expanding the Non-native Plant Project to additional areas of the New Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain and develop the Land Management Advice Service with particular emphasis on provision of support in the forest fringe, coastal plain and Avon valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor the effectiveness of funding streams that support land management, including the Verderers HLS scheme and grants provided under the Land Management Advice Service, and plan for continuity of such funding in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review the implementation of the New Forest Recreation Strategy to ensure avoidance and mitigation of pressure on sensitive areas. Monitor and manage recreation pressure on vulnerable sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in collaboration with neighbouring districts and counties to support landscape scale provision for biodiversity over administrative boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to improve the condition and status of water bodies in the New Forest in accordance with the WFD including .....Ponds scheme??</td>
</tr>
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*NatureConsult – June 2012*
Maintain an active role within the Solent Forum and Solent European Sites Management Group to review the range of issues affecting the coast and take specific action as needed.

Review and develop provision for replacing habitat lost to sea level rise, including habitat creation both within and beyond the New Forest coast.

Identify early action to support coastal adaptation to climate change including opportunity for evolution of habitat within river valleys and working with private landowners where adjustment to defences may be possible.

### Planning and development

**Objectives**
- No net loss of biodiversity
- Restoration and enhancement of biodiversity
- External pressures on the natural environment minimised
- Sustainable development – green infrastructure enhancing the natural environment and supporting wellbeing and the local economy

**Strategic actions**
- Adopt the principle of no-net loss of biodiversity within the planning process and require compensatory provision for unavoidable impacts on biodiversity.
- Maximise the opportunity for habitat enhancement and restoration within development schemes eg. mineral development in the Avon Valley.
- Support the implementation of green infrastructure strategies outside the New Forest to minimise the potential impacts of recreational pressure on the national park.
- Ensure high standards of green infrastructure in new development.
- Take account of studies and strategies designed to guide the planning process on biodiversity matters eg. Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project (recreational disturbance to birds) and Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy.
- Develop the use of developer contributions to support conservation management, including the mitigation of recreational pressure.
- Maintain high standards of environmental impact assessment including rigorous assessment in accordance with the Habitat Regulations for any development that may have a potential impact on sites or species of international importance for biodiversity.
- Continue to work with developers and their agents to support their understanding of requirements for biodiversity.

### Data and information

**Objectives**
- Up-to-date information on the biodiversity of the New Forest and the State of Biodiversity reported
- Appropriate monitoring of plans and strategies influencing the natural environment
- Information on biodiversity accessible to the public and local communities and available for education and research
- Integrated data management systems supporting efficient access and use of data.
Nature in the New Forest: action for biodiversity
New Forest National Park Authority

### Strategic actions

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<tr>
<th>NatureConsil – June 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic actions</strong></td>
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### Growing a green economy

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<th><strong>Objectives</strong></th>
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<td>• Business and industry demonstrating corporate responsibility for the natural environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A land-based economy that maintains the natural environment of the New Forest</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Green tourism where recreational impacts on the quality of the New Forest are mitigated</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strategic actions</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continue to provide support for commoning including the Verderers HLS Scheme, support for affordable housing, maintenance and provision of back-up grazing and review of the recommendations of the New Forest Commoning Review</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review the potential to develop markets for products from sustainable land management eg. woodfuel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review the potential to award brands for local produce that involve conservation management eg beef from conservation grazing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continue to support diversification of land-based industry which will help support the viability of land management practices that sustain the natural environment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raise awareness within business and industry of the benefits of adopting measures that demonstrate corporate responsibility for the environment and how to contribute to the conservation of the natural environment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Work with Local Nature Partnerships to engage business</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review the potential for income derived from tourism to help support the management and in particular the mitigation of recreational impact</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**LEADER / Sustainable Development Fund??**
# Reconnecting people and nature

## Objectives
- Nature accessible to all
- Nature used to support mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Local communities and individuals engaged in looking after and enjoying the natural environment
- School children learning outside the classroom

## Strategic actions
- Develop and support initiatives for public and private health providers to use the natural environment to improve mental and physical health
- Participate in the work of the Hants and Wight LNP and Wiltshire and Swindon LNP to promote the use of the nature in public health provision
- Identify communities with particular health needs and develop programmes to increase access to nature
- Continue to develop opportunities for volunteering in the management of the natural environment
- Engage local communities in landscape scale conservation projects and inspire and support community based conservation activity
- Continue to use the New Forest National Park Educators’ Forum to develop opportunities and support for outdoor education
- Continue to actively engage the public and schools in the recording of wildlife eg. Bioblitz
- Promote awareness of the environment of the New Forest to visitors of the National Park, to encourage public interest in the natural environment and involvement with nature
- Implement the New Forest National Park Recreation Strategy to facilitate enjoyment of the natural environment, while providing for mitigation of recreational pressures

## Governance and monitoring
- Build on existing partnership work and support for a biodiversity action plan for the New Forest, and in particular the ‘Growing the Forest Partnership’, to establish a forum for developing and overseeing the landscape scale and integrated approach to biodiversity set out in this plan
- Identify detailed actions and priorities for delivery using the strategic action framework provided by this plan.
- Identify targets to steer and monitor the effectiveness of action
- Report progress on implementation of action, including reports to Defra as part of their national framework for monitoring progress against national targets for biodiversity to 2020
- Work in partnership with the Hants and Wight LNP and Wiltshire and Swindon LNP

## Appendices – to follow