

NFNPA 553 /18

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 12 JULY 2018**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 22 March 2018. The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Aiming for Excellence' themes from the 2018-21 Business Plan, summarised below:

Protect	Enjoy	Prosper
<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Protecting and growing the natural capital across the National park Landscape, connecting with surrounding areas to ensure habitats and wildlife are sustainable.▪ Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with the National Park, promoting high quality design and environmental net gain.▪ Conserving the historic and built heritage; supporting local culture with continued focus on commoning.	<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Helping more people to understand and value the things that make the New Forest National Park unique and special.▪ Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park.▪ Facilitating a partnership approach to managing recreation to achieve a net gain for both the working and natural landscape as well as for the recreational experience.	<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy where natural capital is an integral component of doing business.▪ Promoting connectivity across the National Park through sustainable transport and information and communication technologies.▪ Supporting the social wellbeing and sustainability of New Forest Communities.
Aiming for Excellence		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Maintaining and enhancing a capable, motivated team that delivers high quality service.▪ Championing the National Park and brokering partnership to achieve collaboration for the benefit of the New Forest and its communities▪ Identifying new resources and using them alongside our existing resources, effectively and efficiently.		

Recommendation:

To note the report

Contact: Alison Barnes

Tel: 01590 646633, Email: alison.barnes@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Equality & Diversity Implications:

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.

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Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

This is the first of my reports in the new format of our new Business Plan 2018 – 2021 where our work under the themes of Protect, Enjoy and Prosper reflect Government's 25-Year Environment Plan. Central to both plans is a 'natural capital approach' – where the environment is at the heart of decisions about our communities and environment.

Our work for wildlife has taken great strides, with the Our Past Our Future Heritage Lottery Fund scheme reporting successes at the half way point of the four-year scheme. These have included 22 hectares of broadleaved woodland created at the National Trust's Foxbury site; 4km of hedgerows planted or restored and 4,400 days spent by volunteers on conservation and heritage projects across the scheme which is led by us with 10 other organisations.

The New Forest Land Advice service has helped 101 commoners submit their claims for rural payment for farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy. This is a very complicated process as commoning – which sustains the New Forest's protected habitats – does not fit the usual application process for farmers. The payments process is also online which creates difficulties for many who don't have internet access. This year we asked for voluntary donations for the service and 47 people contributed, raising £1,800.

In conjunction with the Freshwater Habitats Trust and Southern Water, projects to improve the River Beaulieu catchment are progressing and have received £15,000 from the Environment Agency to fund the partnership over the next year. Work includes helping landowners with practical improvements to the catchment areas, a programme of monitoring water quality by volunteers and a campaign encouraging local communities to reduce pollution.

We launched the joint Future Forest consultation with the Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group organisations, asking people for their views on 25 draft actions to protect the Forest and improve the visitor experience. The consultation is being promoted through stakeholders, on the ground with posters and leaflets, on websites, e-newsletters and social media and at the New Forest Show. The consultation ends on 12 August.

Helping people to discover why the Forest is special and how they can help care for it is an important part of our work. Over 700 students from 13 schools learnt about the New Forest National Park with the education team in the spring term. Meanwhile 56 schools have applied for a travel grant to help them with educational visits and over 1,400 pupils have already enjoyed learning with members of the Educators Forum thanks to a grant.

Three seasonal rangers have been working alongside our colleagues in the Forestry Commission, National Trust and Hampshire County Council to share messages about protecting the New Forest's special ground nesting birds. They spoke to over 1,200 people during 50 sessions at 20 different places across the Forest and contacted 23 user groups such as walkers, runners and horse-riders.

A new initiative to engage with dog owners this spring was 'Bark Ranger School' was launched to encourage dog owners to walk their pets responsibly in the Forest. Four weekly training sessions with a dog trainer/behaviourist looked at natural dog behaviours and suggested how fun activities can be used by owners to help manage their pets' walks responsibly. The sessions were well attended and received great feedback.

Rangers shared 'Caring for the Forest' messages with over 5,000 people, including over 150 people in schools and local communities who heard about the problem of marine plastics from the coastal ranger.

Three Travel Ambassadors, sponsored by South Western Railways, have started with us and will be based at Brockenhurst Station and the New Forest Centre during the operation of the New Forest Tour (7 July to 9 September), to help visitors find their way and travel car-free around the national park.

As always our staff are our greatest asset and it is important that we all understand the wider work of the Authority and how our jobs play a part. Our annual 'Discovery Days' for staff to widen their knowledge and spend time with colleagues and partners were led by our staff and those from partner organisations including the RSPB, New Forest Marque, Southampton University, Forestry Commission, Commoners Defence Association and Freshwater Habitats Trust. Topics included local food and produce, the new RSPB acquisition at Franchises Lodge, effective communication techniques, the work of the commoning community, historic research, recreation management and freshwater ecology. A total of 61 staff attended these days and feedback has been very good on how they highlight our work and how we work in partnership to deliver for the New Forest.

The future role of protected landscapes is being looked at in the Glover Review. An independent panel will look at how our iconic landscapes meet our needs in the 21st century – including whether there is scope for the current network of 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks to expand.

The review, led by writer Julian Glover, will also explore how access to these landscapes can be improved, how those who live and work in them can be better supported, and their role in growing the rural economy.

The announcement clarified that weakening or undermining their existing protections or geographic scope will not be part of the review, which will instead focus on how designated areas can boost wildlife, support the recovery of natural habitats and connect more people with nature.

We will be feeding into the review and there will be a visit from panel members in the coming months so we will have the opportunity to present all the good work of ourselves and our partners in the New Forest and our aspirations and hopes for its future.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper' objectives from the 2018-21 Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the first page. In addition, a fourth section, 'Aiming for Excellence', summarises those activities that support and contribute overall to all our work, and the final section lists Members' activities and events.

1 Protect

1.1 **Protecting and growing the natural capital across the National Park landscape, connecting with surrounding areas to ensure habitats and wildlife are sustainable**

Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Landscape Partnership Scheme

Now the Scheme is half way through we have undertaken a mid-term evaluation. As well as considering whether the projects are meeting their targets, the review also gathered information from partners and stakeholders to 'tell the story' behind the quantitative reporting.

The review recognises the difference that volunteering has made and recommends that the overall approach should be maintained, with an emphasis on attracting, retaining and growing the volunteer resource. The Scheme will explore the possibility of self-sustaining volunteer groups, how to build the capacity of volunteers to take on leadership roles and options for resourcing coordination of volunteering beyond the life of the Scheme.

The review recommends a refocussing of efforts on engaging with the New Forest Neighbours audience in order to ensure that the Partnership's aspirations of engaging with and influencing a wider audience are met. It also recommends that the second half of the delivery should focus on legacy to identify overlaps and synergy between projects in terms of the work they need to do to secure legacy, and what the opportunities might be to combine legacy preparation activities across projects and for successful relationships to continue after the 'glue' of HLF funding ceases. Board members will attend a legacy workshop to look specifically at these issues in the autumn.

The Board members are keen to start to consider future partnership working and will be checking the level of internal support for a partnership initiative within their individual organisations and for an initial meeting to discuss the potential of such a partnership as well as its key objectives.

The review also highlights that some excellent outcomes are now beginning to be seen with positive benefits for the natural and built heritage, people and communities. Most projects are on track to achieve their targets with a few having made minor changes as the work has progressed that have been agreed by the Board and HLF. An infographic has been produced which highlights some key achievements of the last two years. A fifth OPOF Newsletter has been produced which provides updates on some of the 21 projects in the Scheme.

Key highlights over the last few months include the following:

- Practical conservation tasks have been taking place over the winter period through many of the Restoring Lost Landscapes projects. This has involved contractors and volunteers clearing scrub and thinning trees etc. on a number of privately owned sites in order to improve the habitats and their conservation value. In particular the Better Boundaries project has now achieved its aim to restore or create 4km of boundary features, such as hedgerows. The project has worked with landowners on nine land holdings within the Western Escarpment to

create these habitat corridors for wildlife which enhance the landscape character of the New Forest farmland.

- National Trust have created 22ha of broadleaved woodland at Foxbury and built timber cabins and an accessible toilet to encourage better engagement of school and other groups.
- Through the provision of courses, 300 people have better knowledge or skills to repair and look after historic buildings.
- Installation of replacement trail markers and seed sculptures at Blackwater will encourage people to experience the Forest through touching the tactile sculptures and discovering the health and wellbeing benefits of time spent in this special area.
- Five experienced commoners have mentored 19 new or young commoners and passed on their knowledge and skills about commoning in the New Forest.
- 4400 days have been spent by volunteers on a number of conservation and heritage projects across the Scheme.
- First wild play site has been opened at Holbury Manor Woods in partnership with Fawley Parish Council. Second site is nearing completion in Sway.
- Year 2 apprentice rangers (Martin Meaker and Peter Dovey) have worked with a number of ranger teams across the Forest and have received more formal training at Kingston Maurwood College. Both are really enjoying the work and have been a great asset to the New Forest National Park Authority and our partner organisations.

At the beginning of the Scheme there was a £130,000 shortfall in matched funding. The Board are now confident that all of this has now been secured. This will be kept under ongoing review.

New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS)

The main focus of work for the advisors since March has been assisting commoners with their Basic Payment Scheme forms. BPS is the rural payment farmers get to support their businesses under the Common Agricultural Policy and applications are annual with a May deadline each year. The system of claiming funds in the New Forest is complicated because commoners are not only claiming on the land they manage on their holdings but can also claim on the common land if they have livestock turned out. In addition, due to complications with administration of payments on commons throughout the country, some commoners are still waiting for funds due to them since 2015. The NFLAS have played an integral part in supporting commoners to ensure they claim and receive the payments owed to them and work closely in partnership with the Rural Payments Agency to iron out the myriad of problems arising from this process.

This year NFLAS have assisted 101 commoners with their claims, mainly through 1:1 meetings. This year we asked for a voluntary donation. Forty seven contributed towards our time in this way and £1800 was raised.

Catchment Partnership

Our co-hosting with the Freshwater Habitats Trust has seen the following highlights during the period:

- Successfully securing £15,000 grant funding from the Environment Agency for the operation of the Catchment Partnership in 2018/19.
- Work to secure further funding from the Environment Agency for capital works to improve water quality in the Beaulieu and Sowley areas.
- Work with Southern Water and other local catchment partnerships to deliver a campaign to help local communities improve water quality, reduce pollution and discourage inappropriate disposal of items such as wet wipes in sewage systems. Work will be targeted in parts of the New Forest in autumn/winter 2018.

- Provision of a New Forest National Park staff Discovery Day.
- Delivery of practical improvements with landowners and monitoring of water quality continues successfully, either as core Catchment work or part of the Living Waters element of 'Our Past, Our Future'.

Evidence and Data

- We participated in a workshop with Southampton University to exchange ideas and develop partnerships around biological data and research. We are seeking to develop opportunities for researchers to agree and support research priorities in the Park
- We participated in a workshop with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) to develop the final stage of their bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for 'Snakes in the Heather' project. This builds on the successful work surveying the rare smooth snake the Authority has helped with since 2016 via funding from the Sustainable Community Fund and officer volunteer support
- We have agreed prioritisation of habitat survey and biological data management for this year with Wiltshire and Hampshire Biological Records Centres
- We attended a training workshop run by Buglife and the People's Trust for Endangered Species on the Noble chafer beetle which is the focus of conservation action as part of the national initiative 'Back from the Brink' due to its rarity. The New Forest is of interest as there have been records around Lyndhurst and the use of habitats here may differ from elsewhere in the UK. The first stage of survey work and research is being undertaken by volunteers this summer.

Supporting biodiversity through planning roles

- During the period (13 weeks between mid-March and mid-June) we received over 24 formal consultations in respect of NFNPA planning as well as other enquiries. A total of 76 applications were screened as having potential wildlife impacts. During the same period we received 50 consultations requests from NFDC as well as other requests for input to other cases. Over 80 applications were screened as having potential wildlife implications.
- There has been significant and ongoing input into larger developments such as Fawley Waterside and other major allocations during the period. We have also been engaged with partners and policy officers to address air quality impacts on wildlife sites in the Park and have received a report which has undertaken research into the issues.

RSPB Franchises Lodge

- At the March Authority meeting the Memorandum of Understanding was approved by members and signed by Alison Barnes CEO and on the same day by Mike Clarke, Chief Executive of the RSPB. The MoU details Partners' mutual understanding of the NFNPA's objectives and what it needs to achieve in return for contributing to the acquisition of the land at Pimlico.
- The MoU covers the acquisition of the land at Pimlico for the Reserve by the RSPB and partially funded by the NFNPA. The funding is being used by the RSPB to help them purchase the land (the NFNPA will not hold any title to the land or any part thereof).
- The MoU also covers continuing partnership working on the Reserve.
- Communication with local people has been the main focus at the site since March. This has taken place in the form of public meetings at local pubs and guided walks on the reserve. We have supported the site manager at these events. In addition we were involved in two events to welcome over 100 internal RSPB staff and council members to the reserve. This gave us the opportunity to explain our roles as partners in the acquisition and ongoing

management of the site and to ensure they were given an overview about the New Forest area and how the new reserve fits into it.

- We have also worked with the RSPB to arrange site familiarisation visits for NPA members and staff.

National Grid Visual Impact Provision (VIP)

National Grid have continued to investigate the feasibility of their preferred route for the potential undergrounding of the high voltage pylon line that runs across Hale Purlieu. Parish Councils local to Hale Purlieu held several meetings in April and May to discuss National Grid's preferred route. Local residents have set up a group to oppose the preferred route (the Protect Hale Purlieu Movement).

On 6 June, National Grid held a Stakeholder Reference Group meeting at Lyndhurst Community Centre to discuss progress on their investigations into the preferred route and to seek advice from the attendees at the meeting as to what further information would be required for the Environmental Impact Assessment that will form part of the planning application that National Grid expect to submit towards the end of 2018.

At the request of local Parish Councils, National Grid held a meeting at Mannington electricity sub-station (near Three Legged Cross, Ringwood) on 19 June to answer detailed queries from Parish Councils and from the Protect Hale Purlieu Movement. The statutory bodies were also in attendance to respond to queries where appropriate (Natural England, National Trust, National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Verderers).

National Grid will be holding a series of public information sessions over the summer period as follows;

Saturday 14 July Turf Hill Forestry Commission car park 10am to 4pm

Wednesday 18 July Hale Village Hall 2pm to 8pm

Thursday 19 July Redlynch Village Hall 2pm to 8pm

Saturday 21 July Turf Hill FC car park 10am to 4pm

National Grid will have a stand at the New Forest show in July to inform visitors to the show about the proposed undergrounding, with National Grid staff on hand to answer specific queries.

Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) programmes.

The LEI Expression of Interest application made to National Grid for funding of habitat improvements for Landford Bog was successful and the NPA and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust were invited to make a full application which was submitted on 22 May with a total project cost of £37,000, 75% of which would be covered by the fund, the remaining 25% covered by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's donations and volunteer time. The decision from National Grid's LEI panel on the Landford Bog application is awaited.

The successful LEI fund for Warren's Copse, Holbury, is already being spent on the Wildplay area and also some tree works. The main part of the funding will be spent in early autumn on footpath works with improvements to existing culverts and timber bridges and steps. This work has been timed to avoid the bird breeding season.

Green Halo Partnership

A networking event for Green Halo Partners was held at Solent University on June 5th, World Environment Day. The event considered the implications of the 25 Year Environment Plan for the work of the Green Halo Partnership and actions that individual partners can take to help work towards the objectives of the Plan.

In August we will be hosting a visit by Defra's Director for Natural Environment Policy which will provide an important opportunity to demonstrate how we are facilitating much of the government's environmental policy through the work of the Green Halo Partnership.

Natural capital is at the core of Government thinking on the environment, as evidenced by the 25 Year Environment Plan and the recent Health and Harmony consultation on food, farming and the environment. The Green Halo Partnership is helping to bring this thinking to a wide audience, particularly rural land owners and managers. Alison Barnes will be sharing a platform with the chair of the Natural Capital Committee, Dieter Helm when she presents the Green Halo as a case study at a Savills sponsored event in London on 4 July.

1.2 Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with the National Park, promoting high quality design and environmental net gain.

Development Management

We received 191 applications in the period 22 March to 27 June and in the same period determined 188 applications with an approval rate of 82%. The team are continuing to respond to a number of significant proposals, in particular those relating to Fawley Waterside.

We have now received a start date for the Lyndhurst Park Hotel appeal and a six day public inquiry is scheduled to take place in October. We are awaiting confirmation on the final dates from the Planning Inspectorate.

Eleven appeal decisions have been received since the last meeting; four dismissed and seven allowed or allowed with conditions. The number of appeals allowed by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) is of concern and in one particular case, where an Inspector misapplied a cornerstone local plan policy, it has been agreed that the Authority should challenge this decision through the courts. At its meeting in June, the Planning Committee further resolved that a letter should be sent to the Chief Executive of PINS expressing the Authority's concerns about the inconsistency in some appeal decisions and the constant reference to the Authority as 'the Council'.

On a more positive note, a customer satisfaction survey undertaken at the end of May revealed that 84% of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the Authority's planning service. Although there was a smaller number of respondents than in previous years, the results were nonetheless pleasing and an increase from 79% since the last survey in 2013.

Enforcement and Trees

Since March we have received 76 new allegations about breaches and served seven Enforcement Notices directed against the most harmful breaches of planning control. We have also resolved 81 investigations through the grant of planning permission or the negotiated removal or amendment of unauthorised development (or upon investigation it was concluded to not be a breach of planning control). This is a high volume, particularly as there is currently a

vacancy on the Enforcement team – recruitment for a replacement team member is now underway. Following attendance at the Royal Courts of Justice earlier in the year, where we secured an injunction to compel the owners of land to comply with two Enforcement Notices, we can report that those Notices have now been complied with which brings to an end a three year series of flagrant planning breaches.

We have registered a very high volume of tree work applications for the National Park and surrounding New Forest District areas at 337 since March. We have also made 12 Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees of high amenity value that were otherwise under threat from new development or inappropriate works.

Policy

Following the final 6-week public consultation held earlier this year, the Authority's draft Local Plan, supporting documents and all of the representations received were formally submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in mid-May 2018. Two Planning Inspectors have subsequently been appointed to assess whether the draft Local Plan is 'sound' and the Examination hearing dates have been provisionally timetabled for November 2018. We have also appointed an experienced Programme Officer to oversee the Examination process and he will act as the main point of contact between the appointed Inspectors, the National Park Authority and all of those who have submitted representations on the final draft Local Plan.

Following endorsement at the April Planning Committee meeting, we submitted our response to the Government's proposed updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) in May 2018. Our consultation response welcomes some aspects of the proposed revisions (including guidance on viability in planning and the recognition of the protection afforded to National Parks); while raising concerns regarding other aspects (including the proposals for 'entry-level homes'). We also input into the collective National Parks England response to the Government's consultation and understand that the final version of the revised NPPF is due to be published before the end of July 2018.

1.3 Conserving the historic and built heritage; supporting local culture with continued focus on commoning.

Community led projects

The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group – made up of representatives of the seven town and parish councils within the Conservation Area – met in April 2018. Discussions focused on the potential use (where justified) of Article 4 Directions to provide control over incremental changes affecting the character of the Conservation Area; and future work on the issue of sign clutter and the design of highway works in the Conservation Area. The updated Western Escarpment Conservation Area Action Plan 2018 – 2023 was endorsed at the Authority meeting in June 2018 and will guide the work of the group over the next few years.

Following our highly successful WWII oral history work a drive to bring together oral historians across the New Forest has begun as part of the Heritage on my Doorstep project. An oral history review of past, present and future plans of different groups was conducted with the additional offer of OH training by NFNPA Oral History Team. The offer of training was taken up by three groups/organisations with the first session for Fordingbridge Museum at the beginning of June.

'... a splendid Oral History Training Day... informative, well thought out and presented, and gave us an enormous amount of useful information on which to build. You were patient beyond belief,

especially with those such as I who find the IT content of everything a mite taxing! We are very grateful for the excellent comprehensive ring binder training manuals which will be invaluable as we start putting our newly acquired knowhow into practise plus all the other hand-outs you gave us.' Philippa (Fordingbridge Museum Manager)

Design advice and guidance

The team has been busy with design and heritage advice on planning application across the Park and District Council areas. In addition to the work on heritage matters the team also comments on design issues on other sites in particular larger schemes and those in sensitive locations. Fawley Waterside has taken up quite a bit of time and the team have been working on the emerging masterplan with the current site owner and his design team. Several schemes for new housing and affordable housing developments have received design advice and guidance over the first quarter.

In addition to this advice the team continues to run the design awards which assists in raising the profile of good design across the New Forest National Park. This illustrates the Authority's commitment to good design and recognises applicants that have put in additional effort to improve the design and appearance of planning applications.

The SLA with the District Council to provide building design and conservation advice was renewed for a further year at the beginning of April.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Helping more people to understand and value the things that make the New Forest National Park unique and special.

Education

A busy term has seen 724 students from 13 schools learning about the New Forest National Park with the Education team. The majority were once again from primary schools; we have seen a fall in the number of secondary schools visiting the Forest to carry out GCSE fieldwork since the changes to the exam requirements, instead remaining close to home and carrying out fieldwork in the vicinity of school. However, several of the schools we have worked with over recent years have chosen the NPA team to lead their only fieldwork visit of the year because we have been able to advise the staff and adapt sessions to fit the new curriculum, and because, as one teacher commented, "If they only have one experience of fieldwork it needs to be memorable, and your sessions always are".

The next step is to persuade schools to bring Key Stage 3 students to the National Park to learn fieldwork techniques before the pressures of the exam years. We're delighted that two schools have already started to do this.

As always, the Travel Grant is of enormous benefit in enabling school groups to experience the special qualities of the National Park first hand. 56 schools have applied, with more applications coming in every day, and 1402 pupils of all ages have already enjoyed their learning with the Educators Forum thanks to the grant.

A cold wet Easter week saw the team supporting the New Forest Centre with children's activities at some very busy Discovery Days; over 400 people visited on one particularly inclement day.

Fortunately, the sun smiled on a very successful Wild Play at the Beach Day just one week later, with many families staying the whole day to enjoy the play activities.

Public and community events / rangers

Our three seasonal rangers got off to a flying start, working alongside our colleagues in the Forestry Commission, National Trust and Hampshire County Council to share messages about protecting the New Forest's special ground nesting birds.

The seasonal team spoke to over 1,200 people during 50 sessions at 20 different places across the Forest and contacted 23 user groups such as walkers, runners and horse-riders. They also led two well attended nightjar walks and conducted 70 surveys on perception and behaviour in relation to the 'Keep to the Main Tracks' message.

A new initiative to engage with dog owners this spring was Bark Ranger School, organised by the people and wildlife ranger with a dog trainer/behaviourist. Four weekly training sessions looked at natural dog behaviours and suggested how fun activities can be used by owners to help manage their pets' walks responsibly. The sessions were well attended and received great feedback via social media from attendees.

Another well received event was an owl pellet dissection session for the New Forest SCARF group (Supporting Special Children and their Relatives and Friends). Afterwards the leader said: 'Some of the young people were completely absorbed...Thanks so much, we would love to do it again some time.'

Easter is when we get busy with outdoor events, and this year was no exception, in spite of the cold and wet weather. Rangers supported the opening of Holbury Manor wild play site and also ran activities at the successful Wild Play Day at the Beach. We were out and about at numerous events across the Forest that ranged from big country shows and village fairs to walks, talks, family fun days and library visits.

During this spring period we shared 'Caring for the Forest' messages with over 5,000 people, including over 150 individuals in schools and local communities who heard about the problem of marine plastics – so often in the news at the moment - from the coastal ranger.

We also joined forces for 'roadshows' with Forestry Commission rangers to tackle feeding and petting of livestock and to complement the work done by seasonal rangers to protect ground nesting birds.

Communications

Our residents' newspaper Park Life was published, with features including ground-nesting birds, the new Franchises Lodge nature reserve, the future of farming post-Brexit and volunteering. Distribution is in the Lymington Times with 15,000 additional copies printed for our distribution at events and community outlets.

We prepared the marketing campaign for the New Forest Tour with the bus company MoreBus.

In conjunction with the Recreation Management Steering Group partners, we launched the Future Forest consultation on draft actions for managing recreation. Communications work involved web pages, an online survey, press releases, newspaper ads, messaging for staff

briefings, posters, leaflets, New Forest Show exhibition panels, briefings for stakeholders, and social media campaigns.

We launched a fundraising campaign to renovate the Lepe Loop footpath, with Hampshire County Council and the Friends of Lepe as part of a nationwide footpath fundraising campaign involving all the national parks.

We organised the nominations, shortlisting and judging visits to entrants in our annual awards scheme with the CLA, which recognise those going above and beyond in championing the Forest. The awards are presented at the New Forest Show.

Work with National Parks England, NPUK and National Parks Partnerships have included the launch of an accord with mobile phone operators; features in the Guardian magazine and online about walks in the Forest, in conjunction with corporate partner Columbia; and preparations for National Parks Week in July.

We teamed up with Go New Forest's to ensure messages about caring for the forest are embedded across the tourist website www.newforest.co.uk while our website directs people to their section on finding accommodation.

Promotion of the Our Past, Our Future Heritage Lottery Fund scheme has included a press release on the commoners' mentoring scheme; an infographic capturing the highlights of the scheme at the half-way point; a newsletter for partners and stakeholders; the launch of a wild play area at Holbury and World War II collections being transferred to the New Forest Knowledge website.

Other projects promoted this quarter include PedAll; the Building Design Awards winners; a Date with Nature raptorcam and events at the Reptile Centre and the annual Open Art competition with the New Forest Centre.

2.2 Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park

Interpretation projects

We have continued to meet and liaise with staff and Trustees of the Ninth Centenary Trust to prepare a draft MoA to underpin financial support from the NPA for the New Forest Centre. We aim to complete this process in the autumn in time for approval by the Authority in October.

We have been working on the New Forest Show content to support the Future Forest consultation. We have also been supporting the CDA in leading the Commoners Voices interpretation including a presence at the Show and also the exhibition at the New Forest Centre which will run in the Autumn.

Historic routes

The preliminary desk based research on over 600 rights of way is now complete (bar three parishes), the initial sift of those routes is now done, this has reduced to total routes to progress to around 300. During this initial sift 24 draft trail proposals have been produced. The members of the Steering Group have been asked to comment on the sifted rights of way and the draft trails. Volunteer training in the field work is due to start on Monday 2 July with teams going out to start assessing the condition of rights of way in Totton and Netley Marsh.

Health & Wellbeing

We have been talking with Hampshire Art for Recreation and Therapy about a programme for young people from Totton College at Foxbury in the autumn.

Walking for health has had a successful second quarter; we are awaiting figures of participation. We also have assisted with First Aid Training for walkers, as well as expanding the programme to include dementia walks and support of those living with dementia to attend walks, including at this year's walking festival

Volunteering

Since the beginning of the OPOF scheme 4,400 days have been spent by volunteers. In the last quarter this has included Himalayan Balsam pulling, water quality monitoring, historic routes research, archaeological survey, and archival research for New Forest Knowledge and tree maintenance.

The volunteers working on the Biodiversity Monitoring project have been carrying out surveys of sites that have been restored or enhanced through OPOF. A whole range of surveys have been under-taken, including birds, bats, butterflies, bees, dragonflies, damselflies, botanical and hedgerow surveys. Many of the sites have not previously been surveyed, so the data collected not only helps us monitor changes on these sites but makes a valuable contribution to the species records for the New Forest, helping us understand what species are where.

A training session on butterfly and bumblebee survey took place at Testwood Lakes during May. Volunteering has also continued at the Date with Nature in the New Forest and Healthy Walks projects. The RSPB has started recruiting local volunteers at Franchises Lodge including many local naturalists who are starting to survey the site.

2.3 Facilitating a partnership approach to managing recreation to achieve a net gain for both the working and natural landscape as well as for the recreational experience

Recreation Management

All six organisations on the Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group (Forestry Commission, Natural England, Verderers, Hampshire County Council, NPA and New Forest District Council) supported the content of the joint consultation which is running from 18 June to 12 August. 25 draft actions to improve the management of recreation across and beyond the National Park are being proposed, along with examples of ways in which they could be delivered. Further work will be done during the autumn to refine and add detail to the actions, and gain agreement from specific organisations to lead particular projects. The consultation is being widely publicised through multiple channels. It will also feature in the NPA's stand at the New Forest Show, and we anticipate being joined, as last year, by staff from partner organisations.

We made representation to Natural England about the proposed route for the England Coast Path between Highcliffe and Calshot, highlighting parts of the route where we had concerns, or wanted reassurance that better alternatives do not exist. Issues included use of roads, potential disturbance to wildlife, establishment and maintenance costs the way in which 'spreading room' will be pictured on OS maps. There is likely to be a long delay before the route is decided. Meanwhile, we have recently been asked to advise on the next stretch of the route (Calshot to Gosport), part of which is within or close to the New Forest.

Educational campaigns

We facilitated a meeting of the Animal Accident Reduction Group in April. Overall, the autumn/winter campaign was agreed to have been positive – and the number of accidents fell back to ‘normal’ levels after a very poor autumn/winter last year even though the number of animals depastured has risen. There is ongoing work to improve static, changing and electronic signage, use of road markings and communication materials. We also hosted and contributed to a meeting convened by Defra staff and attended by people from various parts of the UK where commoners’ animals are vulnerable to road traffic accidents. The New Forest has a more coordinated and effective approach to reducing accidents than elsewhere – although of course there is much more to do.

Participants in UK Cycling Events’ spring sportive on 14 and 15 April were required to wear rear numbers and a range of other measures were put in place to help reduce impacts. We heard of very few complaints although there were issues around Sway and Pilley where road closures due to emergency gas repairs and a burst water pipe necessitated changes to the planned route.

We convened the Joint Litter Working Group in April. Although hampered by snow, the Spring Clean and subsequent community litter picks were successful. We are working with partners to see how it would be possible to more effectively monitor the amounts of litter as well as generate new ideas to reduce it.

We plan to agree the wording for a draft Professional Dog Walkers’ Charter at the next Dogs Forum, and invite dog walking businesses operating in the New Forest to contribute their ideas at an event in August. Our list of such companies now exceeds 75. The approach will be to discuss with them how they can demonstrate their commitment to the Forest environment, other people and their dogs, and the welfare of the dogs they walk, but we also need to understand (with the Police, Dog Wardens and Forestry Commission staff) what alternative enforcement measures are possible and appropriate.

As reported above, rangers and seasonal rangers have spent much of the spring promoting responsible walking and dog walking on the heathlands to reduce disturbance to ground nesting birds. We understand that the number of pairs of curlews has again been about 40, with at least some evidence of breeding success. We also helped to inform BBC’s Countryfile coverage of the range of pressures faced by curlews in the Forest.

New Forest Access Forum

The Access Forum met at and had a guided tour of Lepe Country Park in June. Among other updates, it considered the research being planned by Test Valley Borough Council on behalf of several local planning authorities. This is driven by the need to understand how people in new housing could affect the designated areas of the New Forest, but will be of wider significance as strategies for managing recreation are developed.

We are working with the Forum to recruit new members (to represent land owners, equestrians and people with disabilities) and to ensure there is a good spread of other interests and experience.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy where natural capital is an integral component of doing business.

New Forest Marque

Jane Overall has stepped down as Chair for New Forest Produce Limited, after 3 years of dedicated work to keep the New Forest Marque moving forward. Thanks in large part to Jane's efforts the Marque has a stable membership, a 3 year business plan and developing marketing strategy. Phil Marshall was elected as the new Chair at the AGM in April.

Sustainable Tourism

In May we hosted a Go New Forest Discovery Day for Tourism businesses focussing on the wildlife of the National Park. We visited the New Forest Reptile Centre and saw the Date with Nature partnership in action. We were also guided by a New Forest Keeper onto the Open Forest to think about ground nesting birds and how we can help them.

We attended the first Go New Forest advisory group and are helping to ensure key messages about the Forest's special qualities are embedded in its website, and featured in its publications and other communications.

We have engaged a consultant to assess by how much the oft-quoted figure of 13.5 million day visits to the New Forest may have changed since 2005 when this was calculated. The plan is to apply existing datasets for key 'drivers of change' (e.g. for traffic, tourism, population change etc.) to bring the figure up to date and predict future changes.

New Forest Trust

The Trusts' website has been revamped and updated to highlight the projects that it supports. The 'Love the Forest' grant scheme which, helps distribute moneys raised from local businesses has been brought in house and two members from the businesses that support the scheme have been added to the steering group.

3.2 Promoting connectivity across the National Park through sustainable transport and information and communication technologies.

Sustainable Transport

We have recruited three Travel Ambassadors who started on 25 June and will be based at Brockenhurst Station and the New Forest Centre during the operation of the New Forest Tour, 7 July to 9 September 2018. South Western Railways have sponsored the ambassadors again, providing 50% of the cost of running this service.

Following the decision by, Go South Coast, the operator of the Beach Bus to discontinue the full route, discussions have been ongoing with the bus company and a decision made to support the extension of an existing service route, the Bluestar 9 that currently covers Southampton-Langley Farm. The small subsidy will enable extra resources to support an increased frequency of the service. Instead of only six journeys per day to Lepe during previous summer seasons on

the old beach bus route, now there will be 15 every weekday, 13 on Saturdays and six on Sundays from Hythe to Lepe during the summer.

We have been carrying out driver training in advance of the New Forest Tour season and have been bus with other preparations for the Tour, including commentary amendments, guidebook, marketing and publicity.

3.3 Supporting the social wellbeing and sustainability of New Forest communities.

Affordable Housing

The planning application for two new affordable homes and a local heritage centre at Burley was submitted at the beginning of July. It is anticipated that this application will be reported to the Planning Committee on 18 September 2018. Meanwhile, the planning application for two new affordable commoners' dwellings at Rockford is due to be considered by the Planning Committee on 17 July 2018.

As part of the National Housing Federation's 'Rural Housing Week' (2 - 6 July 2018) we represented the HARA partnership at a Parliamentary Reception on 3 July 2018 to share ideas on how to best deliver rural affordable housing projects (based on our recent experience of undertaking the Bransgore Affordable Housing Scheme).

Sustainable Communities Fund

Funds of £9,945 have been agreed for three projects:

- Lyndhurst Parish Council will install a new cycle repair kit within the main public car park adjacent to a series of bike stands. The kit will be available for public use and enables cyclists to make small adjustments and repairs to their bikes using a range of tools as well as a pump and wheel holder.
- Bransgore Parish Council are planning to refurbish and restore the Grade II WWI memorial in Bransgore and improve its setting. Our funds will contribute towards replacing the existing concrete bollards with oak posts as it would have been originally designed, ensuring the setting is more in keeping with the landscape quality of the National Park.
- Minstead Study Centre will provide an inspirational, highly productive fruit and vegetable garden which will be used as a teaching resource for those visiting the centre through school visits as well as wider communities at weekends and school holidays. A gardener will work on developing the garden into a more productive space which can supply enough fresh produce for the needs of the centre, whilst also using this as a teaching resource to help visitors learn more about local food and the benefits of healthy organic produce, including ideas around the 'food footprint'. An outreach worker will take planting, gardening and food ideas out to schools and public events and bring audiences back into the centre to help them gain inspiration from the garden with a view to them developing their own. A key part of this is to advise schools on how they can set up their own school gardens and after-school gardening clubs. By the end of the project at least five school gardens will have been established. The site receives around 2500 children every year as well as an additional 1220 people who visit the centre through community courses, residential weekends and open days.

Reducing plastics

The Coastal Ranger engaged with over 150 people through community groups and litter picks about the issues of marine plastic. She led on additional school sessions and liaising with local businesses such as The New Forest Stand Up Paddle Boarding Company, parish councils and Surfers against Sewage. In June she worked with 60 students and staff from Priestlands School raising awareness of plastics on the marine environment as they litter pick along Hurst Spit and around the Castle as part of their activities week.

We are also liaising with other people who are working around the New Forest on plastics, collating and promoting projects such as SAS Plastic Free Lymington; Ban the Straw / Straw Amnesty; New Forest Transition Refill Project (free tap water refills); New Forest Marque; New Forest Show Straw Art Competition; Showing of the Plastic Ocean Film at Durlston Court, Steiner School and Southampton University.

4 Achieving Excellence

4.1 Maintaining and enhancing a capable, motivated staff team that delivers high quality services.

Human Resources

As at 28 June 2018 the total staff headcount was 93 or 81.07 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	FTE	Variation from previous report
Core funded	70*	– 2	60.43*	– 2.91
Funded by external projects	23	+ 6	20.64	+ 5.82
Total	93	+ 4	81.07	+ 2.91

*Of the core funded roles, 10 staff (8.92 FTEs) are working in shared services, 27 are part-time and two are on fixed-term contracts.

In the last four months we welcomed the following new staff:

Name	Job title	Contract type	How funded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emily Fergusson ▪ Kat Saleiko ▪ Heidi Staines 	Seasonal Assistant Ranger	Summer seasonal	Jointly funded by us, Camping in the Forest and the Forestry Commission
Kirstin Waite	Project Assistant – Records Management	Fixed-term	Core funded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diana Collett ▪ Daniel Hipkiss ▪ Agnes Kalauz 	Sustainable Travel Ambassador	Summer seasonal	Part project/grant funded, part reserves

We also welcomed Gemma Stride (Project Co-ordinator – Working Woodlands) who has joined us on a 13-month secondment from the Forestry Commission.

In the last few months we said goodbye to Pauline Megson (Building Design and Conservation Officer) who had been providing maternity cover and to two of our Planning Officers; Emma MacWilliam and Daniel Pape. We wish them well in their future ventures.

Recruitment is currently underway for:

Job title	Contract type	How funded
Planning Officer	Permanent	Core funded

Data Protection

The new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force on 25 May 2018. Staff training has been rolled out through ELMS, an e-learning programme and we have updated our Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice on our website, as well as refreshing many consents and privacy notices in all areas of our work. The process of conducting an authority wide information audit by department is underway and the new Project Assistant – Records Management who joined us on the 18 June will be key to taking this forward. A more detailed report will be considered by RAPC in September.

Freedom of Information

We received 47 requests for information between 1 April 2017 and 30 March 2018, which is one less than the same period last year. All but one were responded to within the statutory deadline, with the average response time being 13 working days.

In 51% of requests the information that was held was disclosed fully, with a further 23% of requests being disclosed with only minor redactions, the most common reason for withholding information was because the information was or contained the personal data of a third party. 17% percent of requests were for information which was not held by the NPA and the requester was redirected to the relevant public authority. Only 4 requests (9%) were withheld in full, all of them because the information was the personal data of third parties.

As in previous years the majority of requests (59%) related to the planning function including enforcement, trees and policy. We continue to receive a significant number of requests relating to how the Authority is managed in areas such as procurement, ICT, policies, finance etc.

Two requests, which were from the same requestor in relation to the 'Call for Sites' process, went through an internal review stage and were subsequently referred to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO determined that we could have provided the information that had been requested within 20 working days of the requests, but following the provision of further information to the ICO, we were not required to take any further action.

Complaints

We received 25 complaints last year, four of these were from one individual. All of the stage 2 complaints were responded to within our target of 20 working days, with the average response time of 14 working days. All but three were related to our planning work, including trees, enforcement and Planning Committee.

Only two of the complaints were upheld. Both of these complaints were regarding the service of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). A written apology was sent to both complainants.

Four complaints were referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), of which one was redirected back to us, because it had not already been through our complaints process, one was closed after initial enquiries and the other two were not investigated.

In addition to handling formal complaints Corporate Services also collate and record compliments, feedback and thanks received from our customers and the public. We have logged 12 compliments this year.

4.2 Championing the National Park and brokering partnership to achieve collaboration for the benefit of the New Forest communities.

Team New Forest

A successful programme of six 'Discovery Days' for staff have been run, led by staff from the NPA and from partner organisations, including the RSPB, New Forest Marque, Southampton University, Forestry Commission, Commoners Defence Association and Freshwater Habitats Trust. Topics included local food and produce, the new RSPB acquisition at Franchises Lodge, effective communication techniques, the work of the commoning community, historic research, recreation management and freshwater ecology. A total of 61 staff attended these days and feedback has been very good on how they highlight our work and how we work in partnership to deliver for the New Forest.

4.3 Identifying new resources and using them alongside our existing resources, effectively and efficiently.

ICT Services

The main focus for the team has been in progressing the introduction of a new records management system in Microsoft Office 365 to meet with GDPR requirements.

Work has commenced on the roll out of Microsoft Office 365 beginning with the Champions programme. An initial introductory meeting was held outlining the role of the champions and this was closely followed by 1:1 sessions with the Champions explaining in more depth the main work that needs to be carried out to enable the transition to the new records management system. Subsequent meetings will be arranged as required by both individuals and the project.

More workshops have been run to highlight useful features within Outlook. These have proved to be very successful, and we aim to continue running similar workshops to cover other areas of software and equipment. Additional telephone training is also underway.

A considerable amount of work has been carried out to replace the back-up system, allowing a critical upgrade to the back-up software. Patching and security continue to take very high priority.

5 Members

5.1 Some Members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events

- Planning Committee – 17 April
- Consultative Panel – 19 April
- Planning Committee – 15 May
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 4 June
- Consultative Panel – 7 June
- New Forest Access Forum – 11 June
- Forestry Commission Members Day – 12 June
- Planning Committee – 19 June
- Planning Tour – 4 July

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Committee – 17 July
- New Forest Show – 24/25/26 July
- Planning Committee – 21 August
- New Forest Access Forum – 3 September
- Resource, Audit and Performance Committee – 10 September
- Planning Committee – 18 September
- Standards Committee – 1 October
- Members Day – 10 October

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- BBC South interview, Franchises Lodge – 22 March
- BBC Wiltshire interview, Franchises Lodge – 23 March
- HIOW CX meeting – 23 March
- Behavioural Change training session – 27 March
- Forestry Commission National Accord teleconference – 5 April
- HLS Board – 11 April
- Meeting with training facilitator – 12 April
- RSA live-streamed talk – 12 April
- Meeting with Chief Executive Test Valley Borough Council – 13 April
- NPE Board meeting – 18 April
- Consultative Panel meeting – 19 April
- Walk to Burrard Monument – 20 April
- Intro meeting with National Trust General Manager, Mottisfont – 20 April
- Preview of Ancient Trees exhibition – 20 April
- NFA AGM – 21 April
- RSA live-streamed talk – 24 April
- HLS open afternoon and AGM – 25 April
- SE Quadrant meeting – 25 April
- Intro meeting with Strategic Rural Policing Inspector – 26 April
- Memorial Service for Ken Thornber – 26 April
- Picasso Exhibition – 3 May
- Meeting with Surrey Nature Partnership – 8 May
- CPRE meeting – 10 May
- Landscape Management Leadership Forum Video Conference – 11 May
- RAPC – 14 May
- ENPOG meeting – 16 May
- RSPB Council day and dinner – 18 May

- NPE / Forestry Commission meeting – 21 May
- Members Day – 22 May
- Leadership Group meeting – 24 May
- Consultative Panel agenda setting meeting – 24 May
- ELT Awayday – 25 May
- Members Day – 12 June
- Meeting with Bob Jackson – 12 June
- Meeting with Friends of Brockenhurst – 14 June
- St George's House Annual Lecture – 14 June
- Meeting with Desmond Swayne – 16 June
- Chief Executive's Performance Panel – 18 June
- National Parks / AONB teleconference – 19 June
- Meeting with Go New Forest – 26 June
- Meeting with Business South – 28 June
- Business South Board meeting – 28 June
- Testwood Lakes celebratory event – 29 June
- Opening of new Woodland Centre – 3 July
- Speaker at Savill's Natural Capital Seminar – 4 July
- Landscape Institute President's Reception – 4 July
- Meeting with Christchurch and East Dorset District Council – 5 July
- New Forest Centre 30 years celebrations – 6 July
- JNPOG – 9-10 July
- SE FWAC – 11 July

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- NPE Board meeting – 18 April
- Forest Farming Group – 30 April
- Meeting Chairman of Ninth Centenary Trust, Mary Montagu-Scott – 14 May
- Meeting with Official Verderer – 14 May
- Attended Verderers Court in Committee – 16 May
- RMS Steering Group – 29 May
- Meeting with Julian Lewis MP – 8 June
- Meeting with Desmond Swayne – 16 June
- NPE Video Conference – 18 June
- Meeting with Julian Glover, Chairman National Parks Review Panel – 5 July

6 Recommendation

To note the report.