Nature in the New Forest: action for biodiversity

New Forest National Park Authority

Produced in association with
NatureConsult Ltd
Poplars
Crawley
Winchester
Hampshire
SO21 2QE
http://www.natureconsult.co.uk

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1 Introduction

The New Forest is one of the most valuable areas for wildlife in Europe. It supports a rich and diverse complex of habitats and wildlife which are appreciated by large numbers of visitors and local people every year.

Biodiversity – the variety of natural life, is one of the New Forest's 'special qualities'. The special qualities are those that define the National Park, 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 is 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.(UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge UKNEA)

Maximising and valuing the services provided by nature is central to the sustainable management of the New Forest and to the national park aims 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/

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 (Welsh Government, 2012)*

About the action plan

What is the New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan?

This is the first action plan for biodiversity in the New Forest. It addresses both the New Forest National Park and the wider New Forest District Council area. It brings together information and collective aspirations for biodiversity and the work of many partners who already deliver outstanding nature conservation projects. In doing so it provides an evidence base to inform other important management plans and strategies relevant to the area and a tool to promote a process of positive partnership.

Whilst it has been approved by the New Forest National Park Authority to inform its own work, it is a plan for the National Park as a place and will only succeed through future partnership with all those who contribute actions to support biodiversity in the area. The plan and the associated web resources that will be developed alongside, provide a strategic foundation to prioritise and promote future work and will be supplemented by partnership work to produce more detailed annual action plans and implementation projects.

The Plan reflects 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.

Aims of producing 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 support an ongoing process 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 objectives and strategic actions outlined in this plan will require the identification of detailed action by partners and stakeholders which will be achieved by an ongoing process of cooperation and collaboration.

What the Plan is not

The plan does not seek to replace any of the other strategies and plans that relate to the natural environment of the New Forest. Rather the plan seeks to complement these, provide a reference source of information that can be used in the production of other strategies and act as a catalyst for partnership work to deliver action on the ground. The Plan is not a Supplementary Planning Document.

How the plan has been shaped

The New Forest National Park Authority has been working with partners and local communities to develop this action plan and an initial draft was produced in 2010 based on liaison with a Working Group of local organisations and experts. The public and local organisations were invited to give their views on the plan and their aspirations for conserving biodiversity during the spring and summer of 2010. A number of roadshows were held within the National Park and District areas to support online public consultation. Input from Forest organisations was also promoted by inviting feedback via Parish Council meetings, local nature conservation group meetings and the New Forest Consultative Panel.

What the Plan contains

Significant shifts in national biodiversity policy have been reflected in the structure of plan whilst retaining local views. Strategic action in this plan is divided according to key themes of the Natural Environment White Paper (The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature. HMSO (2011):

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

The plan is in five sections, ***National ambitions local action*** provides background on international, national and local commitments and activity relating to biodiversity.

Biodiversity in the New Forest summarises the important wildlife features of the area using simple geographical areas and helps to start the process with partners of defining species of particular importance or local character that could form the basis for future agreed action.

Securing the value of nature in the New Forest establishes objectives and strategic objectives for:

- ***Protecting and improving our natural environment***
- ***Growing a green economy***
- ***Reconnecting people and nature***

The New Forest National Park Authority is initially coordinating this action plan and associated partnership process 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.

Governance and measuring success outlines proposals for developing partnerships to help develop and agree plans of action to achieve the strategic objectives, oversee and steer projects and provide a Forum for local involvement.

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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 action[1]. The United Nations has declared 2011-2020 the ***UN Decade for Biodiversity*** to promote the vision of living in harmony with nature[2].
>
> ***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 year[4].

[1] The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity includes 5 goals and 20 'Aichi Targets' http://www.cbd.int/sp/
[2] http://www.cbd.int/2011-2020/
[3] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/2020.htm
[4] http://www.teebweb.org/

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***[5] 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***[6] (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***[7] 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[8]. 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

[5] http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/index.htm
[6] http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/
[7] http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/
[8] http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/08/19/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020/

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]. The Framework confirms that "the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations.... and should be given weight in National Parks".

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. 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 that will work together in the counties of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and is being led by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

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 called Link 2 Nature that will drive forward links between the natural environment, society and the economy.

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

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.

[9] http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/nppf
[10] See section 165 and section 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework

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.

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.

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3 Biodiversity of the New Forest

The biodiversity of the New Forest can be broadly divided into 4 geographical areas

- 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.

Open Forest

Central, and occupying most of the National Park, is the Crown Land of the New Forest. This 'Open Forest' area, 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 zone is Crown Land managed by the Forestry Commission. Hampshire County Council and the National Trust are also important landowner managers. 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 lapwing. 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. 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.

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 mixed habitat of enclosed 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 largely farmland and includes back up grazing land for the Forest, particularly to support stock in the winter. The area 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 local wildlife sites (such Hampshire's Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation or SINCs). The current status and distribution of such habitats is poorly understood and they are of conservation concern. Woodland and trees in the fringe support a rich fauna of birds, bats – including the rare Barbastelle and Bechstein's bats – and invertebrates including several woodland butterflies of conservation concern.

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 and, grey wagtail.

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 important populations of Atlantic salmon, sea trout and brown trout as well as 27 other species of fish. 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 series of large water bodies created by gravel extraction, part of which is a nature reserve. -The lakes attract 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 eelgrass beds support a rich invertebrate fauna and provide a feeding resource for wintering and migrant waterfowl.

Vegetated shingle is a nationally rare habitat that supports scarce plant species such as Little robin 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 woodlands 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.

The following summary is based upon analysis of the most recently available data. Future analysis will be used to update website resources linked to this document on the New Forest National Park Authority website.

Habitats of principal importance in the New Forest - Hampshire

	Total area of priority habitat (ha)	% of area of NFNP or NFD
New Forest National Park (NFNP)	29,099	51.36%
New Forest District (NFD - outside the NFNP)	5,236	21.30%
Total	34,335	

Source: Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre

Nature conservation designations in the New Forest

	Statutory designations*		Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation	
	Area (ha)	% of area of NFNP / NFD	Area (ha)	% of area of NFNP / NFD
New Forest National Park	32,262	56.95%	3,018	5.33%
New Forest District	2,519	10.28%	2,401	9.67%
Total	34,781		5,419	

* 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.
Source: Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre

Habitat condition

It is estimated that in 2011 48% of the 375 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation within the New Forest National Park and 37% of the 221 SINCS in the New Forest District outside the Park area 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).

Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (2011)				
	New Forest National Park		New Forest District (outside the NFNP)	
Condition	Area (ha)	% of area	Area (ha)	% of area
Favourable	10,955.0	34%	110.0	4.1%
Unfavourable recovering	20,769.9	64.5%	2,557.7	95.5%
Unfavourable no change	154.8	0.5%	-	-
Unfavourable declining	307.5	1.0%	9.3	0.3%
Source: Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre				

Species

It is no surprise that the New Forest with its richness of habitats and unique land management heritage hosts a diverse range of species that are rare, uncommon and declining elsewhere in the UK and Western Europe. As well as rare status, species may be associated with the New Forest due to the area being a particular important stronghold for commoner species. To many naturalists the fame of the New Forest is associated with special species such as the New Forest cicada, wild gladiolus, tadpole shrimp, smooth snake, nail fungus and Hampshire purslane, as well as its habitats.

Section 41 (S41) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The S41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

There are 943 species of principal importance included on the S41 list. These are the species found in England which were identified as requiring action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and which continue to be regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. The Secretary of State in consultation with Natural England keeps the S41 list under review and so these are reproduced within the website resources associated with this Plan rather than an appendix. It is thought that 40% of these priority species are found within Hampshire and the New Forest.

The Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan identified 50 notable species which local organisations and experts regarded as meriting special regard. The richness of the New Forest is illustrated by 41 of these being found within the area. Data on the status of these species is updated annually by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre in their monitoring reports.

There is no agreed separate priority list of species for the New Forest, indeed many experts would caution against promoting single species as their conservation in the New Forest relies more on managing supporting habitats on a landscape scale than individual 'gardening' which is likely to adversely affect other conservation interests.

However there is a need to keep special species under review and take opportunities to promote engagement and conservation activity based around such 'champion' species. Through the future partnership work associated with this plan, partners will be engaged to review and propose locally important species. The website resources associated with the plan will present the results of this work. During the process of producing this report the following examples of champion species have been suggested by local stakeholders and experts:

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. It highlights that 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 or forestry 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, coast and water 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, coast and water 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 action 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 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 benefit 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 due to its importance has received a considerable amount of external funding 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. Managing pressures such as human activities requires areas outside of the core forest to help provide offsetting functions.

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 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 ; economic enterprise such as management of woods for wood fuel can support the management of the natural environment.

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. 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 (Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network. Lawton (2010)). This 'network' approach to land management will help species move to more suitable areas and adapt to changing conditions. The principles of enhancing, restoring and connecting 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

*Reproduced from England Biodiversity Strategy Climate Change Adaptation Principles: Conserving biodiversity in a changing climate. (DEFRA 2008)

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 and embrace significant areas of land with potential for habitat enhancement and re-connection. The areas have been identified using biological and environmental criteria alone and so it is acknowledged that it may not be possible or desirable to realise all this potential. Socio-economic factors including landowner and local views will have an important role to play.

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

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in the New Forest	
Landscape zone	**Biodiversity Opportunity Area**
Open Forest	New Forest Ringwood Forest
Forest Fringe	New Forest Test Valley (small part extends into the Forest fringe)
Avon Valley	Avon Valley Martin Down / Boulsbury /Toyd Down
Coastal Plain	New Forest Coast

Opportunities for enhancing habitats in New Forest BOAs*

	Biodiversity Opportunity Area				
	New Forest	New Forest Coast	Avon Valley	Ringwood Forest	Martin Down
Priority Habitat	Theoretical maximum potential for habitat enhancement (ha)				
Lowland dry acid grassland	3285	22	28	712	1
Lowland fen	1039		8	7	17
Lowland heathland	9005	38		695	
Lowland meadows	116	180	156	11	53
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	9917	1086	310	122	193
Purple moor grass and rush pasture	45	26	13	10	
Wet woodland	257	39	10	62	95
Wood- pasture and parkland	50	40			
Reedbed	5	42	1	8	1
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh		612			
Saltmarsh		751			
Vegetated shingle		105			
Intertidal mudflat		960			
Saline lagoon		31			
Lowland calcareous grassland					103

*comprehensive 'Habitat Opportunity Mapping', derived from analysis of a range of factors, shows the potential to enhance habitat within each BOA. These figures represent the biological potential, a range of factors will influence what proportion is realistic or desirable to achieve in the future.

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, although 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 (which forms part of the website resource to support this plan). 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, enhanced and connected within ecological networks at a landscape scale
- Biodiversity successfully adapting to climate change

Land, coast and water management in the New Forest

Land management in the Open Forest area

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. Detailed action is set out in the Forestry Commission's Crown Lands Management Plan 2008-13 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 Forest Design Plans which include provision for restoration of former wood pasture, heathland and valley mire in specific areas. Issues include the retention of deadwood, the balance of natural extension of woodland with open forest habitat, restoration of BAP 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) and Life III Project (2002 – 2006). 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~~ enhancement 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 the National Park Authority. Funds enable sustainable commoning and habitat improvements.

The Verderers Grazing Scheme

The Verderers Grazing Scheme for the New Forest is a unique approach to the provision of support under the national Environmental 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 and grassland. The prime objective of the scheme is to ensure that grazing by commoners is sustained to preserve the New Forest's 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 Invasive Plants Project

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 over 1 million by 2026. The *New Forest National Park Recreation Management Strategy 2010-2030* 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.

The continuation of grazing is fundamental to the Open Forest habitats, but the viability of this pastoral economy is increasingly threatened. For example land and house prices are a significant barrier to young commoners remaining in the Forest. Schemes such as the Verderers HLS, the Commoners Dwelling Scheme and farm diversification are helping to maintain the livelihood of commoners and should where possible be maintained, while seeking new ways to ensure commoning can be more economically sustainable in the long term. The New Forest Commoning Review undertaken in 2007 made recommendations to guide future action and support, many of which are being acted upon by a variety of local organisations.

Land, coast and water management in the Forest fringe ~~zone~~

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~~, and~~ a number of small commons, verges and village greens ~~once grazed,~~ are no longer grazed and are losing their biodiversity interest. Many of these areas have become invaded by scrub or have been incorporated into urban mowing regimes with consequent loss of wildlife interest. There is potential to allow grazing again, or manage these grasslands through improved cutting regimes.

The amount of back up grazing land within the Forest fringe is thought to have declined due to changes in land ownership and agricultural land uses. This not only restricts the land available to commoners, but has resulted in the loss of botanically rich grassland which benefitted from historic management practices such as use for hay and aftermath grazing. Historically this grassland has also been lost through the use of artificial fertilizer or herbicides and inappropriate mowing. The extent of botanically rich pasture and meadow in the Forest fringe has not been comprehensively surveyed and further evidence 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 restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites back to semi-natural broadleaved woodland is a conservation priority, both on Crown Land and private land. Initiatives are required to assist the economics of woodland management and development of markets for woodland products and wood fuel have an important part to play. Woodlands are increasingly split in to multiple land ownership parcels that can make management challenging and partnerships between nearby landowner-managers will be important to facilitate management and deer control in particular.

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. In response to this identified need projects are underway involving the national freshwater charity Pond Conservation, in conjunction with the New Forest Catchment Stakeholder Group and other local bodies and communities. These seek to implement a landscape strategy for management and creation of ponds and work with local communities to raise awareness and record pond wildlife.

The biodiversity of a number of the 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 often declined in their biodiversity value through agricultural improvement, abandonment and drainage. Work with landowners is needed to enhance their management and hydrological regime.

Compared with the investment in the management of the Open Forest, the Forest fringe habitats have been less well-funded. The network of habitats is of considerable importance and would benefit from work with landowners to help ensure management complements and connects habitats with other parts 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 – Working with landowners in the Forest fringe

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 unimproved grassland is dependent upon hay cutting and grazing to maintain its floristic richness and to support exceptionally important breeding wader and wintering wildfowl populations. However changes in the agricultural economy have affected the condition of traditional floodplain habitats,. 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. Changes to the traditional practice of weed cutting in the river has proved controversial, some believe this 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, and 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 the '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 and minerals 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 within an Environmental Stewardship Scheme and 90% of the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation within the BOA are 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 anticipated 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, although opportunities in some areas are constrained and so a landscape scale approach is required.

The *North Solent Shoreline Management Plan* (New Forest District Council *et al* 2010) 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 Regional Habitat Creation Programme facilitated by the Environment Agency and Natural England in partnership with local planning authorities and private landowners. 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.

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 which is being piloted and 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, and 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 thePearl 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 loss as a result of development proposals, 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) (Solent European Marine Sites, Management Scheme. Hampshire County Council and Solent Forum 2004) 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 is facilitating 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. The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (Solent Forum 2010) 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 and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust), Lymington Reedbeds (HIOWT) 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 enhancement of habitats in the Open Forest and Inclosures.
- 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:
    - River catchment management and waterbody enhancement (eg. Lymington, Beaulieu, Sowley and Hatchet streams)
    - Re-introduction of grazing to commons and other suitable sites beyond the Perambulation of the Forest where appropriate
    - 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
    - A programme of action for enhanced 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
- Support the implementation of the New Forest Recreation Management Strategy to assist avoidance and mitigation of pressure on sensitive areas. Develop projects and initiatives to research, 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
- 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 the opportunity for evolution of habitat within river valleys and working with private landowners where adjustment to defences may be possible and is supported by local community.

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 identified under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- Irreplaceable habitats and features such as ancient woodland and veteran trees (National Planning Policy Framework para 118)
- 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 by government in March 2012 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, no net loss of biodiversity, the identification of ecological networks and the provision of green infrastructure (see below).

National Planning Policy Framework 2012

The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- 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.

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

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 (The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature. HMSO (2011) 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.

A range of national best practice is available to inform the quality of decision making processes. In particular the national standards body the British Standards Institute has produced a Publicly Available Specification (PAS 2010) which outlines ways to integrate the conservation of biodiversity into spatial and land use planning.

"The Home Builders Federation welcomes PAS 2010 as a practical specification that illustrates how planners and developers can identify and promote a consistent and effective means of conserving biodiversity within the planning and development process."

John Slaughter, Home Builders Federation

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

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 National Park Authority *Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD)*, December 2010
- New Forest District Council *Local Development Framework, Core Strategy (New Forest District outside the National Park),* October 2009
- NFDC *Sites and Development Management DPD*: Proposed Submission Document, January 2012
- *Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton, New Forest and South Downs Minerals and Waste Plan*: Submission February 2012
- *Wiltshire Core Strategy Pre-submission document* February 2012

These documents and the planning policies associated with them will evolve over time and so relevant websites should be checked for most up to date documents and any associated changes to the context of this section.

The New Forest District Council (NFDC) has prepared a draft Green Infrastructure Strategy which has identified green infrastructure improvement, enhancement and opportunities for inclusion in future planning strategies and council projects.

The New Forest National Park 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.

The New Forest District Council aims for growth outside the National Park up to 2026 with provision for a larger number of 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.

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 nder the Habitats 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 associated wildlife sites. It has been suggested that this pressure could lead to significant disturbance of birds using the New Forest and Solent and Southampton Water SPAs. A *Green Infrastructure Strategy for South Hampshire* produced on behalf of authorities including New Forest District Council and Test Valley District Council includes proposals for absorbing recreation pressure that would otherwise be exerted on the New Forest. The New Forest National Park Authority and New Forest District Council are working together ~~and~~ with other local authorities in the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire to try to minimise potential impacts. The New Forest District Council's proposals for green infrastructure and the National Park Recreation Management Strategy will also assist.

Development can also have other cumulative effects on biodiversity interests in terms of loss of green space, air quality impacts and impacts on water quality and quantity. These have been highlighted in assessments and background evidence to several local planning strategies.

Implementing strategic mitigation through development contributions

Within the New Forest National Park new housing proposed that is likely to have a significant effect on the New Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) is 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 in order to avoid impacts. Similar mitigation packages are being investigated and researched as part of a Solent wide project.

Development management

The development management process gives opportunities for impacts on wildlife to be appropriately quantified and best practice avoidance, mitigation and enhancement implemented to conserve wildlife. This can assist not only meeting planning requirements but also ensures wildlife offences are not committed during development.

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework establishes that planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss. It states that planning policies should promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets.

Currently in Hampshire and Wiltshire planning authorities use a biodiversity or ecology checklist to guide the information required to assess applications and ensure developments correctly address impacts on wildlife. These provide useful guidance to applicants on how different forms of

development can affect wildlife. This plan can help inform assessment of development proposals by highlighting habitat and species of concern, however the plan itself will not establish any additional planning policies of controls.

Natural England has adopted national standing advice for the planning process which establishes their statutory recommendations in respect of protected species and ancient woodland. This reinforces requirements for appropriate wildlife information to be available to decision makers such as planners and relevant committees when decisions are made.

Opportunities through development

Managing development at a strategic and local level 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 improvements in the Waterside area will help the National Park bear the pressure of a substantially increasing population in the surrounding area 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 (reflecting the government's requirements in National Planning Policy Framework e.g. Para 9)
- Maximise the opportunity for habitat enhancement and restoration within development schemes eg. mineral development in the Avon Valley
- Explore opportunities offered by biodiversity offsetting to provide supporting Green Infrastructure for the New Forest
- 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
- Adopt best practice approaches, in particular implement PAS 2010
- 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 where this is appropriate within planning frameworks, including the mitigation of recreational pressure
- Maintain high standards of assessment of wildlife impacts of proposals, promoting best practice approaches in relation to survey requirements that are appropriate to decisions being made
- Continue to work with developers and their agents to support their understanding of requirements for biodiversity and obtain their feedback , making best use of existing fora as well as new awareness raising and training opportunities.

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. The *National Planning Policy Framework* states 'Planning policies and decisions should be based on up-to-date information about the natural environment'. 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

Biological records centres in the New Forest

Biological data for the New Forest is coordinated by two records centres covering Hampshire and Wiltshire. The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) is the central repository for biological records in Hampshire. The Centre is hosted by Hampshire County Council and operates as a partnership. It 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.

The Wiltshire and Swindon Biological records Centre (WSBRC) operates as a not-for-profit partnership housed at the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust which provides a central reference point for environmental information on species, sites, habitats and geology in Wiltshire and Swindon. Like HBIC, the centre is supported by a range of wildlife stakeholders including the New Forest National Park Authority, local planning authorities, national organisations and the voluntary sector.

The biological records centres provide essential services by holding and managing extensive records and mapping of habitats, species and designated sites. They provide a wide range of data and information services to their partners and operate habitat survey programmes. Voluntary sector species recording groups make an important contribution to this evidence base and often the centres help to manage data on behalf of such groups.

Making best use of data

In addition to the data system provided by biological records centres, 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 waterbodies and their condition.

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 but represents a significant challenge.

The Forest is a magnet for academic research and there is a wealth of local ecologists and wildlife recording groups. These make an important contribution to our understanding of the area. There are opportunities to harness and channel this expertise to help meet specific and priority data needs and to engage communities in better understanding their local wildlife.

Researchers have highlighted the benefits in communicating and linking research more widely, particularly 'grey literature' which is not widely published or available. The New Forest hosted a biodiversity conference in 2007, facilitated by Bournemouth University, which has helped to start the process of partnership between a variety of researchers and New Forest organisations which should be built on in the future.

Projects in the New Forest have shown the potential for engaging the public in survey and collection of information which in turn provide a spring-board for communities to care for their local environment. Education initiatives are also underway that utilise data to support key skills and raise awareness the New Forest's special wildlife. These projects rely on easy access to well managed and verified data.

Community Wildlife Plans Project – engaging local people in recording wildlife

The Community Wildlife Plans Project encourages local communities to record, map and conserve wildlife in their local area. The parishes of Hordle, Landford, Godshill, Wellow, Marchwood and Milford-on-Sea are all involved, together with the town of New Milton.

Paid for by a European fund called RDPE (Leader) the project is hosted by the New Forest National Park Authority and involves a range of other partners. It will run from October 2012 to September 2013. Training is provided to give people the skills, confidence and support to survey for all sorts of plants and animals. At the end of the project local communities will produce a wildlife plan summarising the wildlife resource in their area and their own proposals for how this will be managed and enhanced for wildlife and local people. Opportunities are being sought to extend the project in the future.

Although there is a huge amount of biological 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 inform adaptation to climate change.

Data and information: Strategic actions

- Continue to support biological information centres to undertake their various data functions
- 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
- Identify priority areas for enhancing and connecting habitats e.g. 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 to inform strategies and activities as well as requirements for biodiversity reporting linked to government initiatives
- 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 (The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature. HMSO (2011) 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 wood fuel 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 must be carefully managed to help maintain the special qualities of the natural environment that sustain ecosystem services to society.

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. A range of local organisations and initiatives encourage sustainable tourism and have identified potential for enhancing the image of the area as a 'green tourism' destination. Visitor payback schemes to contribute to environmental improvements have been considered and the New Forest Trust is currently operating an initiative to implement this.

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 in the longer term 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. Planning policies also make provision for diversification, to enable other sources of income, as long as new development sustains the existing farm business and is compatible with the conservation of the environment. The New Forest Commoning review makes a variety of recommendations for supporting the viability of commoning, many of which are being actively pursued by a range of partners.

Agri-environment support is important 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. This has been recognised by organisations and in the past small landowner grants for wildlife improvements have been available through sources such as Wiltshire Council and the New Forest Land Advice Service. However these are no longer available and partners are working to identify new opportunities for funding.

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 wood fuel sourced from woodland restoration. The National Park Authority is investigating the socio-economics value of the forestry and woodland management sector.

The New Forest Marque scheme, managed by a partnership including the New Forest National 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 appropriate 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 recognise and promote 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
- Maximise the potential for income derived from tourism to help support land management and in particular the mitigation of recreational impact

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"
>
> Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (Defra 2011)

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 at some point in their life. (The Office for National Statistics Psychiatric Morbidity report, 2001) 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 (Natural Childhood. Stephen Moss. National Trust 2012).

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 Millenium 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 environment. People with easy access to nature are three times more likely to participate in physical activity (Chapter 24 Health Values from Ecosystems. UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge).

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.

Current government thinking such as 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.

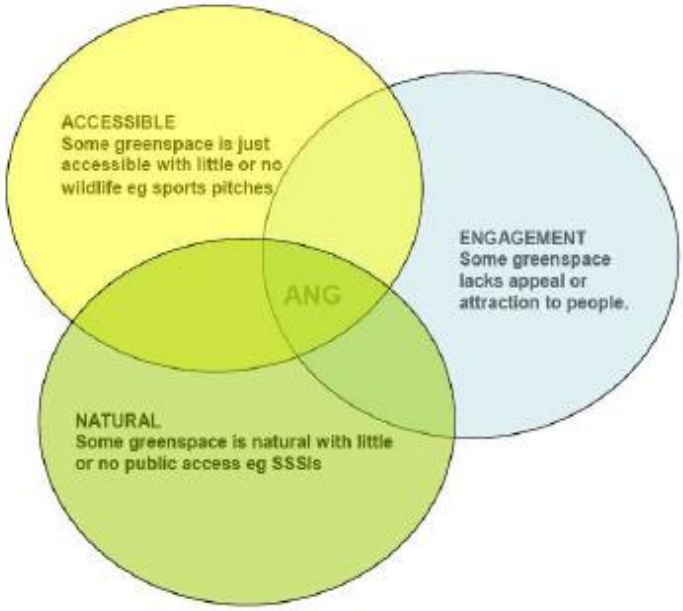
Accessible natural greenspace

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 (Nature Nearby. Natural England (2010)) . ANGSt applies to those areas that are a combination of natural, accessible and attractive to visit – see diagram below.

Yet many people in built-up or urban areas do not have access to local greenspace nor the means to visit areas of countryside nearby. 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 (UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge)

Figure 9: Pictorial representation of the Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards balance



(Natural England, 2009c, p. 5)

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 .

Green infrastructure provides a good opportunity to bring nature into the heart of communities and enhance biodiversity. Access to nature is a fundamental objective of green Infrastructure and the design and management of it 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" (The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature. HMSO (2011)). A key reform will be action to get more children learning outdoors, removing barriers and increasing teacher confidence to teach outside the classroom.

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 (The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature. HMSO (2011). 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 in some way. In a visitor survey of the New Forest carried out in 2005, the landscape, wildlife, birds and animals were some of the most frequently cited aspects that people liked about the New Forest. (New Forest

Visitor Survey. Tourism South East (2005). The area 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. A range of other organisations, groups and individuals are actively involved in promoting and facilitating the health benefits of the natural environment such as the Avon Tyrell Outdoor Activity Centre's EcoHealth project.

Linking the New Forest and wellbeing

The 'Breaking Down the Barriers' project was designed to encourage young people and vulnerable adults to access protect and learn more about the landscape of the New Forest National Park. Funded partly by the National Park's Sustainable Development Fund and managed by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust as a result of the project over 180 young people and 60 adults took part in a range of practical conservation tasks on nature reserves in the New Forest area.

'Health walks' are specifically designed to improve health, are undertaken on a group or facilitated basis and are affordable, widely available and socially inclusive. A 'Healthy Walks Coordinator' for the New Forest is funded jointly by a range of organisations including Community First New Forest, New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council, New Forest National Park Authority, HNS 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

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.

Access to nature

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

Outside the Park boundary there are larger residential areas 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 draft New Forest District Council Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) 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.

Promoting opportunities to enjoy the special qualities of the New Forest is fundamental to the purposes of the National Park. The National Park Management Plan notes that although surveys indicate a high level of visitor satisfaction, further clarification is needed from a wider range of

groups and individuals, including those that currently feel excluded from enjoying the New Forest. For example feedback from young people has shown that they find the area difficult to access and feel there are few facilities and activities designed specifically to meet their needs. Other groups with particular requirements, such as people with disabilities, those from different cultural backgrounds or those living in surrounding communities, may lack knowledge or feel unsure about visiting the New Forest for various reasons.

Mosaic

Mosaic was a national project, led by the Campaign for National Parks that aimed 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 up to 2012 were to:

- 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.

Following the success of the work, from 2013 the Mosaic model is to be adapted to focus on young people between the ages of 16 and 25.

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 and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Pond Conservation and National Trust that organise volunteer work directly relevant to the conservation, public understanding and enjoyment of the area.

The Park Authority has supported many projects that engage volunteers to record wildlife. These include: partnership with the People's Trust for Endangered Species project on the noble chafer; the Hampshire and Isle of Wight 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 and Woodland Trust; and the annual BioBlitz event. 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.

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.

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 and Isle of Wight 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.

Reconnecting people and nature: Strategic actions

- Develop and support initiatives for public and private health providers to use the natural environment in appropriate ways 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
- Build on partnerships such as those supporting 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 and partnership working for conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the New Forest to 2020 – the year by which the Government wishes to halt the loss of biodiversity. 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 and shared responsibility. 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.

In 2011 a range of nature conservation partners and local community representatives around the New Forest came together to respond to a Government initiative to recognise Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) which provided opportunities to reconnect across landscapes and link communities more closely with their natural environment. A New Forest bid for funding and recognition, entitled 'Growing the Forest' was not ultimately successful but the process was significant in bringing over 50 New Forest organisations together to agree the principles and objectives for the bid. As a result of the partnership, initially led by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, a number of projects have now been initiated and are being delivered on the ground e.g. support for Community Wildlife Plans.

As well as helping to start projects, the catalyst of the bid has successfully brought people together who share the objectives of 'Growing the Forest' which are mirrored in this plan. A partnership is developing as a result and with the support of key partners it is proposed that a representative Working Group of key delivery bodies is well placed become the mechanism to oversee and support the implementation of strategic actions from this plan. The engagement and support of the wider 'Growing the Forest' partnership is also important and mechanisms will be implemented to provide feedback on activity and promote engagement and involvement such as an annual conference or Forum event.

This plan is only the start of the partnership process and future work is proposed to promote further engagement with partners, obtain their further endorsement of the strategic objectives and aims and identify how they feel best placed to help implement them.

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.

Translating strategic action into delivery

During the process of developing this plan partners on the Working Group have indicated that due to uncertainties relating to resources it can be difficult for organisations to commit to long term activity. As a result of suggestions from partners the plan has therefore adopted an approach of being a living document that can evolve in response to opportunities and differing levels of organisational input, whilst establishing a strategic framework of objectives and action that can form a framework to guide partnerships.

There will be a need to develop a detailed suite of activity and a delivery plan under the strategic actions given in this plan. It is proposed that this is a rolling 2-year delivery plan that is flexible to respond to challenges and opportunities. The New Forest National Park Authority in partnership with other key organisations will play a lead role in developing a detailed delivery plan with the Partnership and ensure that this is updated alongside the website supporting this plan once it is agreed.

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 to produce a 2 year delivery 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 to promote work to achieve the strategic actions for the New Forest

6 Summary of objectives and strategic actions

Protecting and improving our natural environment

Land, coast and water management – a landscape scale and integrated approach

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
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, focussing on habitat connectivity, integrated sustainable management and linking the core of the Forest with surrounding landscapes. Examples include: • River catchment management (eg. Lymington and the Blackwater) • Re-introduction of grazing to commons adn other suitable sites beyond the Perambulation of the Forest where appropriate • 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 operating in the valley, 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
	Support the implementation of the New Forest Recreation Strategy to assist 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 WFD 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 and is supported
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
	Adopt best practice approaches, in particular implement PAS 2010
	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 and obtain their feedback, making best use of existing fora as well as new awareness raising and training opportunities.
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
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 habitats 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 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	
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
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 the management and in particular the mitigation of recreational impact
	Review potential of LEADER / Sustainable Development Fund to support natural environment outcomes
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 in appropriate ways 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	
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 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 to promote work to achieve the strategic actions for the New Forest