

# New Forest Partnership Plan

## 2015 – 2020

### Evaluation report

#### April 2021

Programmes of Work		
<b><u>Protect</u></b> Landscapes and Habitats Land Management Local Distinctiveness Climate Change Tranquillity	<b><u>Enjoy</u></b> Understanding and enjoying the Special Qualities	<b><u>Prosper</u></b> Local Communities Economic Wellbeing Traffic and Transport

## 1. Introduction

The New Forest Partnership Plan was published in November 2015 and covered a period of five years. In 2018, a mid-term monitoring report was produced, assessing progress of the 90 actions included in the Plan thus far.

This evaluation report covers the whole five-year period of the Partnership Plan and gives an overview of the actions' performance and achievements. The report was put together with the help of those partners who provided input about the actions they were leading on.

In line with the Partnership Plan's format, the actions have been categorised under the three Programmes of Work 'Protect', 'Enjoy' and 'Prosper' in this report, which broadly reflect the two National Park purposes and related socio-economic duty. They are further



broken down into sections that make up the respective acronyms, e.g. Landscapes and Habitats – ‘LH’, Special Qualities – ‘SQ’, Local Communities – ‘LC’, etc. An overview of all 90 actions and their performance is provided in the annex.

## 1.1 Annual progress reports

Four progress reports were published in the five-year period. The purpose of the progress reports is to highlight a selection of about 20 different successful projects every year across the three Programmes of Work. The progress reports are aimed at organisations involved in the Plan, other bodies interested in the National Park and the general public, which is reflected in their design, and they are usually published shortly before the annual New Forest Show. The projects are described in a succinct manner, guided by headline figures of outputs achieved. The progress reports also contain case studies that give more insight into specific actions but don’t normally include updates about previously highlighted actions or details about actions where there had been no progress. Regular updates of the actions in the annual progress reports have been invaluable in producing this final evaluation report.

## 1.2 Monitoring and reporting

The New Forest Leadership Group is the principal decision-making body for the Partnership Plan and oversees the delivery and monitoring of the Plan’s actions on a strategic level. It consists of senior representatives from the nine statutory partners who, amongst other organisations, jointly co-produced the Partnership Plan. The Leadership Group is supported by the Partnership Plan’s operational group of officers from the statutory organisations and some non-statutory partners.

Representatives on the operational group provide regular updates about actions they lead on or are named as a partner. The data is being collated by the National Park Authority’s Partnerships Officer. Progress of the 90 priority actions is being monitored on a database and regularly updated.

The annex to this report is an overview of all 90 actions and indicates their performance. This is being visualised via the following ‘traffic-light’ system:

- **Dark green:** Action has achieved or exceeded its outcome or output. It may be finished or is still ongoing.
- **Light green:** Action is ongoing and has achieved most of its outcomes or outputs.
- **Amber:** Action may be ongoing but unlikely to achieve its outcomes or outputs.
- **Red:** Action has not been carried out or it started but didn’t progress further.

An assessment of the performance of the individual actions has been made according to lead partners’ input where provided and then categorised under these four measures of progress. Since the mid-term report from 2018, most actions that were previously ‘ongoing’ have been achieved or in cases where the original target had not been achieved, at least



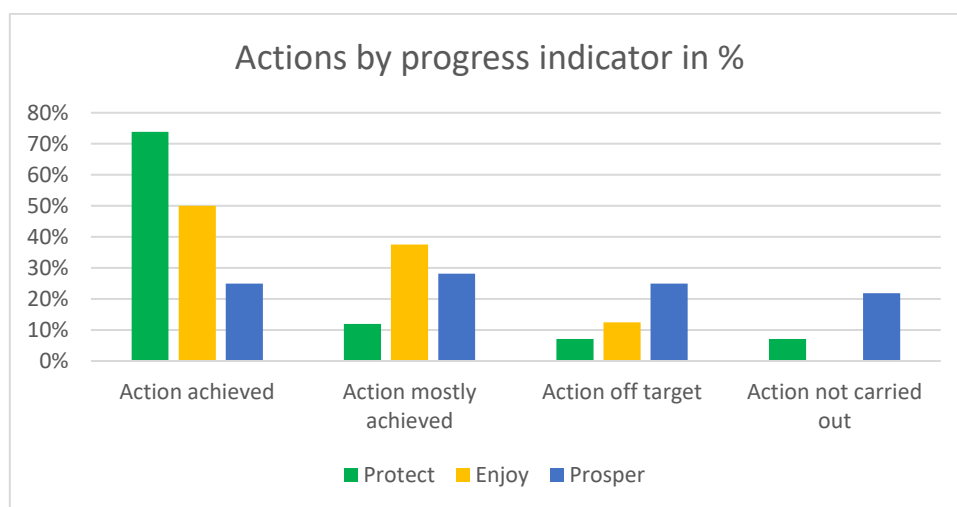
more progress since 2018 was made. It is worth emphasising that many actions are still ongoing, despite the end of the Plan period.

## 2. Assessment of the 90 actions

### 2.1 Overview

A total of 47 actions achieved or exceeded their original outcomes or outputs, 20 achieved most of their outcomes or outputs, 13 were off target and 10 had not been carried out.

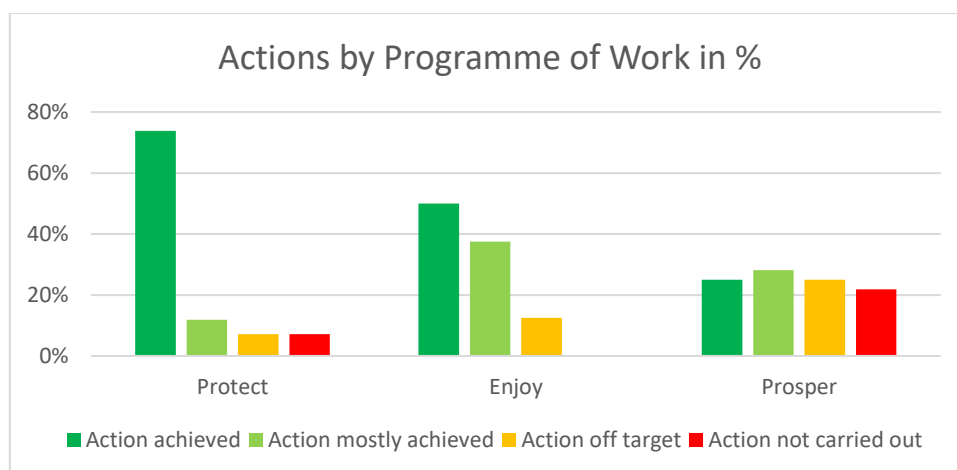
The chart below compares end results of the actions categorised by the three Programmes of Work (Protect, Enjoy, Prosper).



The chart shows that most actions under Protect and Enjoy achieved or almost achieved their original outputs or objectives. Actions under Prosper performed less well, with nearly half of them off target or not carried out. The overall results are however overwhelmingly positive. When compared to the 2018 mid-term progress report there was a shift from actions on track to achieve their original outputs or objectives to 'action achieved'.

The following chart shows progress of the four indicator categories per Programme of Work (Protect, Enjoy, Prosper).





This diagram underpins the previous illustration in that it shows both Protect and Enjoy were progressing well and Prosper less so. This again reflects the trend from 2018.

## 2.2 Reasons for good progress of actions

### Statutory / adopted actions

Out of the 90 actions there are 48 actions in the Plan that only have one delivery partner. Even though other organisations may be involved, most of these actions are being implemented as part of a delivery organisation's statutory function or its internal plans, independent of their action's adoption into the Partnership Plan. The advantage of this approach is that there is a relatively high certainty of this Partnership Plan action being carried out since commitment and resources will be in place. Examples include the redeveloped visitor facilities at Lepe Country Park by Hampshire County Council (EP8), the reduction of fly-tipping by New Forest District Council (LC7) and encouraging private sector investment in forestry management by the Forestry Commission (EW4).

### Our Past, Our Future (OPOF)

The £4.4 million Landscape Partnership application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was developed at about the same time as the Partnership Plan. 22 actions similar to the proposed OPOF projects were included in the Plan, e.g. Foxbury (LH4), Ecademy (SQ5) and Wildplay (LC9).

Due to the success of OPOF, the respective Partnership Plan actions have also been progressing well. Furthermore, OPOF has already established new or strengthened existing links with partner organisations in the New Forest. However, without HLF / external funding many of the OPOF related actions would have probably either progressed at a smaller scale or not at all. This illustrates the benefits of clear funding streams to help deliver identified Partnership Plan actions.



### Existing partnership initiatives

Existing partnerships have also had a positive impact on the progress of their respective actions in the Plan, most notably the New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS). This initiative provides advice to land managers in the New Forest and is an independent partnership between the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the National Park Authority. The NFLAS either led or was involved in nine actions in the Partnership Plan, e.g. creating links between habitats (LH3), establishing woodland management hubs (LM5) and implementing the Community Wildlife Plans initiative (LC2).

Another established initiative is the New Forest Catchment Partnership. The National Park Authority and the Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT) are co-hosts. The FHT, a national charity with the aim of doing practical work on the ground with local communities and volunteers, lead on project development and delivery. The group includes many partners who were also involved in other Partnership Plan projects (LH7 and LH8).

Other close partnership working took place around various training initiatives (e.g. for land and property owners, volunteers, apprentices, business, etc.), campaigns (e.g. #add3minutes, litter picking, walking and other wellbeing initiatives, fungi picking, etc.) and flood protection.

## **2.3 Reasons for lack of progress**

### Resources

The most commonly stated reason for those actions that did not progress well is lack of resources – both human and financial (e.g. Ancient Woodland inventory, LH13; and assessment of visual impacts, ST5). It is apparent that many actions that progressed less well were often ‘in addition’ to an organisation’s core remit and therefore rely on additional resources (e.g. development of social enterprises, EW10; sign clutter, TT5; and design guidelines for highways infrastructure, TT6).

### Unrealistic targets

The Partnership Plan’s actions were ambitious. Whilst the aim was to be realistic when the Plan was developed, inevitably some actions could not be implemented because targets were probably set too high. Examples of this include 43km of rivers enhanced (LH8), improve the management of at least 2,000ha of woodland (LM5) and superfast broadband to 95% households (EW7).

### Other reasons

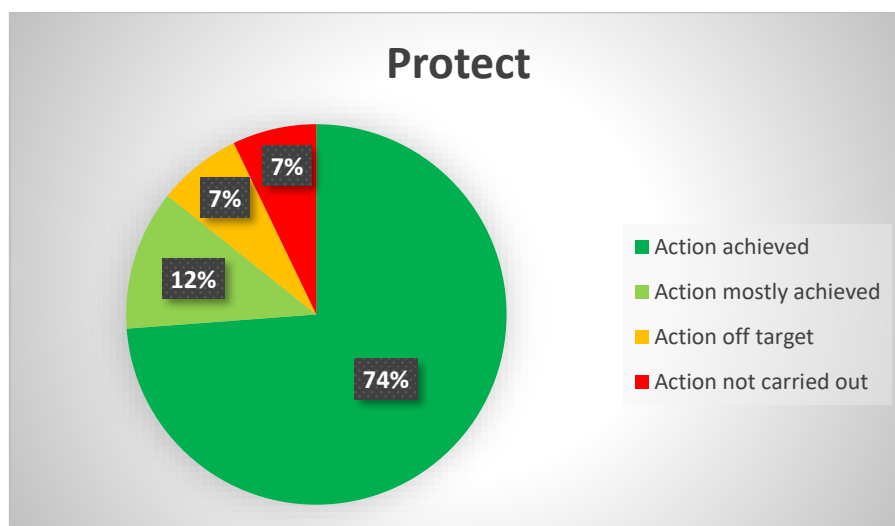
A number of actions were originally thought to be viable but soon turned out to be difficult to implement, e.g. actions where multiple landowners are involved (e.g. ‘Forest Park’, EP6), large infrastructure projects (e.g. cycle path between Lymington and Cadnam, TT10), anticipation of funding which did not materialise (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships, EW3),



lack of support by the community (e.g. 'Quiet Lanes' network, TT4), or lack of authority to enforce them (reducing HGV through-traffic, TT1).

### 3.1 PROTECT

'Protect' is the Programme of Work with almost half of all actions in the Partnership Plan, i.e. about the same as 'Enjoy' and 'Prosper' combined. This reflects the importance of the first National Park purpose. Actions under Protect performed well, as the diagram below shows.



Of the 42 actions under Protect, 31 were completed, 5 were mostly achieved, 3 were off target 3 were not carried out.

#### Analysis of actions marked 'amber' or 'red'

The three actions marked 'amber; off target' is a reduction of three since the last report. They again reflect a mixture of reasons why their original outcome or output was not quite achieved. LH2 ('achieve 60% favourable condition of SSSIs by 2020') was considered as too ambitious by Natural England, the lead applicant and delay to the delivery of originally planned works. LH13 (ancient woodland inventory) turned out to be more complex than originally anticipated and available funding could only cover woodland within the Crown Land. CC4 (climate change adaptation plan) is incomplete as only a draft version was available at the time of this report.

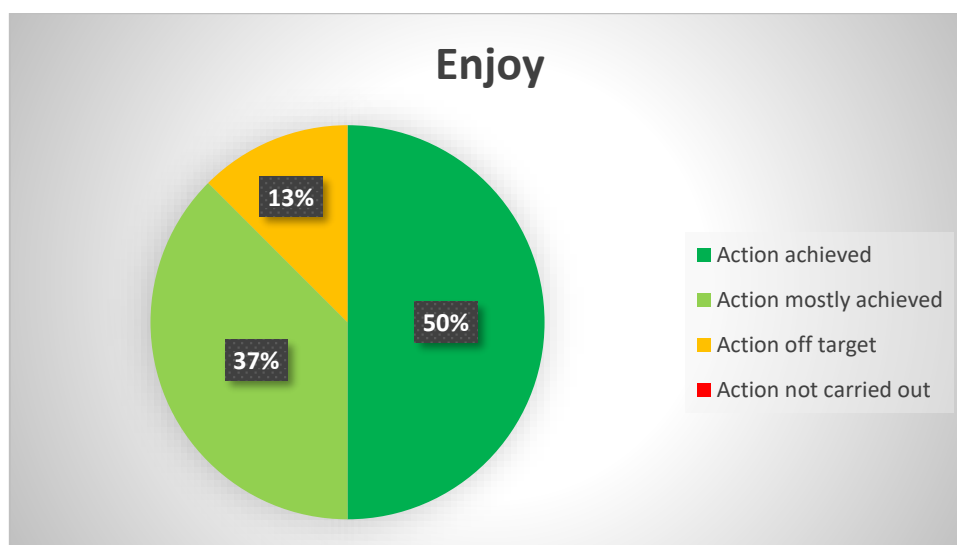
LH11 (green infrastructure plan) never started and was partly superseded by similar initiatives. ST4 (undergrounding high voltage cables) was about to go ahead before strong local opposition resulted in the project not being pursued further. ST5 (assessment of visual



impacts) also never started; a lack of resources has been stated as the main reason. All three actions have therefore been marked as 'red'.

### 3.2 ENJOY

With 16 actions 'Enjoy' has the lowest number of actions in the Plan. This Programme of Work performs best compared to Protect and Prosper, with 8 actions complete, 6 actions mostly achieved, two off target and none 'not carried out'.



#### Analysis of actions marked 'amber'

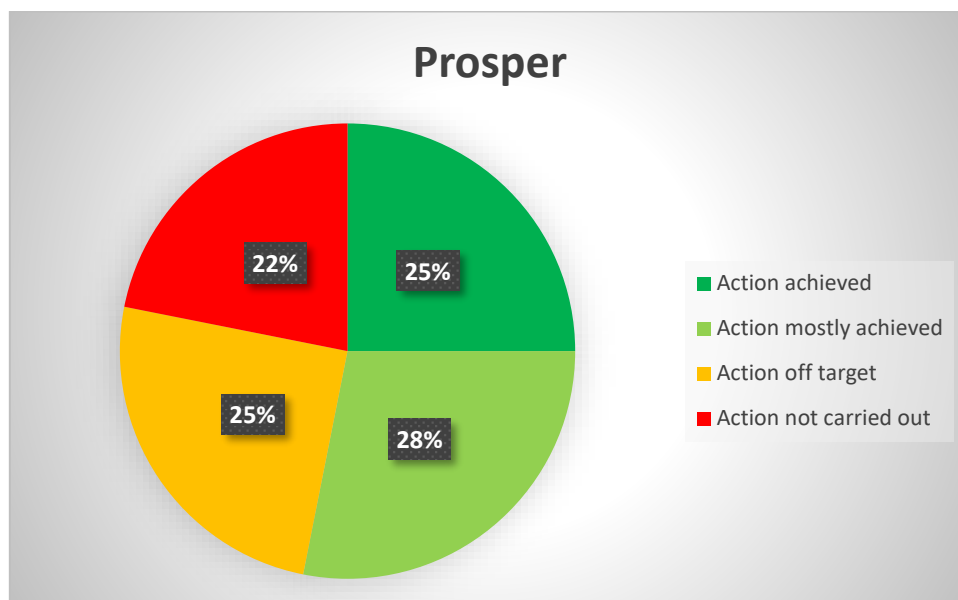
One of the actions marked 'amber; action off target' ('rights of way', EP2) is a good example of work being undertaken in this area on an ongoing basis but where the numerical target was originally set as too high. This means that even though the action was progressing well, it is marked as not achieving its original output which may give it a more negative impression than it merits.

The other action 'off target' – 'Forest Park', EP6 was marked red in the previous report and there has been some progress since. Even though the action hasn't achieved its (ambitious) overall target, developer contributions have supported capital investment for improved public access in the woodland with improved trails, gates, signage and dog bins. It is a good example of an action that will still be highly relevant going forward and which could potentially be included again in the next Partnership Plan.

### 3.3 PROSPER



'Prosper' has 32 actions. This Programme of Work performs less well compared to Protect and Enjoy, with the highest percentage of 'amber' and 'red' marked actions: eight actions have been achieved, nine actions were mostly achieved, eight actions were off target and seven were not being carried out.



#### Analysis of actions marked 'amber' or 'red'

The eight actions marked 'amber; ongoing, but off target' have all very different reasons for not performing as originally expected when the Plan was drawn up in 2015. Lack of resources and/or changed priorities are however still the most common reason, e.g. 'community facilities' (LC3); 'social enterprises', (EW10); and 'sign clutter' (TT5).

Other reasons include difficulties of finding suitable sites for affordable housing (LC5), increase in rents (LC6), limited investment from LEP (EW3) and insufficient funding for broadband infrastructure (EW7).

Most of the actions marked 'red; not pursued' are under the 'Traffic and Transport' section. Similar to actions marked 'amber', lack of resources is a reason for four actions in this category: 'reducing HGV through-traffic', (TT1); 'improve the reliability of journey times' (TT3); 'design guidelines' (TT6); and 'cycle routes' (TT10). A number of these actions fell on the local highway authorities within the National Park, whose resources were focused on other priorities.

Other discontinued actions include a change in responsibility ('EU funded DEAL project', EW6); lack of schemes proposed by communities ('review speed limits', TT2); and lack of community support ('Quiet Lanes network', TT4).





## 4. Conclusion

Updates that were submitted by the lead partners for this report showed that most of the trends and reasons for failure or success that were already described in the mid-term report in 2018 had largely not changed. Given the high rate of successful actions after the first three years, this was to be expected.

The annual progress reports were a valuable source of action updates throughout the years and contributed to the making of this report. Progress of all 90 actions was tracked on a database and regularly updated. The 'traffic-light system' that was being used for this, and which is provided in the annex, has been a useful visual aid.

The New Forest Leadership Group and associated officers' group were important forums for making strategic decisions and providing feedback to their colleagues internally.

In summary, some of the most important lessons learned following analysis of the 90 actions included:

- Reliance on a single delivery 'partner': for more than half of the 90 actions there was only one organisation responsible for implementing an action. This was often the case when the action was part of a statutory remit that might have been carried out regardless of being included in the Partnership Plan. Those actions had a high success rate but were missing the 'partnership' element.
- Well-funded projects succeeded: the 'Our Past Our Future' (OPOF) project delivered a quarter of all actions (22).
- Many successfully implemented actions were carried out by partnerships that existed well before the Plan (e.g. the Land Advice Service and the Catchment Partnership), and consequently had a higher chance of success.
- Lack of both human and financial resources were the most cited reasons for actions not progressing well. Many actions were in addition to an organisation's core remit and hence did not have a high enough priority.
- Other reasons for some actions not progressing were unrealistic targets or actions that were initially submitted by individual staff who had since left the organisation without follow-up support.

Those findings over the last five years will have an important role in informing the contents and vision of the next Partnership Plan. The new National Park Partnership Plan for the next five-year period is in preparation and national policy continues to recognise the importance of National Park Management / Partnership Plans in co-ordinating the work of a range of bodies to deliver the statutory National Park purposes and related duty.

