



New Forest National Park Local Plan Examination

Opening Statement by the New Forest National Park Authority

6 November 2018

New Forest National Park Authority Local Plan Opening Statement

1. Firstly, on behalf of the National Park Authority, we would like to welcome the Inspectors, Caroline Mulloy and Kevin Ward, and all those attending this examination.
2. We would also like to thank the Programme Officer, Chris Banks, for his support in managing the Examination process to date.
3. The purpose of this Examination is to allow independent scrutiny of whether the preparation of the Local Plan meets the legal requirements for compliance and whether the Plan meets the tests of soundness.

The role of the planning system in the National Park

4. The New Forest National Park was designated in 2005 and covers an area of 220 square miles within the counties of Hampshire and Wiltshire. It is home to 35,000 people. National Park designation affords the New Forest the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty in the NPPF.
5. National policy recognises the key role played by the planning system in the delivery of the two National Park purposes and it is this statutory framework that provides the context for the Authority's Local Plan. The Vision for the National Park and the Local Plan's strategic objectives are drawn from these legal purposes and the related socio-economic duty and seek to conserve and enhance the qualities that make the New Forest a special place.

Local Plan Review process

6. The review of the local planning policies for the National Park commenced in 2015. Over the course of the last three years the Authority has undertaken an extensive consultation process with local communities, statutory consultees and neighbouring authorities that exceeds the requirements set out in the relevant regulations and our own Statement of Community Involvement.

7. Under the Duty-to-Cooperate we have worked positively with our neighbouring authorities on a range of strategic, cross-boundary matters. This is reflected in the Statements of Common Ground between the Authority and all of our constituent council and is also illustrated by:
 - The development of complementary policies in the National Park and New Forest District Council draft Local Plans to deliver a new sustainable community of 1,500 homes, 2,000 jobs and wider landscape and habitat enhancements for the surrounding National Park at the former Fawley Power Station site.
 - Joint working with neighbouring authorities to ensure the planned level of development does not impact on the integrity of the internationally protected habitats that make up over 50% of the National Park.
8. The Local Plan will be assessed against the NPPF (2012). The Local Plan is supported by a proportionate evidence base focused on the main planning issues affecting the National Park, including housing need; affordable housing for local people; viability; employment and business needs.
9. The delivery of housing to meet identified needs within a nationally protected landscape with significant areas of internationally protected habitats is a key challenge for the Local Plan and for the first time in decades a limited number of housing site allocations are proposed. The affordable housing policies have been informed by viability evidence and are in line with the National Parks Circular which confirms National Parks are not appropriate locations for unrestricted housing.
10. The Local Plan has also undergone a Sustainability Appraisal; and a Habitats Regulations Assessment to ensure the Local Plan does not impact on the protected habitats in the National Park.

Conclusion

11. In conclusion, we consider that the Local Plan provides a sound, up-to-date framework for future planning decisions in the National Park and we look forward to assisting the Inspectors in their examination of the Local Plan.