

NFNPA 586/19

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 10 October 2019

STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

Report by: Holger Schiller, Partnerships and Community Officer

1. Background and role of the State of the Park report

- 1.1 The State of the Park report provides key facts and figures for each of the 10 objectives set out in the original New Forest Management Plan 2010-2015 (and carried forward in the current Partnership Plan 2015-2020). Most national parks in the UK have published a State of the Park report and paragraph 117 of the [National Parks Circular](#) (2010) states, “*An essential part of the process of review of a Park Management Plan is an assessment of how the Park has changed over the previous period. The Authorities are expected to lead by compiling the State of the Park report...*”. The recently published ‘Landscapes Review’ report (“Glover report”) emphasises the importance of State of the Park reports through its Proposal 2: “*The state of nature and natural capital in our national landscapes should be regularly and robustly assessed, informing the priorities for action.*”
- 1.2 The State of the Park report is not intended to include a comprehensive database of every available statistic. Neither does it seek to interpret or examine data at great length. This would make the report too detailed for its purpose. It should also be noted that the report looks at New Forest data only and does not compare its data to other national parks or England-wide data. The first report was published in 2012 and has been reviewed several times since. This version is a ‘light touch’ update of the 2016 report and will be the last update in the current format before the new Partnership Plan with new objectives is published in 2020.
- 1.3 It is important to note that many other important datasets relating to the current state of the National Park are being collected by external organisations. The current format of the State of the Park report will be reviewed in tandem with the Partnership Plan review and there will be the opportunity to include different / more indicators for specific areas in future State of the Park reports.
- 1.4 The report as a whole is a starting point for the upcoming review of the Partnership Plan as it identifies important evidence and trends that may be reflected through future actions in the new Partnership Plan. The information it contains has been compiled by the NPA with the help of many partner organisations and to the best of the contributing organisations’ knowledge these sources are reliable, and the data is correct at the present time.
- 1.5 Each of the 10 Partnership Plan objectives includes one or two headline indicators followed by more detailed information to help illustrate the specific data for that topic. Those indicators were originally chosen because they are specific to the New Forest,

relate to the Partnership Plan objectives and give a broad indication of whether its actions are being achieved, and they also provide data that should be readily available from a known source and is repeatable over time. In some cases, new data has not been available since the last report was published.

2. Key findings of the report

2.1 Overall, there have been no substantial changes in the headline indicators compared to the most recent report from 2016. Whilst this means there have been no significant downward trends, it also means indicators have not necessarily improved either. There are however some more pronounced changes in the non-headline indicator statistics.

2.2 The most notable changes have been:

- Increase of scheduled monuments and listed buildings at risk: 2.3% to 2.6%; 1.8% to 3.2% respectively
- Slight increase of SSSIs in favourable condition: 51.9% to 52.9% (note that due to the large area of SSSIs in the National Park, Natural England only survey the condition of a certain number of units each year)
- Total number of marked animals depastured has increased; in 2016 numbers of cattle overtook numbers of ponies for the first time and in 2018 there were 1,000 more marked cattle depastured than ponies
- Total area of farmed land has increased by over 3,000 ha
- Sharp decline in ground nesting bird populations
- A substantial rise in volunteers and children and young people benefitting from New Forest related education
- A notable increase in visitor numbers by about 1% per year
- Average house prices have further increased by more than £100,000 since 2015 whilst new affordable housing numbers remain low
- The economic benefit of visitors' spending has risen sharply since 2014 – by about 18% and there has also been a 5% rise in people employed by the tourism sector
- Except for the seasonal New Forest Tour, local bus services have decreased in the rural communities

2.3 Other statistics and observations to note:

- Only 13 new practicing commoners in the last three years
- Only one commoners' dwelling has been built in the last three years
- Whilst it is very difficult to obtain climate change related data such as carbon emissions, cut to the National Park boundary, there are a multitude of community-based projects in the New Forest to promote low-carbon living
- Many data sources can only partly be verified and in many cases further survey work is needed
- Service provisions in local communities have been relatively stable, although there has been a slight decrease in village shops and more so in post offices; and there has been a sharp fall in (mobile) police stations (from nine in 2004 to one in 2019)
- Traffic volumes in the National Park have stayed relatively stable since the

year 2000 with either only slight or no increases (Lyndhurst)

3. Other sources of data relating to the National Park

- 3.1 One of the most frequently quoted sources in the State of the Park report is the 'Monitoring Change in Priority Habitats, Species, and Designated Sites' report, produced by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) and published annually in December (Wiltshire provide a similar service). It includes data about priority habitats (e.g. grasslands, woodlands, etc.), nature conservation designations (LNR, NMR, Ramsar, SAC, SPA, SSSI, SINC*) and changes in notable species. The main purpose of the HBIC report is to provide information for local planning authorities' Annual Monitoring Reports which is another important source of data for the state of the National Park.
- 3.2 The NPA provides financial and officer support for HBIC in order to support the system of collection, dissemination and curation of species and habitat records. HBIC also works with the Authority to identify and designate local wildlife sites within the county-wide systems which it coordinates. A rolling programme of habitat surveys of local wildlife sites is carried out by the NPA in partnership with HBIC. In recent years this has been undertaken via the 'Working Woodlands' and 'Nature's Stepping Stones' projects within the HLF Living Landscape Scheme 'Our Past, Our Future'. The Verderers' HLS scheme has also resulted in surveys of species for which the New Forest is especially important.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The updated State of the Park report is a true and accurate record of the latest available data per headline indicator. Whilst it is not the purpose of the report to interpret data or trends in great detail, this report will provide useful sources of evidence for the upcoming review of the New Forest Partnership Plan.
- 4.2 Although overall there are relatively few significant trends, some particular statistics identified in the report suggest the need for further action. The review of the National Park Partnership Plan – which will be undertaken within the context of the recent Glover Review Report findings (September 2019) emphasising the need for strengthened management plans containing clear priorities and actions – provides an opportunity to address the matters highlighted in the State of the Park report.

Recommendation:

1. **To note the content of the updated State of the Park report and endorse its publication (subject to some additional minor modifications as more data is becoming available, hence marked as 'draft').**

* LNR: Local Nature Reserve; NMR: National Nature Reserve; Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance; SAC: Special Area for Conservation; SPA: Special Protection Area; SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest; SINC: Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.