

Recreation Management in the New Forest

Strategic Actions – with explanations of what will be done

An update to the New Forest National Park Recreation Management Strategy 2010-2030

May 2019

This document summarises the actions that the New Forest Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group believes should be taken forward in the coming months and years. They are not static and may evolve over time in the light of new information.

They are subject to formal endorsement by each of the organisations represented on the Steering Group.

In total there are 22 strategic actions grouped under seven objectives. The first three objectives all relate to raising awareness and understanding, which emerged as the strongest theme in the 2017 Future Forest public consultation. All the objectives and actions have been reviewed and updated in the light of feedback received in the 2018 public consultation.

For each action there are examples of things that will be done to implement them. Some of these reflect current programmes of work that will be continued or enhanced; others are new or in their infancy.

All the organisations on the Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group are jointly committed to delivering the work in partnership with each other and with other organisations. The Steering Group will ensure there are clear delivery plans for each area of work to ensure progress is made as quickly as possible.

Overview

The objectives and draft actions fall into three different categories which are colour-coded below.

Actions that continue and expand on existing work to help people understand how special the New Forest is, avoid negative impacts and benefit from spending time outside.	
Objective 1: Convey the things that make the New Forest National Park special to both visitors and local people in more consistent and effective ways, so that they enjoy it, come to value it, want to care for it and do not inadvertently damage it.	Actions 1.1 – 1.5
Objective 2: Address significant and/or widespread negative impacts caused by recreation in the most appropriate, proportionate and effective ways.	Actions 2.1 – 2.4
Objective 3: Reduce the barriers that limit participation in beneficial outdoor recreation among those who need it most	Actions 3.1 – 3.3
Actions relating to specific sites and routes that will help reduce impacts and improve the recreational experience.	
Objective 4: Protect and enhance the New Forest’s working and natural landscape, and improve the recreational experience, by influencing where recreation takes place.	Actions 4.1 – 4.2
Actions aimed at increasing the level of funding available for recreation management, developing an evidence-based approach and keeping the strategy ‘live’.	
Objective 5: Increase the level of funding available for recreation management so that it is sufficient to address both existing and upcoming needs.	Actions 5.1 – 5.3
Objective 6: Collate data and evidence to help inform the ongoing management of recreation	Actions 6.1 – 6.2
Objective 7: Regularly review progress against agreed recreation management actions and adapt forward plans to protect the special qualities of the National Park and enable people to enjoy and benefit from them	Actions 7.1 – 7.3

Objective 1: Convey the things that make the New Forest National Park special to both visitors and local people in more consistent and effective ways, so that they enjoy it, come to value it, want to care for it and do not inadvertently damage it.

This objective acknowledges that the level of awareness of the New Forest’s special qualities, and their sensitivity, is currently variable and is often very limited. People who enjoy and come to understand the New Forest are much more likely to value and want to protect it, so it is important to work together to create a greater sense of ownership, respect and responsibility that ensures the Forest will retain its unique features into the future. The work needs to be tailored to resonate with the varying motivations and interests of different people.

Strategic action	What will be done?
1.1. Improve the quality and availability of information and interpretation about the special qualities of the New Forest.	<p>We will take every opportunity to ensure that information and interpretation about the New Forest highlights the things that make it unique (its rich wildlife, commoning etc.). Websites, social media posts, leaflets and other publications, posters and signage, exhibitions, film and face-to-face communication are all important.</p> <p>The work will require concerted, coordinated and ongoing effort by multiple organisations, groups, businesses and individuals who either produce their own information or can help inform information produced by others.</p>
1.2. Increase the number of staff, volunteers and ambassadors ‘on the ground’ who can encourage people to enjoy recreation responsibly.	<p>We will increase the number of welcoming, helpful and informative people who can engage face-to-face with visitors to help them enjoy and learn about the Forest, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rangers (including apprentices and seasonals) • other staff working ‘in the field’ • travel ambassadors • trained volunteers • well-informed local people. <p>This will be achieved through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocating additional funding (e.g. from developer contributions) • improved coordination between partner organisations through establishing a new Ranger Forum • providing additional training.
1.3. Encourage organisations involved in promoting recreation and tourism to inspire	<p>We will seek the commitment of those who actively promote the New Forest as a destination for holidays, recreation activities, sight-seeing and spending money to include information on how visitors can enjoy the New Forest in beneficial rather than harmful ways.</p>

<p>respect for the special qualities of the National Park by regularly including agreed key messages in their communications.</p>	<p>This will include visitor attractions, publishers, accommodation providers and other businesses.</p> <p>An initial joint task is to review the 'caring for the Forest' codes and develop a new, more concise and memorable summary that can be packaged for use in different ways (on-line, posters, leaflets etc.).</p>
<p>1.4. Develop the current programme of guided activities and themed events to give local people and visitors authentic experiences and meaningful connections with the special qualities.</p>	<p>We will ensure there is a range of educational guided walks, public events and other activities for people who visit or live in and around the New Forest. This first-hand contact with passionate and knowledgeable people will inspire respect and a caring attitude towards wildlife and the working Forest.</p> <p>Examples include the autumn walking festival, visits to commoners' landholdings and training courses for people who want to learn about specific topics and improve their chances of employment in the countryside.</p> <p>The activities will be carefully planned to avoid sensitive locations or times of year and to maximise the use of sustainable transport where possible.</p>
<p>1.5. Increase the uptake of formal educational programmes on offer and provide additional supporting resources on New Forest specific topics.</p>	<p>We will continue the current work with the formal education sector, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • classroom sessions, school assemblies and engagement with eco-groups • field trips and residential visits • student work placements and teacher training • the online New Forest Curriculum and Education Toolkit. • the New Forest Educators Forum which brings all education providers together to share expertise and best practice <p>Engagement with schools is mainly through national curriculum links with the New Forest in Key Stage 1 (habitats), KS2 (national park studies) and KS3 (geography). Schools also welcome talks at assemblies on topics such as litter and sustainability to help fulfil their social and environmental commitments. There are further opportunities to work with secondary schools in citizenship and sustainability.</p> <p>We will seek new funding to expand the existing travel grant scheme and to employ additional education staff.</p>

Objective 2: Address significant and/or widespread negative impacts caused by recreation in the most appropriate, proportionate and effective ways.

This objective recognises that there are many different ways to encourage responsible recreation and to reduce or displace activities that might impact negatively on the New Forest or other people. It also emphasises the shared responsibility for protecting the Forest between relevant organisations and user groups. There is already broad recognition of the main issues, and some good initiatives are in place; but more needs to be done.

Although impacts sometimes result from very deliberate acts (such as arson) most result either from a lack of thought or understanding, or from the number or concentration of people involved.

Some of the activities that need to be addressed are clearly illegal. These are candidates for enforcement.

Strategic action	What will be done?
<p>2.1. Work in partnership to reduce negative impacts of recreation.</p>	<p>We will continue to address the most significant and widespread negative impacts through working groups or other joint initiatives involving relevant local organisations. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disturbance of wildlife such as ground nesting birds • feeding of ponies and donkeys • animal accidents on unfenced roads • out of control dogs • litter • physical erosion of habitats including as a result of parking on protected verges • noise disturbance in the more tranquil areas. <p>This ongoing work will be strengthened by the following toolkit and other actions in this strategy (e.g. increasing the number of rangers and volunteers on the ground).</p>
<p>2.2. Develop a ‘toolkit’ to showcase the best ways to influence recreational behaviour.</p>	<p>We will collate examples of techniques that have been found to influence people’s behaviour in positive ways. Some will be from the New Forest (e.g. from work done through the Shared Forest project); others will be from elsewhere in the UK or abroad. From this we will create a suite of best practice advice (a toolkit) to guide the work to address specific recreation-related issues.</p> <p>The toolkit will help identify the combination of methods that is most likely to be effective for each issue, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face-to-face by rangers or volunteers • nudge techniques (encouraging the right behaviour rather than discouraging the wrong behaviour)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peer pressure • making the right option the easiest one to take • printed materials and signage • websites, digital technology, social media • charters that set high standards of operation for organised activities
<p>2.3. Use appropriate and proportionate enforcement activities to deter illegal use of the Forest.</p>	<p>Organisations with the powers to enforce laws and byelaws (e.g. landowners and managers, the Police and local authorities) will work together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree when enforcement is appropriate, and by whom • clarify what evidence is needed to achieve a successful outcome • use their enforcement powers to protect the Forest. <p>The current activities that may need to be addressed in this way include: parking on open Forest verges, dropping litter (including from vehicles), flying of drones where this is not allowed, wild camping, lighting fires, commercial fungi picking, parking in car parks overnight, feeding of commoners' animals, cycling off the permitted network and out of control dogs.</p> <p>A clear reporting system will also be developed so that members of the public know what to do and who to tell if they see something illegal going on.</p> <p>The fact that fixed penalty notices or prosecution in the courts is available as the 'ultimate sanction' should act as a powerful deterrent to the vast majority of people.</p>
<p>2.4. Manage organised activities and larger events to minimise negative impacts on wildlife, the working Forest and on local people.</p>	<p>Landowners of open Forest and other protected areas will review and update their permissions and licensing systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the way these are administered • the rationale for judging what is and isn't allowed • charges that may be applicable • how they publicise the need for event organisers to register events in advance • information provided to minimise the risk of unintended consequences. <p>Safety Advisory Groups will continue to advise, share best practice and where possible control public events (e.g. in villages and on the roads) to limit any negative impacts. We will continue to encourage full compliance with the Cycle Event Organisers' Charter.</p> <p>A charter will be established to clarify what is expected of commercial dog walkers within the New Forest.</p>

Objective 3: Reduce the barriers that limit participation in beneficial outdoor recreation among those who need it most

The New Forest already helps people to maintain and improve their health and wellbeing, it provides training and employment opportunities and is an ‘outdoor classroom’ from which we can all learn. However, some people feel excluded and others do not recognise the value of the Forest (to themselves, the wider population or to future generations). This in turn risks alienating important sectors of society and failing to make the most of the ‘natural health service’ that is available. This objective is therefore about targeted work with specific groups of people at locations that are well-suited for bespoke interventions or activities.

Strategic action	What will be done?
3.1. Inspire more young people to appreciate and understand the special qualities of the New Forest.	<p>By working with a range of organisations, we will create opportunities for young people to get involved with and benefit from the National Park. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wild play sites and events that help children and families gain confidence to explore and be creative in the natural world using low-tech outdoor games and activities. • involving School Councils, Young Farmers Clubs, Young Commoners and Junior Parish Councils in drafting actions for the next National Park Partnership Plan. • offering secondary school, college and university students work placements and work experience opportunities • schemes such as John Muir Award, New Forest Youth Action Partnership, Duke of Edinburgh Award, National Citizenship Service and apprenticeships in countryside services • encouraging local youth groups such scouts and guides to get involved in practical conservation work • using the 2018 Europarc youth manifesto and the 2019 Year of Green Action to prompt inspirational youth-led projects
3.2. Develop projects that improve people’s health through outdoor activity in and around the New Forest.	<p>We will develop and encourage new and existing schemes with targeted user groups, e.g. walking for health, health volunteering and outdoor therapy.</p> <p>These will be accessible (e.g. close to where people live), at appropriate locations and may be run in partnership with clinical commissioning groups, health and wellbeing groups etc.</p>
3.3. Identify and implement appropriate changes	We will establish more regular liaison between:

that will increase accessibility.

- organisations that provide opportunities for outdoor recreation
- organisations that represent people with a range of disabilities
- people with disabilities

A list of costed opportunities to improve access in appropriate locations will be drawn up. This could include:

- provision of better information
- removal of stiles or other 'barriers'
- accessible toilets
- further development of PEDALL (a local project which provides opportunities for people with disabilities to use adapted bikes)

Implementation will follow as resources allow.

Objective 4: Protect and enhance the New Forest’s working and natural landscape, and improve the recreational experience, by influencing *where* recreation takes place.

The New Forest needs a clear overarching plan for where recreation is encouraged – one that is supported by multiple planning authorities, landowners, organisations and the public. This objective is therefore primarily about the geographical distribution of recreation facilities. By taking this ‘spatial approach’ we can direct and encourage people to the most appropriate sites (within and beyond the National Park), avoid or reduce current negative impacts on more sensitive areas and plan ahead for the future. Significant net benefits should be achieved.

Locations for recreation can be usefully categorised as follows:

- a) Gateways: key entry points to the National Park and/or to the open Forest (where many people want to go). These include certain villages, car parks, rail stations, visitor centres and other information points.
- b) Key sites: sites where people enjoy recreation for some length of time. These include country parks, local green spaces, wild play sites, campsites – and Forest locations with facilities such as larger car parks, visitor information, litter bins and toilet facilities.
- c) Core routes: walking, horse riding and cycling routes designed to accommodate higher levels of use than other routes (without resulting in negative impacts). They could include on and off road routes, could link villages and other places of interest and would ideally be reached on foot, bicycle or public transport from where people live.

Strategic action	What will be done?
<p>4.1. Develop a spatial plan for where recreation should be encouraged across the New Forest and surrounding areas and establish procedures to facilitate desirable changes</p>	<p>The National Park Authority plans to develop a spatial plan, supported by a Local Development Order (LDO), which would be focused on the distribution of visitor facilities, identifying the kinds of places where gateways, key sites and core routes should ideally be located. The spatial plan would complement habitat mitigation strategies of neighbouring planning authorities.</p> <p>In particular, the proposed LDO would provide the rationale and well-considered processes for permitting changes to the distribution and capacity of car parking that would both protect the environment and improve the recreational experience. It would clarify when planning permission is still needed, when consent is required, e.g. from Natural England and the Verderers and when a Habitats Regulations Assessment or Environmental Impact Assessment is necessary.</p> <p>As with the development of other planning documents, all key stakeholders (the public, local communities, user groups and organisations) would be involved and consulted on the proposed LDO.</p>

<p>4.2. Manage the distribution and type of recreation facilities to protect the Forest, improve people's enjoyment and use resources effectively</p>	<p>Guided by the spatial plan, a range of opportunities will be considered and progressed where appropriate. Some will be dependent on funding being found and some could be phased (e.g. over a number of years and/or on an area basis).</p> <p>Options include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routes that could be developed to encourage people to travel to or around the New Forest without a car (i.e. on foot, by bicycle or on public transport, including the New Forest Tour) • traffic regulation to reduce verge parking and the harm this causes to protected habitats • changes to car parking distribution and capacity e.g. moving, enlarging or closing some car parks (seasonally or permanently) – whilst maintaining overall capacity • increasing or decreasing the level of associated visitor facilities and/or information • selective improvements to the network of permitted off road routes for cycling, carriage driving and organised events (in particular to address key gaps in the cycle network and thereby reduce the need for people to drive from residential areas or cycle on potentially dangerous roads – or be tempted to use other tracks and trails) • route information on cycle waymarkers to help people navigate on permitted Crown land cycle routes • rights of way where higher levels of maintenance, enhanced signage or interpretation would be useful (e.g. to implement Hampshire County Council's desire for strategic routes or to provide an alternative to walks in the open Forest) • road safety improvements e.g. at junctions that are difficult for cyclists, and where off-road routes have to cross busy roads • new areas in and around the National Park where recreation can take place, including off-lead dog walking and training (e.g. on private land) • charging for parking at some locations where it is currently free, with appropriate concessions (e.g. for regular users or local people) and making it clear that the money would be spent on the Forest
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Objective 5: Increase the level of funding available for recreation management so that it is sufficient to address both existing and future needs.

This objective recognises that resources are limited and that some aspirations for improved management of recreation can only be achieved if additional funds can be found. For example, car park maintenance could occur more regularly and more rangers could be deployed across the National Park if additional funding can be found. New recreation sites such as country parks would require major capital funding and business plans which ensure they are sustainable financially.

Strategic action	What will be done?
<p>5.1. Raise funds and commit other resources towards the creation and maintenance of recreation facilities and the conservation of the wider Forest.</p>	<p>We will continue to allocate core funding and staff resources each year, and work together to maximise beneficial results.</p> <p>A joint projects database will be developed as part of the wider National Park Partnership Plan. This will aid collaboration and reduce competition as we jointly approach potential external funders such as local businesses and charities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, grant making bodies, youth and health-care organisations and clinical commissioning groups.</p> <p>Mechanisms will also be developed to encourage people who enjoy and benefit from recreation facilities, and those who run commercial activities, to make financial contributions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and promoting the voluntary Love the Forest visitor gift scheme which is becoming more popular with local businesses and helping to fund conservation and education projects • inviting donations from the public to support specific recreation facilities • payments for activities that require permission
<p>5.2. Develop a coordinated approach among planning authorities in and around the New Forest to mitigate the impacts of new housing on protected areas – and use developer contributions to support work that protects the Forest.</p>	<p>A significant number of new dwellings are proposed in areas surrounding the National Park. In planning for this new development, local authorities are required to develop mitigation strategies to ensure there is no impact on the integrity of the protected habitats and their associated wildlife species.</p> <p>Hitherto, this has largely happened independently in local authorities around the New Forest, but the benefits of a more coordinated, strategic approach are acknowledged. This will deliver a consistent approach and enable contributions to be pooled to be spent on an agreed set of mitigation measures.</p>

	<p>This joint working should boost awareness raising initiatives (including rangers) and support the creation of significant new recreation sites outside of protected areas. Research being undertaken on behalf of several of the planning authorities, and due to be completed in late 2019, will support the implementation of a joint approach to the long-term protection of the Forest.</p>
<p>5.3. Work with Defra and Natural England to include incentives for access improvements on private land including future environmental land management grants, where these would benefit the public and reduce (or not increase) pressure on nearby sensitive areas.</p>	<p>A consortium of New Forest organisations has asked that post Brexit funding for managing land should include options to recover costs of providing increased access. This fits well with the Government's stated aims of encouraging 'natural capital' and 'public benefit'.</p> <p>Where there is no conflict with wildlife habitats and species, planning policies or other important constraints, we will then help landowners consider whether new walking, cycling and horse riding routes could fit with their plans for their land. This concept of drawing recreation away from designated areas could be extended to include campsites and other recreation facilities.</p> <p>Grants could also fund the removal or downgrading of tracks or car parks that are no longer needed.</p> <p>Funding to implement the England Coast Path within the New Forest has already been set aside, as has some provision for maintenance. We aim to establish the Path as an exemplar new route that encourages healthy walking, boosts the local economy and avoids impacts on wildlife, the working Forest and local residents.</p>

Objective 6: Collate data and evidence to help inform the ongoing management of recreation

There is ample evidence of the benefits of quiet outdoor recreation to our health and wellbeing. It is also clear that people sometimes impact in negative ways on each other, on sensitive wildlife habitats and species and on important aspects of the working New Forest. The actions in this strategy should therefore be progressed without delay.

However, more data and evidence would help target resources more effectively and efficiently, clarify trends in recreation, help predict which interventions are most likely to work and monitor the success of different recreation management initiatives.

Strategic action	What will be done?
<p>6.1. Collect data about recreation, its benefits, and its impacts on the special qualities of the New Forest.</p>	<p>We will continue to work together to gather data and evidence, especially where important gaps in our knowledge are identified.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work by rangers who routinely monitor the effectiveness of their engagement with visitors through feedback received, questionnaires and watching whether people take notice of information provided. • citizen science projects both to gather new data and to raise awareness among participants of the things that make the New Forest unique • extensive research into how visitors from planned new development could affect the protected habitats of the New Forest National Park • monitoring the quality of habitats and the populations of selected wildlife species • use of the new RSPB Franchises Lodge nature reserve as a base for research, including visiting university students
<p>6.2. Analyse, publish and use data to improve the management of recreation across the New Forest.</p>	<p>Key facts and figures about recreation will be made available to the public in the State of the Park Report, showing trends over time, and guiding work to manage recreation. The Report also includes information about many other aspects of the National Park and forms an important part of the background evidence for the wider Partnership Plan.</p> <p>All planning authorities also produce Annual Monitoring Reports for their local plans, providing another place for recreation-related data to be collated and made public.</p>

	<p>The various working groups and other joint initiatives that aim to address specific issues will monitor the success of their efforts. In practice it is rarely possible to prove that a specific intervention has had a specific and measurable effect, but it's important to focus efforts on what is most likely to work.</p>
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Objective 7: Regularly review progress against agreed recreation management actions and adapt forward plans to protect the special qualities of the National Park and enable people to enjoy and benefit from them

It is impossible to predict the degree to which the actions in this strategy will be achieved, especially given the ambitious nature of some actions that will depend on new resources being found. However, the organisations on the Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group will remain focussed on protecting the Forest for the benefit of future generations; they will therefore continue to meet, monitor progress and consider how to respond to changing circumstances.

Strategic action	What will be done?
7.1. Regularly review the implementation of the actions in this strategy and the degree to which they achieve the desired outcomes.	<p>We will gauge success through a range of mechanisms, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data and evidence collected • feedback from lead organisations • reports from joint forums • feedback from user groups
7.2. Where actions are not progressed or finalised, consider what could be done to redress the situation and gain agreement for revised actions where possible.	<p>This action will depend on which actions need to be addressed. It may be that new resources need to be found or that a shift in priorities towards the most important actions is necessary.</p>
7.3. Review the Recreation Management Strategy to ensure the management of recreation remains a high priority into the future.	<p>A formal review of the Recreation Management Strategy actions will be due in 2024.</p> <p>In the meantime, we will incorporate the most significant areas of work within the wider Partnership Plan for the National Park. This statutory document describes how multiple organisations are jointly committed to all aspects of the National Park, including recreation, so it is the most effective document to achieve maximum buy-in for joint working on the management of recreation.</p> <p>Whether the Recreation Management Strategy remains a stand-alone document or not, we will ensure that any significant changes are subject to appropriate consultation with user groups, local organisations and the public.</p>