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# New Forest National Park Recreation Management Strategy 2010 - 2030

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New Forest National Park Recreation Management Strategy  
2010 - 2030





Bird watching, Keyhaven

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the many people who have helped to produce this Strategy, and particularly to all the organisations and individuals who participated in the consultation and discussion meetings and who commented at various stages in the development of the Strategy.

## Further information

The Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) can be viewed on the National Park Authority's website at [www.newforestnpa.gov.uk](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk)



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## Foreword

Promoting opportunities to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the New Forest is fundamental to the purposes of the National Park. Outdoor recreation is one of the key ways in which people enjoy the area and provides opportunities for people to understand and value its special qualities. It also brings important benefits; these include quality of life, tourism, local business, the economy and the sustainability of community facilities.

The New Forest is England's smallest and most intensely visited National Park. It also has the highest concentration of designated wildlife sites of any of the English national parks. As such it faces particular challenges to integrate outdoor recreation with the conservation of its special qualities.

The purpose of this Strategy is to review recreation provision across the whole of the National Park and start to map out a sustainable way forward for the next 20 years.

There is much we still need to know and understand about outdoor recreation and its impacts. While we have some hard evidence and a wealth of information from and insight into the perceptions of our many stakeholders, we do not have a satisfactory or complete picture of hard facts on which to make decisions. We believe, however, that there are some important initiatives that can and should start now, while we gather evidence to inform others in the future.

We would not have achieved this much without the valuable information, insights and advice we have received from the many individuals and organisations who have contributed to our work so far. The Authority is extremely grateful for all of the help and many comments we have received in preparing this document.

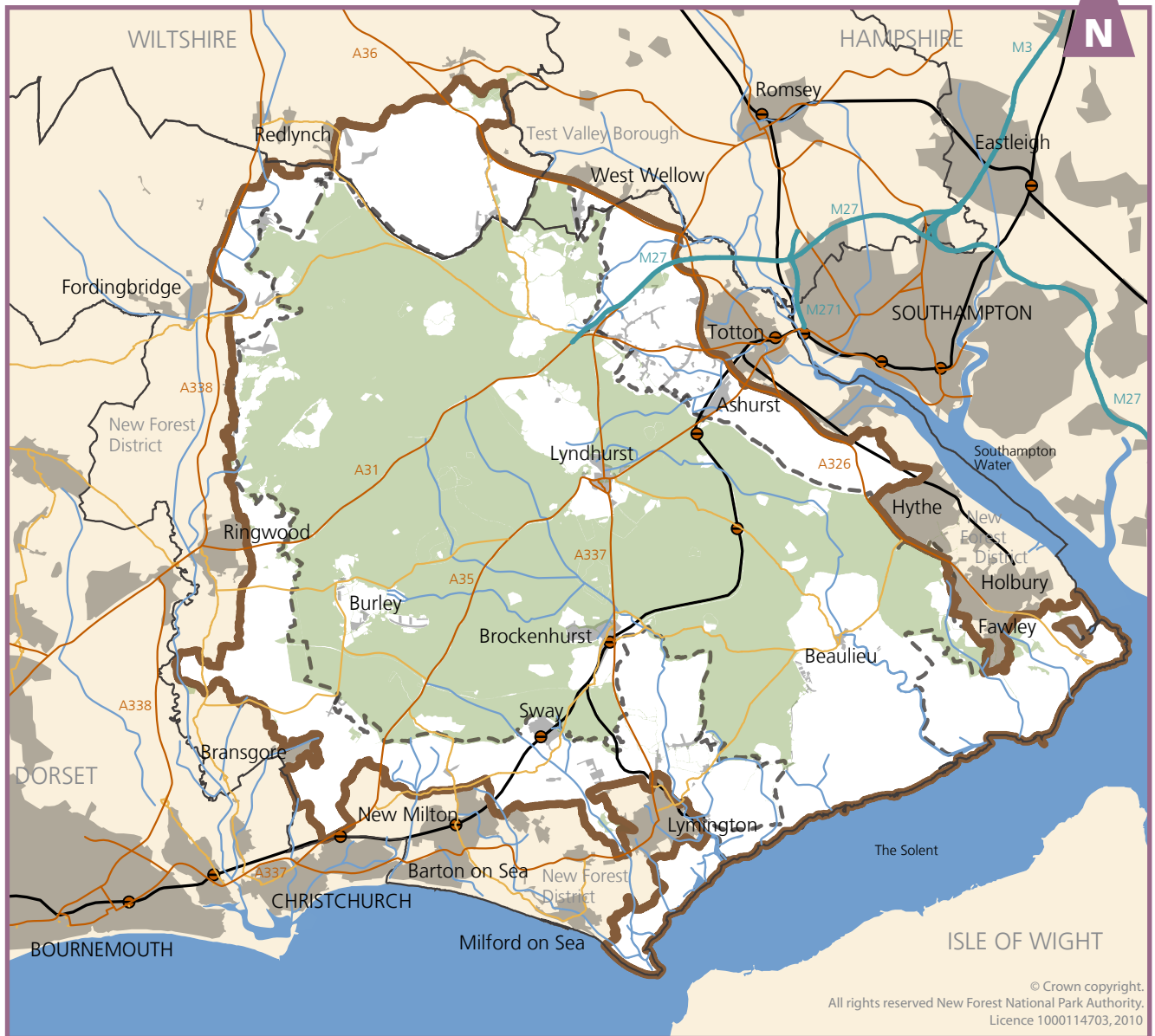
Over 80 different stakeholders and many more individuals have contributed to the preparation of this Strategy. Their help, advice and commitment have been invaluable. This has included input from the New Forest Access Forum; the Stakeholders Advisory Group; an informal Members Advisory Group; preliminary consultations with a wide range of recreation providers and users; and active participation through a series of workshops supporting the preparation of both the first National Park Management Plan for the New Forest and this Strategy.

The Authority also welcomed a large number of detailed comments during a public consultation during 2008. The draft Strategy has been fully revised to reflect the views expressed through all of this involvement and consultation. The Authority is committed to continuing the high level of participation by stakeholders as the process of developing ideas and actions continues over the coming years. This will be critical to future success.





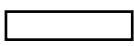


**Map 1 The New Forest National Park**

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-  New Forest National Park boundary
-  Perambulation
-  The Open Forest and other publicly accessible land
-  Main settlements and larger villages
-  County and district boundaries



Footpath in summer, Keyhaven

## Summary: the key points of the strategy

The Recreation Management Strategy sets out a long term vision for how recreation will be managed and promoted in the New Forest National Park over the next 20 years. The outstanding opportunities for recreation and enjoyment that the National Park offers will be protected and enhanced whilst a balanced approach to management will safeguard the conservation of the resource that visitors wish to experience and enjoy.

The Strategy identifies a series of actions for the National Park Authority and key partners over the next five years. These are designed to improve and develop the way in which recreation contributes to the sustainability and well being of the New Forest National Park and all those people who live and work here - as well as for those people who come to visit and enjoy its special qualities. The Strategy has been developed through extensive consultation and discussion with partners and interested groups and has been shaped by the views of the public.

A series of priority actions are outlined which address some of the major challenges facing the National Park. These are grouped around the following key themes:

- **Active engagement** with users, land managers and providers of recreation to further the first and second purposes of the National Park
- Appropriate communication structures and events will be set up, as required, to enable **active discussion** between user groups, land managers and recreation providers to address matters of conflict (actual or perceived) and mutual interest
- **A programme of survey and research** will be implemented to inform future discussions and decisions about the management of recreation. The Strategy will be reviewed after five years in the light of this evidence
- **The majority of recreational activity will be focussed on gateway locations.** The potential for enhancing facilities within the New Forest National Park will be explored at these sites and around a core network of sustainable access routes
- **The provision of new areas of green infrastructure** will absorb the anticipated growth in levels of recreational demand from new housing and increased populations in adjacent urban areas. This will be achieved by working with neighbouring Authorities to improve the provision of new and enhanced facilities within or close to the growth areas
- **Capacity for further growth in visitor numbers within the National Park will be managed** by having a maximum number of car park spaces and limiting the provision of new facilities outside villages.



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Heather, Hatchet Pond

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# Chapter one





# Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Strategy

This Strategy sets out a framework for the management of outdoor recreation in the New Forest National Park over the coming 20 years. Its key purpose is to ensure that, at a strategic level, outdoor recreation operates in as sustainable a way as possible; ensuring that it functions within environmental limits whilst optimising the social and economic benefits it can bring. It also proposes a process through which some of the current conflicts and polarised opinions about recreation might be resolved. If recreation is to be managed successfully, it is essential for the public, users and land managers to be involved and supportive of the process.

The Strategy has been drawn up in parallel with the first National Park Management Plan, 2010 – 2015, and the National Park Core Strategy Submission Document (due to be confirmed following examination 2010) and Development Management Policies. It also fits with other regional and national policy documents such as the South East Regional Spatial Strategy (Government Office for the South East, 2009), Rights of Way Improvement Plans, Local Transport Plans, Defra's Outdoors for All?<sup>1</sup> and Planning Policy Guidance 17<sup>2</sup>. The Strategy will be an important consideration in assessing recreation-related planning applications.

The Recreation Management Strategy serves as a 'daughter' document to the National Park Management Plan and develops some of the objectives set out in that document. It is deliberately short and strategic with practical activity highlighted by a number of headline actions which will be developed and implemented with partners over the first five years. The Strategy will eventually form part of a suite of 'daughter' documents that will include a Landscape Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan.

Overall, the Strategy demonstrates the Authority's commitment to improving the management of recreation and access across the National Park. After five years, it will be reviewed with stakeholders as new evidence becomes available.

<sup>1</sup> Defra (2008) Outdoors for All? An action plan to increase the number of people from under-represented groups who access the natural environment

<sup>2</sup> Planning Policy Guidance 17 (July 2002) Planning for open Space, Sport and Recreation



## 1.2 Who is it for?

While it has been prepared by the New Forest National Park Authority, the Strategy is primarily for all of those organisations and businesses involved in providing for, and managing recreation in the New Forest. The successful implementation and delivery of the Strategy will depend on the joint and coordinated activity of these organisations:

Verderers of the New Forest, Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire Council, New Forest District Council, New Forest District Local Strategic Partnership, Natural England, private Land Managers, Test Valley Borough Council, The National Trust, The Wildlife Trusts, New Forest Association, New Forest Access Forum, members of the New Forest Consultative Panel, Parish and Town Councils in the New Forest National Park, New Forest Equine Forum, New Forest Dog Owners Group, Ramblers Association New Forest Group, Ringwood and Fordingbridge Footpath Society, Cyclists' Touring Club, New Forest Tourism Association, Commoners Defence Association, New Forest Business Partnership, a wide range of recreation providers in the area, New Forest Access for All and many others.

The Local Strategic Partnerships and the Health and Well Being Strategy for the area will be particularly important in helping to deliver many aspects of the Strategy. The Strategy takes into account many of the priorities agreed by these Partnerships, as set out in their Sustainable Community Strategies, and the National Park Authority will continue to contribute directly to their work.

## 1.3 Which activities are included?

The Strategy focuses on outdoor recreation. The term 'outdoor recreation' describes a wide variety of mainly active leisure pursuits that take place in the countryside of the New Forest. The most popular activities include:

- **Walking**
- **Horse riding**
- **On and off road cycling**
- **Camping and caravanning**
- **Coastal activities including watersports, sailing, windsurfing, kite surfing, canoeing / kayaking, swimming**
- **Cricket**
- **Golf**
- Running
- Orienteering
- Paddling and playing in water
- Enjoying the countryside – painting, writing, photography, field studies (including natural history, cultural heritage and landscape)
- Picnicking
- Kite flying
- Model aircraft and model boat sailing
- Carriage driving
- Angling
- Conservation volunteering
- Visiting villages, historical sites and other attractions

This list is not exhaustive and new activities are likely to emerge in future. The main focus of the Strategy is on those activities highlighted in bold and implementation of actions for these will have beneficial results for the other listed activities. Additional specific action plans will be produced for other activities as part of the five year review or when necessary.



Cycling, Keyhaven

## 1.4 Achieving National Park Purposes

All National Parks have two statutory purposes and a duty that set out the main reasons for their designation. The two National Park purposes are:

- **to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park; and**
- **to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Park's special qualities by the public.**

National Park Authorities also have a duty, in taking forward the Park purposes, to:

- **seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities.**

The two purposes are given equal importance in the Environment Act, 1995. Section 62 of the 1995 Environment Act requires relevant authorities to take the two purposes into account in any work that may affect the National Park and make every effort to reconcile any conflict between the two. If such efforts fail, then only as a measure of last resort should the first purpose take precedence.

The relationship between the two purposes is commonly known as the 'Sandford Principle' which is clarified in the government Circular 12/96 (currently being revised in 2010). The Sandford Committee reported in 1974 and concluded that most conflicts could be resolved by good management but stated that 'where it is not possible to prevent excessive or unsuitable use by such means, so that conflict between the two purposes becomes acute, the first one must prevail in order that the beauty and ecological qualities of the national parks may be maintained'. Circular 12/96 continues 'The National Park Authorities and other bodies should

make every effort to reconcile any conflicts which may arise between the two National Park purposes. The National Park Authorities in particular will be expected to encourage mediation, negotiation and cooperation, but there may be cases where reconciliation becomes impossible. In those cases the conservation purpose should take precedence'.

Providing sustainable opportunities for access and outdoor recreation is one of the important means by which both National Park purposes and the duty can be achieved.

## 1.5 The role of the National Park Authority in managing outdoor recreation

Many different organisations, authorities and businesses are directly involved in managing recreational activity in the New Forest. The National Park Authority does not directly own or manage any property or facilities within the National Park and it has little direct involvement with outdoor recreational activities. However, the Authority is the local planning authority and has a key role in managing recreation-related development in future.

The National Park Authority is also involved in a partnership agreement to support the work of the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst and currently sponsors eight local information points around the National Park (these are based within and managed by existing businesses). The Authority runs a programme of events and activities designed to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the National Park. It is also very active in developing interpretation projects, delivering educational programmes and supporting a series of awareness raising campaigns.

The National Park Authority has both a listening and leading role in:

- supporting sustainable recreational activities
  - working with, supporting and providing advice to recreation providers for the wider strategic benefit of the New Forest
  - helping to build partnerships and facilitate agreement and consensus over a wide range of issues
  - championing and raising awareness of the special qualities of the National Park and how they can be best enjoyed
  - establishing the broader framework of policies within which recreation takes place
  - identifying and securing external funding to make projects and agreed actions happen
  - increasing the dialogue between the New Forest National Park and neighbouring authorities and working to support the implementation of their green infrastructure strategies that are required to off-set the potential impact of housing growth plans
  - working with conservation groups.
- opportunities to promote understanding and a sense of care and stewardship. Outdoor recreation provides a means by which people can enjoy a first-hand experience of the special qualities of the New Forest National Park. Research suggests that one of the first stages in the development of environmental awareness and a concern for conservation is to have a meaningful personal experience with nature (see Hungerford and Volk 1990; Chawla 1998, 1999; Louv, 2005). Some recreational activities may therefore help to induce a sense of value and appreciation of the environment in some participants – and thereby influence positive behaviour changes and a range of other outcomes. A positive first-hand recreational experience of the New Forest is one important way of developing an emotional bond between the visitor and this inspiring landscape
  - financial benefit to the local economy and jobs. Whilst some activities are free at the point of delivery, recreation still has a considerable financial impact - and there is a significant degree of overlap between outdoor recreation and tourism. Tourism is the largest single industry in the New Forest economy. Virtually all staying visitors (i.e. tourists who have the highest spend per head) participate in outdoor recreation during their visit and many surveys show that the opportunity to walk or cycle in the New Forest landscape is one of the key attractions<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.6 Benefits of outdoor recreation

Well-managed and sustainable outdoor recreation can bring enormous benefits to individuals and society alike. These include:

- improved health and well-being for individuals, communities and the nation. Outdoor recreation can provide opportunities for people to live healthier lifestyles, escape from the pressures of modern life and promote psychological well-being

<sup>3</sup> Visitor Survey of the New Forest National Park 2004-2005 (Tourism South East)



Lapwing in profile, Keyhaven

It is estimated that in the New Forest District as a whole, some 600 tourism businesses generated £395m in 2004 employing more than 9000 people<sup>4</sup>. The leisure visit spend in the National Park has been estimated to be more than £100m, sustaining around 2,500 jobs<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.7 Potential impacts of recreation

A number of potentially negative impacts of recreation have been identified. These are summarised in Annex 1. Most of these impacts are highly variable – they tend to occur at a localised scale, are difficult to measure objectively and vary in their extent and severity according to the weather, time of year and a wide range of other factors. One difficult issue is that individuals on their own cause little or minimal impact but it is the volume and scale of the numbers of visitors that can combine to have significant effects. The Strategy aims to ensure that recreational activities avoid adverse impacts on the special qualities and in particular on the Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, National Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Ramsar sites in the New Forest which are protected by the Habitats Regulations.

It is important to recognise that there is much debate and disagreement about whether these impacts are valid or whether they are significant enough to justify some of the remedies proposed by some land managers and interest groups. Whether the listed impacts are real and supported by objective evidence or simply based on

anecdotal information, the opinions of interest groups and individuals are often strongly and passionately held.

One of the aims of the process outlined in this Strategy will be to promote a greater level of understanding and appreciation of the different perspectives that other interest groups may hold. Many disagreements have their origin in key differences between the interest groups; in terms of personal values and interests, social backgrounds and a range of sociological factors. These can be amplified by poor communication and a lack of respect, concern, or intolerance of other people's activities, interests and property. Finding solutions that are acceptable to a broad range of interest groups will require a political and social process which involves building confidence and mutual respect - and acknowledges the need for 'give and take' in reaching lasting agreements.

This Strategy recognises that the New Forest is a living and working landscape that supports many people's livelihoods in farming, commoning and forestry. The role of commoning is particularly important in the management and conservation of the landscape that visitors come to enjoy. It will be important to ensure that recreation has the least possible impact on the working activities of local people and residents - and that users respect other people's property and activities. There is already evidence that commoners and land managers have had to change the way they do things because of recreational activities; and proportionate steps need to be taken to reduce the extent to which inconvenience is caused when different groups try to use the same parts of the Forest at the same time, for example, by managing potential conflicts during pony drifts.

<sup>4</sup> Future Matters: Issues and options for the New Forest (New Forest District Council 2006)

<sup>5</sup> Future Matters: Issues and options for the New Forest (New Forest District Council 2006)

# Chapter two



## A vision for recreation management in the National Park

This vision is a sub-set of that outlined in the New Forest National Park Management Plan (2010-2015) and provides some extra detail on how recreation can help to deliver the following elements of the Management Plan vision, in which:

- tranquillity and a feeling of naturalness pervade large parts of the Park
- the mosaic of distinctive landscapes and habitats are all of the highest quality and a great variety of wildlife is able to flourish
- there is a strong sense and understanding of the heritage and living culture of the Forest
- all visitors can gain inspiration, health and well-being and enjoy the extensive areas of land with open access
- people live and work sustainably and contribute to the care of the Forest
- everyone contributes in appropriate ways to keeping the National Park a special place for present and future generations
- local, regional and national organisations recognise the value of the National Park and there is a shared understanding of its role within the wider area

In 20 years time, the New Forest National Park will continue to be recognised as a welcoming place which offers a wide range of appropriate recreational opportunities for people to experience the National Park at first-hand. Recreation will make a positive and sustainable contribution to the New Forest; improving people's quality of life, health and well-being; supporting the local economy and management of the New Forest while ensuring the Park's special qualities are conserved and enhanced for future generations.

People's lives will be enriched by taking part in outdoor recreational activities. They will find for themselves the inspiration, refreshment, exercise and enjoyment that the New Forest landscape can offer. These activities will make use of an integrated network of public and private transport, rights of way, permissive routes and areas with

open access. More people will have better information about where they can go and what they can do in the National Park.

Individuals will continue to have the freedom to enjoy the National Park but they will also have the personal responsibility for doing so in a way which respects the natural environment, cultural heritage and the legitimate activities and interests of other people, including residents, commoners, landowners and other users. The conflicts and misunderstandings between recreational users, residents and the natural environment will have been addressed through a collaborative process which works towards the best possible outcomes for the New Forest. Wherever possible, solutions will be built around agreement and consensus; through the involvement of relevant user groups and landowners working in partnership within statutory limits.

# Chapter three





## A popular and special place

The New Forest has long been a destination for visitors in its own right. The most popular destinations for informal outdoor recreation are the open landscapes in the heart of the Forest, where the main activities are walking, dog walking, horse riding, enjoying the scenery, cycling and picnicking. On the coast, sites such as Lepe Country Park and Calshot are also popular.

The National Park offers a wide range of attractions, from informal but well known 'beauty spots' and low key facilities, such as Bolderwood, to major visitor and heritage attractions of which the best known include Beaulieu Abbey and National Motor Museum, Buckler's Hard on the Beaulieu River, Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway, New Forest Centre and Paultons Park. The villages of Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst, Beaulieu and Burley are also popular.

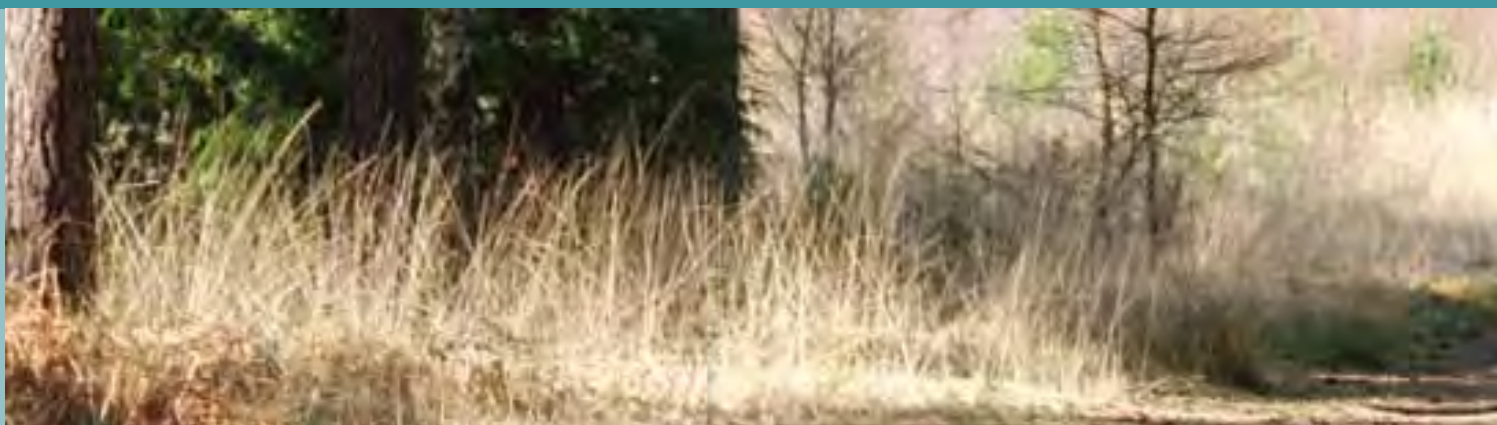
These are complemented by well managed and very popular outdoor recreation sites within and close to the National Park. Within the Park, Calshot Activity Centre is one of the largest outdoor adventure centres in Britain and Lepe Country Park is a major coastal recreation resource. Outside the Park, Avon Heath and Moors Valley Country Parks (lying within easy reach of the western boundary of the National Park) offer a wide range of activities for all the family in a robust environment.

The New Forest is an exceptionally popular resource for outdoor recreation (see Table 1). Of the 13.5 million visitor days spent in the New Forest, approximately 60% relate to day visitors (many very local in origin) and 40% to staying visitors.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Visitor Survey of the New Forest National Park 2004-2005 (Tourism South East)

**Table 1** Key characteristics of day and staying visitors

Day visitors	Staying visitors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The vast majority come from the three counties surrounding the National Park with 52% coming from Hampshire, 29% from Dorset and 7% from Wiltshire</li> <li>▪ 58% are very local - either from the National Park or from an 8km radius beyond the National Park</li> <li>▪ The majority of local day visitors come alone (many walking dogs)</li> <li>▪ 46% of local visits are habitual, made every day throughout the year, and 34% of these come at least once a week all year round</li> <li>▪ 94% of non local day visitors and 88% of local residents use a car to reach destinations within the New Forest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 98% come from the UK</li> <li>▪ 30% stay in the New Forest National Park; while the remaining 70% come in from outside</li> <li>▪ The average length of stay in the National Park is 5.4 nights. Longer stays of up to 8 nights are associated with those staying in camping and caravan sites</li> <li>▪ Of those who stay in the National Park, 72% stay in self-serviced accommodation (mainly camping and caravan sites). For those staying outside the National Park, 48% are staying in self serviced accommodation</li> <li>▪ Most staying visitors come in pairs (53%) or in larger groups (40%)</li> <li>▪ Tourism is the largest single industry in the New Forest</li> </ul>



A significant proportion of day visitors travel short distances and are relatively habitual in their visits, many visiting the New Forest every day of the year whilst staying visitors mainly concentrate their visits in the summer months.

Different places are popular with different people. Staying visitors tend to concentrate their visits at a dozen or so popular sites, including the villages and settlements of the area. Local users tend to make most use of locations closest to their homes. For the day visitor from further afield there is a

clear pattern with those travelling in from the east staying in the eastern part of the National Park and those from the west staying in the west and so on. The result is a dispersed recreation pattern supported and created by the dispersed pattern of car parks but with visitor pressure evident around groupings of popular sites.

The most popular visitor sites for different activities are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 Examples of popular areas for recreation within the New Forest National Park**

Most popular car parks in the New Forest	Areas popular with staying visitors	Areas popular with those living in the National Park*	Areas popular with those living on the borders of the National Park*
<b>Very high use</b>	Blackwater	Lyndhurst	Lyndhurst
Bolderwood	Bolderwood	Brockenhurst	Burley
Dibden Inclosure	Lepe	Beaulieu	Brockenhurst
Wilverley Plan	Ober Corner	Burley	Beaulieu
<b>High use</b>	Bolton's Bench	Fritham	Wilverley
Blackwater	Rhinefield Drive	Bolderwood	Bolderwood
Keyhaven	Roundhill	Stoney Cross	
Longslade Bottom	Rufus Stone	Rhinefield Ornamental Drive	
Lepe	Whitefield Moor		
Calshot	Wootton Bridge		

\* Referred to by 6% or more of household respondents living within or bordering the National Park NB the survey excluded some coastal sites and popular villages.

There are a number of other informal and formal recreation facilities within the National Park, some of which are located on the Open Forest, used mainly by local people. These include sports pitches in most parishes, cricket grounds, golf courses, several football pitches, and facilities for specialist interests such as polo and archery. Some

groups visit the National Park to participate in organised events, such as orienteering, marathons, scouting and guide activities and charity events. A proportion of the enclosed landscape is used for riding and keeping recreational horses including provision for ménages and other equine infrastructure.



Cyclist, Deerleap

The Solent is one of the major recreational yachting locations in the UK and attracts people from all over southern England. A proportion of these are catered for within the National Park, with a number of public and private moorings on the Beaulieu River including Buckler's Hard, at Keyhaven, Ashlett and Calshot, and with purpose built marinas close to the Park at Lymington, and Hythe.

The context for recreation in the New Forest National Park is its proximity to one of the most populated parts of southern England. The Park is significant because nearly half of its area lies within public ownership and a clear distinction between the public estate (i.e. Crown/Authority owned land) and private land needs to be made; the policies for the former will not necessarily apply in the same way to the latter.

Much of the Forest's unique environment is of international importance for wildlife. Over 56% of the National Park (and most of the Open Forest) is covered by designations for biodiversity - Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Ramsar sites. The National Park also has 10% of all the scheduled ancient monuments in the south east of England. While not receiving any form of specific statutory recognition the most tranquil and remote areas of the Forest are an essential part of the Forest's character<sup>7</sup>. These overlap with the Open Forest and coastal habitats, but also include some of the adjacent enclosed landscapes, particularly in the south east of the National Park. There is some concern that tranquillity, as a very fragile and intangible quality, has been gradually eroded in many parts of the New Forest due to the popularity of the area.

<sup>7</sup> The tranquil areas of the New Forest were last mapped in 1996. This 'Tranquil Areas Study' of the New Forest Heritage Area assessed the landscape in terms of the impact of visual intrusion (from buildings, industry and pylons) and noise disturbance from traffic

It is the contrast of the New Forest with surrounding urban areas – the senses of freedom, antiquity and peace that it offers, the New Forest pony, its wildlife, wide views along the coast, and its accessibility to a large number of people – that makes the National Park such an important and valued recreational resource.



### 3.1 Special Qualities

The essence of what makes the New Forest special and unique is captured in the 'Special Qualities' of the New Forest National Park which were identified by public consultation in 2007. These qualities define what makes the New Forest unique and immediately recognisable and, when taken together, distinguish it from other parts of the country. Although particular features that we

value about the New Forest today may alter over time, conserving the essence of the place and ensuring its uniqueness can be experienced by future generations, is the central priority for the National Park and is at the heart of this Strategy. A full description of the special qualities can be found in the National Park Management Plan (2010 - 2015) but they are summarised below:

#### Special Qualities of the New Forest National Park

The New Forest National Park's landscape is unique; it is a 'living' and working remnant of medieval England with a powerful sense of continuity, tradition and history. It is the survival of not just one special quality but a whole range of features that brings a sense of completeness and integrity. These features include:

- the New Forest's outstanding natural beauty: the sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland with large veteran trees, heathland, bog, autumn colour and an unspoilt coastline, with views of the Solent and Isle of Wight
- an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals of international importance
- a unique historic, cultural and archaeological heritage from royal hunting ground to ship-building, salt making and 500 years of military coastal defence
- an historic commoning system that maintains so much of what people know and love as 'the New Forest' forming the heart of a working landscape based on farming and forestry
- the iconic New Forest Pony together with cattle, donkeys and pigs roaming free
- tranquillity in the midst of the busy, built up south of England
- wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation, learning and discovery in one of the last extensive, gentle landscapes in the south including unmatched open access on foot and horseback
- a healthy environment: fresh air, clean water, local produce and a sense of 'wildness'
- strong and distinctive local communities with real pride in and sense of identity with their local area.



Cotton grass, Shatterfold Bottom

## 3.2 Accessibility

The New Forest National Park offers extensive opportunities for quiet outdoor recreation that are unrivalled in the lowlands of southern England. There are in excess of 30,000 hectares (74,000 acres/115 square miles) of unenclosed land where people can walk freely, a large proportion of which is also open to horse riders. This includes the heaths, woodlands and commonable lands managed by the Forestry Commission, and the commons managed by the National Trust and Hampshire County Council as well as around 50 privately owned parts of the Open Forest. Outside the Crown Lands there are 325 km (190 miles) of rights of way mostly within the privately owned and enclosed landscape of the National Park. There are some well established and way-marked cycle routes, some of which are on traffic-free forest tracks. Carriage drivers are able to use a designated network of forest tracks. The many minor roads within the National Park add considerably to the recreational network.

At present around half of the National Park's coast is accessible; the existing coast path between Hurst Spit and Lymington is very popular, and passes through Keyhaven Nature Reserve. Lepe Country Park and Calshot beach also offer good opportunities to access the shoreline. The implementation of new legislation will extend access to the coast in the next few years.

Overall, the quantity of physical access in the National Park appears to meet the needs of its users and recent consultations have revealed little latent demand for substantial new access provision<sup>8</sup>. However, in some locations the condition and safety of the existing physical access opportunities is unsatisfactory.

<sup>8</sup> Hampshire Countryside Access Plan 2008 – 2013, Hampshire County Council

## 3.3 Recreation management to date

Recreation management is not new to the New Forest. Over the last four decades the New Forest has undergone two significant step changes in visitor management which have proved to be very successful in addressing the issues for which they were designed. In many ways the New Forest is already an exemplar of how to manage the pressures that recreation can bring within a small and sensitive landscape.

Before 1972 vehicles, campers and caravans had free and unrestricted access to the unenclosed Forest. By the early 1960s this was causing significant problems with severe erosion scars and vehicle tracks, and with cars and caravans visible in nearly every view of the Forest.

In response, a Conservation Plan was produced in 1970 and by 1976 all cars were confined to the present day pattern of dispersed car parks. Wild camping was prohibited with camping being limited to designated campsites.

Then in the early 1990s came the second step change – the introduction of a 40 mph speed limit on the unfenced roads<sup>9</sup> within the Perambulation of the Forest. The limit was first introduced to the northern half of the Forest in 1990, followed by the southern half in 1992. Although the primary purpose was to reduce animal fatalities from speeding traffic it has also improved the visitor experience, making roads safer for recreational users and helping to contain the intrusion of traffic on the Forest. More recently some 30mph limits have been introduced to villages within the National Park.

<sup>9</sup> That is roads where animals are able to graze the road verges and can range over the carriageway



The network of rights of way is managed by the respective County Highway Authorities with some assistance from the National Park Authority through the provision of grants and management support. This includes a small grants scheme for improvement projects requested by local communities which is jointly administered by Hampshire County Council and the National Park Authority. Several organisations produce a series of waymarked trails, run guided walks, events and other activities. Certain activities on the Crown Lands have been managed through the provision

of defined permissive routes (e.g. off road cycling) or through permits (e.g. carriage driving).

### 3.4 Recreational Trends

The New Forest has experienced changing patterns of recreational use over recent decades – largely in line with a series of national trends recently identified for Natural England<sup>10</sup>. These are summarised in the box below.

<sup>10</sup> Henley Centre Headlight Vision 2005, a report for Natural England's outdoor recreation strategy

#### Current national trends in outdoor recreation

- The population is getting older but many people are more physically active later in life
- There has been a major increase in car ownership and traffic levels which is set to continue
- Changes in modern working patterns mean that people's leisure time is more evenly spread through the week than in the past - although weekends are still important
- Greater use of information technology (e.g. internet, mobile phones and GPS) has provided more information on recreational opportunities and new ways of finding out about them
- Increasing wealth has generally resulted in more spending on leisure and holidays by some (the experience of the current recession so far suggests that numbers of people taking holidays in the UK and in National Parks may increase as people take fewer foreign trips)
- The urbanisation of culture, alternative indoor pursuits and safety fears have resulted in less association with the natural world than any previous generation – especially amongst young people
- There are more leisure choices available to more people than ever before – and greater competition for their attention which in some areas may have reduced the numbers of people participating in outdoor recreation
- Increased demand for organised events
- Increased demand for customised and personalised information provision
- Some decline in informal recreation like picnicking (not experienced in the New Forest) and an increase in some new active sports like kite surfing and mountain biking

Many recreational activities take place all year round although others are still seasonal due to restrictions (e.g. camping) or due to weather (e.g. some water sports in winter). Increasingly we

can expect this to change as the trends in climate change become clearer and more activities become viable throughout the seasons.



Photographing deer, Ober Heath

### 3.5 Managing the needs and expectations of visitors

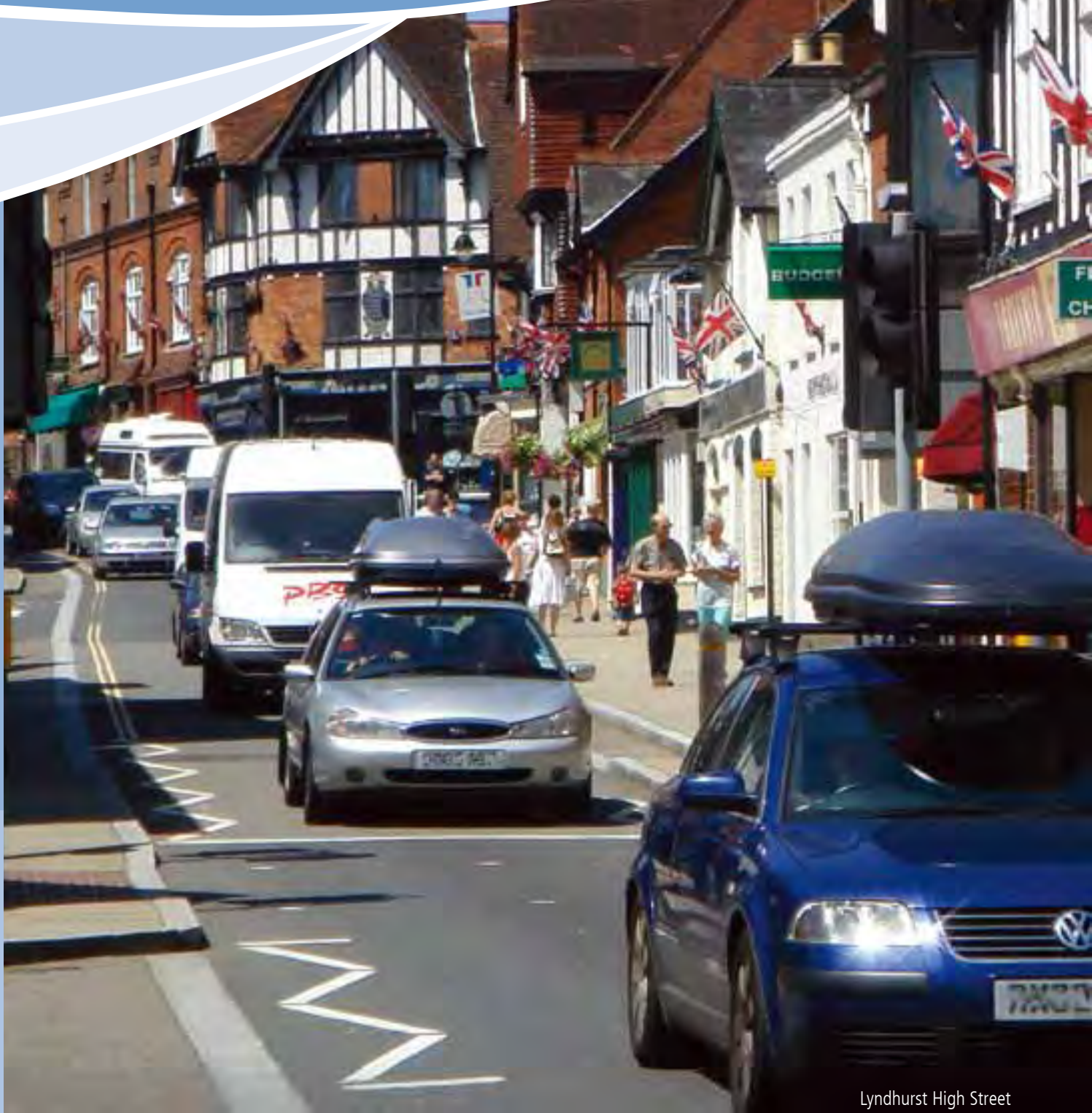
Whilst this Strategy is not led by recreational demands, it is recognised that the needs and expectations of visitors should be met as far as possible within available financial resources. This will ensure that associated benefits are maximised and provide a means to deliver visitor management objectives and encourage compliance with codes of conduct.

The majority of visitors seem very satisfied with their visit to the New Forest, although the surveys also indicate that there is scope for improvement in terms of:

- the range and quality of facilities provided. Many facilities in the Park are 'tired' and in need of substantial investment to bring them up to modern standards
- traffic congestion
- potential safety conflicts between vehicles and recreational activities especially cycling
- the visitor welcome, customer care and better information provision.

However, many users enjoy and love the National Park as it is and do not want to see any significant change in the way recreation is managed. Many are strongly averse to any further restrictions on their recreational activity.

# Chapter four



Lyndhurst High Street



## Challenges and issues for the National Park

In the coming years, a number of external factors will continue to affect the New Forest National Park and drive changes over time. The key challenges affecting the future of outdoor recreation are likely to be:

- **Population growth and future demographic characteristics:** Nationally, the population of England is predicted to rise from 51.5 million in 2008 to 60.7 million people by 2033<sup>11</sup>. At a local level, new housing provision is likely to result in significant population growth within a 50km (30 mile) radius of the New Forest. Preliminary analysis of the available data suggests that this alone could increase the number of visitor days spent in the New Forest by 12% or 1.6 million per annum by 2026<sup>12</sup>. There is uncertainty over this figure as what actually happens will depend on changing lifestyles and recreational habits - and on any mitigation measures that may be taken.
- **Economics:** The challenge of increasing the financial contribution that recreation makes to the New Forest economy and land management, insofar as this is compatible with taking forward National Park purposes.
- **Car use** and a lack of willingness to travel by other means. Increasing traffic volumes appear inevitable as a consequence of surrounding population growth. Although traffic volumes stabilised during 2009, due to economic conditions, Government forecasts for England published in 2008 predict a rise in traffic by 4% by 2010, 17% by 2015 and 32% by 2025 (against a 2003 baseline). This is forecast to translate into a rise in congestion of 1% by 2010, 17% by 2015 and 37% by 2025.
- **European and government policy:** National policy underlines the importance of outdoor recreation for healthy living and well-being. It advocates the use of the outdoors for learning, discovery and development of environmental responsibility and understanding. It encourages the accessibility of outdoor recreation to all sectors of the population. National Parks are committed to playing an active role in meeting these aspects of government policy and achieving more with diminishing resources.
- **Climate change:** Which is introducing considerable uncertainty about future recreation patterns. Higher temperatures and an emphasis on carbon reduction may result in more people holidaying in the UK whilst also increasing the vulnerability of environmental resources. Recreation will need to adapt to climate change and help to lessen the Park's carbon footprint.
- **Respecting the National Park's special qualities:** To avoid adverse impacts – especially on the internationally designated habitats in order to comply fully with the Habitats Regulations.
- **Raising awareness and understanding:** Providing opportunities for people to learn about, understand and enjoy the special qualities and getting information about where to go and what to do to those who need it before they arrive.
- **Building support for conservation** and a shared sense of stewardship for the New Forest, encouraging people to become more actively involved in looking after the National Park and to comply with appropriate codes of conduct.

11 Office for National Statistics: National population projections 2008-based, Statistical Bulletin October 2009

12 Sharp, J., Lowen, J. & Liley, D (2008) Changing patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park, with particular reference to the New Forest SPA



- **Providing recreational facilities** whose design, scale and location is in keeping with the character and special qualities of the National Park whilst meeting the needs and expectations of users as far as possible.
- **Being inclusive and respecting the diversity** of those living within and visiting the National Park.

## The big issues

Six major issues emerged as key themes from the consultations:

### 4.1 Respecting the fragility of the National Park environment:

the environmental quality of the National Park is not only subject to strong legal protection but forms the basis of what visitors come to enjoy. The Strategy aims to comply fully with the requirements of existing legislation in the management of recreational impacts; in particular by assessing all proposals that might affect the European wildlife sites against the tests of the Habitats Regulations and the New Forest Acts. It will also seek to protect those qualities that are not specifically safeguarded in legislation such as tranquillity. Robust information such as noise mapping information (and other key factors) is required to monitor whether measures to protect tranquillity are being successful and whether recreational activity is causing any deterioration. One of the key ways of managing recreational impacts will be to focus the most popular recreational activities onto gateway sites and existing linear routes. This means that some routes and locations need to be more attractive than others thereby creating quieter 'sanctuary' areas that people tend not to go into. This approach avoids the need for intrusive control measures – exploiting the desire of most people to stay

on 'defined' routes where they are less likely to get lost. It does not mean that people will be prevented from accessing quieter parts of open access areas if they so wish, it simply means that the majority of users will keep to the main paths voluntarily and by preference.

People's sense of personal freedom can be protected in return for high standards of personal responsibility and conformity with codes of conduct that respect the National Park's special qualities, its communities and other users. A range of topic-based campaigns will be one of the principal mechanisms for influencing visitor behaviour. This may result in increasing peer pressure for improved standards of behaviour.

### 4.2 Managing current demand and potential growth:

the National Park is already a well used and widely enjoyed recreational resource.

There would seem to be two key issues which are relevant to the level of visits and recreational pressure:

- the 'background' level of activity from everyday regular recreational visits, and
- the levels of activity on the busiest days of the year when several factors can coincide to dramatically increase the visitor population and levels of traffic congestion.

Further hard data on the trends in these elements of visitor pressure is required. The days of peak recreational demand include summer bank holidays and certain weekends when in good weather the number of cars and visitors may be well above the background average. On these days, the capacity of facilities and certain honey pot sites can be under severe pressure (and potentially exceeded). At these peak times, the New Forest's capacity has



Cricket ground, Burley

been reached and it would be undesirable and damaging to provide for any increase.

There is a view amongst some that average visitor pressure may have exceeded the limits of what is acceptable and that future growth in everyday visits poses further risks to the designated nature conservation sites, tranquillity and the enjoyment of current users. Potentially, with future growth, the number of exceptionally busy days may increase as the underlying background levels of activity increase.

Others argue that there is no overwhelming evidence to show that levels of use have exceeded the Forest's ecological capacity and there is no justification for taking active steps to reduce the overall number of background recreational visits. The calculation of whether limits of acceptable change have been exceeded is an exceedingly difficult and complicated process, if it is to be assessed in a fair and balanced way. No work has been undertaken on what limits of acceptable change might be appropriate in the New Forest but working to define and set some tangible limits may be one option to consider. Once such limits are established and agreed they would then be monitored, and if exceeded would trigger the need for further action to address the problems.

As a consequence of the uncertainty about the appropriate number of visits that can be supported in the National Park, this Strategy does not set out to increase the overall number of visitor days taking place in the New Forest. This will be achieved by carefully limiting the capacity of recreational facilities (particularly car park capacity) and preventing the creation of new facilities outside the villages. The emphasis will be to ensure that those who already visit can enjoy the very best possible experience whilst having the least possible impact.

There is evidence of recreational impacts causing problems at a localised site-based scale. These

issues are most appropriately managed at the site level by land managers in conjunction with users. The assumption of this Strategy is that appropriate recreational activities can be accommodated sustainably if they and the sites on which they occur are managed effectively. This is why the Forestry Commission Conservation Plan of 1970 was so successful and effective; it managed wild camping and unhindered access for vehicles through the provision of dedicated new facilities (i.e. new campsites and car parks) and has helped to safeguard the special qualities despite an apparent increase in the number of visitors in the decades since this pioneering approach was taken. Some of the sites created in the 1970s have suffered localised damage such as at Hollands Wood. If, following attempts at management, the impacts remain then a proportionate response should be adopted according to the significance of the damage. For example, there is evidence that camping continues to cause damage to three campsites in areas of ancient and ornamental woodland on the Open Forest and hence the action to relocate this activity to more appropriate locations outlined in Section 6.4.2.

Recreation management will continue to be focussed on the main gateways through which visitors already access the National Park. These comprise the existing network of main car parks, rail and bus links, villages and honey-pot destinations listed in Table 3. These sites have already developed the infrastructure with which to manage and contain recreational demand. Many are destinations in their own right, others function as entry points or recreational 'hubs' from which people set out for their recreational experience in the wider landscape.

These principal gateways should continue to be the key places where visitors receive a warm welcome, information and interpretation - and the main



sites at which facilities are provided. It is important that these sites are well maintained and designed because this helps to generate respect and reduce vandalism (although there is no assumption that existing sites will be upgraded). It will be appropriate to focus most effort on those gateway sites that are outside or on the periphery of the most sensitive designated locations. It is also important to ensure that the provision of facilities at other non-gateway sites are of an appropriate and high standard in terms of design, materials

and environmental footprint. Table 4 opposite proposes some draft criteria for how gateway locations might be recognised in future. Inclusion in this list does not imply any future or further development on the scale or scope of provision at these locations. Any further changes are likely to require considerable consultation and involvement by local communities and would consider a wide range of social and economic issues as part of the planning process.

**Table 3 Tentative list of the main existing gateways to the National Park**

Villages, settlements and other attractions	Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst, Beaulieu, Burley, Keyhaven, New Milton, Ashurst, Lymington, Fordingbridge, Ringwood, Bournemouth, Southampton, Buckler's Hard, Sandy Balls Holiday Park
Open Forest car parks	Bolderwood, Dibden Inclosure, Wilverley Plain, Knightwood Oak, Blackwater, Longslade Bottom, Bolton's Bench, Hatchet Pond, Linford, Moyles Court, Beaulieu Road
Coastal sites	Lepe, Calshot, Keyhaven, Salt Grass Lane , Milford-on-Sea
Railway stations	Ashurst New Forest, Brockenhurst, Sway, New Milton
Bus services	New Forest Tour, various service routes
Managed Visitor Attractions	Beaulieu Motor Museum, Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway, Paultons Park
Websites and information centres	New Forest Centre, St. Barbe Museum, NFNPA, FC, NFDC, Local Information Points

A reduction in the pressures on sensitive sites will be sought by encouraging the alternative use of more resilient sites - and the network of relatively robust rights of way and permissive routes in the enclosed landscape. Effective maintenance and management of these routes will be essential

and it is proposed to identify a core network of existing routes onto which limited resources can be focused. Opportunities will be explored to develop this core network to link local communities with their surrounding landscapes via safe and attractive routes.



Boats at Keyhaven

**Table 4** Draft criteria on the selection of gateway sites. They should:

Have scope to provide information and interpretation in an appropriate way	Be located where people want to go	Have lots to do and see
Provide adequate parking	Have adequate links to the highway network and not place unacceptable pressure on quiet lanes or access for local communities	Ideally be connected to public transport networks
Have means by which people can be encouraged away from sensitive habitats and species	Have access to sustainable and robust parts of the core route network	Have scope to provide adequate and appropriate facilities

## Beyond the National Park boundary

The Strategy also aims to anticipate and plan for any significant increase in overall visitor numbers that might arise from external factors beyond our control (such as population growth in neighbouring conurbations).

This is outlined by the South East Plan (GOSE, 2009) whose Policy C6 (Countryside Access) states that local authorities should promote appropriate access and other management measures on Natura 2000 sites and Ramsar wetland sites with an identified risk of adverse impact from recreational use. Paragraph 5.1.16 of the Habitats Regulation Assessment of the final South East Plan states that to avoid or mitigate recreational impacts on sensitive European sites, access management measures and the physical separation of development would be required - including the provision of alternative natural greenspace, and that '...this was considered to be particularly relevant for the New Forest SPA/SAC...'.

Appendix 3 (page 305) of the Habitats Regulation Assessment contains a number of recommendations from the Assessment that were

deemed to be outside the remit of planning policy, including:

The Secretary of State should discuss assistance with access management with the New Forest National Park Authority ... and provide financial assistance to aid this. If such stringent access management is deemed to be unacceptable by stakeholders in the National Park, it is difficult to see how impacts on the European site could otherwise be avoided without major revisions to housing, particularly since the New Forest attracts its visitors from such a large catchment area<sup>13</sup>.

The key mechanism to achieve this is by providing alternative destinations for everyday recreation elsewhere beyond the National Park boundary, and not permitting any increase in the capacity of car parks or facilities of the National Park. Other as yet unidentified mechanisms may be generated and explored within the proposed New Forest Recreation Management Steering Groups (see below).

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.gos.gov.uk/497648/docs/171301/815607/fSAandHRAAssessment.pdf>



The National Park Authority is committed to working with neighbouring authorities to deliver new recreational sites beyond the boundaries of the National Park. It may also be possible to develop some small new open space sites for local communities to address additional pressures arising from new housing within the National Park.

### 4.3 Making the most of recreational opportunities and enjoyment within the context of the New Forest environment

Although recent survey work<sup>14</sup> appears to indicate high levels of visitor satisfaction, more feedback is needed from a wider spectrum of groups and individuals. The New Forest is not difficult to access and many recreational users of the New Forest like 'their Forest' and the recreational arrangements just as they are now; many are uncomfortable with the need for any change. Other groups with particular requirements, such as people with disabilities, families with very small children or those from different cultural backgrounds may lack knowledge or feel unsure about visiting the New Forest for various reasons. Taking the needs of people with disabilities into consideration when providing facilities and infrastructure is a fundamental principle of the strategy.

<sup>14</sup> A Survey of Recreational Visits to the New Forest National Park (Tourism South East, 2005) noted that 79% of staying and day visitors were satisfied with their visit.

### 4.4 Increasing understanding of the New Forest, its special qualities and the range of recreational opportunities on offer

It is widely recognised that better information and understanding is key in helping to maximise the enjoyment and benefits that can arise from recreation. It is also important in helping to influence how the National Park is used and to resolve a number of the reported conflicts.

An evidence base to demonstrate how this approach is working will be essential.

### 4.5 Managing uncertainty

There are significant gaps in the extent and quality of data about recreation in the New Forest. For example, we lack comprehensive information on visitor numbers, patterns of activity and recreational trends. Similarly we have limited evidence-based research on the impact of recreation activities on wildlife or other special qualities.

Subject to the availability of resources and other priorities, these gaps will be addressed through a programme of survey, research and monitoring (see Chapter 6) which will inform the five year review of the Strategy.

Whilst reliable information is important to inform future decision-making, reaching agreement on the interpretation of that data will be vital to achieve consensus. The survey and evidence needs of the Strategy will therefore be developed in partnership with users to ensure that all parties are comfortable with the outcomes.



Path and heather view, Longslade Bottom

There is also uncertainty over the way climate change will affect the New Forest and patterns of recreational use. It will be increasingly important to promote more sustainable choices for people to enjoy recreation in the New Forest and to support targets to reduce the Park’s environmental footprint.

## 4.6 Resolving conflict and building consensus

The strength of feeling about recreational issues was clearly demonstrated by the number and tone of responses received during the consultation

on the first draft of this Strategy in autumn 2008. This exemplified the degree of polarisation between different New Forest communities on a number of issues. Table 5 summarises some of the subjects on which there seem to be strong differences of opinion. Many of these perspectives are deeply embedded and have beset not just the New Forest but other areas of the British countryside for many decades. Many groups feel passionately about their interests and it is important for the New Forest National Park Authority and land managers to recognise these beliefs and different perspectives.

**Table 5** A summary of some of the polarised beliefs, views and arguments often expressed about recreation in the New Forest (not necessarily the views of the National Park Authority)

Cyclists should be given greater access on the tracks of the New Forest and some argue that they should be allowed to ride anywhere they wish – mountain bikes don’t cause any damage or disturbance if they’re ridden responsibly and it’s a healthy activity that is good for families and individuals to explore and enjoy the National Park. There are no rational reasons why cyclists can’t ride across more of the New Forest. There is a need for a joined up network.

Cycling should be restricted to certain sustainable routes and be tightly managed. There are already many miles of cycle routes – and that should be enough to satisfy them. They are an alien activity in the New Forest, cause noise and visual intrusion into the peace and solitude of the tranquil areas of the Forest and can cause erosion. If cyclists are allowed onto forest tracks they’ll ride everywhere and interfere with drifts. Additional routes will fracture and break up the wilderness of the forest and impact on the wildlife.

Camping is a low impact, environmentally friendly activity that is very popular and enjoyed by thousands of people each year. It provides a great way for people to enjoy the New Forest and get a close encounter with the natural environment. There is a demand for improved and more permanent facilities.

Camping is an eye-sore that damages the beauty of the New Forest landscape. It damages the ancient and ornamental woodlands in which it is located and creates litter, traffic, noise, mess and nuisance.

Kite surfing is a fun and exciting activity that tests the skill and endurance of surfers against the elements – using the natural power of the wind. Visitors enjoy the spectacle of watching surfers.

Kite surfing disturbs significant numbers of roosting and feeding birds – and looks alien in a natural environment and fails to respect the owners of the places where it happens.

Table 5 Continued..

<p>Walking is a popular, harmless and environmentally friendly way of enjoying the Forest and having a quiet and close encounter with the New Forest's natural environment. People can enjoy walking as individuals, and as part of groups or organised activities.</p>	<p>There are too many people in the Forest and you can't find solitude as you could in the old days. Many places are so popular that it destroys the character and experience of the visit. In some locations it damages the vegetation, in others there are so many people that wildlife is displaced by the pressure.</p>
<p>People should be allowed to exercise dogs off lead as long as they are under control ... and they don't necessarily cause disturbance to ground nesting birds. Dog mess problems are caused by a small minority of irresponsible owners and there aren't enough dog bins to dispose of mess. Dog owners are being 'persecuted' for a harmless activity which is healthy and should be encouraged.</p>	<p>People should keep their dogs under close control and preferably on a lead ... dogs running off lead causes disturbance to birds and other wildlife – consequently the disturbance has reduced populations of some key species, in some cases to the point of extinction. Dog mess is anti-social and annoying - and people are irritated and sometimes scared by uncontrolled dogs especially when they jump up. Dogs can kill wild animals and worry livestock.</p>
<p>Recreation is great for the Forest – people don't cause a real problem; the area is not over crowded or anywhere near its carrying capacity and there is ample room for growth; we shouldn't get hung up about promoting recreation as the impacts are over exaggerated and there is little evidence that there are any problems of such significance that they can't be overcome by working together.</p> <p>There is a good deal of passion for what we already have, and that many things are best left alone.</p> <p>Enforcement and policing is unnecessary and totally out of all proportion to the problems – and worse of all it doesn't and wouldn't work. The best approach is to be positive and to work with people. People need to be persuaded to adopt certain behaviours through explanation and without being felt to be criminals. We feel we are facing a common enemy in the shape of bureaucratic control.</p> <p>There are a lot of miserable 'spoil sports' in the New Forest who are hell bent on ruining other people's enjoyment and telling other people what to do.</p> <p>There is much sympathy for well thought-out softly-softly approaches that would achieve the same objective of ensuring that many parts of the Forest remain tranquil.</p>	<p>Recreation is a bad thing for the Forest – it's generally too busy, it causes traffic congestion, brings in too many people and people are badly behaved and don't respect the way of life of local people. Visitors interfere with land management and we need more policing of visitor behaviour to make sure people behave responsibly in the way we want them to as our interests are more important and we've been here longer.</p> <p>A whole host of items have been identified which do indeed cry out for a coherent form of recreation management.</p>





Horseriders, Rufus Stone

Flying powered model aircraft is an enjoyable and harmless activity for many people. It provides a visual attraction for many visitors who come to the Forest. The sites where aircraft are flown are former airfields so it is entirely appropriate for small models to be flown here.

Model aircraft are noisy and irritating to other quiet users of the New Forest – and do not apply the health and safety codes of good practices that are applied elsewhere. On an otherwise peaceful day, the distant drone of model aircraft in the distance over the heath can ruin a walk or ride.

Riding horses on the Open Forest is a hugely enjoyable recreational activity and gives a great sense of satisfaction to many riders; it doesn't cause serious erosion.

In some locations where riding is concentrated the levels of erosion and churning can affect the enjoyment of other users and damage the environment. Equestrian activity at close quarters can be frightening for other users.

A forest of prohibitive signs and notices will serve only to damage the appearance of the National Park. The 'understanding' part of recreation management is of great importance, and this should be communicated to people in an organised and creative way. Notices crowded with lots of 'do's and don'ts', and a Forest filled with leaflets and publications would not be sufficient. We must be ready to make imaginative use of all the facilities that technology offers us, but at the same time not overlook old-fashioned face-to-face education and involvement.

People, especially urban immigrants, cannot be trusted to know how to behave in the National Park. They should be told what to do and what not to do through the widespread use of signs and notices. All leaflets and publications should contain a full 'Code of Conduct' to ensure everyone knows what the rules are.

One of the key issues for the New Forest is its small size in comparison to the large volume of recreational and other demands made of the landscape. This results from the close proximity of a large resident and visiting population which comprises a multitude of different interest groups. The pressure of 'squeezing' multiple activities into a limited space inevitably creates the potential for tension and conflict between groups of people.

Working closely with a wide range of partners and stakeholders will be critical to the successful delivery of better recreation management in the New Forest. This is particularly important as the National Park Authority does not directly own or manage any land within the New Forest nor is it

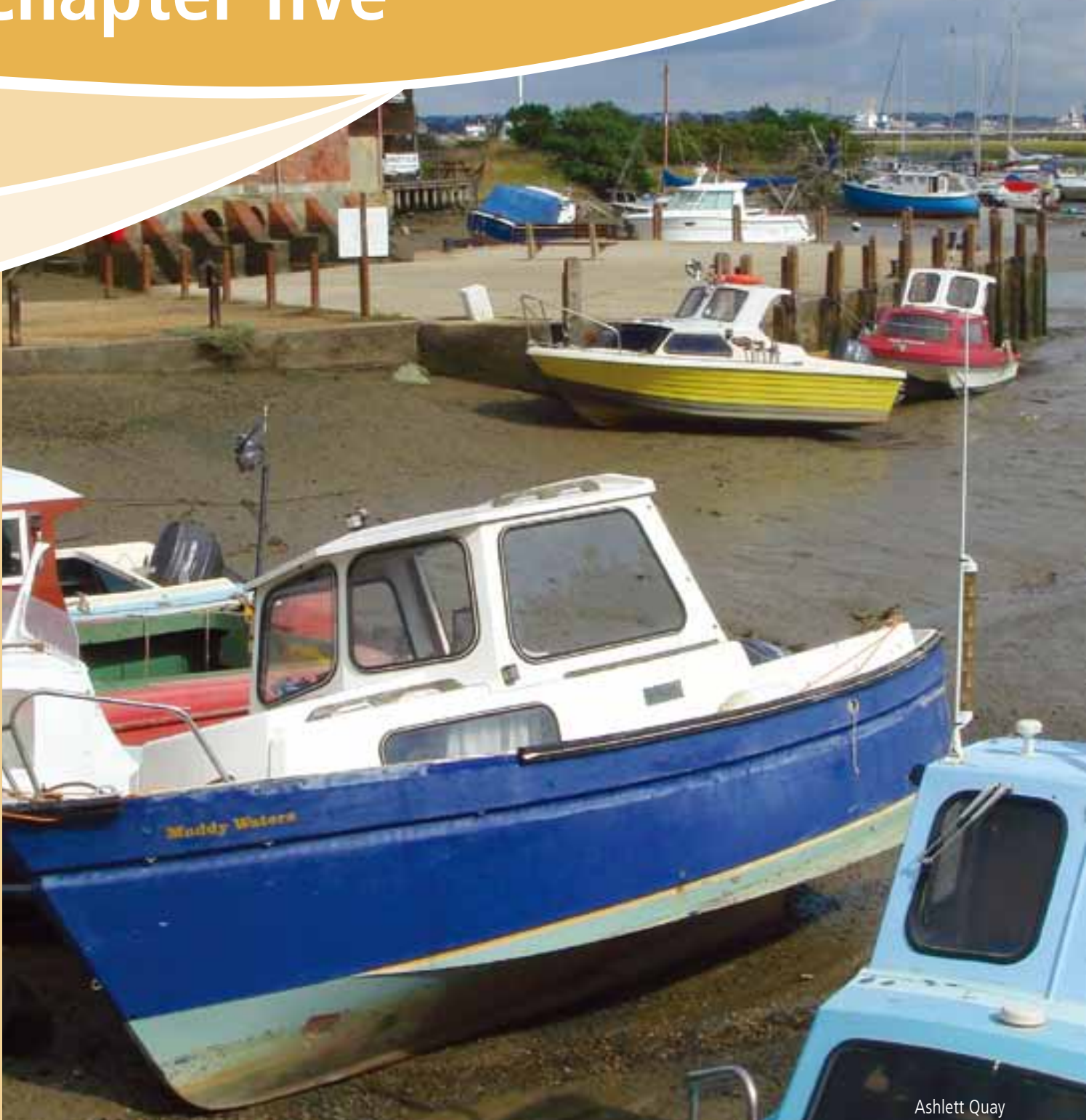
the highway authority. Establishing a clear policy framework is critical for those organisations who do manage recreational sites.

A fundamental theme of the Strategy will therefore be to establish a meaningful and working partnership between the relevant and interested parties. The aim is to find practical ways of bridging the gaps between different interests and working to resolve conflicts by finding the best possible outcomes wherever possible within existing regulations and legislation.

# Themes for taking action

The themes that follow are grouped in line with those in the National Park Management Plan.

## Chapter five



## 5.1 Working together

### **Overarching Management Plan objective:**

Taking action to enhance people's enjoyment and quality of experience of the National Park, while safeguarding the special qualities of the area



Piglets and car, Bramshaw

As outlined above, this Strategy proposes to take a collaborative approach to the management of recreation in the New Forest. A number of mechanisms currently exist within the Forest. These include the Consultative Panel, a long established forum in which over 90 local organisations consider and give feedback on a wide range of New Forest issues. In recent years the New Forest Access Forum has been set up. Comprising members from a range of access, recreation, economic and land management backgrounds, this is a statutory body created under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which advises the National Park Authority, Wiltshire Council and Hampshire County Council and others on access matters especially in relation to rights of way and open country. In 2009, the Authority also established an Equine Forum as a mechanism for discussing and consulting on issues relating to horses and their management. A Cycle Working Group of organisations and user groups also exists to support the development of cycling in the New Forest.

As none of these fora currently meet the needs of this Strategy or provide a mechanism for resolving future issues, it is proposed to establish a **New Forest Recreation Management Steering Group**.

This could have the following purposes:

- to identify, agree and commission the future evidence and survey needs that are required to support a sustainable approach to recreation
- to discuss, understand and recognise differing views and perspectives on a range of recreational issues relevant to the Forest
- to participate in discussions on recreation management proposals
- to work together to implement this Strategy and monitor progress.

Such a group could re-establish and develop the working group that was set up by the Forestry

Commission's PROGRESS initiative in the early 2000s. Any group must involve and have the support of the key players – including the main land managers and user organisations. It is proposed that the National Park Authority, at least initially, is best placed to facilitate and provide support to the steering group. The group would provide regular reports to the New Forest Access Forum and the Consultative Panel – and will liaise closely with existing working groups such as the Local Strategic Partnership, Community Action Networks, Cycle Working Group, Wildlife / Conservation organisations and the Equine Forum. It is important to recognise and respect the voluntary contribution that individuals make to consultation processes in the New Forest and the detailed workings of each group need to be designed to minimise the time commitment required of participants.

However, a number of questions have arisen during the consultation process which whilst being generally supportive open up a series of practical and logistical questions that deserve further consideration and hence the proposal to enter a process of further debate during 2010/11.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

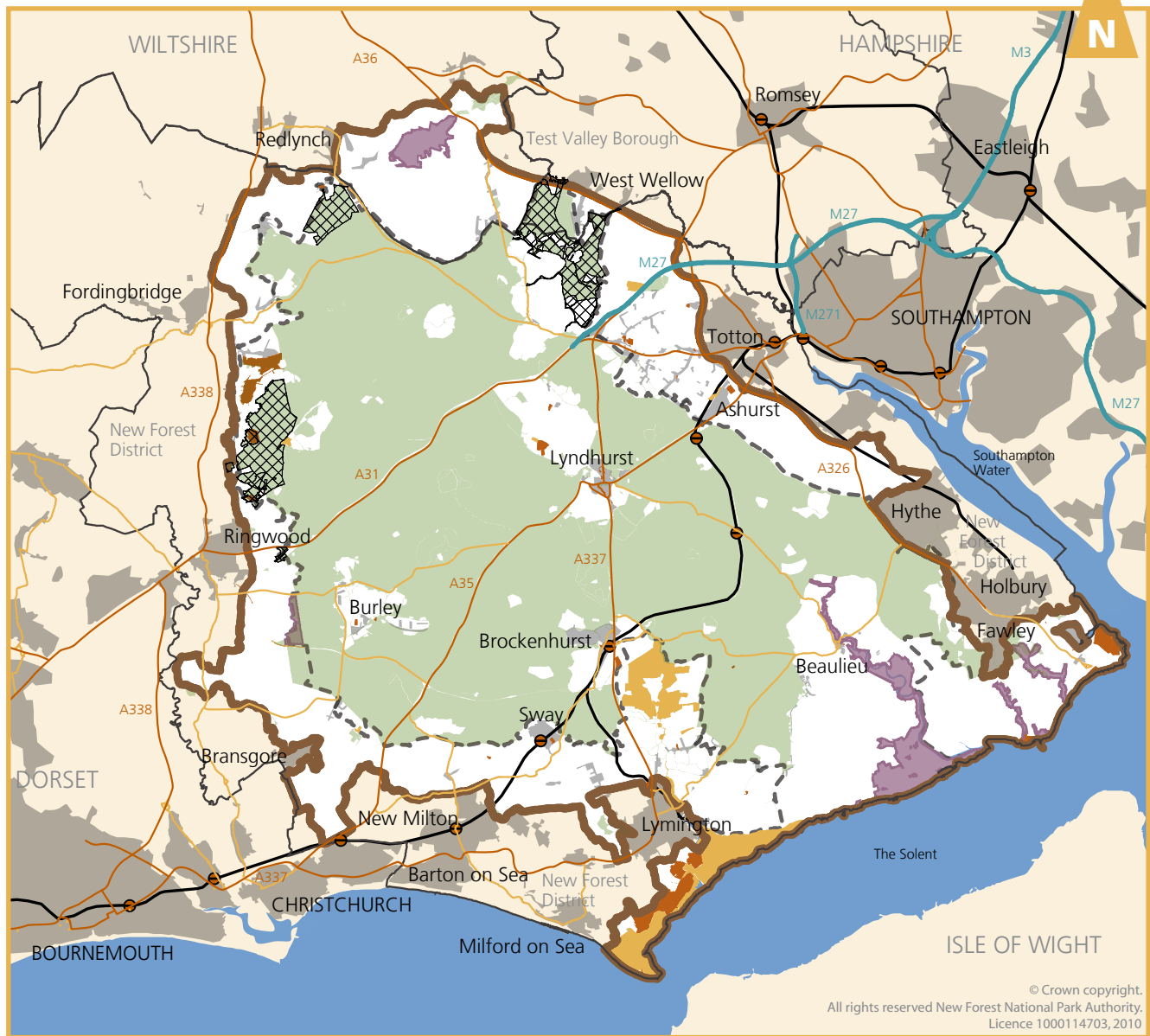
5.1.1 Continue to support and work with the main stakeholder organisations for outdoor recreation in the National Park, including the New Forest Access Forum and Consultative Panel.

5.1.2 During the first six months after adoption, officers and members will undertake further discussions with key recreational stakeholders and land managers about how a New Forest Recreation Management Steering Group might be structured, established and managed.



Agister on the move

Map 2 Public Land Management



- |  |                                   |  |                                      |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
|  | New Forest National Park boundary |  | Natural England                      |
|  | Perambulation                     |  | National Trust                       |
|  | Forestry Commission               |  | Main settlements and larger villages |
|  | Hampshire County Council          |  | County and district boundaries       |
|  | Hampshire Wildlife Trust          |  |                                      |

## 5.2 Collecting better information about recreation in the National Park

### **Management Plan objective:**

Improving understanding of the current and likely future recreational demand, and the impacts of recreation on the National Park's special qualities



Survey, research and monitoring will be essential in developing a shared information base for recreation over the coming five years and beyond. There is a clear need for a database to provide objective information about recreational activity and a greater understanding of recreational needs and patterns in the National Park. It will be important to design the methodology used to collect and collate the required data in collaboration with the main stakeholders on the New Forest Recreation Management Steering Group so that all parties can trust the data and conclusions that emerge.

After five years, the Strategy will be reviewed in the light of evidence collected in the intervening period. This may also have impacts on future revisions of planning policies which may be implemented through reviews of the Core Strategy and Management Plan.

The National Park Authority will actively lead and promote work in this area, ensuring that the findings of surveys and research is acted upon so that there is no adverse impact on the special qualities or designated sites.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

- 5.2.1 With stakeholders, agree what recreational information is required and how it will be collected, collated and analysed.
- 5.2.2 Continue to research the effects of recreational impacts and produce specific monitoring tools to inform future management decisions.
- 5.2.3 Develop a programme to monitor the effectiveness of the Recreation Management Strategy actions. The monitoring of progress will be linked to the Annual Monitoring Reports for the National Park Core Strategy.
- 5.2.4 Establish an accessible database / library of all information, survey and research documents on recreation in the New Forest.

## 5.3 Raising awareness and understanding

### Management Plan objective:

Raising awareness about the sensitive environment and the working nature of the New Forest through direct contact with the public and working closely with user groups



Patterns of recreation are the result of individual choices by the millions of people who visit the National Park. These choices can be influenced by providing people with appropriate information and guidance so that they get the very best out of their time in the National Park. It is important to promote the Park as a welcoming and friendly place for people to visit to enjoy a range of activities.

Information about where to go and what to do in the New Forest is available from many sources and in many formats. But most of this material, including signs, has been developed with little co-ordination between organisations and businesses. There are excellent opportunities to agree and communicate key messages across the whole National Park for everyone's benefit.

Guided walks, talks and events are run by many organisations and the New Forest is a popular location for school visits from surrounding areas. The Forestry Commission runs a 60-strong volunteer ranger service to assist full time rangers and keepers in providing practical advice and information to the public as well as undertaking practical tasks such as litter clearance. Other ranger and warden services are provided by Hampshire County Council, the National Park Authority and the National Trust.

As outlined in Annex 1 some activities can, from time to time, cause problems in particular locations. In the enclosed countryside, farmers and landowners have voiced their concerns about the impacts on their businesses of litter, trespass, vandalism and dogs that are out of control. On the Open Forest people are often tempted to pet and feed ponies which have subsequently been known to kick and bite, and many commoners' animals are killed in road traffic accidents each year. While a small minority of these problems may be caused deliberately or thoughtlessly,

the perception is that most are the result of misunderstanding or more often ignorance of their impacts.<sup>15</sup>

Communication needs to be stimulating and inspiring. It needs to make use of influential methods which engage the target audiences in ways that will hopefully lead to a greater sense of care and stewardship for the New Forest amongst a broader spectrum of the population. Excellent progress has been made updating and revising the interpretation at the New Forest Centre and there are ongoing plans for future collaboration.

Word of mouth provides the personal touch and is one of the best forms of communication. Imaginative use of modern technology offers new and unobtrusive ways of engagement, although conventional methods, such as leaflets and publications, will continue to appeal to certain sectors of the community. For local residents and frequent visitors further opportunities should be developed to enable people to become directly involved in caring for the Forest, offering their views and monitoring how it is changing. There is also a need for 'education' and for working with young people. All people, young and old, need direct and positive experiences within the National Park that will engender understanding and respect for its special qualities.

<sup>15</sup> Countryside Access Plan for the New Forest & South-West Hampshire, Hampshire County Council, 2008



Local Information Point, Brockenhurst



New Forest Centre



New Forest National Park Explorer

### Priority actions for the next five years

5.3.1 Improve the availability of information about recreation opportunities in the New Forest, enabling people to make informed decisions about the best places and times to visit.

5.3.2 Provide a coordinated programme of guided activities and events which appeal to a wide range of people and provide first hand opportunities to experience and learn about the National Park.

5.3.3 Work with the recreation user groups and land managers, to promote responsible behaviour amongst all users that respects the special qualities of the National Park and the needs of others through a range of mechanisms, and especially by:

- Face to face contact with co-ordinated ranger services, providing a friendly and knowledgeable presence able to convey consistent messages
- Widely communicating the special qualities of the National Park and the Park-wide 'Caring for the Forest' code of conduct wherever possible, including publications and websites of partner organisations
- Encouraging all recreation providers and user groups to adopt and promote relevant behavioural messages in publications and by word of mouth
- Managing on-site activities with sensitive and minimal use of signs or intrusive urban infrastructure
- Improving the quality of information available to users to help inform the choices they make about recreation activities.

5.3.4 Develop targeted public awareness campaigns about specific issues such as litter, feeding of ponies, disturbance of ground nesting birds and animal accidents.

5.3.5 Develop a National Park Ranger Service which is responsive to the needs of the Forest as they emerge, and facilitate the co-ordination of existing ranger services within the National Park. Consider establishing a Young Friends of the New Forest Group to involve and engage young people more in the area.

5.3.6 Develop educational programmes and supporting resources that link the special qualities of the New Forest with school, college and adult learning curricula so that students better understand the opportunities for and potential impacts of recreation.

## 5.4 Improving access




### Management Plan objective:

Providing opportunities for safe access, including a more joined-up network of core routes into and within the National Park



Map 3 Public Rights of Way and Access



-  New Forest National Park boundary
-  Land with public access
-  Public Rights of Way





Stile, Roydon Woods



Walkers at Keyhaven



Birdwatching, Wilverley

As the existing access provision in the National Park is already excellent and generally well developed, opportunities for increasing the amount of physical access are limited. Those opportunities that have the potential to increase the amount of access are confined to:

- The coast (see section 5.5 below)
- Some areas of the Park which are less well served by footpaths and other rights of way, especially in the south and east of the New Forest
- Some small areas where there may be opportunities to secure better access for local communities to nearby countryside and open space.

The quality and safety of the existing access provision is less satisfactory and there are opportunities to:

- Improve the existing access infrastructure for those with limited mobility
- Improve the network of safe routes for all users (including cycling and equestrian users) with particular emphasis on non-car transport. Initiatives could include developing more safe crossing points on main roads such as the A36 and A326.

The New Forest Access Forum and the National Park Authority are committed to the implementation of the Countryside Access Plan for the New Forest and South West Hampshire which, together with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Wiltshire<sup>16</sup>, set out how the network of access routes might be improved to meet the needs of users. These documents highlight some of the access issues in more detail.

The main proposal is to identify a core network of existing but sustainable routes on which limited resources could be prioritised. This core network

<sup>16</sup> These plans have been produced by Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire County Council respectively.

would, subject to the availability of funding, receive higher levels of investment and would be maintained and promoted to a higher standard. The location and design of any new routes that might be added as links to the existing network will need to be carefully considered in line with the Habitats Regulations (as will any improvements to existing routes), areas of high tranquillity and other planning and legal considerations such as the New Forest Acts. Landowners and land managers will be key partners in any proposals to improve or promote the network.

Improving the linkages between the Forest and local settlements could potentially reduce the number of vehicle trips made to Forest car parks by providing better alternatives to walk, ride or cycle.

### Priority actions for the next five years

5.4.1 Develop and implement a 'Core Route Strategy' that identifies key existing routes which will be maintained and promoted as a prioritised coherent network across the National Park - and which provides safer links on foot, bicycle and horseback. It may, through consultation, identify new linkages to improve the network.

5.4.2 Improve access opportunities in areas less well served by linear access routes, particularly near to local communities who currently have little access to open space.

5.4.3 Support the implementation of the New Forest and South West Hampshire Countryside Access Plan and the Wiltshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

5.4.4 Work with the Verderers and Commoners to introduce measures to avoid conflicts between recreational activities and livestock during pony drifts and any other ongoing livestock management activities.

## 5.5 Coastal access



Maps 2 and 3 illustrate the current provision for access and land ownership along the 34 miles of National Park coastline. There are approximately 18 miles with some form of public access, in the form of public rights of way, permissive paths, or publicly accessible land. A number of different bodies have responsibility for maintaining the public access.

The main foci and honey pot sites for coastal access are Calshot Spit, Lepe Country Park, Buckler's Hard and the coastal path between Lymington and Hurst Castle including Hurst Spit. At several other locations, although access is physically possible, the number of visitors is restricted by permit systems (at Needs Ore, for example), limited vehicle access, lack of car parks or the absence of public transport. Ashlett Creek, Calshot, Buckler's Hard/Beaulieu, Lymington and Keyhaven also serve as major gateways to the Solent for recreational sailing and watersports. Limited access to the coast is identified as one of the 8 main issues in the New Forest Rights of Way Improvement Plan<sup>17</sup>.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 introduced a new coastal trail which will give linear access along the coast. Suitable land adjacent to the trail will be defined as 'spreading room'. This will become open country for walkers if it meets the criteria defined in the Act and will be covered by some of the provisions in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000 (Crow Act). All land to the seaward side of the trail will normally automatically become spreading room unless it is excepted land or subject to restrictions or exclusions, for example private gardens; other land on the landward side of the trail could also be classed as spreading room.

Virtually the entire coast is designated because of its importance for nature conservation, as either Ramsar or Natura 2000 sites (sites protected for birds and / or habitats of European importance). A very careful assessment of the impacts of extending coastal access on these interests will have to be made in line with the Habitats Regulations. These impacts are likely to include the:

- disturbance of important populations of breeding and / or over-wintering birds both on coastal habitats and at high tide roosts
- trampling of sensitive vegetation on soft substrates such as shingle.

Specific management will be required to ensure that the new access rights do not result in any adverse impact on the wildlife interest. The impacts and any associated avoidance or mitigation measures will be assessed by Natural England on a site-by-site basis through a Coastal Access Report. Many of the potential issues will be addressed either through avoiding sensitive areas or through restrictions as determined by Natural England.

Where there is an existing route along the coast which meets the relevant criteria, the trail is likely to adopt this line, as for example between Hurst Spit and Lymington. Where there is no suitable route, a new convenient or improved route will be provided that meets the criteria set out by Natural England.

The new access rights are likely to bring most public benefits on the relatively undeveloped and privately-owned sections of coast between Lymington and Calshot which includes the North Solent National Nature Reserve. These areas are currently enjoyed by relatively few people and there is likely to be considerable latent demand for access if new facilities are provided. At present, the number of visitors would appear to be restricted by the limited amount of legal access, the low key

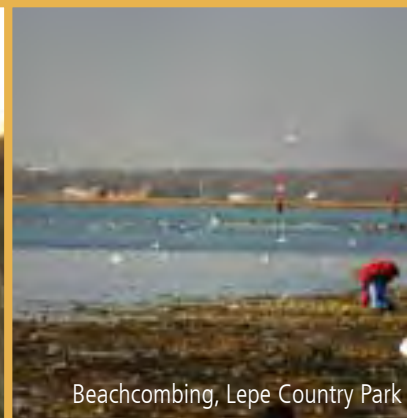
<sup>17</sup> Issue 5, Countryside Access Plan for the New Forest & South-West Hampshire 2008-2013



Boat ladders, Keyhaven



Path signs, Keyhaven



Beachcombing, Lepe Country Park

nature of existing provision, a lack of car parks and limited parking opportunities, a sparse public transport network and the long walk-in from the nearest car parks or bus stops.

One of the key objectives in the management of these new access rights will be to maintain the tranquil character of this quiet and unspoilt stretch of coast whilst ensuring that those people who wish to do so can enjoy the unique qualities of the coastline. This will require a sensitive and low-key approach to the provision, capacity and management of facilities.

There are also a number of private houses and gardens located along the foreshore and the coastal strip between Lymington and Calshot. The extension of access rights to the coast could raise difficult issues over potential loss of privacy - although all parks and gardens are automatically excluded from the new rights. Natural England will produce a coastal access report on this section of coast and make recommendations on the alignment of the trail in liaison with the National Park Authority and landowners. Natural England will be the sole authority determining any restrictions or exclusions to the coastal access arrangements.

Hampshire County Council's report on 'Improving Access to the Hampshire Coast' offers prioritised delivery options for improving access to and within the coastal area. This report is complementary to the new statutory Coastal Access rights as it also considers the provision of higher rights (such as cycling and horse riding), improvements to enable access by people with disabilities, and routes to and from the coast including circular routes.

The National Park Authority supports the Solent Forum and the Solent Recreational Disturbance and Mitigation Project and will act on its recommendations where appropriate and relevant.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

5.5.1 Subject to funding and Natural England's timetable, implement the new coastal access route and associated spreading room along the New Forest coast with the involvement and participation of all interests in the alignment and design of the new access rights (including any wardening / ranger requirements, waymarking and any other management provisions that may be needed).

5.5.2 Produce a local National Park map with associated interpretation explaining what the new rights and responsibilities mean for walkers and landowners, showing the new coastal route, the associated spreading room areas and how the route is integrated into the surrounding access network, including gateway sites.

5.5.3 Work with Hampshire County Council and landowners to deliver any recommendations made by the 'Improving Access to the Hampshire Coast' report, once agreed and subject to the necessary funding being made available.

## 5.6 Providing sustainable services and facilities

### Management Plan objective:

Encouraging a high standard of well-designed and maintained services and facilities for visitors within the National Park.



The location and provision of facilities has a major influence on where people go in the National Park. They can also contribute to the quality of the visitor experience and function as places to interpret the National Park and promote key messages to visitors.

**Informal sites and low key facilities:** Many areas within the New Forest have long standing popularity because of their inherent beauty and nearness to roads. Others have informal facilities, such as the addition of the deer viewing platform and feeding at Bolderwood and the development of the Ober Water Trail, starting at Whitfield Moor car park. In planning for the future it will be important to avoid putting additional pressure on already sensitive sites and areas. There may be a case for developing alternatives in more environmentally robust locations serving both the general visitor and particular interest groups both within the enclosed landscape and outside the National Park.

**Major visitor attractions:** The New Forest offers a range of different attractions and facilities, from major visitor attractions, such as Beaulieu National Motor Museum and Exbury Gardens (receiving respectively 350,000 and 125,000 visitors annually) to services and facilities in village centres and a broad spectrum of informal sites.

**Country Parks:** The popularity of existing Country Parks and related sites demonstrates their very strong appeal and role in taking pressure off the Open Forest and the National Park more generally. A study from 2007<sup>18</sup>, has identified potential areas of search for new Country Parks close to centres of population just beyond the National Park boundary such as that proposed by Test Valley Borough Council to the south of Romsey near the M27.

These proposals are strongly endorsed by this Strategy and the National Park Management Plan and Core Strategy.

Country Parks, including Lepe within the National Park and Moors Valley and Avon Heath just beyond, offer a range of recreational opportunities and facilities in a well-managed environment. They have broad appeal and are highly popular (Moors Valley and Avon Heath each receive in excess of 1 million visitors a year) filling a clearly identified recreational need for families with younger children and others.

### Local open space and informal access

**opportunities:** Many regular visitors to the New Forest come from areas immediately outside the National Park which are less well served by local and easily accessible open space. It is in part this lack of any alternative that exacerbates the pressure on the New Forest. Again, a recent study<sup>19</sup> has identified those areas that are particularly poorly served by informal open space within and around the National Park - deficiencies that should be addressed through the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire's Green Infrastructure Strategy.

**Multi-activity centres:** There are a number of well-established centres providing instruction and opportunities for outdoor recreation in the National Park, for example, at Calshot, Avon Tyrell and Foxlease. The Authority supports their good work in providing services and products that meet the need of users.

Many stakeholders have expressed concerns that the provision, condition and quality of facilities is currently inadequate at many locations in the National Park. A review of facilities is required





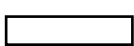

<sup>18</sup> Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study for the New Forest Area, for New Forest District Council and the New Forest National Park Authority, February 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid



Map 4 Key visitor attractions



-  New Forest National Park boundary
-  Perambulation
-  The Open Forest and other publicly accessible land
-  Main settlements and larger villages
-  County and district boundaries
-  Key visitor attractions



across the New Forest. Any review of provision will need to ensure that facilities are:

- designed to the highest possible environmental standards, reflecting the special qualities of the New Forest and the local distinctiveness of the Park's landscape character areas - using materials befitting the New Forest
- situated in suitable locations bearing in mind the context of the surrounding landscape - new facilities will need to fit with new planning policies which limit new provision outside the National Park villages
- of an appropriate scale for their context.

Amongst the commercial visitor attractions and landowners who provide for recreation, there is likely to be pressure to improve income by expanding or charging for visitor facilities. At major robust sites this could provide attractive alternatives to the Open Forest thus helping to reduce pressure on sensitive sites. The main drivers for this are likely to be the need to retain financial viability and a need to cover the costs incurred by both private and public landowners in providing for recreation. These costs can be significant and in the current financial climate many land managers will be looking to secure additional sources of income.

### Car parking: key facts<sup>20</sup>

- There are around 143 official car parks outside villages with a capacity for roughly 6,800 vehicles (managed by the Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council and the National Trust)
- Over 1.7 million cars park in the New Forest car parks per annum with an average daily turnover of 4,700 cars
- The four most heavily used car parks on the Open Forest (classified as 'very high' use) are those at: Wilverley Plain, Bolderwood, Longslade Bottom, and Dibden Inclosure. Other very busy sites include Lepe and Calshot
- These are followed by 24 car parks classified as 'high' use. Amongst these the most heavily used are: Blackwater, Bolton's Bench, Linford Bottom and Keyhaven Marshes
- Of the remaining car parks 35 were classified as 'medium' use; 47 as 'medium low' use; and 29 as 'low' use
- Approximately 25 – 30 Forestry Commission car parks are closed seasonally from the October half term to Easter, with minor variations from year to year
- A small number of car parks (four – five) are also closed temporarily on an experimental basis during the bird nesting season, as part of a project to monitor impact on ground nesting birds
- There are also informal car parking sites, for example, village halls and lay-bys and other parking spaces.

<sup>20</sup> New Forest Car Parking Strategy 2008 (Forestry Commission) and other sources













Train approach, Beaulieu Road Station

Map 5 Main transport links and car parks

Not to scale



-  New Forest National Park boundary
-  Strategic road network
-  Local road network
-  Public Rights of Way
-  Existing cycle routes

-  Railway
-  Land with public access
-  Airports
-  Ferries
-  Car parks



**Car parks:** The 143 official car parks are fairly evenly distributed across the National Park. Many are located away from roads and a number are effectively screened by trees.

Car use creates demand for car parking spaces and the distribution of car parks has a significant influence on where visitors start and end their visit. For the foreseeable future car parking will continue to be a necessary part of recreation infrastructure as the main way in which people access the National Park.

It is important to understand if the location of certain car parks is having an adverse impact on the most fragile environments of the New Forest. Localised disturbance to wildlife and dog fouling can be a problem in areas adjacent to car parks. There may be opportunities to reduce or avoid impacts on the special qualities by managing and influencing the patterns and distribution of visitors through changes to car park size, design and location.

It is important to enable land managers to exercise some flexibility over how they manage car parks to achieve a range of objectives within the overall allocation of car parking spaces. A variety of options may be available and land managers will be supported in adopting different mechanisms to manage their sites where there are good reasons for taking action and following appropriate consultation with users. For example, this may include encouraging visitors to use car parks away from the most sensitive areas at certain times of year and potentially closing car parks on a seasonal basis. The preference on all occasions would be to encourage and support land managers in seeking voluntary agreements with local users.

The issue of car park maintenance and, in particular, the repair of pot holes, is frequently

raised by visitors<sup>21</sup>. Additional sources of funding will be required to allow land managers to maintain car park surfaces to the standards expected by visitors.

#### **New Forest National Park Core Strategy\* Policy CP16: Tourism Development**

Tourism development will be supported where it provides opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park in a way that either enhances, or does not detract from, the special qualities. This will be facilitated by:

- a) supporting small scale development of visitor facilities and accommodation using new or existing buildings in the four defined villages and existing/established managed visitor sites or through the re-use or extension of existing buildings as part of a farm diversification scheme outside these villages
- b) retaining existing serviced visitor accommodation where it contributes to the sustainability of local communities
- c) supporting opportunities to relieve visitor pressures where this would assist the conservation or enhancement of internationally or nationally designated nature conservation sites.

\*Submission document - wording subject to change, to be confirmed following examination in 2010.

21 See minutes of the New Forest Consultative Panel





Shatterford car park

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

5.6.1 Undertake a review of recreational and visitor facilities in the National Park.

5.6.2 Improve the quality of existing informal visitor facilities – where this does not increase the overall scale of provision or alter the character of the locality (refer to policy CP16 in the Core Strategy Submission Document).

5.6.3 Manage car parking in the National Park as a means of providing access for people to the New Forest and managing impacts on the most sensitive areas. Overall car parking capacity across the National Park is not anticipated to increase or decrease significantly from existing levels:

- Audit car parking provision within the National Park
- Whilst ensuring there is no increase in overall car parking provision, enable land owners to manage the size, capacity and location of car parks for the benefit of the Forest and users
- Based on the existing schemes and arrangements, support landowners in implementing seasonal or permanent closure of car parks where significant landscape or nature conservation benefits can be demonstrated. Such proposals will only be supported following full consultation with user groups and where suitable alternative provision for displaced recreational activities and disabled people is available. The number of car parking spaces affected is likely to be a very small proportion of total capacity.

5.6.4 Following public consultation, consider a range of measures to resolve verge parking problems and manage car parking outside designated areas.

5.6.5 Support landowners in finding new sources of funding to cover the costs of providing public access and maintaining recreational infrastructure (and especially to fund car park maintenance).

5.6.6 Support initiatives which seek to provide alternatives to car transport, including schemes for visitors who arrive by car but might then travel around the Park by other means.

## 5.7 Healthy lifestyles and opportunities

### Management Plan objective:

Enabling the involvement of under-represented groups who feel the National Park provides few opportunities for them, or who feel excluded due to cost, lack of transport or other barriers.



The New Forest already offers exceptional recreational opportunities for all sections of the community but there remain two particular challenges:

- to cater for the less mobile, including the elderly – with some projections suggesting that in the next 20 years half the population of New Forest District and certain surrounding wards<sup>22</sup> will be over 60 years of age
- to realise the health benefits that outdoor recreation can provide by increasing the level of involvement in active recreation that enhances overall well being.

Joint working will be essential, reflecting the partnership that has been developed to deliver education and interpretation projects. This will include working with and building on the experience of existing centres, for example, Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council (Lepe) New Forest Centre, the Countryside Education Trust at Beaulieu and Avon Tyrrell Activity Centre – the national activity and residential centre of UK Youth. The Youth Hostel at Burley also offers activities to a wide section of the community.

The New Forest provides an attractive environment for the less mobile and the elderly (and also families with young children) with a wide range of level and surfaced routes suitable for buggies, pushchairs and mobility vehicles. There are also an increasing number of sites within the New Forest offering specific facilities for disabled people. These opportunities are appreciated with 59% of disabled visitors to the New Forest considering that facilities for disabled people are either very good or good; and a further 20% considering them to be average. But there is more work to be done, both

in the provision of more accessible infrastructure and the availability of information on the opportunities for less mobile people. To this end, both the Forestry Commission and the National Park Authority are producing better Accessibility Information for users.

High levels of obesity are already present amongst neighbouring populations and are predicted to increase across all age groups including young people. This is likely to have significant social and economic costs in the future with associated problems of anxiety, stress and inactivity. Outdoor recreation in an outstanding environment like the New Forest can provide an excellent remedy to these health issues. Research has indicated that unfamiliarity with the natural environment can be a barrier to participation – and evidence suggests (the Diversity Review 2005) that if children have little or no experience of the natural world they are less likely to appreciate it in later life. Moderate and low impact recreational activities in the New Forest could offer low cost but effective solutions to these problems.

<sup>22</sup> Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study for the New Forest District Council and the New Forest National Park Authority (February 2007)



Nordic walker, Shatterford Bottom



Old Farmhouse Tea rooms, Burley



International group visit, Bolton's Bench

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

5.7.1 In partnership, provide information suitable for a wide range of different audiences, ensure the availability of affordable and accessible transport options and help recreation providers to understand how best to provide for groups with special needs.

5.7.2 Initially in partnership with the Mosaic project, develop programmes of outreach work with minority ethnic communities to clarify their interests and needs, and find ways in which they can enjoy and contribute to the Park.

5.7.3 Develop programmes of co-ordinated walks and activities for health and well-being.

5.7.4 Work with disability groups to identify and implement ways in which people with disabilities, the elderly and less mobile can better enjoy the Park.

5.7.5 Develop a range of new opportunities, both supervised and unsupervised, for young people to enjoy imaginative wild play activities in the National Park.

## 5.8 Sustainable transport

### Management Plan objective:

Reduce the impact of traffic on the special qualities of the National Park and provide a range of sustainable alternatives within the park.



Cycle rack sign, Holmsley Tearooms

The use of cars for recreational trips raises a number of issues. It detracts from the tranquillity of the National Park, can conflict with other recreational users, especially on minor roads which are an important part of the recreational network, and increases the carbon footprint of the Forest. The Visitor Survey of the New Forest (2004/05) states that 96% of staying visitors, 94% of non local day visitors, and 88% of local visitors arrive at their destination within the National Park by private car.

The National Park is crossed by a number of fenced major roads, such as the M27/A31, and there are several major routes on the periphery including the A326, A35 and A36. These roads can act as significant barriers to people on foot, cycle and horse-back and present significant road safety issues for these users.

The New Forest is accessible by train through four railway stations with the National Park: Ashurst New Forest, Brockenhurst, Beaulieu Road and Sway – and others close by at Lymington and New Milton, together with the ferry terminals at Lymington Pier and Hythe. A number of bus routes cross the Forest Bus services are reduced in the evenings and at weekends. The New Forest Tour open top bus service links settlements and public transport hubs with recreation opportunities as part of its circular route during the summer.

The New Forest Transport Strategy (2003) sets out a series of objectives and targets for transport in the area, and forms the basis for the New Forest sections of the Local Transport Plans (2006-2011) covering the Park.

### Priority actions for the next five years

5.8.1 Encourage and work with Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council, which have responsibility for the road network, to explore the possibility of developing a hierarchy of roads concept and encourage them to introduce a range of mechanisms that allow the shared use of road space for a wide range of non-motorised users such as reduced speed limits and appropriate signing.

5.8.2 Encourage and work with Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council to increase the accessibility of the National Park by providing safe road crossing points at key locations for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, ensuring that these will not increase pressure on the most fragile parts of the National Park.

5.8.3 Improve opportunities for accessing recreation by public transport.

## 5.9 Influencing recreational provision beyond the boundaries of the National Park

### **Management Plan objective:**

Influencing recreational provision beyond the boundaries of the National Park.



The National Park currently receives an estimated 13.5 million visitor days each year<sup>23</sup> and preliminary work suggests that this could increase by about 12% (or an additional 1.6 million visits each year) by 2026<sup>24</sup> as a result of major housing development proposals for the areas surrounding the New Forest.

The National Park Authority will work closely with the nearby authorities that are producing green infrastructure strategies to deliver the recommendation of the South East Plan (see 4.2). The aim will be to provide or improve countryside areas for recreation close to new development and agree other strategic and practical measures to mitigate the impacts of recreational pressure on the National Park.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

5.9.1 Outside the National Park, work in partnership with other Authorities to improve recreational provision that provides for their community needs (thereby helping to relieve pressure on the New Forest Special Area of Conservation). Ensure that recreation provision is at the forefront of planning for major urban expansion within a 20km radius beyond the boundary of the New Forest.

5.9.2 In partnership with neighbouring authorities, actively support their search to identify and implement opportunities for new Country Parks or similar and advocate the inclusion of these aspirations in the local development frameworks and core strategies of neighbouring authorities.

<sup>23</sup> A Survey of Recreational Visits to the New Forest National Park (Tourism South East, 2005)

<sup>24</sup> Changing Patterns of Visitor Numbers within the New Forest National Park, with particular reference to the New Forest SPA (Footprint Ecology, 2008)

## 5.10 Climate change and sustainability



Climate change is anticipated to bring different weather patterns to the New Forest. Summers are expected to become longer, drier and hotter whilst winters are likely to become milder and wetter over the coming decades. Unusual and extreme weather events will probably occur more frequently. There is considerable uncertainty about the size, extent and timing of these changes although there is a high level of confidence amongst scientists that the trends are reliable. A significant proportion of this climate change is attributed to human activities that have increased levels of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere.

Participation in outdoor recreation makes a contribution to the carbon emissions and wider environmental footprint of the National Park. This Strategy aims to work with providers and users to calculate this impact and seek year-on-year reductions in recreation's dependence on non-renewable energy and material resources.

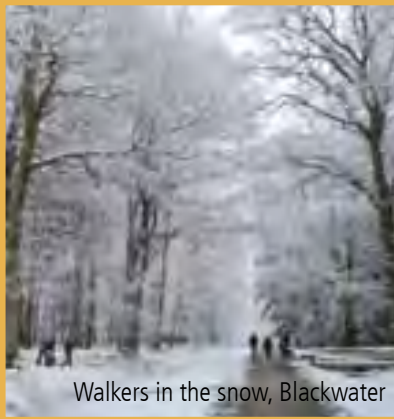
It will be increasingly important to promote more sustainable choices for participants to enjoy recreation in the New Forest and to support wider objectives of reducing the Park's environmental footprint.

Ways in which climate change might influence recreational patterns and their impacts:

- warmer and sunnier weather will increase visitor numbers and related traffic congestion especially at weekends – bringing benefits for business and the economy but more congestion
- increased costs of air travel may increase the numbers of people taking holidays in the UK's National Parks
- longer visitor seasons and increased numbers of people camping out of season
- the pattern of recreational activities may change – away from the potentially overheated heaths and grasslands to shadier woodlands and the cooler coast – it may be more popular to undertake activities in the early morning and evening. Water-based activities could become even more popular
- warmer and sunnier weather in summer may improve the condition of paths but they could be more muddy and inaccessible in winter
- increased levels of trampling and disturbance due to more people
- increased risk of wildfires caused by drier weather events and higher numbers of visitors – more people having barbeques
- coastal change could affect the new coastal route through sea level rise
- a related issue is the likely increase in energy and transport costs arising from the decline in global oil supplies. The impacts on recreation in the New Forest are unclear because of the as yet unknown outcomes of technological and behavioural change.



Forest wildfire



Walkers in the snow, Blackwater



Aircraft over Longslade Heath

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

5.10.1 Calculate the carbon emissions and environmental footprint of recreational activities. Establish targets and action plans for year-on-year reductions in these parameters by encouraging recreation providers to minimise the resources and energy they consume and reduce the waste they produce – promoting recycling and re-use of resources.

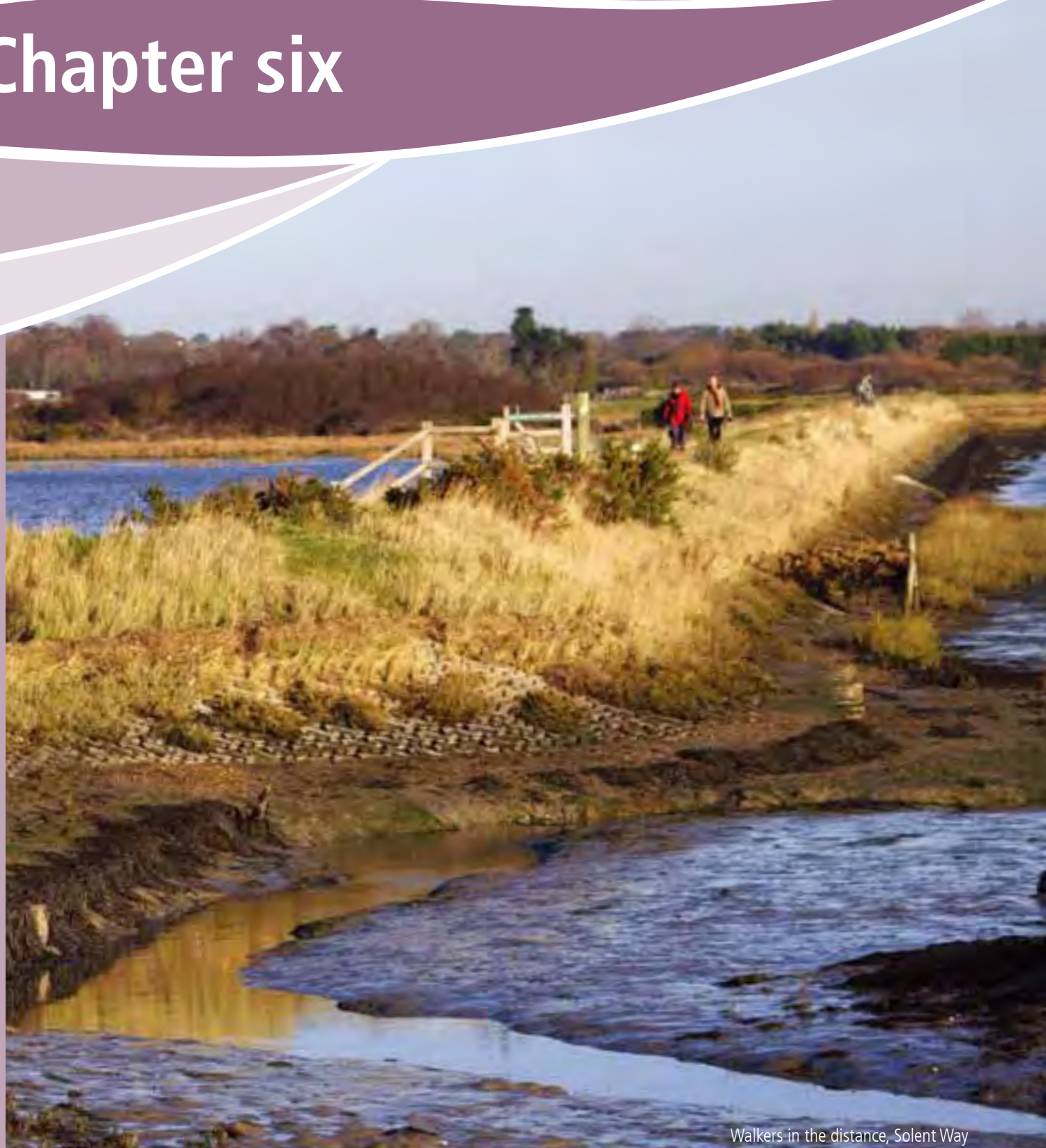
5.10.2 Encourage all recreation providers to have a travel plan offering sustainable transport options to their visitors.

5.10.3 Promote recreational transport links between the main public transport nodes (e.g. railway stations and ferry terminals in and around the National Park) and popular destinations and the network of 'core routes'.

5.10.4 Encourage visitors to use public transport options as an alternative to their car, through marketing and publicity campaigns. Continue to support the New Forest Tour as a service which can be used for outdoor recreation.

# Proposals for specific recreational activities

## Chapter six





## 6.1 Walking

Walking is the single most important recreational activity and forms part of nearly every visit to the National Park. For 30% of visitors it is the main purpose for visiting<sup>25</sup>. There is unrestricted access on foot across the commons and a relatively small amount of open country land covered by the Crow Act; 325 km (200 miles) of rights of way cross the enclosed lands; and two long distance routes – the 98 km (60 mile) Solent Way and the 51 km (32 mile) Avon Valley Path from Christchurch to Salisbury which part cross the New Forest. The Forestry Commission has developed a number of popular waymarked routes on Crown Land – at Blackwater, Wilverley, Ober Water, Bolderwood and the Reptile Centre. The Crown Lands also attract a significant range of organised events ranging from orienteering, cross country and organised walks through to Duke of Edinburgh expeditions.

The potential creation of a Core Route Strategy for the National Park (5.4.1) would enhance these opportunities further; providing a prioritised network of routes that make links to settlements beyond the park boundary, to public transport nodes, and car parks on the periphery. It would need to be developed through the Recreation Management Steering Group and offer a mechanism for influencing where people go - promoting those routes that offer a good visitor experience but avoiding the most sensitive areas of the National Park. This network could include both single and multi-use routes and combinations of minor roads, public rights of way and the tracks of the Open Forest.

Dogs and their owners are welcome in all those parts of the New Forest that have public access.

The National Park is a wonderful place to walk the dog – offering a great diversity of walking experiences within a very accessible landscape. On

### New Forest Dog Walking Code

1. If you cannot control your dog you must keep it on a lead
2. Your dog must not be allowed to disturb or chase wildlife
3. Keep your dog to existing tracks when birds nest on the ground
4. Prevent your dog fouling on footpaths and around car parks
5. Groups of dogs can be intimidating – keep them under control
6. Be considerate to other Forest users
7. Keep well away from any work taking place in the Forest
8. Prevent excessive barking by your dog

the Crown Lands, dogs may be walked off the lead, provided they are under control. This is a highly valued privilege in a country with ever-increasing controls on dog walking. This privilege carries key responsibilities, primarily the legal duty not to disturb livestock or wildlife and additionally the social duty not to offend other users of the Forest with dog fouling or inappropriate behaviour. This is underpinned by the New Forest Dog Owners Group Walking Code.

The NFDog Walking Code emerged as part of the Progress Project that was led by the Forestry Commission.

#### Priority actions for the next five years

6.1.1 Encourage provision of new routes within the enclosed landscape through agri-environment schemes such as Higher Level Stewardship and Woodland Grant Schemes.

6.1.2 Working with user groups and land managers, minimise disturbance to species and habitats that are sensitive to disturbance or trampling (e.g. ground nesting and overwintering birds and bog vegetation) through a range of mechanisms to be developed with the Recreation Management Steering Group, land managers and the National Park Authority.

6.1.3 Continue to provide improved physical access and better information, particularly for people with reduced mobility.

<sup>25</sup> Visitor Survey of the New Forest National Park 2004-2005' (Tourism South East). Of these walkers 12% come for a short walk (<1 hr), 11% for walk of 1 – 2hrs; and 7% for a long walk (2 hrs)

## 6.2 On and off road cycling



The National Park offers significant opportunities for cycling. In addition to the network of bridleways and roads, the Forestry Commission and National Trust permit cyclists to use their land on designated cycle routes.

Cycling offers a highly sustainable means of getting to and around the National Park although these opportunities are significantly underdeveloped. While 11% of staying visitors use cycles to get around the New Forest – only 2% of local day visitors arrive by cycle. There are nine cycle hire facilities within and on the edge of the National Park. Many cyclists currently drive to car parks in villages as the starting point for their trip.

Cycling is a popular recreational activity with 7% of visitors citing it as the main purpose of their visit<sup>26</sup>. Some conflicts between cycling and land management activities have been reported especially by commoners. These conflicts could be addressed through greater awareness of, and uptake of, agreed Codes of Conduct<sup>27</sup>.

### Characteristics of off-road cyclists

- 80% are on holiday, 17% on a day trip and 3% staying with friends
- Most travel less than five miles to their starting point, primarily by car
- The average route length is seven – eight miles, taking two – three hours, and undertaken once a month

The highest levels of activity are in the school holidays, especially August, with the most popular locations for cycling being Beechern Wood and Rhinefield Drive.

<sup>26</sup> Visitor Survey of the New Forest National Park 2004-2005 (Tourism South East)

<sup>27</sup> The Forestry Commission in association with New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council and Sustrans has developed the New Forest Cycle Code which seeks to minimise disturbance to wildlife, commoner's stock and other users.

There are opportunities to make cycling one of the most important means of getting to and around the Forest as a recreational activity for enjoying the National Park. This would require better connectivity between the existing waymarked routes and safe road routes and joint working between Wiltshire Council, Hampshire County Council and a range of partners. The cycle network needs to be well connected to key transport nodes (including railway stations in and around the National Park) to encourage non-motorised travel. There is a demand for better and safer cycle links between Forest settlements and between these settlements and their surroundings. A series of strategic routes are also needed, linking the New Forest with settlements outside the National Park, and with the Test and Avon Valleys, and the coast.

The distinction between cycle routes on the Crown Lands and non-Crown Lands is important. Opportunities to improve the network on the Crown Lands by providing new sections of cycle tracks between existing unconnected routes will need to be achieved in partnership with the Verderers. Any such routes must be consistent with the Habitats Regulations and other land management issues and provide a net gain to the Forest. The Forestry Commission supports the development of such routes.

Reflecting these needs, a number of new strategic routes were proposed in 2003 by a consortium of organisations<sup>28</sup> to provide a Strategic Cycle Network within and adjoining the National Park. These proposals include a National Cycle Network route (Route 2) from Southampton via Hythe across the National Park to Christchurch.

<sup>28</sup> These proposed routes have been put forward by New Forest District Council with the help of Hampshire County Council, the Forestry Commission, CTC the national cyclist's organisation and Sustrans and also assisted by English Nature, the Verderers of the New Forest and Southampton City Council.



Cyclists and car, Ober Heath








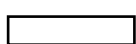
Cycling, Oakley Inclosure



Bike hire, Lyndhurst

## Map 6 New Forest National Park cycle routes



-  New Forest National Park boundary
-  On and off road cycle routes
-  Perambulation
-  The Open Forest and other publicly accessible land
-  Main settlements and larger villages
-  County and district boundaries



Cyclist admiring the view, Solent Way

Other proposals link the National Park, including Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst, with the Test Valley, Totton, Hythe, Fawley, Lymington, Christchurch, Ringwood and Fordingbridge. The majority of these routes follow existing roads. The map of proposed routes was never fully implemented and it will need to be updated. There is a major task to align all of the cycling issues across a number of administrative boundaries and to resource initiatives.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

6.2.1 Continue to prioritise and implement the existing and agreed New Forest Strategic Cycle Network (2005). Complement this with a review of the local cycling network and produce a new map of proposed routes that meets the needs of users and local communities by providing a safe, coherent core cycle network within the National Park that links settlements with existing permitted routes.

6.2.2 Identify the resources to implement this network with partners – a major injection of investment could open up significant opportunities. The majority of the strategic network will probably be based on existing routes but it may require the creation of new linkages to make more user-friendly connections.

6.2.3 Encourage an increase in the number of people cycling as a means of travelling to and within the National Park by making it an easier, safer and more attractive option to the car.

6.2.4 Work with the Verderers, cyclists, the New Forest Recreation Management Steering Group, New Forest Access Forum, Natural England, landowners, South West Trains and Forestry Commission to identify and implement some changes to cycling routes on the Crown Lands.

## 6.3 Horse riding



Horse and cart, Anderwood

Horse riding has a long history within the New Forest. It is an important and highly valued activity in the New Forest landscape. Horse riders have rights of access to roam across all of the open Crown Lands<sup>29</sup>. In addition, there are some 75 km (47 miles) of rights of way open to horse riders (bridleways and byways) over the enclosed landscape. The extensive nature of these rights offers unique opportunities that have no equivalent anywhere else in the lowlands of the UK.

However, despite this outstanding provision, only a very small proportion of people who visit the National Park do so to ride horses. Most people who do ride in the National Park live within or very close to the Park<sup>30</sup>. On average riders spend some two hours per visit, with most horse riding undertaken at weekends and on spring / summer evenings after the clocks have changed. Many riders are actively involved in a range of riding clubs and participate in local competitions.

One of the key concerns of riders is the question of safety and accessibility. Because many grazing paddocks are located around the periphery of the National Park, riders frequently have to cross busy and dangerous roads to gain access to the Open Forest, with overgrown verges and hedges obscuring the view of oncoming traffic. For those who keep their horse at some distance from the Forest the alternative option is boxing in, with some car parks used regularly more than others. The issue of the use and appearance of paddocks will be addressed through the New Forest National Park Core Strategy and by working with the Equine Forum and users to develop advice on design and management that is appropriate to the distinctive landscape context of the New Forest.

<sup>29</sup> This right is established in law (law of Property Act, 1925) on the Crown Land, and on the National Trust commons, and is a permissive right on the commons owned by Hampshire County Council

<sup>30</sup> Visitor Survey of the New Forest National Park 2004-2005 (Tourism South East)

### Priority actions for the next five years

6.3.1 Work with the Equine Forum on horse riding related issues and maintain the experience for horse riders that is currently available.

6.3.2 Enhance opportunities to access the New Forest on horseback by improving the condition and accessibility of rights of way and filling identified gaps in the network of bridleways surrounding and within the National Park and prioritise those links that will bring greatest benefit to riders and the whole Forest.

6.3.3 As part of wider campaigns for responsible behaviour raise awareness of the safety needs of riders to other recreational users, including car drivers.

6.3.4 Promote high standards of paddock and boundary management by working with the Equine Forum to develop and provide advice and training to paddock owners. Assist owners to secure additional sources of funding for land management e.g. by joining agri-environment schemes.

## 6.4 Camping and caravanning



The New Forest offers a highly valued and unique camping and caravanning experience in which people can camp within ancient woodland, grassland and heathland alongside the grazing animals. Unrestricted camping was allowed across the Open Forest up until the early 1970s. Today camping provides the main accommodation for visitors staying in the National Park.

There are in excess of 20 campsites within the New Forest offering over 4,500 pitches. The main

provider is Forest Holidays; a Forestry Commission and Camping and Caravanning Club joint venture company. They manage 10 campsites in the Open Forest with a total of 3,200 pitches for tents, caravans or motor homes. Overall these campsites achieve 60% occupancy with peak numbers associated with bank holidays, half terms and the summer holidays.

**Table 6 Campsites run by Forest Holidays**

\* Dog free ° Disabled facilities available

Campsite	No. of pitches	Opening
Aldridge Hill	220	End May – beginning September
Ashurst* °	280	March – end September
Denny* and Matley Wood	170	March – end September
Hollands Wood °	600	March – end September
Holmsley °	700	March – November
Ocknell and Longbeech	480	March – end September
Roundhill °	500	March – end September
Setthorns	250	Open all year

In addition, there are at least a further 1,200 pitches<sup>31</sup> on privately owned land. These include Caravan Club sites at Black Knowl, Brockenhurst, Foxlease and the New Forest Centenary Site at Bransgore. There is also one holiday centre within the National Park at Sandy Balls near Godshill.

Together campsites make a very significant contribution to the local economy, totalling some £12.5 million annually (in 2003) and form a significant part of the Forest's tourist provision.

Those sites located within the heart of the Open Forest lie within areas of international importance for biodiversity, raising concerns about damage to fragile habitat features and disturbance to

sensitive species in surrounding areas. The key issues include visual intrusion, compaction beneath ancient trees, loss of deadwood, the felling of trees and limbs to meet health and safety requirements, changes in tree micro flora and the prevention of regeneration. For those campsites located in ancient woodland, such as Hollands Wood, Longbeech and Denny Wood this can lead to unfavourable condition of the designated nature conservation site.

Despite these impacts, the campsites offer something very rare, certainly in southern England - the opportunity to camp in a wild and ancient landscape, bringing people close to nature and the New Forest. The key challenge is to ensure that camping does not have an adverse impact on

31 New Forest Committee (2003) Strategy for the New Forest



Caravan convoy, Brockenhurst



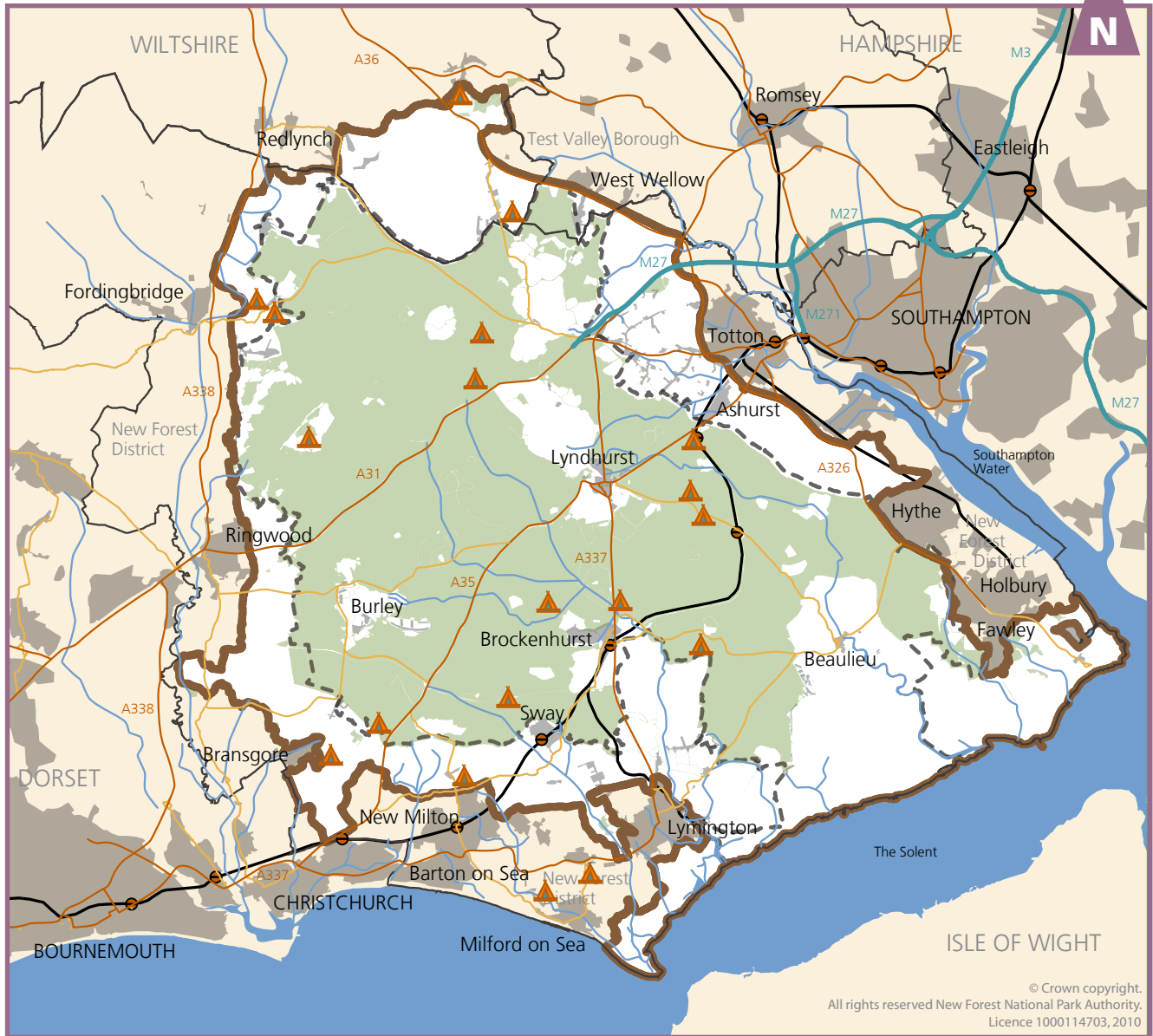
Hollands Wood campers





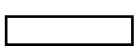



Lodge Heath campsite

### Map 7 Key camping and caravanning sites

Not to scale



-  New Forest National Park boundary
-  Perambulation
-  The Open Forest and other publicly accessible land
-  Main settlements and larger villages
-  County and district boundaries
-  Camping/ caravanning sites

Based on data from Ordnance Survey points of interest.



Matley campsite

the special qualities and to ensure that pressure for commercialisation does not destroy the very character that makes these campsites stand apart. Campsites also provide a major opportunity to raise awareness of the New Forest with visitors and help them to enjoy their stay.

**New Forest National Park Core Strategy\*  
Policy DP18: Extensions to Holiday Parks  
and Camp Sites**

Extensions to existing holiday parks, touring caravan or camping sites will only be permitted to enable the removal of pitches from sensitive areas by the relocation of part of a site to a less sensitive area adjoining an existing site, providing:

- there would be overall environmental benefits
- there would be no increase in the overall site area or site capacity
- the area where pitches or other facilities are removed from would be fully restored to an appropriate New Forest landscape, and any existing use rights are relinquished.

\*Submission document - wording subject to change, to be confirmed following examination in 2010.

**Priority actions for the next  
five years**

6.4.1 Audit the provision of camping in the National Park and maintain the unique experience the New Forest offers; sustain the significant contribution it makes to the local economy whilst ensuring that campsite management does not adversely damage the Park's special qualities.

6.4.2 Work with partners to identify potential alternative sites to which the phased relocation of the more damaging campsites (e.g. Hollands Wood, Longbeech and Denny Wood) might

be achieved whilst providing a similar quality of camping experience. It must be recognised the difficulties in finding alternative sites; many issues will have to be taken into consideration, including the local economy, transport links, access to facilities (e.g. villages, shops) and the camping experience.

6.4.3 Work with campsite operators to reduce the environmental footprint and impact of camping and caravanning on sensitive areas to enhance landscape and visitor satisfaction by:

- preventing the extension of existing and development of new camping and caravan sites
- restricting the spread of new supporting built facilities
- ensuring that any built facilities that are provided reflect their surroundings
- securing more sympathetic conservation management of existing camp sites
- monitoring the condition and operation of the sites on designated areas.

6.4.4 Explore opportunities to develop campsites as substitutes to those displaced from the commonable lands as a valuable form of farm and business diversification in robust locations.

6.4.5 Provide further guidance on the future management of campsites to reduce the dependency on car use, for example, by encouraging campers to leave their cars on site whilst visiting the National Park and continuing to promote alternatives to the private car for travel around the Forest.



## 6.5 Water based recreation



Kite surfing, Hurst

The overwhelming majority of water based recreational activity takes place off the New Forest coast in the Western Solent; there are few inland freshwater locations suitable for sailing or other activities. Strictly speaking this occurs beyond the National Park boundary which lies at mean low water springs. However, it is an important consideration for recreation management in the National Park for several reasons:

- a large proportion of water based activities gain access to the coast from facilities in the National Park, use the road network and/or store their equipment at sites on land
- the view from the Solent gives a different perspective on the beauty of the National Park's coast and provides an important means of enjoying and appreciating the shoreline
- water based activities can have an impact on the quality of the visitor experience on land – both as an intrusion or as an attraction
- it is important to integrate management across the land-sea boundary.

Water based activities are extremely popular and the fleet of boats based on or off the New Forest coastline form part of the wider Solent fleet – representing one of the largest recreational sailing fleets in Europe and possibly the world. It has major economic importance and national significance in terms of its importance for sailing. The main forms of water based activity along the New Forest coastline include: sailing, motor launches and power boats, canoeing, windsurfing, kite surfing, jet skiing, diving, rowing, fishing and swimming.

Access to the water is managed by the relevant Harbour and Port Authorities within their

jurisdiction. Most water-based activity outside of this jurisdiction is organised by the various clubs along the New Forest Coast including the Royal Lymington Yacht Club, Royal Southampton Yacht Club, Keyhaven Yacht Club, Lymington Town Sailing Club and Lymington Rowing Club.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

6.5.1 Provide new interpretive materials to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the coast by people engaged in water based activities e.g. coastal archaeology and wildlife

6.5.2 Work with user groups and Harbour Authorities to support the planning and management of recreational activities and related facilities. Help to develop codes of conduct to minimise the impact of activities and ensure that they are compatible with the sensitive sites and species of the coast

6.5.3 Work in partnership with the Solent Forum to survey and research water based recreation activities in the Solent.

## 6.6 Cricket



Cricket at Burley

There are 13 cricket pitches within the open access areas of the Crown Lands and 20 in total in the National Park. Some of these are also used for other sports such as football. The playing of village cricket is a long-established and traditional recreational activity in the New Forest. As in much of rural England, the game is a quintessential part of the social life of local communities and a good indicator of the vibrancy of village life.

New Forest village cricket has a particularly distinctive and unusual flavour. One of its peculiar features is the way in which pitches are situated on the open commons in a relatively natural landscape. They are usually open to grazing animals and provide an entertaining spectacle for passing visitors with the interesting visual contrast between the players, smartly dressed in white, and the beautiful backdrop of woodland, heath and scrub.

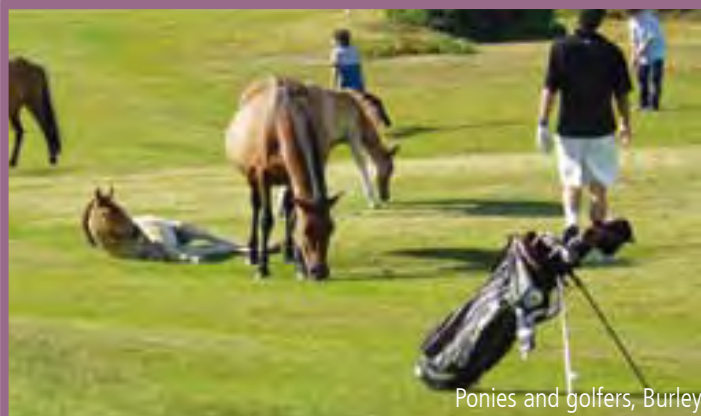
Generally cricket makes a positive and very welcome contribution to the National Park's special qualities and to the social dimension of local communities. Particular attention needs to be given to avoiding the potential for inappropriate visual intrusion arising from the use of any cricketing infrastructure such as screens, covers, netting and pavilions. The scale, design and materials used should be appropriate to the often high profile landscape setting of the cricket pitches.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

6.6.1 Working with cricket clubs, Natural England, landowners and the Forestry Commission, provide advice and support to avoid any undesirable landscape impacts of cricket in the National Park whilst ensuring that the maintenance and development of facilities is at an appropriate scale and design to their landscape context.

6.6.2 Take steps to work with others to improve the cleanliness of cricket outfield.

## 6.7 Golf



There are three golf courses on the open commons of the New Forest and nine in total within the National Park. These provide a valuable and enjoyable recreational resource for those who participate in the sport.

However, the location and operational management of golf courses can result in varying degrees of visual intrusion in the New Forest landscape although these can usually be reduced with a careful and sensitive approach to management. Golf courses can result in changes to the topography and character of the New Forest landscape arising from bunkers, course features, associated buildings and infrastructure, intensive green keeping, grass cutting and the management of vegetation generally. There may also be conflicts with nature conservation and historic environment objectives.

There are also potential conflicts between golfing, commoners and other recreational users of the Open Forest including safety concerns about flying golf balls.

### **Priority actions for the next five years**

6.7.1 Working with golf clubs, Natural England and the Forestry Commission, provide advice and support on avoiding any undesirable landscape impacts arising from golfing activities in the National Park. Ensure that related facilities use sympathetic materials and design and are of an appropriate scale to their landscape context.

# Chapter seven



Spiders web, Fritham

## Resources and funding

The implementation of many of the actions in this Strategy will require changes in the approach of partners, land managers, user groups and joint ways of working. As such, many will not necessarily require major new sources of funding and can be accommodated within the existing and anticipated level of resources available to the National Park Authority and its partners.

It is anticipated that some of the actions will require additional staff and volunteer time, if they are to be achieved successfully. The New Forest National Park Authority will incorporate many of these actions into the work programmes of existing staff and, subject to funding, intends to employ additional rangers to provide additional capacity to achieve some of the objectives of the Strategy. The Strategy will also hopefully influence the work programmes of staff in other organisations and partners to achieve the vision for recreation in the National Park.

In areas where additional funding is likely to be necessary, for example, in terms of commissioning surveys and monitoring to meet the identified evidence requirements of the Strategy, the Authority will look to allocate some of its existing resources to meet the objectives. The Authority will look to secure external funding contributions from partners such as Natural England to make this core funding go further.

The implementation of some other areas of the Strategy, such as the improvement of the cycling network off the Crown Lands, will require major additional funding. The Authority will coordinate, with partners, potential external funding applications to deliver these aspirations, when they have been agreed.

# Chapter eight



## Monitoring and review

The Strategy includes 59 priority actions to be taken forward over the next five years as a core part of its implementation. In discussion with the organisations involved, these will be incorporated into a more detailed on-going action plan with details of lead organisations and main partners. The action plan will be updated regularly on the National Park Authority website.

The Recreation Management Strategy as a whole will be reviewed every five years, involving wide public consultation.

# Appendix 1

## Some potential, perceived and real impacts of people that require further evidence and research

### **Direct physical trampling effects**

Leading to a change in the composition and structure of vegetation; eventually opening up bare ground and the potential for soil erosion. The extent and severity of trampling and erosion depends on a number of factors including the type, timing and frequency of recreational activity, recovery times, vegetation and soil type, slope, aspect, prevailing weather and site history, wetness and water table levels, and grazing pressures.

### **Litter**

A widespread problem which detracts from the natural beauty of the landscape and causes a great deal of offence to those who love the Forest although the majority of litter seems to be thrown from car windows and relatively little by people enjoying outdoor recreation. Litter and broken glass can be a risk to livestock and there is a potential for ponies to be harmed by discarded human food.

### **Interference with livestock and risks to land management activities**

The pattern of visitor distribution influences the distribution and behaviour patterns of livestock and wild animals. Visitors can inadvertently (and sometimes deliberately) get in the way of management activities such as drifts and forestry operations, leave gates open and cause obstructions to land managers going about their every day activities.

### **Reduced tranquillity**

Perceived overcrowding can seriously impair people's enjoyment of the New Forest and undermine their expectation of what their visit should provide – a difficult issue to define because different individuals vary in their sensitivity to the presence of other people. For some, the threshold level at which their sense of tranquillity is ruined can be very low – seeing one other person can ruin the day. Many people enjoy and seem to prefer the company of others, for example, at an

apparently crowded picnic spot or beach location with hundreds of other people.

### **Challenged perceptions of what is right for the Forest**

Some people who have seen the Forest before the growth of recreation find it difficult to accept that some activities that are outside their personal experience or knowledge are 'right for the Forest'. These activities offend against people's view of what is appropriate in the place that they love and cherish. Many hold the belief that the Forest is just too congested and would prefer to turn the clock back and reduce significantly the numbers of visitors.

### **Traffic congestion**

High levels of congestion on some of the National Park's roads are frequently blamed on visitors. It is by no means clear that all traffic problems are caused by visitors and there is little data analysis to show the contribution that recreation makes to the problems. At some specific locations it is fairly closely linked but generally recreation is only one small component of traffic.

### **Wildlife disturbance**

All recreational and land management activities may cause variable degrees of disturbance to many wild animal species. The response - to take flight and avoid an encounter with people - can be clearly seen in a range of mammals, reptiles and birds when they are disturbed. The main issue is the extent to which the frequency and severity of this disturbance affects the population levels of key species. The impact can affect breeding success, winter survival and whether species are forced to migrate and become excluded from habitats they would otherwise occupy. These impacts are difficult to establish objectively because of the complexity of the ecological relationships of wild species and large number of factors that can influence population levels. Direct impacts arising from people and dog worrying are also recorded.



# Appendix 2

## Glossary of terms

### **Nutrient enrichment**

In other parts of the UK and Europe, impacts of nutrient enrichment on sensitive natural habitats have been recorded on intensely used recreational areas. This can alter and damage the vegetation and structure of a locality. The main sources of nutrient potentially come from dog mess – where this is concentrated for example on grassland sites near to car parks, and human sewage. In the New Forest there is currently no hard evidence to support the suggestion that dog mess is causing a problem – though it has been suggested as a potential concern at some sites. In the summer months, sewage from some of the campsites can cause problems for the waste treatment plant in Lyndhurst / Brockenhurst which are suspected of leading to nutrient impacts downstream. Eutrophication may also result from coarse fishing activities.

### **Increased risk of wildfires**

During periods of extreme dry conditions, recreational activities can increase the risk of damaging accidental wildfires.

### **Adjacent commons**

Commons in a variety of ownerships outside the Crown Lands, but included within the Perambulation by the New Forest Act, 1964.

### **Agri-environment schemes**

These are land management schemes run by Natural England and Forestry Commission on behalf of Defra. Payments are made to land managers in return for adopting sensitive farming practices which provide a range of environmental and wildlife benefits. Schemes include the Woodland Grant Scheme, Environmental Stewardship, Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship.

### **Ancient and Ornamental (A&O) Woodlands**

A local term applied to pasture woodlands within the Crown Lands that are grazed by deer and commoners stock. They are ancient in origin (they have been woodlands continuously since 1600, and probably much earlier) and are of very high nature conservation and cultural heritage value.

### **Ancient Woodland**

A general term used for woodlands which have had a continuous history since at least 1600, and probably much earlier. They are of very high nature conservation and cultural heritage value.

### **Commons**

Defined areas of land which are subject to rights of common. The present Perambulation of the New Forest (New Forest Act, 1964) includes both common land owned by the Crown and public bodies and privately owned commons and manorial wastes. There are also a few registered commons outside the Perambulation (such as Whiteparish and Pennington Commons).

## Commoners of the New Forest

Those people eligible to use rights of common. In the New Forest this is based on the occupation of specific land to which common rights are attached. Practising commoners are those who exercise their rights and pay marking fees to the Verderers.

## Common rights

The New Forest Atlas of Common Rights was prepared under the 1949 New Forest Act, using the register of New Forest Claims published in 1858. The 1964 New Forest Act extended the Perambulation to include the adjacent commons. A further Atlas of Rights was prepared defining land to which rights are attached in added areas. There are six different rights of common in the New Forest. Common of pasture (the right to turn out ponies, horses, cattle and donkeys) and common of mast (the right to turn out pigs in the pannage season in autumn to feed on acorns and beech nuts) are the most used today.

## Crown Lands

The land owned by the Crown vested in the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Crown Land in the New Forest is managed on behalf of the Secretary of State by Forest Enterprise (part of the Forestry Commission), overseen locally by the Deputy Surveyor.

## Drift

A drift is a round-up of the New Forest ponies to check stock condition before the winter months.

## Enclosed land

Fenced land from which the commoners' stock are excluded, both in Crown and private ownership. The enclosed lands includes the landed estates and other agricultural land surrounding, and within, the Open Forest.

## Eutrophication

The process by which nutrient levels in a variety of habitats may be raised above 'natural' background levels by human activities. This can damage the nature conservation interest of certain sites which depend on low nutrient levels by changing the types and abundance of species present.

## Gateway

A place from which people start their recreational activity within the National Park. For example, car parks (in villages and at countryside sites), public transport nodes, and promoted rights of way.

## Green Infrastructure

A planned or managed network of open spaces, including areas such as parks and gardens, countryside areas and amenity open space, designed to improve the quality of life and provide for the needs of nearby communities.

## Interpretation

Interpretation includes the full range of activities that help to raise public awareness and enhance understanding of cultural and natural heritage sites. This may involve publications, public events, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programmes and community activities.

## Open Forest

The unenclosed Crown Lands and adjacent commons which are subject to common rights.

## Perambulation

The historic term for the boundary of the area governed by Forest law. It is now the area within the cattle grids over which commoners' stock are able to roam freely. It is defined in the New Forest Act 1964 and encompasses Crown Land, adjacent commons and certain areas of road verge and unenclosed land outside the Open Forest.

### **Ramsar site**

A wetland of international importance, especially for wildfowl, designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, 1971.

### **Scheduled Ancient Monument**

A designated archaeological site, building or structure of national importance that is protected from destruction or change under the provisions of the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act.

### **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

Nationally important sites for nature conservation designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

### **Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**

Areas designated under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (The Habitats Directive) 1992 as being of European importance for habitats and species. The largest is the New Forest SAC, covering 29,000 hectares (72,000 acres) in the core of the Forest.

### **Special Protection Area (SPA)**

Areas of European importance for birds, designated under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds 1979 (the Wild Birds Directive).

### **Wildfire**

An unplanned and uncontrolled fire which affects countryside vegetation – most are caused by people whether deliberately or carelessly.

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