

AM 576-20

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 10 DECEMBER 2020

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 15 October 2020. The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Achieving Excellence' themes from the 2018-21 Business Plan, summarised below:

Protect	Enjoy	Prosper
<p>Our priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Protecting and growing the natural capital across the National park Landscape, connecting with surrounding areas to ensure habitats and wildlife are sustainable. * Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with the National Park, promoting high quality design and environmental net gain. * Conserving the historic and built heritage; supporting local culture with continued focus on commoning. 	<p>Our priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Helping more people to understand and value the things that make the New Forest National Park unique and special. * Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park. * Facilitating a partnership approach to managing recreation to achieve a net gain for both the working and natural landscape as well as for the recreational experience. 	<p>Our priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy where natural capital is an integral component of doing business. * Promoting connectivity across the National Park through sustainable transport and communication technologies. * Supporting the social wellbeing and sustainability of New Forest Communities.
Achieving Excellence		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Maintaining and enhancing a capable, motivated team that delivers high quality service. * Championing the National Park and brokering partnership to achieve collaboration for the benefit of the New Forest and its communities * Identifying new resources and using them alongside our existing resources, effectively and efficiently. 		

Recommendation:
To note the report

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Equality & Diversity Implications:

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.

AM 576-20

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 17 DECEMBER 2020

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

As the Covid-19 pandemic progresses and we learn and observe more about the importance of nature in people's lives, we have been asked through Partnership for South Hampshire to take a lead in convening partners to develop a 'Greenprint' framework for Green Recovery. This represents a huge opportunity to develop plans with partners from across sectors which place our 'net zero with nature' ambitions at their heart. This commission is all the more timely following the launch of the 'Green Industrial Revolution' ten-point plan by the Prime Minister in November.

The 'Greenprint' will build from the work done with and through the Green Halo Partnership, which in the Forest this includes pioneering and demonstrating how we can deliver nature-friendly farming; how we can support more green jobs and skills and career paths for young people; and how we can attract private investment for environmental ambitions. We are delighted to have secured a three-month PhD placement from Southampton University to help develop the Greenprint.

The New Forest Land Advice Service is at the forefront of advising and engaging with land managers and commoners on what is increasingly known in emerging policy and practice as 'natural solutions' which deliver 'public benefits'. Examples include working with landowners to improve the water quality of Bartley Water; joining with five commoners/farmers to trial an element of the new Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMs) which will replace the Common Agricultural Policy; and setting up a farm cluster in the north of the Forest to further agri-environment projects.

The Our Past Our Future scheme, backed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is in its final months after four years. Many of the 21 projects are already complete, ranging from habitat restoration, to training people in Forest skills and repairs to the historic Verderers Hall. Some projects have been impacted by the pandemic, in particular those which included volunteer work. Now plans are in place to complete the remaining work, celebrate the achievements and look ahead to future joint funding bids.

We submitted our response to the Government's 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, which sets out proposals for widescale reform of the planning system, both as a National Park Authority and in a collective response from National Parks England. We await the Government's feedback.

Meanwhile our planning service continues to be extremely busy, with a number of large scale and complex planning applications including the Fawley Waterside development and the Lyndhurst Park Hotel; a high number of enforcement cases and of tree work applications and enquiries.

The Forest continues to be unseasonably busy particularly on dry days. NPA rangers work closely with partners to monitor the situation, provide a visible presence on the ground and educate visitors about appropriate behaviours to help protect and care for the Forest. Particular initiatives in the last few months include supporting the Verderers and commoners to ensure public safety during the drift season and working with Forestry England to reduce disturbance to the rutting deer by photographers, which had become a significant issue disrupting the rut in some instances.

Our communications campaigns to support the engagement, education and enforcement on the ground have seen huge uplift both in traditional media and online. Social media 'caring for the forest' campaigns have recorded over three million impressions since April with over 265,000 engagements (likes, comments and shares). Promotion of projects highlighting the special qualities of the New Forest and the work of the Authority have received widespread media coverage regionally, nationally and internationally.

On the 30 November, following the passage of the Agriculture Act as we leave Europe, more details about domestic agriculture policy were provided in the 'Path to Sustainable Farming – An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021-2024'. The plan refers to a package of measures to support farmers in Protected Landscapes make improvements to the natural environment, cultural heritage and public access on their land. We await further details on the opportunities this might offer farmers and commoners here in the New Forest. There is no doubt this will significantly shape our work for the foreseeable future and represents a vital indication of direction for funding and resources for the Forest.

As the new policy and legislative landscape becomes clearer following recent announcements, our Partnership Plan review will be critical in articulating the case for the Forest and its communities. Never has working as 'Team New Forest', getting our voice heard and our wonderful landscape understood as crucial to Government priorities been more important. We have a great deal to offer.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper' objectives from the 2018-21 Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the first page. In addition, a fourth section, 'Achieving Excellence', summarises those activities that support and contribute overall to all our work, and the final section lists Members' activities and events.

1 Protect

Protecting and growing the natural capital across the National Park landscape, connecting with surrounding areas to ensure habitats and wildlife are sustainable.

Nature Recovery - Net Zero with Nature

The Agriculture Bill became law in November, paving the way for the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) that will reward farmers and land managers who deliver public benefits on their land - such as improved biodiversity, better water quality and healthier soils. More details about ELM were provided in the 'Path to Sustainable Farming – An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021-2024', published by Defra on 30 November. The plan refers to a package of measures to support farmers in Protected Landscapes make improvements to the natural environment, cultural heritage and public access on their land. We await further details on the opportunities this might offer farmers here in the New Forest National Park.

The ELM programme is not due to be rolled out until 2024 but we are working with the Forest Farming Group and other local farm cluster groups to try and ensure that the New Forest will be able to get maximum benefit from the new scheme.

We have received a small amount of funding from Defra for this work and will be aiming to join with other protected landscapes in Hampshire (Cranborne Chase AONB and the South Downs National Park) to raise awareness of the opportunities the new scheme will create for farmers and land managers.

In addition to ELM, there is increasing interest in private finance for environmental enhancement, such as carbon credits and phosphate offsetting. We are working through the National Parks Partnership to engage with companies who have expertise in this area to assess the scale of opportunity that exists within National Parks, and the New Forest in particular.

Green Halo Partnership

The Green Halo Partnership has given us a platform to work beyond our boundaries and engage with partners on the opportunities for a green recovery in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are working with the Partnership for South Hampshire, the

Southern Policy Centre and Future South to develop a 'green print', a framework for green recovery and the 'green industrial revolution' announced by the Prime Minister. This aims to help us move towards a zero carbon economy, with resilient communities and where a healthy natural environment is seen as being integral to our overall success. This will support action across sectors and is a direct result of our Green Halo Partnership work. We have secured a three-month PhD placement from Southampton University to help draw this work together.

Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme

Several projects which have been led by the NPA/NFLAS are now complete, including New Forest Rural Skills (including the mentoring scheme), Traditional Building Skills, Apprentice Rangers, Veteran Trees Skills, and the New Forest Arts Festival. Some partners projects are also complete. Conserving the Forest Fringe concluded its work programme earlier in the year, but Forestry England will continue with this work post OPOF now that the project officer has been made permanent. The restoration and interpretation at the Verderers Hall are also complete and once lockdown restrictions are lifted FE will be able to resume public access to the Hall. Practical work at Foxbury has been on hold since the beginning of the first lockdown, however the majority of the OPOF funded work had already been completed and once lockdown restrictions are lifted the volunteer and visitor activity will be able to resume and the National Trust will be able to finalise any outstanding tasks at the site.

The remaining 16 projects still have work to complete before the end of the Scheme. This includes the following: production of landowner management plans for the habitat restoration sites; final reports on some of the heritage/archaeology work; restoration of ponds on the Beaulieu Estate; completion of some practical improvements, signage and interpretation on the Historic Routes and Past Pathways trails; signage at three wild play sites and the final wild play toolkit; installation of the replacement trail at the reptile centre; interpretation at Tatchbury Hospital, Holbury Manor Park and Warren Copse; production of graphics for future Shared Forest campaigns; and the production of the Behaviour Change toolkit.

The NPA's and NFLAS's volunteering opportunities continue to be affected by Covid-19. We had hoped to restart volunteering this autumn, however it has been delayed again due to the second lockdown. It's still hoped that some final volunteer task days can be arranged at some key sites before the end of the scheme. The OPOF volunteer coordinator has continued to help with the hugely successful New Forest Ambassadors initiative.

As we are nearing the end of OPOF we are currently working with a local film maker to produce a final celebration film of what we have achieved through the scheme. The short film will focus on some of the key success stories that are emerging from our evaluation, such as the value of volunteering, collaborative and partnership working across the scheme. We are aiming for the film to be ready to show at a webinar event in early

February 2021. The webinar will be instead of the celebration event that we were not able to hold due to the lockdown restrictions. Once a date is confirmed, invites will be sent to all Members, as well as OPOF partners, volunteers and stakeholders who have been involved in the scheme over the last five years.

OPOF partners have all input into the final evaluation of the scheme. A report is due from the consultants, Resources for Change, by the end of the year and the results will be reported at the webinar event in February.

One final OPOF Board meeting is planned for March 2021 and all final reporting and claims will be complete by the end of April 2021.

At the November Board meeting the partners agreed that they are committed to continuing to work together post OPOF scheme. In support of this we are currently writing a Memorandum of Understanding to feed into our legacy planning. We plan to hold a meeting in January 2021 to consider future joint working opportunities.

New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS)

NFLAS has been delivering a partnership project with the Freshwater Habitats Trust using funding from the Environment Agency's Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) to carry out practical interventions on the Bartley Water to help improve water quality which is very poor in the stream.

Several farmers/landowners are now engaged in the project and we have brought in contractors to deliver our recommendations on several sites. We are optimistic that the EA will continue to fund this project next year so that we can continue to work with the multiple farmers who have land along the stream, for example in Minstead, Bartley and Woodlands.

We have made a start on our ELMS Defra Test and Trial work which involves working with five commoners/farmers in the New Forest to test a Land Management Plan template. This is part of a larger, national Test and Trial being run by several Wildlife Trusts, including Hampshire, our partner.

Natural England is funding NFLAS to deliver Phase Two of setting up a New Forest Northern Farm Cluster. This work will be delivered between January and March 2021 and be carried out by a combination of NFLAS staff and freelance consultants.

Nationally, the English National Parks and AONBs have been contracted by Defra to deliver an ELMS advocacy project, informing and educating farmers and land managers about the new scheme. This will be delivered by NFLAS between December and March 2021.

The NFLAS OPOF nature enhancement projects end in December. The core NFLAS team will pick up the ongoing nature recovery work on the project sites to support

landowners with the management and advice needed to enhance these sites for wildlife. We will be looking for funding opportunities and ways to continue to run the volunteer groups we have set up so that the practical work can continue.

Julie Melin-Stubbs led a staff virtual Discovery Day about the gifting of a meadow at Godshill and a video and press release (both available here www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/news/big-plans-for-a-little-meadow/) were produced to promote the project to the public. Some necessary fencing work was carried out by a Young Commoner using some donated NFLAS funds and the same commoner put two of his Forest donkeys on the meadow to graze for a few weeks over the autumn. We have also liaised with several of the neighbours and given them our contact details.

New Forest Catchment Partnership

The New Forest Catchment Partnership secured a Water Environment Improvement Fund Grant from the Environment Agency to deliver water quality improvements in the Bartley area this financial year, and has been working collaboratively with the New Forest Land Advice Service to use their expertise to engage landowners and project manage practical installation of measures during the period.

The Partnership continues to be involved in a range of delivery including work to support Forestry England's ongoing improvements to Hatchet Pond, which was the subject of consultation and public communications during the period [Hatchet Pond | Forestry England](#). The pond is one of the most wildlife rich of its kind remaining in lowland England, and home to almost 90% of the rarest wetland plants in the UK. Many species found here have long since become extinct from other parts of the country.

We have also been developing our relationship with Southern Water by providing local expert input to their Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans, this will be further explored in online workshops with Southern Water and local experts over the final quarter of 2020/2021. Final draft plans will be subject to customer consultation later in 2021.

October saw the 11th edition of the New Forest Catchment Partnership newsletter. It highlights our work with partners on the fringe of the catchment and the 'Blue Halo' of the National Park. [Water-News-Issue-11.pdf \(freshwaterhabitats.org.uk\)](#)

1.1 Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with the National Park, promoting high quality design and environmental net gain.

Development Management

We received 170 applications in the period 1 September to 23 November and in the same period determined 145 applications with an approval rate of 94%.

During this same period 21 appeal decisions were received; 11 were dismissed, eight were allowed and two were allowed in part. Having considered the most recent appeal decisions at the November Planning Committee, Members agreed that a letter should be sent to the Planning Inspectorate expressing the Authority's concern about the Inspectors' reasoning in allowing some of the appeals.

Work is progressing to finalise the legal agreements in respect of the Fawley Waterside proposals and it is hoped that this work will be completed in the next few weeks. An application for the redevelopment of the Lyndhurst Park Hotel site is expected to be submitted shortly whilst pre-application discussions are now underway on the remaining allocated sites in the Local Plan. An application for the reconfiguration of Ipley Crossroads has also been received and is generating significant interest.

Trees

Since the last report the Tree Team has experienced continued high numbers of tree work applications and enquiries from the public. There have been 165 tree work applications determined, 100% of which have been within eight weeks.

During the same period 44 Consultations have been provided on planning applications.

One new Tree Preservation Order has been made and work continues reviewing old TPOs.

Planning Enforcement

The second lockdown period has continued much as the first with a high number of cases reported and investigations underway. There has been a noticeable number of complaints related to people who are more often home-based relating to neighbour developments, such as out buildings, fences and encroachment of gardens. Several cases of outbuildings being used for short term residential holiday lets have been reported whilst concerns continue to be received about the impact of some of the 'pop up' campsites operating in the Forest under permitted development rights (the normal 28 day allowance has again been extended by Government to 56 days for 2021 to assist the hospitality sector).

A number of concerns continue to be reported about the new residential mobile home park under construction at Vernon Dene, near Bransgore. The lawful use of the land as a caravan site was established in 2008 through a Certificate of Lawful Use. Queries have though been raised as to whether the associated 'site works' and drainage arrangements benefit from permitted development rights given the site's proximity to the European designated sites and the provisions of the Habitat Regulations. This is now under active consideration and discussions are being held with the owners to establish the lawful position.

Other cases of note include the subdivision of woodland and fields for sale as individual plots, often sold at auction as amenity plots.

In response, we have served enforcement notices on the eight owners of a split woodland site near Lymington who are incrementally adding structures and hard surfacing and using the site for caravan / camper van siting. The Authority has also recently served an Article 4 Direction taking away permitted development rights for the erection of fences, gates and means of enclosure for a site near Cadnam. Another woodland near Exbury is subject of ongoing investigation for similar issues.

There are a further 10 sites where, having exhausted reasonable negotiation, enforcement notices are being prepared to be served in the next two months or so.

Policy

Following endorsement at the full Authority meeting in October 2020, our formal response to Government's proposed reforms to the planning system set out in their Planning White Paper (August 2020) was formally submitted. Alongside our own National Park Authority response, we contributed to the National Parks England response which was similarly submitted by the deadline of the end of October 2020. We await the Government's response to the feedback they have received.

As a member of the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH), we have continued to engage in the evidence base work to inform the update to the Spatial Position Statement (2016). This non-statutory Position Statement will guide development across the sub-region to 2036 and beyond to 2050 and will inform the subsequent development of new local plans, including by identifying Strategic Development Opportunity Areas (SDOAs) to accommodate future growth. The Authority's membership of the Partnership for South Hampshire enables us to ensure due regard is given to potential impacts on the New Forest National Park from this sub-regional work.

As part of our regular planning policy work, the team is also working on the following:

- Preparing the Authority's first 'Infrastructure Funding Statement' (IFS). This will set out the developer contributions negotiated from new development in the National Park and identify the local projects supported by the contributions. It is a national requirement that all planning authorities should publish their Infrastructure Funding Statements by 31 December, reporting on the previous financial year. The contributions negotiated by the Authority in 2019 – 2020 have helped to fund new wild play sites in a number of villages in the National Park, as well as a package of habitat mitigation measures (including the employment of seasonal rangers).
- Work is well advanced on compiling the information for our Annual Monitoring Report. This reports on the performance of our Local Plan policies, as well as providing information on a series of key planning indicators. As with the IFS, the Annual

Monitoring Report looks back at the previous financial year, which including the adoption of our new Local Plan in August 2019. Dwelling completions in the 2019 – 20 year have been impacted by the requirement for nitrate neutrality in the Solent and River Avon catchments, which is having a significant impact on housing delivery.

- We are liaising with partners at Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council regarding the review of the adopted Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan (2013). Work is likely to pick up on this review in 2021 and our current intention is to bring a report to the full Authority meeting in March 2021 on the scope and timetable for the plan review.

1.2 Conserving the historic and built heritage; supporting local culture with continued focus on commoning.

Archaeology

We are pleased to report that a new Archaeologist was appointed in October and will start in the new role on 2 January. We have continued to deliver our Archaeology SLA's for both Forestry England and New Forest District Council, with our Assistant Community Archaeologist, recruited in August supporting responses to planning matters.

Planning matters still form much of our day to day work. We have received a few (lower than normal) public enquiries for information and assistance on heritage matters for personal or group research. There has been a noticeable increase in cases of metal detecting and we are developing new informative content for our website and hope to work with partner organisations to promote a single well-thought through approach to dealing with illegal and inappropriate detecting.

Building Design & Conservation

Earlier this year, the Authority's Planning Committee approved a work programme consisting of the review of the adopted National Park Design Guide SPD; the preparation of guidance on non-designated heritage assets (alongside the list of assets within the National Park); and a review of three Conservation Areas within the National Park. Work on the Design Guide review is progressing well and members will be engaged on the revised draft document in the new year, prior to a period of public consultation. Work on compiling a list of non-designated heritage assets in the National Park and an advisory note on their status within the planning system is also well advanced and will be presented to a Planning Committee meeting in due course.

The level of planning applications and enquiries remains high and the team continues to offer specialist advice on building design and conservation matters for current planning applications, pre-application enquiries and planning enforcement cases. In November we

were notified that the 19th century Landford Wood Mission Hall has been added to the National Heritage List by Historic England following its designation as a Grade II listed building. The hall was built by philanthropist Lady Ashburton for people living around the Melchet Court Estate (the photograph below is credited to Historic England).



19th century Landford Wood Mission Hall

2 Enjoy

2.1 Helping more people to understand and value the things that make the New Forest National Park unique and special.

Education

This October the education and youth team was excited to run three school visits to Bolderwood and to support learning in school grounds. Teacher Cora Phillips from St Faith's Primary School in Winchester was as enthusiastic in her feedback as her pupils:

'I just wanted to say a MASSIVE thank you to both of you for such a wonderful trip. The children (and adults!) came back so excited and enthusiastic about the New Forest; you really brought it to life for them and they learnt so much. A really wonderful day!'

Our team members were equally inspired to be back out in the woods and pleased that all the hard work put into revising risk assessments and improving procedures to adapt to

Covid-19 proved effective. While the second lockdown meant that some of our other school bookings for November were cancelled (at the schools' choice), we have everything in place to support those who are able to meet us on the coast, out in the Forest or in their school grounds.

At half term, the team ran a bespoke, socially distanced, event for the families of charity SCARF New Forest (Supporting Special Children and their Relatives and Friends) at Lepe Country Park. We introduced them to the John Muir Award in an accessible way to generate interest for our pilot of an online John Muir Award for families. Four families signed up and have been sharing their memories of their day at Lepe and subsequent independent explorations of the New Forest via a private Facebook group. New ideas and guidance are regularly shared in person by Education and Youth officer Amy Moore and we have been brilliantly supported by the Communications team in developing and managing this new area of work.

The New Forest Educators' Forum will be held once again in December and we plan to take the time to visit and support other learning venues, planning ahead for restarting joint work such as the Youth Action Project.

Public and community events / rangers

The Forest continues to see unseasonably high visitor numbers especially since the second Covid-19 national lockdown where coast and countryside sites are popular destinations for households to exercise or individuals to meet with one another as a consequence of many other facilities and shops being closed. Although there are fewer issues with some damaging anti-social behaviours such as BBQs, fires and water-related activities, there is still considerable verge parking at the busy visitor sites. NPA rangers continue to work closely with partners to monitor the situation, provide a visible presence on the ground and engage with visitors to educate them in appropriate use of the Forest.

Rangers assisted with engagement to ensure public safety at drifts in busy visitor locations during this period. This was much appreciated by the Verderers Office and local Agisters.

In conjunction with Forestry England keepers and rangers, NPA rangers undertook targeted patrols around the Queens Meadow/Blackwater/Fletchers Thorns area to engage with the public, in particular photographers, to reduce disturbance to the rutting deer which had become a significant issue causing cessation of the rut in some instances.

The team was thrilled to welcome Hayden Bridgeman back to the NPA in September as our North Area Ranger. Hayden completed a New Forest Apprenticeship with us in 2018/19 before successfully being employed with Hampshire County Council (a partner in the apprenticeship scheme) as an Assistant Ranger at Lepe Country Park. Having gained considerable experience working on such a busy site with a diverse job role, Hayden beat 252 other applicants to secure the North Ranger role – not only a testament to Hayden's passion and enthusiasm for rangership and the New Forest but a huge success story for

the New Forest Apprenticeship Scheme too. Funding is currently being sought to continue the scheme post OPOF.

We have been able to secure Jake Barnes and Erika Dovey, two of our summer seasonal rangers for assistance over the winter months, including cycle patrols, gathering information about cyclists using the Forest, their routes and motivations which will help inform how cycling is better managed in the future. They are also assisting area rangers in undertaking a 100% audit of all the rights of way within the National Park to provide us with ease of use data.

We said goodbye to our last two OPOF apprentices in mid-October but are pleased to have both remaining in the Forest, one gaining a long-term residential volunteer position with the RSPB at Franchises Lodge and the other with interviews for local organisations pending.

We will continue to provide a ranger presence over the coming months to maintain visibility out on the ground, engage with visitors and monitor use of the Forest.

Communications

The impact and results of the Our Past, Our Future scheme are being promoted as projects come to an end. At the start of 2019 we worked with the Commons Defence Association to put together a calendar of 'Caring for the Forest' campaigns with partners, which have seen a huge uplift. Campaigns include reducing animal accidents, keeping to the tracks to protect rare ground nesting birds and keeping your distance from New Forest stock. On social media alone they have reached nearly three million people and had over 265,000 engagements (likes, comments and shares) since April. A breakdown of some of the social media campaigns is as follows:

- Outside Inside (bringing the special qualities of the Forest to people during lockdown) – 695,169 impressions; 2,573 clicks; 55,815 engagements
- New Forest code – 1,092,493 impressions; 1,042 link clicks; 115,977 engagements
- Ban disposable BBQs - 610,298 impressions; 1,175 link clicks; 63,512 engagements
- Fire warning - 2,392,553 impressions; 5,293 link clicks; 277,307 engagements
- Ground nesting birds – 186,779 impressions; 189 link clicks; 11,955 engagements
- Keep your distance from Forest animals - 812,930 impressions; 705 link clicks; 68,657 engagements
- Animal accidents - 175,000 and engagements of nearly 9,000 so far.

Continued social media support by the Comms team of the Commons Defence Association included 34 posts on the CDA's social accounts gaining 250,000 impressions and 15,000 engagements. An additional 37 posts in response to the CDA campaign calendar, which was created through OPOF, have gained 480,000 impressions and 35,000 engagements on CDA accounts.

A blog, press release and social posts about a series of archaeology digs on the Beaulieu Estate were published. This was picked up by a wide number of publications and websites, from the Daily Mail to Russia Today. We also marked the 25th Birthday of the National Lottery, joining in the #ThanksToYou campaign on 19 November, highlighting what the Our Past, Our Future scheme had achieved.

A story about a citizen science project to record historic tree graffiti which can be found in the Forest was picked up again and received widespread media coverage from around the world including Spain, Poland, Italy and the US.

We promoted the gift of a meadow at Godshill to the Authority with a press release and a video which has so far had 2,600 views.

Armistice Day was marked with photographs of the poppy installation at St Michael's, Lyndhurst, and links to New Forest Remembers WWI and WWII content on the New Forest Knowledge website.

The Authority's response to Government's proposals to reform the planning system was promoted with a press release and comment from the Chairman. This was used as the basis for an article in Friends of the New Forest 'Forest Matters' magazine.

We also launched a call for nominations for the Building Design Awards to celebrate the Forest's built environment and recognise high quality developments – the scheme is now in its sixth year with four categories available and we're encouraging parishes, businesses and individuals to submit worthy projects.

Our annual Walking Festival was changed to a virtual walking and cycling festival, highlighting designated routes to encourage people to stick to the tracks, while improving their health and wellbeing. It was also a chance to highlight the special qualities of the National Park and encourage people to learn more about why it is so special, either virtually or while out and about. People could tag their photos #newforestwalks or #newforestcycles for a chance to win some outdoor gear sponsored by our partner Columbia. The campaign saw over 250,000 impressions with nearly 12,000 engagements (comments, likes and shares).

We put a call out to local photographers to take part in takeovers of our Instagram accounts and had an overwhelming response. The first two photographers promoted their work on our channel, highlighting what they love about the Forest and giving a different viewpoint, while gaining a wider audience for their work. They saw over 120,000 impressions and nearly 7,000 engagements. Our Instagram account grew by 12% in October and November with a younger audience engaged.

Content has been provided for Forestry England's Essential Guide visitor publication and a series of advertisement features on the New Forest Marque. Articles have been written for the Landscape Institute magazine and Hampshire Living.

Other campaigns have included sharing respect, protect, enjoy messages at half term and when the second lockdown was announced and a plea for people to be mindful of Forest animals on fireworks night.

We continue to promote our virtual Authority and Planning meetings which are receiving good engagement, with over 200 people viewing meetings held from September to November.

2.2 Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park

Interpretation projects (including Historic Routes)

We organised a webinar for New Forest Ambassadors which included a talk by Lyndsey Stride on commoning. Lyndsey also hosted a 'behind the scenes' walk for Waterside Health and Wellbeing coaches.



Lyndsey Stride talking with Waterside health and wellbeing coaches, Pilmore Gate Heath, Oct 2020

Development of the content for the Historic Routes project is almost concluded. There are three intended outputs for each trail: a dedicated webpage, a downloadable leaflet and content via the mobile Walking App – webpage content being the most detailed and informative. Four of the [five trails](#) (Tatchbury Mount, Lepe to Fawley, Carter's Lane and Stuckton Iron Works) have content finished for both web and leaflet but the fifth (Rockford Common) is currently on hold following a request from National Trust. Due to limited space on the App, content is being still being edited. Other content includes folk songs, historical themed stories and artistic reconstructions of sites. A short promo film, highlighting each trail is also being discussed.

New Rights of Way signage is being made and new gates (to replace stiles) have been ordered. Two new gates were recently installed along rights of way used by the Tatchbury Trail.

At the Tatchbury Mount Hospital 'Brighter Grounds' site, an area of habitat regeneration via the Natures Stepping Stones project, work is now in progress on new interpretation and development of their Trim Trail with carved wooden waymarker posts. A carved wooden bench will also be produced, all guided by input from patients and staff. New Forest oak has been sought for some of the waymarker posts and the uprights for the interpretation panel. The bench is being created from tree trunks from previous onsite tree works. Work is expected to continue into next year.

Health and Wellbeing

We have been joined by Dr Lizzie Moore from Public Health England (South East) who will be working closely with us on developing our strategic approach to health and wellbeing and on further developing the [Nature Health Network](#) in partnership with Bournemouth University, PHE and the NHS. Lizzie's placement with the NPA is the first in a planned five-year programme of medical specialty trainee placements, as part of a partnership between Health Education England (funding the work), PHE SE and the NPA.

Two more Nature Health knowledge share webinars took place in October and November, with presentations from the University of Derby on Nature Connectedness and its relation to health and the practice of slowly walking in the Forest for health (often referred to as 'forest bathing'). Over 40 people attended both webinars and new connections have been made across the region. We supported two applications to the Government's Green Social Prescribing expression of interest, one in Dorset and one in Hampshire. Neither moved forward to the next stage (they had over 55 applications for just five pilots), but the process has developed useful partnerships for future funding opportunities.

PEDALL

PEDALL inclusive cycling is continuing to ride and support people to improve health and wellbeing in line with government guidance.

The current project finishes at the end of 2020 and we are working hard to secure new funding. We have been successful in securing £50,000 of capital funding from Sport England towards a possible new cycling hub in Ashurst to improve accessibility and reduce travel times for people to the north and east of the Forest. This money however is only for capital expenditure and we do not currently have funding for running costs past March. We are awaiting the imminent outcome of a funding application from National Lottery Community Fund which will provide a large proportion of the next three years' programme, if successful.

2.3 Facilitating a partnership approach to managing recreation to achieve a net gain for both the working and natural landscape as well as for the recreational experience

Recreation Management

Alongside the day-to-day work by rangers responding to the ongoing high numbers of people visiting the New Forest, work continues on longer term recreation management solutions.

The Recreation Management Strategy Advisory and Steering Groups met in October and November respectively. Finding ways to reduce verge and gateway parking remains high on the agenda as well as the potential for some redistribution of parking facilities.

The New Forest Ambassadors scheme which was launched in July, has continued to grow; 400 of the 500 litter picking kits put together have now been collected. We continue to liaise closely with the lead councillors for the four parish quadrants as we explore options for growing the scheme next year. Together, we put on a webinar for the Ambassadors, to thank them for their efforts and encourage their interest in the Forest – Lyndsey Stride's talk on commoning was very well received.

Lead rangers of different organisations and representatives from the Police and Fire Service met to review their joint working through the busy summer months. They agreed to continue to meet regularly to plan for future busy days, work together on training of staff and volunteers and improve their response to the many issues they face on the ground.

A steering group of key partners has been formed to lead and jointly fund the development of a New Forest Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). An [LCWIP](#) is a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at the local level, to be implemented as funding is sourced and becomes available over a 10-year period. The key outputs of an LCWIP are:

- a network plan for walking and cycling which identifies preferred routes and core zones for further development
- a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for future investment
- a report which sets out the underlying analysis carried out and provides a narrative which supports the identified improvements and network

The partners are NFNPA, NFDC, HCC and Forestry England. Wiltshire Council is also part of a wider group. The first meeting is in December. In addition, the Cycling Working Group (local hire shops, Sustrans, Cycling UK and others) has met twice since the last report to look at maps and scope a possible 'network' of on- and off-road core routes for cycling – both recreational and for active travel. A presentation to the New Forest Low Carbon Alliance was given in November. Information on the New Forest LCWIP will be

taken to all the quadrant meetings in the new year with details about how people can be involved and input into the development of the plan.

Educational campaigns

The simplified New Forest Code continues to be shared online, including by Go New Forest to visitors and accommodation providers.

At this time of year, the most prominent campaign is to reduce animal accidents. With shorter day length and the clock change, November is usually the worst month. Following the September meeting of the Animal Accident Reduction Group, the NPA comms team has worked hard with partner organisations to promote safe driving. In the first two weeks, the press release resulted in 10 pieces of newspaper and radio coverage, plus social media impressions of over 175,000 and engagements of nearly 9,000. Messages included tips for drivers, the cost to the Forest and commoners of any animal accident and highlighting the high-risk routes. It also included an incident where a motorist was clocked by the police doing 71mph in the 40mph zone on the B3078.

We facilitated a meeting about how the risks of incidents between cattle and people and their dogs can be reduced. Attendance by HCC, Forestry England, National Trust, Natural England, the CDA and the Verderers brought together land managers, cattle owners and health and safety specialists. They agreed to share their respective risk assessments, reflect on national best practice and work towards shared content and a coordinated approach to mitigation measures.

We also facilitated another partnership meeting about the use of appropriate and proportionate enforcement activities to deter illegal use of the Forest. Among other things we discussed the potential to broaden the use of window stickers when vehicles are parked in gateways or on protected verges.

Having been delayed by Covid-19 we are launching the Professional Dog Walkers' Charter in December (as supported by the NPA last year). This sets very high standards of operation and will be applicable throughout the National Park. Businesses that comply with the charter will be able to promote this to potential customers and people looking for someone to walk their dog will know what they should expect, including respect for the environment and consideration towards other Forest users.

Access and Rights of Way

National Park signposts are ready and waiting the finishing touches before they are installed along the Lepe Loop. The signposts were designed in partnership with Hampshire County Council and will replace the existing signposts along this route, supporting both the Lepe Loop and the wider path network. This is the final stage in the Mend Our Mountain project, organised by the British Mountaineering Council with much of the funds being crowd sourced. The project seeks to improve countryside access in all

15 UK national parks and we look forward for more opportunities to improve accessibility in the New Forest

We have improved the volunteer section of the NPA website and are tentatively preparing for a spring launch to coincide with the end of OPOF and mark the launch of a new database system of handling volunteer information and sign-up. We look forward to leading volunteer work parties out to clear vegetation from the rights of way network depending on what COVID-19 restrictions are in place.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy where natural capital is an integral component of doing business.

Sustainable Tourism / business

The second lockdown has of course come at a key time of year when businesses seek to make the most of Christmas demand. We again offered to help local New Forest Marque businesses with deliveries but it seems the businesses have themselves adapted to new ways of working. We have supported the Marque local produce campaign to encourage people to support local businesses when doing their Christmas shopping this year.

Surveys conducted amongst local businesses indicated that they will need financial support into the future as despite re-opening, normal levels of income will not be achieved for some time. We continue to work alongside Go New Forest in promoting sustainable transport as a way to access the New Forest and help the visitor economy. Some local businesses have been unable to continue to participate in the Go New Forest Card scheme, which supports shopping local through discounted purchases, due to current uncertainties. The New Forest Tour will hopefully assist in connecting visitors to local produce next summer.

3.2 Promoting connectivity across the National Park through sustainable transport and information and communication technologies.

Sustainable Transport

We met with the Tour operator to discuss the detail of the 2020 season, which didn't follow the usual path due to the reduced lead-in time and absence of printed promotion. The Tour performed relatively well, dropping only 25% patronage, compared to comparable visitor bus services which dropped, on average, 50%. Of the three routes, the Blue Route (coastal), maintained its popularity the most. Interestingly, there was much greater reach on social media than in previous years.

We all remain positive about the Tour operating next year, especially given the propensity to staycation. If the situation allows, we may even be able to extend the season next year. There are also plans for a new Tour website and a new Tour ticket app. We discussed other ways of how we can assist full operation if there are still social distancing restrictions, as well as perhaps moving from print to an electronic-based visitor guide. The next meeting is scheduled for early March, by which time the situation generally will hopefully be clearer.

Whilst the 'Lepe extension' bus service was forced to cease during the summer on account of congestion negatively impacting the timetable, the good news is that the Sunday service has continued during the winter. Patronage has been variable, depending on the weather, but on a par with last winter.

Yellow Buses have reinstated the 1a along the coast to New Milton operating every 30 minutes Monday to Friday and every 60 minutes on Saturdays, with plans to expand services and timetables next year.

3.3 Supporting the social wellbeing and sustainability of New Forest communities.

Affordable Housing

We have again dealt with a small number of pre-apps for rural exception sites, with some of them expected to be forthcoming. NPA officers work closely with NFDC and other partners to encourage more affordable homes in the right places and with the necessary community involvement.

As a permanent member of the 'Hampshire Homes Hub' (the successor of the 'Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing') we keep updated about the latest developments and events in Hampshire and also on new national policies about affordable housing coming from the Government agency Homes England which funds the Hub.

Negotiations have continued to secure the affordable housing site at Burley and the last remaining hurdle - agreeing the easement for services – is now close to being concluded. All being well, it is hoped that works on site will commence in the New Year.

Sustainable Communities Fund

Funds have been allocated to the New Forest Live at Home scheme to organise a series of site visits for older people to get outdoors in the New Forest in a safe and supported way. The programme of visits will be to local produce and farm shops that sell a range of New Forest Marque products followed by a local café or pub where visitors can sample New Forest Marque produce on their menus. The funds cover the cost of a member of staff to lead the visits and provide subsidised travel for those taking part (max of eight per

visit). The programme of visits will take place over a six-month period with one visit per week starting in February 2021.

Funds have also been allocated to support the continuation of the New Forest Non-Natives Plants Project hosted by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. The project aims to stop the spread of invasive non-native plants along watercourses by working with landowners to support control programmes. The project's success also depends on the huge amount of help given by volunteers to tackle plants such as Himalayan balsam which threaten to out-compete the native wildlife, monitor the effectiveness of control work, and help raise awareness about invasive non-native plants and the problems they cause.

4 **Achieving Excellence**

4.1 **Maintaining and enhancing a capable, motivated staff team that delivers high quality services.**

Human Resources

As at 30 November 2020 the total staff headcount was 81 or 70.57 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	Full Time Equivalents	Variation from previous report
Core funded	64*	– 1	56.14	– 0.47
Funded by external projects	17	– 4	14.43	– 4.00
Total	81	– 5	70.57	– 4.47

*Of the core funded roles, one staff member (1 FTE) is working in shared services, 25 are part-time and four are on a fixed-term contract.

In the last three months we recruited to the following roles:

Role	Contract type	How funded
Education and Youth Officer	Permanent	Core funded
Ranger	Permanent	Core funded
Archaeologist	Permanent	Part core funded and part funded via SLAs

We said goodbye to:

Role	Contract type	How role will be filled in future
Seasonal Assistant Ranger	Seasonal, project funded	N/A – end of seasonal role
Planning Officer	Permanent, core funded	Assessing vacancy, currently covered by temporary staff

Archaeological Officer (Data and Projects)	Fixed-term, project funded	Replaced in part with Archaeologist and in part with Assistant Community Archaeologist
New Forest Apprentice Rangers x 2	Permanent, project funded	N/A – end of apprenticeships
Sustainability Officer	Permanent, core funded	Assessing vacancy

Staff Wellbeing

As part of our commitment under the 'Nurture' theme in our People Plan and to support staff through the pandemic, a number of wellbeing focused initiatives have taken place in the last few months:

- 44 staff attended a half day virtual wellbeing workshop to gain a deeper understanding of mental health and ways to apply self-care. When added to the previous Mental Health First Aid and managers training, this means 90% of all staff have experienced training related to wellbeing which has increased the overall awareness and understanding of mental health across the organisation
- Our Education and Youth Officer delivered a Wellbeing themed virtual Discovery Day where 30 staff were introduced to mindfulness and progressive relaxation to help them apply techniques that could be used when faced with anxieties
- Our HR and Training Officer who leads on staff wellbeing has contributed to Health and Safety Forum meetings to ensure a collaborative approach
- Since September, the Wellbeing group led by our HR and Training Officer has held three meetings where a winter wellbeing programme has been discussed and the following initiatives have been taken forward:
 - National Perk café – a 30-minute virtual café taking place once/twice a week for staff to drop in and engage with each other hosted by different 'baristas' from the Wellbeing group.
 - Wonderwalks – every week in different areas of the Forest (when restrictions permit) a member of staff leads a socially distanced walk that other staff sign up to. It highlights the importance of the outdoors and engagement with others as a way of supporting positive mental health and wellbeing. Photos are shared on our staff intranet
 - Several activities are being arranged for the lead up to Christmas including Christmas Wonderwalks and a virtual Christmas social
- The dedicated Wellbeing area on our internal intranet continues to provide access to information to help staff maintain and enhance their mental health and wellbeing. We have given prominence to Wellbeing on the homepage so it's one of the first things staff see when visiting the intranet.

We appreciate the time and effort members of the Wellbeing group have put into the implementation of such a variety of activities for staff to get involved in support of keeping up morale across the organisation.

4.2 Championing the National Park and brokering partnership to achieve collaboration for the benefit of the New Forest communities.

Team New Forest / Updating the Partnership Plan

An update about the Partnership Plan review was provided to members at the last Authority meeting in October including the possibility of establishing a Partnership Board to oversee and guide the work of the new Partnership Plan and drive forward meaningful collaboration for the Forest. Since then, the 'Member Task and Finish Group' has been established and this is the subject of a separate report on the agenda which also includes a wider update on the progress being made to update the Partnership Plan.

4.3 Identifying new resources and using them alongside our existing resources, effectively and efficiently.

ICT Services

A great many security updates have been required over the past few months and with equipment both on and off site, this has proved challenging. Changes have now been made to allow easier management of security updates, which has been helped by having more staff set up with NPA equipment at home. We are liaising with the remaining staff still using their own laptop or PC to make the necessary arrangements to provide them with NPA equipment. Dual factor authentication was rolled out to all in October, adding another level of security.

Most staff completed the 'how to recognise a phishing email' training released recently. The Meta compliance system allows mock phishing emails to be randomly sent which we did with good but not perfect results. Most staff were able to recognise the mock phishing emails, but the exercise did highlight a few areas where file additional training would be helpful.

The Microsoft Champions programme has been re-instigated, and three SharePoint workshops have now been held. These workshops will be supplemented by individual sessions with teams to help drill down to their specific queries and requirements and we are also looking at other additional ways of supporting users. Thanks to the help of the Champions and others we will be able to set several of the old drives to read only at the end of the year. With a deadline of March 2021 to get all staff working within SharePoint, we aim to turn the remaining drives to read only by mid-February.

We have had several meetings to discuss options for the ICT infrastructure, enhanced security, Microsoft licensing and a replacement phone system. The current hardware in the server room must be replaced by June 2021; work which was commenced a year ago had to be delayed whilst we have been dealing with the more pressing requirements that have come about by the need to get everyone working from home. In addition to this we have attended some new planning system demonstrations, both browser based, and compatible with mobile devices. Project deadline for this is March 2022 when the current contract for Acolaid ends.

Legal and Information management

Ensuring that we meet our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) remains a high priority and we are constantly reviewing and updating our website, documents and privacy notices to improve transparency and compliance, and responding to data protection queries as they arise.

Formal requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations have eased off a little in the last few weeks, but remain well ahead of previous years, as at the 23 November we had received 50 compared to only 29 for the same period last year. The five year annual average is 51 requests, and with still four months of the year left we are just one short of that figure. All but two of the requests received this quarter have been about planning, enforcement and trees, and generally relate to a specific case, although we received one about our Self-build register obligations and another asking how much we have spent on defending planning appeals and judicial reviews. The two requests which were not planning related concerned the cost of the annual pay review and a subject access request made under the GDPR, where the requester is asking for copies of data that we hold about them.

To date we have received two formal complaints during Q3, which is the same number as last year. In total the number of complaints received this financial year is marginally ahead of last year (16 versus 14 last year). As in previous years, most complaints received relate to specific enforcement cases, planning or tree works applications. We have also recently received two decisions from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and in both cases, the Ombudsman did not find fault in the way we had handled the matters.

The Project Assistant - Records Management has continued to work with officers across the Authority to facilitate our move to SharePoint. In more than 30 meetings held between mid-October and end of November alone, she has provided a mix of one-to-one user training in addition to leading more formal discussions with teams on structure and content of the new SharePoint sites.

The team also provides legal advice across the Authority. A large part of this work relates to the Authority's planning function, including drafting legal agreements and assisting with enforcement matters. Recent significant pieces of work include issuing an Article 4

Direction to protect a piece of land in Cadnam, which was reported to the November Planning Committee meeting.

5 Members

5.1 Some Members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events

- 2 November – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 17 November – Planning Committee
- 2 December – Members Day (TBC)
- 3 December – Consultative Panel
- 7 December – New Forest Access Forum

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- 15 December – Planning Committee
- 19 January – Planning Committee
- 1 February – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 9 February – Members Day (TBC)
- 16 February – Planning Committee
- 1 March – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 16 March – Planning Committee

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements - virtual meetings

- 16 October – introductory meeting with new Chief Executive, Test Valley Borough Council
- 19 October – meeting with Southampton University
- 20 October – Wildlife Roundtable
- 20 October – introductory meeting with Southampton University student
- 20 October – meeting with National Parks leads and AONBs
- 20 October – Fawley Waterside / Natural Capital Research Project Board
- 3 November – Natural Capital conference
- 3 November – introductory meeting with Health & Wellbeing PHE placement
- 4 November – SE FWAC
- 4 November – College of Fellows meeting
- 5 November – Green Recovery meeting
- 5 November – SEEPL meeting
- 6 November – Forest Farming Group pre meeting
- 6 November – HLOW CX meeting
- 6 November – New Forest Leadership Group meeting
- 9 November – meeting with New Forest Business Partnership

- 9 November – NPO meeting
- 11 November – HLS Board
- 11 November – Forest Farming Group
- 13 November – meeting with Hampshire County Council
- 13 November – meeting with CDA Chair
- 13 November – Green Recovery meeting
- 17 November – Fawley Waterside / Natural Capital Research Project Board
- 17 November – Green Recovery webinar
- 18 November – Wildlife Roundtable
- 18 November – PfSH catch up
- 19 November – ENPOG meeting
- 19 November – St George's Fellowship talk
- 20 November – HLOWLGA meeting
- 20 November – speaker at Global Urban Parks conference
- 23 November – Greenprint for South Hampshire meeting
- 23 November – Business South 'Meet the Board' event
- 23 November – Business South Board meeting
- 24 November – Natural Capital Finance and Investment Conference
- 25 November – Natural Capital Finance and Investment Conference
- 26 November – Greenprint for South Hampshire meeting
- 26 November – World Urban Parks Congress session
- 27 November – Solent Leaders Forum
- 30 November – NPA / AONBs Defra meeting
- 1 December – meeting with New Forest Showground
- 2 December – Members Day
- 2 December – meeting about ELM
- 3 December – National Landscape Stakeholder Reference Group meeting
- 7 December – meeting with Deputy Surveyor
- 7 December – NPO meeting
- 8 December – Regenerate South conference
- 8 December – Green Halo Steering Group
- 9 December – All Parks Health and Wellbeing Leads meeting

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- 15 October – FE signage meeting
- 16 October – Meeting with Chief Executive
- 23 October – Planning reform meeting
- 4 November – meeting with Official Verderer
- 6 November – CDA chair meeting
- 13 November – Meeting with Edward Heron (HCC/NFDC)
- 13 November – Chairs induction

- 13 November – Meeting with Chief Executive
- 19 November – All Staff Team meeting
- 20 November – Meeting with John Glen MP
- 26 November – New Forest Partnership Group meeting
- 27 November – Solent Leaders Forum
- 2 December – NPUK Chairs Forum
- 9 December – NPUK meeting

6 Recommendation

To note the report.