

NFNPA RAPC 431/20

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

NATURE RECOVERY IN THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Report by: Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy

1. Summary

1.1 Following the renewed commitment made by the Authority in January to address the climate and nature emergencies, work has continued across a number of areas to develop a nature recovery plan for the National Park. This paper provides a summary of that work and seeks approval to submit a bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to support projects that could help deliver some of our nature recovery objectives.

1.2 Recommendations

- 1 To approve the principle of the NFNPA submitting a bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to further our work on nature recovery
- 2 Members to note the report

2. Introduction

2.1 In January the Authority reaffirmed our commitment to addressing both the climate and nature emergencies, with the aim of becoming a National Park that is “Net Zero with Nature” (Paper AM 594/20). We have been working with a range of partners to further our key objectives:

- Develop a nature recovery plan for the National Park
- Agree a portfolio of large-scale projects consistent with Lawton Principles
- Mapping carbon stores
- Ensuring that action to minimise climate change maintains and enhances the unique mosaic of habitats in the New Forest

2.2 The evolving nature recovery plan for the National Park will be the central element of the forthcoming Partnership Plan. Our work has been taking account of developing national policy and legislation such as the Environment Bill, Agriculture Bill and the ambition of the Landscape Review that National Parks should lead the way in nature recovery.

3. Delivery Plan for Wildlife in National Parks

- 3.1 In late July, National Parks England published the “Delivery Plan for Wildlife in National Parks” (Appendix 1), committing all National Parks to developing the targets into nature recovery programmes that will then form the backbone of our future statutory National Park Management (Partnership) Plans. Our contribution to these national targets is in development as set out below and is likely to be focussed on heathland restoration and improvements to freshwater habitats.

4. Nature Recovery in the New Forest National Park

- 4.1 In 2019 we convened a Wildlife Roundtable chaired by Mike Clarke, former CEO of the RSPB. This has brought together NGO bodies such as the HIWWT, RSPB and National Trust to agree the key areas for nature recovery in the National Park and surrounding area. The group is developing a schedule of priority habitats, important for their intrinsic quality but also areas of high-quality green space close to where people live. Over 10,000 hectares of priority habitats have been identified and are currently being mapped in advance of sharing with key stakeholders.
- 4.2 More work is needed to identify further opportunities for habitat restoration in enclosed farmland, along river corridors and at the coast. The New Forest Land Advice Service is working with farm cluster groups in the north and southeast of the National Park and there are discussions scheduled with landowners in the southwest of the National Park later in September.
- 4.3 Our work with the New Forest Catchment Partnership will help inform opportunities along river corridors and with the freshwater ponds that are a key feature of the New Forest. In the south of the National Park, two new projects have recently been awarded funding from the Environment Agency’s ‘Water Environment Improvement Fund’, helping to address diffuse pollution and encourage best practice in land management.
- 4.4 The mapping of carbon stores is a complex area of work but will be aided by the preparation of a Natural Capital baseline for the National Park that is currently underway and should be completed later this year. The development of a natural capital approach to assessing the state of nature in national landscapes was a recommendation in the Landscapes Review and the New Forest is likely to be the first of the English National Parks to develop a baseline.

5. Engagement in national policy

- 5.1 Managing land to enhance and secure environmental benefits is a key part of the 25 Year Environment Plan with the departure from the EU providing the stimulus

for important policy changes, particularly regarding the environment and agriculture.

- 5.2 The Environment Bill includes provision for statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies that are expected to have a significant role in planning, development decisions and biodiversity net gain. A strategy will include a definitive statement on biodiversity priorities for a spatial area and a local habitat map. The statement of priorities should include those for recovering or enhancing biodiversity. The local habitat map should also include areas that in the opinion of the responsible authority, could become of particular importance for biodiversity, or are areas where the recovery of biodiversity could make particular contribution to other environmental benefits.
- 5.3 A national Nature Recovery Network aims to provide additional wildlife habitat and a range of additional public benefits. Our work with the Wildlife Roundtable has begun to lay the foundations for how the National Park will be part of this Nature Recovery Network; identifying priority areas for habitat enhancement and creation and also areas that could provide quality green spaces near where people live. The work of the Roundtable will need to be shared with a range of stakeholders, a common vision established and a series of actions identified in the forthcoming Partnership Plan that will deliver the changes needed to bring about nature recovery in the National Park.
- 5.4 In August the government announced the establishment of 5 national pilots to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies that will run until March 2021. Early indications are that a Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be prepared at the county level. It is our intention to continue developing the nature recovery plan for the National Park, linking to the county wide work through the Hampshire Local Nature Partnership.
- 5.5 The Agriculture Bill will be introducing the concept of “public money for public goods”, encouraging farmers and land managers to take part in a new Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme that will support measures to protect the environment. With NPE colleagues we participate in working groups that are helping design the new ELM scheme. Locally, we continue to convene the Forest Farming Group to try and ensure the Forest is best placed to benefit from the new scheme when it is introduced in 2024. In July we coordinated a group response to the national consultation on the ELM Policy Discussion document.

6. Resources

- 6.1 The national policy changes and development of the Nature Recovery Network are being designed to deliver environmental enhancement from both new development and land management. To ensure we can get maximum benefit from these changes and put nature recovery and the ‘Net Zero with Nature’ programme

at the heart of our work will require some internal reorganisation of existing staff resources and potentially some additional staff resource utilising part of the biodiversity element of this year's Defra grant. Views on how resources can best be deployed to further the work on nature recovery is currently being discussed with partners in the Wildlife Roundtable.

- 6.2 We are also working with partners to submit a bid to the 'Green Recovery Challenge Fund' when details are announced by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in early September. The timescale for the Fund is short, with bids to be submitted by the end of September. Our usual procedure is to bring the details of bids for over £50,000 to this Committee for formal approval, but in this instance we are seeking endorsement from the Committee to the principle of submitting such an application for funding when details become available to officers. Further updates on the guidance and criteria for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund will be provided at the meeting should they be available at that time.

7. Recommendations

- 1 To approve the principle of the NFNPA submitting a bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to further our work on nature recovery
- 2 Members to note the report

Contact:

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Equality and Diversity Implications:

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