

**AM 601-21**

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 19 AUGUST 2021**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

**Summary:**

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 25 March 2021. 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><b>Our priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protecting and growing the natural capital across the National park Landscape, connecting with surrounding areas to ensure habitats and wildlife are sustainable.</li> <li>Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with the National Park, promoting high quality design and environmental net gain.</li> <li>Conserving the historic and built heritage; supporting local culture with continued focus on commoning.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Our priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helping more people to understand and value the things that make the New Forest National Park unique and special.</li> <li>Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Our priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy where natural capital is an integral component of doing business.</li> <li>Promoting connectivity across the National Park through sustainable transport and communication technologies.</li> <li>Supporting the social wellbeing and sustainability of New Forest Communities.</li> </ul>

### Achieving Excellence

- 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.

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Our work to tackle the nature and climate emergencies has gathered pace in the run-up to the crucial COP-26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in October.

We have appointed a Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager and a Nature Recovery Officer to take forward this important work with partners, communities and our wider team.

We were awarded £100,000 by the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund to work with Palladium and two estates to devise a model to encourage private investment in habitat restoration for climate and nature benefit. It is hoped this pilot could then be rolled out nationally.

Meanwhile the Green Halo Partnership marked its fifth anniversary with a conference, 'Towards 2030', attended by over 130 people. Delegates considered the rich natural capital of our area and explored how individuals and organisations working in and around the New Forest National Park can tackle the climate and nature emergencies. Stemming from the Green Halo Partnership vision and working with partners at Southampton and Portsmouth Universities and Southern Policy Centre we continue to develop the 'Greenprint' - a framework for a green recovery. This has been adopted by local authorities and Local Economic Partnerships and was reflected in the bid for the Solent Freeport.

A major part of our plans with partners to drive a green recovery was secured thanks to a £539,000 grant from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. With match-funding, this represents a £800,000 investment in the Forest. The partnership is with the Freshwater Habitats Trust, Commoners Defence Association, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Countryside Education Trust. Working with farmers, landowners, communities and volunteers, it will extend nature networks and create wildlife-rich corridors that link National Park habitats to neighbouring towns and cities. Areas of grassland, woodland, hedgerows, streams and ponds will be improved, bringing with it numerous opportunities for people to understand, access and help to care for the landscape and creating or retaining 17 jobs.

We launched our Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme, following its announcement in the Written Ministerial Statement on the Government's response to the Landscapes Review of 24 June. The new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme will provide additional investment to allow farmers and other land managers to work in partnership with us to improve access, and deliver bigger and better outcomes for the environment, for people and for places.

The net zero with nature work is also a central theme of our joint draft Partnership Plan – the overarching, shared strategy for all organisations that work in the National Park to 2026. We launched a consultation with our partners on the draft which runs until 3 September. We have run media adverts and press releases, email newsletters and an extensive social media campaign as well as engaging with a range of Forest organisations, Parishes and the Consultative Panel to hear views. We hope many individuals and organisations will help us shape the future of the New Forest, building on the feedback received from the 2500 respondents of the snapshot survey we ran in 2020 to gather views about the impact of the pandemic on our collective priorities for the National Park.

As Covid-19 restrictions are reduced, our 'care for the Forest, care for each other' campaign and action plan continues with our partners. So far we have not seen the level of recreation management issues from last year and our collective interventions appear to be resulting in fewer barbecues and less verge parking. The action plan includes a package of measures ranging from increased ranger and emergency service patrols and a greater focus on visitor hotspots, improved signage and a Forest-wide barbecue and fire ban. The organisations are also working closely with the tourism sector on a visitor communications campaign focused on the New Forest Code; support for the working Forest of commoners; and a task force leading the action plan is meeting regularly. Temporary roadside digital signs are on the A337 at Cadnam, A35 at Ashurst and A35 near Hinton and display messages encouraging people to follow the Code, keep their distance from the animals, to take litter home, park only in car parks and not to use barbecues or fires. The signs will be in place for three months and are jointly funded by the New Forest National Park Authority, New Forest District Council and Forestry England. Over 700 ambassadors have signed up to the scheme, helping with litter picking and distributing the New Forest Code; the total involves around 150 young people.

Our Generation Green programme is under way, with a group of young people with additional needs taking part in six visits across the Forest and with partner organisations. Our two apprentice rangers supported by the scheme have also started work. Generation Green is a £2.5 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund programme with the Youth Hostel Association, the 10 English National Parks and outdoor education providers. Thousands of young people in the UK are being given the opportunity to connect with nature through new jobs, training, volunteering roles, residentials and outdoor learning experiences and it is great to see the New Forest project beginning to change young lives.

It was an honour to be invited by Milford Conservation Volunteers to speak at their recent presentation by the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire of their prestigious and richly deserved Queens Award for Voluntary Service. We heard our nomination of the group had been successful in 2020, but because of the pandemic the presentation could not take place earlier. The group have achieved so much for the nature and community of Milford-on-Sea and their excellent, dedicated work is an example to us all as we embark on new projects with communities and support many others through the Sustainable Communities Fund.

The summer period has also provided the opportunity for us to organise visits out in the Forest with all of our local MPs and to meet with a number of partners, including the new Deputy Surveyor Craig Harrison. We are showing them projects underway and discussing the direction we can take together and the support we need from Government and beyond for the New Forest and our communities as we work towards a green recovery and finalise the Partnership Plan in the autumn. Building on our work together and our efforts to 'care for the Forest and care for each other' during the pandemic there is a big opportunity for us to come together in even stronger than before to be greater than the sum of our parts for the National Park.

## **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*

We continue to invest resources into our nature recovery work, with the appointment in July of a Nature Recovery Officer who will develop some of the potential opportunities for nature recovery into a portfolio of projects that will form the basis of our Local Nature Recovery strategy.

This work will be complemented by our successful application to the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund. A £100,000 grant awarded in July, will enable us in partnership with Palladium and National Parks Partnership, to develop a model to enable private finance to support habitat restoration for climate and nature benefit. We will be working with landowners to identify the changes in land management required to attract funding from emerging markets (in carbon credits, water quality and biodiversity net gain) and companies who will be needing to purchase the credits that will finance the work and provide landowners with an income stream. The project will run for 12 months and is one of 30 projects nationally to receive funding in the first round of the Investment Readiness Fund programme.

##### *Green Halo Partnership*

The Green Halo Partnership celebrated its five-year anniversary with an online conference in June, attended by 130 people. The keynote speaker, Sir Dieter Helm, reflected on the wealth of natural assets here in this part of the South, their benefits to communities and business as we tackle the climate and nature crises and urged all stakeholders to continue to invest in the natural capital of the area to ensure these assets are not only maintained but enhanced into the future. [Green Halo conference explores challenges and opportunities for nature recovery in the New Forest - Green Halo.](#)

The themes of the Green Halo Partnership have been reflected in a Greenprint for recovery which we initiated working with Southampton and Portsmouth Universities, Future South, the Southern Policy Centre and the Hampshire Local Resilience forum. Providing an agreed framework for a green recovery for ourselves and the economy following the Coronavirus pandemic and in the context of the climate emergency, the Greenprint identifies five key priorities: net zero with nature, a natural health service,

world class blue green environments, creating great places through quality in design and build and our area as a centre of excellence in green skills and jobs. This approach now has the support of the Partnership for South Hampshire local authorities, the Solent and M3 Local Economic Partnerships and BCP Council. It also formed a key part of the Outline Business Case for the Solent Freeport that was submitted to government at the end of July.

### *Farming in Protected Landscapes*

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme launched in July will also provide additional resources to work with land managers to support nature recovery and access to nature. In this financial year we have in the region of £189,000 to support farmers and land managers who are looking to do more for nature, climate, people and place. The programme will run for three years and we are in the process of engaging prospective applicants and recruiting members to the Local Assessment Panel that will oversee the awards of grants to significant projects.

### *National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative funding (LEI)*

The LEI projects that are on the ground have been running well; Warrens Copse (owned by Fawley Parish Council) at Holbury Manor is now in its management period, having had all the capital works completed to footpaths. Works at Landford Bog Nature Reserve (owned by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust) are proceeding well with perimeter fencing replaced which has allowed cattle to be introduced to the site to graze, an important part of conserving the nature reserve.

Another LEI project (footpath improvements in Marchwood, Tatchbury and Cadland) that was submitted in 2020 is still under scrutiny by the LEI panel and we hope to hear soon if that application has been successful.

### *New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS)*

The New Forest Land Advice Service, a partnership between the NFNPA and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, has continued an extensive programme of work over the period:

Grants and schemes - We have supported 65 commoners during this quarter to submit their annual Basic Payment Scheme applications by the May deadline. In addition we have also worked up and submitted eight Countryside Stewardship applications by the annual July deadline and assisted a further three with claims for their existing scheme agreements.

Commoning – in total we have worked with over 90 commoners during the quarter. This included using our contacts to find a commoning family alternative back up land after their longstanding tenancy agreement was terminated and they found themselves at risk of giving up commoning.

Defra Test and Trials – we have now started to deliver a Test and Trial on behalf of the Foundation for Common Land, looking at how the New Forest commons will fit into the new Environmental Land Management Scheme. This will involve inviting all commoners to one of four walks and workshops during August and September, along with a range of other outcomes to inform Defra in its scheme design process. In addition, having worked on a Wildlife Trust Test and Trial last year, we have been approached by the Trust again to trial four more Land Management Plans on farms this year.

Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) – NFLAS and Freshwater Habitats Trust have taken on another WEIF contract from the Environment Agency this year and are continuing our work with a new suite of land managers in the Bartley Water catchment.

Funding – The success with the Green Recovery Challenge Fund means that NFLAS will be funded to deliver some new projects over the next 18 months. This includes continuing with our delivery of hedgerow and meadow enhancements after the success of our OPOF projects and working to develop five farmer clusters/landowner networks, some of which we have already been working on over the past couple of years, others of which will be new as a result of this funding. In addition, we will be playing a supporting and partnership role in delivering two projects that are being led by the Freshwater Habitats Trust; continuing the work in woodlands and building on our work to mitigate the impacts of equine paddocks.

Farming in Protected Landscapes – We have taken on the role of farm liaison officers for the FiPL programme and have been getting the word out to commoners, farmers and landowners and working with several potential applicants. We have set up an NPA FiPL Team for staff who will play a role in delivering this grant programme and have carried out some training for the team.

Encroachment Working Group – We have written some guidance for commoners about encroachments on Open Forest Land and sent this out to all active commoners. We continue to act as secretariat for the Working Group, which we helped establish in 2018 and is which made up of organisations such as the NPA, Natural England, Verderers, CDA, Police, Hampshire County Council, National Trust, Forestry England, and together are collaborating in order to deal with a long list of issues.

Open Forest Environmental Land Management Scheme – This is the scheme that will follow on from the current Environmental Stewardship Schemes that several landowners of the Open Forest have on their land. With the aim to bring as much of the Open Forest into the scheme as possible, we are working through the Forest Farming Group to prepare for an ELM application (which will launch in 2024) for the Open Forest areas of the New Forest SSSI/SAC/SPA/Ramsar. An example of an action we have delivered this quarter is that we have identified approximately 40 landowners who own the majority of the area and have contacted those for whom we have contact details in order to invite them to be involved in the process from an early stage.

## **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 298 applications in the period 1 April to 26 July and in the same period determined 305 applications with an approval rate of 89%. The volume of cases received has remained high.

During this same period, 10 appeal decisions were received; seven were dismissed and three were allowed.

The application for the redevelopment of the Lyndhurst Park Hotel site is still under consideration and an application has also been received for the site allocation at Whartons Lane in Ashurst for 62 dwellings; access; associated parking; public open space; landscaping; and associated works. Discussions have continued in progressing the s106 agreement for the Fawley Waterside proposals and it is hoped that this work will be completed soon.

Following the report to the Authority meeting at the end of March (Options for Managing Pop Up Campsites) the team have been collecting habitat mitigation payments and assessing drainage arrangements for pop up campsites this summer to ensure compliance with the Habitat Regulations. In the meantime, the Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for new and larger campsites is being progressed with a public consultation scheduled for the early autumn.

We said goodbye to Liz Young who left the team at the end of July to move to a new role outside the Authority. We would like to thank Liz for her valuable contribution to the work of the team and the Authority over many years and wish her every success in her new role.

### *Trees*

Since the last report there has been an increased workload which the Tree Team have dealt with including numerous enquiries from the public, and successfully determined 267 tree work applications to protected trees, 100% of which have been within eight weeks.

During the same period 112 consultations have been provided on planning applications and continued involvement with several major applications.

One new Tree Preservation Order has been made to protect trees or woodlands of high amenity value that were otherwise under threat from new development or inappropriate works

Several unauthorised trees works and hedgerow removals are currently under investigation working with the Planning Enforcement Team and the Authority's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer. We were pleased with the recent successful prosecution and hope this will act as a deterrent to any future unauthorised tree work.

### *Planning Enforcement*

There are currently 215 planning enforcement cases at various stages of investigation and as always, interested parties are kept apprised through the monthly enforcement lists which chart the progress of individual cases.

Compliance with some enforcement notices has been delayed, with owners citing the pandemic as a reason. There is also a backlog of enforcement-related planning appeals with the Planning Inspectorate. These factors are contributing to the high number of outstanding cases.

In early December 2020, 15 oak trees, one field maple tree and a group of hawthorn trees were felled on land south of the A336 at Bartley, which were protected because they were in a Conservation Area. Large fractures and splits were left in the trunks, and several other oaks had been marked with an 'X', suggesting that they were also going to be chopped down. Known as Terry's Patch, the site, between the junctions with Eadens Lane and Tatchbury Lane, has a long-standing woodland tree preservation order (TPO). It's classified as a priority habitat of broadleaved deciduous woodland, with badgers, hedgehogs, at least six types of bat, and more than 25 protected bird species found in the area. As reported previously the Authority acted immediately and was successful in securing a High Court injunction to prevent further unauthorised felling.

Sufficient evidence was put together against the landowner who pleaded guilty in court on 30 July. The court issued a £2,000 fine, and the landowner was also ordered to pay the Authority's costs. Whilst the level of fine is disappointing it does act as a clear deterrent towards such unlawful acts.

Katherine Pullen is now on maternity leave and we are pleased to welcome Ethan Townsend to cover this temporary vacancy in the team.

### *Policy*

At the Authority meeting in July, the New Milton Neighbourhood Plan was formally 'made' (i.e. adopted) following the local referendum in May 2021 where 88% of those voting endorsed the Plan. Around a third of the parish is located within the National Park for planning purposes and the adoption of the Plan marks the culmination of six years' work. The Policy team also continue to liaise with several other town and parish councils within the National Park as they progress their Neighbourhood Plan work.

Following discussions between the two organisations, Natural England updated its advice to the Authority on the requirements for nitrate neutrality in new development in the majority of the National Park area draining into the Solent's protected sites. Natural England's updated advice broadens the geographical area within which mitigation can be provided, while still ensuring the integrity of the designated coastal sites is protected, and this is welcomed.

A members' briefing session on Hampshire County Council's draft Waterside Transport Strategy - which is open for public consultation until the end of August 2021 – was convened earlier this month. The draft Strategy includes a range of proposals relating to the A326 road corridor, the Waterside rail line and walking and cycling infrastructure provision in the Waterside area of the New Forest and is therefore an important consultation for the National Park Authority to respond to.

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

### *Archaeology*

During this period the Archaeology Team has consulted on 44 New Forest District Council and 16 Authority planning applications.

Forestry England's Service Level Agreement (SLA) work and the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) work has continued. During the next period the aim is to complete the Scheduled Monument Management Plan (SMMP) work delayed due to Covid-19.

### Scheduled Monument Improvement Works

At the end of June, we saw a return to volunteering with the first two days of the volunteer pilot project, part of the Forestry England SLA, to clear vegetation from Scheduled Monuments highlighted during the SMMP work. Hilde and Richard led a small team of volunteers over two days (11 volunteers total) to clear bracken on eight Bronze Age barrows at Beaulieu Heath East and Roundhill Campsite.

More bracken removal sessions are planned over August. Access to three more barrows and one Medieval hunting lodge has been confirmed with Forestry England Keepers, albeit somewhat delayed due to the probability of ground-nesting birds. We are also returning to the eight completed barrows at end of August or September to clear any summer regrowth.

Then, from October onwards, we will be running volunteer days throughout the winter until March to clear gorse and other scrub on those same, and additional, Monuments. In total, 20 Monuments will be cleared of vegetation and left in much improved condition by March 2022.

### Metal detecting guidance

New guidance has been produced for the website regarding metal detecting. We have seen a marked increase in illegal detecting during lockdown. The aim of the guidance, which can be found in the Visiting section of the NFNPA website, is to promote responsible detecting whilst highlighting the protected nature of the National Park, explaining which permissions are required, and giving guidance to landowners and those who come across illicit detecting. We have worked with numerous partner organisations and landowners to draft, publish, promote and signpost this guidance.

From August onwards, we will be again working with those organisations, landowners and others to put together similar guidance for the use of drones across the New Forest National Park.

### LoCATE scheme

We are continuing with the LoCATE (Local Community Archaeological Training and Equipment) scheme. Working with archaeological societies and community groups from across Hampshire and Dorset. LoCATE provides access, training, and support to advanced survey equipment that would otherwise be hard to obtain. The goal is to enable an even greater contribution to the understanding of the rich archaeological heritage of our region. The current equipment that is freely available for groups to book out and use in their own time is a Magnetometer, a Resistivity Meter (provided by Bournemouth University) and a Total Station (an optical instrument used for surveying archaeological sites, excavations, finds and features) provided by the NFNPA.

Our Total Station is on loan with East Dorset Archaeological Society in July and August. We ran a survey training day at the start of the loan and are currently providing ongoing support with the data collection and processing. We have created a guidance booklet on how to use the TS and are currently creating another one on subsequently processing the data in QGIS. We are supporting another individual in setting up a geophysical survey project in Brockenhurst over the next year. The results of both projects will feed into the New Forest Knowledge information database.

### Festival of Archaeology

Due to ongoing Covid risks, it was decided not to attempt to organise any large in-person events such as an excavation project for this year's Festival of Archaeology – an annual nationwide two-week period of celebration of archaeological sites and projects. Instead, we are organising two free guided walks on the D-Day remains at Lepe beach (24 attendees total).

In addition, we are publishing 3/4 short social media (Instagram and Twitter) video and two YouTube videos throughout the Festival, to act as additional 'virtual tours' of heritage sites around the New Forest. This is feeding into a new social media plan for the Archaeology Team, including a new YouTube video series called 'New Forest Unearthed'.

The forward plan for 2022's Festival of Archaeology is to organise an excavation (test-pitting) project in cooperation with Minstead Trust.

### *Building Design & Conservation*

Following workshops held with Authority members and local architects between February and May 2021, the draft New Forest National Park Design Guide was approved for the

purposes of public consultation at the July Planning Committee meeting. The draft document will be published for a six-week period of public consultation in early September 2021 and a wide range of stakeholders will be directly notified of the consultation. Once all the representations received during the public consultation have been considered, the current intention is to present the revised Design Guide to the full Authority meeting in December 2021 for formal adoption.

In July the Government published its revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated National Model Design Code. Both of these documents place a strong emphasis on high quality design and support the production of local design guides and/or codes. The preparation of our consultation draft Design Guide has included consideration of the most up-to-date national policy and guidance.

Following our successful bid for Historic England funding earlier this year, we are in the process of recruiting an officer to help co-ordinate work on updating our 'local list' of non-designated heritage assets. This follows the endorsement of our first consolidated list of locally listed buildings by the Planning Committee earlier this year and the receipt of national funding will allow us to take this work further and ensures more of the New Forest's important buildings are identified.

## **2 Enjoy**

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

#### *Education & Youth*

Education visits to the forest recommenced from June, after a few postponements and extra effort to help class teachers overcome hurdles and concerns in running visits after lockdown, the team was able to meet 306 pupils for curriculum-linked sessions around the special qualities of the National Park. In addition, our online teaching continued in the form of a virtual careers session for pupils at Noadswood School and we were pleased to support the local infant school federation with teacher training that had been postponed until May.

Our work as part of the Generation Green Coalition is underway. We've learned some valuable lessons in methods of co-operating with 10 other national parks and five other coalition partners through the funding and reporting process. Wild Spaces Youth Officer Claire Pearce met and enabled a group of young people with additional needs on a series of six visits across the forest and with partner organisations with a particular highlight being their adventures with PEDALL, revealing unknown talents.

'The staff and students wanted to say a massive THANK YOU for everything you've done for the wonderful trips they've experienced. ...It's given the students some great new experiences, thank you so much!'. Class teacher, Great Oaks School.

The travel grant scheme was launched in April and uptake has been lower than usual but positive. 15 schools have applied so far which represents 1,304 pupil days enabled in or about the New Forest National Park.

Supporting and working with the wider team has been key to our motivation and creativity this year, we coordinated two face-to-face skill share meetings with the Recreation Management and Learning (RML) team, including new seasonal and kickstart team members, hosted by venues from our partners in the New Forest Educators' Forum. We continue to spend time building relationships with partner organisations in the Educators' forum and potential organisations with expertise in engaging youth audiences.

Education and Youth Officer Amy Moore began her maternity leave at the start of July and we will be joined by Sian Brewer as her maternity cover from the beginning of August. We have been incredibly lucky and grateful to have the able support of colleagues from the RML team and in the form of Kickstart Education Assistant Ella Gardner. Ella joined us in May for a six-month programme of work shadowing and training and she has proved both willing and able to step into responsibilities such as reviewing and refreshing our careers talks, the Family John Muir Award newsletter and more. We would also like to thank Nigel Matthews for all his support and wish him a happy retirement. Having a team leader who has understood education and engagement roles from long personal experience has been invaluable to us.

### *Public and community events / rangers*

August sees the end of the Ground Nesting Bird season for 2021. Once again NPA rangers have worked closely with Forestry England and the National Trust. Several sites in the Forest have been identified and designated as 'Quiet Zones', having had previous successful nests. Collaboratively New Forest Ranger teams have increased signage, closed car parks, and have provided additional ranger resources on the ground to engage with the public in these areas as well as co-ordinated comms messages across organisations.

On-site ranger time is an essential element of the ground nesting bird work as we know people can become 'sign-blind' and also the birds sometimes change nest locations after a failure, so may end up being in a much more vulnerable area. This year the New Forest birds have benefited from much closer biological survey and monitoring work as part of the research work for a PhD. With good dialogue between the researchers, Forestry England Keeper staff and National Park Rangers, we have received live updates of nest locations, nest failures and predation and disturbance incidents – for example one family of curlews had been seen causing chaos on the roads near Whitten Pond!

We published a new engagement leaflet with information about the 'Heathland Habitats' which we've shared with the public to broaden their understanding of the sensitive habitat and species within it. We look forward to hearing back about the successes (and failures) of our iconic ground nesting birds through the planned partnership season review meeting in September.

With the continued lifting of Coronavirus restrictions, we have been able to get the mobile information unit out for the first time since the pandemic hit. This enabled us to attend Dogstival – a dog owner focused event held in Burley in early June, very close to some of the most sensitive ground nesting bird breeding areas in the Forest. Subsequently rangers have been taking the mobile unit to hotspot car parks across the Forest to engage with visitors and promote responsible use of the National Park and following the New Forest Code.

Rangers have also continued working jointly with FE, National Trust, Hampshire County Council and NFDC to undertake joint patrols across the National Park.

The ranger team has been boosted this season by two Kickstart Ranger Trainees with us for six months to assist with public engagement and events whilst providing them with key skills for future employment and knowledge in countryside and visitor management. In May, Erika Dovey left her seasonal role after successfully applying for the vacant South Ranger role. Jake Barnes left his seasonal ranger post at the end of May to further his career with a job for Natural England. In June two seasonal rangers started to assist with the ground nesting bird work and Camping in the Forest activities during the summer.

The first Camping in the Forest activity sessions were delivered on Saturday 25 July to engage, inspire, and spread awareness on how to enjoy the National Park responsibly whilst protecting the precious wildlife and habitats. 25 sessions are planned during the six weeks of school holidays.

Rangers have given talks about the New Forest special qualities and the New Forest Code to staff at outdoor centres so that they can help us to pass on our key messages.

Claire organised the annual meeting with New Forest stakeholder groups including Verderers, Forestry England, National Trust and Commoners Defence Association to discuss the livestock feeding and petting issues.

The team was very happy to resume informal outdoor sessions for youth groups which has included local Young Farmers clubs, Cubs and Scouts.

Rangers have assisted with newly resumed volunteer sessions to clear overgrown footpaths in the north of the Forest.

The rangers said a very fond farewell to Nigel Matthews at the end of July after his leadership since the inception of the team in 2010.

### *Communications*

The fifth anniversary of the Green Halo Partnership was marked with a virtual conference: Towards 2030 in June, which explored how individuals and organisations working in and around the New Forest National Park can tackle the climate and nature emergencies.

More than 130 people joined the online conference to consider how we can deliver on nature recovery and 'net zero' and support people's health and prosperity at the same

time in the context of the pandemic. Inspirational guests at the conference included keynote speaker Sir Dieter Helm, Professor of Economic Policy at the University of Oxford who chaired the Government's Natural Capital Committee.

We announced a new partnership with Palladium and English National Parks to look at how to drive private investment in nature restoration. The Authority is one of 27 organisations across England awarded up to £100,000 each as part of a ground-breaking £10 million Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund from Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England. Working with Palladium, the pilot project involving the Barker-Mill and Cadland Estates will look at where arable farmland and low-quality grasslands could be turned into woodlands and wetlands to enhance nature, capture carbon, improve water quality and extend these benefits to the Open Forest. The project will then work out how much economic value these environmental benefits provide for people, what they cost to deliver, and how much investment is needed to get started.

The Authority issued a response welcoming a written ministerial statement which outlined the Government's intentions regarding the future of protected landscapes.

In July the Government launched its Farming In Protected Landscapes national grant programme to help farmers improve the natural environment, cultural heritage and public access on their land. We promoted the fact that £600,000 is expected to be available for projects in the New Forest National Park during the three-year programme and appealed to landowners, farmers and commoners to put forward projects for funding.

We also announced that our 'Green and blue horizons from city to Forest' scheme with four partners has been awarded over £500,000 from the Government's £40 million second round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, a multi-million pound boost for green jobs and nature recovery.

Working with eight organisations, we launched the consultation of the draft Partnership Plan in June with an online version of the plan, online form, a video and toolkit. The consultation has been promoted to stakeholders and featured in the media. The online advertising campaign has so far reached nearly 159,000 people with over 4,500 engagements (likes, comments, shares). The consultation runs until 3 September.

The New Forest Tour launched for an extended season, and we worked with MoreBus and BlueStar to promote it and encourage people to travel around the National Park sustainably.

Heritage content has proved extremely popular, working with the archaeology team. We created a new web section to highlight five historic routes which were researched by the archaeology team. The routes are also brought to life with specially-commissioned reconstruction drawings, dramatisations and folk songs. The project was featured twice on BBC Radio Solent and in other media. July saw the national Festival of Archaeology and a 'archaeology takeover' of the Authority's Instagram account with videos of tours around a bronze age barrow, iron age hill fort and Roman villa. The takeover reached over 18,000 people and the videos had nearly 4,500 views.

New planning rules for pop-up campsites were the focus of a press release and generated several media enquiries.

Following the successful prosecution of a landowner for unauthorised tree felling, a press release was issued and followed up by journalists.

We have also supported the Resources team promoting job vacancies in the busiest period ever for recruitment, in promoting our online Authority, Planning Committee and Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meetings and a press release and web updates welcoming our new members.

The New Forest's special qualities have been promoted with new wildlife and habitat content. We extended our wildlife section on the website with information about bats which we promoted on social media. The summer has also seen us celebrate heathland week, insect week and world oceans day and the Big Butterfly Count with text, images and video.

New guidelines for metal detecting were added to our website. Extensive work has also taken place with our website company to implement new accessibility standards.

### *Educational Campaigns*

We created a New Forest Code toolkit of downloadable materials and social media assets available on our website for communities and businesses to share. Another 10,000 copies of the code were printed and distributed. We continued to work with partners on the nine different aspects of the code, with highlights of the individual campaigns including the following:

- Dorset Council and Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council joined our campaign to control the use of disposable barbecues in the countryside and have been asking local retailers to withdraw them from sale. The Co-op announced it is banning the sale of instant barbecues at 130 of its stores located within a one-mile radius of all UK national parks on the back of our campaign and one in the Peak District. In the New Forest it gained support from national retailers including Waitrose, Marks and Spencer, Tesco and Sainsburys. Sadly, many stores such as Morrisons, Lidl and Aldi are still stocking them with front of store displays. Our online campaigns about barbecues and fire risk warnings have, so far, this financial year reached 53,000 people with 3,000 engagements.
- With National Parks UK we launched a national advertising campaign on TV and social media, encouraging new, young visitors to #LoveYourNationalParks and not to drop litter. The campaign is running throughout the summer.

- BBC Countryfile filmed ranger Erika Dovey, highlighting the impact visitors had had during the pandemic on national parks in England. Erika's interview included details about the implications for ground-nesting birds and messages about keeping to the tracks to help them thrive during the breeding season.

### *Fundraising*

Working with the New Forest Trust, we took part in the **Big Give crowdfunding campaign** in April which enables you to double donations. Overall, with the crowdfunding, Big Give contribution and Gift Aid, the fundraiser generated nearly £9,000 to support our New Forest volunteering programme with partners.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund announced a £539,200 grant for our **Green and blue horizons from city to Forest** project. We will work alongside the Countryside Education Trust, the Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, and the New Forest Commoners Defence Association to deliver the project over 18 months, starting in September 2021.

The Authority and its partners will work with farmers, landowners, communities and volunteers to extend nature networks and create wildlife-rich corridors that link National Park habitats to neighbouring towns and cities. Areas of grassland, woodland, hedgerows, streams and ponds will be improved, bringing with it numerous opportunities for people to understand, value and help to care for the landscape. Across the project, 17 jobs will be created or retained and around 50 local contractors will be needed to help support nature improvements.

The NPA is one of 27 organisations across England awarded up to £100,000 each as part of the ground-breaking £10 million **Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund** from Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England. Working with Palladium and the Barker-Mill and Cadland Estates, the funding will be used to develop and trial a new investment model that can contribute to restoring nature in the National Park, with potential to replicate the approach across the UK.

## **2.2 Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park**

### *Interpretation projects (including Historic Routes)*

New welcome and interpretation panels have been produced and delivered to Holbury Manor wildplay site for installation. We visited the site with staff from the Youth Hostel Association to show the sorts of sites possible with wild play. The visit has resulted in a follow up visit to look at wild play opportunities at Burley YHA as well as linking up with future volunteering opportunities.

The new Historic Route trail pages went live following the delayed completion (due to Covid-19) of the leaflets and new interpretive artwork. The five trail web pages include route map, downloadable leaflet, historical facts, dramatises historical accounts in audio

form, reconstruction artwork and trail inspired old folk songs. Over the coming months the plan is to film a short promotional film with highlights from each walk.

The work at Tatchbury Hospital has been delayed again due to Covid-19. However, all the wooden carvings (Trim Trail waymarkers and wooden bench) have been completed and delivered to site ready for insulation. The Lift the Flaps units have also been delayed due to local wood supply issues. The interpretation panel and wooden lectern unit, including hand carved uprights are on site and ready for insulation as soon as the hospital team can make this happen.

### *Volunteering*

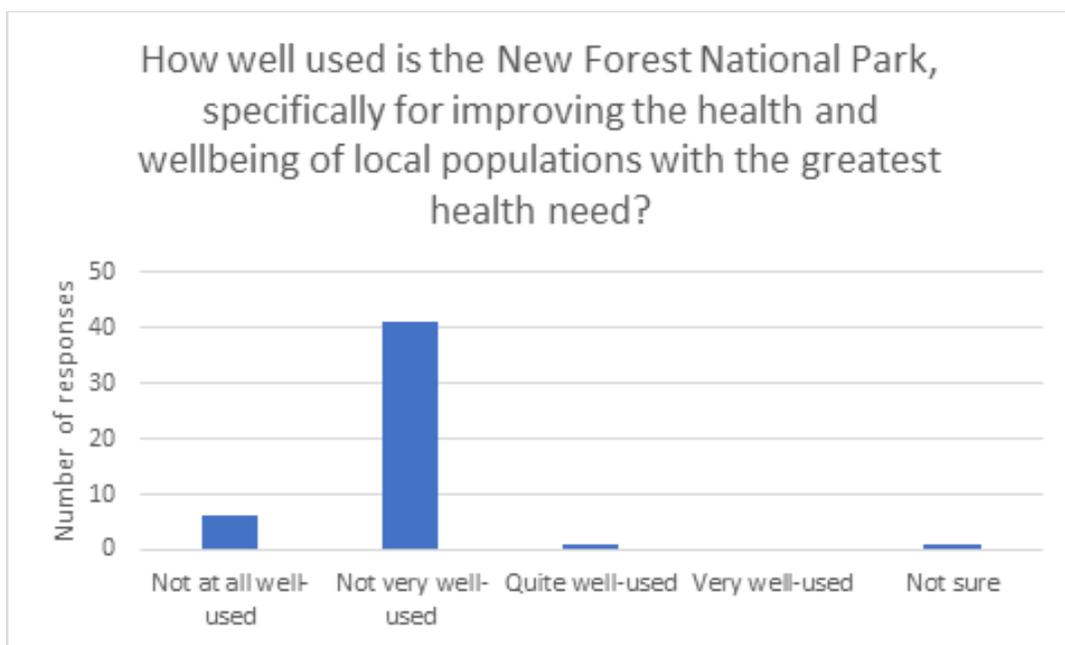
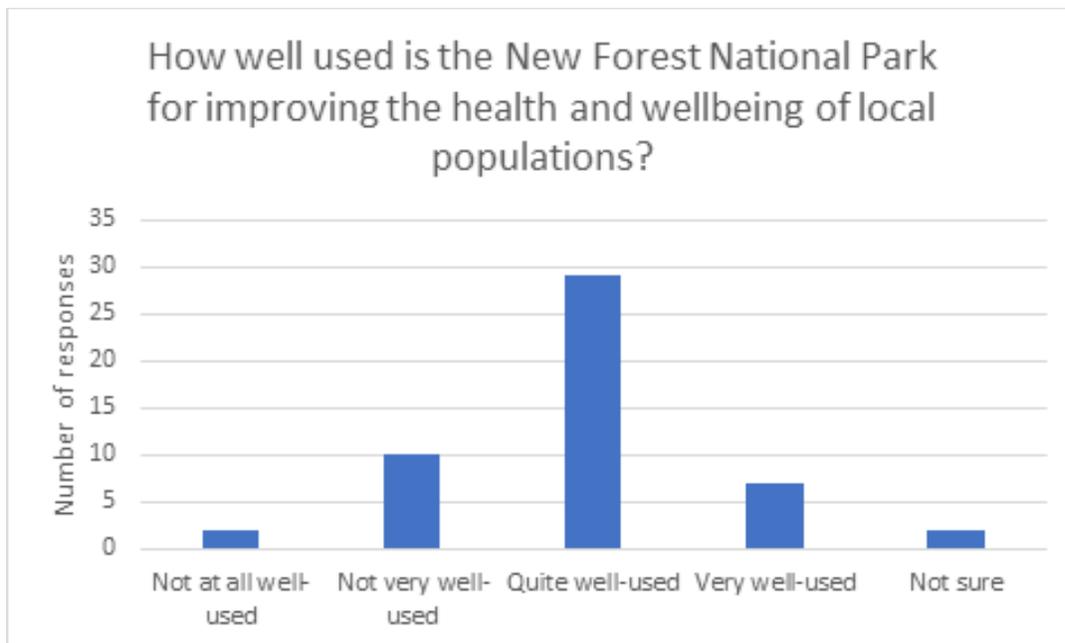
The NPA volunteering programme restarted in May. Volunteers have been invited to take part in the following opportunities:

- Clearing rights of way in the National Park. Volunteers have cleared rights of way in Godshill, Tatchbury, Woodgreen, Hale, Blackfield, Hamptworth, Landford and Stuckton.
- Restoring scheduled ancient monuments by bracken bashing. Volunteers have visited barrows at Hilltop and at Roundhill campsite.
- Joining the Blackwater Conservation Group on the River Blackwater to remove the invasive species Himalayan balsam from the riverbanks at Hamptworth Golf Club.

A total of 50 volunteers have given 557 hours to our volunteering programme so far in 2021. Plans being made for the autumn for practical conservation, countryside access and archaeological volunteer days.

### *Health and Wellbeing*

On 31 March and 1 April we held two workshops to bring together a range of organisations from health, care, environment and other sectors, to discuss our approach and identify key areas for action, with a focus on cross-organisational and cross-sectoral collaboration and partnership. Over the two days, over 50 individuals participated, representing 39 organisations. These were chaired by our Public Health Specialty Register placement Dr Lizzie Moore and a report was circulated after the event with key findings.



*Fig- results of two questions asked to attendees at our workshops in the spring.*

Lizzie has subsequently drafted a Health and Wellbeing strategy for the NPA which is already helping shape work for the year and in our thinking about how we develop the 'Inclusive National Park' theme in the Partnership Plan. A key first action is to develop a collaborative health offer to be communicated online so that local organisations, communities and social prescribers can easily find and signpost to the many great greenspace and nature offers in the area for people to benefit from. The second key area is developing partnerships with groups in areas with the greatest health need. We

subsequently have hosted a walk of social prescribers in May and met with Southampton Children's Hospital Youth workers to develop a programme of visits in the autumn.

We co-hosted (with Bournemouth University and Public Health England) Nature Health Network webinars in April, May and June, with over 140 people attending the three knowledge-share events. Speakers included Carey Newson, Director of Green Space for Health Programme for the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, Victoria Hume, Director for the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance, Dr Thomas Kador from UCL University, as well as Dr. Martin Yelling, Founder of the children's mental health charity Stormbreak and Eleni Venaki, Director of the Comfrey Project in Gateshead which works with asylum seekers and Northumberland National Park Authority. Layne Hamerston, Nature Health Network coordinator from Bournemouth University, spoke at the Green Halo event in June highlighting the work of the network, which will reconvene in September with a new programme of webinars, open to all.

The partnership 'walking for health' programme which we support is returning successfully after pausing in the winter for the second lockdown. Between April to June the programme supported 219 walkers walking a total of 1,465 hours. Walks take place in 11 different locations across the Forest- including the market towns, main villages and from Lepe Country Park. Walkers talk about how much they have missed the walks and how they benefit from the regular exercise and social opportunity. New walks and walkers are joining regularly and a push for new volunteers is planned.

### *PEDALL*

PEDALL is back out riding and attracting a wider range of riders. We have also welcomed new people who would not perhaps have ridden with PEDALL before Covid-19. To help with Covid recovery we are now offering confidence rides, which are predominantly on two-wheel bikes encouraging people to improve health and wellbeing and reconnect with nature.

PEDALL has also run a series of guided walks in six different Forest locations, for people with additional needs. These walks have been with MENCAP and we are looking to extend this walking offer further.

PEDALL now has fully qualified volunteer ride leaders and has run a volunteer social and information sharing day. Although we have lost some volunteers due to covid disruption, we have gained some new volunteers and are actively recruiting more. We have been impacted by not being able to recruit through the annual NFNPA volunteer fair.

We have been successful in promoting PEDALL across all local media including a number of radio interviews, newspaper and magazine articles, all of which seem to have helped with volunteer and rider recruitment.

We have been gifted a minibus to help people access the Forest and ride with us and we are working with the community to use this resource in the most effect way to meet the local need.

We have successfully recruited a new Ride Leader, James Hunt, who will predominantly work out of Ashurst and is due to start mid-August. We are finalising the Ashurst lease agreement with NHS Property, and access and use of the cycle tracks with Forestry England. We will be using the Sport England and British Cycling funds to establish this new inclusive cycling hub at Ashurst. This new hub will enable people to access PEDALL on public transport and reduce travel times for people from the north and east.

### **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*

Tips to help people care for the New Forest are now appearing on new roadside signs at key gateways to the National Park. The temporary digital signs are part of an [action plan](#) we put in place with other local organisations to encourage people to care for the Forest and care for each other. Initiatives include targeted interventions at key hotspots (more signs, mobile patrols, stickers to warn people parking on verges), joint ranger patrols with emergency services and the ambassador scheme. The mobile digital signs are on the A337 at Cadnam, A35 at Ashurst and A35 near Hinton and display messages encouraging people to follow the New Forest Code, keep their distance from the animals, to take litter home, park only in car parks and not to use barbecues or fires in the open countryside. The signs will be in place for three months and cost £12,000, funded by the NPA, New Forest District Council and Forestry England.

#### *Ambassadors*

The Ambassador scheme continues to attract local residents to become involved by picking litter, recording verge parking, reporting issues in the forest and distributing our New Forest Codes. We continue to supply litter picking kits from our collection points in Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst, Beaulieu, Woodgreen, Lepe, Milford on Sea and Lymington. A total of 708 ambassadors have signed up to the scheme, 150 of which are young people under 18.

#### *Access and Rights of Way*

We have re-started the Public Access volunteer offer and are out leading volunteer days to clear paths of branches of brambles. This work (up to 50 hours so far) will allow more people to enjoy the beautiful New Forest countryside directly from their doorsteps.

We are running two sessions per month which are fully booked within days and so are

looking to expand our volunteer offer to take advantage of this increased enthusiasm to have fun outdoors and give something back to the New Forest.



The rollout of the Calshot to Gosport section of the England Coast Path has been re-scheduled for an August/September approval. We will be organising the establishment works after we have received the go ahead from Natural England.

### **3 Prosper**

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

##### *Sustainable Tourism / business*

Support from local Forest organisations and sponsorship from the local business community were gratefully secured for the New Forest Tour. This year, messaging on board was augmented around caring for the Forest. Places to support local and receive discounts (e.g. Go New Forest Card) were highlighted. Unfortunately there are no Sustainable Travel Ambassadors this season due to an absence of funding.

National Park Experiences Collection: there are four businesses involved in promoting guided activities in the New Forest (access to start point by sustainable transport). Uptake has been low so far. The collection was launched only recently via the National Parks UK website so may take time to embed and reach a wider audience, many of whom may be focusing on visiting families and friends rather than bespoke visitor experiences.

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

#### *Sustainable Transport*

We have run mapping workshops for the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan with the Access Forum and the Cycle Working Group.

We have met with Highways England (South West Team) to look at the A36 and possible improved crossing points and severance of communities from access to greenspace and the National Park on foot, by bike and on horseback.

We have worked with HCC, Sustrans, Forestry England and the contractor to look at solutions for a diversion for cyclists during the period of works and closure at Holmsley Bridge. We convened the site meeting and will be promoting the preferred diversion route for cyclists crossing the A35 at Rhinefield Ornamental Drive. The National Cycle Route 2 will be diverted to cross here for the duration of the works (approx.10 months).

Working alongside Go South Coast, we helped launch the New Forest Tour season early (29 May), with the expected increase in visitor numbers informing the decision to operate for 15 weeks rather than the usual nine weeks. Average daily patronage in the first fortnight was 90% of what it was for the full 2020 season, and 68% of what it was for the full 2019 season. This is quite encouraging given the recent perceived apprehension around returning to public transport. Weather is always an important factor in determining customer demand, and the fluctuation between heavy downpours and heatwave so far this season are reflected in the boarding numbers. Of the three routes, the Blue Route (pictured below) is showing the greatest increase in popularity compared to last year.



Yellow Buses created a new route between Christchurch and Ringwood and kindly agreed to include animal safety messaging on the livery (pictured below).



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

#### *Affordable Housing*

Two of our adopted Local Plan (2019) housing site allocations (Whartons Lane, Ashurst and the site of the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel) are now the subject of current full planning applications. Part of the justification for the Local Plan housing site allocations was the delivery of affordable housing for local people in housing need. The assessment of the current planning applications includes a wide range of material planning considerations that will need to be weighed in the planning balance, including the provision of on-site affordable housing. At the time of writing, neither of these two detailed applications has been determined. Alongside this potential source of new affordable housing, we continue to liaise with landowners regarding a number of possible rural exception site developments in the National Park area.

#### *Sustainable Communities Fund*

Several grants have been awarded in support of initiatives that improve opportunities for wildlife and habitats, reduce carbon emissions, and connect new groups to nature:

- £2,000 to Lyndhurst Parish Council to install a fully accessible compost toilet at Lyndhurst Cemetery for the benefit of those using the site. The facility will enable sewage waste to be safely composted and reduce impacts on the surrounding local environment.
- £2,000 to Hythe Pier Heritage Association to restore one of the carriages on the Hythe Pier Railway. The restoration will contribute to the viability of the ferry service, which supports sustainable access to the New Forest from Southampton and provides a direct link to the New Forest Tour.
- £2,000 to Burgate School and Sixth Form to provide an electric vehicle charge point for staff and students. The project supports the school's plans to become carbon neutral by 2025.
- £1,630 to a range of schools and community groups around the National Park in support of the small actions that really do make a difference. Wilder areas and green spaces will be developed with new native planting, bug hotels, hedgehog homes, nest boxes, bird feeders, pollinator trails, and water recycling and compost facilities. The funds are also supporting a local volunteer group to survey and monitor slow worms within churchyards in the National Park.

## 4 Achieving Excellence

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

#### Human Resources

As at 6 August 2021 the total staff headcount was 84 or 74.49 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	<b>Headcount</b>	Variation from previous report	<b>Full Time Equivalents</b>	Variation from previous report
Core funded	66*	+ 1	58.04*	+ 1.49
Funded by external projects	18	+ 3	16.45	+ 3.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>+ 4</b>	<b>74.49</b>	<b>+ 4.80</b>

\*Of the core funded roles, one staff member (1 FTE) is working in shared services, 26 are part-time and four are on a fixed-term contract.

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

<b>Role</b>	<b>Contract type</b>	<b>How funded</b>
New Forest Apprentice Ranger x 2	Fixed term	Project funded
Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager	Permanent	Core funded
Ranger Assistant Trainee x 2	Fixed term	Government funded Kickstart scheme
Education Assistant	Fixed term	Government funded Kickstart scheme
Seasonal Assistant Ranger x 2	Fixed term, seasonal	Project funded
Communications Administrator	Fixed term	Core funded
Ranger	Permanent	Core funded
Planning Enforcement Officer	Maternity cover	Core funded
Nature Recovery Officer	Fixed term	Biodiversity Fund established by Defra
Education and Youth Officer	Maternity cover	Core funded

We said goodbye to:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Contract type</b>	<b>How role will be filled in future</b>
Communications Administrator	Fixed term, project funded	Replacement

Finance and Administration Assistant	Fixed term, project funded	N/A – end of project
Our Past, Our Future Delivery Manager	Fixed term, project funded	N/A – end of project
Planning Officer	Fixed term, core funded	N/A – fixed term contract
Policy Officer	Permanent, core funded	Assessing vacancy
Seasonal Assistant Ranger	Fixed term, project funded	Replacement
Planning Officer	Permanent, core funded	Replacement
Head of Recreation Management and Learning	Permanent, core funded	Assessing vacancy

### *Staff wellbeing*

As part of our commitment under Nurture in our People Plan, the Wellbeing Group led by our HR and Training Officer has continued to meet monthly to ensure our wellbeing focused initiatives continue to provide our staff with the required support.

In the last few months:

- A further three members of the Wellbeing Group undertook Mental Health First Aid training. We now have 10 officers as certified Mental Health First Aiders across the organisation with good representation across different departmental teams
- Our HR and Training Officer who leads on staff wellbeing has contributed to Health and Safety Forum meetings to ensure a collaborative approach
- The dedicated Wellbeing area on our intranet continues to provide access to information to help staff maintain and enhance their mental health and wellbeing.

We appreciate the time and effort the Wellbeing group has put into supporting our staff and for the implementation of a variety of activities for staff to get involved in.

## **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*

The draft New Forest National Park Partnership Plan 2021 – 2026 was published in June for a 10-week public consultation, closing on 3 September. The consultation has been launched by a partnership of organisations and comments are invited on the five key themes or ‘agendas for action’ identified – nature recovery; net zero with nature; thriving Forest; an inclusive National Park; and Team New Forest. All of the comments and feedback received during the 10-week consultation will be reviewed and the intention is to update the Plan in Autumn 2021 following further liaison with partners.

Officers have attended a number of external meetings over the summer to promote the consultation and to answer questions from interested parties.

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

##### *ICT Services*

The focus for much of this reporting period has been on upgrading the infrastructure and improving security of the systems. A considerable amount of time was spent liaising with consultants on the preparation for the infrastructure move with the main work itself commencing late June to build a landing zone in the cloud. The aim was to move the nominated servers over in July, this unfortunately has been delayed to August following an issue with the HSPN. The decision has been made to not move the planning servers to the cloud due to expected additional costs that would be incurred, this will be done as part of the planning system upgrade instead. Importantly, work to replicate the critical servers including the planning ones has been completed, providing DR backup, this being particularly critical as there have been issues with the off-site tape back-up system.

In readiness for the infrastructure move most old drives are now set to read only, with most staff working in OneDrive and SharePoint. The remaining servers will be switched to read only by end of August at which point all teams will work in OneDrive, SharePoint, or the planning system. Follow up teams training has taken place.

Replacement of the planning system is progressing. A preferred supplier has been identified and the necessary steps being taken via the GCloud framework to progress to the next stage. In the meantime, ICT has begun identifying data that does not need to be transferred to a new system.

Security remains high on the IT agenda and is taking up increasingly more time as it is becoming more critical and involved. We are moving away from ESET to Microsoft Defender for all PCs and laptops and are looking to do the same with the servers at some stage. In June, the team had a full day of Security training focusing on Microsoft 365 security and to ensure that we are aligned with Government requirements. Changes were introduced following the training, which included setting up of conditional access which is currently under test but once implemented will increase our security rating further. We endeavour to ensure the ICT security protection is as good as it can be and run security updates as soon as available, but it is important to remember that there are continual attempted attacks, and it is crucial that staff are not complacent about security. Relying on the ICT Team totally is not adequate to manage the risk, everyone must take responsibility – if a day zero virus hits the only defence is the alertness and responsible action taken by staff. Further bite-sized, easy-to-digest cyber training has been released, all of which has been personalised to the Authority and is very informative.

## Legal and Information management

### Year-end statistics for 2020/21

#### Information requests

We received 74 requests for information between 1 April 2020 and 30 March 2021, which was a 40% increase on the previous year and the most received in any one year (the previous record was 61).

Number of requests received by year				
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Q1	22	11	14	14
Q2	19	8	20	10
Q3	14	15	12	15
Q4	19	19	12	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>47</b>

All but two were responded to within the statutory response time (20 working days), with the average response time being 13 working days. Of the 74 requests, four were subject access requests made under the General Data Protection Regulation i.e. requests for the personal data of the requester. Fifteen were handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and covered areas of our work such as finance, legal, ICT and two were related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The remaining requests (74%) were handled under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 because they were requests for planning or other environmental information. The majority of these requests were related to specific pre-apps, planning, enforcement or tree works applications, whilst the remainder covered a diverse range of subjects, such as planning policy, adders, ticks, drones, wildfires and 'bigfoot/sasquatch' sightings.

In 39 requests (53%) the information was either released in full or only subject to very minor personal data redactions; a further five were partially released, with only 14 requests (19%) withheld in their entirety (generally because they were related to sensitive planning enforcement cases or pre-application advice). We did not hold the information requested on 12 occasions and the requesters were referred to the appropriate public body, where appropriate.

We received two requests for an internal review of the initial response and in both cases the internal review upheld the original decision. At the time of writing, as far as we are aware, neither have been referred to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for review.

We received 19 requests in Q1 of this year (2021/22) which is just three fewer than Q1 last year, all of which have been responded to within the statutory 20 working days. To

date we have received one request for an internal review, which upheld the original decision.

### Requests under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Last year we received requests from four individuals to exercise their rights under the GDPR, the same number as the previous year. They were all responded to within the statutory timescales (1 month) and were requests either to restrict the processing or delete the data of the requester held on planning files. Only one request was complied with, where the requester asked us to remove some public comments from our website. The processing of the comments was considered to be lawful and in accordance with our usual procedures, however as the planning application had since been withdrawn there was limited public interest in the comments remaining online and we therefore complied with the request. Planning is an area of our work where we constantly strive to balance the requirement for transparency with the privacy rights of the individuals who correspond with us.

### Formal complaints

We received 21 formal complaints last year which was an increase of three on the previous year.

<b>Number of complaints received by year</b>				
	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Q1	3	7	4	9
Q2	11	5	3	4
Q3	4	2	3	9
Q4	3	4	7	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>25</b>

All but one were related to planning matters including trees, enforcement and planning applications. Our average response time was 18 working days, and only one Stage 2 response was outside our target response time of 20 working days. The majority were not upheld, however three complaints were partly upheld and we offered a written apology for some elements of how the matters were handled.

In three cases on receiving the initial response the complainant requested a review of their complaint under Stage 3 of our process, and in each case the review did not find fault and the complaint was not upheld. One complaint was subsequently referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for review; the investigator closed the complaint after their initial enquiries because the matter was out of time and there was no evidence of fault in the way we had considered enforcement action.

We have received two complaints to date this year which is one fewer than Q1 last year. They were both responded to within 20 working days and both relate to the determination of a planning application.

## **5 Members**

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

- 20 April – Planning Committee
- 29 April – Extra Authority Meeting
- 18 May – Planning Committee
- 3 June – Consultative Panel
- 7 June – New Forest Access Forum
- 7 June – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 15 June – Planning Committee
- 21 June – New Forest Access Forum
- 1 July – Extra Full Authority Meeting
- 15 July – Member Day Fundraising
- 20 July – Planning Committee
- 17 August – Planning Committee

### **5.2 Forthcoming activities include:**

- 2 September – Consultative Panel
- 6 September – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 13 September – New Forest Access Forum
- 15 September – Members Day TBC
- 21 September – Planning Committee
- 4 October – Standards Committee
- 19 October – Planning Committee

### **5.3 Chief Executive's engagements - virtual meetings**

- 7 April – Greenprint discussion
- 7 April – Fawley Waterside meeting
- 7 April – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 7 April – Solent Leaders Forum
- 7 April – meeting with Chief Executive, CNP
- 12 April – ENPOG meeting
- 14 April – Solent Freeport meeting
- 14 April – Greenprint Steering Group
- 14 April – Greenprint meeting
- 16 April – meeting with Chief Executive, NFDC

- 16 April – Greenprint catch up
- 16 April – Wildlife Roundtable
- 19 April – NPUK CEO meeting
- 20 April – Green Halo Steering Group
- 22 April – Solent Freeport meeting
- 22 April – meeting with HCC Strategic Manager, Climate Change
- 22 April – meeting with New Forest Business Partnership
- 22 April – National Park City Trustees meeting
- 23 April – meeting with Leader, HCC
- 23 April – meeting with University of Southampton
- 26 April – meeting with Defra
- 26 April – LRF Economy and Infrastructure Recovery Group meeting
- 27 April – meeting with Chair CDA
- 27 April – Solent Freeport meeting
- 28 April – HLS Board
- 28 April – meeting with Defra
- 29 April – Extra Authority meeting
- 29 April – Solent Freeport meeting
- 29 April – Greenprint meeting
- 30 April – Greenprint meeting
- 5 May – meeting with Southampton University
- 5 May – meeting with Mezzana Partners
- 6 May – UK National Parks Foundation AGM
- 7 May – Greenprint Group meeting
- 12 May – All Parks H&W Leads meeting
- 12 May – meeting with Chief Executive, NFDC
- 13 May – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 17 May – ENPOG meeting
- 18 May – Solent Freeport meeting
- 19 May - meeting with HCC Strategic Manager, Climate Change
- 19 May – New Forest Leadership Group meeting
- 20 May - meeting with Mezzana Partners
- 20 May – presentation to NFBP Advisory Group
- 21 May – HLOW CX meeting
- 26 May – assisting with FE interviews
- 3 June – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 4 June – Greenprint meeting
- 4 June – Greenprint Steering Group meeting
- 7 June – NPE AGM and Board meeting
- 8 June – meeting with Solent University
- 9 June – Green Halo Conference
- 10 June – meeting with Chief Executive, CNP
- 11 June – meeting with Chief Executive, Business South

- 11 June – Greenprint Group catch up meeting
- 15 June – meeting with Bournemouth University
- 15 June – meeting with Mezzana Partners
- 16 June – Open Space interview
- 16 June – Hampshire Story Launch event
- 16 June – meeting with Chief Executive, NFDC
- 17 June – Road to CoP event
- 17 June – National Park City Trustee meeting
- 18 June – Greenprint meeting
- 28 June – Greenprint meeting
- 28 June – meeting with Chief Executive and Leader, NFDC
- 29 June – Wildlife Roundtable
- 29 June – NPP meeting
- 1 July – PfSH Chief Executive's meeting
- 2 July – visit by YHA
- 5 July – Student dissertation interview
- 6 July – New member induction
- 6 July – Greenprint meeting
- 6 July – New Forest Leadership Group meeting
- 7 July – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 7 July – meeting with Environment Agency
- 8 July – meeting with Leader, HCC
- 8 July – meeting with Mezzana Partners
- 8 July – Hampshire 2050 Partnership meeting
- 9 July – HLS Board
- 13 July – meeting with HCC Strategic Manager, Climate Change
- 13 July – meeting with Chief Executive, Solent LEP
- 13 July – meeting with Mezzana Partners
- 13 July – Solent Freeport meeting
- 13 July – meeting with Natural England
- 14 July – Greenprint meeting
- 14 July – All Parks H&W Leads meeting
- 14 July – meeting with Chief Executive, NFDC
- 15 July – National Park City meeting
- 15 July – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 16 July – Europarc Atlantic Isles event
- 19 July – ENPOG meeting
- 20 July – meeting with RSPB
- 20 – 22 July – National Park City summit event – Charing Panel sessions
- 21 July – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 26 July – attending Queen's Award for Voluntary Service event
- 28 July – meeting with Natural England
- 28 July – Defra Contact Group meeting

- 28 July – meeting with Chief Executive, CNP
- 29 July – meeting with Southampton City Council
- 29 July – National Park City meeting
- 3 August – site visit with Environment Agency and NFDC
- 4 August – meeting with Natural England
- 4 August – meeting with Mezzana Partners
- 4 August – NPO meeting
- 5 August – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 10 August – meeting with YHA
- 10 August – meeting with Kristine Olson
- 11 August – meeting with Chief Executive, Solent LEP
- 11 August – Wildlife Roundtable
- 12 August – site visits with Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne MP
- 12 August – meeting with Natural England
- 16 August – meeting with Chief Executive, Business South
- 16 August – ENPOG meeting
- 17 August – site visits with Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP

#### **5.4 Chairman's engagements**

- 7 April – Solent Leaders Forum
- 8 April – Solent Freeport meeting
- 8 April – meeting with Leader, NFDC
- 27 April – Solent Freeport meeting
- 28 April – Defra meeting
- 19 May – NPE Directors meeting
- 24 May – Solent LEP meeting
- 27 May – Solent Freeport meeting
- 7 June – NPE AGM and Board meeting
- 8 June – NPE Chairs meeting
- 9 June – Green Halo Conference
- 23 June – Solent Freeport meeting
- 25 June – meeting with Official Verderer
- 28 June - meeting with Chief Executive and Leader, NFDC
- 6 July – New member induction
- 7 July – NPE Directors meeting
- 8 July – Hampshire 2050 Partnership meeting
- 15 July – meeting with Natural England
- 21 July – Solent Freeport meeting
- 30 July – Chief Executive's Performance Panel
- 12 August – site visits with Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne MP
- 17 August – site visits with Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP

## **6 Recommendation**

**To note the report.**