

AM 606-21

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 21 OCTOBER 2021

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 19 August 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>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

- 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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Important progress has been made in our Net Zero with Nature climate and nature recovery programme in advance of the COP26 UN climate change conference this November.

We launched a consultation 'Your future New Forest' on our draft Partnership Plan lasting 10 weeks over the summer around the five themes of:

- Nature recovery
- Net zero with nature
- Thriving Forest
- An inclusive National Park
- Team New Forest.

The campaign saw a social media reach of 300,000, plus 46,000 video views, backed up by media coverage, email newsletters and adverts. Around 75% of the respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the five themes being a key challenge and the proposed outcomes in the draft Plan on average. We are developing a final draft and action plan with partners for consideration at the end of the year.

We marked the first 'Net Zero with Nature Week' with national parks across the UK, launching the 'Revere partnership' with Palladium which seeks to bring £230m of private investment to deliver habitat restoration projects in all 15 national parks. We are pleased that the New Forest is the location for one of the first of these ground-breaking nature restoration projects and that this is connecting into the 'Greenprint' for green recovery for our area, where one of themes agreed with partners is Net Zero with Nature.

The Farming in Protected Landscape scheme is up and running and we awarded the first of our grants to three land manager led environmental projects, with a further 35 in the pipeline for later consideration by the grants panel.

Community engagement is vital as we look to address the climate and nature crises we have launched a Climate and Nature Challenge to our residents, communities and businesses encouraging people to pledge to take up sustainable living options, with advice, signposting to local green groups and grants through our Sustainable

Communities Fund to support efforts. The soft launch was in our Park Life newspaper, with more promotion planned in the weeks up to COP26.

We also launched our Walking and Cycling Festival with 80 events for people to discover the Forest guided by experts, including our Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager, Olivia McGregor. The Festival helps people learn more about the New Forest, connect with nature, improve health and wellbeing as well as promoting sustainable travel in the National Park. Many of the events are already sold out over the three weeks.

Our health and wellbeing work with Public Health England and partners has moved forwards with a new strategy which will form a key part of our 'Inclusive National Park' theme in the Partnership plan. We are forming a steering group of partners to take forward this work collectively and the first project is to create a green health hub to help practitioners subscribe natural health interventions. We presented this pioneering work at The Faculty of Public Health online training day on 'Public health's role in tackling the climate emergency', which was attended by around 100 people. The aim was to inspire Public Health action in advance of COP26 and to engage with the workforce on the importance of the climate emergency and its implications for health. This also gave a boost to another theme of our Greenprint for green recovery work, delivering a 'Natural Health Service'.

Work has begun on delivering the 'Green and blue horizons from city to Forest' scheme which represents an investment of over £800,000 into the Forest to deliver climate and nature projects with partners. Funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, two projects are being managed and delivered directly by the New Forest Land Advice Service, plus other projects in partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust, Countryside Education Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, and New Forest Commoners Defence Association. Nature networks will be extended, and wildlife-rich corridors will be created 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, 16 jobs are being created or retained and around 50 local contractors will be needed to help support nature improvements. This work is contributing to another Greenprint for green recovery ambition of becoming a 'centre of excellence for green skills and jobs'.

We heard this week that our latest bid to National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative for £120,000 has now been approved by OFGEM for our project to improve walking routes (surface, drainage, localised diversions, signage) and restore landscape character (planting hedgerows, trees, removing vegetation) in five areas affected by the overhead power lines. This brings the total received from the LEI Fund to £384,444, which with match funds on top (cash and staff time) amounts to a total of £549,948 of investment into the Forest.

As well as the natural environment, the built environment is an important part of the New Forest's landscape character. Our building design team has launched a consultation on a revised draft Design Guide to ensure high standards of design in new development while retaining and enhancing the distinctive character of the natural and built environment. A local listing project, funded by Historic England funding, has also begun, working with local communities and parish councils to identify locally important buildings and structures within the National Park. Quality design and build is another of the key themes of the Greenprint for green recovery.

Summer recess enabled us to invite and host all four of our local MPs out in the Forest to see projects in action and talk to staff, partners and volunteers. The visit itineraries included Franchises Lodge nature reserve with the RSPB, meeting Kickstart and Generation Green apprentices and unveiling a new interpretation board at a wild play site. The visits were very well received and provided a welcome opportunity to meet out on site and discuss local issues and opportunities linked with the Government's priorities for the environment, land management and green recovery. I also joined Forestry England Board on a visit to the New Forest in September, met Chief Executive of Natural England Marian Spain at Franchises Lodge and our Minister, Lord Benyon, at a visit to a Farm Cluster to the North of the Forest in Wiltshire. All provided excellent opportunities to discuss how 'Team New Forest' is working to support to recovery of nature, climate and ourselves and underline our collective determination and ambition to do more as we move towards implementation of our refreshed Partnership Plan.

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

The primary focus through the summer has been the development of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme launched in July. Members of the Local Assessment Panel were recruited in August, with the first meeting on 20 September. Six applications were considered, with three approved for funding. These included:

- habitat enhancement works at Rockford Barn Farm, including scrub management on priority fen habitat, gapping up a hedgerow, bracken management to enhance the acidic grassland and the restoration of an historic access gate onto the adjacent National Trust common in order to reduce the impact of livestock on an adjacent public footpath.
- works on a commoner's holding near the Passford Water which will create 430 metres of new hedgerows to create a network of habitat across the grasslands
- the restoration of equine paddocks to a wildflower meadow and orchard.

There are more than 35 applications in the pipeline and the NFLAS team is working with specialist colleagues within the NPA to guide the applicants through the application process. The next panel meeting is in November.

Net Zero with Nature

Our work on Net Zero with Nature (NZWN) and Nature Recovery was the focus of a members' day on 15 September, which provided an opportunity to hear from officers leading on NZWN and Nature Recovery programmes, Olivia McGregor and Alison Levy respectively. Net Zero with Nature is also the umbrella strategy for the role the UK National Parks are playing in response to climate change and the biodiversity crisis. National Parks Partnerships is developing partnerships to further NZWN ambitions on behalf of all National Parks and was highlighted at the Natural Capital Finance and Investment Conference on 6 October. The strategy is helping to lever in finance (both public and private) into nature-based solutions in National Parks. As a result of this

partnership £1,500,000 has been secured across six National Parks, including the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund for the New Forest which was achieved with the support of Palladium, a key partner in the NZWN strategy.

National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative funding (LEI)

The LEI funding for the first year of landscape improvements at Franchises Lodge, Hamptworth, has been received from National Grid. The scope of works includes removal of large areas of Rhododendron, improvement and renovation of footpaths to improve public access and the restoration of three Scheduled Ancient Monuments (Bronze Age Barrows). The funding from National Grid totals £200,000, representing 75% of project costs with 25% of costs match funded by RSPB (the land owners). Discussions are ongoing with RSPB regarding slight changes to the programme of works to allow for some increased contractor costs and changes to timing of works due to starting later than anticipated and also further into autumn and winter than originally planned. None of these slight alterations will affect the outcomes of the work on site and discussions with National Grid are being held to ensure that the projects comply with the application and agreement.

Our latest LEI bid for £120,000 has now been approved by OFGEM and we are due to receive the funds in November. We are directly managing this project which will improve walking routes (surface, drainage, localised diversions, signage) and restore landscape character (planting hedgerows, trees, removing vegetation) in five areas affected by the overhead power lines (some of these follow 'historic routes' developed through the Our Past Our Future scheme):

- Hale and Woodgreen
- Hamptworth and Landford
- Carter's Lane, Marchwood
- Cadland Common
- Tatchbury Mount Walk.

This brings the total received from the LEI Fund to £384,444, which with match funds on top (cash and staff time) amounts to a total of £549,948 of investment into the Forest.

New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS)

In addition to the Farming in Protected Landscapes applications the NFLAS team began work on projects on the Green and Blue Horizons Project (funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund programme). Two projects are being managed and delivered by NFLAS and two others with NFLAS involvement as partners with Freshwater Habitats Trust. An Assistant Advisor is being recruited to the NFLAS team to work on these projects.

Work is also continuing in the Bartley Water catchment, working with several landowners to tackle water quality issues.

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 131 applications in the period 1 August to 1 October and in the same period determined 116 applications with an approval rate of 90%. During this same period seven appeal decisions were received; three were dismissed and four were allowed.

The applications for the site allocations at Lyndhurst Park Hotel and Whartons Lane are still under consideration and we are working to resolve issues raised in some of the consultation responses. The application for the site allocation at Church Lane in Sway has also now been submitted proposing 46 no. dwellings; ancillary infrastructure; access provisions; associated informal public green space and landscaping. We have also received EIA screening / scoping requests for the dualling of sections of the A326 and for the site allocation at Ashurst Hospital. We are still awaiting an EIA screening direction from the Secretary of State regarding the proposed residential mobile home development at Vernon Dene, near Bransgore.

We are continuing to provide a duty planning service by telephone. Planning committee meetings are being held in person with a livestream from the meeting. A significant project for the team over the next six months is managing the switchover to a new planning software system by spring 2022 and the project planning for this process has begun. We are pleased to welcome Liz Marsden who joined the team as a Planning Officer on 4 October.

Trees

Since the last report the Tree Team has registered and determined 113 tree work applications to protected trees, 99.1% of which have been within eight weeks.

During the same period 23 consultations have been provided on planning applications and continued involvement with several major applications.

Two new Tree Preservation Orders have been made to protect trees or woodlands of high amenity value that were otherwise under threat from new development or inappropriate works.

Planning Enforcement

Notable over the last three months have been complaints about holiday accommodation and the need for planning permission, ranging from self-contained accommodation (often

provided in outbuildings or shepherds' huts) to 'pop-up' campsites (which have benefitted again this year from an extended 56 days 'permitted development right'). At the same time, the Government has encouraged local planning authorities to adopt a more flexible and tolerant approach to enforcing planning controls in so far as they relate to the hospitality sector (in response to the pandemic and surge in 'staycations').

One enforcement notice has been served during this period relating to an unauthorised timber processing and storage business.

As a result of enforcement investigations a number of retrospective planning applications have been submitted. These are always invited on a 'without prejudice basis' but like all planning applications, must be considered on their individual merits.

Policy

As part of Southern Water's 'Water for Life' consultation held earlier this year, the Policy team submitted detailed comments on the proposals for a large scale desalinisation plant on a site within the National Park near Ashlett Creek. Our response raised significant concerns regarding the process Southern Water had gone through for their site identification, the need for development to meet the major development test in the NPPF (2021) and potential impacts on the internationally designated sites in the area. Following a consideration of all of the points made, in September Southern Water announced that the desalinisation plant in the New Forest will no longer form part of their plans to address the water shortage in Hampshire and instead they will focus on water transfer options from the recently consented Havant Thicket reservoir. This decision is supported and it is agreed that there were major challenges around the deliverability of the scheme at Ashlett within the timescales Southern Water required.

The six-week consultation on the National Park-wide Article 4 Direction to provide greater planning control over 'pop-up' campsites was launched in late September. This follows an earlier report to the March Authority meeting and applies to all new 'pop-up' up sites (first established March 2020 and thereafter) and all larger sites (51+ pitches). Article 4 Directions can be used by local planning authorities to protect the amenity of an area and ensure areas are properly planned. The Article 4 Direction for the National Park would come into effect in September 2022 and comments are invited by the closing date of 7 November. The Government, constituent local authorities, town and parish councils and existing temporary campsite operators have been notified of the proposals and invited to comment.

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

Archaeology

During this reporting period the Archaeology Team has consulted on 19 New Forest District Council and 12 Authority planning applications as well as attended three site monitoring visits.

Forestry England's Service Level Agreement (SLA) work and the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) work has continued. HLS stump shearing at Turf Hill has now been completed. The last remaining area in this round of works to undergo ridge, furrow and stump removal (stump shearing) - Dunces Arch - has been delayed due to unexploded ordnance being discovered and suspected unexploded ordnance within the working area.

The team has been working on three HLS project proposals for consideration by the HLS Board in October. If successful this will see the creation of a New Forest focused version of Hampshire's Atlas of Hampshire's Archeology, the creation of a consolidated New Forest Heritage Map (GIS datasets) and a complete survey and assessment of war time concrete remains. We hope to also produce some new onsite interpretation to update and replace existing ageing panels.

General public enquiries have also picked up following a lull during lockdown, with a particular interest in the Second World War heritage that can be seen and discovered in the Forest.

We've been asked for our input on a couple of Farming In Protected Landscape potential applications relating to improving the condition of two old (one Listed) barns. We've also been working with the buildings team regarding the Local Listing project and continue to support this project.

New Forest Knowledge

We continue to work closely with the New Forest Heritage Centre on the running of the New Forest Knowledge website. The site continues to be very popular with over 10,000 visits in August. During this reporting period the site has also had 22 new registrations and four new contributions added.

Scheduled Monument Improvement Works (SMIP)

Our Scheduled Monument Improvement Project is in full swing, continuing our work to clear vegetation from Scheduled Monuments highlighted during the SMMP work, as part of the Forestry England SLA. After two successful rounds of bracken clearance on eight Bronze Age barrows at Beaulieu Heath East and Roundhill Campsite, we have started our programme of gorse and other scrub clearance on Bronze Age barrows over the autumn/winter season, beginning with the barrows on Beaulieu Heath East. In total, 20 monuments will be cleared of vegetation – consisting of both bracken and perennial scrub – and left in much improved condition by March 2022.

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 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 has been on loan with East Dorset Archaeological Society from July until September, and with our support they have successfully surveyed two excavations. We are supporting another individual in setting up a geophysical survey project in Brockenhurst over the next year, researching the site of the Lady Hardinge Hospital for Wounded Indian Soldiers.

Festival of Archaeology 2021

For this year's Festival of Archaeology we ran two guided walks to the D-Day and Mulberry Harbour remains at Lepe Country Park. Both events 'sold out' in minutes with 32 people attending. We produced two YouTube videos in the theme of 'New Forest Unearthed', 'Dragonflies' at Hatchet Pond' (515 views) and 'Dams' at Crockford Bridge (492 views). We also took over the NPA Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts, with a very good response.

Facebook:

Reach	24,445
Engagement	453
Link clicks (link to YouTube)	55

Engagement Rate: 2.1% - High

Twitter:

Twitter tracks Impressions rather than reach – this is likely to be much higher as a post may appear multiple times on one person's feed.

	@NewForestArch	@NewForestNPA	Total
Impressions	65,965	13,245	79,210
Engagements	2,456	262	2,718

Engagement Rate: 3.4% - High

Instagram:

Reach	16,302
Engagements	570

Engagement Rate: 3.5% - Moderate

Discussions are now looking at the Festival of Archaeology 2022. The hope is to organise an excavation (test-pitting) project in cooperation with Minstead Trust and Furzey Gardens. We aim to get villagers involved in their own gardens, along with inviting school groups to Furzey Gardens for a day of learning about archaeological excavation techniques.

Castle Hill, Burley

We are working with Forestry England, Bournemouth University, Southampton University and Burley Historical Society to organise scrub clearance on Castle Hill Iron Age Hillfort in Burley in early 2022, so that we can carry out a geophysical survey afterwards. This will be the first archaeological research on this Scheduled Monument and will involve community outreach through an 'adopt-a-monument' scheme.

Building Design & Conservation

Following approval at the July Planning Committee meeting, the six-week public consultation on the draft New Forest National Park Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document runs from 10 September to 22 October 2021. As part of this

consultation, presentations have been given to the recent round of parish quadrant meetings. In addition, all town and parish councils, local authorities in and around the National Park, local planning agents and architects and other stakeholders have been directly notified of the consultation and invited to comment. The current intention is to present to final draft document – which will be revised following the public consultation – to the full Authority meeting in December 2021 for formal adoption.

We are pleased to welcome Therese Kearns, who joined us in September as our Heritage Project Coordinator. Over the next six months Therese will help take forward our work on the local listing project, for which we received Historic England funding. The project will engage local communities and parish councils to identify locally important assets within the National Park.

2 Enjoy

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

Education and Youth

The New Forest Educators' forum reconvened in person for the first time in early September and was valued by all able to attend, especially where staff changes have taken place over lockdown. Key messages were shared by Forestry England permissions team, along with guest speaker from the Freshwater Habitats Trust prompting a helpful discussion on running educational visits and venues in an environmentally sensitive manner. We would like to thank members of the forum for their flexibility and supporting others throughout lockdown by providing various outdoor meeting venues!

Our staff were invited and ran very popular workshop and Hampshire Outdoors (Hampshire County Council) Outdoor Learning conference supporting professional development of teachers. We are planning ahead with a working group of climate educators to ensure our assembly offer is synchronised with the Countryside Education Trust's new programme funded by Blue and Green Horizons. We continue to meet with potential new partners to develop our youth engagement programme.

Autumn school term has seen a flurry of last minute requests and booking rescheduled from the summer term which we have managed to accommodate with a combination of support from the ranger team, and by putting training in place in time for our new member of staff, Sian Brewer. We are now effectively fully booked until half term (22 October), totaling day visits for 475 pupils in September and October alone. Our Kickstart Education Assistant, Ella Gardner, has been able to step up from shadowing and be supported in leading education activities with groups.

For the generation green funded Wild Spaces Youth project, two groups from under-represented backgrounds were booked for a series of visits over the autumn, both of

which have unfortunately been rescheduled until spring due to high Covid-19 cases within those schools/colleges. A third group had been identified who will benefit from the place-making element and initial meetings held.

We have dates reserved during the walking and cycling festival to encourage local secondary schools who we haven't previously worked with to take part and the John Muir family award online will be available this autumn following a family launch event during the festival. We are delivering two staff discovery days, a wellbeing visit for social work students from Solent University and walks for young people with long term illness at Southampton Hospital. We are also undertaking research with local schools to plan how we can best support work experience programmes and careers day requests next summer.

Public and community events / rangers

Joint patrols with Forestry England have continued with a focus on promoting the New Forest Code and reducing negative impacts from recreation on the Forest. Patrol vans, bikes and the mobile unit were all deployed to reach as wide an audience as possible with one sunny Sunday seeing the team engage with over 200 people on a single patrol from Whitefield Moor.

The team welcomed the return of some events which had been postponed by Covid, including New Milton Bee Fayre, Tiptoe Green Fayre and Hobourne Woodland Festival. Rangers attended with the mobile information unit, speaking with over 380 people collectively.

Thousands of New Forest Codes and other NPA literature has been distributed by the team right across the National Park including pop-up campsites, accommodation providers, local businesses and cycle hire centres.

Rangers are assisting Agisters with 12 drifts this season, providing information to the public and helping to keep them safe during the events.

From late September, NPA rangers are working closely with FE rangers and keepers to assist with deer rut patrols to ensure key 'quiet zones' are maintained and there is minimal disturbance to the deer in other areas at this crucial time of year.

The seasonal rangers delivered 21 activity sessions at Camping in the Forest campsites with 1,324 engagements over the six-week holidays. The mobile information unit was used at every session alongside a mix of self-guided activities, guided walks, New Forest quiz nights and bird box making sessions.

Face to face meetings have resumed with Parish Clerks and other community groups.

At the end of September, we sadly said goodbye to Dawn Rayment, our People and Wildlife Ranger to pursue her career with Forestry England Wider Southern Beats. Recruitment for the post will begin shortly.

Communications

A series of visits around the national park by our four MPs enabled us to show them first-hand our work, projects and partnerships across the board and discuss our emerging Partnership Plan and alignment with Government priorities. All resulted in press releases supported by photos arranged by the Communications Team.

The annual review and the autumn/winter issue of our residents' newspaper Park Life have been printed.

We launched the New Forest Climate and Nature Challenge, encouraging people, businesses and organisations to join us in combating the joint crises. We invited people to sign a pledge to take on the challenge and highlighted a number of sustainable living opportunities, including the Walking and Cycling Festival, applying to the Sustainable Communities Fund to gain support for their projects. As well as an article in Park Life, we have updated the web pages on climate change and nature recovery plus community engagement, include the Sustainable Communities Fund. A Q&A with our Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager Olivia McGregor was launched as a blog and appeared in several publications.

We also supported the National Parks UK Net Zero with Nature week, highlighted the Revere investment project with Palladium to secure at least £239 million of additional funding to restore and protect forests, wetlands, meadows and peatlands within National Parks and surrounding areas.

Consultations on the Design Guide and Article 4 direction on temporary campsites were launched during this reporting period. We launched the Partnership Plan consultation 'Your Future New Forest'. The campaign included 57 social posts, a video, eight newsletters, radio and press coverage, plus comms from partners. Results included a social media reach of over 300,000 and engagement of 7,900; web visits of nearly 7,000; 46,000 video views, and 380 surveys completed by groups and individuals.

We are working with partners on developing an online 'green health hub' which will provide green prescribing options to health professionals (such as healthy walks, volunteering).

The annual walking festival was launched, including guided cycling opportunities for the first time. Over 80 events are on offer with expert guides from the NPA and partners over the three weeks and many are already sold out.

Educational Campaigns

A joint press release was issued about volunteers from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service (HIWFRS) joining forces with Forestry England and NPA rangers this summer to help encourage everyone visiting the New Forest to be fire safety aware. In joint patrols the combined team talked to visitors to remind them that the New Forest is a strictly no BBQ and fire zone and sharing tips on how everyone can help prevent wildfires in the countryside.

We have updated and reprinted tens of thousands of copies of the New Forest Code in different formats, including outdoor signs of the code for cycle hire and activities businesses to use. Digital signs at three key gateway roads into the New Forest were put in place and messages around littering, wild camping, feeding and petting ponies and the New Forest code are being displayed over three months to end October.

A wash-up meeting has just been held with partners involving in the 'Care for the Forest, care for each other' campaign over the summer and it was agreed that combined efforts on the ground and greater visibility off issues through communications, signage and patrols had worked well. Full results from all the partners are currently being collated so we can provide a full report and plan for the following season.

We are preparing to launch our animal accidents reduction campaign when the clocks go back to cover the period when most accidents happen.

Fundraising

We have started work on delivering 'Green and blue horizons from city to Forest' which was awarded a grant of £539,200 from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. We are co-ordinating and leading the project on behalf of several trusted partners: the Countryside Education Trust, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, and New Forest Commoners Defence Association.

Nature networks will be extended, and wildlife-rich corridors will be created 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, 16 jobs are being created or retained and around 50 local contractors will be needed to help support nature improvements.

The total cost of the project is £794,200 (the difference being the match-funding from the partners) with £220,600 awarded to the National Park Authority. The project began in September 2021 and will end in March 2023. The Green Recovery Challenge Fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Forestry Commission.

2.2 Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park

Interpretation projects (including Historic Routes)

Historic Routes project

Some of the trails of the Historic Routes project gained their new Rights of Way signage and Trail Waymarker discs have been supplied to HCC for addition over the coming months.



Historic Routes Trail Waymarker disc

Tatchbury Hospital, Trail enhancements and Nature Stepping Stones

Lift the flap units, the final items left to finish, were delivered to Tatchbury Hospital. However, installation of the new Trim Trail waymarker posts, carved wooded bench, interpretation panel and lift the flap units are still on hold due to site constraints. We look forward to the Hospital team installing them soon.

The carved bench was made from a tree trunk from the hospital site and the waymarker post from New Forest Oak sourced from a local sawmill.



Carved Wooden Bench



Trim Trail Waymarker Posts

Exhibitions

Exhibitions have restarted this year and we supported the Ancient and Remarkable Trees of the New Forest exhibition to return to the New Forest Heritage Centre from 19 June to 18 July. New content and photos were included and over 4,500 people visited the exhibition. The Commoning Voices exhibition is also back at the Ringwood Meeting House for the month of October, linking to promotion of the New Forest Code.



The Beaulieu River Oak, from the exhibition by Dave Russell.

Volunteering

The NPA volunteering programme has continued throughout the summer months. 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, Stuckton and Lepe.

- Restoring scheduled ancient monuments by bracken bashing. Volunteers have visited barrows at Hilltop and at Roundhills 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 75 volunteers have given 1,094 hours to our volunteering programme so far in 2021. Plans being made for the autumn for practical conservation, countryside access and archaeological volunteer days.

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 737 ambassadors have signed up to the scheme, 163 of which are young people.

Health and Wellbeing

In late September we had shared our proposed approach to health and wellbeing with stakeholders who attended the workshops back in the spring. Dr Lizzie Moore, our PHE placement has completed a strategy which will form a key part of our 'Inclusive National Park' theme in the Partnership plan. We are forming a steering group of partners to take forward this work collectively and our first project is to create a 'green health' website or hub so that communities, social prescribers and those working with groups with health inequalities can find what is on offer and also click through to a variety of services provided by partners.

On 7 September, the Faculty of Public Health ran an online training day on 'Public health's role in tackling the climate emergency', with the aims of inspiring Public Health action in the context of the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) and to engage with the workforce on the importance of the climate emergency and its implications for health. Around 100 attendees included public health consultants, practitioners and registrars (trainee consultants). Lizzie was asked to present the NPA's strategic health and wellbeing work in a breakout discussion focusing on nature-based solutions and green health initiatives. Key discussion points included the importance of communicating the benefits of (and thus value of) nature for human health and cross-sectoral partnership working. Key actions identified to feed back to the Faculty included stronger advocacy for improved access to greenspace, supporting national green infrastructure standards for public health, and supporting awareness and education of public health professionals in this area.

Dr Moore completed her placement with the NPA at the end of October and we wish her the very best in her next placement with Oxford City Council, working on further nature

and health initiatives. Our next placement will be recruited over the winter to start in spring 2022.

The Nature Health Network met again in September and October and heard from inspiring speakers including directors from the built environment communications group BECG, the newly launched NHS Oceans Project, the Eco Attractions Group and the Circle of Life Rediscovery CIC.

The Walking for Health programme has recorded 1,452 walking over the summer from 246 different walkers. New walk leaders for the Barton on Sea and Lyndhurst walks have been trained.

PEDALL

PEDALL has had a busy summer, with more riders this summer than in 2019, and this is still without a lot of our regular groups such as Colton Care and with a lot of cancellations due to either Covid-19 or staff shortages on the client front. So as things slowly improve and with the addition of James Hunt our new ride leader, who is now up and running sessions, we will continue to grow our uptake of riders.

James started at the beginning of September. He will be primarily be based at Ashurst, where we are still waiting for NHS property to finalise the lease agreement. James will also be the primary Saturday ride leader, his days are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturdays.

We have had good up take of new volunteers over the summer with around 20 signing up. We have recently purchased six new cycles aided by grants from British cycling and Wave 105 Cash for Kids, these have already proven very popular with a lot of our riders. We are also on the hunt for new two-wheel bikes but these are still very difficult to source.

Our promoting of PEDALL is starting to pay off with more people discovering our services through the different outlets, from local radio to the small free local papers/magazines.

We are now entering a naturally quieter time of the year for us, so will be a time of catching up on maintenance and working on updating procedures.

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

As noted above, along with our partner organisations, we are now evaluating the effectiveness of our joint 'Care for the Forest, Care for Each Other' campaign which was launched in March 2021. Early feedback suggests that the new signage has been particularly welcomed in deterring verge parking and promoting the New Forest Code.

The RMS Advisory Group met on 23 September and the RMS Steering Group on 14 October. Matters discussed included the effectiveness of the 'Care for the Forest, Care for Each Other' campaign, the responses to the Partnership Plan Consultation and an update on the feasibility of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for the National Park.

Access and Rights of Way

NPA Signposts were installed on the Tatchbury Mount route by national park volunteers in partnership with Hampshire County Council rangers. Six signs were installed along the new promoted route giving people more confidence to walk the route.



We have had initial discussions with landowners about improving access through FiPL funding. Initially these project are focused on existing permissive paths and on our NPA promoted walking routes.

The Walking and Cycling Festival has gone live and is already booking up! This year we have a selection of over 80 guided walks and guided cycle rides which give great opportunities to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the national park. We have liaised closely with Forestry England ensuring that any events on the Crown Lands comply with the new permissions policy.

3 Prosper

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

New Forest Marque

On 4 October Burley Manor Hotel was the venue for an event to discover the quality and range of New Forest Marque produce. An invited audience of 80 people – potential buyers and stockists of Marque produce were invited to a dining event to sample Marque produce and meet the producers. The event aimed to promote Marque produce to key elements of the hospitality and visitor economy, showcasing those Marque members who have the potential to scale up their production and meet increasing demand for locally sourced food, drink and crafts.

Visitor experience

We hosted a post-summer season round-up with the visitor communication and information group (VCIG) which included the destination management organisation (Go New Forest), local businesses and information provision points. The group shared news of a positive summer in terms of visitor numbers and interest, citing positive projects demonstrating wider inclusion of the community and sharing of Forest-friendly messaging via art and activities, as well as exhibitions bringing to life the story of the New Forest for locals and visitors alike. VCIG will meet again in February.

The latest NPA-endorsed local information point, Minstead Community Shop, also stockists of New Forest Marque produce, has been furnished with a sign made from local wood (see top of door).



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

Sustainable Transport

The New Forest Tour enjoyed a successful longer season (15 weeks compared with the usual nine weeks) from 29 May – 12 September; this is the longest single period of operation since the Tour's inception.

As 2020 was an anomaly, comparisons are made with 2019 to gauge its performance this season. Comparing the standard 2019 operating period with the equivalent period in 2021 shows loads were 17% higher in 2021. By route, this comparison is +2% Red, +62% Blue, +3% Green. The Blue route is proving increasingly popular year on year.

Full analysis of passenger numbers at individual boarding points is underway in order to identify ways to maximise and manage passenger numbers on all routes, with a greater focus on promoting multi-modal travel around the Tour, aligned with our net-zero with nature agenda.

There were no NPA concierge staff in situ this summer (nor last summer). In 2019, NPA concierge accounted for 13% of Tour ticket revenue from their Brockenhurst train station base.

Walking and cycling

Following up on our workshops relating to the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), we met with FE to consolidate plans. Steering group meetings with FE and NFDC, led by HCC, are ongoing.

We continue to liaise with HCC, the engineering contractor and Sustrans to ensure the Holmsley Bridge diversion routes for those on non-motorised forms of transport are appropriate and fit for purpose.

Working with the New Forest Cycling Working Group (NFCWG), we submitted a response to the Waterside Consultation Strategy, with a focus on the Waterside LCWIP and the importance of its cohesion with the forthcoming New Forest LCWIP. Another consultation we co-ordinated for the NFCWG was the Eling-Holbury cycle scheme provided through the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF).

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

Affordable Housing

Two of the adopted Local Plan (2019) housing site allocations are currently being considered as full planning applications. There are a range of material planning considerations to be assessed for the applications at Whartons Lane, Ashurst (Policy SP22) and Church Lane, Sway (Policy SP25). Both applications include a policy-compliant level of affordable housing (50%), in accordance with the Local Plan site allocations. Both applications will be presented to future Planning Committee meetings for determination.

Sustainable Communities Fund

Several grants of £150 have recently been awarded to schools and community groups in the National Park in support of small actions that really do make a difference. Existing green spaces are being enhanced to make them wilder and provide better space for wildlife, and support children to observe and find out about the natural environment. Collectively around 400 square metres of wildflower meadows are being introduced,

along with native planting, improvements to wooded areas, hedgehog homes, bug hotels, bird feeders, fat balls and seed, as well as improvements to rainwater collection and composting.

The funds are also supporting volunteers from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Amphibian and Reptile Group (HIWARG) to survey and monitor slow worms within churchyards in the National Park. Reptile transects have been set up at St Nicholas' in Brockenhurst, All Saints' in Fawley; Christ Church in Colbury, St Michael's in Lyndhurst; Christ Church in Emery Down, and All Saints' in Minstead. So far slow worms have been found at All Saints, Fawley.

4 Achieving Excellence

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

Human Resources

As at 4 October 2021 the total staff headcount was 85 or 75.74 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	Full Time Equivalents	Variation from previous report
Core funded	66*	0	58.23*	+ 0.19
Funded by external projects	19	+ 1	17.51	+ 1.06
Total	85	+ 1	75.74	+ 1.25

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

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

Role	Contract type	How funded
Inclusive Cycling Ride Leader	Fixed term	Project funded
Heritage Project Co-ordinator	Fixed term	Project funded
Planning Officer	Permanent	Core funded

We said goodbye to:

Role	Contract type	How role will be filled in future
Seasonal Assistant Ranger	Fixed term, project funded	N/A – end of fixed term contract

People and Wildlife Ranger	Fixed term, project funded	Assessing vacancy
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Staff wellbeing

As part of our commitment under the 'Nurture' theme 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.

The Wellbeing Group will promote themes in line with national and international events and those that have been requested by staff. October is Menopause Awareness Month and we have updated the internal intranet to provide staff with useful information, advice and support. 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.

Our HR and Training Officer who leads on staff wellbeing continues to contribute to Health and Safety Forum meetings to ensure a collaborative approach.

Staff Discovery Days are returning in October, enabling staff to meet other staff out in the National Park and find out about their work.

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 Partnership Plan consultation closed on 3 September and was open over a 10-week period. The draft Plan was the result of the NPA working with the statutory partners to come up with five overarching themes that will be important for the New Forest over the next five years and beyond, including a new vision and a number of 'agendas for action'. Organisations were directly invited to take part and the press release and social media campaigns triggered a large number of impressions on social media, partly thanks to the partners' communication teams who also promoted the consultation.

Over 370 responses and over 1,000 free text comments had been received over the 10 weeks, including 27 organisations. Around 75% of the respondents agreed or 'strongly agreed' with the five themes being a key challenge and the proposed outcomes in the draft Plan on average. Most people also provided free text comments to further support or voice concerns about the themes. Better cycling facilities and linked cycle paths was the topic that was mentioned the most (16%), followed by overgrazing damaging the Forest (12%) and better sustainable travel needed (11%).

Based on the feedback received, a more detailed action plan is being worked up with the partners. The plan will cover the first two years of the Partnership Plan and will be attached to it. It is expected that subsequent action plans for the remaining period will be updated online on a rolling and annual basis.

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

ICT Services

There is still currently an issue with the HSPN which is delaying the final upgrade of the infrastructure. All the network drives, except GISdata have been set to read only, all users are now working in OneDrive and SharePoint.

A contract for the replacement planning system has been signed and published on the GCloud framework. An initial meeting with the Agile Applications project team will take place on 1 October after which an implementation plan should be in place. The deadline is very tight, as the move off the current system must take place by end March 2022 when the current contract expires.

The Idox DMS was upgraded in August as the previous version is being de-supported. After a couple of weeks use it came to light that there is a major issue with PDF documents that have been amended. Whilst these documents appear correctly on the website, within the annotate section of the DMS which staff use, they do not. Idox have confirmed there is a bug and are working on a fix but once again they are proving to be slow in their response to deal with such issues.

Security

ICT Technical officer has attended a 4-day Microsoft 365 security administrator training course. All PCs and laptops are now using Microsoft Defender rather than ESET, the reporting side of Defender is much better and clearer for the team to administer. The IT team are continually working to improve security knowledge within the Authority but as stated previously no matter how good the system security IT put in place is, it is still very dependent on users playing their part.

Legal and Information management

At the midpoint of the year formal requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 are down on the same period last year 31 vs 41, although it should be noted that last year was a record year and we experienced a significant spike in requests during the first lockdown. The last four years average for the same period is 29.5. Half of the requests relate to

planning matters including Policy, trees and our enforcement work. We continue to receive queries on a wide range of subjects; our IT and telephone arrangements, staff complaints, payments to charities and the use of peat-based products, to name a few. All requests were responded to within the statutory 20-working day deadline, with the average response time being 12.3 working days. We received one request for an internal review of the matter and that review upheld the original decision to withhold the information.

Formal complaints are well down on the same time last year 5 vs 14, although last year's figure included multiple complaints about planning concerns at two separate sites. As most complaints are related to specific planning applications or enforcement cases the numbers do tend to fluctuate. All complaints were responded to within the 20-working day target with an average response time of 15.8 days. In one case the complainant has since requested an internal review of the matter under Stage 3 of our process which has yet to be determined.

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. In September 2021 we achieved a long-term project goal, with all network drives being set to read only. All current documents are now created, edited and shared across Office 365 (OneDrive and SharePoint). We are now hosting a total of 140 Team sites, storing more than 30,000 files. We continue to work with staff across the NPA to improve the structure of their SharePoint sites as well as providing ongoing training on a one-to-one basis where required. Due to the rapid shift to homeworking at the beginning of the first lockdown period, large numbers of files were saved to OneDrive. The next phase of the project will see us work with officers to assist them in moving all relevant Authority records to their designated filing locations in SharePoint. In addition to our internal SharePoint sites, we have now started to set up sites that enable external sharing, facilitating our partnership work with organisations across the Forest and beyond.

5 Members

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

- 6 September – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 13 September – New Forest Access Forum
- 15 September – Members Day, Climate & Nature Emergencies
- 21 September – Planning Committee
- 4 October – Standards Committee
- 7 October – Consultative Panel
- 19 October – Planning Committee

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- 16 November – Planning Committee
- 1 December – Members Day TBC
- 2 December – Consultative Panel
- 6 December – New Forest Access Forum

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- 20 August – Introductory meeting with new Deputy Surveyor
- 24 August – tour of National Park with John Glen MP
- 25 August – tour of National Park with Caroline Nokes MP
- 26 August – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 6 September – NPE meeting
- 6 September – Road to net zero webinar
- 7 September – Leadership Development session
- 7 September – National Park City meeting
- 7 September – Greenprint meeting
- 8 September – meeting with Interim Chief Executive, NFDC
- 8 September – NPO meeting
- 8 September – National Park City meeting
- 9 September – Greenprint Steering Group
- 9 September – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 9 September – meeting with CX, Hart District Council
- 10 September – Leadership Group meeting
- 14 September – Green Halo Steering Group
- 14 September – NPE APPG
- 14 September – meeting with Acting Area Manager, NE
- 16 September – SLT Awayday
- 16 September – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 17 September – HIOW CX meeting
- 17 September – meeting with NFDC and EA
- 20 September – Business South Board meeting
- 20 September – Telephone call with CX, Solent LEP
- 20 September – ENPOG meeting
- 21 September – Meet FE Board members
- 21 September – National Parks Partnerships meeting
- 22 September – 'Parks for the Planet' webinar
- 23 September – Defra Contact Group meeting
- 28 September – Wildlife Roundtable meeting
- 28 September – PfSH Chief Executives meeting
- 29 September – Hosting a Business South Master Class
- 29 September – 'Parks for the Planet' webinar
- 30 September – Speaker at Local Produce Show

- 1 October – Site visit with CX, Natural England
- 5 October – Defra meeting
- 5 October - meeting with Interim Chief Executive, NFDC
- 5 October – call with Director of Countryside, SDNPA
- 6 October – meeting with Strategic Manager, HCC
- 6 October – ‘Parks for the Planet’ webinar
- 6 October – Greenprint workshop – Natural Health Service
- 7 October – Regen South Conference
- 7 October – ‘Parks for the Planet’ webinar
- 8 October – Solent LEP Board meeting
- 8 October – meeting with LGA
- 11 October – site visit with GWCT attended by Minister Lord Benyon
- 13 October – Greenprint workshop – world class blue/green environment
- 14 October – NPE Board meeting
- 15 October – meeting with RSPB Directors for England and Southern Region
- 18 October – Partnership Plan Leadership Group meeting
- 19 October – meeting to develop Environmental Leadership programme with Mezzana Partners
- 20 October – NPP AGM
- 20 October – ‘Parks for the Planet’ webinar

5.4 Chairman’s engagements

- 24 August – tour of National Park with John Glen MP
- 25 August – tour of National Park with Caroline Nokes MP
- 1 September – NP Chairs meeting
- 2 September – Solent Freeport meeting
- 6 September – NPE Board meeting
- 14 September – NPE APPG
- 16 September – Governance Task and Finish Group
- 21 September – Solent Freeport meeting
- 1 October – PfSH planning meeting
- 14 October – NPE Board meeting

6 Recommendation

To note the report.