



The New Forest National Park Habitat Mitigation Scheme

Mitigating recreational impacts on New Forest designated sites

Annual Report on Scheme Implementation

(1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020)

1. Introduction

1.1 This is the annual report on the implementation of the National Park Authority's (NPA) Habitat Mitigation Scheme¹. It describes the progress made implementing mitigation measures during the year from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. There were a total of 18 new dwellings and two extensions to visitor accommodation that made mitigation contributions during this period.

2. Implementation of Mitigation Measures

2.1 The key mitigation measures in the NPA's Habitat Mitigation Scheme² that were implemented during this year included:

- Provision of Rangers
- Delivering messaging across a range of Communications channels
- Planning for improvements to alternative recreational routes outside the designated sites

Ranger activities

2.2 Four seasonal assistant rangers were employed to focus on recreational activities from March 2019 until June 2019. They engaged with a total of 3,960 people at car parks and at public events, representing a rise from 3,098 engagements in

¹ Details of how development can impact the designated sites in the New Forest and the need for mitigation is outlined on the website at: www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/planning/development-impacts-on-protected-areas/

² The Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD was only adopted in July 2020, so the Scheme operating during this reporting period was contained in the Development Standards SPD 2012. See <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/planning/development-standards/>

2018. There were 43 engagement sessions, engaging with 1390 people, and 12 public events were attended, with engagement of 2570 people.

2.3 Specific target locations and areas were chosen using information shared by previous Seasonal Rangers, Forestry England Keepers and Rangers, and NPA, Hampshire County Council & National Trust Rangers. Engagement sessions took place 7 days per week between 7am and 7pm, to ensure that the Rangers reached as many people as possible.

Car parks/locations included:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| • Wilverley | Ogdens |
| • Beaulieu Heath | Godshill Cricket |
| • Dibden | Ashley Walk |
| • Yewtree Heath | Deerleap |
| • Shatterford | Fritham |
| • Longdown | Whitefield Moor |
| • Turfhill | Hale Purlieu (NT) |
| • Moonhills | Rockford (NT) |
| • Longslade Bottom | Matley |
| • Black Knowl | Abbots Well (HCC) |

Public events attended included:

- National Trust Easter Event, Foxbury
- Beaulieu Road Pony Sales
- NF Young Farmers / Young Commoners
- Earth Day at Lepe Country Park
- Sandy Balls Summer Festival, Godshill
- Youth Bird Trail Event, Blashford Lakes
- Dogstival, Pylewell Park
- Downton Cuckoo Fair, Downton
- Bark Ranger School, Moors Valley
- Wild Play Day, Hurst Spit

2.4 Forestry England temporarily closed 5 out of the 127 Forest car parks to help take the pressure off the protected ground nesting birds. At the start of the season some of the regular users of these car parks parked along verges. The rangers had conversations with as many users as they could about why the car parks were closed and recommended the next nearest car park, thereby helping to ease disturbance at sensitive habitat locations.

Communications

2.5 A significant element of the Mitigation Scheme is dedicated to delivering consistent key messages about the protected birds, habitats and species and how

recreational users can avoid impacting these. This year articles containing these key messages were included in a range of publications, and messages have been delivered through the NPA's social media channels including Facebook, Twitter and its website. All these media channels allow messages to be delivered to a very large audience, and even if only a very small proportion of these lead to responsible behaviour in the protected sites, then these measures are expected to be effective.

2.6 The reach of key mitigation messages included the use of:

- NPA website - 7,806 page views.
- NPA Publications³, incl Essential Guide, Park Life, Pocket Guides etc – almost 400,000 copies printed.
- E- News Letter – click throughs to article/webpage/event - 1118.
- Social media Facebook / Twitter / Instagram - Engagements 20,249 (post was liked, shared or commented on); Reached: 280,799 (post appeared in a feed, but with no comment, like or share); video views 68,665.

2.7 A short film was commissioned from Big Wave Productions about the New Forest heathlands and their protected species. It contains key messages about the rare habitats and species and what visitors can do to help protect these, such as keeping to the main tracks. The short film can be seen on the NPA's website at: <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/protecting-nature/ground-nesting-birds/>. Further shorter video clips will be made from this film and used through the various social media channels and on the NPA's website. The number of times this and other shorter versions of the film have been viewed by visitors to the website will be reported in future years.

Improvements to alternative recreational routes outside the designated sites

2.8 This project involves improvements to signage on selected rights of way outside the internationally designated areas that would provide an alternative location for recreation. Funding in 2019/20 supported the production of designs for route markers and the process of identifying appropriate routes was started. The first route to be identified was at Hale – Woodgreen. This route can be seen on the promoted Walking routes page on the NPA's website at: <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/things-to-do/walking/new-forest-walks/>

2.9 The installation of improved waymarkers is planned for subsequent years when funding permits and following the collection of initial data to show the usage of the route prior to any improvements.

3. Monitoring and Research

3.1 It is planned to install people counters on the alternative recreation routes outside the designated sites to count baseline usage before improvements are completed. This will enable the monitoring of whether the improvements will increase the use of these walks away from the designated sites.

³ NPA publications are distributed to local attractions, information points and accommodation sites, and distributed by NPA and Forestry England Rangers at public events, fairs, shows, campsites and car parks.

- 3.2 Research into visitor patterns and recreational use of the New Forest has been jointly commissioned by six local planning authorities, together with Natural England and Forestry England from specialist consultants Footprint Ecology, and is funded by the government. This research focuses on understanding the impacts of recreation arising from increased housing development in and around the National Park on the New Forest's international nature conservation designations and the potential for mitigation. This is the most comprehensive survey of recreational use of the New Forest since the 2004/5 Tourism South East survey.
- 3.3 The primary aim of this research is to serve as an appropriate joint evidence base to inform the longer-term development of a cross-boundary comprehensive mitigation strategy. However, the future implementation of the NPA's Mitigation Scheme will also be informed by the evidence of visitor patterns and mitigation measures contained in this research. The results of this work can be seen on the NPA's website at: <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/managing-recreation/future-forest/research-into-recreational-use-of-the-new-forests-protected-habitats-footprint-ecology-2020/>.

4. Financial Position

Balance of funds available for mitigation measures at 31 March 2019

- 4.1 Prior to the adoption of the New Forest National Park Local Plan in August 2019, the previous Core Strategy (2010) collected developer contributions from new development towards a range of habitat mitigation measures. Funds held by the NPA at 31 March 2019 were £93,858.

Contributions received during 2019/20

- 4.2 During 2019 – 2020, habitat mitigation contributions towards the New Forest designated sites were received from a number of small-scale residential schemes, including developments in Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst, and Sway, and from an extension to the Premier Inn at Ower. The total received in developer contributions during the period was £46,637 (of which, £2,262 was transferred into the In-Perpetuity reserve⁴ for long-term mitigation measures).

Expenditure on mitigation measures during 2019/20

- 4.3 During the 2019 – 2020 reporting year a total of £31,005 was spent on mitigation measures, details of which are outlined in Section 2 above. Expenditure on mitigation measures comprised:
- Seasonal Rangers: Habitat mitigation contributions have been used with funding from other sources to increase the seasonal ranger resource working in the New Forest SAC and SPA - £18,005

⁴ The In-Perpetuity reserve has been set up as part of the Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD and details can be seen at <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/planning/development-impacts-on-protected-areas/>

- Communications: The cost of interpretation information, publications, website and social media development - £5,000.
- A short educational film with strong messages about the potential impacts of people on rare bird species and habitats in the New Forest - £6,000.
- Design of new signage for alternative recreation routes - £2,000.

Balance of funds remaining for mitigation measures at 31 March 2020

4.4 Following the funds received and expenditure during the year, the funds remaining and available for mitigation measures in 2020/21 are £107,228.

Starting balance:	£93,858
Contributions received:	£46,637
<i>minus</i> expenditure:	-£31,005
<i>minus</i> In-Perpetuity:	<u>-£2,262</u>
<u>Funds available for 2020/21</u>	<u>£107,228</u>

5. Development of the Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD

5.1 Significant progress was made during 2019/20 on the development of a revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme. Following the adoption of the National Park Local Plan in August 2019, the NPA’s existing Habitat Mitigation Scheme (adopted 2012) was updated in parallel. An initial draft of the revised Mitigation Scheme was published for consultation alongside the Submission draft Local Plan in early 2018 and was submitted as supporting evidence for the Local Plan Examination in 2018–19.

5.2 As part of the process of preparing the new Local Plan the NPA recognised its existing Habitat Mitigation Scheme (2012) would require updating to reflect:

- the scale and type of mitigation needed to reflect the planned increase in development in the new Local Plan;
- the area covered by the Scheme;
- incorporating long term impacts and mitigation (in-perpetuity);
- inflation adjustments to developer contributions; and
- clarifying the requirements for visitor accommodation, age related housing, and permitted development.

5.3 During the last year the Habitat Mitigation Steering Group (comprising representatives from the RSPB, Hampshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, New Forest District Council and specialists from the NPA) has overseen the implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the 2012 Habitat Scheme but also assisted in the preparation of the revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD. The principles of the Mitigation Scheme are based on the evidence contained in Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Local Plan. The revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD⁵ is planned to be completed and adopted in the summer of 2020.

⁵ A Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was adopted in July 2020 - see www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/planning/development-impacts-on-protected-areas/.

6. Development of a strategic habitat mitigation approach for the New Forest

- 6.1 The NPA's Habitat Mitigation Scheme does not address the significant scale of residential development planned in areas outside the National Park boundary and its potential impacts on the New Forest's designated sites. This is the responsibility of neighbouring planning authorities. Consequently, the NPA is committed to work with Natural England and other neighbouring local authorities to develop a longer-term strategic approach to prevent adverse effects on the internationally designated nature conservation sites in the New Forest.
- 6.2 The progress of this work is highlighted in paragraphs 3.2-3.3 above. The future implementation of the NPA's Mitigation Scheme will be informed by the evidence of visitor patterns and mitigation measures contained in this research.