

AM 617/22

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 MARCH 2022

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 27 January 2022. 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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The weeks since my last report at the end of January have coincided with the arrival of spring and it is fitting that we have been reflecting on a refreshed agenda for National Parks nationally with the preparation of our submission to the government's response to the Landscapes Review and making the final edits to the new 5 year plan for the New Forest National Park with partners, our Partnership Plan.

The Landscapes Review response you will consider at this meeting has been put together following discussions at a members session held on 2 February followed by three staff sessions, providing as many opportunities as possible for colleagues to express their views. The consultation, which runs until 9 April, was also discussed on BBC Countryfile with a segment by Tom Heap interviewing Friends of the Forest and Campaign for National Parks at Lyndhurst featuring our Ambassadors.

We saw how climate change is having serious consequences on our tree population with February's storms, since the end of November 2021 the UK has experienced seven named storms. Storm Eunice on 18 February had the most significant effect on the New Forest, not least on protected trees which our tree team helped to deal with.

To ensure our habitats are more resilient to climate change and help nature recover, we have a number of projects moving ahead on the ground. Over £180,000 in grants has been given out this financial year to landowners and land managers through the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme we administer. Projects range from new hedgerows, wildflower meadows and water quality improvement initiatives to a charcoal burner to help with woodland management. Through the National Grid Landscapes Enhancement Initiative we have worked with landowners communities to improve habitats and access for people at Landford Bog, Warrens Copse at Holbury, and are helping to remove invasive rhododendron at Franchises Lodge nature reserve.

Our second Awakening Festival throughout February brought together a wide range of organisations to share messages about the climate and nature emergencies and promote ways to live more sustainably. With 45 online and in-person events, over one million

people had the opportunity to see our climate and nature messages. Many events were sold out and our climate champion school assemblies reached over 2,100 children.

Planning powers remain our main tool to protect the National Park. Our enforcement team's approach is to always work to remedy a breach of planning control where reasonable and practicable depending on the circumstances of the case. Formal action is followed where this has not been possible and it is both expedient and in the wider public interest to do so. Recent cases have included an international-sized horse-riding arena and associated structures built without planning permission at Sway – a planning inspector supported our enforcement notice at appeal; a seven-day public inquiry relating to enforcement notices, planning applications and certificates of lawful use at a site at Lymington; and planning a joint agency venture with Forestry England, Highways, the police and ourselves to progress clearance of an unregistered site used for scrap vehicle storage next to the A31.

Our built and historical environments are a vital part of the National Park's character. The updated Design Guide and local listing project to capture important buildings and structures in our communities continue to be well received. Work to improve scheduled ancient monuments has seen 19 sites cleared of scrub this year and involved over 1,000 volunteer hours with sessions on the weekends enabling a greater diversity of people to engage.

As we prepare for the summer season and more activities out on the Forest become possible with the warmer weather, we are pleased that volunteering and education offers remain attractive. Overall, this financial year, 144 volunteers have given 3,067 hours to our volunteering programme and our travel grant has enabled 2,130 days of pupils learning through visits across New Forest education providers. We also have over 700 Ambassadors as we go into the spring and are working to design the tasks they can help with this year. Our annual Volunteer Fair was held virtually with 16 different groups presenting their volunteer opportunities online. Around 200 people attended the online talks and the recordings will be shared online for others to watch and be inspired with.

We were delighted to host our Minister, Lord Richard Benyon and senior Defra officials on 10 March. The day out on the Forest enabled us discuss a wider range of Forest matters, the proposals in the Landscapes Review and the issues and opportunities we have as we go into the new Partnership Plan. A visit to Lyndsey and Robert Stride's holding demonstrated the vital role of commoning and need to support it into the future as we go through the transition after leaving Europe and look ahead to new schemes in 2024. We visited the wetland restoration with HLS partners at Fletcher's Thorns and discussed engagement with people and recreation management with the Rangers and PEDALL colleagues at Blackwater. A new Forest Marque lunch in the Verderers Hall attended by 20 local partners enabled discussion about the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme and was very well received. We also visited the Forest fringe to the

east to discuss the vital relationship with the Waterside and the green finance Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund pilot underway in that area.

The Ministerial visit and increasing opportunities for us to meet in person with Forest partners as we emerge from Covid restrictions have been especially welcome as we go into the new financial year, with a real sense of renewing all important relationships and fueling determination to deliver for the Forest together as our Partnership Plan is finalised.

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

As part of our ongoing Nature Recovery work our Nature Recovery Officer Alison Levy organised an event in the north of the Forest aimed at encouraging landowners to consider removal of invasive rhododendron from their woodland areas. Held jointly with the RSPB, the event provided an opportunity to see both the large and small-scale methods of rhododendron control and removal at Franchises Lodge. 11 landowners attended and we were able to promote the funding opportunities available through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

Farming in Protected Landscapes

A further two projects were approved for funding in February, meaning that the programme is on course to spend the full budget allocation for year one - £174,000. We have also secured further money from the reallocation of underspend from other protected landscapes to help support small scale projects that are able to complete their project before the end of the financial year.

Approved grants:

Brooklands Farm - rainwater harvesting, improved manure storage, solar panel installation and habitat enhancement – hedgerows and wildflower margins.

Pondhead Conservation Trust – grant to support the purchase of a replacement kiln for charcoal production.

National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative funding (LEI)

The three current LEI funded projects are continuing to make progress. The first at Warrens Copse, Holbury Manor is moving into the maintenance phase having

successfully completed the LEI funded improvements of woodland management of the SINC woodland, introduction of a wildplay area, improvement of the existing footpath network in the woodland and upgrade of the gravel car park. Warrens Copse is owned by Fawley Parish Council which maintains the area for the benefit of the local people.

The second LEI funded project is at Landford Bog, owned by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and open to the public as a nature reserve. Landscape improvement works continue at Landford Bog, with new perimeter fencing having been installed to facilitate summer conservation grazing by Dexter cattle. Dipwell kits have been installed to measure water levels in the bog area and two new galvanised kissing gates have been installed. A boardwalk is under construction and will be completed by summer 2022.

The third LEI funded project is Franchises Lodge, owned by RSPB. LEI funded work has started, clearing rhododendron which dominates many parts of the woodland floor.

The fourth LEI funded project improving access, landscape and biodiversity at Marchwood, Tatchbury and Cadland is still awaiting the release of the LEI funds expected sometime in 2022. In the meantime, officers are liaising with the various landowners involved in the project and preparing the projects so that they are ready to start when funding is received, seasons permitting.

Scottish and Southern Electricity undergrounding

Extensive lengths of SSE transmission lines are in the process of being undergrounded to the west and south of Burley. The removal of telegraph poles and wires has already improved the landscape greatly with more scheduled for removal, returning the landscape to its natural state and enhancing the natural beauty of the area.

Green and Blue Horizons – from city to forest

Recruitment of staff to help deliver the aims of this programme has continued in this period, with the appointment of an additional Land Advisor to the NFLAS team in February and interviews for the Project Co-ordinator held in March.

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

Development Management

We received 118 applications in the period 1 January to 1 March and in the same period determined 84 applications with an approval rate of 90%.

During this same period, eight appeal decisions were received; four were dismissed and four were allowed. A more in-depth analysis of the Inspectors' reasoning in allowing appeals is to be reported to the Planning Committee.

We hope to conclude the s106 agreement for the Fawley Waterside proposals very soon, which need to be agreed by a number of parties that include ourselves and New Forest District Council as the local planning authorities, as well as Hampshire County Council. Similarly, we need to finalise the s106 agreement for the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel site. Meanwhile, the applications for the site allocations at Whartons Lane in Ashurst and Church Lane in Sway are progressing as we work to resolve issues raised in the consultation responses.

We are working with ICT as we move from the current to new planning software.

Trees

Since the last report there has been continued high numbers of tree works applications with 208 tree work applications to protected trees, 100% of which have been determined within eight weeks. Some 25 of these have been for emergency or exempt tree works which have been recorded this year.

During the same period 50 consultations have been provided on planning applications and continued involvement with several major applications.

A new Tree Preservation Order has been made to protect the historic lime tree avenue and one of the largest veteran oak trees in the New Forest at Hale Park.

Climate change is having serious consequences on our tree population especially with the ever-increasing number of storm events. Since the end of November 2021, the UK has experienced seven named storms with storm Eunice on 18 February having the most significant effect on the New Forest. This in turn heightens people's apprehension of trees in their property and can put added future pressure on their retention.

Planning Enforcement

As at the end of February 2022 there were 165 open planning enforcement related cases on the enforcement list at various stages of investigation, action, monitoring, appeal or prosecution. This number has been reduced from a peak of 215 in the summer of 2021 and reflects a concerted effort to conclude cases which have built up over the last year or so.

A seven-day Public Planning Enforcement Inquiry was held end of February/early March relating to enforcement notices, planning applications and certificates of lawful use applications at Passford Farm just outside the main boundary limits of Lymington. Here the issue related to the use of the site for separate dwellings/visitors in the context of Policy SP 46 sustainable tourism accommodation, listed building setting issues and the degree works have been undertaken with the deliberate intention of concealment.

The Planning Enforcement team has been successful in defending an enforcement notice appeal for an oversized manege /jumping arena, horse walker and other works undertaken without planning permission at a property called Eastwoods in Sway. The owners are required to remove the horse walker structure, remove the international size arena and reinstate the land as grass field. Here the Inspector supported the Authority's case which reinforced the intrinsic landscape quality of the National Park and the impact upon the character of the locality and issues around policies DP53 (Maneges) and DP50 (Agricultural and forestry buildings).

In early March an enforcement notice was served for the creation of extensive hardstanding in a field which had been used for storing vehicles at a property in Marchwood.

A joint agency venture with Forestry England, Highways, the police and the NFNPA has been planned and will progress clearance of an unregistered site which has been taken over for scrap vehicle storage adjacent to the A31.

A further seven potential enforcement notices are scheduled in the coming months if matters are not adequately resolved through other routes. The Authority will always seek to remedy a breach of planning control where reasonable and practicable dependent upon the circumstances of the case. Formal action will be followed where this has not been possible and it is both expedient and in the wider public interest to do so.

Policy

The Policy team continues to work on several aspects of our habitat mitigation work. This has included liaison with a number of nitrate mitigation schemes regarding the overarching legal agreements required to support nitrate mitigation measures to serve development within the National Park (including mitigation sites in the Test and Itchen catchment and sites that serve the New Forest Rivers catchment). In addition, the team continues to engage with surrounding planning authorities on ensuring the recreational impacts arising from new development are appropriately mitigated. This includes new greenspace provision as part of new development, as well as delivering mitigation measures within the New Forest's designated sites.

The team continues to review and respond to planning policy consultations from surrounding authorities. A response was submitted to Bournemouth Christchurch Poole's Local Plan consultation, which highlighted the need to consider impacts on the adjacent National Park from housing site allocation options around Bransgore. Test Valley Borough Council's Local Plan consultation closes in early April 2022 and the team will be preparing the Authority's response to this consultation in due course.

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

Building Design & Conservation

Following the adoption of the updated New Forest National Park Design Guide in January 2022, the Building Design & Conservation team continues to work to ensure new development enhances the built environment of the New Forest. This has included convening the building design awards judging panel to review nominations received for our 2022 awards. This year's nominations highlight a high quality of design across the award categories and reflect the importance given to design in the new Design Guide.

Building design and conservation officers have also input into our assessment of several important planning applications, including the adopted Local Plan housing site allocations at Ashurst and Sway; and several applications relating to designated heritage assets.

Our 'local listing' project was launched in January 2022 and has been positively received by local residents and parish councils within the National Park. Following presentations at the parish quadrant meetings earlier this year, nominations are now being received and will be considered for inclusion on our local list at a future Planning Committee meeting.

Archaeology

During this reporting period the Archaeology Team has consulted on 11 new NF District Council and five new Authority planning applications and given comments and recommendations on several other ongoing cases. The volume of planning work, from NFDC, is highlighted as they have now used an additional half of their normal yearly quota of allocated time. The current SLA with NFDC to provide archaeological support services (relating to Planning) runs to 31 March 2022.

Forestry England's Service Level Agreement (FE-SLA) work and the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) work has continued.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)

Turf Hill

A meeting was held on 14 January to assess the area of the Turf Hill site that due to potential underlying heritage had received a different restoration approach to the rest of the site. The results of the work conducted to date were reviewed and to examine if the three stated aims of the HLS ridge & furrow programme (restoring habitats, enabling future mechanical maintenance and stock management) had been achieved.

The Verderers expressed that they wish the remaining ridges and furrows to be removed across the site, and that this was a unique opportunity to restore the habitat and smooth

the ground surface to enable commoners to more safely gallop across it while rounding up the New Forest ponies. It was agreed that a monitored programme of machined ridge and furrow removal take place, outside the exclusion zone/s, to assess if it could be conducted in such a way as not to impact negatively any underlying potential archaeological features if extended into the exclusion zone. 7 to 11 February saw work commence on site, being monitored by the Archaeology Team daily. Following the initial trial area and a site meeting with the Verderers on 8 February, it was agreed that this method could continue across the entire area.

Dunces Arch

Following an unexploded ordnance (UXO) survey and Forestry England confirming what ridge, furrow and stump removal (and stump shearing) was to take place a UXO removal program was initiated. This saw potential UXO being physically investigated and removed by a specialist team. Due to the potential archaeology in the area all removal works were monitored by the Archaeology Team. Work commenced on 11 February with 31 potential UXO targets being examined.

Some ordnance-related items were found, including two individual bullet casings and a possible cache of heavily deteriorated Small Arms Ammunition and another isolated target comprised one bullet casing.

Stream Restoration

We have consulted on two stream restoration works, one of which at Picket Mire should also result in preventing further erosion of an earthwork enclosure recorded on the Drivers Map.

Forestry England's Service Level Agreement

Scheduled Monument Improvement Project

Working with volunteers we have now cleared 19 archaeological sites, which have been left in much-improved condition and has increased Scheduled Monument visibility. We were hoping to clear 20, but ecological constraints restricted access to some of the target sites. The project will be reviewed with Forestry England in the last week of March, and the continuation of the project in the new financial year will also be discussed.

During this pilot year for the project, we have surpassed 1,000 volunteer hours. To encourage volunteer diversity during this programme, we have been running weekend events on Saturdays. This has allowed volunteers who were signed up to our newsletters but had not been able to join any events due to their jobs to come along. In February, we were joined by Forestry England volunteers, and it is hoped that they will be able to join for this project again in the next year.

Festival of Archaeology 2022

As mentioned at the end of 2021 we had been approached by the Minstead Trust wishing to run a community archaeology project in 2022 as part of its anniversary celebrations. The project idea was to conduct test pit excavations in Minstead with local residents and people with learning difficulties, who Minstead Trust supports. We reached out to a local commercial archaeology company to ask for their support.

We can now report that initial discussions have proven fruitful - we are now working with Wessex Archaeology on the project. There are more details to confirm but it is looking very positive that they will be able to support this community project for the Festival of Archaeology in July.

We will be working closely with Wessex Archaeology and the Minstead Trust to develop the project, named Dig Minstead. The intention is to engage with residents to conduct 10 to 15 test pits (1x1m excavations) in Minstead and at Trust sites. This will hopefully include talks, training, fieldwork, as well as building survey, and finds processing on site.

Working with Community Groups

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. However, during this reporting period no requests have been received.

We continue to support a small local group with its research into the history of Lady Hardinge Hospital for Wounded Indian Soldiers in Brockenhurst and a proposed geophysical survey project of the site some time in 2022, subject to permissions.

We are working with Forestry England, Bournemouth University, Southampton University and Burley Historical Society to organise bracken knocking and scrub clearance on Castle Hill Iron Age Hillfort in Burley in 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 a continuation of the 'Dig Burley' theme.

We are also providing archaeological advice to Forestry England regarding the Romani Community Archaeology Project, which is an archaeological fieldwork charity hoping to launch in Spring/Summer 2022 and currently going through the FE permissions process. The charity's aims are 'educating, encouraging and engaging through the investigation of historic Romani sites by today's Romani people.'

New Forest Knowledge website

With an all-new NFK Team at the New Forest Heritage Centre (NFHC) we aim to continue to work closely on the running of the New Forest Knowledge website. Trevor Johnson is the new Centre Manager. We will meet him and we hope other members of the new team later in March.

The New Forest Knowledge website continues to be extremely popular. January and February view stats are 11,340 and 11,090.

We are fast approaching the end of the funding legacy from the Our Past, Our Future scheme and discussions are due to start on how the site is funded, maintained and developed going forward.

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

This year's assembly campaign addresses the climate and nature emergency by inviting pupils to vote for the best habitat in our climate champions online assembly. The pre-recorded assembly with larger than life characters is available online to all schools has had over 171 views by classes online to date and over 2,100 children have been reached via our follow up Q&A sessions streamed live to the classroom by the education team. Questions from pupils have been insightful as ever and include:

'What was it like 9,000 years ago?'

'How long has climate change been happening?'

'Which species are most in danger?'

The video has been described by pupils as collaborative, inspiring and informative.

Plans to meet classes in person on field trips are in place for the spring and we have been holding detailed discussions with the permissions team at Forestry England to ensure we continue to be responsible in our practices within this valuable and unique habitat. We have also interviewed and accepted five work experience students who will be joining us in the summer term.

After much rescheduling, our Generation Green project has finally got back underway with three groups of young people benefitting from weekly sessions. The Calshot youth club is developing ideas to develop their own space for nature, while students from St Joseph's Catholic School and Bournemouth and Poole College have enjoyed a wellbeing walk at Bolderwood, geocaching and activities with PEDALL, sessions at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Lepe Country Park and New Forest Activities and bushcraft with the team at Woodlander Hoburne Bashley.

We were especially proud to partner with Burley YHA to host a residential for pupils at St Josephs' School. This is the first time our education and youth team has coordinated a residential visit, inspired by the success of our fellow national parks. Knowing that there are a lot of residential offers in our region, we wanted to offer something different. In this case it was enabling those who might never otherwise get to go on residential, just 10 students, for one night, each with additional needs. We spent time with school staff to overcome barriers for including anxiety, learning needs and diabetes. It still remains a debate amongst pupils whether the campfire cookout or the full English breakfast was the highlight! Wild Spaces Youth Project Officer Claire Pearce will be remaining with the team to help evaluate the impact of the generation green project after delivery work ends on 31 March thanks to a funding extension from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

Over the last year, our travel grant has enabled 2,130 days of pupils learning through visits across New Forest education providers. While take-up has been less than last year (many schools did not resume or reschedule visit until September 2021) we are pleased to be able to enable these visits, often making them affordable for many who might not otherwise participate.

'[The grant made a] huge difference as had to go on two days to keep people in their (Covid) bubbles and the coach was twice as expensive, the children had a fantastic time at Testwood Lakes which wouldn't have been financially viable without the help of the travel grant scheme.' (St Marks CofE Primary School, Southampton).

'The travel grant meant we could enable all children to experience the New Forest for less than £5 which makes it achievable for all – thank you.' (Broadchalke Primary School, Wiltshire).

Communications

Climate and nature communications:

The Awakening Festival marked its second year with 45 events throughout February both online and in person (up from 28 events last year) from the NPA and a wide range of partners about the climate and nature emergencies. Several events were provided by community 'green groups' we have convened into a network to share best practice, advice and to join up on sustainable living projects where appropriate. Over one million people had the opportunity to see our climate and nature messages through the Festival (including social media impressions and media / email newsletter readership).

Events included online talks, in-person wildlife walks, Instagram takeovers, a farm tour, mini film festival, podcasts, carbon workshop, energy use tips, community schemes and climate assemblies. Other highlights included:

- The NPA's online volunteer fair as part of the Festival attracted 240 sign-ups. The sessions will be made available online for additional people to watch later.

- Prize draw – a win a globe competition attracted nearly 30 applications from children who had shown through their artwork how they had helped the climate and nature emergencies.
- 2,100 children aged four to 11 attended or signed up for Climate Champions assemblies, with more to follow outside February.
- A competition to win a tour of Storms Farm with commoners the Parry Nortons had the highest number of New Forest Marque impressions and engagements of any post (all platforms) in the last 12 months.

Our social media wildlife campaign has seen 2.7 million impressions this financial year and 209,000 engagements. Most recently we marked World Wildlife Day with a blog from our ecologist about the New Forest's top five rare flora and fauna.

We continued to promote the New Forest Climate and Nature challenge pledge with nearly 570 people signing up to take steps towards more sustainable living. Updates were made to the Green Halo Partnership website and five new member businesses were welcomed, plus social posts gained nearly 4,000 impressions in February alone.

New Forest Code behaviour change campaigns:

The Pocket Guide has been printed highlighting the New Forest Code, the National Park's special qualities, the New Forest Tour, Love the Forest scheme, Pedall and the New Forest Marque. 250,000 copies are being distributed over the visitor season.

In terms of New Forest Code campaigns, we and Forestry England launched the annual campaign to protect ground-nesting birds. New Forest Dog Owners Group, the British Horse Society, New Forest Cycle Working Group, PEDALL New Forest Inclusive Cycling, and New Forest Access Forum are among many local groups who are getting behind efforts to support these rare birds by sharing tips and advice on how best to enjoy the Forest during the breeding season.

We also took part in the multi-agency 'Operation Mountie' between November and February. Nearly 100 drivers have been stopped and educated about the dangers of speeding on New Forest roads to reduce the number of animal collisions and deaths.

During the three months on Roger Penny Way and surrounding roads:

- 86 vehicles were stopped for speeding offences
- 16 people received tickets for speeding and invalid licences
- 69 motorists received educational advice from partners agencies who form the New Forest Animal Accident Reduction Group
- Three vehicles were seized due to having no insurance or not having a valid driving licence.

The operation was supported by the Safer Roads Unit Mobile Camera Team and resulted in a further 112 fixed penalty notices being issued for speeding offences along Roger

Penny Way, the B0379 and on the A31 between Stoney Cross and Emery Down. As well as attending the 'days of action' to educate drivers, we supported the campaign online and in the media.

Built environment:

Projects highlighting the special qualities of the built environment of the National Park this quarter have included the local listing project which has received a number of nominations thanks to a media and social campaign which has seen 188,000 impressions and nearly 14,000 engagements. The Design Guide has also been finalised and a press release issued.

Nature connection:

The three-year artist in residence programme was launched with the charity SPUD based in Sway. Following the call for artists which saw 46 applications, the first two artists were revealed.

National Parks collaboration:

We have continued to promote and encourage people to respond to the Landscapes Consultation. The consultation was featured on BBC Countryfile with Tom Heap interviewing Campaign for National Parks policy officer Ruth Bradshaw and Gale Pettifer from Friends of the New Forest at Boltons Bench in Lyndhurst, with some of our ambassadors litter picking featuring in the film segment.

International Women's Day was marked on 8 March with a series of blogs and social posts of women working in the New Forest National Park. This was joined by partners including other national parks, Campaign for National Parks and National Parks UK all brought together under the hashtags #ExtraordinaryWomen #ExtraordinaryLandscapes.

1.1 Enabling high quality and beneficial experiences of the National Park

Historic Routes project:

Filming for a short promotional film, delayed by Covid, has now been completed and is now being edited. This short film, for our YouTube channel, briefly visits all five Historic Routes trails encouraging those living close to a trail to ditch their car and explore these lovely locations via their local walking trail.

Tatchbury Hospital, Trail enhancements and Nature Stepping Stones:

The team at the Hospital has been able to progress the installation of the new Trim Trail waymarker posts, carved wooden bench and interpretation panel.

Volunteering and Ambassadors

The New Forest National Park Volunteer Fair went virtual on the 6 March and 16 groups presented using Microsoft Teams Live about their volunteering offers. This was the last event of the Awakening Festival and its focus on the climate and nature emergencies. We were pleased to welcome new groups to the fair such as Greener Brockenhurst, Greener Living Fordingbridge and Ringwood Race Against Time, with offers on how to help tackle the emergencies. Our increased links with Southampton through the Green and Blue Horizons work resulted in new groups such as Southampton City Council's Open Spaces team and Sholing Valleys Nature Reserve also joining forces for the fair. 240 people signed up for the event with 130 attending on the day. The links to the fair remain live so we will monitor how many visit the pages to view the links.

The NPA volunteering programme delivered a range of activities over the winter period, with a total of 358 volunteer days. Volunteers have been invited to take part in the following opportunities:

- Restoring scheduled ancient monuments by removing gorse. Volunteers have visited barrows at Longslade View, Wilverley Pit, Hawkhill Inclosure, Crockford, Whitemoor Pond, Hilltop and at Roundhills campsite.
- Gapping up a hedgerow at Rockford Farm by planting a native mix and removing bracken to give space for the new plants to become established.
- Removing bramble from the wildflower meadow and medium sized trees along the edge of the pond.
- Cutting and burning gorse, Scots pine and birch on Poors Common, Burton Common and Cranemoor Common on the Meyrick Estate.
- Invasive species removal of rhododendron at Harrow Wood, Bransgore and Furzey Grounds, Walhampton to help restore these habitats to heathland and woodland respectively.

A total of 144 volunteers have given 3,067 hours to our volunteering programme between May 2021 and March 2022. The volunteer database has a total of 777 registered volunteers, with 48 new volunteers registered in this period.

Health and Wellbeing

The 'Green Health Hub', a signposting website for nature and health offers, is being developed and is the first project of the network of green groups across the Forest and surrounding area. This is planned to go live in the summer. The 'Nature Health Network', a wider regional and national knowledge-sharing initiative between the NPA and Bournemouth University, returned on 15 March, with speakers on nature connection from DeMonfort University and on climate and health from Pedal for Parks.

PEDALL

PEDALL has agreed the lease with NHS and moved into its new cycling hub at Ashurst. We will operate temporarily from the chapel while the Ashurst Hospital site is being

redeveloped into a care home and wellbeing centre by the NHS. Once the NHS redevelopment of the site is complete PEDALL will move into its own bespoke container adjacent to the community wellbeing centre. There is work to be done to make the chapel fit for purpose and we are working with our volunteers and raising funds to make this happen.

We are working with Pentaver Ltd in Southampton to fit out the bespoke PEDALL container using the Sport England funding.

The PEDALL team, which now includes 35 active volunteers, held a Strategy and Planning day in January to gather ideas and commitment to start planning for the future of PEDALL after the current Lottery funding ends in 2023. There have been follow-up sessions to keep everyone on track and provide support. Friends of PEDALL charity has been strengthened with two new trustees who have a commercial background.

Our second ride leader left post in January so we are currently recruiting a replacement. Our volunteer ride leaders have stepped up and are helping to deliver some rides. We are working to try and deliver additional needs work experience and apprenticeships, and sourcing funding to support this.

We submitted our first year report to The National Lottery Community Fund (our primary funder), which included an external evaluation of PEDALL in 2021. The Lottery was delighted with progress given the challenging year and has agreed to carry over any unspent budgets for delivery in 2022. The external evaluation report, which contains some fantastic case studies, is available for further information on the project.

The number of rides and outcomes we need to deliver in 2022 are high as they include rides we were unable to deliver in 2021 due to the delay in moving in to Ashurst and COVID restrictions, as well as the 2022 rides. There has been a slow uptake in our Confidence/ COVID recovery rides and we are asking for assistance from our partners to promote PEDALL and the wellbeing opportunities PEDALL provides.

With the support of volunteers, PEDALL has been out and about in February taking the inclusive cycles to Lymington, Bournemouth and Southampton to promote the project and encourage more people to come out into the New Forest for rides. Minister Lord Benyon also tried out a specially adapted bike during his visit to the Forest on 10 March.

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

Both the RMS Advisory Group and RMS Steering Group have met since the last Authority meeting. Agenda items included updates on the Partnership Plan, the Article 4 Direction

(for campsites), the feasibility of a Public Spaces Protection Order and the Government's Response to the Landscapes Review. In regard to the latter, officers have also attended Defra hosted workshops to consider the Government's proposals for managing visitor pressures.

We have again secured the necessary funding for a People and Wildlife Ranger (on behalf of NFDC) as well as our own our seasonal rangers and we are now recruiting to these posts.

Access and Rights of Way

We installed seven National Park Signposts on the Lepe to Exbury promoted route. This is a long route and these will be supplemented with another tranche of signposting funded by the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

We are refreshing the look of the New Forest Walks App and adding eight new walks. The app is extremely popular (with over 1200 downloads already this month). We hope to further boost usage and encourage more people to explore the footpaths on their doorsteps and reduce the need to drive to the designated land and in turn reduce associated impacts on fragile habitats.

3 Prosper

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

New Forest Marque

The Marque Board has been planning for the coming year. The 22/23 Directory will be launched in the spring and Marque members are preparing to return to key events such as the New Forest Show in July and Ellingham Show in August.

Marque member and Director Andrew Parry Norton hosted an event at Storms Farm for the Awakening Festival, with 20 people taking part in a tour of the farm and tasting of Marque produce. An associated Facebook competition resulted in 80 new followers for the Marque.

The Ministerial visit was catered by Marque members, The Trough, receiving a great deal of praise including, 'the best sandwich lunch I've ever had'.

Visitor experience

We are working with SSG (Save St Giles) in Godhsill. They are on track to repurpose the church into an information and 'retreat' space, including wooden panels telling the story of Godshill. They are trying to raise money to make various improvements to cater mostly

for the summer walkers/cyclists from the nearby holiday site, possibly to include a bike repair station and a water refill point. They have been advised of our Sustainable Communities Fund.

We have met with New Forest information providers and shared plans for the coming summer season including the relaunch of the 'care for the Forest, care for each other' approach. We are planning a visitor facing short film to highlight how to get the best from a visit while caring for the National Park, which we also intend to use as a training aid for visitor focused businesses. We are also planning an online visits survey for the summer months.

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

New Forest Tour

The New Forest Tour will operate Saturday 25 June – Sunday 18 September (inclusive), with negligible changes to the timetable and routes. We will continue to promote car-free ways to access the Tour (connecting buses, trains and ferries) as well as free bike carriage on the Tour fleet. Against a general backdrop of bus driver shortages and slower recruitment, as well as rail fares rising by 3.8% - the highest increase in nine years – this is more challenging. We will continue to work with the operator to promote the New Forest Tour via social media. The onboard audio commentary will impart the Forest-friendly messaging and information. Due to funding restrictions, unfortunately there will be no NPA concierge to welcome visitors at Brockenhurst station. Being in receipt of government support precludes transport operators from making profit which in turn impacts on the ability to upgrade the New Forest Tour fleet, although this remains a long-term objective.

Sustainable transport

Recovery to normal levels of bus patronage was negatively impacted with the arrival of Omicron. The good news, however, is that Covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant will continue.

As an 'enhanced partner', we are working with HCC to try to improve rural bus services as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan. However, the national Bus Back Better fund has shrunk from £3bn to £1.4bn, which will affect DfT funding allocation to local authorities. We recently took part in HCC's passenger transport forum in which insufficient rural services were confirmed as a top priority during the enhanced partnership consultation. Demand responsive transport was suggested as a possible solution to this challenge.

Reinstating the shuttle extension bus service to Lepe Country Park has not progressed owing to infrastructural and practical obstacles on site. On a more positive note, Busters New Forest Explorer will operate again this year starting Saturday 9 April until September, from Highcliffe to Ringwood via Burley. Busters Beach Bus open-top bus service also restarts on Saturday 9 April until October, covering the coast westwards of the National Park.

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

Affordable Housing

As reported earlier, detailed planning applications for two of the adopted Local Plan housing site allocations in Ashurst and Sway are currently under consideration. As submitted both applications include a policy-compliant level of on-site affordable housing (in terms of numbers - 50%), which would be secured for local people in housing need in accordance with the Local Plan policies. Officers are currently considering a wide range of material planning considerations on these applications and both applications will be presented to future Planning Committee meetings for determination.

We continue to explore options for rural exception sites and there are a few schemes which are being considered at the moment.

Sustainable Communities Fund

Over the last year we have supported the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project hosted by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. The project supports the removal of huge swathes of invasive non-native plants such as Himalayan balsam, from New Forest riverbanks, allowing wildflowers to flourish. During 2021, 55 volunteers participated and gave 1,605 hours of their time to help remove Himalayan balsam. This included several new sites along the lower reaches of the Cadnam River near its confluence with the River Blackwater. An annual forum meeting is planned in March to review the activities of the project. Forum members will also hear presentations from the Blackwater Conservation Group and Wessex Rivers Trust, as well as updates on research currently being undertaken relating to biological control of invasive non-native plants.

4 **Achieving Excellence**

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

Human Resources

As at 28 February 2022 the total staff headcount was 80 or 70.18 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	Full Time Equivalents	Variation from previous report
Core funded	66*	- 1	58.12*	- 0.61
Funded by external projects	14	- 1	12.05	- 0.81
Total	80	- 2	70.18	- 1.41

*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 said goodbye to:

Role	Contract type	How role will be filled in future
Inclusive Cycling Ride Leader	Fixed term, project funded	Seasonal replacement for 2022
Senior Planning Officer	Permanent, core funded	Two new permanent roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Officer • Senior Planning Assistant

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

Advanced versions of the Partnership Plan and action plan were presented at the last Authority meeting. They included consultation feedback from individuals and organisations. Since, Members, staff and partners have had further opportunity to provide input. Where appropriate and relevant this has been included in the latest, final draft versions that are now being presented to Members. This update on the Partnership Plan is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

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

ICT Services

Security - there continues to be what seems a never-ending release of security updates which, although rolled out quickly by IT still need users to allow them to run. This is being reviewed and may be changed so the updates cannot be ignored and will automatically run, whilst this may cause a minor inconvenience to users it will ensure updates are installed without any delay.

The change to Microsoft Defender has already proved useful, identifying, and removing many emails with infected attachments / links.

Following the piloting exercise in December multi factor authentication has now been rolled out to all Members.

Major security flaws were announced in late December referred to as Log4J and IT teams across the world scrambled to update and protect systems. This led to us being contacted directly by DEFRA to report our on our affected systems. The VCentre was upgraded mid-January enabling the latest security updates to be installed to protect us from the Log4J vulnerabilities.

The Cyber Audit report has now been issued giving an overall finding of reasonable. There were ten management actions identified, two out of the three marked as high have been addressed and the remaining one, relating to a cyber security incident response plan is already in hand.

Mid-February the server room had to be powered down for urgent electrical testing to take place. Our Disaster Recovery plan is kept up to date but having a little notice prior to the power down allowed us to double check it and was re-assuring that no changes were required.

Replacement planning system – Training has taken place through February continuing into March. Access to the system for testing and familiarisation purposes should be available first week of March. Conversations are being held at a senior level regarding delivery times for the Citizen Portals which provide the web facing side of the system and GIS. The team's focus now is to input all the documents templates and merge fields.

Training - A few courses included as part of our Microsoft licence package have been attended:

- ICT Technical officer - MS Azure fundamentals
- ICT Technical officer and Systems Support Technician - MS security compliance and identity fundamentals

The first week of 2022 brought with it the Y2K22 bug which affected all Exchange on premises servers. For us this affected the server used for the planning emails, fortunately, although our IT Officer was on leave, a support maintenance agreement we have in place enabled us to get urgent third-party assistance to help which minimised the impact to the planning system.

The new time management system, built and designed by the Systems Support Technician to replace TiM has now been released to staff.

Changes to the way land charges are dealt with are being rolled out across the country with NFDC, TV, Wiltshire being moved to the new system sometime later this year or next. This will lead to the originating authorities being responsible providing the data and liable for any compensation challenges should the data be incorrect. Land Registry will be doing a data comparison between the data the local authorities provide and the data we hold.

There is still an issue with the HSPN which is delaying the final upgrade of the infrastructure whilst the IT Technical Officer is working to resolve this it may result in an upgrade of the firewall being necessary which would be another major project.

An ICT survey has been sent out to staff, the last one was in 2018 and a lot has changed in that time. The questionnaire is designed to assist us in providing the best service we can and help shape the service we provide going forwards.

5 Members

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

- 31 January – Standards Committee
- 2 February – Government Response to the Landscape Review Members Day
- 7 February – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 15 February – Planning Committee
- 3 March – Consultative Panel
- 15 March – Planning Committee

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- 19 April – Planning Committee
- 12 May – Members Day – Rangers
- 17 May – Planning Committee
- 6 June – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee

- 9 June – Consultative Panel
- 13 June – New Forest Access Forum
- 21 June – Planning Committee
- 29 June – Members Day - TBC

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- 28 January – Meeting with Chief Executive and Leader, NFDC
- 28 January – Climate Action meeting with NFDC
- 31 January – New Forest Leadership Group meeting
- 1 February – speaker at Health & Wellbeing in National Parks meeting
- 2 February – Members Day
- 2 February – Nature Recovery Network meeting
- 3 February – Nature Recovery meeting with Natural England
- 3 February – Nature Recovery meeting with consultants
- 9 February – Wildlife Roundtable
- 9 February – Nature Recovery Network Partnership Management Group meeting
- 11 February – Nature Recovery Business Case meeting
- 11 February – meeting with Chair, Wildlife Roundtable
- 15 February – Nature Recovery meeting with Natural England
- 16 February – Nature Recovery meeting with Peak District NPA
- 17 February – Landscapes for Everyone meeting
- 17 February – Business South Board Meeting
- 17 February – Nature Recovery meeting with NPE
- 18 February – St Georges Leadership Fellows - 'Leader to Leader Exchanges'
- 23 February – Meeting with consultants
- 1 March – Solent Freeport meeting
- 2 March – Leading the Green Revolution development sessions
- 3 March – meeting with PFSH
- 3 March – Hampshire & Isle of Wight Dinner
- 4 March – HIOW CX meeting
- 4 March – Solent Net Zero meeting
- 7 March – meeting with Natural England
- 7 March – New Forest Estates meeting
- 8 March – Leadership Insights Group
- 9 March – meeting with CX, NFDC
- 9 March – H&W discussion with NPE
- 10 March – Co-hosting Lord Richard Benyon Ministerial visit
- 14 March – Solent Freeport meeting
- 16 March – Nature Recovery Network meeting
- 17 March – Wildlife Roundtable
- 17 March – Green Halo Steering Group
- 18 March – Meeting with Health Colleagues, NHS and OHID

- 18 March – St Georges Leadership Fellows – Leader to Leader Exchanges
- 18 March – meeting with NFDC and temporary Police Assistant Chief Constable
- 21 March – English NP Officers Group meeting
- 22 March – Directors of Conservation meeting (National)
- 23 March – Landscapes for Everyone meeting (National)

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- 27 January – Solent Freeport meeting
- 28 January – Meeting with Chief Executive and Leader, NFDC
- 14 February – PfSH Joint Committee meeting
- 16 February – Solent Freeport Board meeting
- 1 March – Solent Freeport and Net Zero meeting
- 10 March – Co-hosting Lord Richard Benyon visit
- 14 March – Solent Freeport and the Green Agenda meeting

6 Recommendation

To note the report.