

## RAPC 500-23

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 6 MARCH 2023

### Team New Forest – joint working between the New Forest National Park Authority and Forestry England

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

#### 1 Summary

- 1.1 The Re:New Forest Partnership Plan highlights the need for a culture of collaboration to deliver key policies and measures to enhance the National Park landscape, economy and communities. The Authority has a number of existing partnerships in place that illustrate the Team New Forest approach. This paper looks at our work with Forestry England.

#### Recommendation:

Members are requested to note the content of the report and the presentation from the Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest

#### 2 Introduction

- 2.1 Forestry England and National Parks England have a joint national Accord (April 2018) which sets out 5 priority areas where the two bodies will work together to deliver a shared ambition for the management of woods and forests within England's National Parks. These 5 priorities are:
- Decision making that enhances National Park landscapes and the woodlands in them
  - Woodland creation and expansion in National Parks
  - Exemplary FE and NPA owned/managed woodlands in National Parks
  - Woodland grant schemes fit for the future
  - National Parks woodlands for people
- 2.2 With almost 50% of the New Forest National Park under the management of Forestry England the relationship between the two organisations is closer here than in many other National Parks. On the publication of the Accord the NFNPA and FE worked to develop local outcomes that can interpret the national accord at the local level. These include:
- Sharing resources and capacity
  - Data and evidence
  - Skills and expertise (especially around land management and woodland creation projects)
  - Community engagement
  - Staff development and training (secondments, apprenticeships and shared posts)

2.3 Progress on these local outcomes was reported to members in November 2020 (RAPC 436/20), highlighting joint working in response to the ending of the national “lockdown” period in that summer, the renewal of the Historic Environment SLA, joint work on Recreation impact mitigation and the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, the New Forest Ambassadors Scheme and the OPOF funded Apprentice Ranger programme.

2.4 Since November 2020 joint working has continued on these local outcomes with some examples highlighted below:

2.5 **Sharing resources and capacity**

- The National Park Authority (NPA) and Forestry England (FE) are part of a wider steering group comprising eight planning authorities and Natural England overseeing the development of a more strategic approach to mitigating the recreational impacts of planned new development on the New Forest’s internationally designated sites. We jointly hosted an event for neighbouring planning authorities in summer 2022 illustrating the work of the respective ranger teams, information and awareness raising which was well received by attendees.
- The majority of neighbouring planning authorities now have mitigation schemes in place and the steering group’s work is now focused on mitigation measures within the designated sites. Forestry England are a key player in this and are actively engaged in the work.
- NPA and FE officers have liaised closely in working with NFDC on the two proposed Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs).
- The ongoing HLS scheme and the development of the Environmental Land Management scheme (ELM) is a key area of interest for both the delivery of conservation measures and the viability of commoning. The NPA and FE work together through the HLS Partnership Board and Forest Farming Group to deliver the HLS outcomes and examine the consequences for the forest from the changes to England’s Agricultural policy. This has included hosting Defra Ministerial visits and contributing to an assessment of the suitability of Countryside Stewardship for the forest.
- The Historic Environment Service SLA has continued, with the NPA providing advice, guidance and support to FE on archaeology and cultural heritage across the entire South England Forest District, complementing the archaeology work carried out on the Crown Lands under the HLS scheme. The current SLA with Forestry England ends on 31 March 2023. The NPA has been invited to re-tender for the service for a further three years with the possibility of a further extension.
- FE and the NPA collaborate extensively with regards access and learning. Examples include developing the Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure plan and liaising with HCC and NFDC, joint development and support of the Cycle Working Group including liaison with the Verderers on the off-road cycle network, accessibility routes for walking and joint educational visits. FE provide a home to the inclusive wellbeing project PEDALL at Burley as at nominal rate and also support this through special permission to use at the Ashurst site.

- The Care for the Forest, Care for each other Action Plan was created to ensure a joint partnership approach to the pressures directly arising from Covid 19. The Operational Group has continued to meet with representatives from FE, NPA, NFDC, HCC, NT and HIOWWT. This will continue and evolve to identify strategic approaches to delivering the New Forest Code and reducing negative impacts of recreation on the ground. It is hoped communication with FE recreation managers can be maintained through this.
- Operation Mountie is a multi-agency response to reducing both the speed of traffic and animal deaths on the roads across the New Forest. Amongst others, NPA and FE rangers recently were honoured with a Certificate of Congratulations from the New Forest District Police Commander as recognition of their joint contributions towards this work.

## 2.6 Data and evidence

- FE were a key partner in the NEIRF funded project to design and test a model for restoring nature with private financing. Working with the NPA, Palladium and two private estates the project examined the suitability of 60ha of FE land for generating ecosystem service credits. While the project site ultimately proved ineligible for private financing the learning from the study contributed to the overall delivery of the project.

## 2.7 Community engagement

- The Community Manager at FE is a regular attendee at the Quadrant meetings, providing Parish Council representatives with updates on work and acting as a key point of contact for FE.
- NPA Rangers continue to work closely with FE Rangers and Keepers throughout the year with particular focus on ground nesting bird season, the deer rut and busy summer visitor season. Where possible patrols and events are attended jointly to provide a partnership message and support for each organisation. Recent examples include a visit for local refugees attending a walk with conservation pine pulling session at Shatterford. Representatives from both organisations have attended careers fairs and green skills events with local schools and training providers.

## 2.8 Staff development and training (secondments, apprenticeships and shared posts)

- Following the success of the OPOF Apprentice Ranger Scheme, budget was secured through the Green and Blue Horizons fund to continue the scheme for an additional cohort of 16 months. FE will host the two apprentices later in summer 2023 for a ten-week placement. Support and assistance have been given with FE staff assisting the recruitment of apprentice rangers and site locations for interview days.

### **3 Continued joint working**

- 3.1 The production of the Partnership Plan in July 2022 has provided an opportunity to review how FE and NFNPA work together. Work is now being aligned around delivery of actions in the Partnership Plan where there is particular emphasis on land management, ecology and the HLS programme (Nature Recovery and Net Zero with Nature) recreation and public affairs (An inclusive National Park) and ensuring the Crown Lands continue to be and contribute to a living, working landscape of the New Forest (Thriving Forest).

#### **Recommendation**

Members are requested to note the content of the report and the presentation from the Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest

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