

## NFNPA RAPC 517/23

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 4 SEPTEMBER 2023

### TEAM NEW FOREST – NEW FOREST LAND ADVICE SERVICE

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

#### 1. Summary

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 covers the work of the New Forest Land Advice Service; a partnership between the NFNPA, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) and Natural England.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 The New Forest Land Advice Service evolved from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Forest Friendly Farming Initiative which had provided free advice to commoners and landowners since 2009. The NPA and HIWWT were supported by Natural England to extend the Land Advice Service to the wider New Forest, Avon Valley and coastal plain enabling landowners, commoners, and land managers to access a range of advice, support, training and grants, promoting sustainable land management practices and management advice. Natural England left the partnership in 2014 but a succession of grants from the Verderers' Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Scheme, National Lottery 'Our Past Our Future' and the Green Recovery Fund enabled the NFLAS to continue to deliver projects and manage a range of projects; building a professional reputation for local delivery of advice and guidance.
- 2.2 Staffing changes and the conclusion of some project funding in recent years has meant the NFLAS has lost considerable experience, along with an overall reduction in the number of advisors. However, the new Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme includes a budget for advice and administration until at least March 2025 and, earlier this month, the HLS Board agreed to continue supporting the NFLAS for the remaining four years of their funding rollover to the end of 2027.

#### 3. Current Position

- 3.1 The NPA and HIWWT remain firmly committed to NFLAS, especially at a time of agricultural transition with changing programmes of support for farmers, commoners and land managers and an urgent need to work with the land management sector to deliver nature recovery and net zero ambitions. The need for effective land advice has arguably never been greater.

- 3.2 There are currently two full time advisors (one employed by HIWWT, one by the Authority) and a part-time administrator. The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust has also been contracted-in to help deliver the FiPL programme in the Avon Valley with a field officer working with the NFLAS advisors.
- 3.3 To improve co-ordination of advice within the National Park, Natural England has agreed to be part of a steering group for NFLAS. Core work for the advisors will include:
- Land management advice and management plans for grasslands, heathlands, woodlands, watercourses, ponds and other environmental features, facilitating the delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme
  - Advice for holdings managed by New Forest Commoners (supported by HLS funding)
  - Hedgerow management advice
  - Advice about applying for land management related grants, e.g. Countryside Stewardship
  - Nitrate Vulnerable Zones advice
  - Cross Compliance advice
  - Assistance with Basic Payment Scheme and Rural Land Registry enquiries
  - Matchmaking service for landowners and graziers to ensure a supply of back-up land for grazing
  - Organising training, courses and events
  - Support for community groups interested in wildlife conservation in their green spaces.

#### 4. Future Opportunities

- 4.1 The NPA and HIWWT are working to align the NFLAS work programme with the Nature Recovery and Net Zero objectives within the Partnership Plan and the Trust's Wilder Strategy. Workstreams are being developed in the following key areas:

**Advice to landowners on nature restoration projects:**

Habitat creation, management and connectivity, inspire and engage groups of landowners to undertake landscape-scale projects benefitting climate and nature, offer training events and implement nature-based solutions where they would have greatest impact.

**Core support for the New Forest commoning community:**

Helping commoners understand the HLS agreement, manage their land and livestock to ensure best practice impact to HLS land, and offer a training programme on farming and agreement regulations.

**Provision of farm business advice:**

Promoting regenerative farming, advice on succession and planning, advice on soil management and carbon schemes, undertaking training on legislation and future farming grants.

**Greater understanding of emerging markets for nature finance:**

Working with National Parks Partnerships and Revere to improve our knowledge and understanding of the opportunities provided by the markets for carbon, Biodiversity Net Gain and nutrient mitigation.

**5. Future Resources**

5.1 The Authority will be recruiting a ‘Net Zero with Nature Manager’ before the end of this calendar year, who will have responsibility for the day-to-day management of the NFLAS team. The FiPL and HLS grants provide the ongoing resource to maintain the Land Advice Service at its current staffing level. However, with demand for advice likely to remain high due to uncertainty around the Agricultural Transition programme, there will be a need to secure additional resources to expand the support and services provided by the NFLAS team.

5.2 The NPA, HIWWT and Natural England will work together to examine opportunities for extending the NFLAS team. This will include:

- Better co-ordination and targeting of advice provided by other agencies such as Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Natural England. This could potentially involve additional agencies joining the NFLAS partnership
- Developing a more commercial approach to the work of the NFLAS, e.g. charging for the provision of advice where this is not covered by the use of grant funding
- Seeking additional grant funding, particularly for the development of farm business advice – an area that is currently lacking within the NFLAS.

A Memorandum of Agreement and Terms of Reference will be drawn up to formalise the arrangement between the NPA, HIWWT and Natural England. This will be extended to include additional partners as opportunities arise.

**Recommendation**

**Members are requested to note the content of the report.**

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**Equality and Diversity Implications:**

There are no specific Equality, Diversity or Inclusion implications arising out of this report.