

AM 671/24






**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 21 MARCH 2024**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 25 January 2024. The report has been formatted to accord with our statutory purposes and duty; these are delivered by the Re:New Forest themes of 'Climate, Nature, People, Place, Partnership and Achieving Excellence' from our newly agreed Business Plan, summarised as follows:

 Re:New Climate	 Re:New Nature	 Re:New People	 Re:New Place	 Re:New Partnership
Establishing data and evidence baseline and implementing nature-based climate solutions.	Making space for nature and mitigating recreational pressures.	Increasing green skills and jobs - supporting New Forest business / green tourism. Sustainable land management and securing the future of commoning.	Promoting health and wellbeing through contact with nature.	Establishing stronger partnerships within the boundary.
Building a New Forest coalition for a Net Zero economy.	Enhancing natural capital.	Increasing the National Park's resilience to the effects of climate change.	Connecting people with nature and landscape.	Leading the green agenda beyond the New Forest.
Activating communities and increasing sustainable travel.	Supporting nature recovery through Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).	Increasing the availability of affordable housing.	Safeguarding cultural heritage.	Developing a centre of excellence of insights and innovation for the New Forest.
Re:New Organisation: Achieving Excellence				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering high-quality services through a capable and motivated staff team • Maximising resources and using them efficiently and effectively • Modernising our use of the office space and our wider ways of working 				

Recommendation:

To note the report.

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Equality and Diversity

The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination in respect of certain protected characteristics and places us under a duty to have due regard to the advancement of equality in the exercise of our functions. We aim to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity throughout all aspects of our work. More details regarding our projects and initiatives, such as PEDALL, are set out in the relevant reports and Equality Impact Assessments.

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In the eight weeks since our last Authority meeting the spring has started to take hold with the Forest Awakening Festival running over 70 events and 50 organisations involved to highlight the climate and nature emergency in the New Forest.

Support for New Forest habitats has moved forward with the introduction of nationwide Biodiversity Net Gain regulations. BNG makes sure habitats for wildlife are left in a better state than they were before development and developers must deliver a BNG of at least 10%. The requirement for BNG will apply to many smaller developments from 2 April.

This comes alongside the inaugural meeting of Re:New Nature Partnership and our support of the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Hampshire and Wiltshire, which will set the direction for projects and collaborations to boost nature in and around our National Park.

Our rich natural heritage was also the focus of a conference organised by the New Forest Biodiversity Forum with Wild New Forest and attended by NPA staff. The Forum focused improving wildlife surveying, monitoring, recording and conservation and provided an opportunity to promote nature recover with our developing Re:New Nature programme.

We commissioned a report to explore green links to connect people and wildlife between the Southampton Water and the National Park. This Waterside Green Links Study was launched at a workshop of partners organisations with interest in the area. Opportunities for innovative solutions to connect across for the benefit of people and nature.

The future of commoning and how it is subsidised is extremely complex and is at a critical point as the Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship scheme is due to end in 2027. The Forest Farming Group has found funding and agreed a feasibility study into the options for a future scheme.

The three major housing schemes allocated in the National Park Local Plan are progressing with the Lyndhurst Park Hotel site moving ahead; work expected to start soon on the Church Lane site at Sway; and planning permission issued for the site in Whartons Lane at Ashurst. All three sites include affordable housing allocations. Our

planning team received over nearly 100 applications in two months and determined a similar number, 94% of which were approved. Our planning application process was the subject of an Internal Audit Report which was extremely positive and received the highest possible assurance opinion.

The partners of the YouCAN youth for climate and nature £1.4m scheme met for the first board meeting. We are already seeing a wide range of collaborative activities with and for young people among the seven partner organisations at the start of the three-year scheme. One of the NPA-led projects is a junior ranger programme and 25 young people have already committed to take part.

We were delighted that our Pedall inclusive cycling charity was awarded £384,000 ensuring a level of stability for the charity over the next five years. With the result of several other bids expected soon, if successful the Authority would be managing 12 partnership grants totalling around £3.4m investment in the New Forest. Another £300,000 in applications to the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative is being prepared. This totals £15m of [funding](#) brought into the Forest for partnership projects since 2010 and is a clear demonstration of how we're working as 'Team New Forest' to be greater than the sum of our parts at a time of scarce resources.

The end of January saw the publication of the [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#), which sets the ambition for Protected Landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes) to achieve 3 outcomes set out in the Environment Improvement Plan 2023: Thriving plants and wildlife, Mitigating and adapting to climate change and Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment. Our Re:New Forest Partnership Plan is well aligned with these targets and the Partnership Leaders Panel met on 7 March to look at how we respond to this and the Duty on all public bodies to further National Park purposes that came into law at the end of 2023.

The year ahead is shaping up to be a very important one for Protected Landscapes as we celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the UK's first national park in December and will put a spotlight on how we can work together in the New Forest to deliver more for our landscape communities and the nation.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

The report has been formatted to accord with the statutory purposes and duty, which we often refer to as Protect, Enjoy and Prosper. These are delivered through our Re:New 'Climate, Nature, People, Place, Partnership, Achieving Excellence' objectives from the newly agreed Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the first page.

Our Business Plan is delivered through annual Work Programmes, progress on which is set out in these reports alongside the formal quarterly reporting under the six themes to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee; at the end of each year we produce an Annual Review document.

The final section of this report lists the Members', our Chair's and the Chief Executive's activities and events.

1 First Purpose: Protect

Re:New Nature

As reported last time, the Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Hampshire and Wiltshire are being prepared and the NPA has a formal role as a supporting authority for both strategies. In February NPA staff assisted with delivering two locally focused workshops: a community group event with the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and a larger event led by Hampshire County Council. Both events were opportunities to highlight the Re:New Nature priorities for the New Forest and help identify possible areas for investment through Biodiversity Net Gain and Environmental Land Management schemes.

A New Forest Biodiversity Conference was held on 6 and 7 February, providing a further opportunity to promote our Re:New Nature Challenge to 100+ organisations and individuals working to support and improve biodiversity survey, monitoring, recording and conservation in and around the National Park. The Conference was organised by the New Forest Biodiversity Forum; we have a seat on the forum steering group and support comes from the Kairos Philanthropy Fund. A number of staff attended the Forum and all were able to take information from the Conference and apply it to their day to day work. It is hoped that the Conference will be an annual event.

The Land Advice Service Team has continued to develop projects to be supported by the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. The Local Assessment Panel approved a further project at its meeting in February and the focus now is to ensure the remaining budget is fully allocated by the end of this month.

January saw the publication of the [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#), which sets the ambition for Protected Landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes) to achieve 3 outcomes set out in the Environment Improvement Plan 2023: Thriving plants and wildlife, Mitigating and adapting to climate change and

Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment. The priorities of the Partnership Plan largely align with these targets and we will be working with the National Park family and Natural England to apportion the contribution we can make in ways that reflect the local circumstances of the New Forest. The NPA will be obliged to publish provisional targets on our website within 18 months and include them in future updates of the Partnership Plan.

Linking the New Forest landscape with Southampton Water

A Waterside Green Links Study has been prepared on behalf of the New Forest National Park Authority by consultants ARUP and contains a thorough examination of the opportunities for creating green links between the National Park landscape and Southampton Water, across the Waterside and the A326. Such links could enable new connections for wildlife and people and grazing opportunities within the Waterside and foreshore of Southampton Water with possible innovative solutions such as green bridges and new underpasses, as well as improving existing underpasses. The study was launched at a workshop at the end of February with all major partner organisations of the National Park in attendance and represents the start of an innovative and thought-provoking process to explore what might be possible.

Development Management

97 applications were received from 1 January to 29 February 2024. In the same period 96 applications were determined with an approval rate of 94%.

During this same period, two appeal decisions were received. Both were dismissed.

Planning permission for the site allocation at Whartons Lane in Ashurst (62 dwellings) was issued on 31 January following completion of the legal agreement. Works are at an advanced stage in the redevelopment for the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel site and it is expected that works will commence soon on the approved scheme for 46 new dwellings at Church Lane in Sway. There has been some recent media speculation over the future of the Fawley Waterside scheme (the s106 legal agreement has still not been completed) and we expect to receive some clarification from the applicants/investors on their future intentions for the site in the next few weeks.

A well-attended Members' Day was held at the Lyndhurst Community Centre on 13 February which focused on recent legislative and policy changes affecting planning decisions as well as taking a forward look at the planning team's work programme for 2024.

We were pleased to receive an extremely positive Internal Audit Report that demonstrated a well-managed 'end-to-end' planning application process with suitable controls in place at each stage of the application process. The report tested all types of planning applications received from August to November 2023 and concluded that 'A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls

operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.' The 'substantial' assurance opinion provided is the highest available.

We welcomed two new Planning Officers - Joshua Dawes and Rhian Arquier – to the team on 4 March.

Planning Enforcement

Since the last Authority meeting the team have dealt with 37 new cases and closed 43 cases running with an average of 140 cases open at any one time.

During the same period, we have issued five Planning Contravention Notices (PCNs) in response to suspected breaches of planning control and have prepared a number of Enforcement Notices ready for issue. One already served in recent weeks is against a mobile home in Landford which is being used for independent residential purposes. The team is currently working on and awaiting the outcome of five enforcement appeals.

Non-compliance with two earlier enforcement notices was the subject of a report to the Planning Committee last month.

Policy

The eight-week public consultation on the submission draft Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan – which covers the whole of the New Forest National Park – closed on 5 March. The draft Plan, supporting evidence base and all the representations made at this final Regulation 19 stage will be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in the summer.

The Policy team continues to assess the on-going reforms to the planning system regarding their implications for the New Forest National Park and the statutory planning functions of the Authority. Our Planning Committee on 19 March considered a report on the latest proposed revisions to national Permitted Development Rights which would extend the types of development that could be undertaken in nationally protected landscapes without the need for full planning permission. We have consistently highlighted the conflicts of this approach with the delivery of the statutory National Park purposes. This has been brought into sharper focus with the strengthened duty to seek to further the National Park purposes when making decisions that could affect National Parks, introduced through the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023. We are expecting further extended national permitted development rights to be announced in the summer.

Work is progressing well on the draft Ringwood and Wellow neighbourhood plans. The independent examiner's report into the draft Ringwood Plan has been received, which concludes that subject to modifications the plan meets the necessary tests and legal requirements. Authority officers are now liaising with planning colleagues at New Forest District Council and Ringwood Town Council to prepare the document for local referendum later this year. An independent examiner has been appointed to review the

draft Wellow Neighbourhood Plan and all the representations received following the public consultation held in late 2023.

The mandatory requirement for major developments to deliver 'biodiversity net gain' (BNG) came into effect on 12 February. This legal requirement is grounded in the Environment Act 2021 and the Government has recently published further guidance on the delivery of biodiversity net gain – see [Biodiversity net gain - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain). The requirement for BNG will apply to many smaller developments from 2 April. Our Planning Committee considered an update report on BNG at its meeting on 20 February and further details are set out in report PC 449/24.

Archaeology

The Archaeology Team was consulted on 20 New Forest District Council and 18 Authority planning applications and given comments and recommendations on several other ongoing planning cases and enquiries. We've also made three site monitoring visits to NFDC sites to review the archaeological work being conducted.

The Archaeology Team received 12 new requests (equating to 15 actual sites) for Heritage Impact Assessments (Data Packs) and site mark-ups ahead of forestry work. For the SLA with Forestry England, the team progressed 25 sites and made seven visits to sites across the southern district, including on the Isle of Wight and conducted a three-day Watching Brief of works in Fawley Inclosure along the Scheduled Monument.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS):

During this reporting period the team has progressed and concluded five HLS requests, providing Heritage Impact Assessments (Data Packs), site visits and site mark-ups ahead of ground works for ridge, furrow and stump removal, trees and scrub clearance, stream/wetland restoration and lost lawns. The team will now focus on concluding outstanding work from previous years and progressing HLS projects.

LoCATE training 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. Following on from a successful training session in November a new training session is being planned for later this year.

New Forest Oral History Group:

We've seen a few volunteers step away from the team which means that we will advertise the transcription role to gain some new members. Those volunteers remaining continue transcribe oral history recordings (27 tapes) from the Beaulieu and Buckler's Hard Archives, 10 of which are now fully transcribed.

New Forest Knowledge website:

Website views from January to date are 22,696, with WWI and WWII content still high on the most popular pages viewed. In early February a meeting was held with the New Forest Heritage Centre to discuss the site's future. All agreed that the site was extremely popular and a valued resource that both NFHC and the Authority want to see thrive. However, the site is in much need of an update. The NFHC is updating its (now out of date) cataloguing software which will not be able to provide up to date information to the NFK site unless the site is updated. All agreed to continue working together to plan a way forward.

Building Design and Conservation

We have been working with Netley Marsh and Copythorne Parish Councils on the review of the Forest North East Conservation Area and related Character Appraisal. This was identified as one of the National Park's conservation areas with the highest level of planning applications. Netley Marsh Parish Council has identified two areas where consideration could be given to potentially extending the Conservation Area. Officers are in the process of reviewing the information shared by the Parish Council and any proposed revisions would be subject to public consultation later this year.

Our annual Building Design Awards will be presented at the March Authority meeting. The judging panel – made up of four members of our Planning Committee – met in January to review the nominations received and agreed that awards would be presented in three categories this year – best residential, best non-residential and best green building. The awards highlight the positive contribution high quality design makes to the built heritage of the New Forest National Park.

We continue to deal with a very high caseload of applications and pre-application proposals relating to designated (e.g. listed buildings, Conservation Areas) and non-designated (e.g. locally listed buildings) heritage assets in the National Park.

2 Second Purpose: Enjoy

Education and Youth

Focus this spring has been on getting the YouCAN projects up and running. As such we took a decision to take a year out from our popular assembly and online learning programme to schools. We have engaged with a small number of some specific school groups which enabled inclusion of underrepresented groups including pupils at Marchwood and Oak Lodge Schools. It has also been a good time to update and review best practice and procedures and try out new skills in the team including forest bathing.

Applications for Junior Rangers opened in January and 25 young people have signed up for a commitment of a least five monthly sessions. We'll be running sessions every month

with different partner organisations enabling them to make difference and learn about a variety of aspects of the National Park. Our first practical skills session with the NFNPA ranger team was extremely popular.

Our team worked alongside representatives of National Park youth voice to propose to members that we start work to form a youth voice committee or panel. We were pleased that this was unanimously supported and we are all now working with a task and finish group of members to identify next steps.

The New Forest Travel Grant, available to schools and groups visiting venues within our area and members of the New Forest Educators' Forum has closed for the year after being fully subscribed. Over the year, (including two forthcoming trips in March) £6,900 will have enabled 2,470 days of pupils learning - a combination of residentials and day visits.

At the New Forest Volunteer Fair we hosted two bespoke workshops on volunteering for 11 to 18-year-olds and volunteering for a green career which were both very well received. Having young people who already had conservation volunteering stories to share speak as guests was really impactful for their peers.

Public and community events / rangers

We attended the University of Southampton's Science and Engineering Day as part of the Awakening Festival. We co-ordinated the YouCAN project partners to attend together and raise awareness of this project as well as the special qualities of the National Park.

We are in the early stages of planning for a project with three artists and Southampton University to encourage vulnerable communities to express themselves in nature through art and technology. The aim is to have two walks with a film being made about the experience shown at a final screening evening.

Hayden was pleased to meet with Natural England's newly-appointed Langley Wood Local Nature Reserve Manager to strengthen partnership working opportunities in the north west of the National Park.

Rangers worked with Forestry England and Oak Lodge SEN school to support them in completing their Duke of Edinburgh volunteering hours.

Patrolling and engagement with Forest users continued throughout this period, despite the inclement weather. Having a larger mitigation ranger team has provided opportunity to engage year-round and reach a more local demographic during the winter. We continue to promote the New Forest Code and have been distributing literature and information ready for the start of the ground nesting bird season from beginning of March and upcoming Easter holidays.

Area rangers continued to organise and lead tasks for NPA wildlife conservation volunteers. Sites included Teddy's Farm, Harrow Wood and Poors Common. Tasks involved clearing invasive rhododendron and cutting back overgrown gorse to restore woodland and heathland habitats.

Gillie helped facilitate and participated in a number of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy workshops led by Hampshire County Council and the Wildlife Trust, providing input regarding the importance of recreation management for their success and giving insight to access, engagement and wellbeing considerations for future plans.

Ranger team members attended the New Forest Biodiversity Conference. We all gained a huge amount from the wealth and breadth of engaging expert speakers. The information will be invaluable in helping the team get across key messages when engaging with the public out in the Forest and through our walks, talks and events.

On 21 March we will be saying goodbye to our Southwest Area Ranger Claire Sherwood who has been with the Authority for 17 years, firstly in communications then the ranger team. Her wealth of knowledge and expertise of working with the New Forest and with its visitors and local communities will be very much missed but we wish her all the best in her retirement.

Communications

Our Awakening Festival was launched with over 70 events and 50 organisations involved to highlight the climate and nature emergency in the New Forest. The Festival runs throughout March with walks, talks and activities and several events sold out. The Great British Spring Clean litter event is during the Festival and joint New Forest litter picking events are being held.

Our bi-annual Park Life publication is about to be published featuring articles on commoning; the importance of New Forest verges; the 20th anniversary of the New Forest Tour; and an interview about our net zero with nature programme.

Working with New Forest District Council and Culture in Common, of which we are a partner, we promoted a new community garden for Bramshaw which has been designed by local groups and will be on display at the BBC Gardeners' World spring fair at Beaulieu on the first Bank Holiday May weekend.

We promoted the beginning of the ground-nesting bird season, World Wildlife Day and World Wetlands Day. A series of short films have been produced to show how Sustainable Communities Fund grants have helped support a wide range of initiatives and their lasting impact.

The Building Design Awards judging, presentations and promotion of the award winners have been organised with some fantastic developments receiving recognition.

We attended the New Forest Attractions Showcase organised by Go New Forest to promote our publications and initiatives such as the New Forest Code, Marque and Tour to tourism businesses.

The YouCAN youth for climate and nature partnership board met for the first time and we held a session with them to plan the communications for the whole scheme. The Green Groups Network has some funding as part of the scheme and we held a workshop to decide how they want to use the funding to collaborate on sustainable living projects.

Preparation is underway for the Green Halo Partnership conference and 80th anniversary of D-Day (both in June) and the New Forest Show in July.

New Forest Marque

The New Forest Marque members currently stand at 166. Preparations have been underway for the Marque Roadshow at Everton Nurseries being held over two days for the first time on 9 and 10 March. The Local Produce Guide is currently being prepared. This will be the first of a number of roadshows to be held at various venues this year. The 24/25 Local Produce Guide – the directory that showcases the Marque members and the produce and services they provide - is currently being prepared.

Fundraising

Several bids have been submitted recently and if approved, these will provide support for volunteering, apprentice rangers, Pedall, and habitat creation. In combination with existing grant agreements already approved, this would mean we would be managing 12 grants totalling around £3.4m investment in the New Forest. We are also in the process of applying for three landscape improvement grants of up to £300k each via the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative. The first project is working with Hampshire County Council on the Breamore Railway line, near Fordingbridge. The second project is with Forestry England at Fawley and Dibden Inclosures, Dibden Bottom and the wider Beaulieu Heath landscape. A third project to continue landscape enhancement and rhododendron removal at the RSPB's Franchises Lodge Reserve is also to be worked up over the coming year.

Arts Development

We are planning for the next National Park Artist in Residence – Jasper Rowen - to join us in the New Forest in May. Jasper grew up in Kent but now lives and works as an artist in Amsterdam.

He said: 'In the summer of 2019 I cycled from Amsterdam to Dorset. I entered the New Forest National Park just over halfway through the ride. While searching for a bakery, I stumbled upon a curious scene that forced me to stop: a brown pony was standing by the porch of a large white house, completely blocking the door and trapping the residents inside their own home.

'I'm excited to investigate and explore the intangible borders that exist between the different inhabitants of the New Forest National Park. By engaging with the local community, I will seek to learn how they deal with these comical moments of "mundane madness".'

With funding from our sustainable communities fund ArtfulScribe, a not-for-profit writer development agency supporting and celebrating spoken and written word, is setting up a writer in residence in partnership with the Countryside Education Trust in Beaulieu. The writer will be working on site over the next year and help visitors and local people to engage with the special qualities of the New Forest National Park. The residency includes creative writing workshops, production of an anthology or other collection of writings from participants, a written creative response to the Forest throughout the seasons, and potential exhibition material for display at Forest Arts Centre in New Milton to tie in with its literature festival. As part of the residency the writer in residence will connect with the NPA and partner organisations to help inform their work and approach, and access events including the National Park walking and cycling festival and Awakening Festival.

Funded by a £1m investment from Arts Council England, Culture in Common is an arts and cultural programme for the New Forest, co-created with the people that live in the district. The National Park Authority is a consortium member alongside Energise Me (lead), Folio New Forest Arts and Culture, The Handy Trust, and New Forest District Council. The programme is aiming to provide more opportunities for residents to access professional performances and creative activities much closer to home, and what better setting to inspire creativity than that of the National Park. Recent activities have included photo workshops guided by professional photographer Paul Gonella, with opportunities for participants to learn new skills, meet new people and study and appreciate the varied landscape of the National Park. We're also working together with local award-winning designer Leigh Johnstone, also known as The Beardy Gardener, to create a New Forest inspired garden for BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair in May. The garden has been designed and built by home-schooled children in Bramshaw and adult participants of Solent Mind, in collaboration with local award-winning designer Leigh Johnstone. The garden, which has been named 'A Forest of Calm', has been designed to reflect the many benefits that creative opportunities and a connection with nature can have on our mental wellbeing. After the event, the garden will be moved to its permanent home at Bramshaw Village Hall, where regular users of the hall can continue to enjoy and help care for the space.

Cultural heritage and place-shaping strategies

Hampshire County Council, Solent Partnership and New Forest District Council are all in

the process of developing cultural heritage strategies.

We have attended workshops on each to ensure New Forest traditions, heritage and the natural environment are embedded in the place-shaping strategies. Wiltshire Council's emerging strategy is at an initial consultation stage and [comments are invited until 24 March](#).

Health and Wellbeing and inclusive projects

We are planning a Green Halo conference focused on the theme of Health and Wellbeing to take place in the New Forest on 12 June. The Green Health Hub will be highlighted at this event, as well as highlighting the 75th anniversary of national parks in the UK and their role in providing a 'natural health service'.

The Green Health Hub continues to grow with new stories and groups joining the hub. We have met with social prescribers and providing groups locally and in Southampton to raise awareness of the Hub and how it can help people find activities that can help them.

The Walking for Health programme (run by Community First New Forest) which we support continues to grow, with 350 walkers undertaking 1,546 walking hours between October and December 2023. Lyndhurst is one of the most popular walking groups, along with Barton on Sea.

PEDALL

PEDALL, our New Forest Inclusive Cycling charity, has been preparing for the 2024 riding season throughout January and February with an extensive training programme for our volunteering community.

Our rides started at the end of February and we were delighted to welcome back regular riding groups from Tiptoe Primary School, Minstead Trust and Summerwood (supporting adults with learning disability).

Highlights:

We participated in the NFNPA Volunteer Fair in January and have a number of new volunteers in the pipeline to support us in 2024. Enhancing and developing the skills within our volunteering team is critical to our operation. Ensuring our volunteers are offered the opportunity to learn and grow also helps sustain interest and the on-going commitment that is so important to PEDALL. We launched 'safeguarding training' supported by our Friends of Pedall Trustee, Vanessa Targett. The safeguarding training communicated the NFNPA Safeguarding Policy and focused on role play and scenarios that we may encounter working with vulnerable riders. Other volunteer training included

an accredited 'Velotech' bike mechanics course, outdoor first aid, Ride Leader and Ride Assistant training. Over 20 volunteers participated in one or more of these courses.

Funding:

We were delighted to receive fantastic news from the National Lottery Community Fund that we were successful with our application for a five-year grant of £384k. This funding provides PEDALL with a good level core financial stability for coming years. We await news from South Western Rail 'Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF)' in April.

Friends of Pedall:

Friends of Pedall's work with pro bono charity consultants [Cranfield Trust](#) to develop a shared five-year vision and fundraising strategy is progressing to plan. The funding from the Lottery Community Fund is a great foundation for future match-funding activity which will be the key focus for Trustees.

Volunteering and Ambassadors

Access surveyors have been given their path survey maps and are preparing for the first half of the Ease-of-Use path survey. This survey is conducted in March/April, then later in September/October, assessing a randomly selected 20% of paths which gives an estimate of the percentage of paths which are open and easy to use. Our current score is 76%.

The New Forest National Park Volunteer Fair took place on 28 January at Brockenhurst Village Hall and was very well attended. We have received very good feedback from the 40+ groups attending, who have recruited many new volunteers from the 600+ people who attended the fair.

In partnership with Freshwater Habitats Trust, we organised a litter-pick on 4 February at Parc Pale which 20 newly signed-up volunteers and existing New Forest Ambassadors took part in. 12 full bin bags of litter were collected. The event featured on the local ITV news. Along the way, we discussed why litter is an issue here and explained definitions such as 'designated landscape' and highlighted the New Forest as a high-quality wetland that needs protection.

Recreation Management

The Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group (RMSSG) met on 8 March 2024 where the focus was on progressing a spatial plan for recreation management (one of the key priorities listed in the Partnership Plan). Linked to this the Steering Group noted that the New Forest LCWIP consultation document had still not been published and it was agreed that the Chair of the Steering Group would write to Hampshire County Council for an update.

Refresher training is being organised for staff engaged with the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) where the emphasis remains on the four E's – engage, explain, educate, enforce.

Access and Rights of Way

Sixteen oak signposts have been installed along the new Franchises Lodge walking route and a further 15 signposts are due to be installed over the next month along the Landford and Hamptworth walking route.

We are starting the third year of the Access For All scheme. We will be using the funds to support Pedall, work in partnership with Forestry England to re-surface the Knightwood Oak trail and design a series of leaflets for some tramper-friendly routes in the New Forest.

Discussions continue with Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council and other access authorities about establishing a Trail Partnership. The working title is the Solent to Sussex Trail Partnership and will cover an area from Dorset to Brighton. By forming a trail partnership we are eligible for a larger maintenance grant from Natural England.

3 Duty: Prosper

Re:New Forest Partnership Plan

The New Forest National Park Partnership Plan Officers' Group met on 26 February. The focus of the meeting was on the recently strengthened legal duty to seek to further the statutory National Park purposes set out in the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023; and the recently published Protected Landscapes Outcomes Framework. The latter sets out a series of targets and outcomes for England's 44 nationally protected landscapes and Natural England is now working on apportioning the national targets down to individual protected landscapes, including the New Forest National Park.

The New National Park Leaders' Panel met on 7 March. The meeting was chaired by the Verderers of the New Forest and hosted at King's House, Lyndhurst. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss some of the challenges facing commoning in the New Forest and the need for an agri-environment payments scheme that works for the Forest.

New Forest Business Partnership

The NPA is represented on the Advisory Group of the New Forest Business Partnership. The group met on the 20 February, confirming the intention to hold the Brilliance in Business Awards later in the year, an event at which the NPA sponsor a sustainability category. The winner and finalist in last year's category, Gillian Keartland of Vida Promotions and Nancy Hyne, founder of True Horizon consultancy, were both speakers

at the Business Partnership event to mark International Womens Day on 8 March.

Commoning in the New Forest

A sub-group of the Forest Farming Group met in February to agree the delivery of the Countryside Stewardship feasibility study that will inform the choice of future scheme to follow the Verderers HLS scheme that is due to end in 2027. The feasibility study will take up to a year to complete, with the work being done by a local consultancy with in-depth knowledge of commoning and its role in managing the habitats of the New Forest.

Visitor experience

A new Local Information Point (LIP) opened in East Boldre on 26 February. Via planning and archaeological input, and a £10k grant towards sustainable energy infrastructure, the NPA supported the project to maintain a shop and Post Office in East Boldre. It is now established as a community-owned and non-profit business selling local produce and boasting a social space in a former historic chapel. This more central hub replaces the former LIP for the area which was located with New Forest Activities.

The New Forest Visitor Information Communications Group comprising 10 organisations/businesses met on 6 February to provide updates since the group met in September 2023, with a focus on how we can support each other and share relevant visitor-focused information within and outside of our networks.

On 22 February, we convened a 'joint litter working group' meeting with NFDC, Forestry England and National Trust to learn about NFDC's upcoming projects - and opportunities for partnership work - to reduce and manage litter in the Open Forest, towns and villages, and coastal areas.

New Forest Tour

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the New Forest Tour. We are working with local businesses and the bus company on marketing and operational matters in the lead-up to the start of the summer season.

Sustainable Transport

We took part in meeting with a group of experts and practitioners who are focused on ways to decarbonise the leisure travel network. There was a presentation from a guest speaker about alternatives to car parking at attractions, and incentives to arrive by public transport or bike. We learnt that leisure travel, compared to other travel types, is on an upward trajectory; 60% of Scope 3 (wider CO2) emissions come from cars; 23% of households in England (15m people) don't own a car therefore don't have access to nature; those who travel car-free spend 20% more than car owners. We plan to consider this learning in the context of the New Forest.

Walking and cycling

29 members of the Cycle Working Group, convened by the NFNPA, met on 21 February. We remain focused on supporting HCC develop a New Forest LCWIP (Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan) and looking at how we can advocate for better non-vehicular access between communities and between communities and the New Forest, including improving the gravel network. Discussions continue with the Verderers. The Cycling Code has been reviewed and an updated version will be promoted in due course.

Affordable Housing

On 31 January the planning permission and accompanying legal agreement was issued for the development of the Local Plan housing site allocation at Whartons Lane, Ashurst. The permission secures 9 shared ownership units and 22 affordable rented dwellings for local people in affordable housing need. The Section 106 legal agreement ensures that the priority will be given to people with a local connection to the parish of Ashurst & Colbury. This development will make an important contribution to meeting local housing needs in a National Park with the highest average house prices of all the UK National Parks.

Sustainable Communities Fund

Due to many good applications received recently the fund is fully allocated for this financial year and will reopen in April 2024. While the fund has been closed to new applications we have been revisiting some of our previous projects to check on their progress and to develop a series of [films](#) that help celebrate their achievements.

4 Organisation: Achieving Excellence

New Forest Voices

New Forest Voices is our programme focused on equality, diversity and inclusion and is a key part of our work to deliver the Inclusive National Park theme. The New Forest Voices group, drawn from staff across the NPA, has continued to meet at least every two months to help steer delivery under three themes – understanding, experiences and ways of working. Recent work has included participating in a series of workshops convened across protected landscapes to investigate what training and learning gaps need to be addressed.

Human Resources

As of 8 March 2024 the total staff headcount was 74 or 66.16 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	Full Time Equivalents	Variation from previous report
Core funded	56*	+ 1	50.8*	+ 1.40
Funded by external projects	18	+ 2	15.88	+ 1.66
Total	74	+ 3	66.16	+ 3.07

*Of the core funded roles, one staff member (1 FTE) is working in shared services, one is on a fixed-term contract and 20 are part-time.

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

Role	Contract type	How funded
YouCAN Project Co-ordinator	Fixed term to August 2026	Project funded
New Forest Apprentice Ranger x 2	Fixed term for 18 months	Project funded
Planning Officer	Permanent	Core funded

We said goodbye to:

Role	Contract type	How role will be filled in future
Receptionist (Mondays & Tuesdays)	Permanent, core funded	Assessing vacancy

We are currently recruiting:

Role	Contract type	How funded
Building Design and Conservation Officer	Permanent	Core funded
Policy Officer	Permanent	Core funded
Inclusive Cycling Ride Leader (PEDALL)	Fixed-term for 6 months	Project funded

IT & Cyber Security Services

Security / Infrastructure

The Geo server has now been switched off and all the old firewall rules disabled. With the replacement phone system nearing completion we will be looking to switch off the final 4 servers and retire the SAN.

Planning system

We hope to see some movement on the outstanding work following a recent meeting with the planning software providers. The conversion of the tiff files to PDF has taken place, we are currently planning the next critical stage which involves the transfer of the pdf files by the software provider and removal of the old tiff files.

The IT & Cyber Security Technician has been working closely with the Head of Policy and the Grants Officer to obtain funding from DLUHC for digital planning improvement fund.

The past few months have seen an increased amount of work, alongside the Senior Planning Administrator in preparing for the Land Registry / Land Charges move.

Other work / projects

Replacement telephone system – the request to port the lines and numbers from the current provider has been accepted. We hope to go live mid-March but if this isn't possible due to other team commitments it will be delayed to early April. The changeover will incur some downtime of the phones for up to four hours. Users should see immediate benefits with the new Teams phone system as it is designed for hybrid working, unlike the current system and will seem familiar as Teams has been used generally within the Authority for some years. The new system is compliant with the BT ISDN changes which are due to be rolled out by 2025 and completion of this project will allow the SAN to be fully retired.

The draft IT policy is with the Head of Resources for review.

Internet update – we are in the process of updating and revamping the IT pages on the intranet and will include a full review of all the user guides. Alongside this we are also reviewing all our IT procedures. In addition to the reviews, there are a considerable number of new guides and procedure notes that will also be included.

Legal and Information management

Information requests

To date this year financial year (as at 5 March 2024) we have received 71 formal requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations, which is an increase of eight on last year (+13%). We had a particularly busy

August receiving three times the usual number, which unfortunately meant that we did not meet the statutory timeframe in five cases, therefore only 93% have been responded to within the statutory timeframe. As in previous years many requests relate to our planning function, with requests about specific planning applications, pre-apps and enforcement investigations, as well as policy and statistics enquiries. Those which are not related to our planning function are predominantly concerned with matters relating to finance, our IT arrangements, and HR matters. We have undertaken four internal reviews so far this year; in three cases the original decision was upheld and in the third some further disclosures were made. We are not aware of any appeals to the Information Commissioner to date.

Complaints

The number of complaints received so far this year is 12, which is identical to the number received in the previous two years. All but one are related to planning matters such as specific planning applications, enforcement investigations or the planning pages of our website. One was related to the use of the complainant's personal data. We are aware that one complaint is currently being considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

The LGSCO have recently published a new '[Complaint Handling Code](#)' which sets out advice and guidance for local councils about how to administer an effective complaints process. Although we are not bound by this code, we are reviewing our own Complaints Process in light of the Code's recommendations to ensure that we do not depart significantly from the standards that the LGSCO has set for local councils.

Privacy and data protection

We continue to constantly review and update our website, documents and privacy notices to improve transparency and compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). So far this year we have received five requests from individuals wanting to exercise their rights under the GDPR and DPA. All of these requests were related to the publishing of their personal data in relation to planning matters. We process personal data in relation to planning matters under our planning powers as the Local Planning Authority and therefore such requests are considered on a case-by-case basis and will be determined based on the particular situation of the individual making the request. Whilst these types of requests are still relatively few in number, there does appear to be an anecdotal increasing awareness of privacy matters and individuals' rights.

5 Members

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

- 5 February – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 13 February – Members Day – ‘What’s new in Planning?’
- 20 February – Planning Committee
- 4 March – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 7 March – Consultative Panel
- 19 March – Planning Committee

5.2 Forthcoming Members activities include:

- 3 April – Members Day – PEDALL
- 16 April – Planning Committee
- 21 May – Planning Committee
- 3 June – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 6 June – Consultative Panel
- 10 June – New Forest Access Forum
- 18 June – Planning Committee
- 25 June – Members Day – TBC
- 16 July – Planning Committee

5.3 Chief Executive’s external engagements

- 25 January – National Park City visitor centre opening
- 28 January – Volunteer Fair
- 29 January – Greenprint Steering Group
- 29 January – Defra, Protected Landscapes meeting
- 30 January – Meeting with Chair, National Parks Partnerships
- 31 January – HLS Board meeting
- 31 January – Meeting with Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England
- 1 February – Future New Forest Steering Group meeting
- 1 February – Business South Directors of the Future dinner
- 2 February – Meeting with Chair, Go New Forest
- 5 February – Meeting with Deputy Director Thames Solent, Natural England
- 16 February – Meeting with Director of Landscape & Strategy, South Downs NPA
- 19 February – Regular meeting with Chief Executive, New Forest District Council
- 19 February – National Park Cities meeting
- 20 February – National Park City International meeting
- 21 February – Independent Climate & Environment Group meeting (Southern Water)
- 22 February – Greenprint workshop preparation meeting

- 22 February – Meeting with Executive Director, National Park City
- 22 February – Partnership for South Hampshire Chief Executive's meeting
- 23 February – Greenprint for South Hampshire workshop
- 23 February – International Women's Day event planning
- 26 February – English National Parks Officers Group meeting
- 27 February – Meeting with Chief Executive, South Downs NPA
- 27 February – Meeting with Nigel Burt, Trustee of Olivia Inspires Charity
- 27 February – Introduction to the Trustees of Friends of PEDALL
- 29 February – Waterside Green Links Study workshop
- 1 March – National Parks Nature Recovery & Race to Zero
- 1 March – International Women's Day event planning
- 5 March – Follow up discussion with CEO & Founder, Prabhaav Global
- 5 March – Introduction to the partners of the YouCAN Partnership Board
- 6 March – Meeting with Director of Conservation & Climate Change, North York Moors NPA
- 6 March – Meeting with Managing Director, ep projects
- 7 March – Partnership Plan Leaders Panel
- 7 March – Meeting with Chair, South Downs NPA
- 8 March – Online International Women's Day event
- 11 March – Directors of Conservation spring meeting
- 12 March – Welcome and intro to attendees at the Re:New Nature Partnership event
- 13 March – St George's, Windsor Fellowship Leadership Conversation
- 14 March – Partnership for South Hampshire Joint Committee
- 15 March – Meeting with Sunnyfields Farm
- 18 March – English National Park Officers Group Peer Learning
- 19 March - NRN Delivery Partnership Management Group meeting
- 20 March – Regular meeting with Chief Executive, New Forest District Council
- 21 March – Introductory meeting with Cranfield Trust

Chair's engagements

- 26 January – Forest Farming Group sub meeting
- 29 January – Partnership for South Hampshire Member briefing
- 2 February – Meeting with Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne MP
- 8 February – Introductory meeting with the Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England
- 9 February – New Forest Heritage Centre visit

6 Recommendation

To note the report.