

NFNPA 670/24

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY – 25 January 2024

Youth focussed work and the YouCAN (Youth for Climate and Nature) project

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1 Summary

- 1.1 Funding from The National Lottery Community Fund has recently been secured to increase the scale and reach of our youth work in relation to the climate and nature crises, so that we support a wider range of ages to take action in a wider range of ways. This extra capacity gives us the opportunity to transform our work in this area over the next three years.
- 1.2 Youth-focussed work is a key part of delivering the Re:New Forest Partnership Plan 2022-27 and our Business Plan 2023-27. Our goal is to empower young people and give them new skills to help understand and protect the New Forest National Park. Members are asked to consider how they might be able to help support us with this work; specifically, how young people engage with the Authority's decision-making process and governance work. Young people in this context are between the ages of 11 and 30.

Recommendation:

That Members appoint an informal task and finish group, comprising three to five interested members, to propose options of how the Authority can engage with and involve young people in governance and the decision making process. Officers will report back to the Authority on suggested initiatives with an interim report at the March Authority meeting and a final report at the June Authority meeting.

2 Strategic focus

- 2.1 Part of the Re:New Forest National Park Partnership Plan focuses on the need to remove barriers to accessing national parks for all parts of society. The 'Inclusive National Park' theme aims to develop comprehensive and inclusive programmes of health, youth engagement and outreach to build relationships with diverse communities and audiences. The 'Thriving Forest' theme recognises the need to encourage and facilitate collective action on developing green skills, careers and sector capacity. Engaging and working with young people is also inherent to the 'Team New Forest' theme.
- 2.3 The NPA's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programme is framed under the 'New Forest Voices' workstream. A group from across the NPA has been working on three different areas including enhancing understanding, developing experiences, and

creating new ways of working. This group recognises that the NPA has good experience and a strong reputation in engaging with young people and that this can be further developed to increase inclusion and enhance diversity in our thinking and decision making. This will in turn strengthen our delivery of the National Park purposes and duty.

- 2.4 Greater opportunities for young people will help the New Forest become a more inclusive National Park with benefits including:
- Future generations helping to protect and conserve our landscape and heritage.
 - The value of young people's contribution and voice to the National Park.
 - Young people can represent a broad cross-section of the rest of society (including socio-economic background, ethnic diversity, culture, gender and identity, physical ability or many more)
 - The lessons learned in working with young people can be applied elsewhere and lead to more opportunities (e.g. intergenerational projects).
- 2.5 In the NPA's Business Plan 2023-2027, our objectives corresponding to Thriving Forest' are to:
- Develop and promote further green apprenticeship and internship opportunities at the Authority.
 - Maintain and enhance an internal and Forest-wide 'early green careers' network.
 - Lead connections with partners to foster new opportunities and further support existing green skills and jobs within the National Park.
- 2.7 Our objectives in the Business Plan on 'Inclusive National Park' that closely relate to youth engagement are:
- Deliver programmes that remove barriers to participation and access to nature.
 - Deliver a portfolio of learning and engagement activities for different audiences, making the National Park relevant and accessible to all and giving everyone a voice in its future.
 - Deliver communications and event activity to engage new audiences and connect them with nature and the National Park.
 - Maintain the development and delivery of high-quality, bespoke, curriculum-linked education for schools and colleges.

3 NPA youth focus

- 3.1 We aim to transform our youth focussed work from provision *to and for* young people to provision *with and inspired by* young people. This culture shift can help enable young people to be truly valued and change how we work for the longer term. Our youth work has a broad reach and perpetual new audience, with lots of special interest areas, knowledge and skills, so partnership working is essential to have more impact. Examples of existing youth focussed work are given in Annex 1.
- 3.2 This area of work is led by the Education and Youth Team: Helen Robinson (Lead Education and Youth Officer 0.7 FTE, core), Amy Moore (Education and Youth Officer, 0.6FTE, core) and Claire Pearce (Youth Development Officer, 0.6 FTE). The YouCAN project funding (see 4) retains the Youth Development Officer and creates a new role of Youth Engagement Coordinator (1 FTE). Delivery of youth focussed activities are

supported by our rangers and staff from the Access and Learning team and Communication and Fundraising team.

- 3.3 Historically, much youth provision at the NPA has been funded through a variety of externally-funded projects. In response to the Landscapes Review in 2019, the NPA was part of an Access Unlimited consortium bid to Defra's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. We also delivered some youth focussed work as part of the 'Green and Blue Horizons' project also funded by Defra's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. We have moved from delivering one-off, single sessions to a more targeted, longer-term approach enabling young people to form a deeper connection and understanding of the New Forest. We have used various opportunities to consult with young people when planning future provision.
- 3.4 Green careers and skills feature across the work of the Authority and therefore are relevant to all teams, through supporting work placements and internships and developing skills. More detail on the NPA's work on Green skills and careers can be found in Annex 1.

4. YouCAN (Youth for Climate and Nature)

- 4.1 As members will recall, the NPA and its partners were successful in a bid to The National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund for £1.2 million towards our three-year Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN) partnership project. The Climate Action Fund supports projects that use nature to encourage more community-led climate action. Funding from The National Lottery Community Fund is aimed at supporting people and communities to thrive. This includes bringing people together and building strong relationships across communities, improving the places and spaces that matter to communities, and helping more people to reach their potential, by supporting them at their earliest stage. More detail on the YouCAN project can be found in Annex 1.

5 Engagement with National Park Authority Members

- 5.1 The work outlined in this paper and the increased capacity brought in by the YouCAN project gives an opportunity for Members to engage to a greater degree with young people over the course of the current business plan, and to transform our work in this area.

Examples of how this could be done include:

- A dedicated Youth board providing the opportunity for young people's thoughts and ideas to be part of decision-making processes. Youth boards are already making significant contributions to the work of other national parks across the UK, including the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and the North York Moors, with other national parks also in the process of setting up their own youth board.
- A more formal link between members and young people, enabling views to be heard at the governance level

- Co-opting young people onto committees / boards (e.g. the YouCAN Partnership Board)
- Individual mentorship of young people by those in governance roles.

5.2 NPA members are asked to consider how future interactions with young people can be designed to be valuable and meaningful in achieving our national park purposes and duty. The challenge from young people is to consider not only how they are consulted, but heard, valued and accounted for.

For example:

- What methods of communication between members and a youth board might work well?
- How will young people's contributions be acknowledged and valued?
- What decision-making can young people be involved in, for example consultation on grant giving, awards, minor project approvals/design? Will this counter the risk of tokenistic consultation and communications?
- What themes of work and decision-making can young people become involved in (without making assumptions about their areas of interest), e.g. access, fundraising, heritage, volunteering, planning, governance?

5.3 Time will be needed to fully consider any implications on governance, members' time and other aspects of the NPA business. This paper therefore provides an opportunity for members to have an initial discussion and commission an informal task and finish group to report back to the full Authority.

Recommendation

That Members appoint an informal task and finish group, comprising three to five interested members, to propose options of how the Authority can engage with and involve young people in governance and the decision making process. Officers will report back to the Authority on suggested initiatives with an interim report at the March Authority meeting and a final report at the June Authority meeting.

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Annex 1 – Background information

1 National Context

- 1.1 At a National Parks UK level, a Green Pathways model has been developed to show our collective work with young people:
- Green Shoots: outreach projects and resources predominantly through links to schools to provide inspirational experiences for under 12s, planting the seeds of ambition to work in the green economy
 - Green Leaders: training and engagement to support young people as leading voices and active participants in the green economy and conservation through, for example, working as young rangers in national parks
 - Green Beacons: employ and train educators and youth leaders to be the inspirational figures that can light the way for young people to work in the green economy.
- 1.2 In 2022 some young staff members represented us at the National Parks UK Youth Voice conference. Outcomes included two staff members representing us at a new National Parks UK youth voice and we are using the messaging the young people developed at the conference to inform our practice and future work.
- 1.3 In 2023 our two NFNPA apprentice rangers attended the Europarc Youth Climate Camp in the Cairngorms National Park. The young people articulated their thoughts and priorities around the climate crisis which has helped inform the development of youth engagement within the YouCAN project.
- 1.4 The Europarc Youth Manifesto was launched in 2018 and provided a call for change in rural communities and protected areas. Young people expressed a desire to *'want to work with you to create our common future'* and for organisations to *'listen to the voice of young people and give us the chance to take the lead.'* The youth work within the YouCAN project aligns with the aspirations of the manifesto.
[EUROPARC Youth Manifesto - EUROPARC Federation](#)

2. NPA youth delivery

- 2.1 In the year 2022/2023 the education and youth team engaged with 764 young people in youth focussed programmes such as youth groups/ youth programmes, direct communication at careers fair, junior rangers and through work experience. These figures don't include all the additional engagement via the education programme while students are partaking in study trips / curriculum related sessions. The age range is generally 11-18 (and some up to 25 with additional needs).
- 2.2 PEDALL inclusive cycling has also provided bespoke youth engagement opportunities for groups with additional needs. Young people from Brockenhurst College and Coxlease School have taken part in maintenance and skills training at Ashurst and the planned programme for the next five years includes increased activity in this area as well as piloting paid employment for people with additional needs within the PEDALL project. The PEDALL Voices initiative will also give our young riders with additional

needs the opportunity to guide and steer the PEDALL project through focused feedback and advisory sessions. This will help to shape the future of PEDALL, develop a sense of trust and belonging, and ensure young people are shaping decisions that affect them.

- 2.3 A 'student innovation project' run in partnership with Southampton University has enabled two groups of students to conduct research into youth boards in the UK and produce reports with recommendations on how a youth board could function and support the work of the New Forest NPA.
- 2.4 Consecutive rounds of funding for youth provision have been key to developing our youth provision. Skills and staff within the team have been retained, enabling us to learn from our experiences and tailor future provision.

3. Green skills and careers

- 3.1 The NPA aims to deliver targeted, specialist provision for young people aspiring to enter a green career. We provide a range of entry level positions that give young people from a range of backgrounds valued experience in the industry.
- 3.2 Inspiring and informing young people is key to supporting entry to green careers. We work with college groups on tailored green skills programmes, attend careers fairs and work with universities on a range of projects. We have increased our capacity to reach more young people through teaming up with partner organisations to deliver shared knowledge and inspiration. We're also learning from colleagues at local schools, colleges and universities to improve our knowledge and best practice.
- 3.3 The NPA provides a wide range of opportunities for young people to embark on a green career. Work experience placements are available for year 10 and 12 students for between three days and two weeks. University students are also supported on an individual basis. Internships have been provided through externally funded 'Kickstart' and 'New to Nature' initiatives. These programmes have enabled five young people to gain invaluable knowledge and experience of the New Forest and wider protected landscapes. All three previous interns have continued to work in the industry, two of whom are in the local area.
- 3.4 Apprentice rangers have been trained and employed by the NPA for the past seven years through a partnership-based scheme. The scheme has been hugely successful with seven out of 10 moving on to employment with either the NPA or other partner organisations. Feedback from previous and current apprentice rangers suggests they have flourished in their roles and recent reviews with placement leads have been very positive about their potential to be employed within the sector upon completing the apprenticeship.
- 3.5 The Early Green Careers Network was launched in January 2023. This supports individuals in the early stages of a green career in and around the New Forest area. The network provides peer support, networking and a range of training opportunities throughout the year. Currently, there are 35 people from 17 organisations supported by the network. The network works alongside a sister group hosted by the Forestry Commission in the Southeast. Training opportunities are shared with their 'New

Forestry Professionals Network' increasing the range of training available to all members.

- 3.6 Internally within the National Park Authority, we support a group for staff members under the age of 30 years. The self-named 'Early Careers Branch' aims to:
- provide support and development to young people working for the NPA
 - provide social opportunities, particularly for new starters
 - encourage cross team working and collaboration
 - further opportunities for youth voice across the NPA.

4 YouCAN (Youth for Climate and Nature)

- 4.1 One of the drivers for developing YouCAN was feedback from local youth charities that need help linking young people with nature and our environmental partners with a youth gap in nature-related work. YouCAN focuses on supporting young people to work with their communities so that a wider range of ages can benefit. The programme of work is aimed at creating a deeper connection with nature that leads to changing people's behaviours and foster a greater care for the environment. While there is a focus on engaging with young people and communities and the project also delivers across several of the other Partnership Plan themes including net zero with nature and nature recovery.

- 4.2 YouCAN themes are:

INSPIRE: exploring, connecting climate, nature, people, place, via outdoor learning

ACTIVATE: supported access to volunteering, internships, skills, training, social, wellbeing.

COMMUNICATE: youth voice designing, creating, developing, leading.

GROW: joined-up network of people and communities taking climate action.

REFLECT: thinking about climate and nature in new ways and insights based on evidence.

- 4.3 Overall responsibility for the project sits with the NFNPA as lead partner, including administrative, financial, and management functions of the project. We will be working with several partners including the Freshwater Habitats Trust and the Countryside Education Trust. Investment also helps us to bring in several new partners: Alabaré, Southampton National Park City project, Theatre for Life, and the Parks Foundation in Bournemouth. We're already working with these partners individually, but the project will bring us all together to widen and share knowledge and expertise.

- 4.4 Partner areas of delivery are:

- Alabaré – supporting and advising on youth group participation.
- Countryside Education Trust – climate engagement programme, day visits, courses, lectures, open days, outreach events, volunteering, internships, training.

- Freshwater Habitats Trust – climate and freshwater events, walks, talks, stream restoration, interns, plant propagation, citizen science.
- Southampton National Park City project – walking and cycling excursions, garden of sanctuary communal space, green grid implementation, River Itchen project.
- Theatre for Life – youth-led verbatim theatre project with workshops, rehearsals, and community tour.
- The Parks Foundation – environmental rangers' programme in 13 parks across Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.

4.5 NPA areas of delivery are:

- Youth – youth development officer, youth engagement co-ordinator roles, deliver sessions / residential stays with local providers, refugee visits programme, youth and climate festival, online portal, budget for young people to take part including access, resources, travel.
- New Forest Green Groups – development of a network including face-to-face meetings, workshops, delivery of collaborative projects/outcomes.
- Climate resources – bespoke adaptation report, training budget for staff/participants.
- Communications – communications assistant for the partnership, climate and nature events and promotion, content creators programme.
- Admin – project coordinator for the partnership, green groups, and volunteering.
- External evaluation – working with consultants on theory of change/logic model, measuring and reporting system for climate impact/carbon reduction, active learning approach.

4.6 A youth advisory board will help to shape the project ensuring that its focus is with and for young people. This will also help us to meet and respond to the issues that young people and their communities are facing. During the project we will be testing recommended models of youth voice. A long-term aim of the board is for it to be accessible to smaller New Forest based organisations who do not have the resources to support their own youth board.

4.7 Funding will enable (across the Partnership):

- 29 roles created or retained
- 15 internships
- 40,000 participants
- An established Youth board
- A Junior ranger programme
- A Youth volunteer programme

4.8 The YouCAN partnership board will be convened in February 2023. At the NPA meeting on 17 October 2023, National Park Member Brice Stratford was appointed as Chair of the Youth for Climate and Nature Partnership Board.