

## AM 676/24

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

#### AUTHORITY MEETING – 21 March 2024

#### NET ZERO WITH NATURE

**Report by:** Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy & John Stride, Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager

#### Summary:

The National Park Authority has made a commitment to work with partners to develop a plan for the National Park and surrounding area to be 'net zero with nature' by 2050. Net Zero with Nature is one of five theme-based 'agendas for action' set out in the Partnership Plan. Aiming to achieve significant cuts in land-based carbon emissions through natural habitat restoration, the Partnership Plan lists five key priorities for the Net Zero with Nature programme:

- Establish data and evidence baseline.
- Implement nature-based climate solutions.
- Build a New Forest coalition for a net zero economy.
- Activate communities.
- Increase sustainable travel.

This paper highlights some of the work carried out under these headings during 2023/24 and key areas of activity for the 24/25 financial year.

#### RECOMMENDATION

- 1. It is recommended that the Authority note the content of this report.**

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Investing in nature is seen as critical to meeting the challenge of climate change – in the words of the Prime Minister at COP27, 'there is no solution to climate change without protecting and restoring nature'. Protected landscapes are seen as crucial to delivering the nation's commitments to tackle climate change and restore nature and being at the forefront of coordinating the local action needed to achieve national ambitions.
- 1.2 In 2020 the New Forest National Park Authority declared its ambition for the National Park to be net zero by 2050, and local partners such as New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council have all made commitments to net zero.
- 1.3 The New Forest National Park is internationally important for nature and an important place for people to connect with nature and both its built environment and habitats are

at risk from climate change impacts. Cross partnership working is vital to successfully tackle the threat it poses, since coordinated action is needed to both reduce emissions and increase our resilience to the now inevitable impacts.

- 1.4 Throughout 2023 we have continued to work with the family of National Park Authorities across the UK to build a case for delivering nature recovery in our national parks, to enable them to become beacons for both nature and climate recovery. Covering 10% of England, national parks have a key role to play in delivering the Government's ambition.
- 1.5 Since our previous update in January 2023, the focus is now on developing an approach to management of the Net Zero with Nature programme which will clearly link delivery to the Re: New Nature outcome of the Partnership Plan. These twin programmes have great potential to complement each other by supporting climate change mitigation as well as adaptation.

## **2 Establishing data and evidence baseline - Defining Net Zero**

- 2.1 Following the completion of the New Forest Greenhouse Gas Emissions Baseline Report in 2022, we have been working with UK national parks to define the combined contribution national parks can make to the net zero challenge. This will be reported in a synthesis report for all the national parks in the UK, due in May of this year.
- 2.2 Analysis of the report for the New Forest suggests some initial gaps in evidence, particularly around peatland and woodland; addressing these gaps will form part of the work programme over the coming year.
- 2.3 We need to better understand the extent, profile and condition of peat across the New Forest. The upcoming revision of the peat map for the UK, undertaken by Natural England, will improve understanding of the extent of peat, depth, vegetation cover, bare peat and surface features but this will not tell us the condition, and thus the opportunity for improvement to support carbon storage. Surveys have taken place over the winter of 23/24 and we will work with Natural England to analyse the results.
- 2.4 Native woodland creation is suggested as a critical component of a net zero New Forest National Park. However, given the significance of other habitat types within the New Forest, opportunity mapping is needed to better understand where this can most appropriately be targeted.
- 2.5 As noted above, by connecting this programme of work more closely to the Re:New Nature programme, there is an opportunity to undertake a climate change risk assessment to identify areas of adaptation. Extending and connecting critical habitats such as heathland and native woodland can not only support the New Forest landscape to survive and thrive through a changing climate, but also absorb more carbon at the same time.
- 2.6 Over the coming year the net zero with nature programme will increase engagement with Authority teams and partners to identify and advance actions that will achieve desired emission cuts.
- 2.7 We will also be responding to the Third National Adaptation Programme, published by government in July 2023 and the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes

Framework published in January 2024. Protected landscapes cover nearly a quarter of land in England and have a key role to play in meeting national ambitions on nature and achieving net zero. The Adaptation programme places an obligation on Protected Landscapes to produce by 2028 a Climate Adaptation Plan linked to existing management plans while the Targets and Outcomes framework provides a mechanism for measuring progress and delivery towards key outcomes of extending wildlife rich habitats, improving SSSI and priority habitat condition.

### **3 Implementing nature-based climate solutions**

- 3.1 We have continued to support partners with the delivery of several nature-based climate solutions. This includes habitat restoration work funded by the Green – Blue Horizons programme, increasing the land’s ability to sequester carbon. Through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme trees and hedgerows have been planted which will be drawing down carbon from the atmosphere and storing it as they grow. In the north of the forest the programme is also supporting a farming cluster work on deer management which will help adaptation to climate change by creating areas for trees to naturally regenerate.
- 3.2 The Re:New Nature Partnership convened in March, bringing together Partnership Plan signatories and other organisations with a primary role in nature recovery to develop the portfolio of projects that together can form the overall Forest-wide programme for nature recovery. The project portfolio will complement the county wide Local Nature Recovery Strategies being developed for Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset and help target land suitable for Biodiversity Net Gain. It will support the spatial approach of expanding the ecological network of the national park from the core of protected habitats to four surrounding areas; the Eastern Waterside, Southern Coast, Western Avon and Northern Forest.
- 3.3 <sup>(Obj)</sup>A key area of work for the coming year will be to establish a landowners' forum as a place to share the ambitions for nature recovery and net zero in the National Park. Through the Land Advice Service, we are involved with several established farm clusters that are farmer-led and delivering a range of projects. However, to meet the ambitious targets and outcomes around net zero and nature recovery set for National Parks will require planning and targeting of activity in collaboration with owners who are making long term investment decisions for their land.

### **4 Building a New Forest coalition for a net zero economy**

- 4.1 The Partnership Plan highlights the need to integrate infrastructure projects with the wider natural environment. A recent example is the Waterside Green Links Study, which was commissioned by the Authority to assess the feasibility of connecting the landscape of the National Park to Southampton Water across the A326. The Study highlights potential opportunities for traffic reduction, habitat restoration and connectivity, providing a vision plan for five new green links. The Study has been shared with partner organisations and complements a separate, more detailed, green infrastructure study for the Waterside commissioned by the District Council.
- 4.2 The need to adapt to sea level rise has been a focus of work in 2023. The National Park coast is both an important area of natural habitat and significant economic asset that is vulnerable to sea level rise and we have been involved in two projects through the year:

- We have assisted the Environment Agency and partners in the preparation of a Hurst Spit to Lymington strategy. Sea level rise is predicted to have a range of consequences: overtopping of existing defences increasing the likelihood of flood risk, the loss of coastal habitats, likely loss of access and physical changes to Hurst Spit. The development of the strategy provides a 'case study' for climate change adaptation and the chance to examine opportunities for the creation of habitats such as coastal grazing marsh and saltmarsh that have significant capacity for carbon sequestration.
- We also secured £36,000 of grant funding from the Environment Agency to work with the Countryside Education Trust to consider the possible impacts of sea level rise on the coast east of Lymington, to Calshot.

## **5 Activating communities**

- 5.1 In October work began on the Youth for Climate and Nature scheme (YouCAN), funded by a £1.2million Climate Action Fund grant from the National Lottery Community Fund. The NPA is the lead partner in the three-year scheme which aims to connect young people to nature and help communities across the region tackle climate change. The scheme will provide resources to produce the Climate Adaptation Report (2.7 above).
- 5.2 We continue to drive greater collaboration and coordination between local community green groups in and around the National Park through the Green Groups Forum. This enables local green groups to come together and amplify their impact, sharing knowledge, resources, and funding. Groups attended our stand at the New Forest Show, hosted events as part of the Awakening Festival and the NPA had a stand at the Ringwood Eco Fair. Green Groups also benefited from £10,000 in grants from the Sustainable Communities Fund to work together on community energy saving initiatives and will be collaborating on further projects thanks to funding from the YouCAN scheme.
- 5.3 The Awakening Festival continues to develop and is now a key means of increasing people's understanding of the New Forest's role in the climate and nature emergencies. Running throughout March and coinciding with the Forest awakening for spring, this year's festival has over 70 events delivered by a range of partners. We use the Festival to encourage people to take the New Forest Climate and Nature Challenge pledge, which currently has 1,421 signatories.

## **6 Increasing sustainable travel**

- 6.1 The New Forest Tour continued through the summer, offering a car-free way to access and enjoy the New Forest. We continued to support the Community Rail Partnership. An integrated multi-modal public transport ticket was implemented in 2023.
- 6.2 We, alongside officers from HCC, New Forest District Council, Wiltshire Council and Forestry England continued to work on the production of the New Forest Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). We have applied to a new Active Travel England National Parks Capability Fund for resources to take forward LCWIP priorities to feasibility stage, ensuring that any schemes fit with the constraints and opportunities of the protected landscape.

- 6.3 As part of a partnership between BMW and all 15 UK National Parks, two electric vehicle charging points will soon be installed at Jubilee Fields, Sway. The programme also provided us with a £60,000 grant from BMW's Recharge in Nature fund.

### Recommendation

**It is recommended that the Authority note content of this report.**

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