

AM 681/24






NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY AUTHORITY MEETING – 25 JULY 2024

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 21 March 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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NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 25 JULY 2024

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

This spring and early summer quarter has seen the Forest landscape at its best and has been an important period for us to spend time with our partners as 'Team New Forest' seeing first-hand what our work is achieving and discussing how we can work together to address the challenges ahead.

Our second annual Partnership Plan Leaders Panel Tour in mid-June took us to the north of the Forest focusing on Wiltshire and Test Valley areas. The tour included visits to the RSPB's reserve at Franchises Lodge; the Langley Wood National Nature Reserve; and Lyburn Farm and enabled us to see how our shared themes of nature recovery, net zero with nature, thriving forest and vibrant communities are being delivered. There was a palpable sense of 'Team New Forest' in action across a whole, connected landscape thanks to the RSPB, Wiltshire Council, Natural England, Lyburn Farm, Test Valley Borough Council and the National Trust's input and insights.

6 June marked the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion and we were privileged to support a number of events, acts of commemoration and to share stories, including that of our Chairman's uncle on our webpages, to mark the momentous operation and the way the Forest played its part. It was very fitting that we were able to take colleagues (19 heritage staff from 12 National Parks, Welsh Government, Forestry England, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales) to the D-Day remains at Lepe Country Park whilst hosting the annual meeting of the Joint UK Statement on the Historic Environment in the National Parks. It was fascinating to discuss the challenges faced with heritage on our ever-changing coastline such as that at Lepe with leading archaeologists from across the UK.

A visit by the English National Parks Agricultural and Rural Development Group later in June provided an important opportunity to discuss with Defra and Natural England officials how future agri-environment schemes may support commoning and habitat restoration in the New Forest as we move into the domestic agricultural policy. We and Forest organisations are calling for a bespoke scheme to better suit local circumstances and have written as the Forest Farming Group (FFG) to the new Secretary of State for Defra, Steve Reed MP, asking for an urgent look at the now precarious situation of support for the Forest can be addressed. At the same time the FFG has commissioned a

feasibility study to establish management principles for the key habitat features of the New Forest which will help determine the most appropriate future scheme for the New Forest.

We were pleased back in May that Defra announced that additional funding has been secured to extend all FiPL roles for six months until the end of September 2025. Funding has also been secured to extend the Farm Advisor role to March 2027 to help optimise the effectiveness and take-up of Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme in alignment with National Park management plans. By the end of the scheme our FiPL scheme will have allocated £800,000 to 50+ projects. Most notable are grants to provide storage tanks to harvest rainwater for use by livestock in dry weather, as well as a scheme to bring landowners together to help manage the deer population destroying habitats in the north of the Forest.

Two of our major schemes achieving significant funding got underway this quarter. The £1.3m Species Survival Fund scheme will see six partners deliver nature recovery across 25 sites over the next 18 months, with over 250 hectares of habitat improved. This is one of just 20 projects nationally to secure support from the fund run by Defra and the National Lottery Heritage Fund aimed at halting species decline and the restoration of priority habitats. In May we hosted a visit from Defra's policy and protected sites teams, who saw some of the habitats we are restoring and our strong working relationships with landowners and delivery partners.

The £1.4m Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN) scheme has also been establishing governance and finance structures, securing staff and launching recruitment for the New Forest Youth Board with currently nine young adults have signed up to volunteer. Thirty-four young people have also registered to be one of our regular Junior Rangers, who we run sessions for once a month.

Water quality and that of freshwater habitats has been very much on the agenda this period. We hosted the Chief Executive of Southern Water with Freshwater Habitats Trust, Environment Agency in early July. Visiting the Beaulieu area, we illustrated how important the freshwater ecosystems of the Forest are and impressed upon him the urgent need for investment in the water environment and in delivering together with us on our Partnership Plan in line with the 'duty to further' national park purposes set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act for public bodies and utilities.

Our role as co-host of the New Forest Catchment Partnership saw Defra commit a further £15k for the coming year. In the previous financial year, the Partnership's work generated nearly £200k of cash and in-kind contributions and projects included 3,317 volunteers taking part across 34 water conservation events.

A highlight of this quarter was the Green Halo Partnership conference 'National Parks for Health: A Natural Health Service' attended by over 100 delegates across sectors and with attendance from many colleagues across the national park family. Engaging

presentations from the health and social prescribing sector as well as inspiring talks and well-being activities from organisations using art, gardening, cycling and theatre to improve health outcomes made for a very fruitful conference. We are looking to build on this momentum with expansion and promotion of initiatives such as the Green Health Hub, linking to Hampshire 2050 year of health and exploring how we can be a focus for a 'natural health service' approach. Presentations and more details can be found at www.greenhalo.org.uk/past-events.

Our planning policy team continues to work with communities to enable them to influence planning decisions and the design of new development in their areas. Local residents voted overwhelmingly in favour of both the draft Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan at the referendum on 4 July; and also the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan at the referendum held on 11 July. Meanwhile Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council and Copythorne Parish Council are working with our building design team on Village Design Statements.

Work on the revised Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan led by Hampshire County Council with the NPA, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council and the South Downs National Park Authority is reaching a critical stage. The draft Plan, the supporting evidence base and all the representations received during the last formal consultation stage are to be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination shortly.

Plans for our presence at the New Forest Show are in place and we are looking forward to connecting with 'Team New Forest' on the showground and using the opportunity to talk with thousands about the importance of the National Park and the people who keep it special. We will be launching a joint communications campaign commissioned by the Partnership Plan Leaders Panel 'Behind the Scenes' to promote the incredible wildlife and habitats of the Forest as well as showcasing people working for the Forest behind the scenes. We are also looking forward to recognising more of those special people in our annual New Forest National Park Awards with the CLA. The awards will be given out in the main ring at the New Forest Show and always provide an opportunity for celebration as well as inspiring many to step forward themselves to support a positive future for the National Park.

The New Forest Show allows us to come together and gives unrivalled opportunity to discuss with so many of our partners how we can work together as 'Team New Forest' in the year ahead. It could not be better in timing as we must collectively consider how we can ensure the best for the New Forest National Park and its communities as a new government takes shape. Across all our Partnership Plan themes we need to make a strong and clear case for the Forest's future in the months ahead.

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, Organisation' objectives from the 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 Partnership - workshop 8 May

A successful workshop brought 15 representatives from 10 organisations together to further develop a partnership approach to having greater impact for nature recovery across the New Forest and wider area. Outputs from this workshop included the following top priorities for collective action:

- Act together as champions to reposition the New Forest in national policy as a key priority in nature recovery at a UK level.
- Set out a clear strategy and vision for nature in the New Forest, joined up with other related strategies.
- Set out a shared, clear and costed ambition, promoting the case for funding support.
- Work together to overcome bureaucracy and overcome delivery pinch-points and barriers.

A further series of workshops, focusing on these areas is being developed for the autumn.

Species Survival Fund

The NPA was one of just 20 projects to secure support from the Species Survival Fund, a funding scheme run by Defra and the National Lottery Heritage Fund aimed at halting species decline and the restoration of priority habitats. In May we hosted a visit from Defra's policy and protected sites teams, who saw some of the habitats included in the project, how these connected with nearby SSSIs. We were also able to demonstrate our strong working relationships with landowners and delivery partners involved in the project.

Development Management

169 applications were received between 1 March and 30 June 2024. In the same period 174 applications were determined with an approval rate of 97%.

During this same period, 10 appeal decisions were received. Seven were dismissed and three were allowed.

A major planning application for a 6MW solar farm at Thornlands Farm in Netley Marsh was refused following committee consideration on 18 June. A full application for the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel site has been received (to replace the remaining original section of the former hotel).

In early May we held a members' briefing session which looked at likely future development proposals for the Waterside, including an update on the proposed improvements to the A326 and a presentation on the recently commissioned 'Green Links Study' undertaken by ARUP consultants. Since then, it has been announced that the outline planning applications for Fawley Waterside are to be withdrawn due to 'wider economic pressures and increased construction costs'. The company said it will continue to work closely and collaboratively with New Forest District Council and the New Forest National Park Authority to consider the most appropriate development strategy for the site.

Only last week a consultation was launched by Exxon Mobil on the Solent CO2 Pipeline Project which is seeking permission to install an underground pipeline to transport captured CO2 from the Fawley Refinery to a storage location in the English Channel. Any resultant planning application will be considered by the Planning Inspectorate as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). The consultation can be found here - [Solent CO2 Pipeline Project](#)

A planning discovery day was held on 5 June which allowed other teams to gain an understanding of the work of the planning team.

Some planning officers attended an archaeological site visit at Fordingbridge on 25 June which has increased understanding of archaeological processes and interlinkages with planning.

Carly Cochrane and Lindsey Chamberlain will be going on maternity leave in July and we are pleased to welcome Ben Gilpin and Dean White to the team to provide planning officer cover during this time.

Planning Enforcement

Since March the enforcement team has been busy dealing with the initial assessments on 75 new enforcement cases and concluding 44 cases. The Team has issued three

Enforcement Notices and a Stop Notice. The Enforcement Notices relate to; an area of land being used for open storage purposes (the Stop Notice requires that no further items are brought onto the land), the erection of inappropriate fencing and gates and the erection of a substantial outbuilding that was refused permission and then dismissed at appeal. Once issued, Enforcement Notices are open to appeal and we are currently dealing with 8 enforcement appeals.

In addition, the Authority has secured compliance with a Breach of Condition Notice and an Enforcement Notice avoiding the time and expense required to prosecute the owners for non-compliance with those notices within the compliance period. A prosecution is progressing in respect of a continuing breach of planning control relating to the unauthorised use of an area of woodland that has been subdivided and used for leisure and accommodation purposes.

In April new Government planning enforcement rules came into force which will help the team further protect the New Forest's protected landscape. These include unlimited fines for those who don't comply with enforcement notices, restrictions on appeals against enforcement notices and a longer period in which Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) can take enforcement action against some unauthorised development – with the previous four-year limit now extended to 10 years.

Policy

The draft Hampshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Partial Update is due to be formally submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination shortly. This Plan covers the whole of the New Forest National Park – including the Wiltshire area – and follows the final period of statutory consultation held earlier this year. The draft Plan will be submitted alongside the accompanying evidence base, a schedule of proposed minor modifications, and all the representations made at the Regulation 19 submission stage.

The draft Ringwood and Wellow Neighbourhood Plans were subject to independent referendum on 4 July and 11 July respectively. This follows several years of evidence gathering, plan-preparation and independent examination. The two Neighbourhood Plans are the subject of separate reports at the July Authority meeting.

A briefing session was held with National Park Authority members regarding the partial review of the New Forest National Park Local Plan in early June. The session covered the areas of the Plan that will be the likely focus of the future review, the main requirements in terms of the updated evidence base, and the indicative timetable for the review. The Authority's updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) sets out the timetable for the review and is the subject of a separate report at the July Authority meeting.

We continue to engage with landowners on overarching legal agreements to enable the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units and nutrient mitigation credits for planned new development in the National Park area. This will ensure there are local

mitigation/credit schemes available to ensure new development necessary to meet the needs of local communities is delivered, while also delivering environmental benefits.

Archaeology

In May we hosted this year's National Parks UK Joint Statement Meeting. This is a yearly event, held over three days, in one of the 15 National Parks. It is a coming together of National Park Heritage staff and invited guests, sharing examples of good practice in the conservation, research, interpretation, public engagement and wider contribution of the historic environment to National Park priorities.

Joint Statement on the Historic Environment in the National Parks of England, Scotland and Wales.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/caring-for-heritage/poster-joint-statement-historic-environment-national-parks-2105-pdf/>

19 heritage staff from 12 National Parks, Welsh Government, Forestry England, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales attended in person, with eight attending online. In addition to three meetings, covering a wide range of current heritage topics, attendees visited Ashley Walk and the D-Day remains at Lepe Country Park. At Lepe discussions explored the challenges faced with heritage on our ever-changing coastline.

6 June marked the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. In the office we added 'Lest we forget' in large silhouette letters in the windows of the top floor and, in addition to a page about events across the New Forest, the communications team added the following pages to the website:

- D-Day Landings 80th Anniversary and the New Forest - <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/discover/history-culture/d-day-landings-80th-anniversary-and-the-new-forest/>
- NPA Chair shares family connection to D-Day - <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/blog/npa-chair-shares-family-connection-to-d-day/>
- Dan Snow on a Forest at war - <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/blog/dan-snow-on-a-forest-at-war/>

We published a new video on our YouTube channel showing archive footage of the New Forest in the build-up to the D-Day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HppAEinFDsw>

We also supported Culture in Common with content for use in the rented Maritime Archaeology Trust's Maritime Bus, a mobile heritage outreach vehicle. The bus visits villages and locations across the Forest and was filled with D-Day panels and objects from across the heritage bodies (St Barbe Museum and Art gallery, New Forest Heritage Centre etc.). Culture in Common also published a D-Day book with content from our New

Forest Remembers WWII project. <https://cultureincommon.co.uk/event/the-new-forest-commemorates-d-day-80/>.

During this reporting period the Archaeology Team has consulted on 30 New Forest District Council (NFDC) and 21 Authority planning applications and given comments and recommendations on several other ongoing planning cases and enquiries. We've also made a site monitoring visit to an NFDC site to review the archaeological work being conducted. For the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Forestry England the team progressed 12 sites and made eight visits to sites across the southern district and for the Higher-Level Stewardship Scheme progressed and concluded six requests.

Service Level Agreement – New Forest District Council (Planning)

New Forest District Council has renewed the SLA for another year, increasing the allocated time from 60 to 90 hours. We are giving planning advice for 30 sites.

In June we ran another archaeology site visit for planners. Planning Officers from NFDC and NFNPA attended a visit to an excavation in Fordingbridge, ahead of a housing development, which has discovered an Iron Age to Romano-British settlement. Feedback has been very positive and highlighted the need for publish heritage guidance, for planning applicants and Planning Officers.

Service Level Agreement - Forestry England

During this reporting period the Archaeology Team received 11 new requests on 15 actual sites for advice and Heritage Impact Assessments and site mark-ups ahead of forestry work. The Team concluded eight requests, progressed 12 and made eight visits to sites across the southern district, including on the Isle of Wight. With the continued increase in requests, for year two of this three-year SLA, we've agreed to increase the allocated time from 40 to 60 days. We are also looking to gain additional staff support.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)

During this reporting period the team has received seven requests for advice, progressed and concluded six requests, providing advice along with Heritage Impact Assessments, site visits and site mark-ups ahead of ground works for trees and scrub clearance, stream/wetland restoration and lost lawns.

The team has progressed outstanding work from previous years. Processing past survey data has resulted in over 200 features being added to the current New Forest HLS Heritage Index. We continue to process the data sets and estimate 150 additional features will be added once work is concluded.

New Forest Knowledge website

Though the website is in much need of updating it continues to be very popular, with the view stats for this period being 29,981. The Team continues to support the NF Heritage Centre team working together to maintain the site.

Building Design and Conservation

Following a recruitment process in the spring, our Building Design and Conservation officer resource now comprises two full time officers. This enables us to deliver against the Business Plan priorities for the built environment and cultural heritage, linked to the first statutory national park purpose. We wish Sally Knott all the best following her recent retirement and are delighted to welcome Emily Carter and Alex Harwood to the team.

The team is engaging with both Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council and Copythorne Parish Council as they work on their respective Village Design Statements (VDS). In the case of Ashurst this is an update to their existing VDS which dates from 2013. Alongside this proactive work, the team continues to respond to a high volume of cases that engage consideration of the historic and built environment of the New Forest. This includes pre-application proposals, current full planning applications and enforcement cases.

Farming in Protected Landscapes

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 two projects at its meeting in May and the focus now is to ensure the remaining budget is fully allocated and spending complete by March 2025 when the programme ends.

A project to note is the offer to New Forest commoners of rainwater harvesting tanks (the cost of tanks and connections supported by FiPL, not including additional guttering needs or additional costs including labour) to support water resilience for stock animals during periods of limited water supply. 50 tanks have been made available (30 x 10,000 litres and 20 x 5,000 litres). As of 1 July, 18 applications, all for 5,000 litres tanks, have been received. If awarded, this would provide 90,000 litres of stored rainwater to support stock management, roughly enough for 1,800 cows for one day or 450 cows for a four-day of limited water supply. Applications are open until 24 July.

The success of the FiPL programme was endorsed by an announcement in May by Defra that additional funding has been secured to extend all FiPL roles until the end of September 2025, which is six months beyond the stated end of the programme in March 25. Funding has also been secured to extend the Farm Advisor role to March 2027 to help optimise the effectiveness and take-up of Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme in alignment with National Park management plans.

Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS)

The Forest Farming Group secured funding from Defra to investigate the feasibility of delivering management of the New Forest SSSI, SAC and SPA through one of the emerging Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes – either Countryside Stewardship or Landscape Recovery. The existing HLS scheme is due to end in 2027 and the feasibility study, known as a PA2, is being conducted by a local consultancy with strong links to the New Forest commoning community. The PA2 will establish management principles for the key features of the New Forest, in particular lowland heathland, valley mires and wood pasture and will determine the most appropriate future scheme for the New Forest.

National Parks Agricultural and Rural Development Group

In June we hosted the annual meeting of the English National Parks Agricultural and Rural Development Group. With the Environmental Land Management Programme in development and the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme in its final year, the meeting was an opportunity to discuss future developments with Defra and Natural England. The complexities and uniqueness of the New Forest means that national programmes are not always best suited to our local circumstances. Colleagues from across the National Park family were introduced to local farming and commoning enterprises and the opportunity was taken to highlight to Defra the need for flexible, bespoke approaches to future ELM delivery in the New Forest and national parks more widely.

Species Survival Fund

The Species Survival Fund, a £1.3 million nature recovery project received permission to start on 25 April. Aiming to achieve at least 250 hectares of nature recovery over the next 18 months, partners are now completing initial biodiversity assessments and planning capital and engagement works to begin in the coming weeks and months. The project is funded by the Government's Species Survival Fund. The fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Catchment Partnership update

Our role as co-host of the New Forest Catchment Partnership continues to deliver a range of work and secure investment into the National Park. Defra funding agreement for 2023/24 valued at £15k has been secured during the period and combined with a number of external funding sources will see a range of exciting projects over the course of the year which build on activity in 2023/24. End of year reporting to the Environment Agency has been successfully completed during the period and shows the work has generated nearly £200k of cash and in-kind contributions over the last financial year. This included volunteer engagement of 3,317 participants across 34 events.

The period has seen the partnership continue to engage with the public around clean water issues and extend its social media outreach (e.g. delivering the Partnership's 'Wilder for Water' work theme as part of the YouCAN project) and partnership funding and work of our co-host the Freshwater Habitats Trust has been key to supporting the

development Species Survival Fund (SFF) which commenced in May. Advanced techniques have already been used as part of that project to gain a better understanding of the Forest's biodiversity - using environmental DNA to survey nearly 30 New Forest sites for invertebrates and great crested newts. The SFF will continue to build on and deliver the 'Blue Horizons' Partnership work theme which delivered practical improvements at five sites last year, with permissions including planning being secured for creation of a pond complex within the National Park in autumn 2024.

The period also saw the Authority and Catchment Partnership support liaison with Ringwood Town Council and key private and public landowners in the Avon catchment to aid development of plans to use habitat restoration to aid natural flood management.

In early July we hosted a visit by the Chief Executive of Southern Water and the Area Director of the Environment Agency. This was an opportunity to initiate an active partnership with Southern Water, to promote the need for investment in the water environment of the National Park and showcase the vibrant partnerships in the Forest that support shared aspirations for high quality waterbodies and coastal waters.

Green Finance

Attendance at the South Downs Green Finance Conference reconfirmed the importance of green finance in nature recovery delivery. Since then, we have begun discussions with National Parks Partnership to assess the mechanisms needed in the New Forest for a credible voluntary nature credits market. We are in the initial project proposal stages of this work.

2 Second Purpose: Enjoy

Education and Youth

Our continued participation in the Access Unlimited Consortium (Youth Hostel Association, National Parks England, English National Parks, Field Studies Council, the Outward Bound Trust, Scouts, Girlguiding and National Landscapes) has resulted in us being able to take part in a nationwide project funded by DEFRA enabling access to Nature. This project will give underserved young people (YP) in England an opportunity to spend time visiting and connect with nature in our protected landscapes. It will widen access and engagement with protected landscapes, boost nature connectedness and enable YP to gain wellbeing benefits.

In the New Forest, this opportunity will allow us to claim up to £75,000 towards the delivery of school visits to new audiences; including providing grants to school to reimburse coach costs in full to eligible schools. These visits will be delivered by the Education and Youth team and Ranger team, and farm visits by the Countryside Education Trust. We aim to provide experiences to up to 1080 young people from low-income backgrounds in this financial year and take part in a national level evaluation of this provided by the University of Derby.

The youth projects funded through Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN) have been busy getting fully underway. Katie Barrow, our new Youth Engagement Coordinator joined the team in April and has been instrumental in getting these projects off the ground.

Thirty-four young people have registered to be one of our regular Junior Rangers, who we run sessions for once a month. They have taken part in sessions focusing on a range of topics including ground nesting birds and the no BBQ campaign, we have also worked in partnership with both the Freshwater Habitats Trust and the Environment Agency. A bespoke Junior Ranger programme has been offered to organised groups and we are working on a regular basis with young people from Noadswood School who experience challenges engaging in mainstream classroom provision.

The Early Green Careers Network has gone from strength to strength; we now have 44 people registered and four training opportunities have taken place, including a visit to St Giles Farm organised by NFLAS to look at biodynamic farming and eDNA surveying with the Freshwater Habitats Trust.

Recruitment for the New Forest Youth Board has been launched and currently nine young adults have signed up to volunteer. A task and finish group made up of Authority members, NPA officers and young staff from YouCAN partners has been working to look at how the board may run and communicate with partner organisations. A launch residential event is planned for September 2024 and will be hosted by the Countryside Education Trust.

Practical volunteering sessions targeted at young adults have been launched with the first event taking place in June. These will be running at weekends and evenings to fit with most young adults' availability.

Work experience for year 10 pupils for local schools is underway and we are pleased to offer this to pupils from four local schools this year. Amy Moore, our education and youth officer has put together a brilliant and diverse programme enabling candidates to see as many sides of the NFNPA's work as possible. In just a week they have experienced everything from ecology and tree team to building conservation, landscape advice, recruitment, educational visits and a chance to join in rides with Pedall. A huge thanks to all the staff who contribute to this meaningful experience.

One student said: 'Thank you so much for everything, we've really enjoyed it, we particularly enjoyed our time out with Pedall, seeing the education visits and getting to know the role of a ranger.'

School visits with local primary and secondaries have been busy as usual, including visiting a new site at Anderwood.

'Students got to experience geography beyond the classroom. Helen and her team were

very helpful in organising and running the trip. Students improved their geographical skills and built cultural capital.' Geography subject lead, New Forest Academy

'Some of our children have not visited a forest, so the trip was huge for them. Some have anxiety and the trip was a massive confidence boost for them.' Class teacher, Eling Infant School.

'In my opinion, I would say this is better than a trip to Harry Potter Studios. Student, Testwood School

Public and community events / rangers

Rangers engaged with 7,797 people in this period through on the ground patrols, joint engagement sessions with partner organisations, events and community groups.

Having been awarded the Alfred Toepfer Scholarship from Europarc Hayden completed her study tours to Greece to look at how protected areas are engaging with Refugee and Asylum Seeker communities and is currently writing the project report that will include a toolkit to encourage other Protected Areas to open green spaces to this community.

Hayden also became a Trustee of Europarc Atlantic Isles (EAI) Section which is a significant personal achievement but provides great representation of UK National Parks and the New Forest NPA in particular at an international level. Hayden will sit alongside other board members in EAI who are from other protected landscapes to help promote good practice and policy in protected area management.

The team has visited several schools and pre-schools to deliver talks and activities on subjects from coastal creatures, the New Forest code and a typical day of a NPA ranger. We received very positive feedback from staff and students, as well as parents who had been educated by their children about safe driving on Forest roads, the sounds of Forest species and picking up after their dogs.

Rangers continued to support the wider Authority including Junior Ranger sessions focusing on the pony PSPO producing a film directed by the students for social media, delivering a Commoning Discovery Day with hands-on wood branding activity and meet the pony.

We have taken our mobile information unit to events including Dogstival, Buckler's Hard Conservation Day, Friends of Ballard Water Meadow National Meadows Day, Lyndhurst Community event and two Open Farm Sunday events with 2,700 attendees.

Jim and Gillie attended a meeting with NFDC to review the People and Wildlife Ranger SLA with very positive feedback and their intention to renew the agreement for 2025/26.

Partnership working continues with Forestry England and the Police, including Bank Holiday Safer New Forest Patrols and Operation Mountie. Most recently a driver was stopped doing 76mph and failed a drug test. Over 40 other drivers were stopped by the Police and educated by Rangers as to the importance of safe speeds and road awareness. Two joint sessions working with New Forest Police and New Forest Dogs Owners group have taken place aimed dog walkers with a focus on ground nesting birds, and livestock with young offspring.

Refugee Week events concluded with a celebration with our friends over at Southampton Winchester Visitors Group celebrating the refugee community and welcoming them to green spaces.

Dawn attended a workshop hosted by ExCASES research project, conducted by the National Trust and University of Exeter as part of the [RENEW Programme](#). Focusing on a 'people-in-nature' approach this specific workshop focused on better understand the relationship between people, dogs, and nature. More work is planned, but the New Forest National Park Authority is being seen as one of the leaders in this area especially regarding working with commercial dog walkers.

Gillie was invited to sit on the panel at a Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Career Connect event giving opportunity for soon to be graduates of CIEEM-accredited degrees to connect with industry professionals and ask employability advice. We continue to build relationships with CIEEM and assist in developing connections with new entrants and young people entering our industry.

Communications

New planning enforcement rules were introduced in April and we issued a press release welcoming the tougher rules. These include unlimited fines for those who don't comply with enforcement notices, and a longer period in which Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) can take enforcement action against some unauthorised development – with the previous four-year limit now extended to 10 years. LPAs can now also issue temporary 'stop notices' on certain work, which are effective for up to 56 days rather than 28.

We helped to promote the consultations on the Ringwood and Wellow Neighbourhood Plans. We responded to comments on an application for a solar farm covering the size of 14 football pitches with a press release clarifying the planning committee's decision to refuse the scheme.

We worked with National Parks England to develop briefing notes on the Campaign for National Parks health check report and responded to media enquiries.

The YouCAN scheme has included promoting the launch of a Youth Board; our junior ranger scheme; a call for young community researchers to come forward; theatre for life

events to bring young people from Southampton into the Forest; a course from the Countryside Education Trust to introduce young people to green careers and Freshwater Habitats Trust events.

A communications plan for the Authority was approved by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee at its June meeting, setting out a framework and process for prioritising our communications work.

Our annual climate and nature Awakening Festival throughout March saw more than 3,000 people attended 90 events organised by over 50 partners. The Festival is about increasing people's understanding of the special qualities of the New Forest, the issues it faces and how we can all help respond to the nature and climate crises. Messages reached more than 1.5 million people through social and traditional media channels during the Festival.

Last financial year our campaigns saw social media impressions at 7.7m (up 17%); engagement – 303,000; video views – 840,000 up 245%; website users - 794,000 up 12%.

We launched the 20th anniversary season of the New Forest Tour with MoreBus, giving out goodie bags to the first 20 customers and capturing memories of visits over the years.

Our New Forest National Park Awards with the CLA were launched and nominations invited over six categories. The awards will be given out in the main ring at the New Forest Show. The NPA Show stand will feature a campaign commissioned by the Partnership Plan leaders to encourage more people to understand why the National Park is so special in terms of the natural world. Called 'behind the scenes', rare wildlife and habitats behind the scenes/views will be revealed, as well as people working for nature recovery behind the scenes in the New Forest. Visitors to the stand will experience a wildlife sensory tunnel of different species and see photographs by internationally-renowned photographer Steve Poole of those working or volunteering in conservation.

The annual review for 2023/24 has been written and designed, ready for print in time for the New Forest Show. We reprinted flyers and signs of the New Forest Code updated to include the Wiltshire Council logo.

Fundraising

We are awaiting a decision on our application to National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative for a project working with Hampshire County Council on the Breamore Railway line, near Fordingbridge. The bid seeks funds of £300,000 towards landscape improvements along the line.

We are in the process of setting up delivery of several recently awarded grants. During this period the focus for the Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN) project has been on establishing governance and finance structures for the project, and supporting our partners (Alabaré, Countryside Education Trust, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Southampton National Park City, The Parks Foundation, and Theatre for Life) to plan and deliver their project outputs. We have onboarded our project evaluation partner, Action Hampshire, and co-created a Theory of Change with a supporting evaluation framework. Two in-person quarterly project board meetings have been chaired by NPA member Brice Stratford, and a six-monthly funding report and budget reforecast has been shared with The National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund with positive feedback.

Similar governance and finance structures are being established for the Species Survival Fund project working alongside our partners Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, New Forest Commoners Defence Association, and Wild New Forest.

Arts Development

With funding from our Sustainable Communities Fund, ArtfulScribe, a not-for-profit writer development agency supporting and celebrating spoken and written word, in partnership with the Countryside Education Trust in Beaulieu, has appointed Yarrow Townsend as its first writer in residence. Over the next 12 months Yarrow will be spending time in and around the Countryside Education Trust, observing, participating, and writing, and using this experience to facilitate others to do the same. This residency will engage in wider New Forest initiatives through outcomes including workshops, an exhibition and culminating in a printed publication. Yarrow said: 'The New Forest has long been at the heart of my creative practice. From nightjars up on the heath, to curlews down on the mud – the flora and fauna of the New Forest is rich and inspiring. The Countryside Education Trust – perfectly sandwiched between ancient woodland and coastal landscapes – will be an exceptional place to not only create new writing but introduce others to this unique part of the country.'

As part of our role as a consortium member of Culture in Common, an arts and cultural programme for the New Forest, we supported our arts and heritage partners to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day in 2024. The Culture in Common team commissioned editor Dan Goater and designer Spike Golding to create a souvenir programme to serve as a testament to the pivotal role played by the New Forest in Operation Overlord, encompassing land, air, and sea operations that shaped the outcome of World War II. The souvenir programme served as a guide to the various exhibitions, projects, memorials, and commemorative events that took place across the New Forest to mark the 80th anniversary. Elsewhere, a series of creative walkshops have been established throughout the New Forest aimed at connecting people to nature and each other through creative activities including photography, sketching, and creative

writing. Monthly workshops will take place throughout the year in different outdoor locations each month, including Brockenhurst and Keyhaven. Plans and preparations are also underway for the Culture in Common team to partner with Folio New Forest (a collective of professional arts and cultural organisations including the NPA) for the third year to create a Cultural Quarter at the New Forest Show 2024, full of creative art activities, workshops, and high-quality performances.

We are continuing our partnership with SPUD to deliver the New Forest National Park Artist in Residence programme. Recent artists Alex Julyan and Ben Adamson took part in the residency during October 2023 and exhibited their work at spudWORKS in Sway during May. Alex's work focused on den building both as a process of construction, as well as an opportunity to exchange ideas, opinions, and experiences and to reflect on a basic human impulse – to build a den. Alex said: 'There's no question that my month in the Forest will stay with me forever. Apart from the many inspiring people I've met, the opportunity to find tranquillity, breathable air, and a space for my imagination to roam has been incalculable. I've barely scratched the surface of what the New Forest has to offer. My question is, will you have me back?'. The next artist, Jasper Rouwen, took part in the residency during May and will exhibit at spudWORKS in October.

Health and Wellbeing and inclusive projects

The Green Halo Partnership Conference took place in June, with a range of engaging and inspirational speakers and time for attendees to connect to nature in the New Forest National Park. Over 100 delegates attended, including from local businesses, charities, communities as well as those from six other National Parks. The event was supported by Bournemouth University and the South Downs National Park Authority. The venue enabled outdoor activities to take place including a nature connection session and a guided walk to the Sales Yard, plus a chance to try out the PEDALL bikes and hear about this project. We look to now capitalise on this with expansion and promotion of initiatives such as the Green Health Hub and are planning further collaboration to position our area as a focal point for the 'natural health service'.

Two new NHS Public Health Fellows will join us in August, working two days per week each on developing thinking and delivery in this area. They will also be supported by Hampshire County Council's Public Health Team.

In April, we delivered two engagement sessions with Southampton National Park City and, in total, welcomed 22 participants, showing them the New Forest and leading low-key activities and an introduction to cycling via the PEDALL team.

PEDALL New Forest Inclusive Cycling

Now in our peak riding period, we can report that 1,585 riders have joined our inclusive riding sessions April – June, with a total rider number of 1,892 calendar year to date.

We are building momentum at our PEDALL Ashurst Community Hub and have warmly welcomed new student groups with special educational needs from Totton College and Clay Hill School (Lyndhurst). Additionally new groups from Headway Totton (charity supporting people with brain injury) and the local Dementia Hub group have enjoyed joyful rides in the sunshine. Pedall's fleet of specialist cycles really do enable people, no matter what barrier they may face, access the New Forest National Park, improving their health, happiness, and wellbeing.

Pedall hosted our first 'Pedall Voices' event in June, during which time we took a group of regular riders on an extended cycle ride, guided by Naomi Addleton from the Ranger team. The purpose of the Pedall Voices initiative is to offer our riders the opportunity to share their experience, insight and ideas, guiding our project direction and also helping us promote our project by sharing their stories, recognising that our riders are the most effective advocates to promote our inclusive riding session. One of our Pedall voices group commented: 'I can't emphasise enough the huge impact and surprise at finding we could 'cycle' with my husband in a wheelchair. The first excursion using the wheelchair ramp cycle was life-changing. To lose so much but then get back onto forest tracks is fantastic.'

Pedall will be working alongside our friends at Forestry England at the New Forest Show, where we will be offering forest cycle rides for families to promote the Pedall inclusive cycle rides. We are also gearing up for our community celebration and fundraising event 'Pass the PEDALL 2024' on 18 September, during which Gareth Jones, Pedall Operations Manager, we will be riding continuously from dawn to dusk supported by our volunteers and regular riding groups. The aim of 'Pass the PEDALL' is to raise awareness for inclusive cycling in the New Forest National Park, to challenge our riding community, offering them a sense of personal achievement and to raise funds essential to our project sustainability.

Following news of success in March from the Lottery Community Fund for a five-year grant of £384K, we were delighted to receive additional funding from South Western Rail 'Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF)' of £44.5K in support of our 'Ride Leader' and outreach costs relating to our Ashurst site.

Friends of Pedall continue to support the project with Trustees driving awareness in target corporate and community organisations to establish new funding paths.

Volunteering and Ambassadors

From March we have completed 18 hours of volunteer time working on path maintenance at Lymington Hospital. We have started the recruitment process for a Volunteer Coordinator which should increase our capacity to deliver volunteer activities.

In March we marked the Great British Spring Clean campaign alongside Freshwater Habitats Trust by leading a 'litter-picking and information' event at Calshot, with the help

of New Forest Ambassadors.

Our ambassador programme is still active, with interested participants being able to pick up a litter-picking kit from Lymington Town Hall reception. We also encourage our ambassadors to join to the National Parks UK Look Wild Project on iNaturalist.

Volunteers in the New Forest Oral History Group contributed 9.5 hours transcribing oral history recordings.

Recreation Management

Work is progressing to develop a spatial plan for recreation management (one of the key priorities listed in the Partnership Plan) and it is expected that an initial draft will be ready to share with the Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group (RMSSG) when it next meets in September.

The Recreation Management Strategy Advisory Group (RMSAG) met on 30 April and discussed a wide range of issues that included car parks, campsites, cycling and the ground nesting bird campaign.

A Hampshire County Council led public consultation on the draft New Forest Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is scheduled for September.

Refresher training was organised in May for staff engaged with the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) where the emphasis remains on the four Es – engage, explain, educate, enforce.

We continue to work with our neighbouring local planning authorities, Natural England and Forestry England on the preparation of a 'New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy' (SAMM). This is focused on addressing the recreational impacts of planned new development within the defined 13.8km 'zone of influence' from the New Forest's internationally designated nature conservation sites and will complement the measures being delivered by local planning authorities within the own administrative areas. The work builds on the extensive research undertaken by the specialist consultants Footprint Ecology and will identify a costed package of measures designed to mitigate impacts arising from new development consented by local planning authorities. Officers have continued to liaise closely with Natural England and a presentation on the work was given at the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan Annual Tour in June.

Access and Rights of Way

The Highcliffe to Calshot section of the King Charles III England Coast Path is still in the determination phase. We are waiting for the Planning Inspector to make decisions on the 70+ objections raised during the previous phase and decide upon the route. We are in regular contact with the Natural England King Charles III England Coast Path team and are hopeful that we can begin establishment works next year.

In partnership with the Cadland Estate, with National Grid funding, we have improved 500 meters of muddy public bridleway (heavily used by local dog walkers and riders) and have started preparatory work on a public footpath stream crossing.

3 Duty: Prosper

Re: New Forest Partnership Plan

The annual New Forest National Park Partnership Plan Tour took place on 17 June. There was a wide range of local stakeholders and partners represented on the tour, which this year focused on the north of the New Forest. The tour included visits to the RSPB's reserve at Franchises Lodge; the Langley Wood National Nature; and Lyburn Farm. At each stop attendees heard more about the work being undertaken to deliver against the Partnership Plan themes of nature recovery, net zero with nature, thriving forest and vibrant communities, all working under the 'Team New Forest' theme. Particular thanks to the RSPB, Wiltshire Council, Natural England, Lyburn Farm, Test Valley Borough Council and the National Trust for speaking at the event.

Green Halo Partnership Conference

Our latest Green Halo Conference was held at the Beaulieu Inn hotel, with over 100 delegates considering the 'The healing power of nature' and the role National Parks can play in the delivery of a 'Natural Health Service'. Coinciding with the 75th anniversary of the creation of national parks in England Wales, a range of speakers provided insights into how accessibility to inspirational landscapes and nature rich areas can impact positively on public health, arts and creativity and both formal and informal learning.

GreenPrint

We continue to support the pan-regional GreenPrint initiative, which brings together partners to work towards a green central south region, focussing on collaboration and action across five themes- Net zero with nature, Natural health service, World class blue/green environments, Creating great places through quality in design and build and becoming a centre for excellence in green skills and jobs. GreenPrint is a partnership between the NPA, University of Southampton and University of Portsmouth supported by the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH). A successful workshop of local authority partners took place in June which scoped out future collaboration and communication, which will be presented to PfSH later this year. This is underpinned by a three-year plan for GreenPrint which is in the final stages of development. We are working with University of Southampton on sourcing funding for green skills and jobs audit for the region.

New Forest Marque

Our partnership with New Forest Produce Limited was highlighted at the RAPC meeting on 3 June, when members approved the annual grant in support of the New Forest Marque.

The Marque Chair Dan Parsons presented at the RAPC meeting and noted the rise in membership during 23/24, reaching 171 in April. This is partly due to the creation of New Forest Marque 'Inspired' which promotes authentic and original arts and crafts inspired by the beauty of the New Forest.

On 29 May, NPA members visited Brook Hill vineyard in Bramshaw to hear first-hand about the Marque and the support and networking opportunities the Marque offers its members.

We helped with content for the next Local Produce Guide which has gone to print in time for the New Forest Show.

Visitor experience

We have engaged with new staff from the larger hotels in the New Forest to identify opportunities to promote our 'care for' messages with their staying guests.

The 'Enjoy the New Forest' survey launched on 29 June and encouragingly received 140 responses within the first few days. This is the third year of the survey, designed along with Forestry England and Go New Forest. We hope to identify some trend data and information which may shape our work programme and priorities.

New Forest Tour

The season started on 29 June, the sun shone, and the 20th anniversary was marked by distribution of goodie bags to the first customers. We are grateful to local businesses and partner organisations for continuing to support the New Forest Tour as a car-alternative to exploring the forest. Discounted tickets are available via the Morebus app to New Forest National Park residents.

Sustainable Transport and active travel

The Cycle Working Group held a positive meeting on 25 June. Updates and discussion topics included the LCWIP, Active Travel England (ATE) funding, upcoming consultations impacting active travel, and aspirations to improve the off-road network with the support of partners.

As referenced above, following the grant of £100k from Active Travel England's capability fund, we have commissioned the active travel charity Sustrans to audit the National Cycle Network in the National Park (NCN 2 and NCN 236). This study will pave the way to identify where on this network we will need to focus further feasibility work to join up sections of the network. Members of the Cycle Working Group joined Sustrans, HCC and NFNPA staff in June to start this process on site. Other feasibility work will follow later in the year following the consultation on the New Forest LCWIP (led by HCC and supported by the NFNPA, FE and NFDC) scheduled for September.

Affordable Housing

Work has commenced on the Church Lane, Sway site, which is due to deliver 23 new affordable dwellings as part of a mixed scheme. This site is allocated for development in the adopted New Forest National Park Local Plan (2019) and the on-site affordable housing being delivered will make a significant contribution to meeting the identified need for affordable housing arising within the parish.

There has been a renewed effort to get all the final agreements completed to allow work to start on the two new affordable homes at Burley.

Sustainable Communities Fund

We recently reviewed the criteria for the sustainable communities fund and agreed a renewed focus on improving opportunities for wildlife and habitats as well as reducing carbon emissions. Alongside these criteria we have also introduced a new focus on connecting people to nature by supporting cultural and natural heritage projects that foster identity and a sense of place. With this in mind, we recently approved funds of £2,000 for Hampshire Amphibian and Reptile Recording Network to produce an atlas showing the distribution of native species of amphibian and reptile in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and provide a baseline for future recording. Our contribution is a share of the overall cost and proportional to the contribution in the New Forest. The publication will be the first amphibian and reptile atlas for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and provides a tangible acknowledgement of the effort expended by 200 individuals in submitting around 4,000 of the records to date. Feedback often received by volunteers is how they can better understand how their contribution is helping the New Forest landscape, and the atlas is a good way to demonstrate this.

4 Organisation: Achieving Excellence

New Forest Voices

We have supported a national programme to co-create a 'vision for belonging' for the family of UK National Parks. This work, sponsored by DEFRA involves workshops across the National Parks with community groups and representatives and NFNPA staff. We welcomed the team working on this in June at a 'walking workshop' in Brockenhurst and we also visited Pedall to ride with the Minstead Trust and experience this project. Then in July we hosted a follow up session with representatives from National Parks across the southern UK. The results of this work and the vision will be presented at the September National Parks UK Conference, hosted by Northumberland National Park in Newcastle.

Following development of the EDI policy for the NPA, we are developing workshop sessions for all members and staff to take place in the autumn.

Human Resources

As of 30 June 2024 the total staff headcount was 78 or 68.35 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

| | Headcount | Variation from previous report | Full Time Equivalents | Variation from previous report |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Core funded | 58* | + 2 | 51.16* | + 0.88 |
| Funded by external projects | 20 | + 2 | 17.19 | + 1.31 |
| Total | 78 | + 4 | 68.35 | + 2.19 |

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

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

| Role | Contract type | How funded |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Youth Engagement Co-ordinator | Fixed term to August 2026 | Project funded |
| Planning Officer | Fixed term, part-time | Core funded |
| PEDALL – Inclusive Cycling Ride Leader x 2 | Summer seasonal, part-time | Project funded |
| Building Design and Conservation Officer x 2 | Permanent, full-time | Core funded |
| IT and Cyber Security Technical Officer | Permanent, part-time | Core funded |

We said goodbye to:

| Role | Contract type | How role will be filled in future |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| Ranger | Permanent, core funded | Like for like replacement |
| Senior Building Design and Conservation Officer | Permanent, core funded | Replace with non-senior officer |
| Communications Assistant | Permanent, project funded | Replace on a fixed-term contract for two years |

We are currently recruiting:

| Role | Contract type | How funded |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Communications Assistant x 3 | Fixed-term | Project funded |
| Planning Officer x 2 | Maternity cover | Core funded |
| Education and Youth Officer | Maternity cover | Core funded |
| Project Co-ordinator | Fixed-term | Project funded |

IT & Cyber Security Services

Security / Infrastructure

In April DEFRA held its first security conference in Westminster for all arms-length bodies (ALBs). The IT & Cyber Security Manager gave a presentation to the conference which outlined a typical day in the life of a small ALB IT team, highlighting the considerable security challenges faced by the team. The meeting was informative and useful contacts made.

Planning system

Some progress is being made on the outstanding work, albeit slow. Agile Applications have been supplied with 100 cases across planning, trees and enforcement to test linking the converted PDF files and removing the associated tiff files. Following extensive checks, if this appears to have been successful, the remaining files will be done.

Following the successful bid to obtain funding from DLUHC for digital planning improvement, the IT & Cyber Security Technician is working closely with the Head of Policy, Head of Resources and NFDC's digital planning project lead to progress this project.

As part of both the outstanding work with Agile and the upcoming Land Registry changes, we have / are in the process of carrying out a large volume of manual data checking, tidying. This has involved checking entries for over 1,000 historic appeals, checking nearly 1,000 TPO cases for missing documents and uploading approximately 150 TPO orders, all very time-consuming work.

Other work / projects

In May we welcomed Anthony Fakiyesi to the team in the role of IT & Cyber Security Technical Officer. Anthony will help support the IT & Cyber Security Manager with the

technical setup of devices and applications along with security updates and regular security tips for staff.

Replacement telephone system implementation – there are some initial difficulties affecting a small number of external callers getting through. Following investigation, we have been advised that the issue is not with our system and we are currently registering full details of the calls, times and numbers to our provider who is passing on the information to the relevant authorities.

A new draft IT policy is with the Head of Resources for final review, following which a full staff consultation will be undertaken and a revised policy should be adopted in the autumn.

The team ran a successful discovery day, Cyber Meltdown, which was cleverly devised by our IT Cyber & Security Technician. It aimed to give other staff an insight into how IT must prioritise their work, deal with deadlines and interruptions whilst ensuring data protection requirements are met, but also how they might respond to a cyber-attack to ensure everything is up and running promptly.

Legal and Information management

Our solicitor continues to provide legal advice to the NPA on a wide range of matters relating to its work, including governance, contractual matters and the planning function.

Year-end statistics for 2023/24

Information requests

We received 77 requests for information between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, the highest number ever received in a single year and a 15% increase on the previous year.

| Information requests received by year | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 | 2021/22 | 2020/21 | 2019/20 | 2018/19 | 2017/18 |
| Q1 | 14 | 18 | 19 | 22 | 11 | 14 | 14 |
| Q2 | 33 | 14 | 12 | 19 | 8 | 20 | 10 |
| Q3 | 15 | 24 | 20 | 14 | 15 | 12 | 15 |
| Q4 | 15 | 11 | 15 | 19 | 19 | 12 | 8 |
| Total | 77 | 67 | 66 | 74 | 53 | 58 | 47 |

We met the statutory response timeframe (20 working days or one calendar month for subject access requests) in 94% of requests, with the average response time being 15.8 working days.

Of the 77 requests, two were subject access requests made under GDPR i.e. requests for the personal data of the requester. Twenty (26%) were handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and related our IT arrangements, spending and procurement and other governance and work practices matters.

The remaining requests (71%) were handled under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) because they related to our planning function or other environmental matters. Almost half of all requests were related to a specific planning or enforcement case or site, where the requester was seeking information which would not generally be publicly available, such as pre-application enquiries or the source and details relating to planning enforcement investigations.

As in previous years, most requests were received from private individuals, with the rest from journalists, pressure groups, businesses and students/researchers at universities, which accounted for approximately a third of all requests.

In accordance with the presumption in favour of disclosure under the EIR and the public interest in transparency, we endeavour to release as much information as possible. In 38 requests (49%) the information was either released in full or only subject to minor personal data redactions, and a further nine requests (12%) the information was partially released. Only 13 requests (17%) were withheld in their entirety (generally because they were related to sensitive planning enforcement cases or other potential or ongoing legal matters).

In 14 requests (18%) we did not hold the information requested and where appropriate, the requesters were referred to the relevant public authority that we believed may hold the information. Three requests 'lapsed' because they were ambiguous and the requester did not respond when we sought clarification.

Of the 77 requests received, only five requesters asked for an internal review of our initial response; two of those internal reviews were from the same individual. In all cases the internal review upheld the original decision. We are not aware of any of these being subsequently referred to the Information Commissioner; however, since the last internal review was only undertaken in June, if it has been appealed, we may not have been notified yet.

Formal complaints

We investigated 14 formal complaints which is two more than the previous year. As can be seen from the table below the number of formal complaints received do vary year on year and have remained low for the past three years.

| Number of complaints received per year | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 | 2021/22 | 2020/21 | 2019/20 | 2018/19 | 2017/18 |
| Q1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 9 |
| Q2 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| Q3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 9 |
| Q4 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 3 |
| Total | 14 | 12 | 12 | 21 | 18 | 17 | 25 |

All were related to specific planning applications or enforcement cases. Our average response time was 18.7 working days, and in just one case we exceeded the 20-working day target by two days. None of the complaints were upheld. In five cases, on receiving the initial response the complainant requested a review by the Chief Executive under Stage 3 of our process. In all cases the original decision was upheld.

Four complaints have been referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. We have received the Ombudsman's decision for two of the cases and in both the Ombudsman decided not to investigate and closed the case after making initial enquiries; one because the NPA's actions did not cause the complainant significant injustice and the other because they were unlikely to find fault. The other two complaints are from the same complainant and are currently at the initial enquiry stage, and we are yet to hear whether the Ombudsman will close them at this stage or conduct a full investigation.

5 Members

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

- 3 April – Members Day – PEDALL
- 16 April – Planning Committee
- 21 May – Planning Committee
- 1 May – Waterside Members Briefing
- 29 May – New Forest Marque Members Day
- 3 June – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 6 June – Consultative Panel
- 10 June – New Forest Access Forum
- 18 June – Planning Committee
- 11 July – FiPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) Local Assessment Panel
- 16 July – Planning Committee

5.2 Forthcoming Members activities include:

- 30 July, 31 July & 1 August – New Forest Show
- 20 August – Planning Committee

- 5 September – Consultative Panel
- 5 September - FiPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) Local Assessment Panel
- 9 September – Resources, Audit and performance Committee
- 17 September – Planning Committee
- 19 September – Members Day TBC
- 15 October – Planning Committee

5.3 Chief Executive's external engagements

- 21 March – NPC review interview
- 22 March – Greenprint Steering Group
- 25 March – English National Park Officer Group (ENPOG) meeting
- 28 March – regular catch up with the Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England (FE)
- 28 March – meeting with the Chief Executive, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- 28 March – Waterside Steering Group
- 10 April – St George's Windsor Conversation
- 11 April – Green Halo Conference planning meeting
- 12 April – Lunch with Green Leadership Coach
- 15-16 April – National Parks Chief Executives meeting
- 17 April – National Parks England (NPE) Board meeting
- 18 April – National Park City Board meeting
- 19 April – Meeting with Chewton Glen Hotel Manager
- 22 April – St George's Fellowship Annual Lecture
- 23 April – Meeting with new Chair, Consultative Panel
- 23 April – Meeting with UK Chief Executive's and Chairs
- 23 April – International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) meeting
- 23 April – Regular catch up with Chair, National Parks Partnership
- 24 April – HLS Board
- 25 April – Meeting with Executive Director, National Parks England (NPE)
- 26 April – National Park City international meeting
- 28 April – NFDC 50th Anniversary Civic Service event
- 29 April – Protected Landscapes Nature Recovery workshop
- 29 April – Speaker at New Milton Annual Town Council meeting
- 30 April – Meeting with Assistant Director, Regeneration and Growth, Hampshire County Council
- 3 May – BBC Gardeners World Spring Fair
- 7 May – Meeting with Friends of Brockenhurst
- 8 May – Regular meeting with Deputy Director Thames Solent, Natural England
- 9 May – Meetings regarding Chief Executive recruitment at Lake District NP
- 9 May – Meeting regarding summer visit by other NPs and non-government organisations
- 10 May – Verderers Welfare Tour
- 14 May – National Park City meeting

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- 14 May – Welcome to the Historic Environment Groups from the UK
 - 14 May – Meeting with Chief Executive, North York Moors NPA
 - 15 May – Attended Historic Environment Group site visits
 - 15 May – Business South Champions Dinner
 - 16 May – The Central South Civic University of Southampton celebratory event
 - 17 May – Wildlife Trusts Tour
 - 20 May – English National Parks Officer Group peer learning session
 - 21 May – Greenprint Steering Group
 - 21 May – Defra – Species Survival fund site visit
 - 22 May – Regular catch up with the Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England
 - 22 May – Prabhaav Global Cultural Heritage Event
 - 22 May – The Work Revolution book launch
 - 23 May – Green Leadership Group session
 - 24 May – Regular catch up with Chief Executive, New Forest District Council
 - 24 May – Regular catch up with National Park City, Executive Director
 - 28 May – Business South Board meeting, Beaulieu Motor Museum
 - 29 May – Meeting with Director of Science, Natural England
 - 29 May – New Forest Marque members day
 - 30 May – Meeting with Area Director Solent and South Downs, Environment Agency
 - 3-4 June – Interview Panel for Chief Executive, Lake District NPA
 - 5 June – National Parks England (NPE) Board meeting
 - 6-7 June – National Parks UK Chairs Forum
 - 9 June – D-Day memorial service
 - 12 June – Green Halo Conference - National Parks for Health: A Natural Health Service
 - 12 June – 50th Anniversary event – Mottisfont Rose Garden
 - 13 June – Speaker at University College London (UCL) event
 - 14 June – Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) Greenprint workshop
 - 14 June – PfSH Greenprint site visit
 - 17 June – Partnership Plan Summer tour
 - 18 June – Meeting with Heartbeat CEO
 - 18 June – Meeting with Deputy Team Leader Economic Development, New Forest District Council
 - 20 June – St George's Fellowship Peers follow up session in the New Forest
 - 24 June – English National Parks Officer Group meeting
 - 25 June – English Agriculture and Rural Development Group visit to the New Forest
 - 27 June – Forest Farming Group discussion
 - 27 June – Yearly discovery day staff event
 - 28 June – Introductory meeting with Nature Recovery lead – Protected Landscapes Partnership, Natural England
 - 28 June – Meeting with Chief Executive, Business South

- 1 July – Meeting with Chief Executive, Solent Freeport
- 3 July – Hosted visit by Chief Executive, Southern Water
- 4 July – Meeting with Go New Forest
- 4 July – Introductory meeting with Head of Nature Based Solutions, National Parks Partnerships
- 4 July – Regular catch up with National Park City, Executive Director
- 8 July – Performance Panel
- 9 July – Regular catch up with Chair, National Parks Partnership
- 10 July – Regular catch up with Chief Executive, New Forest District Council
- 22-23 July – National Park City strategy meeting
- 23 July – University of Southampton Vice-Chancellor dinner celebrations

5.4 Chair's engagements

- 17 April – National Parks England Board meeting
- 14 May – Protected Landscapes Target and Outcomes meeting
- 5 June – National Parks England Board meeting
- 12 June – Solent Freeport Board meeting
- 27 June – Forest Farming Group meeting
- 2 July – Forest Farming Group meeting
- 8 July – Partnership for South Hampshire members briefing
- 9 July – Fawley Waterside meeting
- 16 July – Partnership for South Hampshire Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 16 July – Solent Freeport Board meeting
- 23 July – Partnership for South Hampshire Joint Committee

6 Recommendation

To note the report.