

## NFNPA 682/24

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING

25 JULY 2024

#### RINGWOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - ADOPTION

**Report by:** David Illsley, Policy & Conservation Manager

#### **Summary:**

Following receipt of the independent Examiner's Report and recommendations into the draft Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan in February 2024, the National Park Authority agreed what actions to take in our published 'Decision Statement' of May 2024 (report PC 459/24).

Under the relevant regulations, the final part of the Neighbourhood Plan-making process is a local referendum for residents within the parish of Ringwood. The referendum was arranged by New Forest District Council (as the 'relevant council') and was held on the same day as the General Election – Thursday 4 July 2024. The overwhelming majority (**82.3%**) of local residents who voted in the referendum supported the draft Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (Annex 1), meaning it can proceed to adoption by the two local planning authorities.

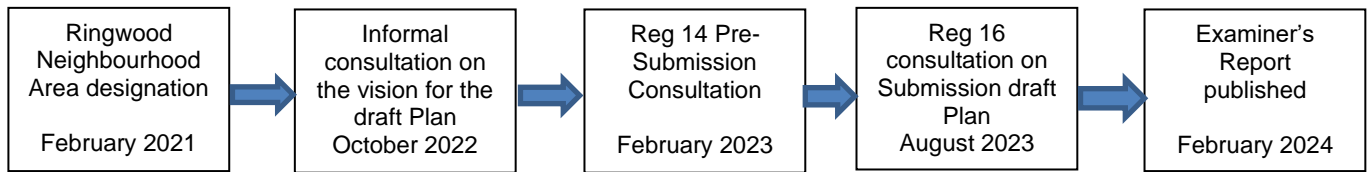
This report therefore recommends the formal 'making' (i.e. adoption) of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (Annex 2) for the part of the parish within the New Forest National Park. Once adopted, the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the statutory 'development plan' for the National Park – alongside the Authority's adopted Local Plan (2019) - and will form the basis for decisions on planning applications within the parish.

#### **Recommendation:**

**The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (Annex 2) be formally 'made' (i.e. adopted) and brought into immediate effect to form part of the statutory 'development plan' and the basis for planning decisions within the part of the National Park in Ringwood parish.**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Work on the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan commenced in early 2021 when the Town Council applied to the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council for the whole of the parish to be designated as a 'Neighbourhood Area'. Around half of the parish of Ringwood lies within the National Park, including the areas of Hightown Common, Hangersley, Crow Hill, Shobley and Bisterne. The designation was confirmed by both local planning authorities for their respective areas in February 2021.
- 1.2 Work on the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan has been driven by the Town Council. They have employed a range of techniques to engage people in the Plan, including surveys, workshops, presentations and drop-in sessions, as well as attending local school assemblies. The Town Council also established four working groups that drew in local people with specialist knowledge on issues including ecology and built heritage. The diagram below summarises some of the key stages that the preparation of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan has gone through over the last three years.



- 1.3 The Authority has liaised with Ringwood Town Council and New Forest District Council throughout this Plan-making process. The Examiner's Report into the draft Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (February 2024) concludes, "...I particularly commend the Town Council's Working Groups, alongside all those that have had an input into the preparation of the Plan. I therefore consider that there is an excellent prospect that the implementation of the policies within the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (when 'made') will ensure that all the stated objectives will be successfully achieved..." (para. 5.5).
- 1.4 Following receipt of the Examiner's Report, it is the responsibility of the local planning authority / authorities to:
- ensure the Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions and to determine whether it proceeds to referendum, with or without modifications; and
  - decide whether the voting area should be the Neighbourhood Area or should include other areas too.
- 1.5 Report PC 459/24 was agreed at the May 2024 Planning Committee meeting and sets out a 'Decision Statement' in response to each of the independent Examiner's recommendations. It was also agreed that the voting area for the local referendum would be the Parish of Ringwood and that there was no need for it to be extended further. This was in accordance with the independent Examiner's recommendations.

## **2. Ringwood Local Referendum – 4 July 2024 (Annex 1)**

- 2.1 As the 'relevant council' under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, it was the responsibility of New Forest District Council to make arrangements for the referendum into the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan. The National Planning Practice Guidance resource on 'Neighbourhood Plans' and the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012 provide details on the referendum process. This includes the question to be asked; details of the information that must be made available; the hours of polling; and the notices required in advance of the referendum date.
- 2.2 The referendum was held on 4 July 2024, on the same date as the General Election. The required notices regarding the date of the referendum and how people could vote were published in May 2024. The question asked was "Do you want New Forest District Council and New Forest National Park Authority to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Ringwood to help it decide planning applications in the Neighbourhood Area?". The main headlines from the referendum result set out in Annex 1 are:
- Turn-out of 58.9% of the eligible electorate in the parish of Ringwood; and
  - **83.2%** of the residents who voted in the referendum voted in favour of the Plan.
- 2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan-making process requires at least 50% of the people who vote in a referendum to support the Plan for it to proceed to adoption. As highlighted above, the overwhelming majority (83.2%) of the local community in Ringwood who voted supported the Neighbourhood Plan. The turnout figure – which at nearly 60% was significantly higher than is typical for neighbourhood plan referendums – highlights the benefits of holding the Neighbourhood Plan referendum alongside the General Election.

### **3. Adoption as part of the ‘development plan’ for the National Park (Annex 2)**

- 3.1 With a strong majority of those who voted in the July 2024 referendum supporting the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan, the Plan must be ‘made’ (i.e. adopted) by the National Park Authority and District Council within eight weeks of the referendum date.
- 3.2 This report therefore recommends that the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan – as set out in Annex 2 – be formally adopted by the National Park Authority. The Plan has been through several rounds of public consultation; independent examination; and has been positively endorsed by the overwhelming majority of local residents who voted in the July 2024 referendum. On adoption, the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the part of the National Park within the parish of Ringwood; forming the basis of planning decisions in that area. New Forest District Council will be formally adopting the Neighbourhood Plan insofar as it relates to the half of the parish within their planning jurisdiction later this summer.
- 3.3 The recommended adoption of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan for the area of the parish within the National Park marks the culmination of several years by Ringwood Town Council, the members of the various working groups established to inform the Plan and the local community. As set out in the Examiner’s Report (February 2024), “...the approach towards the preparation of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan has been conducted in a fair and inclusive manner. I am satisfied sufficient regard has been had to advice in the Planning Practice Guidance on plan preparation and engagement and the process has been procedurally compliant in accordance with the legal requirements.” Members are therefore asked to formally adopt the Neighbourhood Plan.

#### **Recommendation:**

**The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (Annex 2) be formally ‘made’ (i.e. adopted) and brought into immediate effect to form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ and the basis for planning decisions within the part of the National Park in Ringwood parish.**

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**Papers:** **NFNPA 682/24** – cover paper

**Annex 1** – Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan Referendum (4 July 2024) – results of poll

**Annex 2** – Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (for adoption)

#### **Equality Impact Assessment:**

No impacts have been identified. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared through several rounds of public consultation and independent examination. Ringwood Town Council employed a number of initiatives - including surveys, workshops, presentations and drop-in sessions – to inform the Plan-preparation process. The independent Examiner concluded that the Plan was legally-compliant.