

PC 474/24

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING – 17 DECEMBER 2024

HAMPSHIRE AND WILTSHIRE LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGIES – UPDATE

Report by: David Illsley, Policy & Conservation Manager

1. Introduction

- 1.1 England is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world following historic and ongoing declines. The previous Government therefore made legally-binding commitments to end these declines and for nature to recover. There is a recognition that for nature to recover, targeted and co-ordinated action will be required.
- 1.2 [Local Nature Recovery Strategies \(LNRS\)](#) were introduced under the Environment Act 2021. They are locally led, evidence-based strategies that will help to prioritise and target action and nature investment. The Government has designated 48 ‘responsible authorities’ to lead the preparation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their areas. In the case of the New Forest National Park, Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council are the responsible authorities for their respective areas of the Park.
- 1.3 Each LNRS will agree priorities for nature’s recovery; map the most valuable existing areas for nature; and map specific opportunity areas for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals. By mapping where important habitats can be conserved, restored and connected, the LNRSs will allow effort and funding to be funnelled into the most important areas, supporting nature recovery across the landscape. The rationale is that once put together, the 48 local nature recovery strategies that cover the country will be a key way through which the Government’s England-wide nature recovery targets are met.

2. Role of the New Forest National Park Authority as a ‘supporting authority’

- 2.1 The regulations that support the Environment Act 2021 designate the role of ‘supporting authority’ to all planning authorities (including national park authorities) in the Strategy area; and Natural England for all LNRSs. The New Forest National Park Authority is therefore a ‘supporting authority’ for both the Hampshire and Wiltshire LNRSs.
- 2.2 The role of the ‘supporting authorities’ is to share information and insight with the responsible bodies, based on their knowledge of their areas. More specifically, given their statutory planning remits, supporting authorities can ensure LNRSs dovetail with the plan-making system and play a role in the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).
- 2.3 National Park Authority officers have positively engaged with both Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council as they prepare their respective Local Nature Recovery Strategies for their administrative areas. Both responsible authorities gave a briefing to Authority members and officers on their emerging work through a workshop held at Lymington Town Hall on 21 October 2024. This included an overview of the stages reached, the engagement undertaken to date and the next steps in the process.

3. Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

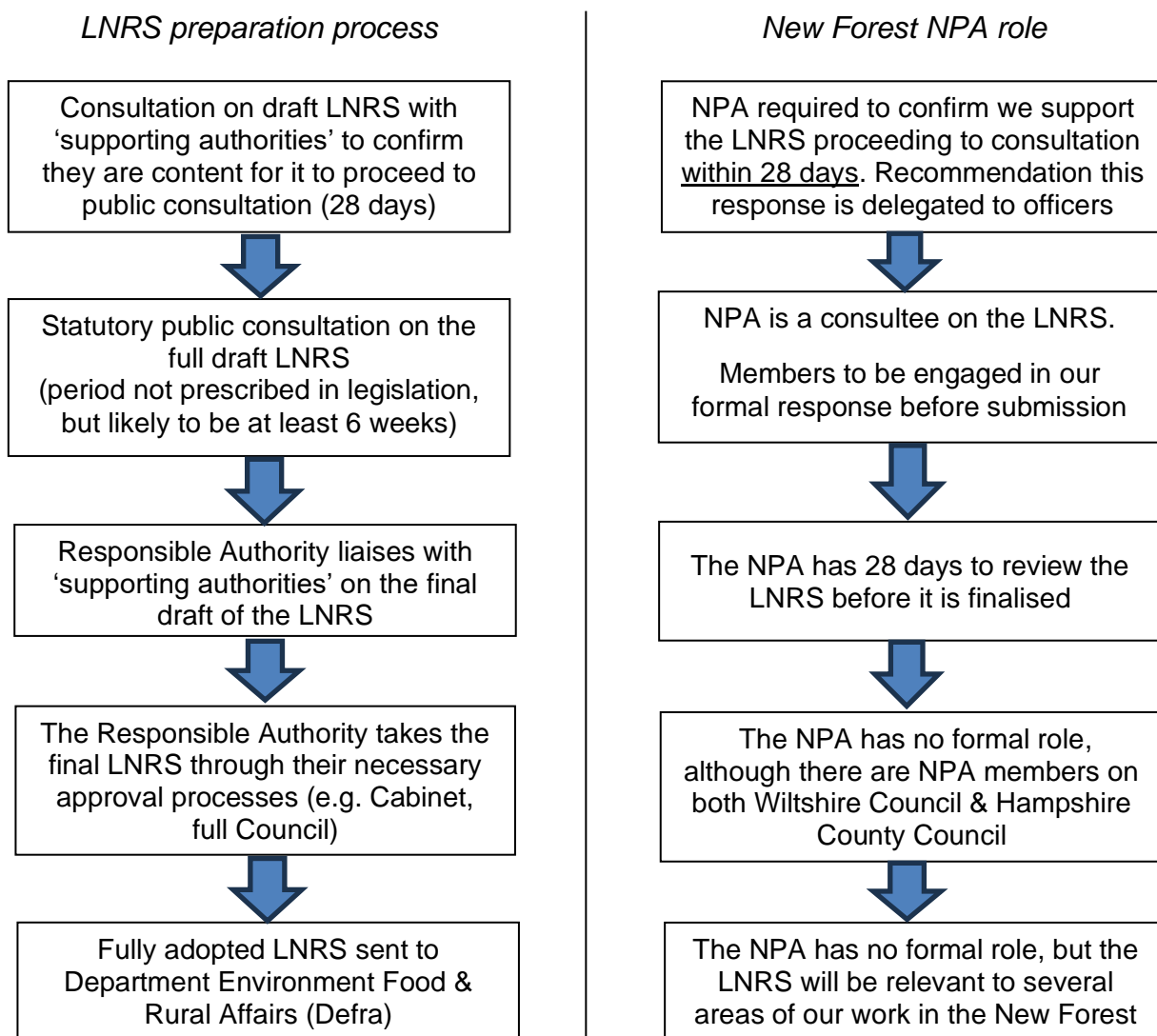
- 3.1 Around 95% of the New Forest National Park is located within Hampshire and will therefore be covered by the emerging Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The preparation of this LNRS is being led by Hampshire County Council and further information is available on their website at [Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire | Environment | Hampshire County Council](#).
- 3.2 In our capacity as ‘supporting authority’, we have been involved in the production of the Hampshire LNRS. For example, the National Park Authority is represented on the Steering Group established to guide the preparation of the Strategy (other representatives on the Steering Group include Natural England, the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the National Farmers Union, the Country Land & Business Association and several other Hampshire local authorities). We are also represented on the ‘Local Planning Authority Working Group’, which is important given the future relationship between LNRSs and local development plans. As outlined above, Hampshire County Council officers also attended a workshop for Authority members on the emerging LNRS at Lymington Town Hall in October 2024, which was well attended.
- 3.3 Following recent advice from Natural England, the timetable for consultation on the emerging Hampshire LNRS has moved back, as Hampshire County Council are working to make the ‘opportunity areas’ identified in the Strategy more focused. It is now envisaged that the statutory consultation on the draft LNRS will take place during the first half of 2025. Section 5 of this report sets out the process for producing an LNRS and also the National Park Authority’s role (and member engagement) at each stage.

4. Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

- 4.1 Around 5% of the New Forest National Park is located within Wiltshire and will therefore be covered by the emerging Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The preparation of this LNRS is led by Wiltshire Council and further information is available on their website at [Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy - Wiltshire Council](#).
- 4.2 In our capacity as ‘supporting authority’, we have similarly been involved in the production of the Wiltshire LNRS. For example, the National Park Authority is represented on the ‘Oversight Group’ established to guide the preparation of the Strategy (other representatives on the Group include Natural England and a Swindon Borough Council lead). This Oversight Group is supported by a ‘Steering Group’ with a broader membership, including the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and representatives from the farming and land management community. As outlined above, Wiltshire Council officers also attended a workshop for Authority members on the emerging LNRS at Lymington Town Hall in October 2024.
- 4.3 Wiltshire Council released a first draft of their LNRS map for feedback in September 2024. They are currently reviewing the responses received and making updates where appropriate. A full formal public consultation will be held in 2025 which will offer a greater opportunity to provide feedback on the Wiltshire LNRS. Further details on the process for approving the final version of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is set out below, which follows the relevant Government guidance and regulations.

5. Next steps in the LNRS process

- 5.1 Set out below is a summary of the process for the final preparation and adoption of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Full legal details of the process can be found in [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#). The flow diagram also sets out on the right-hand side the role of the National Park Authority at each stage and the opportunities for members to input into the process.



- 5.2 As outlined above, the Authority is involved in two main stages of the LNRS-preparation process, namely: (a) indicating our support for the draft LNRS to be published for public consultation (Regulations 7 – 11); and (b) in responding to the subsequent consultation as a consultee for both the Hampshire and Wiltshire LNRSs (Regulation 12).
- 5.3 The Authority is required to respond to the pre-consultation request from the 'responsible authorities' to consult on the draft LNRS within 28 days of the date of receipt. It is important to emphasise that this pre-consultation is the opportunity for supporting authorities to flag up any significant issues with the draft Strategy that prevent it from being subject to future wider public consultation. This is therefore distinct from providing detailed consultation feedback on the content of the LNRS, the opportunity for which is the statutory consultation that follows.

- 5.4 Given the narrow technical question that is being asked at this pre-consultation stage – and the limited response time of 28 days set out in the relevant Regulations – it is recommended that the Authority’s engagement in this stage of the LNRS process is delegated to officers. This would allow us to meet the statutory time limit for responding, while still ensuring that members have the opportunity to review and feed into the Authority’s formal feedback during the public consultation period that follows.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The New Forest National Park Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027 includes a theme on ‘Nature Recovery’ and commits partners to working together, and at scale, to maintain, reconnect and enhance nature, with a commitment to developing a nature recovery programme for the National Park. The Local Nature Recovery Strategies being prepared by Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council play key roles in this.
- 6.2 In our capacity as a ‘supporting authority’ for both the Hampshire and Wiltshire LNRSs, we have engaged positively in the preparation of both Strategies through officer representation on various oversight and steering groups. Members were also given the opportunity to understand more about the work of Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council at the LNRS workshop held at Lymington Town in October 2024.
- 6.3 The statutory process for the preparation of an LNRS is set out in the relevant regulations, which identify the stages where formal decisions are required from ‘supporting authorities’. This process is summarised in the diagram at paragraph 5.1 of this report. As well as outlining this process, this report seeks delegated authority for officers to respond to the initial ‘pre-consultation request’ prior to an LNRS being published for consultation. Our formal representations on the draft LNRS will provide members with the opportunity to engage in the process and to inform our feedback.
- 6.4 Both the Hampshire and Wiltshire LNRSs are due to be published for public consultation in the first half of 2025 and these consultations will be brought to the attention of members. Prior to this, the National Park Authority will receive a ‘pre-consultation request’ for support and it is this stage that recommendation (b) of this report recommends is delegated to officers in the interests of expediency.

Recommendations

Members:

- (i) **Note** the process for the production of both the Hampshire and Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies summarised in Figure 1 of this report; and
- (ii) **Delegate** authority to the Executive Director (Strategy & Planning) to respond to the ‘pre-consultation’ requests the Authority will receive prior to the Hampshire and Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies being published for consultation.

Contact:

David Illsley, Policy Manager
david.illsley@newforestnpa.gov.uk, 01590 646672

Papers:

PC 474/24 – cover paper

Equality Impact Assessment:

The Authority is a consultee on both the Hampshire and Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies, rather than the decision-maker. No equality impacts identified.