

Annex 1

Re:New Forest Communications Plan

Protecting together – shaping tomorrow

SUMMARY

National Park Vision A national beacon for a sustainable future where nature and people flourish. 'Protecting together – shaping tomorrow'		
National Park Mission National Park statutory purposes and duty: 'Protect – enjoy – prosper'		
National Park Outcomes Partnership Plan actions under the themes of: climate, nature, people, place, partnership		
Communication Aims Increase: Awareness of the New Forest National Park Engagement with the work of the New Forest National Park Authority and partners Involvement in caring and advocating for the New Forest National Park		
Communications values Everyone involved. A listening organisation. One organisation, one voice. Fit for the future. Approachable organisation. An open, learning organisation.	Key audiences Communities within/around the National Park. Stakeholders/decision-makers. Visitors. Internal audiences. Under-represented groups.	Messages How special the National Park is. Why it is under threat. What the NPA and partners are doing to care for it. What we can all do to help.
Work priorities to April 2025 Campaigns (New Forest Code, Behind the Scenes, climate emergency). Partnership projects (YouCAN, Species Survival Fund, Generation Green, New Routes to Nature, Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, New Forest Marque). Consultation on Local Plan review of planning policies. Grow digital communications. Engage with new audiences. Events (New Forest Show, Walking Festival, Awakening Festival, Volunteer Fair, Green Halo Conference, 20 th anniversary of the National Park).		

Key targets to April 2025		
Awareness	Engagement	Involvement
Social media following increase to 10k to 150,000.	100,000 engagements in Awakening Festival and climate emergency campaign.	1,700 signed up to climate and nature pledge.
Enews subscribers increase by 500 to 26,500.	6,000 stakeholders and community members give their views in consultations, face to face interactions etc.	Joint sustainable living initiative with the Green Groups network.
Website users increase by 10k to 800,000.	500 attend Volunteer Fair; 3,000 attend New Forest Show stand; 2,000 attend Walking Festival.	Help attract 100 volunteers to take part in 40 volunteer sessions.
500,000 learn about National Park's special qualities through Behind the Scenes campaign.		Help recruit and promote work experience, apprentice and intern opportunities.

1. Introduction

Communications works across the functions of the National Park Authority and is an essential component of all aspects of our work.

With tightening resources this plan needs to ensure our communications are effective, efficient and evaluated.

It will:

- state our intentions clearly and describe the plan's purpose
- explain why we believe good external and internal communication, engagement and influencing are important
- clearly articulate our priority actions and say how we will measure success.

This communications plan has been informed by sessions with members and staff and follows the Government Communications Service's 'OASIS' comms framework:

- **Objectives**
- **Audiences**
- **Strategy/aims**
- **Implementation**
- **Scoring.**

2. Objectives

All English national parks have two purposes as set out in the Environment Act 1995:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

Working in partnership with other organisations it is also the Authority's duty to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of the local communities within the National Park.

The role of communications is to help deliver these two purposes and duty, which we like to summarise as 'protect – enjoy – prosper'.

As well as being a public sector body, we are primarily a protected landscape which has been managed by people for centuries. This interaction between nature and people is at the heart of our communications objectives. Creating an understanding of why the New Forest is so special, a connection with the landscape and inspiring people to care for it is essential if the New Forest is to survive for future generations.

It is always tempting to go straight into looking at the tools at our disposal for communications, at the creative approach and new communications channels and products available. However, strategic planning with clear objectives and key audiences is essential if we are to achieve desired outcomes. This communications plan will help achieve the aims of the multi-partner Re:New Forest Partnership Plan; the associated NPA Business Plan which sets out how it will deliver its actions within the Partnership Plan; and our annual Work Programme.

There are five Partnership Plan themes - climate/nature/people/place/partnership:



Net zero with nature – delivering nature-based climate solutions through local partnerships.



Nature recovery – creating a network of restored and expanded habitats, enabling wildlife to thrive.



An inclusive National Park – pride in the New Forest and connection with nature for all.



Thriving Forest – sustaining a living, working landscape with commoning at its heart.



Team New Forest – communities, organisations and businesses working together and all contributing, being greater than the sum of our parts.

Our communications objectives are to:

- Lead to increasing recognition and understanding of the special qualities of the National Park.
- Enable a greater understanding of the five themes of the Partnership Plan, the NPA's objectives and how the organisation is making a difference.
- Support the delivery of excellent customer service – in particular relating to our planning, trees, and enforcement teams, which makes up half our business.
- Help to generate enthusiasm to engage with the NPA as partners.
- Enable people and organisations to proactively care for and shape the National Park and work together as a team 'for the whole landscape'
- Help to ensure we operate transparently and are accountable.
- Play our part as members of the National Park family - leading the protected landscape agenda, delivering marketing rights as part of corporate partnerships, joining up on campaigns, collaborating on communications projects and sharing resources.

Examples of communications objectives under each Partnership Plan theme include:

Net zero with nature: create understanding about the role National Park habitats and communities can play in tackling climate change; increase participation in the climate and nature Awakening Festival; provide opportunities to get involved in community green group initiatives; encourage land managers to apply for grants which would help habitats become more climate resilient; promote sustainable transport options (e.g. arrive by train, take the New Forest Tour).

Nature recovery: increase understanding about how special the National Park is for wildlife; promote the essential role that commoning plays in shaping the landscape; publicise the Farming in Protected Landscape grant scheme to landowners/commoners; ensure engagement with Species Survival Fund projects and the Local Nature Recovery strategies.

An Inclusive National Park: promote opportunities for people of all ages, communities and abilities to enjoy quiet recreation in the Forest while helping to care for it (e.g. walking app, walking and cycling routes, walking festival, volunteering, social prescribing through the Green Health Hub); publicise arts initiatives including Culture in Common and artist in residence programme; drive engagement with the YouCAN scheme.

Thriving Forest: encourage people to follow the New Forest Code; increase awareness of the Public Service Protection Orders banning feeding or petting of ponies and donkeys or lighting fires/BBQs; encourage visitors and residents to buy New Forest Marque local produce; promote the Green Halo Conference and projects.

Team New Forest: ensure a wide number and range of people give their input and views on the work of the Authority; support partners to work together and engage Forest communities so we are greater than sum of their parts; organise and promote the New Forest Awakening Festival; publicise progress on Partnership Plan actions.

Good communications and engagement are happening all the time in our daily work across the Authority, from our rangers and planners to our members and reception staff. This engagement is beyond the scope of this plan, which we will restrict to our corporate communications function.

3. Audiences and insights

The audiences in terms of communications are wide and varied, including anyone who is involved in, has an interest in or is affected by the NPA and its activities, people whose behaviour we would like to influence or people we would like to get involved in our work.

Our ambitious Partnership Plan means careful choices must be made in terms of time, staff, other resources, and in the number of stakeholders we can engage with.

We target our communications at the most relevant audiences depending on the outcomes we want to achieve or the behaviour we are seeking to influence. As well as issuing information, we provide a wide range of opportunities for meaningful engagement to hear people's views and help shape our work and decision-making.

Each individual communications plan for different projects and campaigns has identified target audiences. However, overall our priority audiences are as follows, noting that people can fall into several categories simultaneously:

- A. Communities within and around the National Park:** including residents, businesses and community groups. There are around 34,000 residents living within the National Park boundary (2,600 residents in the Wiltshire Council area of the National Park; 400 residents in the Test Valley Borough Council area and the remainder in the New Forest District Council. area) In the wider New Forest District Council area there are just under 180,000 residents and 16 million within a 90-minute drive of the National Park. Most New Forest populations are concentrated around the National Park in the eastern Waterside area, southern coastal region and Avon Valley in the west.
- B. Stakeholders and decision-makers:** including Partnership Plan partners; town/parish councils; landowners/managers; commoners; environmental NGOs; MPs; Government departments; government agencies; funders; utility companies; businesses; recreational user groups; media. We regularly deal with around 100 stakeholder organisations and they can be on an international, national, regional and local basis. How we work to involve communities in our planning work is set out in our Statement of Community

Involvement and a wider stakeholder engagement plan is being developed to update our approach. There are many ways we regularly engage with stakeholders including a Partnership Plan panel; regular discussions with the four areas of parish and town councils in 'quadrant meetings'; the R:New Nature partnership to drive nature recovery; through recreation management steering and advisory groups and a Consultative Panel of over 80 organisations.

- C. Visitors:** A 2019 [visitor survey of the New Forest](#) report by consultants Footprint Ecology showed there were around 17 million visitor days per year. For this piece of research, people walking from their house to walk their dog would be counted as a 'visitor day'. By far the largest majority of outdoor activities in the Forest were from residents living in and around the National Park rather than staying holidaymakers.

Insights are about understanding our audiences' behaviour, experiences, attitudes, emotions or beliefs so that we know what and how they will respond to communication, devise the most effective means of communicating with them and manage any impacts. We can draw on research into people's attitudes to climate and biodiversity communications. Our online channels provide more insights about our external audiences from anonymised location to age range, gender and interests which also guide our approach.

D. Internal audiences

Our internal audiences represent the Authority on different levels and are important ambassadors for our work, conduits for sharing our key messages and encouraging action.

1. Staff
2. Members
3. Volunteers
4. 'Sister' organisations (who we host or actively support) – Pedall, New Forest Marque, New Forest Land Advice Service, New Forest Tour, New Forest Trust.

E. A National Park for all

The National Park Authority is a public sector body, funded by society, and should reflect and work for all sectors of the community. More importantly, our work aims to embrace and benefit from the diversity of thoughts, ideas and ways of working that people from different communities, backgrounds, experiences and identities offer, making our National Park and action taken for it more effective and enriched by many skills and perspectives. Our communications support the 'Inclusive New Forest' Partnership Plan theme objective: '... to specifically help people who face barriers or particular challenges so that they can benefit equally from engagement with the National Park. Effective engagement, interpretation and communication

programmes with new and existing partners will be required to ensure we are a National Park for all.'

We make special effort to reach under-represented audiences, working with and through different networks already connected to and working with marginalised communities. We take advice from and co-create content with young people, refugees, ethnic communities and disability groups, ensuring representation in our communications and giving different sectors of society a voice.

Documents such as the New Forest Code are available in other formats such as large print, Braille or alternative languages. Great thought is given to the design of materials to make sure they are as accessible as possible to people of all abilities. Film and photography represent people from different communities and more is planned. Films are subtitled. Our website conforms to the required accessibility standards and material is provided in Plain English to appeal to all ages.

However, there is still much more we need to do to progress this work so we can hear from and represent more people of different communities and experiences.

4. Aims, messaging and channels

In response to discussions at the members' session, our aim is to take people on an 'engagement journey' with us. Our communications look to move people from a point of no awareness of the National Park; to gaining knowledge and an understanding of the National Park and the Authority's work; through to a point of interest and consideration of involvement; then moving to support; engaging fully with the Authority's work and taking action; and ultimately, we hope, to a point where more people and organisations become ambassadors or champions for the New Forest.

Awareness	Knowledge/ Understanding	Interest/ consideration	Support/ preference	Action	Champion/ advocate
Awareness		Engagement		Involvement	

At each stage we look to target certain audiences with key messages, provide opportunities to interact and suggestions for moving on to the next stage of engagement.

Key messages

Each project and campaign will have its own specific messaging.

However, our overarching strategic messaging and story is as follows, to help people to find out:

1. How special the National Park is
2. Why it is under threat
3. What the NPA and partners are doing to care for it
4. What we can all do to help.

1. How special the National Park is:

As part of the statutory process to designate the National Park in 2005 an extensive public consultation was held to define the New Forest's 'USP' or 'special qualities'.

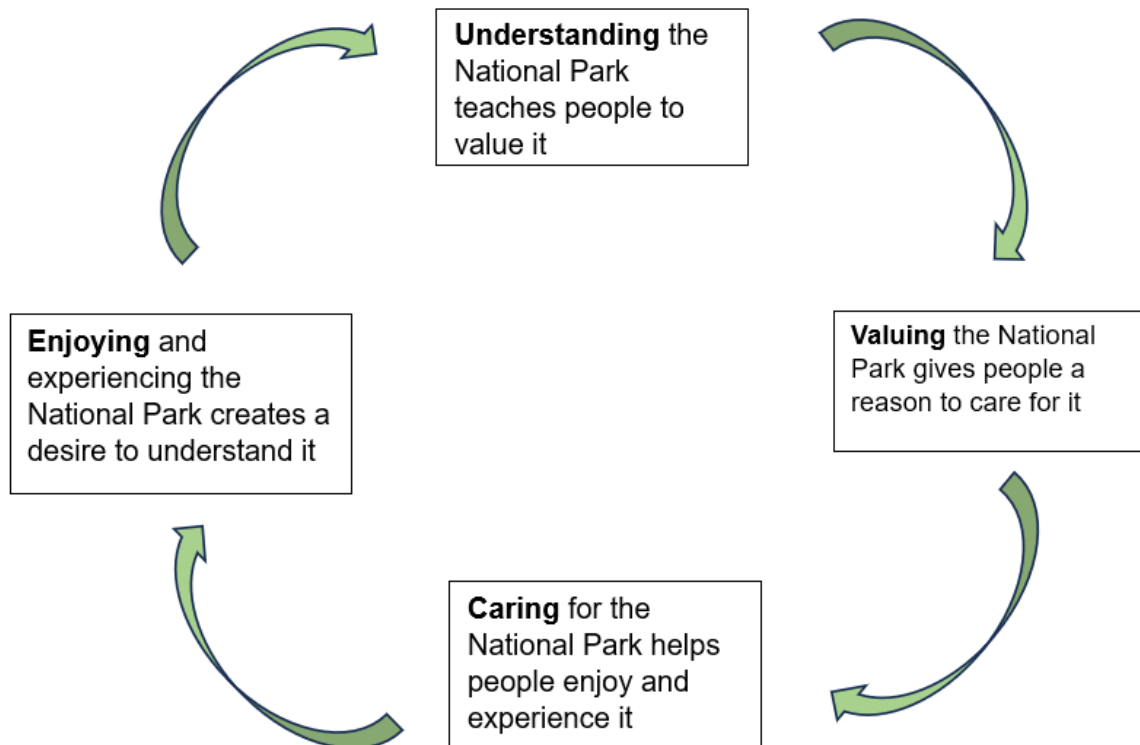
These qualities define the National Park, make it unique and immediately recognisable and together they distinguish it from all other parts of the country. These are as follows:

- The New Forest's outstanding natural beauty: the sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland with large veteran trees, heathland, bog, autumn colour and an unspoilt coastline, with views of the Solent and Isle of Wight.
- An extraordinary diversity of plants and animals and habitats of national and international importance.
- A unique historic, cultural and archaeological heritage, from Royal hunting ground, to ship-building, salt making and 500 years of military coastal defence.
- An historic commoning system, that maintains so much of what people know and love as 'the New Forest' forming the heart of a working landscape based on farming and forestry.
- The iconic New Forest pony together with donkeys, pigs and cattle roaming free
- Tranquillity in the midst of the busy, built up south of England.
- Wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation, learning and discovery in one of the last extensive gentle landscapes in the south including unmatched open access on foot and horseback.
- A healthy environment: fresh air, clean water, local produce and a sense of 'wildness'
- Strong and distinctive local communities with a real pride in and sense of identity with their local area.

We aim to spread the sense of pride in place so that more people will feel ownership and help care for it with us. By experiencing the Forest themselves, people can develop a deeper appreciation for its value.

The 'heritage virtuous circle' is a useful model and works as follows (starting at any point): if you love something you will want to preserve it and look after it; if you preserve something you will want to understand it more and learn more about it; if

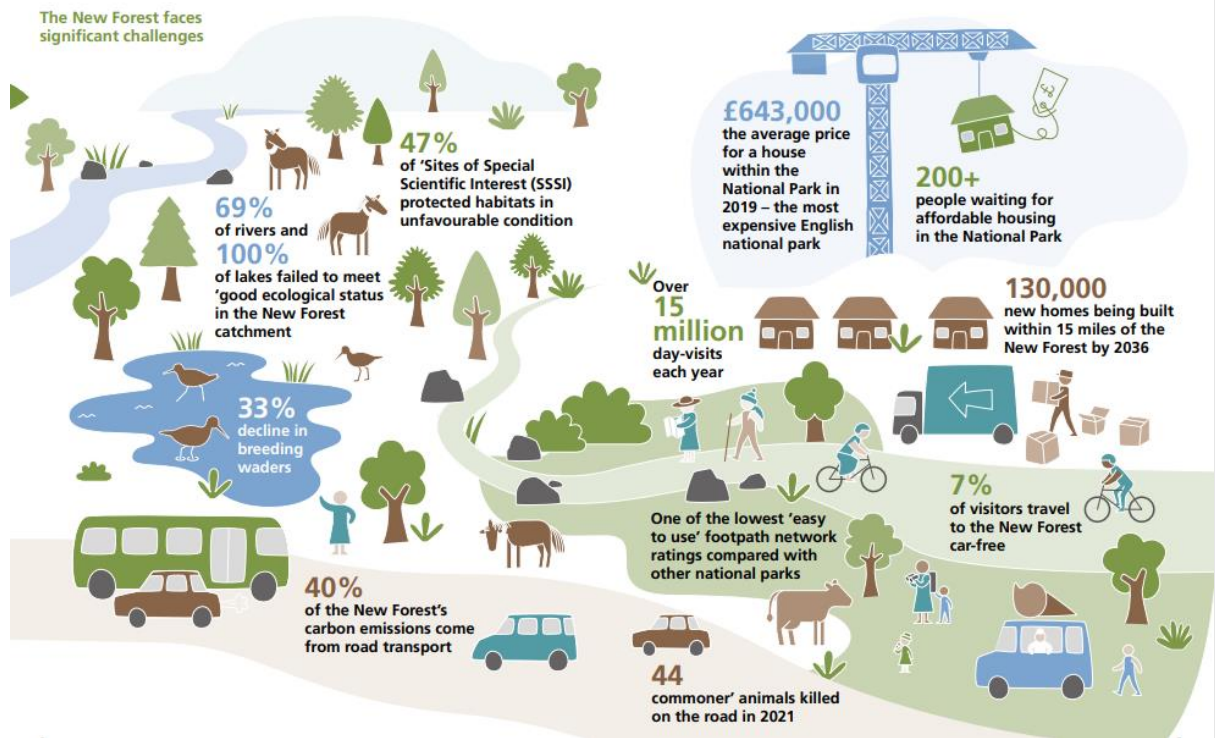
you learn more about it you will come to love it and appreciate its uniqueness and significance, and so on.



It is important to inspire curiosity, highlight the New Forest's ecological and cultural significance, and emphasise the need for conservation to ensure its long-term sustainability.

2. Why it's under threat

The New Forest faces significant challenges ranging from global issues such as the climate and nature emergencies; to challenges relating to our specific geography (a highly protected environment with rare habitats and species coupled with a large number of residents and visitors and development pressures on our boundaries); the nationwide funding crisis; and a lack of affordable housing and sustainable transport options. These challenges and many more were highlighted in the Partnership Plan and summarised in an infographic as follows:



While people need information about the issues and we need to show the urgency behind the challenges, environmental communications best practice proves that messages of doom do not often inspire people to act. They are seen as too remote and too difficult.

Promoting messages of hope, providing people with possibilities and pointing to actions which are relatable, local and showing impact are more likely to resonate with people. We should work with communities to show what the National Park could look like in the future if we don't act and develop a community vision for the Forest showing alternative outcomes with positive interventions.

3. What we and our partners and communities are doing

As a public sector body we are rightly obliged to demonstrate how taxpayers' money is being used to good effect.

A key part of our organisation is our statutory planning role and, with over 800 applications each year delivering our purposes and duty, it is where much of our influence and our strongest statutory power in shaping the future of the National Park lies. Our planning function has a big influence on the reputation of the Authority as a whole and communications about planning issues is vital in helping the public to understand the process and for the credibility of decisions taken. It is the way that most people hear about or directly interact with the Authority.

Communication tools and techniques help explain and facilitate the planning process to ensure the right scheme is achieved for the applicant and the Forest; communicate key decisions taken both proactively and responding to media enquiries; work to ensure local people can have their say in consultations on

planning policy; and enable reporting of suspected planning breaches to our enforcement team.

Other key services alongside planning include nature recovery, tackling the climate emergency, access in the outdoors, education, archaeology and engagement which all require communications support to help drive understanding and engagement.

As well as delivering its own projects directly, the NPA also facilitates networks and resources with other organisations to make a difference for the Forest. These can range from thought leadership and gaining consensus on key issues through forums such as the Green Halo Partnership and recreation management steering group; to encouraging sustainable living actions via the Green Groups network; to joint funding bids.

The National Park Authority also plays an advocacy role at a regional and national level, championing national parks purposes on a range of issues.

4. What we can all do to help

Our aim through our communications is to provide opportunities for people to gain a deeper understanding of and connection with the National Park and play a part in caring for it.

Depending on the types of audiences identified above and the point of the engagement journey they have reached, there are a wide range of opportunities to interact with the National Park Authority. These vary from light-touch at a point of no awareness (eg. pick up a Pocket Guide leaflet to help you enjoy a sustainable visit) to a greater investment of time and energy and taking action such as volunteering; or becoming a champion of the National Park, for example by becoming a Board member.

Examples of key messages

In the staff and member sessions a wide range of messages were proposed which can be adapted depending on the different objectives, audiences and channels being used for each communications piece.

Here are a few examples of overarching messages suggested under the five Partnership Plan themes of climate, nature, people, place and partnership which were common among staff and members:

- Climate: New Forest habitats can play an important role in helping us to reduce the effects of climate change.
- Nature: The New Forest National Park is a world capital for wildlife – an ark for nature in the UK and home to many rare and protected species.
- People: all are welcome to enjoy quiet recreation in the National Park.
- Place: Commoning and cultural heritage are at the heart of the National Park. Follow the New Forest code and help care for the Forest.

- Partnership: Only by joining together as Team New Forest and combining ideas, expertise and resources can we ensure the National Park thrives for future generations.

5. Implementation/Tactics

Our communications values

To help ensure that our communication with the people and organisations we come in to contact with is effective and that communications activity supports the delivery of the Partnership Plan and Business Plan, we have developed six communications values:

- Everyone involved - staff and members all have a responsibility for communications
- A listening organisation – where communications work presents opportunities for conversation, feedback and engagement. We are respectful of others and their views.
- One organisation, one voice – a clear and consistent brand and tone across the Authority is used to help build trust in our brand, while reflecting both our more official statutory role and our more playful tone for example to engage with young people on social media
- Fit for the future – communications which adapts to and embraces new technology, challenges and opportunities to achieve our objectives.
- Approachable organisation - we profile officers and members to present the ‘human face’ of our organisation to help show we are transparent and accountable.
- An open, learning organisation - we hold our hands up when things go wrong and apologise, launch an investigation when appropriate, say why it went wrong, what’s in place to rectify the situation and what steps we have taken to prevent it happening again.

Telling our story

When we think about how we can communicate our key messages we consider:

- Point – what are we trying to say?
- Message – how will we say it?
- Support – is there a story or a fact to support our message?
- Action – is there a call to action?

For our communications to get the interaction needed to achieve our objectives we ensure they gain attention by being:

- Informative – to help people learn more about the New Forest, the NPA, our partners and sometimes themselves.
- Useful – does the piece of communication help the customer or audience achieve their aims or meet their needs?

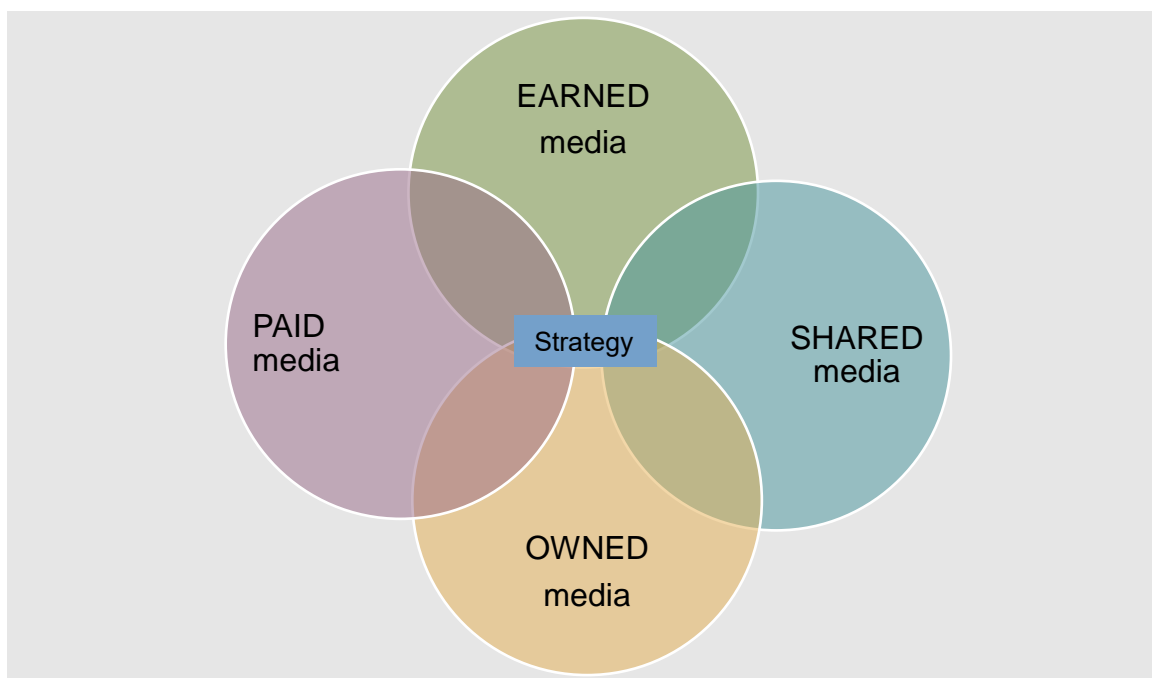
- Entertaining – where appropriate creative approaches, always with a message behind them, attract attention and encourage interactivity.
- Human - appealing to hearts and minds. Facts and figures are useful but they need to be relatable and easily understandable to audiences, so we may give them a 'human scale' - for example give hectares of land conserved for nature in the equivalent number of football pitches as a comparison, or savings per resident rather than an overall figure.

Stories and images about people attract more interest and are more memorable, so we may for example show what goes on behind the scenes or through the eyes of a volunteer. Messages are more likely to resonate and be acted on if we appeal to people's emotions – whether that means laughter, tears or empathy.

Channels

The media landscape continues to evolve radically. Below are a few of the channels and tactics we use, although the relevance and resonance of different channels is ever-changing.

The 'PESO' framework of Paid-Earned-Shared-Owned channels to understand how best to use these tools in conjunction with each other to amplify and multiply our reach:



Examples of channels in each category, some of which cross over between categories:

PAID

- Newspaper adverts
- Online adverts
- Outdoor ads
- Public notices

- Advertorials

EARNED

- Local and national media coverage
- Documentaries
- Speaker opportunities
- Interviews

SHARED

- Publications
- Content in partner email newsletters
- Partner websites
- Signage
- Sponsorship
- Comms from joint-funded schemes
- Social media shares

OWNED

- Website
- Social media channels
- Mobile ranger unit
- Talks
- Exhibitions
- Publications
- Events/conferences
- Surveys
- Consultations
- Email newsletter
- Parish/town council liaison
- Staff induction and training
- Member induction and training
- Public meetings
- Videos
- Blogs
- User generated content
- Thought leadership
- Speeches

Our story

We tell our story by consistently using a clear visual and verbal identity so all our communications are instantly recognisable as part of the NFNPA family. It helps to build a clear identity for the NPA which can have a positive impact on aspects like trust in our organisation, reputation and a mark of quality.

The visual brand is made up of a logo, colours, fonts, graphic elements, appearance on social channels, style of photography and film making. It also includes the tone of voice we use when we speak and write about the New Forest National Park, as set out in our house style.

The communications team oversees the Authority's corporate bank of photography and design work. The National Park Authority provides a service to all residents and visitors and it is important that this is reflected in photography and subject matter in the National Park's printed, face-to-face and online presence. The differing needs of the populations which the Authority serves should be taken into account when planning, designing and distributing material both printed and online. Photography should include representations of different ethnicities, ages, genders and abilities. Information should use language which is easy to understand and should avoid acronyms.

6. Scoring

We evaluate communications projects based on our objectives, we record quantitative and qualitative impact, share results and write up/produce films on case studies. We celebrate success, review and learn from our mistakes.

For set pieces and larger campaigns we look at six stages of the campaign:

- Inputs – what objectives and insights are being used?
- Outputs – audience experience: how successfully communications reached the target audience (eg. press coverage, social media impressions)
- Outtakes – audience perception: what they think, feel or intend to do as a result of communications activity (eg. response rate, click through to website, attitudes change)
- Outcomes – audience behaviour: did they start, stop or maintain doing something? (eg. stop petting ponies; apply for a grant; stick to the tracks in ground-nesting bird season; choose sustainable travel options)
- Impact – did the work achieve our organisational objectives/meet KPIs? (eg. hectares of habitat restored, number of job applicants, education sessions held, satisfaction surveys, volunteer sign-ups)

More work is needed to ensure more of our campaigns are evaluated to a greater extent and lessons learned.

7. Conclusion

Declining public sector resources means our communications must work harder than ever before and be more targeted and effective in helping to achieve Partnership Plan objectives. This can mean difficult choices in what we choose to prioritise and what we may have to say no to. The plan will help us decide where best to allocate our time and resources.

For more extensive campaigns, more time should first be invested in researching audiences, attitudes and behaviours to inform our approach and afterwards allocated to evaluation.

More work is required to ensure we connect with the 'silent majority' of audiences, reach a wider range of communities and provide more opportunities for two-way conversations.

Annex 2 – Draft Joint Communications Campaign Calendar

Month	Big theme	Commoning	Wider Forest/National Days
January	Volunteering	Animal Accidents #PassWideAndSlow	Volunteer Fair
February	Wetlands		World Wetlands Day
March	Ground nesting birds #KeepToThe Tracks		Awakening Festival World Wildlife Day World Forests Day Earth Hour Great British Spring Clean (litter campaign) Tick prevention
April	Mires	Foals arrive	Earth Day
May	Invasive species week	Stallions released	Responsible dog walking National Walking month
June	BBQs and fire risk	Staying safe around animals #KeepYourDistance	Sustainable travel – New Forest Tour starts World Environment Day
July	Heath week	#KeepYourDistance	New Forest Show National Park Awards Festival of British Archaeology
August	Importance of verges	Drifts	Sustainable visits to the National Park
September	Fungi #LookDon'tTouch	Pannage	Great British Beach Clean
October	Walking & cycling Festival	Animal Accidents #PassWideAndSlow	Building Design Awards launch World Mental Health Day
November	National Tree week	Animal Accidents #PassWideAndSlow	Fireworks warning Brilliance in Business Awards
December	Animal Accidents		Small business Saturday – shop local