

AM 708/25






NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY AUTHORITY MEETING – 27 MARCH 2025

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 23 January 2025. 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 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 – 27 MARCH 2025

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

The 20th anniversary of the designation of the New Forest National Park fell on 1 March, giving cause to reflect on the challenges and opportunities for this unique place, past, present and future. The designation is for the whole landscape and there is a responsibility on all those whose activities impact on the landscape to further the purposes of conserving and enhancing its natural beauty and cultural heritage and to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park. Over the last two decades the National Park Authority has worked with partners to ensure this shared responsibility for the National Park is acted upon, bringing people together as a 'Team New Forest' to achieve more than the sum of our parts and tackle complex challenges which are not one organisation's remit.

This report is one of many telling the story of achievements and shared endeavour. We have published a [timeline of key moments](#) and milestones across the 20 years and can see how pooling resources, expertise and funding and agreeing common goals has been essential to working to ensure nature and people can thrive here into the future. Acknowledgement and thanks must go to all the volunteers, communities, businesses, partners, staff and over 70 Authority members who have worked together over this time to further the two National Park purposes and our duty.

Yet the next 20 years are arguably going to be the most challenging we have faced and the many areas of challenge are reflected in my report of our work in this quarter.

The future of commoning which sustains the Forest remains the biggest concern - with no future subsidy scheme agreed to date while the existing scheme is coming to a close and many older commoners retiring and fewer younger commoners coming forward. The study to help inform what the Forest needs from the Environmental Land Management programme ahead of the closure of the HLS agreement in 2027 is being finalised and is due at the end of March. We are preparing to host a meeting with Defra officials in the New Forest in May which will be an opportunity to make the case for support for the New Forest and the unique practice of commoning. Meantime we received the welcome confirmation of the extension of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for a further year, with an additional £225k to be made available for projects from April.

Our planning team continue to perform a vital role both in development management and

in responding to proposals and consultations in the wake of planning reforms. We continue to see a high level of cases as we go into 2025 (whilst maintaining a 95% approval rate) and have responded to the recent Government Planning Reform working Paper: Development and Nature Recovery, which provided an important opportunity to share our advice and expertise as both a planning authority and an organisation with nature recovery central to our remit.

The important work of reviewing our Local Plan began in line with the direction of travel agreed at our last Authority meeting, seeing a six-week public consultation, well attended public drop-in sessions in each quadrant of the national park and a 'call for sites' exercise undertaken.

We also participated in discussions about devolution, seeking to ensure that the National Park's purposes and duty are reflected in proposals (see separate paper).

Ensuring our rare habitats are more resilient so they can adapt to the warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers we are already seeing through climate change and the associated decline in species will become ever more urgent as we move past our 20th year. Our £1.3m Species Survival Fund grant – the only such grant awarded to a national park – is seeing encouraging results to help restore nature around the core Crown Lands of the National Park. Working with five partners, the scheme is improving 250 hectares of land for nature across 25 sites – the equivalent of 350 football pitches. This and other partnership projects have been shared and celebrated at the HLS AGM and annual Biodiversity Forum Conference this quarter. We need to build on this work bringing together the best specialists, environmental organisations and land managers to win the resources needed to continue to work at scale to build the resilience needed for our unique species, habitats and way of life here in the Forest.

With this backdrop of challenges, we are also looking at a difficult and uncertain financial picture for 25/26 as outlined in the budget paper on our agenda and we await news of three-year spending review in the autumn.

However, you will see from my report that there are many positive initiatives driving us forward. We are starting the process of applying for a Landscapes Connections grant for protected landscapes through the National Lottery Heritage Fund with a range of partners which, if successful, could bring in funding for up to 10 years. We are also exploring ways to unlock income through capital investment.

We are focused on investing in the next generations, with our education team reaching thousands of young people through school visits, career fairs, junior ranger sessions, youth volunteering tasks and 'an evening under the stars'. This period nearly 3,500 students from rural and urban schools benefited from our travel grants to connect with nature in the National Park. The Youth for Climate and Nature programme is also paving the way for the next generation of Forest custodians, with our Youth Board clocking up an

impressive 250 hours of training and volunteering time since their inaugural meeting in September

Two of our Youth Board, Fran Nicholas and Toby Pearse Joined Sir Julian Lewis MP in opening our 2025 Volunteer Fair in January attended by over 450 people despite a very wet day. The feedback from the over 50 different groups offering volunteering opportunities was extremely positive and the NFNPA alone received over 30 new volunteering applications from the day. Volunteer tasks out in the National Park have focused on restoring lost heathland at RSPB's Copythorne Common, youth volunteering sessions and a residential, as well as supporting Freshwater Habitats Trust clearing a site of rhododendron and litter picks.

It is these hands-on activities and the active collaboration of communities and partners that give hope for 'Team New Forest' and our efforts to secure the future of the Forest, despite the many headwinds. Partner organisations and businesses have joined us in arranging over 100 activities, talks and walks throughout March for our Awakening Festival which reaches hundreds of thousands of people to learn about how the Forest and its communities can respond to the climate and nature emergencies. We remain focused on achieving the best we can together, making the case for resources and harnessing the passion and care for this special place felt by so many.

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

Nature Recovery

Species Survival Fund

Delivery of nature improvements is now well underway, with all delivery partners - Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Freshwater Habitats Trust and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust as well as ourselves through our contracted land advisor resource - progressing well during this first winter of the project.

Meadows have been created, hedgerows planted, fens restored, heathland extended, and invasive species removed from woodland.

The actual area is currently being confirmed by the partners but at this stage, around 10-20% of the target area (250ha) has been delivered, with around 13% of the budget (£1.3m including match funding) spent.

We are expecting a big upshift in site completion and area delivered, over the coming month as works at a number of large sites complete.

The project also seeks to deliver just under 100 activities (e.g. volunteer events, talks and guided walks), engaging with around 8,000 people. So far, we have achieved around 10% of the activities but have already nearly doubled the 'people' target, largely thanks to some successful events at the New Forest Reptile Centre delivered by Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

We are developing governance, reporting systems and processes which may be inform programme and project management in the future. This includes the use of a dashboard to illustrate relevant project management information for the Project Board, operational partners and the funder. This is proving to be a very useful approach, helping to corral relevant information and streamline systems to gather and report on the most useful

information, whilst presenting it in ways which support decision-making and confidence building.

New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme

The HLS AGM was held at the Verderers Hall on 31 January, an opportunity to celebrate the work of scheme particularly the volunteers who assist with habitat and species surveys and the school visits enabled by the funding. Surveys of species through the year included the six-spotted crane fly, Beaulieu dung beetle, brown diving beetle, New Forest mud beetle, Dartford Warbler, nightjar – all features of the Site of Special Scientific Interest – and an extensive riverfly survey carried out by volunteers. Dr Sophie Lake from Footprint Ecology highlighted the work of the Wetland Restoration Forum and the programme of practical work that is helping to maintain and enhance the wetlands of the New Forest, which represent 75% of Europe's remaining valley mire habitat.

Development Management

74 applications were received in the period 1 January to 28 February 2025. In the same period 74 applications were determined with an approval rate of 95%.

During this same period, three appeal decisions were received. Two were dismissed and one allowed.

The Planning Committee discussed the recent Government Planning Reform Working Paper: 'Planning Committees' and this informed our consultation response of 20 February 2025 which made the case for National Parks to be exempted from any national scheme of delegation.

Planning Enforcement

In the last quarter the enforcement team has reviewed and investigated 36 new cases and worked to resolve and close 47 with only 17 of those cases closed as no breach. Of the cases opened, over 65%, continue to result in breaches of planning control being established which require officer time to engage with those responsible to bring about the most appropriate resolution.

During the course of establishing whether or not a breach of planning control has occurred we have issued three Planning Contravention Notices (PCNs). Two enforcement investigations have resulted in formal action being taken. In both cases an enforcement notice has been issued - one in Dibden against an unauthorised building at an equestrian centre and another against an unauthorised replacement dwelling in Woodfalls. The team is currently working on and awaiting the outcome of seven enforcement appeals.

In early March we sadly said goodbye to Naomi Stone, the Authority's Compliance Monitoring and Legal Support Officer who is taking well-earned retirement. Naomi began working for the Authority in the set-up year of 2005 helping to put together the building blocks of the organisation. We are very sad to have lost such a hard-working, dedicated and knowledgeable member of staff and sent her off with appreciation and good wishes for the future.

Policy

Following endorsement of the 'New Forest National Park Local Plan Review – Direction of Travel document' at the January Authority meeting, the six-week public consultation on the first stage of the review ran from 4 February to 18 March. We also held a 'Call for Sites' exercise over the same period, where landowners and other interested parties could submit details of sites that they wish to be considered for a range of potential uses through the revised Local Plan. During this consultation period we held public drop-in sessions in Bramshaw, Hyde, Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst (one in each quadrant of the National Park), which were well attended and enabled people to find out more about the review and the planning matters that are 'in scope'. In addition to these public drop-in sessions, presentations on the review have been given to the New Forest Youth Board, the Consultative Panel and the Access Forum. Now the initial consultation has closed the planning policy team will consider the responses received as we work on preparing the draft revised Plan.

The examination hearing sessions into the draft Hampshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan were held in Winchester between 4 February and 13 February. The partial update to the adopted Plan covers the whole of the New Forest National Park area. We were represented at each day of the hearing sessions, with the matters covered including legal compliance, minerals supply, the draft development management policies and site allocations. A series of proposed modifications have been put forward to the Plan by the partner minerals and waste planning authorities (Hampshire County Council, Southampton and Portsmouth City Councils, and the New Forest and South Downs National Park Authorities) and it is for the appointed Inspector to decide on the next steps.

The Policy team prepared and submitted the National Park Authority's response to the recent Government Planning Reform Working Paper: Development and Nature Recovery which invites views on proposals for a new approach to how housing and infrastructure development can meet its environmental obligations and contribute to nature recovery. If taken forward, the Government would use the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to make the necessary legislative changes to establish a more efficient and effective way for Habitats Regulations and other environmental obligations to be discharged, pooling individual contributions to deliver the strategic interventions necessary to drive nature recovery. Our consultation response emphasised the need for the reforms to maintain the legal protection afforded to designated sites; and to take forward the existing strategic mitigation schemes that are place in the New Forest and surrounding areas.

Archaeology

Summary

During this period the Archaeology Team has consulted on 16 New Forest District Council and 10 Authority planning applications and given comments and recommendations on several other ongoing planning cases. For the Service Level Agreement with Forestry England the team progressed 16 sites and made four visits to sites across the southern district. For the Higher-Level Stewardship Scheme the team progressed eight sites and conducted two site visits providing advice along with Heritage Impact Assessments (Data Packs) and site mark-ups ahead of ground works for verge restoration, trees and scrub clearance and stream/wetland restoration.

Working with Community Groups

We are continuing with the LoCATE (Local Community Archaeological Training and Equipment) scheme, working with archaeological societies and community groups from across Hampshire and Dorset. The equipment has been in constant use and is being actively handed over and shared between different societies. Community groups are actively teaching each other surveying and data processing techniques upon equipment handovers in between the official training sessions. We are currently supporting a geophysical survey project carried out by the New Forest History and Archaeology Group at New Copse.

Romani Community Archaeology Project

Following on from the Romani Community Archaeology excavation we supported in September 2024, the New Forest Heritage Centre opened an exhibition in January showcasing the finds and telling the story of the camp at Thorney Hill, as well as the lived experiences of this community in the New Forest more widely.

New Forest Knowledge website

The view stats for this period (January to 3 March) reached 22,163 views, demonstrating that the site continues to be very popular. The future of the site is still uncertain, but the Team continues to support the New Forest Heritage Centre team working together to maintain the site as best we can.

Building Design and Conservation

Interviews were held for the vacant Building Design and Conservation Officer post in mid-March, which would bring our specialist-built environment resource back to full strength. In the meantime, we have a high caseload of applications and pre-application proposals, from major proposals for nationally listed buildings to small-scale proposals relating to locally listed assets. The team continues to support local communities on building design and conservation matters, including the preparation of the Copythorne Parish Design Statement. On 26 March we co-hosted the Hampshire Conservation Officers Liaison Group meeting with New Forest District Council, with officers from local planning

authorities in the area visiting Eling Tide Mill to discuss the impacts of climate change on the built environment.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Environmental Land Management (ELM)

A further meeting of the FiPL Local Assessment Panel was held in February. The focus is now on helping grant recipients with their final claims before the end of the financial year and encouraging requests for small capital grants to ensure all the budget is spent locally. Earlier this month we received confirmation that the FiPL programme has been extended for a further year, with an additional £225k to be made available for projects for the 2025/26 financial year.

The 'PA2' study to help inform what the Forest needs from the Environmental Land Management programme ahead of the closure of the HLS agreement in 2027 is almost complete, with the final report due to be finished at the end of March. We are due to host a meeting with Defra officials in the New Forest in May which will be an opportunity to make the case for a bespoke New Forest grant programme.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

The NPA is a supporting authority to the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Wiltshire and Hampshire and we have been assisting the councils to prepare their respective strategies for public consultation. The consultation for the Wiltshire LNRS was launched on 4 March and that for the Hampshire LNRS on 17 March. Following the period of consultation and any subsequent amendments both strategies will be brought to a future meeting of the Authority for formal sign-off.

2 Second Purpose: Enjoy

Education and Youth

Our team has been exceptionally busy this winter and continue to be so until the end of the financial year. We anticipate that by the end of March we will have directly led curriculum linked sessions for 617 pupils since the start of 2025 and a further 187 young people will have met our team (alongside ranger team support) either through our green careers outreach or through more in-depth nature connection experiences including junior ranger programmes and a night under the stars for youth groups.

Annual totals including activity anticipated in March:

- Total school and curriculum visits - 2,091 young people,
- Youth engagement and green careers outreach - 1,647 young people
- University level and teacher and other professional level training - 35 (not including the delivery of carbon literacy training to colleagues across team New Forest shown elsewhere in this report).

Our core funded travel grant designed to enable local rural and urban schools to access learning venues across the New Forest has enabled 3,489 pupil-days of experience across 12 different providers. Schools were incredibly pleased to receive an uplift in this grant from £150 to £250 toward coach travel as the cost of transport has soared once again. Providers across the New Forest Educator's Forum do an incredible job of spreading the benefit of this grant by word of mouth.

Generation green

Through the participation of National Parks in the Access Unlimited Coalition, we have been able to bring the benefit of fully funded outdoor experiences to selected young people in this financial year, through a DEFRA funded project Generation Green 2. This differs from Generation Green 1 in that it focuses solely on nature connection experiences, in particular 'a night under the stars' (also day visits) for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Centres across the country providing experiences include our fellow English National Parks, National Landscapes, YHA, Field Studies Council, Outward Bound, Girlguiding and Scout activity centres.

Our offer in the New Forest is in three formats - day visits for school groups, 'an evening under the stars' facilitated by our ranger team and hosted at Fernycrofts Scout Activity centre, and farm visits for school groups facilitated and hosted by the Countryside Education Trust. We anticipate that by the end of March 1,080 young people will have experienced a high-quality nature connection experience in the New Forest National Park, without the barrier of expensive travel and activity fees, many of whom will have little or no prior experience of the countryside.

Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN)

Our junior rangers celebrated the first full year of the programme with a campfire, hoodies and bronze certificates for those who have attended a range of sessions across the year and accomplished a breadth of skills in their junior ranger logbooks. We're really proud of these young people who have been dedicated, overcome personal challenges and forged new relationships and confidence in nature and with each other.

Our youth board has clocked up 250 hours of training and volunteer time since they first met in September 2024. A lot of their effort has gone into developing positive relationships, creating terms of reference and communication formats which will work now and into the future, attending public forums and events and preparing for a more public interactions in the coming year. Another highlight was two members speaking at and opening the volunteer fair this January.

Youth volunteering events are proving increasingly popular on weekends every month, highlighted by our weekend event at RSPB Friths Lodge, attended by 13 young adults. They each arrived with a different level of experience, engaged in a practical conservation task, carried out a spawn survey and enjoyed an overnight stay at Cameron's Cottage with a wildlife night walk with a thermal camera, topped off with a

guided walk through the ancient woodland.

Public and community events / rangers / recreation management.

The Recreation Management Steering Group (RMSSG) met on 24 February and amongst other things considered Forestry England's proposals to introduce car parking charges next year. The RMSSG was particularly interested in measures to combat any displacement vehicle parking on the verges.

Rangers have been out and about with regular foot patrols focusing on the feeding/petting ponies Public Service Protection Order (PSPO) in and around hot spots such as Boltons Bench, Burley and Vereley car parks. Area Rangers have also attended their local Parish Quadrant meetings, introducing themselves and their work in the local areas and providing an NPA point of contact on the ground. Alongside the regular mitigation ranger patrols additional engagement has taken place at Longslade Bottom, as part of a small monitoring project to identify if ranger engagement impacts the occurrence of public picking up after their dog. Weekly monitoring has also been carried out at the nearby Wilverley Plain, with no additional ranger engagement sessions taking place, to act as a 'control'. The collected data will be analysed and shared next month.

The team supported the New Forest Show Society with tree planting and hedge planting events at New Park, engaging with several schools, providing them with an activity while learning about different types of native trees. The team arranged and helped deliver the NPA All Staff Tree Planting session to celebrate our 20th anniversary as well as the public hedge planting event over weekend of 1 and 2 March, with 150 people planting 2,000 plants.

Rangers have supported Paul Brockman's Woodlander Coppice career work experience programme for Year 10 students, providing them with an insight into our work and career advice for green careers and preparing for employment. We were very shocked and saddened to hear of his sudden passing in mid-March and send our deepest sympathy to his family and gratitude and appreciation for all he has given to so many and to Forest life.

In February, Forestry England published new guidance on managing dog walking in woodlands on the government website. We were proud to see the guidance document relating to Commercial Dog Walkers highlighted our New Forest Professional Dog Walking Charter as an example of best practice.

We are delighted to have made the internal appointment of Naomi Addleton, an experienced, enthusiastic and very knowledgeable long-serving NPA Seasonal Assistant Ranger, to the two-year, habitat mitigation funded post of Assistant Ranger, thus securing her expertise for the Authority

Communications

The communications campaign to support the Local Plan review consultation kicked off with exhibition materials and promotion of drop-in sessions, an online form, email newsletters, newspaper public notices, social media and press releases to drive consultation responses. The drop-in sessions were well-attended.

Our website was launched back in 2018 and needs updating so after a very competitive tender process we have now awarded the contract to a company which has worked with some other national parks and are starting the process of reviewing all existing content and designing the new site. Several 'microsites' (Green Halo Partnership, Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and Green Health Hub) sit in the same system so will also need to be recreated.

We launched the Awakening Festival which reaches hundreds of thousands of people with messages about the climate and nature emergency. Partner organisations and businesses have joined us in arranging over 100 activities, talks and walks throughout March, with many events sold out.

Other climate communications include our online climate and nature pledge which has now seen over 1,750 people sign up live more sustainably. We are preparing an online toolkit of New Forest-specific climate information and activities through the YouCAN and Species Survival Fund schemes.

Government announced an extension of the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme, and we published six case studies and videos about some of the projects the grants have already supported in the New Forest.

Other nature-based communications included a press release on the results of the Higher-Level Stewardship scheme announced at the AGM; surveys through the Species Survival Fund recording over 40 rare species, which was profiled in a number of media outlets including countryfile.com; World Wetlands Day and World Wildlife Day.

The start of the ground-nesting bird season was marked with a positive joint news release about a survey of woodlarks through the Higher-Level Stewardship scheme which has seen the highest ever numbers of the birds recorded. The communications campaign is accompanied by messages about keeping yourself and your dog to the tracks during the nesting season to allow these rare birds to thrive. We are also helping to promote a

nightjar arts project with SPUD, Folio and New Forest District Council to highlight the migration of these fascinating birds, which are one of the reasons the National Park was designated.

We marked the start of the 20th anniversary year of the National Park's designation with staff and public tree planting events and the first 'instagram takeover' of our channel by a local photographer, with other photographer takeovers running throughout the year. ITVX covered the anniversary with interviews with several staff and partners including PedAll, the Commoners Defence Association and RSPB as case studies of our Team New Forest work. We published a blog on our website about 20 years of activities and future challenges, plus a timeline of milestones and key moments since 2005. Additional events and communications activities will take place throughout the year.

Communications activities for the YouCAN youth for climate and nature scheme have included promoting youth volunteering opportunities, a performance from young people about climate issues by Southampton-based partner Theatre for Life; and the launch of a young content creators' scheme.

Publications are being prepared for the visitor season including the delivery of 250,000 Pocket Guides distributed to tourism and community outlets promoting the code and how to help care for the Forest. We are contacting accommodation providers and attractions with tourism body Go New Forest to encourage more tourist businesses to promote the New Forest Code and Public Service Protection Orders (PSPOs). Communications about New Forest Code issues have included #PassWideAndSlow animal accident reduction social posts; litter picking activities; ranger patrols; ground-nesting birds and fly-tipping. The next issue of residents' newspaper Park Life is in production.

The New Forest Marque, which we support with communications, began its busy event season with a producers' roadshow at Everton Nurseries. The annual Local Produce Guide is currently being prepared for publication. We also supported the Marque in promoting local sustainable venison, available in several Marque member outlets.

We also provide communications support to the Commoners Defence Association which this period has included vlogs from the Chair; the salt lick scheme to encourage livestock away from roads; marking fees and Young Commoners committee vacancies. National Parks Partnerships has launched new nationwide collaborations with Pearl and Dean/GiffGaff and Howdens Joinery, plus an active partnership campaign to appeal to companies to support our understanding and enjoyment work, which we supported on social media and with new web pages.

Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Projects

Our two NHS-funded Health and Wellbeing Fellows are working on a proposal to present the value of National Parks to the Royal College of Psychiatry international conference,

which takes place in June in Wales. If successful we hope to use the event to highlight the role of nature and national parks in the nation's mental wellbeing.

We are supporting a new initiative with the charity SPUD, New Forest District Council and FOLIO (group of arts and cultural organisations in the New Forest including African Activities). Called the Nightjar Project, it is an engagement and art programme that draws inspiration from this elusive nocturnal bird and its migration to investigate ideas of movement and homeland, between West Africa, Ghana and the UK. The project takes the rich narrative of migration, folklore, and the particularity of the Nightjar to consider life living under two skies. It will examine cultural and historical views and share stories of land management. It brings together a group of creative, educational and environmental organisations to explore these questions. The aim is to invite us all to think of belonging to places and groups, and how we work and live alongside each other and to share our stories of belonging. This is planned as a two-year project, starting with an exhibition during March by Kwame Bakoji-Hume of African Activities to set the agenda for future discussions, alongside multiple workshops in storytelling and environmental creativity. This will include a series of recorded sound pieces from Ghana and a film by the artist James Elliot looking at land management.

PEDALL New Forest Inclusive Cycling

PEDALL has restarted rides for the year, and we have a packed schedule at Burley Yard with keen groups eager to cycle early in the season. Groups from New Forest based schools and colleges (supporting young people with SEND) will join regular riders from Minstead Trust and Dementia Friendly Hampshire.

Our new 'Social Saturday' event, where Pedall offers free bike safety checks to the local community, followed by a 'social ride' for those who want a little support getting back on two-wheels, was a great success. Our first event on 1 March was attended by the local community police who offered bike security marking and registration. We will run our 'Social Saturday' event on the first Saturday of every month throughout the year.

At calendar year end we are delighted to report that Pedall delivered over 6,000 rider slots and enabled a wider diversity of riders to access the National Park and enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of exercising in nature. This was an impressive increase of 14%, due to momentum with new riders and groups joining us at our second base at Ashurst. We also observed that many riders were happy to continue riding through to the end of the year.

Friends of Pedall trustee Vanessa Targett supported the delivery of Safeguarding Training for our volunteers, an essential programme as the Pedall team engages with some of the most vulnerable people within the New Forest community.

Volunteering

The 2025 Volunteer Fair brought in over 450 members of the public to meet over 50 different groups offering volunteer opportunities in and around the National Park. The fair was opened by two of our Youth Board Members, Fran Nicholas and Toby Pearse. Keen volunteers braved torrential rain, and feedback from stallholders was incredibly positive. We received over 30 new volunteering applications for the NPA as a direct result of the volunteer fair.

The focus of the effort this season has been continuing to restore the lost heathland at RSPB's Copythorne Common. Efforts will restart after the nesting season, alongside a new rotational gorse management plan provided by RSPB's Site Warden for the New Forest, Saul Alonso. Our first Youth Volunteering Residential was hosted at RSPB's Cameron's Cottage, organised by our Youth Engagement Co-ordinator Katie Barrow, and was an absolute success with several first-time attendees signing on to future volunteering tasks.

Our volunteers supported Freshwater Habitat Trust's projects in the New Forest, carrying out rhododendron clearance at Teddy's Farm and removing scrub encroaching on a wildlife pond at Forest Front. We carried out a series of litter picks at Calshot, which included an educational talk on the impact of pollution on marine life.

Planned volunteer tasks in March include our first conservation tasks at Foxlease Park, supporting Foxie's Future with rhododendron management and clearing scrub from scheduled monuments to support Forestry England. This marks the end of the winter season and looking forward to the summer we're providing power tool training to keen volunteers to assist with maintenance on the promoted walking routes around the New Forest.

Access and Rights of Way

Working in partnership with RSPB we have installed three new kissing gates along our promoted walking route at Copythorne Common replacing a stile and two broken gates. This was achieved through the Landscape and Access Project, funded by the National Grid.

With a generous legacy from former National Park member Stephen Tarling, we are replacing two difficult stiles with new gates on a walking route in Sway Village.

The final part of our DEFRA Access For All grant was spent at Knightwood Oak. Working in partnership with Forestry England the final surface treatment of fine stone was added, and the interpretation boards were redesigned and replaced.

3 Duty: Prosper

Re: New Forest Partnership Plan

The next meeting of the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan Leaders' Panel is due to take place on 31 March and will be hosted by Natural England. Protected landscapes (National Parks and Protected Landscapes) across the country are currently working on the local apportionment of the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, as required by the Government's Environment Improvement Plan, and this will be one of the matters discussed at the Leaders' Panel meeting.

Fundraising

We have always had a strategic focus on securing external funding to support the work of the Authority and its partners to deliver landscape-scale improvements, with an average leverage over five years of £1 to £18. We are currently developing plans to apply to The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections strategic initiative which is designed to address long-standing heritage issues at scale and accelerate new ideas and innovations. Grants of up to £10m are available over a 10-year timeframe. We are holding several workshops during March and April with a range of partner organisations and staff contributions to help prepare the content for an application. Grants over the last few years have been focused on short-term delivery with very tight timescales whereas this opportunity would provide investment in long-term projects.

New Forest Skills Development

New Forest District Council has continued the development of a New Forest Skills Action Plan with the NPA represented on the working group. An initial draft report prepared by external consultants was presented to the working group in January and highlighted the need and opportunities for training and development programmes that focus on carbon reduction strategies, nature-based solutions and sustainable land management practices. This reflects the priorities set out in the Thriving Forest section of the Partnership Plan. The final version of the Action Plan is due to be published in the spring.

We have continued to prepare for the start of the GreenPrint study into green skills and jobs, which runs from April to July 2025. This is in partnership with the University of Southampton and will look at the need of the region to deliver on the GreenPrint agenda of a world class environment and world class sustainable economy.

New Forest Land Advice Service

Nearly 100 commoners attended specialist talk on managing cattle on the New Forest, organised by Rhys Morgan from the New Forest Land Advice Service. The event was

one of two cattle related talks, and a third event focusing on ponies and pigs that is funded by the New Forest HLS scheme.

New Forest Tour

We met with the Tour operator to discuss the upcoming season, the details of which will be finalised and shared soon. This year the Tour will launch on Saturday 5 July and finish on Sunday 14 September. We're pleased to confirm that all three routes will continue as before.

Sustainable Transport and Active Travel

We convened the Cycle Working Group on 17 January and discussed a range of topics and projects including: the gravel network proposal; the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which has been through a public consultation process and we hope will be approved at the next Hampshire County Council cabinet meeting in June; Active Travel England feasibility studies, and current consultations for CWG response. The group comprises people in the community who are enthusiastic about delivering improvements to active travel to and within the New Forest.

As part of the Active Travel England National Parks Capability fund, we have commissioned the A35 safer crossings study, and the off-road cycle network wayfinding study. We are currently seeking a consultant to deliver a third feasibility study on the route from Lyndhurst to Lymington, identified as Route 120 in the draft LCWIP.

We've had discussions with Greener Brockenhurst and Brockenhurst Parish Council about the potential to apply to the Sustainable Communities Fund to support the provision of four timber cycle racks in the village. Hampshire County Council would lead the installation of the racks.

We discussed sustainable transport with representatives from the Green Groups, which included how to improve bus service provision, consider an integrated transport network map to help residents and visitors plan their travel car-free. The next step is organising a workshop to include community groups who share this aspiration and to determine how we can best achieve it.

Affordable Housing

Nominations have been received and approved for all of the First Homes at the site of the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel. The redevelopment of the site is progressing well and the First Homes will be sold to people with a local connection to the New Forest. Work is also progressing on the approved development sites at Whartons Lane, Ashurst and Church Lane, Sway which will provide more than 50 further affordable homes for local people in housing need. As part of the current Local Plan Review, we issued a 'Call for Sites' process and the submitted sites will be assessed – alongside other sources of information including the Brownfield Sites Register – to identify potential future site

allocations to help meet local housing needs.

Good progress has been made on finalising arrangements to enable the delivery of two new affordable homes in Burley. The necessary legal agreements with third parties have now been completed whilst preliminary tree works were undertaken in February (in advance of further building works). We have now appointed a Quantity Surveyor to the project and expect to tender the building works very shortly.

Sustainable Communities Fund

Funds of £1,800 have been awarded to Flourish in Nature CIC to enable a greater number of people to take part in organised conservation tasks that support the National Park landscape. Funds will enable use of the community interest company's welfare van so that people with additional needs can access the outdoors and get active and involved in the local community and countryside. Feedback from existing groups and volunteers suggests some people are only comfortable with working on sites if they have access to facilities that the van can provide. By supporting this funding request, we can help more people with a wider range of needs to participate in much-needed conservation activities that they would otherwise not be able to benefit from.

4 Organisation: Achieving Excellence

Human Resources

As of 7 March 2025, the total staff headcount was 83 or 73.00 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	Full Time Equivalents	Variation from previous report
Core funded	61*	– 2	53.76*	– 1.81
Funded by external projects	22	0	19.24	0
Total	83	– 2	73.00	– 1.81

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

In the last few months, we said goodbye to:

Role	Contract type	How role will be filled in future
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Solicitor and Monitoring Officer	Permanent, core funded	Like for like replacement, but full-time hours
Compliance and Legal Support Officer	Permanent, core funded	Like for like replacement

We are currently recruiting for:

Role	Contract type	How funded
Assistant Ranger	Fixed term until March 2027, full-time	Project funded (by habitat mitigation contributions)
Solicitor and Monitoring Officer	Permanent	Core funded
Building Design and Conservation Officer	Permanent	Core funded
Landscape Enhancement Project Co-ordinator	Fixed term for three years	Project funded (Landscape Enhancement Initiative supplied by the National Grid)
Project Co-ordinator	Fixed term to February 2026	Project funded (Species Survival Fund)
Compliance and Legal Support Officer	Permanent	Core funded

IT & Cyber Security Services

Security / Infrastructure

The team has undertaken in-house training provided by the IT & Cyber Security Manager relating to security alerts issued by Microsoft Defender. We will be attending the second DEFRA Arms Length Body security conference in mid-March.

Planning System

The planning microfiches are in the process of being scanned by a third party, so they will be available fully electronically. This will assist planners in being able to view older files and prevent the loss of data due to disintegration of the microfiche which are becoming very fragile. As part of the IT data tidying, we are checking, digitising and back-scanning ex Salisbury paper files.

Collaboration with NFDC on the digital planning project (DPIF) continues. The following data sets have now been published on our website: Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, and Article 4 Directions. Discussions are in place first week of March with Agile for the new Trees Citizen Portal, the completion of which will allow us to publish the final dataset, TPOs, as required by the end of the funding period in March.

We are still waiting for any updates regarding the Land Registry / land charges changes following their review / comparison of the current land charges data with the original data we provided. We continue with our in-house data consolidation efforts.

Replacement Wi-Fi

Following a short delay the installation of 12 Wi-Fi access points at the Town Hall offices was carried out mid-January. Following the installation, the IT & Cyber Security Manager and Officer set up the Wi-Fi networks, carried out testing within the IT team, and then the IT testing group before going live. The NPA guest Wi-Fi, for non-NPA staff to use when visiting the building, should be live by the end of March. The new Wi-Fi system is a considerable jump in performance over the existing system and should help to make the meeting room experience much better for virtual meetings held in the offices.

GIS

Our IT & Cyber Security Technician attended a two-day Cadcorp Spatial Information System desktop training.

The new database and webmap upgrade presented a few problems with work continuing into the January and February to address these. A GIS user survey is about to be launched to officers.

Audit

At the request of the Internal Auditor, the final closing audit meeting for the IT Disaster Recovery, IT Business Continuity, and Cyber Response Plans has been delayed until mid-March.

Equipment disposal – With the successful transition of all NPA devices from Windows 10 to Windows 11 and the change in the phone system last year, several devices were no longer compatible with our systems, security updates, or supported versions of Microsoft Windows. This equipment was either disposed of in an environmentally friendly manner or reconditioned to clear space.

Teams Rooms – In early March, three conference rooms will be set up as Microsoft Teams Conference Rooms, enhancing their suitability for online / hybrid meetings. The Anderwood, Ibsley, and Team New Forest rooms will receive new cameras, screens, and wireless microphones, significantly improving the virtual meeting experience from the office.

IT Champions – The IT Champions programme will be relaunched in March. This initiative will include some current IT Champions along with new members joining this year. We aim to have a representative from each team.

Projects - the main projects the team will be prioritising this year are:

- Mobile phone contract renewal
- Onboarding/Offboarding site
- Purview – document retentions and sensitivity labels
- Review of change management process / form / risk assessment
- SharePoint – review with individual teams, workshops.

Legal and Information management

Information requests

To date this year, as at 27 February, we have received 69 formal requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations, which is just one fewer than last year. We had a particularly busy January, receiving 14, which is almost three times an average month. We have met the statutory 20 working day deadline in all responses sent to date. We have just received notification that one request has been referred to the Information Commissioner but has yet to be allocated to a case officer for investigation.

Complaints

The number of complaints received so far this year is 17, which is an increase of three on the same period last year. All are related to planning matters such as specific planning applications, enforcement investigations or tree works applications.

Privacy and data protection

We continue to constantly review and update our website, documents and privacy notices to improve transparency and compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). So far this year we have only received two requests from individuals wanting to exercise their rights under the GDPR and DPA, these are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

5 Members

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

- 3 February – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 13 February – Members Day
- 18 February – Planning Committee
- 3 March – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 5 March – Finance & Facilities Task and Finish Group
- 6 March – Consultative Panel
- 18 March – Planning Committee

5.2 Forthcoming Members activities include:

- 3 April – Members Day – TBC
- 15 April – Planning Committee
- 20 May – Planning Committee
- 2 June – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 9 June – New Forest Access Forum
- 17 June – Planning Committee
- 24 June – Members Day – TBC
- 15 July – Planning Committee

5.3 Chief Executive's external engagements

- 24 January – National Park City International Steering Group
- 26 January – Volunteer Fair
- 27 January – English National Park Officers Group (ENPOG) meeting
- 29 January – National Park England (NPE) Board meeting
- 29 January – Campaign for National Parks (CNP) AGM
- 30 January – Waterside Vision session
- 31 January – Meeting with Director of Sustainable Development, Lake District NPA
- 31 January – Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS) AGM
- 6 February – Nature Recovery Policy meeting
- 6 February – Business and nature recovery event (EnTrade launch)
- 7 February – Meeting with Director of Conservation and Climate Change, North York Moors NPA
- 7 February – Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) Chief Executives meeting
- 12 February - Independent Climate and Environment Group (Southern Water)
- 14 February – Meeting with National Parks Partnership Chair
- 14 February – St George's, Windsor Leader to Leader Exchange session
- 24 February – ENPOG
- 25 February – Business South Board meeting
- 25 February – Defra meeting
- 25 February – National Park Authorities Chief Executive's meeting
- 26 February – Business South Reception at House of Commons
- 26 February – Business South Business Dinner with MPs, business and civic leaders
- 27 February – Meeting with Director of Park Management, Northumberland NPA
- 27 February – Meeting with Campaign for National Parks Chief Executive
- 28 February – National Park City International Steering Group
- 28 February – Meeting with Director of Conservation & Climate Change, North York Moors NPA
- 28 February – Greenprint Steering Group
- 28 February – Green Leadership planning meeting
- 28 February – Regular meeting with New Forest District Council Chief Executive

- 28 February – Meeting with South Downs NPA Chief Executive
- 1 March – 20th Anniversary tree planting event
- 3 March – Green Halo Partnership Meeting with Managing Director ep architects
- 4 March – Biodiversity Conference
- 5 March – PfSH Joint Committee
- 6 March – Green Leadership interview
- 6 March – Nature Recovery policy meeting
- 6 March – Greenprint Network event planning meeting
- 7 March – Meeting to discuss green finance with National Parks Partnerships
- 7 March – New Forest Business Partnership International Womens Day event
- 8-13 March – Chattanooga National Park City peer review
- 14 March – Greenprint Network meeting - Climate Resilience and Economic Growth
- 19-20 March – Joint Heads of Planning / Directors of Conservation meeting
- 21 March – St George's, Windsor Leader to Leader Exchange session
- 23 March – NFDC Civic Service
- 24 March – Meeting with New Forest Commoners Defence Association Chair
- 24 March – ENPOG
- 25 March – Meeting with ExxonMobil re site management for nature
- 25 March – Meeting with Olivia Inspires Charity
- 26 March – Meeting with Pedall Trustees

5.4 Chair's engagements

- 28 January – Solent Freeport Board meeting
- 29 January – NPE Board meeting
- 28 February – National Parks Chairs meeting
- 18 March – Solent Freeport Board meeting

6 Recommendation

To note the report.