

NFNPA RAPC 598/26

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 1 JUNE 2026

UPDATE ON APPLICATION TO LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS

Report by: Fiona Wynne, Grants Officer

Summary:

As members will recall, the New Forest National Park Authority is currently leading on a bid to The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections strategic initiative. An expression of interest was submitted and approved in December 2025. This paper provides an update on progress.

Recommendation:

Members are requested to note the paper.

1. Landscape Connections

- 1.1. Landscape Connections is a strategic initiative designed by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to support Protected Landscapes and other world-class landscapes across the UK to become better for nature and more able to welcome people from all backgrounds. Grants of up to £10m are available over a 10-year timeframe.
- 1.2. Funding is aimed at supporting those who live in and care for Protected Landscapes to strengthen them as working landscapes based on a clear diagnosis of why the landscape is currently failing to deliver for nature and people and how that will be addressed.
- 1.3. There are deliberately no specific criteria. Projects are being given flexibility to address what is needed for the landscape but in doing so must make the case for how activities will bring about significant and enduring improvement.
- 1.4. Advice from the funder suggests a clear vision for nature recovery is imperative. This should clearly demonstrate what is preventing nature recovery and the actions needed to overcome these challenges. Nature, food, and farming are strong priorities, as well as being able to link up quality habitats in areas with the most potential for recovery.
- 1.5. Projects are required to meet all four of the fund's investment principles:
 - protecting the environment
 - saving heritage
 - organisational sustainability, and
 - inclusion, access and participation.

2. Landscape Connections in the New Forest

- 2.1. In December, our initial expression of interest to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for Landscape Connections was approved and we have now been invited to apply for a development phase (as distinct from the subsequent 'delivery' phase).
- 2.2. Our bid is focused on building and resourcing a multi-disciplinary team that works together to co-create and co-deliver integrated projects and initiatives that create long-lasting systemic change.
- 2.3. The team would be led by the Authority and formed from the Re:New Nature Partnership (nine key partners, practitioners' forum) and wider network of landowners, farmers, Commoners, and communities. It would be supported by the Authority to address two main areas:
 - A spatially driven and integrated programme of capital interventions, engagement activities, comms.
 - Developing the skills, investment, equitable partnership and governance needed to transform the way we support the landscape in the long-term.
- 2.4. To progress these ideas further in preparation for a development phase bid, we are bringing together a guiding coalition group to explore a set of key questions and start developing a work plan. The group will be formed initially from the Re:New Nature Partnership and the outcome of our initial meetings will be discussed with the wider partnership in due course. It is likely that a public consultation opportunity will also take place during the New Forest Show to help inform our plans.
- 2.5. While we expect capital works, engagement activities, and comms to form part of our proposal, we also need to focus on how we will deliver and sustain long-term systemic change. This could include, for example, developing new markets, improving skills pathways, and leveraging investment opportunities, as well as creating new frameworks for how communities, landowners, land managers and organisations work equitably together to agree how to influence and drive change.
- 2.6. We will work with the guiding group to:
 - Reflect on progress to date and lessons learned
 - Identify/agree project area and timescales
 - Develop components of work programme and resources / knowledge needed
 - Explore governance frameworks for development and delivery phases
 - Develop outline theory of change or logic model
 - Gather evidence of support from landowners via permission to work on their land, confirmation of match funding, confirmation from community groups that they will take part.

3. Timeline

- 3.1. While progress has taken much longer than expected as the grant programme has been evolving, the extra time has allowed more dialogue with the funder which has been invaluable.
- 3.2. We are aiming to submit a draft development application to the September 2026 Lottery decision panel. If approved, we would receive a final decision in December for a development phase to start in January 2027 for up to two years.
- 3.3. The development phase would interact with and help inform the next iteration of the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan due in late 2027 (to 2032). The main delivery phase could potentially start in 2029 and cover two partnership plan phases of five years each.
- 3.4. If, for any reason a submission is not possible to the September 2026 panel, we can next submit to the January 2027 panel, to receive a decision by March 2027.

4. Member input

- 4.1. As we develop our plans for a bid, we would like to keep Members informed of our progress by sharing updates and insights from time to time. We have asked Mary Davies (Chair of RAPC) and Adarsh Parekh to help us with this engagement and look forward to working with them in due course.

RECOMMENDATION:

Members are requested to note the paper.

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Previous papers: RAPC 560-25 Grant Funding Update