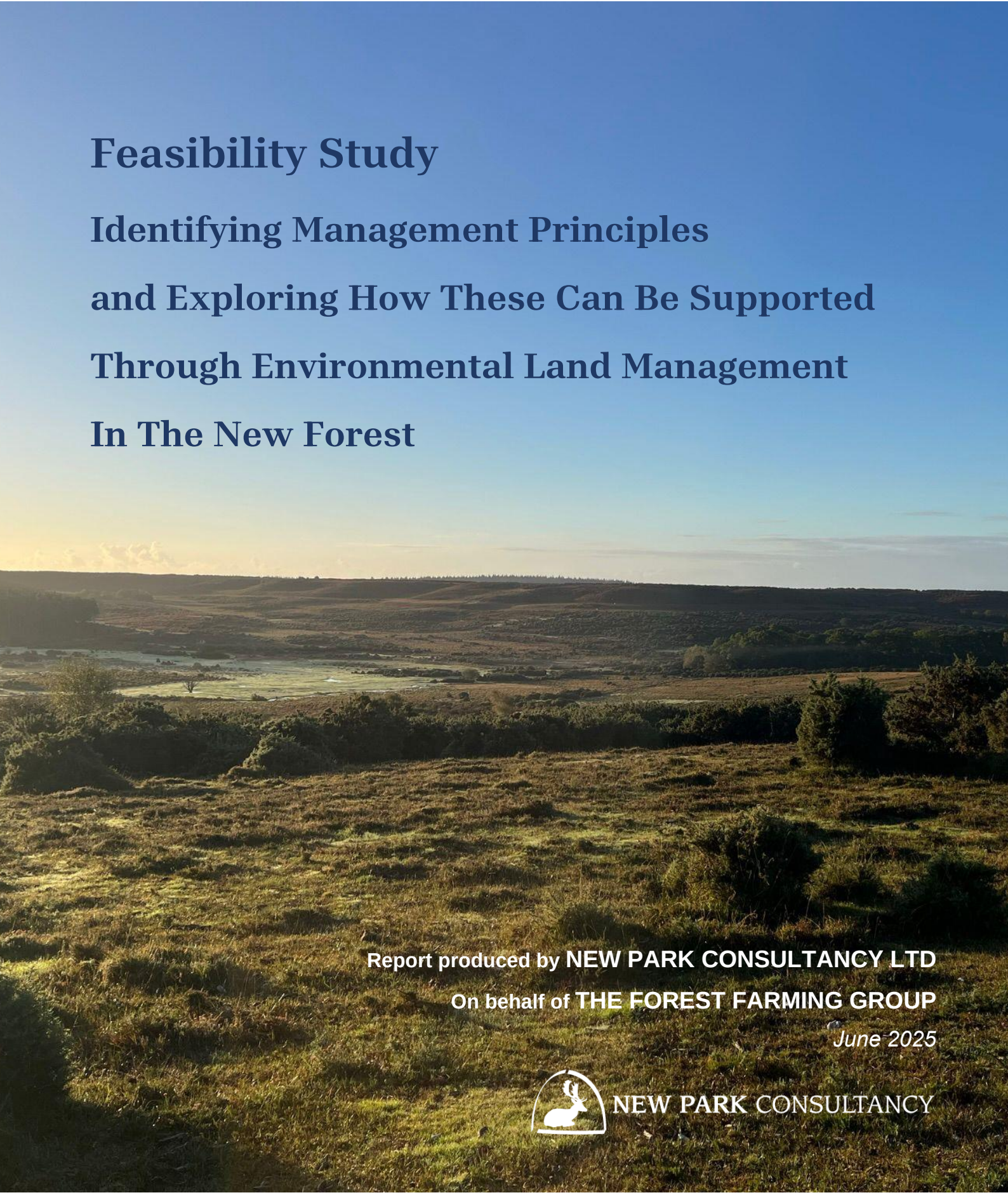
Feasibility Study

Identifying Management Principles and Exploring How These Can Be Supported Through Environmental Land Management In The New Forest



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On behalf of THE FOREST FARMING GROUP

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NEW PARK CONSULTANCY

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

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NATURAL ENGLAND

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1 Executive Summary

This feasibility study was commissioned by the New Forest National Park Authority on behalf of the Forest Farming Group (FFG) to assess how the Government's Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) can effectively be applied to the New Forest. The study explores how statutory designated features can be supported by tailored land management approaches, the challenge being how to achieve this in such a unique, lowland grazing landscape, with rich cultural heritage and complex ecological and legal frameworks.

1.1 Key Findings

The Study Area encompasses over 37,000 hectares within the New Forest National Park, defined by the New Forest Perambulation. Within this, the report identifies a single grazed unit—the area of land managed through shared grazing rights by commoners—as the primary geographic focus for supporting and enhancing the New Forest's key ecological and historic features. This single grazed unit underpins the New Forest's internationally recognised habitats, including pasture woodland, valley mires, wet and dry heaths, and ancient grasslands. These habitats are best supported by low-intensity grazing using native breeds, including New Forest ponies and native cattle, which play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity and habitat structure.

The health and resilience of this core area are, however, closely interconnected with surrounding landscapes, including back-up grazing land and other nearby protected landscapes. Supporting habitat connectivity, hydrological function, and species movement across these broader areas is vital to long term resilience to climate change.

1.2 Management Principles and Strategic Direction

The study outlines a set of Management Principles derived from statutory requirements, conservation objectives, and stakeholder input. These principles should guide future scheme design and delivery. To ensure consistency and clarity, the report's primary recommendation is for the development of a comprehensive, consulted, and living 'Management Plan' for the common land that forms the single grazed unit.

This Management Plan should:

- Clearly acknowledge the Key Features identified in this report as the primary focus and justification for future support.
- Adopt a common set of land management principles applicable across the entire grazed unit.
- Be developed through genuine consultation with all stakeholders—including landowners, tenants, commoners, statutory agencies, and NGOs.
- Assign clear responsibilities for implementation and delivery, including identifying lead individuals and/or organisations.
- Establish working groups for topics that require coordination or shared decision-making.
- Set out the core requirements of any environmental scheme seeking to protect and enhance the Forest's Key Features.

- Be a live policy document, regularly reviewed and revised through further stakeholder consultation to reflect emerging knowledge, challenges, or policy changes.

The plan should identify a long-term vision for supporting the current grazing system in a sustainable way that supports and enhances the Key Features.

1.3 ELMS and the New Forest

The study recognises that the New Forest's governance, grazing system, and land use, are unlike any other in England. A conventional, prescriptive application of national ELMS models would be ineffective and potentially damaging if applied across the entire landscape. Instead, a locally tailored, bespoke approach anchored in existing structures, supported by a clear management plan, and respectful of rights and responsibilities is essential. It is quite possible that there could be multiple ELMS management agreements across the New Forest Common land. Should this be the case, it will be even more important for there to be an overarching Management Plan that the respective agreements can align with.

The ELMS model has the potential to deliver against national environmental targets, but only if it is sufficiently flexible to allow it to align with the local dynamics that sustain the New Forest's ecological value.

1.4 Governance

Due to the scale of the landscape, the complexity of the land management and the multiple stakeholders concerned with the New Forest's Common land, we recommend that a new single legal entity (SLE) is established to act as a vehicle capable of entering into funding agreements, administering management agreements, delegating land management activity and holding collective responsibilities for monitoring and delivery.

Based on information provided by the FFG and following legal advice from Michelmores Solicitors, we recommend that the SLE takes the form of a company limited by guarantee.

The SLE would serve as:

- A central body to contract and administer grant funding;
- A platform to represent stakeholder interests and facilitate coordinated decision-making;
- A mechanism for collective compliance and risk management, helping insulate individual landowners from liabilities associated with breaches in complex funding agreements;
- A long-term custodian of a shared management plan for the New Forest common land.

1.5 Conclusion

This report sets out a clear framework for how ELMS can be shaped to support the New Forest's distinct qualities. Its successful implementation will depend on sustained partnership, clear leadership, and a Management Plan that aligns ecological objectives with the realities of a working and dynamic landscape. With the right structures in place, ELMS offers a powerful opportunity to reinforce one of Britain's most culturally and ecologically important landscapes for generations to come.

2 Introduction

New Park Consultancy Ltd was commissioned by the New Forest National Park Authority, on behalf of the Forest Farming Group (FFG), to carry out a feasibility study on the application of DEFRA's Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) to the New Forest. This study and report has been produced with the support of the member organisations of the FFG, and with the expertise and contributions of Jane Smith (Corylus Environmental), Lyndsey Stride, and Michelmores Solicitors.

2.1 Our Instructions

The FFG is an informal group whose membership comprises the Verderers of the New Forest, The New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA), the New Forest Commoners' Defence Association (CDA), Natural England (NE), Forestry England (FE), The National Trust (NT) and the National Farmers' Union (NFU). The group's aim is to deliver the public goods defined in the Government's 25-year Environment Plan and those identified in the FFG's Natural Capital Report (Forest Farming Group, 2019) the FFG seeks to ensure that any Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) are fit for purpose for the unique landscape of the New Forest and its people.

Our instructions specify that the purpose of the feasibility study is to 'identify appropriate management principles for the study area, in order to deliver the FFG's objectives (which are set out in the group's vision statement (Forest Farming Group, 2022)) and to explore how the management principles can be supported through ELMS'.

We have been instructed to respond to seven specific questions, which are as follows:

1. What are the Key Features of the Study Area?
2. What geographical area is required to support the Key Features?
3. What Management Principles should be adopted in order to support the Key Features?
4. How does the current grazing system in the New Forest maintain the Key Features and how can the grazing system be supported to protect and enhance the Key Features?
5. Which Agri-environment Scheme, or combination of schemes, would be most appropriate for delivering the Management Principles?
6. What governance structure will best support the management of the Key Features?
7. What further research or studies are required?

2.2 The Study Area

The study area encompasses over 37,000 hectares of land within the New Forest National Park. It is defined by the boundary of the New Forest Perambulation (Perambulation), which represents more than 65% of the total area of the National Park. The current Perambulation boundary is set out in the New Forest Act 1964 and defines the area over which the Verderers of the New Forest hold statutory responsibilities, including enforcement through byelaws made under the New Forest Acts of 1877 to 1949.

Figure 1: Plan showing Study Area (Perambulation) with a pink outline and the National Park boundary with an orange outline.

The New Forest is widely recognised as one of the UK's most important areas for biodiversity and is of outstanding conservation significance at both European and international levels. The area supports a diverse and intricate mosaic of habitats, many of which were once widespread across lowland Western Europe but are now increasingly rare and fragmented. These habitats include extensive wet and dry heaths, rich valley mires, wet and dry grasslands, ancient pasture, enclosed woodlands, and a complex network of rivers, streams, ponds, and seasonal wetlands.

Additionally, due to the area's limited development and minimal ground disturbance, particularly compared to landscapes shaped by post-war agricultural intensification, it retains a wealth of historic and archaeological features.

To help understand the Study Area's current management, together with the existing habitat characteristics, constraints and opportunities, we have taken time to review the key historical events that have shaped the Study Area. This also helps us understand the origins and roles of the key bodies which have responsibility for the management of the Forest.

2.3 Historical Context

The New Forest has a long and complex history in terms of its governance and the land management practices that have been deployed from time to time. The relevant history extends over 1000 years covering key periods and historical events that have helped to shape the landscape and species which characterise the New Forest, that we know and recognise today. Some of the most influential events are briefly summarised below to help put some context and understanding to the modern-day forest and its features.

Royal Forest Origins and Forest Law (11th–16th Centuries)

1079 – The New Forest was established by William the Conqueror as a royal hunting forest. Unlike a woodland, this was a managed mix of heathland, scrub, and pasture governed under Forest Law. Local communities lost rights like hunting and fencing, but gained "common rights" such as grazing, pannage (foraging pigs), and collecting firewood—many of which still exist today.

Silviculture Emerges – Though early forest use centred on deer management, coppicing (cutting trees to encourage regrowth) began for fuel and fencing materials. An Act of 1483 encouraged the enclosure of private forest coppices, likely including Crown coppices.

1542 New Forest Act – Crown woodland management was formalised, establishing the Surveyor General of the King's Woods to oversee timber production. The creation of the post of Surveyor General gave rise to a second hierarchy of officer, known as Deputy Surveyors, who were assigned to manage "forest districts". The post of Deputy Surveyor still exists today with the Deputy Surveyor leading the management of the Crown Lands of the New Forest by Forestry England. The Act marked the start of organised forestry and the leasing of coppices to "wood sellers" who maintained underwood while leaving saplings for the Royal Navy.

Timber Production and Conflict (17th–19th Centuries)

1698 Act – the Increase and Preservation of Timber in the New Forest allowed for the first phase of large-scale timber production with 6,000 acres of land being enclosed for timber production. The act sparked tension with local commoners due to restrictions placed on the right to depasture stock throughout the year i.e when deer were calving (fence month) and when winter forage was low (winter heyning).

1808 Act of the Increase and Preservation of timber in Dean and New Forest – Reaffirmed the 1698 provisions and enabled new inclosures. By 1848, 8,247 acres had been enclosed through rolling schemes and replanting.

1851 Deer Removal Act – The Crown relinquished deer stocking rights, allowing for an additional 10,000 acres of plantations, now including pure conifer stands. The significant increase in afforestation came at a heavy cost to the Forest's traditional land use and ecology. The restrictions on grazing continued, and tensions with commoners escalated.

1877 New Forest Act – The Act resulted from campaigning by wealthy local landowners and conservationists. It halted further inclosures beyond 17,680 acres and preserved 45,000 acres of Ancient & Ornamental Woodland. The Court of Verderers was created as an independent statutory body to represent commoners and protect their rights. Conflict between the Crown and Verderers

over their respective roles and powers over the Open Forest grew and disputes with the Crown persisted.

20th Century: War, Policy Shifts, and Conservation

World Wars – The Forest was heavily used for timber and military operations. Around 8,700 acres were appropriated during WWII, some of which later became campsites or poorly/partially restored areas.

1923 Transfer of Woods Act – Management passed to the Forestry Commission, now Forestry England. With the post-WW1 forest policy drive to secure the national timber supply, the Forestry Commission embarked on a programme to convert broadleaved woods to conifer plantations.

1949 New Forest Act – The Act overhauled the administration of the Forest, defining roles between the Forestry Commission and Verderers. The Verderers were granted powers to allow the Forestry Commission to enclose 5,000 acres of new plantations (Verderer's Inclosures) under certain conditions. Inclosures required rent and stock access, and some are now being restored to heathland.

1964 Act – Extended the forest boundary (Perambulation) to include adjacent commons, reducing animal accidents and improving management. It also allowed campsites with Verderers' consent and widely recognised the Forest's ecological importance.

1970 Act – Ensured Verderers' consent was needed for recreation provisions and allowed for the provision to fence the A337, a key road through the Forest. It also granted funding support to the Verderers, laying the groundwork for future conservation schemes.

Minister's Mandates (1971 & 1999) – These government statements curtailed conifer planting and prioritised conservation over timber production in unenclosed areas, preserving the Forest's traditional character.

Modern Protection and Recognition

Nature Conservation Designations – Starting in 1959, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations grew, culminating in nearly 29,000 hectares being legally protected. The New Forest later gained international recognition as a Ramsar site, Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Special Protection Area (SPA), affirming its global ecological value.

2005 National Park Status – The New Forest National Park was established, bringing new planning powers and a mission to conserve natural and cultural heritage, promote public enjoyment, and support local communities.

Recent Legislation – The NERC Act 2006, Environment Acts of 1995 and 2021, and the 2023 Environmental Targets Regulations mandate public bodies to protect biodiversity. The Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 sets legally binding targets to restore wildlife habitats—including those found in the New Forest—by 2042.

3 Key Features

3.1 Introduction

The Key Features of the New Forest can vary greatly depending on individual or organisational perspectives. For the purposes of this study, and following guidance from Natural England and the Forest Farming Group, we have limited our scope to statutory designated features. In relation to nature conservation designations, our focus has been on the habitats and species that underpin the designation of land within the Study Area. Where relevant and appropriate, we have also identified Key Features outside the Study Area and included references to non-designated features within it.

The Key Features and associated designations can be divided into two categories: nature conservation and historic environment.

3.2 Nature Conservation Designations

The New Forest is one of the most highly designated areas within the UK, with its significance for biodiversity reflected in the number and extent of nature conservation designations within the Perambulation. As well as the entire Perambulation lying within the New Forest National Park the area supports all the key statutory UK nature conservation designations, including:

- New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- New Forest Special Protection Area (SPA)
- New Forest RAMSAR
- New Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- National Nature Reserve (NNR)
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

The designation of the New Forest as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been a particular driving force in improving the management and condition of the New Forest habitats and has acted as a catalyst to progress and fund terrestrial and wetland restoration programmes over the last 25 years as well as to increase the area proposed for future habitat restoration.

Approximately 29,733 hectares (81%) of the Study Area is designated which accounts for 52% of the National Park. The only land not designated comprises amenity grassland (e.g. golf courses, sports pitches), semi-improved and improved grassland fields and built-up areas within and around settlements. Even within these non-designated areas the Priority Habitat Inventory shows pockets of priority habitat including deciduous woodland, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, good quality semi-improved grassland and traditional orchards. Many of the field systems are connected via a network of hedgerows and highway verges and a significant number of the verges are included within the New Forest SAC and SSSI. These priority habitat areas amount to, at least, a further 1500 ha (5%) of the Perambulation.

The New Forest SAC encompasses 29,214 hectares and includes most of the unenclosed Forest and Inclosures making up the New Forest SSSI together with the SSSIs of Langley Wood, Whiteparish Common, Landford Heath and Loosehangar Copse and Meadows in the north, and Royden Woods in

the south. Whiteparish Common (SSSI) is also included in the New Forest SAC but lies over 3 km from the Perambulation boundary beyond the A36. The New Forest RAMSAR is 28003 hectares and largely follows the New Forest SSSI boundary.

In addition to the New Forest SAC, SPA, RAMSAR and SSSI, there are a number of other designated sites which are either located within the Perambulation or are within 2 km of the Perambulation boundary. These include some isolated units of the New Forest SSSI as summarised in Table 1. Many of the sites lying outside the Perambulation are connected hydrologically via streams and rivers draining from the forest catchments or have direct terrestrial habitat connectivity so could potentially benefit from management or restoration of New Forest features.

Table 1: Designated Sites

Site	RAMSAR	SAC	SPA	SSSI	NNR	LNR
Located Wholly or Partly within the New Forest Perambulation						
The New Forest	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Boldre Foreshore						✓
Hurst Castle & Lymington River Estuary				✓		
Lymington River				✓		
North Solent				✓	✓	
Located within 2km of the New Forest Perambulation Boundary						
Avon Valley	✓		✓	✓		
Breamore Marsh				✓		
Dibden Bay				✓		
Fletchwood Meadows				✓		
Hythe to Calshot Marshes				✓		
Landford Bog				✓		
Landford Heath				✓		
Langley Wood					✓	
Langley Wood and Homans Copse				✓		
Loosehanger Copse and Meadows				✓		
Lymington River Reedbeds				✓		
Lymington to Keyhaven Marshes						✓
Norley Copse and Meadows				✓		
North Solent				✓	✓	
Poors Common				✓		
River Avon		✓		✓		
Roydon Woods				✓		
Solent & Isle of Wight Lagoons		✓				
Solent Maritime		✓				
Solent & Southampton Water	✓		✓			
Sowley Pond				✓		

The Solent Maritime SAC extends for 11,325 hectares and comprises the Solent coastline and maritime habitats to the mean high-water mark, including estuaries of the Beaulieu Rivers and Southampton Water north to Hythe. It incorporates the North Solent, Hythe to Calshot Marshes, Hurst Castle and Lymington River, Lower Test Valley and Eling and Bury Marches SSSIs. The latter two sites are located over 3km from the Perambulation to the eastern side of Totton separated by main roads and settlements with little or no direct habitat connectivity to the New Forest, although the streams draining the western side of the forest such as the Cadnam Brook, Bartley Water and Jacobs Gutter drain through these sites to Southampton Water. At its most southern extent, the Perambulation boundary extends to the foreshore between the Lymington Estuary and Needs Ore Point encompassing the Solent Maritime SAC. The main connectivity with the New Forest SAC is via the Lymington River, Beaulieu River and streams draining though Beaulieu Heath and Sowley Pond.

The Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC is 36 hectares and includes the saline lagoons of the Pennington Marshes and adjacent areas. The closest part of the site boundary lies less than 1km outside the Perambulation to the west of the Lymington River Estuary.

The River Avon SAC comprises the river and river valley from Breamore south to Christchurch covering 450 hectares in total. The tributaries and streams draining from the western side of the New Forest, including from Millersford Bottom, the Dockens Water, Ditchend Brook, Latchmore Book, Linford Brook drain and Cranesmoor all flow into the River Avon. Sea trout also migrate from the River Avon up into the Forest streams to spawn.

Some of the larger sites, for example, the Avon Valley; tend to have their own discrete projects with well-established management/steering groups and tend to operate separately from the New Forest.

3.3 Conservation Objectives

New Forest SAC Conservation Objectives

The conservation features exist to ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

The specific conservation objectives for the New Forest SAC are as follows:

Subject to natural change, to maintain:

1. New Forest Pasture Woodland in favourable condition with particular reference to: beech forests with holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and yew *(Taxus bacata)*, rich in lichens and mosses (*Illici-*

Fagion), old acidophilous oak woods with pedunculate oak *(Quercus robur)* on sandy plains, *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests, stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*), honey buzzard (*Pernis apivoris*), and nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*).

2. New Forest riverine woodland in favourable condition with particular reference to Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*.

3. New Forest Inclosure Woodland in favourable condition, with particular reference to early 19th century broadleaf and / or Ancient Woodland Sites (AWS), or ancient semi-natural woodland, beech forests with holly *(Ilex aquifolium)* and yew *(Taxus bacata)*, rich in lichens and mosses (*Illici-Fagion*), old acidophilous oak woods with pedunculate oak *(Quercus robur)* on sandy plains, honey buzzard (*Pernis apivoris*), and nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*).

4. New Forest bog woodland in favourable condition.

5. New Forest wet heath in favourable condition with particular reference to Northern Atlantic wet heath with cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Southern damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*).

6. New Forest dry heath in favourable condition with particular reference to European dry heaths, breeding nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), woodlark (*Lullula arborea*), Dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*) and wintering hen harrier (*Cygnus cyaneus*).

7. New Forest mires in favourable condition with particular reference to depressions on peat substrates (*Rhynchosporion*), transition mires, alkaline fens and Southern damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*).

8. New Forest wet grassland in favourable condition, with particular reference to *Molinia* meadows on chalk and clay (NVC M24), M25 and M23 communities.

9. New Forest dry grassland in favourable condition, with particular reference to U1, U3, U4 grasslands and U20-related species-rich bracken and woodlark (*Lullula arborea*).

10. New Forest permanent ponds in favourable condition, with particular reference to oligotrophic waters with very few minerals of Atlantic sandy plains with amphibious vegetation.

11. New Forest temporary ponds in favourable condition, with particular reference to oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of Atlantic sandy plains, and oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with amphibious vegetation belonging to *Littorelletae uniflorae* and / or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea.*

12. The habitats in favourable condition of the populations of Annex I species that contribute to internationally important populations in the New Forest SPA, for breeding Dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*), nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), woodlark (*Lullula arborea*), honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*) and for wintering hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*).

13. The habitats in favourable condition of the populations of Annex II species: Southern damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*).

14. The habitats in favourable condition of the populations of Annex II species: stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*).

15. The habitats in favourable condition of the populations of Annex II species: great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*).

SPA Conservation Objectives

The SPA conservation objectives are to ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
- The population of each of the qualifying features, and,
- The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

RAMSAR Conservation Objectives

No specific objectives are stated, but Ramsar sites share their habitats and species with those listed in the objectives for SAC and SPA sites above. Objectives for the conservation of Ramsar site species and habitats should be broadly the same.

3.4 Condition of SSSIs

The condition of designated sites is primarily assessed through SSSI condition assessment monitoring based on unit assessments. The objectives of Natural England's Standard monitoring, Assessment and Reporting' are:'

- To provide evidence to support site management, and provide feedback to land managers to deliver the best environmental outcomes;

- To assess the effectiveness of interventions, and enable us to report on our corporate plan targets and reporting responsibilities;

- To improve the future delivery of Natural England's protected sites responsibilities, for example through improved guidance and training;

- To contribute to our monitoring and understanding of long-term changes in the natural environment, including delivery of Favourable Conservation Status for habitats and species;

- To support landscape scale delivery of outcomes, as important components of resilient, ecologically functional networks, and ecosystem services;

- To support Natural England's regulatory and enforcement responsibilities, including as part of the evidence presented in public inquiries and court cases.

The monitoring and assessment of SSSIs is an important aspect of Natural England's overall monitoring programme and provides evidence for the delivery of the Government's 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment. The extent and condition of Protected Sites will be a key indicator, and data from the monitoring of SSSI features will also contribute to indicators on habitats, species and heritage features. This evidence will also be used to monitor and evaluate delivery of the Nature Recovery Network, Net Gain, Local Natural Capital Plans and the Environmental Land Management System.

Reforms are underway of the Protected Sites monitoring, including moving from a unit to features scale to make the data most useful for the purposes highlighted above.

The definitions of SSSI Condition Categories are given at **Appendix A.**

Current condition assessment data available for all the SSSI units within and outside the Perambulation is summarised at **Appendix A** and has been derived from magic.defra.gov.uk. Analysis of this data can help to identify where future options or programmes of work can be targeted.

3.5 Nature Conservation Key Features

The habitats of the New Forest are described in great detail in the New Forest SAC Plan, originally published in 2001 and recently updated but not yet published. Much could be written about the characteristics, communities and the myriad of species, many of which are rare or notable found in the different New Forest habitats. However, the following section attempts to summarise the key habitat characteristics and features of the primary habitats. Although the different habitats are described separately, most occur in an intimate mosaic, often transitioning into one another with no distinct boundary depending upon soil type, topography, hydrology, drainage and land management characteristics.

The main habitat types comprise extensive wet and dry heaths interspersed with rich valley mires and associated wet and dry grassland, ancient pasture and enclosed woodlands, a network of clean rivers and streams and frequent permanent and temporary ponds. Outstanding examples of thirteen habitats of European interest are represented together with two priority habitat types, bog woodland and riverine woodland. Several habitat types do not have a Habitats Directive equivalent but are important habitats in their own right and form an integral part of the habitat web that typifies the Forest.

These habitats support an exceptional variety of plants and animals including the richest moss and lichen flora in lowland Europe, scarce flowering plants and a spectacular community of invertebrates. It also supports valuable bird populations as well as being one of the largest areas for breeding waders in southern England. Indeed, the New Forest SSSI includes 7 primary habitat types and 63 NVC, GCR (geological features), species and other features and 64 features for which it is monitored, spread across 582 management units (listed in **Appendix A**).

The quality and diversity of the habitats has arisen due to the historic and present-day land use and management. Of particular importance is the pastoral economy based upon the Rights of Common. The commoners' stock, mainly comprising ponies and cattle have the right to roam freely over extensive areas. Over the years grazing patterns have helped to develop a unique ground flora and keep more aggressive species such as bracken and purple moor grass in check.

The Forest streams and rivers also support important habitats beyond the New Forest SAC boundary. In particular, the estuaries of the Lymington, Avon and Beaulieu rivers support significant reedbed, saltmarsh and mudflat communities. The grassland and pasture along the river valleys provide valuable foraging and cover for waders and other birds.

The table in **Appendix B** shows the relationship between the habitat types and the different New Forest nature conservation designations while the characteristics of the main New Forest habitat types are outlined below. Varying area figures and species numbers are quoted in different reports and publications but most of the figures quoted in this report have been derived from the most recent New Forest SAC plan.

3.6 Woodland Habitats

Pasture Woodland

The ancient beech and oak woods are one of the splendours of the New Forest and cover at least 4,430 hectares (excluding bog and riverine woodland) comprising 3100 ha of old growth woodland and 1,330 ha of more recent secondary expansion, primarily focused on the Crown Lands. The New Forest ranks as one of the finest surviving sites for wood pasture in Europe. These old, characterful woodlands are commonly referred to as "Ancient and Ornamental" woodlands so named by the New Forest Act 1877. There is no formal definition of A&O Woodland though the term is generally understood to refer to the unenclosed woods originating in the 18th century or earlier. The oldest trees still standing originate from the 17th century. The New Forest A&O woodland generally takes the form of pasture woodland where grazing by livestock helps to maintain the characteristic appearance typified by tall groves of beech and oak with an understorey of holly and a mixture of birch, thorns and yew as well as a structural diversity ranging from trees of closed high canopy forest to open stands with heathy or grassy lawns and glades.

Pasture woodlands (which can also include bog and riverine woodland, described under wetland habitats) are expanding and regenerating where patches of scrub and fallen deadwood protect young saplings from being grazed by livestock or deer or from natural expansion out onto heathland and lawns. The mosaic with other types of woodland and heath has allowed unique and varied assemblages of epiphytic lichens and saproxylic invertebrates to be sustained, particularly in situations where the woodlands are open and the tree trunks receive plenty of light.

Another term commonly used to describe old growth former pasture woodland that has survived within Inclosures is Pre-Inclosure Woodland but often these areas have been ungrazed for decades and have since lost some of their pasture woodland character.

Pasture woodland supports several of the Annex I woodland habitat types that contribute to the New Forest's designation as a SAC. These habitats are recognised for designation because the New Forest has/is:

- The largest area of mature, semi-natural beech *Fagus sylvatica* woodland in Britain; much of it is a form of W14 *Fagus sylvatica – Rubus fruticosus* woodland that conforms to the Annex I type 9130 ***Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests**.

- Representative of 9190 **old acidophilous oak woods** Quercus robur on sandy plains in the southern part of its UK range. It is the most extensive area of active wood-pasture with old oak *Quercus* spp. and beech *Fagus sylvatica* in north-west Europe and has outstanding invertebrate and lichen populations.

- Supports the largest area of mature, semi-natural beech *Fagus sylvatica* woodland in Britain and represents 9120 **Atlantic acidophilous beech forests with Ilex and sometimes also Taxus (Yew)** in the shrub layer in the most southerly part of the habitat's UK range.

- The New Forest's presence of epiphytic lichens and saproxylic invertebrates' fauna has led the Council of Europe to identify the New Forest as being of international importance in this regard (Speight, 1989).

Inclosure Woodland

Inclosure woodland accounts for 8,437 hectares comprising

- Statutory Inclosures (7115 ha)
- Crown Freehold Woods (461 ha)
- Leasehold Woods (197 ha)
- Verderers' Inclosures (664 ha)

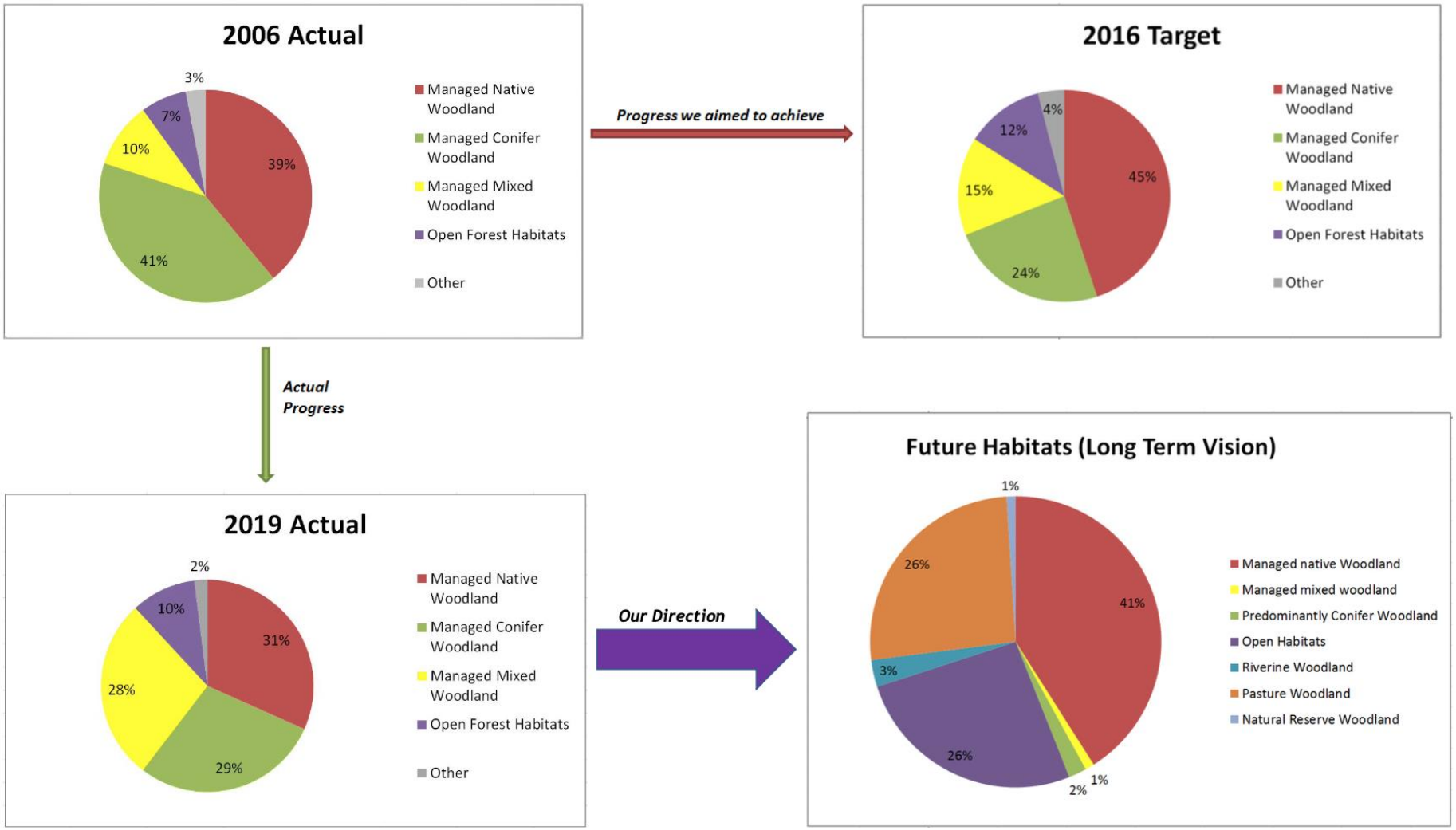
The Inclosures were generally established on former heathland or ancient woodland sites and cleared. They were either planted with broadleaf plantation woodland dominated by oak and beech with occasional sweet chestnut or with conifer. Pine species (Scots and Corsican pine) and Western Hemlock tend to dominate the drier heathland soils while Western Red Cedar, Douglas Fir and Norway/Sitka Spruce dominate the intermediate and wetter sites. However, remnants of former habitat still survive within the Inclosures including mires, pasture woodland (referred to as Pre-Inclosure woodland), grassland and heathland communities where light levels allow. Heathland communities readily restore as the crop is thinned. In the late 1990s, the Forestry Commission (now Forestry England) embarked on a new programme of restoring the Inclosures through the Forest Plan process.

The New Forest Inclosures Forest Plan sets out how Forestry England propose to manage the Inclosures and their habitats into the future. The long-term vision sets the direction of management and has no fixed timescale but is potentially 100 to 200 years or more into the future, depending upon the rate of habitat response, transition and succession. The habitat response will largely depend upon the type, intensity and timescales of management interventions. With this in mind, the Plan sets out the current structure and management interventions planned to progress the vision

over next 10 years and predicts how the structure of the woodlands and habitats will have responded in 20 years' time. By its very nature, woodland management must look many decades ahead due to the time frames associated with woodland management as the life cycle of a timber crops/trees can last hundreds of years.

The first broadscale 100-year long-term indicative strategy for the Inclosures was drawn up in consultation with a wide range of organisations and the public taking into account the England Forest strategy and relevant policies around restoration of ancient and native woodland and the Minister's Mandate. The plans were approved in 2001 (and revised in 2006/7) and an ambitious programme of heathland restoration focused on the Verderers' Inclosures. The Forest plan was fully updated and approved in 2019 to include more heathland restoration and a greater move towards increased connectivity of habitat, and the restoration of wood pasture and native woodland. Forest Plans are renewed every 10 years and undoubtedly the detail of the Forest Plan process will continue to evolve according to changes in legislation, policy, resources available for restoration and maintenance and demand for timber as well as the developing knowledge around lost and remnant habitats.

Figure 2: Forest Plan Progress & Future Ambition (Source Forestry England)



3.7 Heathland & Grassland Habitats.

Heathland and grassland communities cover an estimated 12,306 ha of the Perambulation and are found primarily on the Crown lands on the Open Forest, within restored Inclosures and across the Northern and Western Commons. The term heathland covers a variety of vegetation community types including Dry heath, Humid heath, Wet heath, Lowland Acid grassland, Wet grassland and Valley mires. Grazing by horses and cattle is an integral part of heathland management and the New Forest heathlands have been grazed by commoning stock for centuries leading to the unique landscape and habitat mosaic so characteristic of the Open Forest today. Management using traditional heathland management techniques such as controlled burning, bracken, heather and gorse cutting which have been practised through the ages are still applied today.

Dry Heath

Dry heath communities tend to occur on the drier, gravel plateaus and sandy soils and extend to around 7,600 ha although absolute figures for the sub-types of dry heath are less well known. The New Forest dry heath communities comprise a structural mosaic of ericaceous vegetation with at least 10% young heather and between 20 to 50% maturing or old heather with the total heather cover usually between 25 -90% with between 1 to 10% bare ground forming an intimate web of vegetation. To maintain favourable condition Rhododendron should be below 1% with less than 5% seedling pine/mature and <25% bracken cover and not more than 10% of gorse should be in a degenerate condition. Trying to restore or maintain these favourable condition criteria drives much of the heathland management across the Forest. Two main NVC communities can be found.

- H2 Heather-Dwarf Gorse Heath (*Calluna vulgaris-Ulex minor*)
- H3 Dwarf Gorse-Bristle Bent Heath (*Ulex minor-Agrostic curtsii*)

In addition, a further six sub-community types can be found due to differing levels of soils moisture content and nutrient status through to those too wet to support Purple heather (*Erica cinerea*) but not wet enough to support *Sphagnum.* One of these communities, *Calluna vulgaris-Molinia caerulea-Eria tetralix-Leucobyrum glaucum heath* (Sanderson 1988) is quite unique to the forest and is a type of humid heath which lies in the zone between wet heath between the drier podzols and wetter humic gley and stagnogley soils, where the community is maintained by grazing and controlled burning.

Wet Heath

Wet heath communities cover 2,100 hectares of the New Forest and occurs on nutrient poor mineral soils or very shallow peats that are at least seasonally waterlogged but may be dry on the surface in summer. The vegetation communities are strongly influenced by burning and grazing. Stands which are managed by burning and grazing have the highest biodiversity. The vegetation communities are typified by NVC communities M16a, M16b and M16c.

M16a: Cross-leaved Heath – *Sphagnum compactum* wet heath-typical sub-community

This community is the most extensive and accounts for nearly 50% of wet heath cover. It is generally found on the poorer soils in the northern half of the Forest and is characterised by the presence of

Heather *(Calluna vulgaris)*, Cross leaved Heath *(Erica tetralix)* and Purple Moor Grass (Molinia caerula) although the degree of dominance depends upon water levels and management regime. *Sphagnum compactum* is the dominant moss species. Lichens, particularly the wet heath varieties such as *Cladonia strepilis* and *Pycnothelia papillosum* can be frequent. Typical vascular plants include Deer-grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and Heath Rush *(Juncus squarrosus)*.

M16b: Cross-leaved heath-*Sphagnum compactum* wet heath-Devil's bit Scabious-Carnation Sedge sub-community

This community accounts for 40% of wet heath. It is more tussocky in nature due to the steady movement of surface water and tend to be much more herb rich than M16a due to the richer underlying soils. A rich herb community can usually be found between the Molinia tussocks including such species as Tormentil *(Potentilla erecta)*, Devilsbit Scabious *(Succisa pratensis)*, Heath Milkwort (Polygala serpyllifolia), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panacea*), Meadow Thistle *(Cirsium dissectum)* and Sawwort *(Serratula tinctoria)*. Other notably species include Petty Whin *(Genista anglica)*, Sneezewort *(Achillea ptarmica)* and Creeping Willow *(Salix repens)* and the nationally scarce Marsh Gentian *(Gentiana pneumonanthe)*.

M16c: Cross-leaved Heath – *Sphagnum compactum* wet heath-White beak-sedge-Oblong- leaved Sundew sub-community

This heathland community type accounts for the remaining 10% of New Forest wet heaths. It is characterised by a reduced cover of Heather *(Calluna vulgaris)*, Cross-leaved Heath *(Erica tetralix)*, Purple Moor Grass *(Molinia caerula)* and an extensive cover of mosses including Sphagnum compactum and Sphagnum tenellum. Vascular plants include Deer-grass *(Trichophorum cespitosum)* and Heath Rush *(Juncus squarrosus)*. Wetter hollows and runnels support Common Sundew *(Drosera rotundifolia)* and the rarer Oblong-leaved Sundew *(Drosera intermedia)* which is a particularly distinctive feature of this community. Bare peat tends to be colonised by the local *Rhynchospora fusca* and the club moss *Lycopodiella*.

In terms of SAC habitat, the heathlands have been designated for their Annex 1 habitat types, due to the fact the New Forest:

- Contains the most extensive stands of lowland **4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths** with Erica tetralix in southern England, mainly of the M16 *Erica tetralix – Sphagnum compactum* type. M14 *Schoenus nigricans – Narthecium ossifragum* mire is also found on this site. The wet heaths are important for rare plants, such as marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*, and a number of dragonfly species, including the scarce blue-tailed damselfly *Ischnura pumilio* and small red damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*. There is a wide range of transitions between wet heath and other habitats, including dry heath, various woodland types, *Molinia* grasslands, fen, and acid grassland. Wet heaths enriched by bog myrtle *Myrica gale* are a prominent feature of many areas of the Forest. Unlike much lowland heath, the New Forest heaths continue to be extensively grazed by cattle and horses, favouring species with low competitive ability.

- Represents **4030 European dry heaths** in southern England and is the largest area of lowland heathland in the UK. It is particularly important for the diversity of its habitats and the range of rare and scarce species which it supports. The dry heaths of the New Forest are of the H2 *Calluna vulgaris – Ulex minor* heath type, and H3 *Ulex minor – Agrostis curtisii* heath is found on damper areas. There are a wide range of transitions between dry heath and wet heath, *Molinia* grassland, fen, acid grassland and various types of scrub and woodland. Both the New Forest and the two Dorset Heath SACs are in southern England. All three areas are selected because together they contain a high proportion of all the lowland **European dry heaths** in the UK. There are, however, significant differences in the ecology of the two areas, associated with more oceanic conditions in Dorset and the continuous history of grazing in the New Forest.

Dry Grassland

The New Forest's dry grassland comprises a suite of communities which are generally referred to as:

- Parched acid grassland (estimated 860 ha) – swards are characteristically 1 to 2cm with high grazing pressure and shortage of water restricting the availability of nutrients leads to die-back of vegetation in the summer such that swards may appear dry and brown. Often, they occur in a mosaic with Chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile* greens.

- Heathy acid grassland (1,258 ha) – is generally species poor dry grassland dominated by *Agrostis curisii* and *Molinia caerulea* which grades into dry heath as heather cover increases.

- Moist acid grassland (54 ha) – Species poor grassland occurring locally in the zone between parched acid grassland and wet lawns but is also found in damp, grassy woodland glades and is characterised by fine leaved grasses such as *Agrostis capillaris*, *Festuca rubra* often in associated with *Galium saxatile* and *Potentilla erecta* and the moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*.

- Neutral greens (ha not known) – are generally found around settlement edges on dry to moist neutral soils characterised by a species poor grass dominated sward of *Agrostis capillaris* and *Festuca rubra* with *Cynosurus cristatus, Lolium perenne, Bellis perennis* and *Trifolium repens* sometimes with mats of *Chamaemelum nobile*.

- Herb-rich bracken grassland (250 ha) – bracken stands are an integral part of all heathlands, grassland and pasture and Inclosure woodland communities but herb bracken rich stands in particular, form a distinctive community within a species rich mosaic of grassland and woodland herbs. It is often associated with Wild Gladioli Gladiolus illyricus.

High and relatively uniform grazing pressure, soil fertility and soil moisture retention are the main factors determining the distribution of the different dry grassland communities.

Wet Grassland

The New Forest represents one of the best areas in the UK for wet grassland and is probably second only to culm grasslands for acid fen meadow. Wet grassland communities are of international importance for nature conservation, and it is possible that the UK contains more of this habitat than survives in the rest of Europe, with the possible exception of the Republic of Ireland.

New Forest Wet grassland (or wet lawn) covers around 1063 hectares most of which is found along the non-wooded parts of floodplains. Flushed lawns are a characteristic feature of valley slopes and pasture woodland glades across the Forest. They comprise a suite of plant communities confined to impermeable or slowly impermeable clays, or permeable soils affected by high groundwater levels. The lawns tend to be waterlogged in winter but dry out to some extent in summer.

The community types and distribution are strongly influenced by stocking regimes, soil moisture retention and soil fertility. Generally the swards are tightly grazed (<2cm) and are characterised by the presence of Velvet Bent (Agrostis canina) and sedges such as Carnation Sedge *(Carex panacea)*, Common Sedge *(C. nigra)* and Common Yellow Sedge *(C. viridula oedocarpa)*, along with species typical of wet grassland such as *Molinia caerulea*, Devil's Bit Scabious *(Succisa pratensis)*, Creeping Willow *(Salix repens)* and Marsh Thistle *(Cirsium dissectum)*. Extensive carpets of Bog Pimpernel *(Anagallis tenella)* are seasonally prominent. Where soil water retention is highest or around flushes Marsh Pennywort *(Hydrocotyle vulgaris)*, *Juncus acutiflorus* and Marsh St. John's Wort *(Hypericum elodes)* are abundant. The more acidic sites support Sphagnum lawns and an increasing heathland element typified by Cross-Leaved Heath *(Erica tetralix)*.

The wet grassland habitat forms part of the SAC habitat designation due to the fact it:

- Represents **6410 *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*)** in southern England. The New Forest supports a large area of the heathy form of M24 *Molinia caerulea – Cirsium dissectum* fen-meadow. This vegetation occurs in situations of heavy grazing by ponies and cattle in areas known locally as 'lawns', often in a fine-scale mosaic with **4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths** and other mire and grassland communities. These lawns occur on flushed soils on slopes and on level terrain on the floodplains of rivers and streams. The New Forest ***Molinia* meadows** are unusual in the UK in terms of their species composition, management and landscape position. The grasslands are species-rich, and a particular feature is the abundance of small sedges such as carnation sedge *Carex panicea*, common sedge *C. nigra* and yellow-sedge *C. viridula* ssp. *oedocarpa*, and the more frequent occurrence of mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and petty whin *Genista anglica* compared to stands elsewhere in the UK.

3.8 Wetland habitats

In terms of wetland habitats, the New Forest supports one of only four significant sites of bog woodland, together with one of the six best sites of riverine woodland (ancient residual alluvial forest) in the UK. Together with other scarce wetland habitats the Forest also contains the most extensive lowland valley mire systems in Western Europe. The network of rivers and streams in the Forest, despite some interference by man, represent one of the best examples of a nutrient poor,

acidic, lowland stream network in southern Britain. In addition, the New Forest is now the most important area in the region for breeding waders. The network of ephemeral and permanent ponds supports a range of notable, rare and endangered species. The key characteristics of the wetland habitats are described below.

Riverine Woodland

The New Forest is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK for Riverine Woodland. In the lowlands, intensive agriculture and flood control combined with woodland clearance have reduced this habitat type to small, fragmented examples. However, the New Forest stands are relatively extensive and where not affected by localised stream canalisation, remain functionally intact and seasonally flood especially where water spills from meandering channels along the flood plain; some stands have become isolated from the floodplain due to past drainage and channel straightening. Debris dams are often a valuable feature in riverine woodland promoting both flooding and helping to diversify the channel morphology and habitat niches. Riverine woodland also contains extensive old-growth stands which are exceptionally rare in Europe.

New Forest Riverine Woodland comprises around 212 ha distributed along the floodplains or the stream and rivers. The woodland stands generally comprise occasional to abundant Alder (Alnus glutinosa) and frequent Ash (Fraxinus excelsior). The rich alluvial soils produce a very healthy woodland flora which is sometimes modified by grazing animals. Greater Tussock Sedge (*Carex paniculata*) is absent and Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia caerulea*) is very uncommon. In terms of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC), riverine woodland falls into the two categories below (and frequently lies somewhere between the two):

- W8 – Ash-Maple-Dogs Mercury Woodland (Fraxinus excelsior-Acer Campestre-Mercurialis Woodland) or,
- W7 - Alder-Ash-Yellow Pimpernel woodland (Alnus glutinosa-Fraxinus excelsior-Lysimachia nemorum woodland.

Within the W8 type woodland Alder is confined to the river banks, with Oak *(Quercus robur)* and Ash the dominant species within the woodland canopy with occasional Field Maple *(Acer campestre)*. The tree crown can contain some ancient specimens. The shrub layer is very rich and includes species such as Hazel *(Corylus avellana)*, Hawthorn *(Crataegus monogyna)*, Dogwood *(Cornus sanguinea)*, (*Euonymus europaeus)*, Wild Privet *(Ligustrum vulgare)*, and Blackthorn *(Prunus spinosa)*, with frequent Holly *(Ilex aquifolium)*, Bramble *(Rubus fruticosus)* and Rosa spp. The Holly trunks are noted hosts to rare lichen species. The ground flora is also very rich and includes such species as Common Dog Violet *(Viola riviniana)*, Wood Speedwell *(Veronica Montana)*, Yellow Loosestrife *(Lysimachia vulgaris)*, Lesser Celandine *(Ranunculus ficaria)*, Wood spurge *(Euphorbia amygdaloides)*, Cuckoo Flower *(Cardamine pratensis)* and the Lady Fern *(Athyrium filix-femina)*.

Within the W7 community Alder occurs in bigger stands especially in areas where there are peat accumulations in old channels and around springs. The Alder often shows signs of previous coppice management. Ash is also frequent with occasional Oak. The shrub layer is much poorer than in the drier floodplain woodland but Holly and Willow is usually present. The ground flora is characterised by a prominence of wetland species including Remote Sedge *(Carex remota)*, Yellow Pimpernel *(Lysimachia nemorum)*, Bugle *(Ajuga reptans)*, Marsh Valerian *(Valeriana dioica)*, Water Mint

(Mentha aquatica), Lady Fern *(Athyrium filix-femina)*, Marsh Bedstraw *(Galium palustre)* and Marsh Marigold *(Caltha palustris)*.

Riverine Woodland is a SAC qualifying feature due to the fact that:

- The New Forest supports **91E0 Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanaie Salicion albae)** and contains many streams and some small rivers that are less affected by drainage and canalisation than those in any other comparable area in the lowlands of England. Associated with many of the streams, particularly those with alkaline and neutral groundwater, are strips of alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland which, collectively, form an extensive resource with a rich flora. In places there are examples of transitions from open water through reedswamp and fen to alder woodland. The small rivers show natural meanders and debris dams, features that are otherwise rare in the lowlands, with fragmentary ash *Fraxinus excelsior* stands as well as the alder strips. In other places there are transitions to 9190 Old acidophilous oak woods with *Quercus robur* on sandy plains and 9120 Atlantic acidophilous beech forests with *Ilex* and sometimes also *Taxus* in the shrublayer (*Quercion robori-petraeae* or *Ilici-Fagenion*), for which this site has also been selected.

Bog Woodland

Bog woodland is a European priority habitat because it is considered to be rare and extremely restricted, particularly in northwestern European lowlands where drainage and reclamation has destroyed large areas of former bog woodland. In the UK its total extent is estimated to be less than 1,000 ha. The New Forest is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK for Bog Woodland containing around 200-250 ha.

Bog Woodland is found on peat and contains a significant number of bog species in the ground flora. Bog woodland features two types of community - sallow carrs which are found in the acid headwaters and mires and alder carr which is found on richer soils in valleys on swampy ground. In terms of the NVC classification bog woodland communities can be divided into W4b and W5b as described below.

The W4b community is dominated by Downy Birch *(Betula pubescens)* with varying amounts of Grey Willow *(Salix cinerea)* and occasional Alder *(Alnus glutinosa)* over an open bog habitat. It is generally associated with the larger valley mires. Some communities are of very ancient origin, but the growth is young, sometimes due to recent woodland expansion onto the valley mire. Alder is confined to ancient stands and is totally absent from stands that have colonised open mire in the last 130 years. The groundflora is typified by Sharp-flowered rush *(Juncus acutiflorus)* and Purple Moor Grass *(Molinia caerulea)*, the latter controlled by grazing. The character of the community is often influenced by forest management regimes and grazing.

The W5b (Alder-Tussock sedge Woodland- Yellow Loosestrife sub-community *(Alnus glutinosa- Carex paniculata woodland- Lysimchia vulgaris*) community is characterised by an abundance of Alder. Occasional Grey Willow *(Salix cinerea)* and Downy Birch *(Betula pubescens)* occur in the shrub layer over shade tolerant Greater Tussock Sedge *(Carex paniculata)* tussocks. The ground flora is

restricted by the amount of light that can penetrate the canopy, although the base-rich soils are capable of supporting a rich fen woodland flora including Purple Loosestrife *(Lysimachia vulgaris)*, Water Mint *(Mentha aquatica)*, Purple Loosestrife *(Lythrum salicaria)*, Gipsywort *(Lycopus europaeus)*, Lesser Spearwort *(Ranunculus flammula)*, Remote sedge *(Carex remota)* and Royal Fern *(Osmunda regalis)*.

Bog woodland is a **priority** feature of the SAC due to the fact that:

- Birch stands (willow *Betula – Salix)* occur over valley bog vegetation, with fringing alder *Alnus – Sphagnum* stands where there is some water movement. These stands appear to have persisted for long periods in stable association with the underlying *Sphagnum* bog-moss communities. The rich epiphytic lichen communities and pollen record provide evidence for the persistence of this association. The **91D0 Bog woodland** occurs in association with a range of other habitats for which the site has also been selected.

Mires

The New Forest mires cover an area of around 2020ha and occur as either seepage step mires or valley mires. They support a suite of communities including Valley Bogs, Bog Pools, Soakways, Poor Fen, Moorgrass Mires, Marl Flushes and Transition Mires. Although some areas have been damaged by drainage, most of the New Forest mire systems are still largely intact, and the extensive cover and transitions into other heathland communities is unparalleled in the UK. It is unlikely that such a diversity of mire communities, occurring across this extent and in such an intricate mosaic with surrounding heathland, exists in a comparable form elsewhere in the Atlantic zone.

Seepage step mires tend to form arced lines running along the contour line, perched on the upper terraces of the valley sides where the overlying sandy deposits meet the underlying clay deposits. Valley mires can be found in the valley bottoms where low hydraulic gradients and impermeable subsoils prevail. Wide, shallow valleys can support extensive mires while the steeper valleys tend to support smaller more localised mires. Mires are characteristically acidic with a low nutrient status.

In the Forest, the underlying geology strongly influences the water chemistry and nutrient status which is important in determining the distribution of different mire communities. The central flows of valley mires which receive water from the Headon Beds may be neutral or slightly alkaline, while those fed from sand and gravels are acidic. The mires become increasingly acidic and nutrient poor with distance from the central flow with communities changing from enriched fen and carr to Sphagnum bog towards the periphery.

Valley Bogs

Valley bogs are the most extensive form of mire community found in the Forest and occur both in valleys and seepage steps. The community is characteristic of NVC type M21a – Bog Asphodel-Bog Moss Valley Mire – White Beak-sedge Bog Moss sub-community. *Sphagnum papillosum* is dominant while other sphagnum moss species, for example *Sphagnum subnitens, S auriculatum, S. capillifolium* and *S. recurvum* are frequent. Other common species include Common Sundew *(Drosera rotundiflora)*, Cross-leaved Heath *(Erica tetralix)*, Bogbean (Menyanthes trifoliate), Perfoliate Pondweed (Potamogeton polygonifoliuous) and Bog Myrtle *(Myrica gale)* as well as a

significant proportion of the British population of Bog Orchid *(Hammarbya paludosa)*. The bryophyte flora is especially rich featuring many bog specialist liverworts.

Bog pools

Many of the larger mires support bog pools where low flows or stagnant water result in high acidity and very low nutrient levels. Carpets of Sphagnum moss are scattered with vascular plants such as Bog Bean *(Menythanthes trifoliate)*, White beak-sedge *(Rhynchospora alba)* and Common Cotton Grass *(Eriophorum angustifolium)*. Local species include Lesser Bladderwort *(Utricularia minor)*, Great Sundew *(Drosera anglica)*, Brown Beak-sedge *(Rhynchospora fusca)* and Bog Sedge *(Carex limosa)*. Bog pools are one of the few communities that do not rely on grazing for their survival.

Soakways

Soakway communities are associated with the natural drainage systems of pristine mires. The community is typified by NVC type M29 – Marsh St John's Wort – Bog pond weed soakway. Linear creeping mats of Marsh St John's Wort *(Hypericum elodes)* and Perfoliate Pondweed *(Potamogeton polygonifolius)* are highly distinctive and are often accompanied by Lesser Spearwort *(Ranunculus flammula)* and Bulbous Rush *(Juncus bulbosus)*. A range of other bog or poor fen plants can be found including *Sphagnum auriculatum*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Bog Pimpernel *(Anagallis tenella)*, Common Sundew *(Drosera rotundifolia)*, Bog Aspodel *(Narthecium ossifragum)*, Bottle Sedge *(Carex rostrata)*, Lesser Water Plantain *(Baldellia ranunculoides)*, Marsh Lousewort *(Pedicularis palustris)* and Marsh Bedstraw *(Galium palustre)*. The diversity of species is dependent upon the degree of grazing and poaching and whether the soakway is permanently or seasonally wet.

Poor Fen

Poor fen communities are composed of species which are tolerant of a higher nutrient status than the valley bog communities. The soils are consistently waterlogged and acidic with modest water flow. Poor fens are usually well grazed and provide commoners' stock with an early spring bite and essential grazing during times of drought. Like other mires, areas of poor fen have also been damaged by drainage. The poor fen community is typified by M6di Star sedge-Bog moss mire-sharp flowered rush sub-community. *Sphagnum recurvum* is the dominant species while Sharp flowered rush *(Juncus acutiflorus)* is constant but controlled by grazing. Typical poor fen associates include Velvet Bent *(Agrostis canina), Star Sedge (Carex echinata), Marsh Willow Herb (Epilobium palustre) and the mosses Sphagnum palustre and Polytrichum commune. In the New Forest, poor fens often host Marsh Violet (Viola palustre) and White Sedge (Carex curta).*

Purple Moor-Grass Mires

Purple moor-grass mires have a high level of water movement. Low grazing levels produce ideal conditions for rapid Purple moor-grass *(Molinia caerulea)* growth and dominance. This species together with Bog Myrtle *(Myrica gale)* effectively suppress other less competitive species producing a rather floristically impoverished community. Other species include Sharp flowered rush *(Juncus acutiflorus),* Tormentil *(Potentilla erecta)* and Cross-Leaved Heath *(Erica tetralix).* In terms of NVC the community is representative of M25a: Purple moor-grass-Tormentil mire-Cross-leaved heath sub community. Remnant purple moor grass mire can often be found in Inclosures which were former heathland habitat.

Marl Flushes

The most striking Marl Flushes are found in seepage step mires on marl (lime rich clay) where the water is base rich (pH7.0 or higher) and allows tuffa to be deposited on mosses. However not all marl flushes are base rich enough to allow tuffa deposition. Stoney Moors provides a good example of a Marl Flush. In the New Forest, Marl Flushes are typified by the following communities:

Eleocharis quinquefolia-Drepanocladus revolvens mire which is a lowland form of NVC community M10a: *Carex dioica-Pinguicula vulgaris mire-Carex viridula oedocarpa-Juncus bulbosus* sub-community with highly lime rich Marl Flushes (pH 7.0 or higher), depositing tuffa, with lime loving species prominent. The presence of Few Flowered Spike Rush (*Eleocharis quinquefolia*), the brown moss (*Cratoneuron commutatum*) and the abundance of the brown moss *Drepanocladus revolvens* are diagnostic. Associated species include Carnation Sedge (*Carex panacea*), Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostaina*), Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Devils Bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*) and Quaking Grass (*Briza media*). Purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) is held in check by tight grazing. These marl flushes support a very rich flora including notable species such as Broad-leaved Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum latifolium*), Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and the bryophytes *Cratoneuron commutatum, Philonotis calcarea* and *Preissia quadrata*.

Eleocharis spp-Campylium stallatum mire-Narthecium ossifragum-Drosera rotundifolia sub-community which incorporates NVC Community M14 Schoenus nigricans-Narthecium ossifragum mire. This community is found in less enriched Mire Flushes (pH 6-6.5) which does not result in the deposition of tuffa. The only abundant moss is *Campylium stallatum*. Species characteristic of more acidic mires are evident including Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and Common Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). Associated species include Sharp-flowered rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panacea*) and Cross-Leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*).

Transition Mires

Transition Mires occur on deep, waterlogged peat which are irrigated by base-rich water producing very wet swampy condition. They support brown mosses and tall sedges but Black Bog-rush *(Schoenus nigricans)* is never present. Transition mires are particularly notable for the rare species which they support including Slender Cotton Grass *(Eriophorum gracile)*, Bog Sedge *(Carex limosa)*, Slender Sedge *(C. lasiocarpa)*, *Sphagnum contortum, S. teres, S. subsecundum*, Marsh Lousewort *(Pedicularis palustris)*, Great Sundew *(Drosera anglica)*, Lesser Bladderwort *(Utricularia minor), Pressia quadrata, Calliergon giganteum* and *Philonotis calcarea*. The communities are generally typified by NVC M9: *Carex rostrata- Calliergon cuspidatum/giganteum* mire, although a number of different stand types can be identified.

From a SAC perspective the presence of **7150 Depression of peat substrates of the Rhynochosporian** is an Annex 1 habitat and primary reason for selection of the site. The New Forest, one of three sites selected in southern England, is considered to hold the largest area in England of Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion, in complex habitat mosaics associated primarily with the extensive valley bogs of this site. The habitat type is developed in three situations: in natural bog pools of patterned bog surfaces, in flushes on the margins of valley mires and in areas disturbed by peat-digging, footpaths, tracks, ditches etc. In places the habitat type is rich in brown mosses *Cratoneuron* spp. and *Scorpidium scorpioides*, suggesting flushing by mineral-rich waters.

The mosaics in which this habitat type occurs are an important location for bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*.

Both 7140 Transition mires and quaking bogs and **7230 Alkaline Fens** are an Annex I habitats present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for selection of this site because:

- The term 'transition mire' relates to vegetation that in floristic composition and general ecological characteristics is transitional between acid bog and **7230 Alkaline fens**, in which the surface conditions range from markedly acidic to slightly base-rich. The vegetation normally has intimate mixtures of species considered to be acidophile and others thought of as calciphile or basophile. In some cases the mire occupies a physically transitional location between bog and fen vegetation, as for example on the marginal lagg of raised bog or associated with certain valley and basin mires. In other cases these intermediate properties may reflect the actual process of succession, as peat accumulates in groundwater-fed fen or open water to produce rainwater-fed bog isolated from groundwater influence. Many of these systems are very unstable underfoot and can therefore also be described as 'quaking bogs'

- Alkaline fens consist of a complex assemblage of vegetation types characteristic of sites where there is tufa and / or peat formation with a high water table and calcareous base-rich water supply. There is considerable variation between sites in the associated communities and the transitions that may occur. Such variation can be broadly classified by the geomorphological situation in which the fen occurs, namely: flood plain mire, valley mire, basin mire, hydroseral fen (i.e. as zones around open waterbodies) and spring fen.

Ponds

Temporary ponds (sometimes referred to as ephemeral ponds) are scattered throughout the New Forest and are typified by small water-filled depressions on poorly drained soils which dry out temporarily during the summer months and occasionally during very dry winters. These areas can support a unique assemblage of plants and invertebrates. Sanderson (1999) classified the communities of temporary ponds into five types:

- Spike-rush-Purple moor-grass community
- Lesser marshwort-Floating club-rush
- Creeping bent-Marsh foxtail- Knotweed community
- Floating sweet-grass community
- Pool edge assemblages

The forest supports the best preserved heathland ephemeral pond assemblages in the UK and is of international significance. The ephemeral ponds are also one of the most important habitats in the Forest for flora supporting the main concentration of plant species of conservation concern including *Mentha pulegium, Pulicaria vulgaris, Galiium constrictum* and *Ludwigia palustris,* the latter requiring cattle poached pond edges to survive.

The communities of Permanent Ponds are complex but vary according to the water chemistry and have not been fully investigated or classified. Nutrient poor-acid/neutral ponds are often dominated

by Shore-weed *(Litterellion uniflorae)* communities while richer acid/neutral ponds often have Common water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus peltatus*) as a dominant species.

Key Wetland SAC habitat types are associated with ponds comprise:

- Hatchet Pond which is in fact three ponds, one of which is an example of an oligotrophic waterbody amidst wet and dry lowland heath developed over fluvial deposits. It is defined as SAC habitat type **3110 Oligotrophic water containing very few mineral of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae)**. It contains shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and isolated populations of northern species such as bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* and floating bur-reed *Sparganium angustifolium*, alongside rare southern species such as Hampshire-purslane *Ludwigia palustris*. Hatchet Pond is therefore important as a southern example of this lake type where northern species, more common in the uplands of the UK, co-exist with southern species.

- 3130 **vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or of the *Isoëto-Nanojuncetea*** which occurs on the edge of large temporary ponds, shallow ephemeral pools and poached damp hollows in grassland. These areas support a number of specialist species in a zone with toad rush *Juncus bufonius*. These include the two nationally scarce species coral-necklace *Illecebrum verticillatum* and yellow centaury *Cicendia filiformis*, often in association with allseed *Radiola linoides* and chaffweed *Anagallis minima*. Heavy grazing pressure is of prime importance in the maintenance of the outstanding flora of these temporary pond communities. Livestock maintain an open habitat, controlling scrub ingress, and trampling the surface. Commoners' animals also transport seed in their hooves widely from pond to pond where suitable habitat exists. Temporary ponds occur throughout the Forest in depressions capable of holding water for part of the year. Most ponds are small (between 5-10 m across) and, although great in number, amount to less than 10 ha in total area.

Streams

The New Forest streams are in themselves unique due to the fact they are a geographically isolated type with no equivalent in lowland England. As the streams flow downstream, they gradually become less acidic and less nutrient-poor, supporting a distinctive sequence of vegetation succession. This transition begins with acid-tolerant communities resembling those of upland mountainous regions, progresses through more diverse stream floras within open grassland and woodland habitats, and culminates in enriched, neutral river plant communities in the lower reaches. The streams support a unique assemblage of macrophytes (higher plants) and important populations of macroinvertebrates and fish species. Along many reaches of stream where the channel is shaded stands of macrophytes are generally non-existent. However, where open sections of slow flowing channels exist where silt deposition occurs, macrophyte growth can be prolific. Many of the streams, especially in their upper reaches dry out in summer and exhibit a bare, dry gravel bed.

The New Forest streams support a diverse population of macroinvertebrates including several rare species. Community structure varies according to whether the channels are sinuous or channelised and the macroinvertebrate communities are a valuable marker of the health and character of the channel and variation in a range of parameters. However, the conservation value of the

macroinvertebrate fauna does not differ between sinuous or straight channelised reaches. It is worth noting that some areas of marginal aquatic habitat are found to support extremely valuable invertebrate communities including the rare Mud Snail, *Lymnaea (Omphiscola) glabra*. The richest marginal habitats are those that flood on a regular basis including palaeomeanders and ephemeral leaf litter pools.

The New Forest streams have been subject to intensive modification and canalisation due to historic drainage programmes for both forestry and commoning purposes but in the last 20 years significant efforts have been made to restore the hydrological functioning along sections of modified streams.

3.9 Species

The New Forest supports thousands of important species, many of which are rare or notable. Due to the complexity and number of different species, many of which have their own particular habitat niches, it is impossible to outline them all in any real detail as part of this report; further, extensive detail is available in the SAC plan. Key qualifying features given as reasons for notification of the various designations are listed in Annex B of the SAC Plan and include populations of Schedule 5/Red data book plant species, populations of Schedule 8 fungi, lichens and plants along with the plant communities and butterfly species which have suffered serious population declines.

Species often have competing interests, for many, what benefits one will be detrimental to another. A key management principle for the bodies managing the forest has been to concentrate on the condition of the various habitat rather than on individual species. However, public bodies do need to have regard for the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, which lists 56 habitats and 943 species first identified as priority habitats and species in the UK. The New Forest contains a significant proportion of the 943 species listed other than perhaps those confined to montane, limestone pavement and offshore environments. It is recognized that there are knowledge gaps on the populations and distribution of some of the rarer species so efforts have been underway in recent years to carry out more detailed studies to enhance the knowledge base.

The following section gives a brief overview of the various species groups that are present on the forest, many of which contribute to the qualifying features supported by the various designations.

Overview of Main Species Groups & Conservation Status

The New Forest is known to support 39 bird species of conservation concern and is well known for its aggregations of lowland damp grassland and heathland breeding bird assemblages. The New Forest SPA is notified because during the breeding season the SPA regularly supports:

- Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, 538 pairs representing at least 33.6% of the breeding population in Great Britain
- Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, 2 pairs representing at least 10.0% of the breeding population in Great Britain
- Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, 300 pairs representing at least 8.8% of the breeding population in Great Britain
- Woodlark *Lullula arborea*, 184 pairs representing at least 12.3% of the breeding population in Great Britain (Count as at 1997)

- During the non-breeding season the SPA regularly supports over wintering Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*, with 15 individuals representing at least 2.0% of the wintering population in Great Britain.

During the breeding season the SPA regularly support qualifying individual species not listed in Annex I of the Wild Birds Directive, notably:

- Hobby *(Falco Subbuteo)* – up to 25 pairs representing around 3% of the British breeding population at the time of SPA classification
- Wood Warbler *(Phylloscopus trochilus)* – in excess of 350 pairs representing at least 3% of the British breeding population at the time of SPA classification.

The New Forest mires (together with other New Forest open wetland habitats) are extremely important for breeding waders including snipe, curlew and redshank. The snipe population represents nearly 6% of the English population, the curlew population represents 15% of the southern England regional population and redshank 1.5% of southern England numbers, the majority of which breed at the coast. In addition, the number of breeding lapwings are likely to be of regional significance.

The Forest supports 18 mammal species of conservation concern including Water vole, Otter, Polecat, Pine martin and Dormouse as well as most of the UK bat species, including Bechstein's and Barbastelle. Although not of conservation concern the forest supports all species of British deer which play their own unique role in the forest ecosystem.

The rivers and streams support good populations of fish species with at least 20 species recorded, including several species of conservation concern such as the Bullhead, Brook Lamprey, European Eel and Brown Trout. Migratory sea trout also spawn high up in the New Forests streams.

Amphibians are well represented across the forest with most species present other than the Natterjack toad which became extinct around 1950 and was never widespread as the habitat is generally sub-optimal for this species. Great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* are a qualifying feature of the New Forest SAC and are known to be present in at least 13 sites.

All six species of UK reptiles - Smooth snake *Coronella austriaca*, Grass snake *Natrix natrix*, Adder *Vipera berus*, Slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, Common Lizard *Lacerta vivipara* and Sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* are found in the Forest's heathland and woodland habitats. Only the latter, the Sand Lizard, is confined to the dry heathland habitat.

Of the 57 resident species of butterfly in the UK, 33 have been recorded in the New Forest since the 1980s including 17 species of conservation concern. Since the 1960's, several species, particularly the woodland butterfly species have been continuing to decline and attempts to reintroduce species have not been entirely successful. The greatest losses appear to have been those species dependent upon a rich and structurally diverse herb and shrub layer characteristic of the open woodland habitat. Factors for this decline are considered to be indiscriminate incursion of livestock into Inclosures, habitat loss from intensive forestry operations and fragmentation of broadleaf woodland by coniferization. Climate change may also be playing a role. However, recommended changes in

management practises to reverse this decline are now being delivered through the New Forest's Forest Plan.

At least 1,455 moth species have been recorded from the New Forest although a number have been in decline especially in recent decades. As of 2021 there were at least 123 species of conservation concern, of which about two thirds were associated with woodland habitats and a third with heathland habitats.

Of the 41 species of Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) present in the UK, 27 breed in the New Forest, of which five are of conservation concern. Odonata are typically found around wet heath, seepages, slow moving runnels, bog pools, vegetated streams, permanent pond and ditches. In terms of the New Forest SAC, a qualifying feature is the Southern damselfly (*Coenagrion mercurial*). The forest supports several strong population centres estimated to be in the hundreds or thousands of individuals with a long history of records. Some colonies are thriving while other are in decline where the habitat has become less favourable.

Of more than 4,000 species of beetles present in the UK, up to half have been recorded in the New Forest of which some 240 species of conservation concern have been recorded since 1970. Of these, 54% are associated with the woodlands and 46% with heathlands. A plentiful supply of fallen and standing deadwood of all sizes and stages of decay is essential to many beetle species, while others are associated with wetland habitats such as acid mire pools and runnels to base-rich flushes and forest streams. Others are reliant on animal dung produced by the grazing livestock. The Stag Beetle *Lucanus cervus* is one of the Qualifying Features of the New Forest SAC which is considered one of the most important sites in the UK for fauna associated with rotting wood, and was identified as of potential international importance for its saproxylic invertebrate fauna by the Council of Europe (Speight 1989).

Amongst the 6,000 or more UK Hymenoptera (ants, wasps and bees) some 43 species of conservation concern have been recorded in the New Forest since 1970. All but three are associated with heathland habitat, often being dependent upon dry heathland and south facing bare sandy slopes.

Of 540 species of UK Hemiptera (Bugs), 9 species of conservation concern have been recorded in the New Forest since 1970. Three are associated with the woodlands, six with the heathlands. This includes the elusive New Forest cicada *Cicadetta montana*.

In relation to crustacea, two species of conservation concern are found on the forest - the tadpole shrimp *Triops cancriformis* and the fairy shrimp *Chirocephalus diaphanous.* Whilst the presence of livestock is important in keeping ephemeral ponds open and providing nutrients from dung, aquatic crusacea are highly susceptible to the toxic effects of certain veterinary compounds excreted in livestock dung. The shading effect caused by the spread of *Crassula Helmsii* is also of concern not just to this species but to another of the New Forest's scarce and protected inhabitant, the medicinal leech *Hirudo medicinalis* for which the New Forest ponds are a national stronghold.

A total of 369 spider species have been recorded on the forest since 1940 with 119 species recorded in 2018 of which 24 are key target species. As such it is considered that the New Forest is of national importance for spiders.

The acid condition of the forest means that the New Forest is not abundant in molluscs but it is a known stronghold for the Mud Snail *Lymnaea glabra*, a species of conservation concern, which can be found in softer waters of small muddy pool and ditches especially ephemeral water bodies.

No lichen species are Qualifying Features of the New Forest SAC but lichen assemblages are a feature of the SSSI. Over the past 20 years, a large number of lichen records have been verified and catalogued by Neil Sanderson, supporting the case for the New Forest SAC to be of international importance for lower plants in both woodlands and heathlands. The woodland and heathlands support an outstanding assemblage of rare and scare lichens. Of the 718 species recorded to date (accounting for at least 30% of the British and Irish flora), 71 are of conservation concern. Of the total species recorded 74% are epiphytes predominantly found in pasture woodlands and 26% are heathland species growing on a range of substrates including heather stems, bare rock and soil, mosses and aquatic environments including on gravels in New Forest streams.

No bryophyte features (mosses and liverworts) are qualifying features of the SAC but bryophytes assemblages are a notified feature of the SSSI. There are around 1030 species of bryophytes in Britain of which 326 have been recorded from the New Forest SAC including 96 liverworts and 230 mosses of which 33 are of conservation concern.

The woodlands support outstanding assemblages of rare and scare fungi with the heathlands also supporting some notable species. Fungi has been recorded in the forest for at least 150 years and records suggest that 2,500 species of non-lichenised fungi have been recorded from the New Forest, of which at least 89 are of conservation concern. However, 18 species previously recorded have not been seen in the last 50 years. Most species of conservation concern are woodland species, with the exception of 9 grassland and heathland species. The best-known heathland species is *Poronia punctata* which is a specialist fungi confined to dung from horses grazing acidic rough pastures and may only be confined to the New Forest in terms of European distribution. Some of the rarer woodland species are only found on old or fallen large trees within pasture woodlands and only ever found on a small number of old trees in large areas of pasture woodland.

3.10 Historic Environment Designations

The New Forest has been under some form of protective designation since it was declared a royal hunting forest in 1079. This early designation has helped safeguard much of the area from enclosure, development, and modern agricultural practices such as ploughing and other forms of intensive cultivation. As a result, a significant number of historic features have been preserved.

Today, a range of statutory designations continue to offer protection to these historic assets. These include Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs), and Registered Historic Parks and Gardens.

Listed Buildings

The listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest began in the 1940s under the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947. The current framework is governed by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 1. In England, there are currently over 370,000 listed building entries.

Listed buildings are classified into three grades:

- Grade I – these are of exceptional interest (only around 2.5% of all listed buildings are listed grade I)[1].[1]
- Grade II* - These are buildings of particular importance with more than special interest
- Grade II – These are buildings of special interest. Approximately 91.7% of all listed buildings are in this class[1].

By virtue of a building being 'listed' consent has to be sought before making any changes to that building to assess whether the changes might affect the building's character. Carrying out works on buildings without listed building consent is a criminal offence.

Conservation Areas

Governed by the same legislation as listed buildings, conservation areas can be created where a local planning authority identifies an area of special architectural or historic interest, where careful management is required to protect its character. There are approximately 10,000 conservation areas in England[1]. Consent must be sought before carrying out certain works to buildings or trees located within a conservation area.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Scheduling is the oldest form of heritage protection in England, dating back to the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act. Today the Ancient monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 is the relevant legislation offering protection. Scheduled monuments are selected based on their archaeological or historical interest as well as their management requirement. There are approximately 20,000 entries in England[1].

Historic Parks and Gardens

The Register of Historic Parks and Gardens was established in 1984 and now includes over 1,700 designated landscapes. These are graded similarly to listed buildings:

- Grade I – Parks and gardens of exceptional interest.
- Grade II* – Particularly important sites of more than special interest.
- Grade II – Sites of special interest.

While registration does not offer direct legal protection, it is a material consideration in the planning process and helps ensure that the historic and aesthetic value of these landscapes is recognised and preserved.

[1] Historic England (2024)

3.11 Historic Environment Key Features

The New Forest National Park Authority maintains a record of the historic environment for the area and has provided us with access to their records. This has allowed us to identify the statutory designated historic features located within the New Forest Perambulation in line with our instructions. The records that we hold were downloaded from the National Park's database on 24th May 2024. Given that the database will inevitably be added to over time, we recommend checking whether there have been any new data entries in advance of submitting an application. We also recommend that any future management agreement sufficiently allows for new discoveries and entries to be accounted for. Schedules containing the features that we have identified can be seen at **Appendix C**.

Listed Buildings

We have identified 310 listed buildings located within the New Forest Perambulation, being our Study Area. Of these, eight buildings are listed as Grade I:

- Palace House, Beaulieu
- Remains of Outer Wall Around Cloister and Foundations of Abbey Church, Beaulieu.
- Domus and Ruins of Lay Frater, Beulieu
- Remains of St Leonards, Beaulieu
- St Leonards Barn, Beaulieu
- Church of All Saints, Minstead
- Church of St Michael and All Angels, Lyndhurst
- Church of the Blessed Virgin and Child, Beaulieu

We have also identified 17 Grade II* and 285 Grade II list entries. Not surprisingly the listed buildings are generally located within the New Forest villages, with high concentrations in the villages of Beaulieu, Brockenhurst, Burley, Lyndhurst, Minstead and Bramshaw. Very few of the listed buildings have any interaction with the New Forest's common land and/or land designated for conservation interests. The few that do, include:

- Nomansland War Memorial – Grade II listed memorial located on the New Forest SSSI
- Rufus Stone – Grade II listed memorial located on the New Forest SSSI
- Castle Malwood – Grade II listed lodge which is surrounded by common land designated SSSI, SPA, SPA and Ramsar. The designations appear to include at least part of the boundary banks.
- Milestone 250m north of the Kennels, Lyndhurst in Furzey Lawn Inclosure – Grade II
- Milestone 300m north of Knavesash – Grade II
- Milestone 300m south of Picket Post junction – Grade II
- Milestone opposite entrance to New Park – Grade II
- Guidestone at SU 199043, Burley

A full schedule of the 310 listed buildings identified can be supplied on request.

Conservation Areas

There are 13 Conservation Areas designated within the New Forest Perambulation. These include many of the New Forest villages and settlements bordering the common land. Many of the designated Conservation Areas contain areas of verge, greens and lawns that form part of the common. These areas are invariably also designated under the New Forest SSSI.

The following conservation areas are wholly or partly located within the New Forest Perambulation:

- Bank
- Beaulieu
- Brockenhurst
- Bucklers Hard
- Burley
- Forest Central South
- Forest North East
- Forest North South
- Fritham and Eyeworth
- Lyndhurst
- Swan Green
- The Weirs
- Western Escarpment

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

According to the New Forest NPA's database, there are 174 Scheduled monuments located within the New Forest Perambulation and of these, only two are not located on common land. The listings range from bowl barrows to Roman pottery kilns and sites of former Royal hunting lodges.

Undesignated Historical Features

We understand from the New Forest National Park Authority that many additional features have been identified in their historic environment records as potentially worthy of protection through Scheduled Monument designation. However, assessing these features—many of which were identified through LiDAR surveys—requires detailed data obtained through intrusive archaeological investigation. In practice, such investigations are often extremely challenging, if not unfeasible, due to the overlapping nature conservation designations that apply to the same areas of land.

Forestry England follows a policy of consulting the NPA's historic environment record prior to undertaking any practical works, as part of their Operational Site Assessment process. This includes consideration of both designated and undesignated heritage features. The NPA aspires to carry out further surveys and data analysis to determine which of these undesignated features are of genuine historic significance. Clarifying the status of these features could potentially lead to more efficient land management and a reduction in associated costs.

4 Geographical Area

Whilst our Study Area is the Perambulation of the New Forest, we have been asked to consider what land is required to support the Key Features identified in section 3 above. In doing so, we have considered lands both inside and outside of the Perambulation. Ultimately the purpose of this part of the study is to inform where lines could be draw when drafting future management agreements for the New Forest.

We have met and interviewed many of the larger local land mangers both inside and immediately adjacent to the Perambulation and during our interviews a number of themes emerged. We have used these themes to help us consider this part of the study.

We have reviewed the following when considering the geographical area necessary to support the Key Features identified in section 3 above:

1. The areas subject to the various nature conservation designations in the New Forest
2. Land ownership and management
3. The grazing systems that exist within the New Forest
4. Water catchments
5. Deer management
6. Management of invasive species
7. The eligibility of Forestry England's New Forest Inclosures (as specifically required within our instructions)
8. Climate change – mitigating impacts

4.1 Designation Boundaries

Given that the Key Features have been defined by way of the various statutory designations, the designation citations have been a primary source of information when considering what land is necessary to support the Key Features. As such we have produced a plan illustrating the key New Forest environmental and landscape designations (the New Forest SSSI, The New Forest SAC, The New Forest SPA, The New Forest Ramsar, The New Forest National Park and the New Forest Perambulation). This plan can be seen at **Appendix D (i)**. Some of the New Forest designations encompass land outside of the Perambulation, such as the New Forest SSSI, which has units within Natural England's Langley Wood Reserve and the RSPB's Franchise Lodge Reserve.

Approximately 81% of the Perambulation (our Study Area) is subject to one or more nature conservation designation(s) and almost 100% of the common land in the New Forest is designated both a SSSI and an SAC.

4.2 Land Ownership and Management

When trying to deliver landscape scale projects of any kind, it is often the case that this is more likely to be achievable where there are a small number of land managers holding management control over a large area of land. This happens to be the case in the New Forest, with Forestry England being responsible for the management of an area in excess of 26,800ha (66,222 acres) within the New Forest National Park. This equates to approximately 47.33% of the National Park and 71.53% of the land within the Perambulation. The New Forest's Crownlands were historically bordered by a number of large, landed estates, many of which had manorial waste forming 'satellite' commons adjacent to the Crownlands. Some of these large, landed estates remain in private ownership, whereas the ownership of others has become fragmented and developed into villages or housing estates. We interviewed representatives of the following land managers as part of our research:

Landowner/manager	Land within National Park (Ha)	Land within Perambulation (Ha)	Land designated New Forest SSSI (Ha)	Common/shared grazing land (Ha) *
Forestry England	26,812.71	26,805.05	21,819.88	21,834.97
Beaulieu Estate	2,800	2,800	31.28	34.82
Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust	Not specified	Not specified	6.99	0.00
National Trust	1,243.51	1,243.51	1,243.51	1,243.51
RSPB	427.02	0.00	69.52	0.00
Natural England	211.90	0.00	211.90	0.00
Hampshire County Council (excluding highways)	340.66	159.98	118.65	120.91
Wellow Parish Council	89.43	89.43	89.43	89.43
Minstead Manor Farm	Not specified	Not specified	91.92	91.92
**This includes land that currently forms part of the single grazed unit in the New Forest. This could include land that is not technically common land.*				

We established whilst interviewing the above land managers that there are some large landholdings just outside the Perambulation which historically would have been grazed by commoners' livestock that had strayed from the nearby common land upon which they had been depastured. Whilst these areas now form separate grazing units from the wider New Forest common, the land managers frequently use local commoners/graziers to provide extensive grazing to these areas, which are often designated areas. Roydon Woods (Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust), Franchises Lodge Reserve (RSPB) and Langley Wood Reserve (Natural England) are all examples of such areas. We established during our discussions that the respective land managers wish to retain control over the grazing of these areas which means that they will remain separate grazing units. During our interviews it was mentioned that the grazing often has little or no grazing value to commoners. As such, it is common for conservation grazing to be made available without charge. This meant that fencing, livestock handling facilities and water supplies had to be installed at the land managers' cost. Support from capital grant schemes would appear to be essential to allow these areas to continue to be grazed.

A plan showing the different ownerships of the New Forest's common land/ shared grazing can be seen at **Appendix D(ii).**

As part of the study, we have gathered Rural Land Register (RLR) data from each of the above land managers so that this information is readily available should it be required as part of a scheme application. This data includes the respective land managers' Single Business Identifier (SBI) and the grid and parcel numbers for each parcel of land.

4.3 Common Land / Grazing Units

The extensive grazing system that operates in the New Forest is referenced above for its role in maintaining the Key Features of the Study Area. In many ways this extensive grazing system defines the Study Area's landscape and biodiversity. The grazing rights that continue to be exercised in the New Forest span over multiple ownerships, however the day-to-day land management decisions are typically managed at an ownership or land manager level, despite the internal ownership boundaries being unfenced. The extent of the Verderers jurisdiction is defined by the Perambulation, which allows the grazing system to be administered across the entire area over which commoners' livestock have access. As a result, the Verderers Court often finds itself acting as a forum for dealing with many cross-boundary issues, besides grazing.

The New Forest is not registered under the 1965 Commons Registration Act, instead its protection was documented under the various New Forest Acts of 1877 and 1949 although it is widely accepted as being common land. As a result of not being formally registered, there hasn't been a need to maintain a map identifying the extent over which commoners' livestock have access. This is something that we have sought to address through this feasibility study, although the scale of this exercise means that we have only been able to produce something that we believe to be 99% accurate. The reason for undertaking this exercise is linked to the requirement that an applicant to one of DEFRA's Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) should have 'management control' of the area that they enter into a management agreement. With grazing being so important in relation to the management of the Key Features, being able to demonstrate that the applicant has some degree of control over the grazing pressure is likely to be important. It would also naturally be desirable to include the entire grazing unit within one land management scheme. As a first step towards attempting to achieve this, it seems logical to identify the extent of "the common". Importantly, we note that DEFRA has recognised the New Forest as a single common as opposed to a collection of contiguous commons in the application of agricultural policy to date (eg Single Payment Scheme and Basic Payment Scheme).

We have identified 23,673 ha (58,499 acres) of land that we believe will be accessible to commoners' livestock by 2029. This includes a number of timber growing inclosures that Forestry England informs us are currently fenced but will be made available to livestock within the next few years. It also includes areas that are understood to be grazed under the consent of the Landowner as opposed to by way of right. This contiguous area of land forms a single grazing unit, incorporating various lawns, lanes and verges within the Perambulation. A plan identifying this area can be seen at **Appendix D (iii)**. It should be noted that the precise area is likely to be subject to constant change due to the combined effect of regular encroachments as well as areas being made available as a result of dilapidated fencing or through intentional reintroductions of grazing (such as timber growing inclosures being 'thrown open').

In addition to identifying the extent of the common, we have sought to establish its ownership, the objectives of the respective landowners/managers, information regarding what land is currently entered into a management agreement and the Rural Land Register data for the common. The subsequent database that we have produced will need to be maintained to prevent it becoming outdated as a result of ownership changes and remapping exercises. We have identified the current ownership of 23,462.20 ha (57,976.35 acres) leaving just 210 ha of land where we have not been able to establish the current landowner or manager, primarily due to the fact that the land is not

registered with HM Land Registry. Of the parcels for which we have established ownership, we have only contacted and obtained further information on those land holdings exceeding 10 acres in size.

As mentioned in the previous section, besides the New Forest Common, there are other large grazing units adjacent to the Perambulation, but these tend to be seasonal and involve just one grazier per grazing unit. Roydon Woods, Franchise Lodge, Langley Wood and some of the coastal marshes such as Calshot and Keyhaven are examples of such. The land managers to whom we have spoken have all advised that they intend to keep these grazing units separate from the New Forest Common to allow them to retain control over the grazing pressure. That keeping separate grazing blocks or units might help act as a 'fire break' in terms of disease management was also raised in discussions.

4.4 Back-Up Land

Through our engagement with commoners and representatives of the community, it is evident that the extensive grazing system operating in the New Forest depends upon there being sufficient enclosed land in and around the New Forest National Park for owners of the livestock to source winter forage and to accommodate livestock requiring supplementary feeding or additional supervision for welfare reasons during the winter months. This land is often described as "back-up land" or "back-up grazing". Some of this land comprises hay meadows which can offer species-rich grassland, but the better drained back-up land is generally used reasonably intensively during the winter months. The more intensive use of some back-up land, where supplementary feeding takes place means that the land typically is not eligible for any agri-environmental scheme. This land often requires maintenance in terms of fencing, ditching and hedgerow management. It also requires livestock handling facilities to allow livestock owners to safely manage their livestock during vet visits for example. As a result, the upkeep and management of backup land represents a significant proportion of commoners' cost and without any form of grant funding, the standard to which this land is maintained could potentially be low.

The exact land that is used as back-up land is not fixed and will change from year-to-year as a result of changes in circumstances for both the grazier and the landowner.

During a consultation of New Forest Commoners, we asked those who attended the live consultation meeting to document on a plan the land they knew to be used for supporting the commoning system in 2024. During this exercise, just over 1,800 ha of land were identified. We believe this exercise captured only a small proportion of the amount of land actually being used for back-up grazing.

We have not published a plan showing the location of the backup land in 2024 as we understand that this data is sensitive and the publication may result in landowners not making their land available to commoners in the future for fear that it could restrict how they are allowed to use the land in the future.

4.5 Water Catchments & Quality

The New Forest can be broadly described as a gently sloping plateau that dips from north to south, divided into six principal river basins that originate within the Perambulation:

- Lymington River
- Beaulieu River
- Bartley Water
- Cadnam River
- Avon Water
- Hampshire Avon Tributaries

While the Langdown Stream and Becton Bunny catchments lie largely outside the Perambulation boundary, the other rivers and streams have their headwaters in the heart of the Forest, and their estuaries remain within the bounds of the Perambulation.

For catchment management and monitoring purposes, the Environment Agency has subdivided these six main basins into a series of operational catchments, each drained by a complex network of rivers, streams, and artificial channels (see Figure 2: Forest Plan Progress & Future Ambition (Source Forestry England) and Table 1: New Forest Catchments, Streams and Estuaries). Most of the New Forest catchments fall within the South East River Basin District, whereas those draining into the Hampshire Avon are part of the South West River Basin District.

Topographically, the Forest's steeper western escarpment borders the broad Avon Valley. To the east, the boundary follows the lower River Test valley and Southampton Water, while the gently sloping southern margin is bounded by the Solent. The main watershed runs roughly north to south, separating the Hampshire Avon tributaries to the west from the other principal basins. The Blackwater and Cadnam Rivers drain eastward into the Test and Southampton Water, respectively, while the Lymington, Avon Water, and Beaulieu Rivers flow southeast into the Solent.

Hydrology

Streams in the New Forest are fed by a combination of seepage and valley mires, surface runoff, and throughflow. Many of these streams exhibit a mean daily flow of less than 0.5 m^3/s in dry weather, with significantly lower flows during periods of summer drought. Despite these modest base flows, New Forest streams are naturally "spatey" or "flashy", with rapid increases in volume and sediment load following heavy rainfall, which subside quickly after rainfall ends.

In summer, streams supported by well-developed seepage zones and mires continue to flow, albeit with only a few centimetres of water. Conversely, some, particularly those within the Hampshire Avon Tributaries,may become seasonally dry or reduce to isolated pools and dry gravel bars. Only the deeper pools, often scoured behind debris dams or in meanders, retain water through the driest months.

Historical Channel Modification

Since the 1870s, more than half of the Forest's main rivers and first-order tributaries have been altered by drainage works designed to enhance land for forestry or grazing. For instance, 78% of surveyed channels in the Blackwater and 44% in the Highland Water have undergone some degree of modification. Nevertheless, the New Forest still contains some of the best-preserved examples of lowland river systems in southern England.

Water Quality

The core wetlands of the New Forest are renowned for their exceptional water quality, with 74% of freshwater sites sampled by monitoring organisations showing no signs of pollution. However, water quality tends to decline further downstream, mainly due to:

- Diffuse agricultural runoff
- Leakage from septic tanks
- Discharges from sewage treatment works

Climate Change Implications

Climate change is progressing at a faster rate now than at any point in the last 10,000 years, posing numerous challenges to the integrity of the New Forest's wetlands. Key anticipated impacts include:

- Increased winter flooding and erosion potential
- More frequent summer drying
- Reduced summer water availability for livestock
- Increased invasion by alien species, pests, and diseases
- Shifts in hydrological regimes
- Declines in water quality due to higher temperatures, reduced oxygen levels, and higher respiration rates
- Changes in fish and macroinvertebrate populations
- Alterations in species diversity and distribution (e.g. wetland waders)
- Reduction in drought-intolerant species
- Impacts from rising sea levels

Restoration and Resilience

The Forest's streams and river corridors are ecologically vital, providing habitat connectivity from source to sea. Activities in upstream headwaters can have significant consequences downstream. As such, maintaining or restoring wetland habitats and hydrological regimes is essential for building resilience to climate extremes.

Key conservation strategies include:

- Restoring mires to retain water and improve downstream flow stability
- Re-establishing natural hydrology to enhance stream resilience
- Maintaining summer base flows to preserve water quality
- Reducing downstream flood risk through improved water retention in headwaters
- Supporting habitat migration by enhancing corridor connectivity

Table 1: New Forest Catchments, Streams and Estuaries

Operational Catchment	Principal Waterbodies	Catchment Size	Length	Hydromorphological Designation	Ecological Status
Lymington & Beaulieu	Avon Water	44.753 km^2	24.756 km31.215 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Moderate
	Beaulieu	46.515 km^2		Not artificial or heavily modified	Moderate

Operational Catchment	Principal Waterbodies	Catchment Size	Length	Hydromorphological Designation	Ecological Status
	Beaulieu Abbey	2.253 km^2	2.535 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
	Black Water Stream	20.742 km^2	8.307 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Good
	Danes Stream	19.013 km^2	16.222 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
	Highland Water	26.353 km^2	14.695 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Moderate
	Lymington River	49.376 km^2	21.928 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
	Ober Water	22.781 km^2	14.706 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Good
	Penerley Tributary	21.059 km^2	5.842 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Good
Lymington Beaulieu Estuaries	Beaulieu River Estuary	-	3.097 km^2	Heavily modified	Moderate
	Lymington River Estuary		2.495 km^2	Heavily modified	Moderate
Beckton Bunny	Beckton Bunny	5.741 km^2	2.257 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
Langdown Stream	Langdown Stream	2.105 km^2	2.046 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
Bartley Water	Bartley Water	23.681 km^2	22.822 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Moderate
	Fletchwood Tributary	10.556 km^2	6.396 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
Hatchet	Dark Water	18.455 km^2	8.841 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
	Hatchet Pond	6.702 ha	211.75 ha	Heavily modified	Moderate
	Hatchet Stream	9.523 km$^{2.}$	7.916 km	Heavily modified	Moderate
Sowley	Sowley Pond	16.061 ha	1377.25 ha	Heavily modified	Poor
	Sowley Stream	13.818 km^2	10.984 km	Heavily modified	Moderate

Operational Catchment	Principal Waterbodies	Catchment Size	Length	Hydromorphological Designation	Ecological Status
Hatchet & Sowley Lagoons	Black Water lagoon	-	13.339 ha	Artificial	Good
	Sowley Marsh	-	7.683 ha	Heavily modified	Good
Avon Hampshire	Ditchend Brook	13.741 km^2	9.324 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Good
	Huckles Brook (incl. Latchmoor Brook)	19.699 km^2	12.192 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Moderate
	Dockens Water	25.005 km^2	16.184 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Moderate
	Linford Brook	15.372 km^2	8.764 km	Not artificial or heavily modified	Moderate

Given the integral role that hydrology and water quality play in shaping the New Forest's ecological integrity, ideally any future land management scheme should be designed to reflect natural catchment boundaries rather than relying solely on administrative or ownership boundaries. While the Perambulation captures the headwaters of the main rivers, the health of downstream habitats and waterbodies is also influenced by land use and water inputs originating just beyond its borders. Therefore, the management of the six principal river basins originating within the Forest should be joined up with the adjoining sub-catchments such as Langdown Stream and Becton Bunny, which, though outside the formal boundary, are hydrologically connected. A catchment-based approach will enable more effective coordination of habitat restoration, pollution control, and water resource management, ensuring that interventions are ecologically coherent and aligned with the landscape's natural processes. Integrating the management of these extended hydrological units is essential for maintaining water quality, supporting biodiversity, and building climate resilience across the broader New Forest landscape.

A plan showing the water catchment and main reivers can be seen at **Appendix D (iv)**.

4.6 Deer Management

The New Forest was designated a Royal Hunting Forest in 1079, and since that time, deer management has been shaped by a series of contrasting policy approaches. As royal interest in deer for hunting declined and priorities shifted toward timber production, various efforts were made over the past two centuries to control deer populations. The most significant of these was the Deer Removal Act of 1851, which marked a major attempt to reduce numbers. Since then, deer

populations have steadily increased, reaching levels that many land managers in and around the study area now consider a significant threat to forestry, agriculture, and biodiversity.

Today, five species of deer are present within the New Forest National Park, of which only two (Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)) are considered native. The others, including Fallow deer (*Dama dama*), Sika (*Cervus Nippon*) and Muntjac (*Muntiacus*) have proliferated in recent years, contributing to mounting pressures on woodland regeneration and ground flora.

Deer management emerged as a key topic during discussions with land managers interviewed for this study. A recurring theme was the recognition that deer populations cannot effectively be managed at the scale of individual landholdings. Instead, a landscape-scale approach is essential, particularly in relation to managing the highly mobile Fallow deer population.

In response to this challenge, several deer management groups have formed across the New Forest, feeding into a broader New Forest-wide Deer Management Group, which convenes annually. Among these, the Northern New Forest and Southeast Wiltshire (NNFSEW) Deer Management Group has been especially active in recent years. In response to an exceptionally high density of Fallow deer, the group has promoted collaboration among local landowners through the sharing of population census data and coordinated cull records. This collective effort has resulted in a significantly increased annual cull, helping to bring numbers under control in the immediate area.

However, the success of this focused effort is believed to have displaced some deer into adjacent areas where Fallow populations were historically low or absent. This unintended outcome underscores the necessity of managing deer at a regional landscape level, beyond traditional land ownership or administrative boundaries.

The three main deer management groups within the New Forest delineate their boundaries using prominent landscape features such as rivers, roads, and the coastline. A map illustrating the approximate extent of these deer management areas is provided in **Appendix D (v)**.

4.7 Management of Invasive Plants

Another theme that emerged during our interviews with various land managers within the Perambulation is the importance of and difficulty with managing non-native invasive plants. Examples that were given include:
Himalayan Balsam *(Impatiens glandulifera)*
Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*)
Pitcher plants (*Sarracenia purpurea)*
American Skunk Cabbage *(Lysichiton americanus)*
Giant hogweed *(Hermacleum manteganzzianum)*
Japanese Knotweed *(Reynoutria japonica)*
Parrots feather *(Myriophyllum aquaticum)*
New Zealand pygmyweed *(Crassula helmsii)*
Cotoneaster *(Cotoneaster)*

These invasive species pose a threat to the Study Area's Key Features and as such should be managed carefully.

Past agri-environment schemes and other funding sources have invested in the eradication of these species from some land holdings within the Study Area, however any pause in monitoring and follow-up remedial action can result in these species making a quick comeback resulting in a significant threat to local biodiversity and becoming a much more significant task of which to regain control. Despite investment through various schemes and programs in the past, a significant amount of the monitoring and ongoing management of some of these plants is undertaken by volunteers with very limited resources. The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project operates across the New Forest and is a partnership hosted by the HIWWT. The project has benefited from funding granted by partners, local charities and funding streams provided to the area but is dependent on a significant amount of volunteer time.

In terms of geographical area, some non-native plants tend use corridors in the form of boundary features and watercourses whereas others spread through airborne seed or rhizomes. For those that spread along watercourses it is essential that monitoring and any necessary management takes place along entire watercourses wherever possible.

4.8 Inclosures

The process of enclosing previously open land for timber production in the New Forest began in the 1700s, and became legalised by the New Forest Acts of 1698, 1808, 1877 and 1949. Today, the total area covered by New Forest Inclosures extends to around 8,500 hectares (around 21,000 acres). The Inclosures are clearly demarcated areas of predominately plantation woodland supporting both conifers and broadleaves. An Inclosure may or may not be separated from the grazed Open Forest by stock fences.

There are four legal categories of Inclosures:

- Statutory Inclosures
- Verderers' Inclosures
- Crown Freehold Woods
- Leasehold Woods

Statutory Inclosures - formed under the New Forest Acts of 1698, 1808 and 1851 and are held in perpetuity. These Inclosures were originally set up to grow timber for the Royal Navy and comprised predominantly oak or beech plantations. Most of the early plantations dating from the 18th century were felled during the 19th and 20th centuries, often being replanted with conifer. In 1924 the Forestry Commission took over the management of the New Forest Crown Lands which resulted in a period of more intensive forestry production with a greater emphasis on conifer production to support the national need for timber. Statutory Inclosures currently cover 7,108 hectares (17,564 acres).

Verderers' Inclosures - formed under the New Forest Act 1949, are held on 150-year leases and must be open to stock for much of the time. They currently cover 728 hectares (1,799 acres), mainly on former heathland and have been subject to more intensive commercial forestry based on conifer production. However, the

emphasis within current Forest Plans is on restoring these Inclosures to heathland and mire habitat.

Crown Freehold Woods have their origins in the early 19th century. They cover 456 hectares (1,126 acres) and Forestry England have given an undertaking to manage these woods along the same lines as the Statutory Inclosures.

Leasehold Woods cover 197 hectares (486 acres) and are managed for a variety of timber production/habitat restoration objectives.

A plan showing the locations and the different categories of inclosure can be found at **Appendix D (vi)**.

4.9 Climate Change – Impact Mitigation

Climate change has been raised as a subject at various stages of our study. Through our work identifying the Key Features, we found numerous references to climate change within the emerging New Forest SAC plan. Broadly speaking this was in the context of increasing resilience of habitats through improving their condition. One of the Study Area's greatest strengths when it comes to resilience is its scale. Larger, well-connected landscapes are considered to be more resistant than isolated or fragmented ones. There are still many opportunities within the Study Area to improve habitats and connectivity. For example, there are multiple heathland and wetland restoration opportunities lying within some of Forestry England's Inclosures. As such, the inclusion of these within a future management plan offers great opportunity from a climate change resilience perspective.

Connecting the New Forest with other similar landscapes such as the Dorset Heaths or Salisbury Plain has also been mentioned to us by local ecologists. In order for this to be achieved a dramatic change in land use over significant areas of land is likely to be required.

Restoring hydrology in some of the valley mires and bog systems by removing historic drainage schemes presents another opportunity to enhance habitat resilience. When defining geographical areas, it is important to include entire mire systems, as previous restoration efforts in the New Forest have, in places, been compromised or made more difficult by channelisation further downstream. This has often occurred where the lower parts of the system could not be restored due to being under different management regimes or ownership.

4.10 Recreation Management

The area that is accessible to commoners' livestock is also available to members of the public. This unfenced open landscape presents a number of challenges in terms of recreational pressure. Verge parking has long been an issue in the area and Forestry England have changed their policies in relation to where people can access and park vehicles in an attempt to combat this. Most recently they have installed car-free ditching or timber bollards known locally as dragons' teeth along roads where verge parking is prevalent. During the course of this study Forestry England have also

announced that they are considering starting to charge visitors for using their car parks. This has raised concerns that there will be an increase in the amount of verge parking taking place.

Whilst Forestry England have some resources to manage issues such as verge parking, other land managers in the area do not and this make the verges belonging to some of the local estates vulnerable to erosion, damaging the designated grassland.

Another management issue is the interaction between the public and the livestock that graze the area. Many visitors attempt to stroke and or feed animals which are considered to be semi-feral. This can result in members of the public becoming injured. A constant educational campaign is required to help combat this and there is a need for action to be taken against repeat offenders that do not respond to education and warnings.

The above examples of recreational pressure illustrate the need for unified messaging and a shared resource for managing these pressures across an unfenced landscape where ownership boundaries or the bylaws in place over these areas are not always apparent to visitors.

4.11 Geographical Area Conclusion

This section of our report has set out to explore the geographical area necessary to support the Key Features identified earlier in the study, recognising that the landscape and ecological function of the New Forest extend beyond the historical boundary of the Perambulation. Through consultation with land managers and stakeholders, a detailed understanding has been developed of the physical, ecological, and administrative systems that underpin the management of the New Forest and its surrounding areas.

A key theme to emerge is the importance of considering the New Forest as a functioning landscape unit; one that is ecologically coherent but administratively diverse. The unique grazing system, largely unfenced and reliant on commoning, necessitates a landscape-scale approach to management planning and agreement-making. This is further reinforced by the spatial patterns of habitat designations, water catchments, deer populations, and invasive species, all of which disregard administrative boundaries.

Additionally, the study highlights the critical role of adjacent lands to provide backup grazing and nearby nature reserves in sustaining the ecological and cultural functions of the New Forest that play an important role in supporting the Key Features. These areas, while outside the Perambulation, are integral to the resilience of the wider system and should be actively considered in the development of future management agreements and funding mechanisms, however the practicalities of including them all within a scheme area may be prohibitive.

The data compiled through this feasibility study, particularly in relation to land ownership, grazing units, and management issues, provides a robust evidence base from which future landscape-scale agreements can be drafted. However, it is clear that any long-term strategy must remain flexible and adaptive, responsive to ongoing ecological changes, climate pressures, and evolving land management objectives.

In conclusion, we feel that efforts should be made to include as much of the New Forest Common/single grazed area as possible within a single management plan as this will offer the Key Features consistent and aligned support. We have established that 99% of this area is owned by just four land managers, all of which have confirmed that they are receptive to working with other land managers on a joint venture. The last one percent is held in many much smaller titles, and we have not been able to identify the current owners of some of these parcels. Whilst it would be desirable, we don't consider it to be essential that the entire common is entered into a single land management scheme. It is also likely that it is not practically possible to achieve this anyway. It is more important that there are a clear set of objectives and principles agreed over the entire common and a mechanism for dealing with cross boundary matters such as managing recreational pressure.

Whatever area of land is entered into one or more Land management schemes, the future success of conservation and land management efforts in the New Forest will depend on collaborative, well-resourced, and inclusive planning that extends beyond the traditional boundaries. Only by recognising the interconnected nature of land use, ownership, and ecological function can we ensure the long-term protection of the New Forest's unique natural and cultural heritage.

5 Management Principles

5.1 Introduction & Background

The principles guiding the management of the Key Features and special qualities of the New Forest are not new. They have been formulated through the interpretation of legislation and policy over a number of years. Key legislation has been integrated into management plans and guidance documents, which have been integral to guiding and setting the overall management principles, especially since the late 1990s. With legislation as the foundation underpinned by government policy of the day, a series of key management plans and standards have been influential in delivering and guiding habitat management across the Forest with the aim of maintaining, protecting and restoring the Key Features and special qualities of the New Forest.

Within the Perambulation, practical delivery of the majority of the key management principles has primarily been the responsibility of Forestry England, Verderers, National Trust, Hampshire County Council, Beaulieu Estate, Minstead Manor and other smaller, private estates and land holdings. Other organisations bordering the Perambulation, particularly those managing designated land have also been integral to supporting key New Forest habitats and habitat linkages, notably Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the RSPB.

Partnership working has been crucial to help deliver key objectives around biodiversity and nature recovery. The New Forest National Park Authority, The Verderers, Environment Agency, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and RSPB among others have all played key roles in supporting practical land management delivery through policy direction, project support,

acquisition of funding and provision of professional advice. Other long-established organisations such as the Commoners Defence Association and New Forest Association as well as forums and partnership groups, businesses and charities work alongside the main land management organisations and communities to ensure projects and the wider interests of the Forest, particularly around commoning and nature conservation, are addressed. Parish councils, interest groups and the public also take a key interest in Forest matters.

Significant funding is required to both restore and maintain habitats. The core budgets of organisations managing the Forest simply cannot afford to fund the full extent of capital costs or the subsequent maintenance costs required to restore and maintain quality habitats. Habitat management and maintenance is an on-going requirement often in perpetuity, and it is essential to ensure that the benefits and quality of habitat restoration are retained into the future. Since the late 1990s key funding streams such as Life 2, Life 3, Pathfinder, Final 4000 and the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme have been critical to delivering habitat restoration and HLS has also helped fund essential on-going maintenance, staffing and monitoring. Individual Countryside Stewardship Agreements and historic agri-environment schemes on adjacent landholdings such as private estates and Wildlife Reserves have also helped to deliver habitat benefits, along with funding for bespoke projects.

The tables in **Appendix E** summarise the main issues and management principles relating to the different New Forest habitats identified in the Key Features element of the study. Most are covered in more detail within the SAC Plan, but additional issues have been identified from consultations undertaken as part of the PA2 study. It is, however, useful to set out some background and context to the management issues and principles to better understand some of the drivers, opportunities and constraints associated with future funding options.

5.2 Key Legislation

Several key pieces of UK legislation influence the management of the New Forest, notably:

- The New Forest Acts 1877, 1949, 1964, 1970
- Forestry Act 1967 (as amended)
- Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- CROW Act 2000
- New Forest National Park Act 2005
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) Act 2006
- UK Climate Change Act 2008
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Habitat Regulations 2017)
- The Environment Act 2021
- Land Drainage Act 1991
- Town & Country Planning Act 1990

The list above is not exhaustive but sets out some of the key pieces of legislation with which land managers need to comply. Out of this list, the New Forest Acts, the Habitats Regulations and Wildlife and Countryside Act are perhaps the pieces of legislation that direct habitat management on a daily basis, while other acts such as The Land Drainage Act and Town and Country Planning Act need to be complied with in terms of certain habitat restoration works (e.g. river/stream restoration). The Forestry Act influences tree felling, restocking and other forestry works that may be required to support sustainable forest management and associated habitat management. Other acts such as the NERC Act place a duty on local authorities and public bodies to take biodiversity into account in their decision-making processes and promotes the conservation of habitats and species and provides a framework for habitat restoration and management. The Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act focuses on the protection and management of archaeological sites and historic monuments and sets out procedures for consent before any work can be carried out that may affect these sites. It also emphasises the importance of preserving archaeological heritage for future generations and promotes public awareness and education regarding archaeological sites.

Elements from all of these acts set out certain responsibilities and require that agreement is reached, or consent obtained, between key bodies (e.g. Natural England, Forestry Commission, Verderers, Environment Agency, National Park Authority, Hampshire County Council) before various works can go ahead. Consultation with statutory, non-statutory and wider consultees is a key element required for most activities in the New Forest.

5.3 Key Mandates, Standards and Management Plans

A number of different mandates, standards and management plans have helped shape the management of the New Forest, particularly since the late 1990s onwards. Most have been revised and updated over the years but are still influential in directing land and habitat management across the Forest, notably:

- The Minister's Mandate
- The New Forest National Park Management Plan
- The New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Plan
- The New Forest Inclosures Forest Plan
- New Forest Wetland Management Plan 2006-2016/New Forest NF Freshwater & Wetland Habitats Restoration Strategy
- New Forest District Deer Management Plan
- Water Environment Improvement Plan 2012
- UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS)
- The Forestry Strategy for England 2020-2030 (plus historic government forest Strategies and Regional Forest Frameworks)
- The England Tree Strategy (2020)
- Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England
- Verderers' Policies
- River Avon SAC Conservation Strategy
- North Solent Shoreline Management Plan 2010
- Re: New Forest Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027

- Recreation Management Strategy (2019)

Since its publication in 2001 (and recently revised but not yet published), the New Forest SAC Plan, which was signed up to by all the main bodies involved in the management of the New Forest has been the "blueprint" for managing the main New Forest habitats. The New Forest Inclosures Forest (Design) Plan, which has evolved since its inception under "New Forest New Futures" back in the 1990s, is the main plan which guides the management and restoration of the Inclosures and sets the long-term strategy for 100 years or more into the future.

Over-Arching Management Principles

Both the legislation and the various Mandates, Standards and Management Plans come together to define a set of over-arching management principles. Notably to:

- Maintain or improve the condition of existing high-quality habitats and species populations
- Restore priority habitats where remnant or degraded habitats survive, generally starting from the core and working outwards
- Improve habitat linkages by restoring/improving habitat connectivity and preventing further degradation of key habitats (e.g. stop further headward erosion of stream into mires, removing barriers to species migration)
- Support commoning to ensure animal numbers and type of stock are available to maintain essential conservation grazing levels of New Forest habitats
- Ensure adequate infrastructure and resources are maintained and/or provided to support the required standards of animal husbandry and livestock management (e.g. Access to affordable housing and suitable back-up grazing land, Agisters, water provision, access routes, pounds and drift fences)
- Improve the condition of New Forest habitats to allow them to be more robust and adapt to the pressures of climate change
- Ensure heritage features are surveyed and protected during maintenance and restoration works to safeguard heritage interests and better understand Key Features.
- Promote collaborative working and strong and transparent project communication with both internal and external stakeholders

Management Issues/Principles around Woodland Habitats (Crown Land Inclosures and Private Woodlands)

Within the Perambulation the majority of woodland is located on the Crown Lands which are managed by Forestry England. Plantation woodland, largely managed for timber production is contained within the ~8,500 hectares of forestry Inclosures, most of which were created under the

New Forest Acts. A further 3692 hectares of woodland is contained within the Ancient & Ornamental Woodlands spread across the Open Forest. Other smaller blocks of plantation/natural woodland can be found on National Trust land to the north of the Forest scattered across private estates and individual land holdings.

The management of the New Forest Inclosures is guided by the New Forest Inclosures Forest Plan[2] which sets out a long-term vision (~200 years) for the Inclosures together with management priorities over a 10-50 year period. The plan has been evolving since its initial launch in the late 1990s under "New Forest, New Futures" and is widely consulted upon, amended and approved every 10 years to grant Forestry England a felling licence to manage the Inclosures. The strategic objectives of the current plan are to:

1. Develop natural habitats of better quality and greater resilience, including planning for changes to the natural environment by:

- Maintaining or restoring the extent and distribution of designated habitats and species;
- Maintaining or restoring the structure and function of designated habitats and the habitats of designated species;
- Maintaining or restoring the supporting processes on which designated habitats and the habitats of designated species rely;
- Maintaining or restoring the populations and distribution of designated species;
- Restoring native woodland and open habitats;
- Developing a network of habitat links to reduce the vulnerability of fragmented sites;
- Increasing the quality of edge habitat by ride edge and streamside enhancement and by developing a mosaic of woodland types and open space;
- Providing a proportion of successional temporary open space for key bird species;
- Maintaining other suitable habitats for Lepidoptera;
- Protecting veteran trees and retaining standing or fallen deadwood;
- Exploring site suitability of less prominent native species which can complement the special features of the landscape;
- Increasing the structural diversity of the Inclosure woodlands;
- Developing riverine habitats, wet woodlands and bog woodlands along watercourses within fenced Inclosures and grazed woodlands;
- Increasing the connectivity of the variety of woodland and open habitats within and through the Inclosures.

2. Develop woodlands that are sympathetic to the wider landscape and enhance the natural landscapes for public appreciation
and enjoyment by:

- Where appropriate, implementing changes to the landscape over a long time period (e.g. 200 years)

[2] https://www.forestryengland.uk/sites/default/files/documents/1%20New%20Forest%20Forest%20Plan%20Oct%202019.pdf

- Maintaining an accessible network of ride and tracks linked to high quality access points which are best placed to balance public enjoyment with protection of habitats and biodiversity;
- Informing and engaging people in the cultural, natural and economic value that the New Forest provides to local, national and international communities;
- Ensuring historic features are protected and enhanced for the enjoyment and use of future generations.

3. Improving economic viability of land management by:

- Growing quality timber that is fit for purpose so far as is consistent with the other FDP objectives stands where the long-term management objectives will result in the sustained production of such timber;
- Exploring alternative avenues of income generation derived from activities fulfilling the other FDP objectives.

Much of the plantation woodland, particularly conifer, was planted on former heathland while broadleaf plantation woodland was established on the richer soils, often clearing original native woodland to make way for the new plantations of oak and beech. The latter often forms some of the earliest plantations, many of which were established in the 18th Century, but successive rotations introduced conifer into the planting regime. Elements of the original woodland occasionally survive, known as Pre-Inclosure Woodland (PIW) and some of the oldest plantations contain oak and beech of considerable age which in places is developing a good structural and bryophyte interest[3]. Many Inclosures also contain conifer either as mixed woodland or stand-alone conifer coupes. A number of Inclosures are being restored to native woodland through PAWs restoration with conifer being clearfelled or removed/reduced through successive thinning operations and opened up to grazing either permanently or seasonally to further restore pasture woodland.

Since the 1990s there has been a significant drive to restore Inclosures that were planted on former heathland back to open forest habitat and this restoration is well underway in a number of Inclosures, for example Dur Hill, North Slufters, Markway, Turfhill/Millersford, Longdown, Milkham, Newland Plantation to name but a few. As well as large-scale clearance of conifer, fences have been removed to open up the areas to grazing which is essential to restoring and maintaining good, quality habitat. Ridge and furrow has also been removed, hydrology restored and measures taken to control bracken and remove non-natives such as Rhododendron and Gaultheria.

Over the last thirty years much has been learned about what it takes to restore and maintain good quality habitat, notably:

[3] Parts of the 18th C Inclosures have survived in North & South Bentley, Pitt's Wood, Sloden, Raven's Nest and Long Beech. Pasture Woodland (PIW) has survived in Burley Old, Puckpits, Coppice of Linwood, Sloden, Raven's Nest and Woodfidley.

Open Habitat Restoration within Inclosures

- Removal of brash, stumps and ridge and furrow (particularly in wet heath/mire) to restore natural hydrology, allow the safe drifting of stock and the mechanised management of pine/birch regeneration and treatment of bracken and invasive non-natives;

- Re-establishment of grazing;

- Maintaining strategically placed drift fences and access routes to allow the round-up of and management of stock;

- Restoration of the natural hydrology to restore mires and wet/humid heath and lawns that were historically drained and planted over while the natural or meandering streams were frequently straightened. Most of the straightened streams have become over-deepened and detached from their flood plains, while nick points have developed that have migrated upstream, often to beyond the Inclosure boundary causing erosion and drying of open forest habitats;

- Regular, cyclical removal of conifer and birch regeneration;

- Removal of invasive non-natives with frequent, repeated treatments to keep on top of rhododendron regrowth.

Restoration of Native Woodland (PAWs)

- Measures to establish and protect natural regeneration including deer control and temporary fencing;

- Supplementary planting where required;

- Successive thinning of mature conifers and removal of conifer regeneration.

All restoration activities require adequate funding and staff resourcing to manage the operational planning, consenting and physical works to ensure a successful outcome. There are significant restoration opportunities in many Inclosures but since 2010 and the advent of HLS, only Inclosures that are thrown open to grazing are eligible for HLS funding.

Although a great deal of emphasis is being put on restoration of Inclosure habitats, it is still important to appreciate that timber harvesting from the Inclosures is required to help support the local economy, provide timber to UK markets and is a key source of income to help fund the resourcing, management and maintenance of the Crown Lands by Forestry England.

On private land and estates much of the woodland falls under individual Woodland Management Plans or Felling Licences approved by the Forestry Commission, with woodland improvement often funded under standalone Countryside Stewardship agreements. Many of the restoration and woodland management techniques are similar to those described above for the Inclosures. On private landholdings, areas of conifer plantation were established on former heathland or ancient

woodland and in some of these areas there is a move by landowners to restore open habitat or PAWs. Heathland restoration is not always straightforward as an EIA determination is often required along with approval from the Forestry Commission. Approval is only generally granted where land is SAC/SSSI unless compensatory planting can be provided but there are areas of former heathland that have been planted that could provide valuable habitat linkages.

Management Issues/Principles around Open Forest Heathland Habitats

Heathland requires regular, rotational management of gorse, heather, bracken, birch and pine regeneration to keep it in good condition, supported by grazing. With climate change, traditional management techniques such as controlled burning are becoming increasingly challenging requiring more mechanised approaches to be used instead. In addition, historical drainage schemes involving ditching and stream straightening caused significant damage to mires, lawns and wet heath and restoration work has been underway since the 1990s to restore wetland habitats.

The Open Forest is also susceptible to the spread of invasive non-natives from properties bordering the forest, via stream networks and through illegal introductions. The New Forest Non-Natives Plants Project run by HIWWT since 2009 has been tackling the removal of Pitcher plants from bogs, Himalayan Balsam, American Skunk Cabbage from stream corridors, New Zealand Stonecrop (Crassula) from ponds, Parrot's Feather from mires and Cotoneaster, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed from across the wider forest.

The development of secondary woodland and scrub is also a management challenge. On the one hand the open forest needs to be kept clear of secondary woodland and scrub to maintain open habitat but on the other, the interiors of many of the old-growth A&O woodlands are starting to decline. Left to natural processes, woodland naturally ebbs and flows often spreading out from woodland edges with colonising species such as birch establishing first so there is an on-going challenge around on how best to manage these natural processes. Nor is the Open Forest immune from pests and diseases; for example, there has been some large-scale dieback of holly holms, potentially as a combination of pathogens and climate change.

As development and the population increase around the periphery of the New Forest, the Open Forest is facing increasing recreational pressure and disturbance which does have associated impacts on habitats and species. The New Forest Recreation Strategy (NFNPA, 2010) has been in place since 2010 to try to increase the robustness of the recreational infrastructure to address and better manage some of these threats.

The on-going maintenance and restoration of Open Forest habitats requires:

- Rotational management of heather, gorse, birch and seedling pine either through controlled burning or mechanised cutting;

- Mechanised harvesting of heather. Most of the heather bales are used as in-fill for stream/mire restoration projects or sediment traps both on the New Forest and further afield;

- Bracken control either through spraying or bracken forage harvesting to create bracken compost/mulch;

- Drain-infill and stream restoration;

- Restoration of A&O woodland;

- Grazing and maintenance of access routes and infrastructure required to manage stock e.g. fences and pounds;

- Investment in infrastructure provision to manage visitors and minimise recreational impacts;

- Survey work to update habitat mapping and inform management planning;

- Further research into the impacts of climate change on New Forest habitats and adaption options to inform future management and maintenance;

- Monitoring work to ensure objectives are being met and to learn lessons to inform future management and restoration work. It would be useful to revisit some of the work delivered under earlier funding schemes such as Life 2 and Life 3 to ascertain ongoing maintenance requirements and practical successes.

As restoration programmes both in the Inclosures and Open Forest expand the resourcing requirement will increase particularly around on-going maintenance to secure the initial restoration investment in-perpetuity.

5.4 Habitat Restoration Beyond the Crown Lands & Open Forest

The Hampshire Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping and Ecological Network Mapping carried out by HBIC on behalf of the Local Nature Partnership (LNP), helps to identify strategic habitat linkages and corridors between the Crown Lands and the Perambulation boundary and beyond, linking the open forest habitats to the surrounding meadows, commons, river valleys and coasts. This mapping may provide useful data or evidence to help formulate a future application.

It is hoped that establishing and expanding the network will enable biodiversity to recover from recent declines and create a more resilient natural environment into the future.

The aims of the network are to:

- improve the quality of current wildlife sites by better habitat management;
- increase the size of existing wildlife sites;
- enhance connections between sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones';
- create new sites;
- reduce the pressure on wildlife by improving the wider environment.

Table 2 shows the habitat network potential in the New Forest National Park and surrounding New Forest District while Figure 3 shows these areas relative to the Crown Lands and Perambulation. The published statistics have separated out the NFDC and NFNPA areas to avoid duplication.

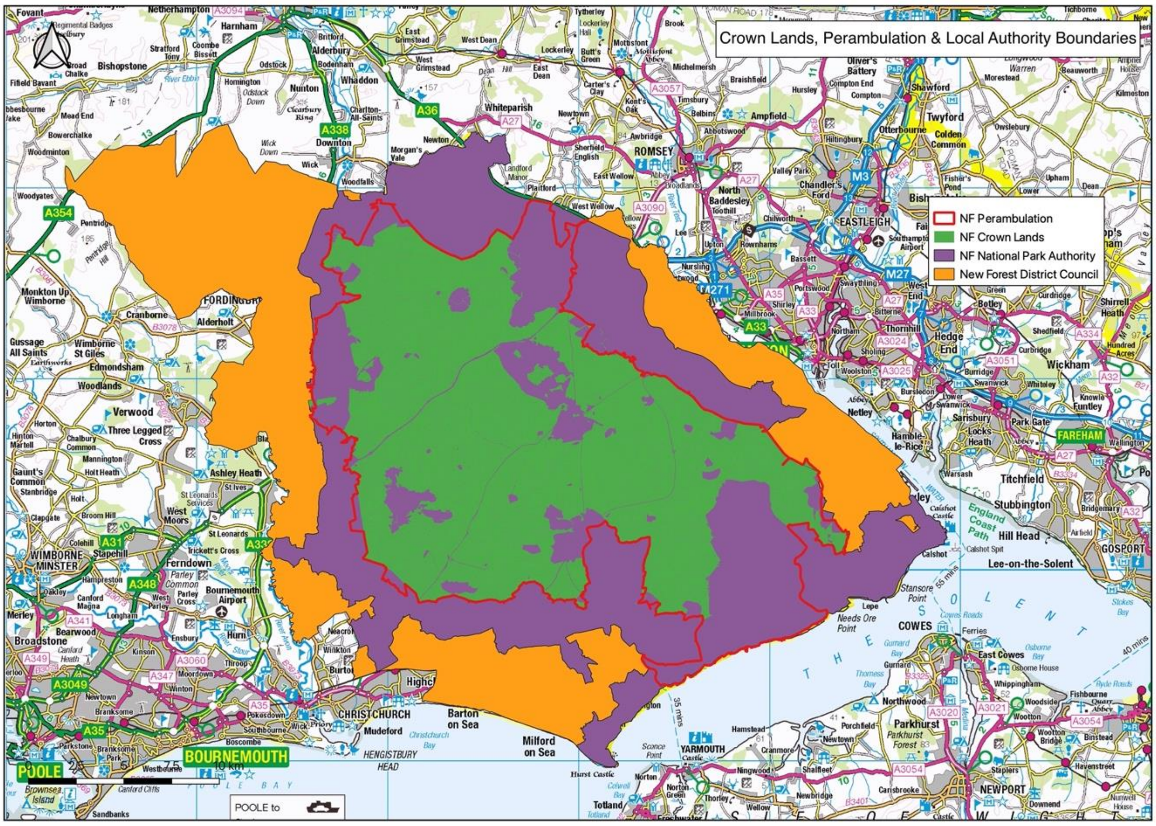
Further analysis of this mapping may help to identify priorities for possible linkages that could be assisted by habitat management and restoration.

Table 2: Ecological Network Opportunity

Local Authority	Area of Authority (ha)	Core Statutory Sites (Ha)	Core Statutory Site (% of Authority Area)	Core Non-statutory Sites (ha)	Core Non-statutory Sites (% of Authority Area	Network Opportunities (Ha)	Network Opportunities (% of Authority Area)	Potential area of full Network	% of Authority Area
NFDC	24,517	2,523	10.3	3,509	14.3	2,999	12.2	9,031	36.84
NFNPA	56,652	32,265	57	6,084	10.7	6,256	11	44,406	78.73

Source: *HBIC* – Mapping of the Hampshire Ecological Network Report, Version 3 March 2020,

Figure 3: Boundary Relationships



The various datasets making up the Core Statutory, Core Non-Statutory Sites and Network Opportunity Areas are listed in **Appendix E.**

A number of funding schemes and partnership projects are helping to restore habitats within and beyond the Open Forest to improve habitat linkages and expand restoration towards and beyond

the Perambulation boundary. For example, the New Forest Blue Horizons Project (2021 – 2026) is a partnership project improving the running and standing water network in the NF to help create a national network of healthy, unpolluted and interconnected freshwater habitats, made up of important freshwater landscapes, important freshwater areas, historic floodplains, and wetland opportunity areas. It is currently funded by DEFRA, Environment Agency, Species Survival Fund and helps to connect habitat linkages between the Crown Lands and peripheral habitats (FWHT, 2025).

As well as helping to fund the Blue Horizons Project, DEFRA's Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) is also funding Think Tank which is New Forest Catchment Partnership project designed to provide a coordinated approach to private sewage treatment to help improve water quality in the lower reaches of the New Forest Rivers. New Forest Equine Paddock Management is also on the list of projects to be funded by WEIF and is aimed at reducing the impact of equine activities on protected sites and waterbodies across the New Forest catchment.

Wilder for Water is tackling recreation pressure and diffuse pollution from campsites

Saltmarsh erosion and increased saline intrusion from sea level rise are key issue affecting coastal habitats. Various landowners along the coast are looking to restore areas of saltmarsh within the Perambulation for example the Beaulieu Estate, HCC and the WIEF is expected to fund the Boiler Marsh Project which aims to restore an eroding area of saltmarsh to the east of the Lymington River entrance.

The New Forest NPA's Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme (DEFRA funded) has helped fund innovative biodiversity initiatives on a number of farms including planting hedgerows and trees, installing bird, bat and mammal boxes and funding new technology and machinery to improve habitat management, all of which help to connect peripheral land with the main core of the New Forest.

No doubt future funding schemes will continue to evolve that could benefit the New Forest and provide cross-boundary opportunities between the perambulation and wider geographical area.

5.5 Status of Mapping & Datasets

Although habitats and opportunities have been mapped at a strategic level by HBIC, for example though the Hampshire Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping and Ecological Network Mapping, more detailed practical habitat survey and mapping is often required to help plan restoration and maintenance at a practical level. Many of the original baseline survey work and datasets that have been used to plan restoration and maintenance works are now out of date, not readily accessible or not in a format or scale that is useful to help with practical planning for land managers. For example, the A&O Atlas published in the 1990's gave very detailed prescriptions and guidance for A&O woodlands which helped inform funding applications and direct practical work. The New Forest Vegetation map has also been a valuable tool but there have been significant changes on the ground since it was originally drawn up. More recent survey work, funded by HLS, has helped to prepare management plans and mapping to inform restoration and maintenance for four grazed Inclosures being returned to heathland. Discussions with various land managers have identified that historic

data that could be valuable for monitoring or habitat assessment is often held in hard copy reports filed away in various offices or repositories, and although a significant amount of research work has been carried out on the New Forest it is difficult to establish a complete picture of what has been prepared by individual experts or organisations.

6 The Grazing System

Under this part of the Study, we have been asked to:

1) establish the relationship between the grazing system and the Key Features we have identified above, and
2) comment on how the grazing system can be supported to protect and enhance the Key Features.

6.1 The Interaction Between the Grazing System and the Key Features

The New Forest SAC Management Plan highlights the central role of extensive grazing in maintaining and supporting the Key Features of the New Forest's internationally important habitats. It positions grazing not just as a traditional land use, but as a primary ecological management tool critical to the long-term conservation of the New Forest's unique biodiversity. Specifically, the plan identifies that:

- Extensive, low-intensity grazing by commoners' livestock (particularly ponies and cattle) is essential for maintaining the open structure and ecological balance of priority habitats such as heathlands, grasslands, and wetland systems.
- Grazing prevents the encroachment of scrub and woodland into open habitats, thereby supporting species-rich communities and maintaining landscape diversity.
- Areas with reduced grazing pressure are noted to experience negative ecological changes, including increased fertility, coarse vegetation growth (such as Molinia), and the decline of rarer plant communities such as *Cirsium dissectum* in wet grasslands.
- In contrast, areas with appropriately managed grazing regimes are associated with habitat features of higher conservation value.

The SAC Plan references the importance of allowing fluctuations in grazing pressure and the subsequent impact on the condition of the Key Features. The SAC plan states the following in respect to fluctuations:

- Fluctuating grazing levels, both spatially and temporally, are noted as influencing the quality and structure of habitat mosaics.
- The plan stresses the importance of maintaining extensive but low-intensity grazing, managed at a landscape scale, to prevent both under and overgrazing.

Cattle and ponies are the principal grazing animals that define the ecological structure and influence the condition of the Key Features. Sheep, donkeys and pigs are noted as forming an important part of the grazing system operating in the New Forest, little is stated about their role within the SAC plan. Pigs form an important part of the commoning cultural heritage in the New Forest and they are known to play a role in consuming acorns that would otherwise pose a risk to ponies and cattle. In

the event that the deer population was significantly reduced, this role would become considerably more important. This is an area requiring further research in order to understand fully.

Both cattle and ponies are essential to maintaining the integrity of priority habitats designated under the New Forest SAC, they exhibit distinct grazing behaviours and have differential ecological impacts. Understanding these differences is vital to designing appropriate management strategies that sustain habitat condition and species diversity.

Cattle are bulk grazers that typically favour lower-lying, wetter ground, such as rush pastures, damp grasslands, and mire margins. Their heavier body mass and broad grazing range allow them to clear coarse vegetation more evenly across larger areas. Ponies, by contrast, are more selective in their feeding; they often graze in concentrated patterns, particularly around accessible paths and lawns, contributing to more localised vegetation impacts. Equines have forward-facing teeth and can graze close to the ground to leave shorter vegetation than cattle.

Native breeds of both cattle and ponies are widely regarded as the most effective and suitable for delivering conservation grazing due to their hardiness, adaptability to local environments, and grazing behaviours that promote biodiversity. Native breeds are particularly effective in maintaining and restoring habitats such as heathlands, wood pastures, and wetlands[4]. The UK's native breeds all have different characteristics and have adapted to different habitats and climates. Behaviours and habits vary between breeds will have an impact on their grazing habits. The New Forest Pony's long association with the landscape means that the breed is best suited to delivering conservation grazing in the New Forest. The breed is also a rare breed and encouraging commoners to keep this breed will help to protect the gene pool (NFPB&CS, 2011).

6.2 Current and Recent Support for Commoning

Agri-Environment

The New Forest was designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) in 1994, a move that acknowledged the need for tailored land management support in ecologically significant landscapes. The Crownlands were subsequently enrolled into the Countryside Stewardship scheme. Under this scheme:

- Commoners received annual payments per head of livestock (ponies and cattle) turned out under agreed grazing prescriptions.
- Payments were conditional on adherence to environmental standards, seasonal grazing limits, and stock recording protocols.
- ESA funding improved the economic viability of commoning by partially offsetting the cost of managing free-roaming animals and maintaining back-up grazing and commoners' holdings.

In 2010, much of the Crownlands managed by Forestry England were entered into Environmental Stewardship in the form of a Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement. The agreement, originally for 10 years, has been extended multiple times and remains one of the largest Environmental Stewardship agreements in England. The Official Verderer is the signatory to the agreement on behalf of the Verderers, who entered into a partnership agreement with Forestry England and the

[4] https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/graze-with-livestock-to-maintain-and-improve-habitats/

NFNPA. Under the partnership, the NFCDA and Natural England also have representatives that make up the 'HLS board', which has oversight of the delivery of the scheme.

The partnership agreed to ringfence a sum equivalent to £40/ha, equivalent to the amount previously received to support commoning under the former Countryside Stewardship scheme, to be managed exclusively by the Verderers for grazing and livestock management. Since 2010, the Verderers HLS agreement has supported grazing in the following ways:

- The Verderer Grazing Scheme (VGS) – this makes annual grazing payments to commoners in return to them signing an annual contract agreeing to share data regarding their livestock and agree to adhere to numerous best-practice requirements. Within this is a requirement to depasture livestock for minimum qualifying periods. The scheme rules are reviewed annually and there are currently caps on the number of cattle that can be entered into the scheme by an individual applicant. The scheme only recognises registered pedigree New Forest Ponies in an attempt to incentivise commoners to not depasture other breeds which might not be well suited to the landscape. Our commoner consultation revealed that the younger generations of commoner are more likely to keep pedigree New Forest Ponies, which could be a result of the schemes influence.
- Small grants scheme for commoners - including livestock handling facilities, livestock trailers, fencing, water troughs, and back-up holding improvements. This has been subject to a £2,000 cap per application.
- Support for breed conservation – The New Forest Pony is listed as a rare breed and support is given to programs preserving the genetic diversity of the breed. Support has manifested itself in schemes that support the maintenance of New Forest Stallions, breeding stallions from rare bloodlines and incentivising commoners to keep young colts from rare bloodlines, so that they can be retained as potential stallions.
- Livestock handling facilities - rebuilding traditional handling facilities or "pounds", renewing fencing to assist with livestock management and to improve road safety.
- Welfare scheme – improving welfare standards of grazing animals.
- Agister support – Support to the Agister team who are employed by the Verderers to oversee livestock welfare of animals grazing the common.

Hampshire County Council, Wellow Parish Council and Minstead Manor Farm all currently hold an agri-environment scheme over their respective common land holdings. These agreements have required them to make annual contributions to the Verderers Grazing scheme. The National Trust also held an HLS agreement however this has now expired, meaning there is not agri-environment scheme in operation over this area. We understand that the National Trust was offered an extension, but this was rejected resulting in over 1,200 ha of common land being out of scheme since 2022. The National Trust has made contributions into the Verderers Grazing Scheme voluntarily since their scheme expired, however where some commoners only having rights for National Trust managed land, there have been times where some commoners have not been eligible to receive VGS payments. This has put some commoners at a disadvantage to others.

Direct Payments

As a legacy from Pillar I of the Common Agricultural Policy, New Forest commoners have qualified to receive direct payments since 2005 under the Single Payment Scheme and subsequently the Basic Payment Scheme from 2015 to 2023 and Delinked Payments since 2024. The roll out of these schemes to New Forest commoners caused many technical and policy issues with the Rural Payments Agency who administered the schemes. Firstly, the entire common had to be mapped along with all "ineligible features", which includes dense vegetation such as bracken or gorse. This data needed to be updated on a regular basis. secondly, the vast number or parcel numbers resulting from the mapping exercise created a large volume of data which resulted in the RPA having to close the rural payments service to all other customers whilst they were calculating the payments for New Forest Commoners.

The payments under these schemes were historically calculated based on a 'notional area' allocated to applicants which was determined by dividing the total payment value for the eligible area of the entire New Forest Common land by the number of livestock units recorded on the Verderers' marking fee register in the previous calendar year. Payment rates were not adjusted between native and non-native breeds. The schemes have been criticised for incentivising commoners to increase the number of animals that they 'mark' to preserve or increase their share of the funding. The annual payments were significantly more than those awarded under the Verderers' Grazing Scheme (VGS) and this is believed to have undermined the influence of the VGS to date. The Basic Payment scheme made payments totalling approximately £3,000,000 per annum to New Forest commoners (DEFRA, 2021). Whilst the application of the scheme in the New Forest is broadly considered to have been unsuccessful as applicants didn't have to do anything beyond adhere to the national cross-compliance rules, it has been noted that receipts did allow commoners to make improvements to their holdings, infrastructure and general standards of welfare. It also made keeping cattle on the common a viable enterprise for a number of years.

The Basic Payment Scheme introduced a young farmers "top up" payment and it also awarded young and new commons with entitlements from the national reserve. This created an incentive to make younger family members "head of the holding" which resulted in some positive examples of greater involvement by the next generation.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is a grant initiative developed to support farmers and land managers operating within England's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), including the New Forest National Park. The programme funds projects that deliver benefits in four key areas:

- Nature Recovery: Enhancing biodiversity and improving habitat quality.
- Climate Change Mitigation: Implementing practices that sequester carbon and reduce emissions.
- Public Access and Engagement: Providing opportunities for people to explore, enjoy, and understand the landscape.
- Sustainable Farm Businesses: Supporting nature-friendly farming practices that ensure long-term farm viability.

In the New Forest, the FiPL programme is administered by the New Forest National Park Authority. It is open to all farmers, commoners, and land managers within the National Park, encompassing

private, public, and charitable sectors. Applicants must manage the land included in their application and have control over the proposed activities, or obtain written consent from relevant parties. Common land is also eligible, with applications possible from individual landowners or groups of commoners acting collectively.

The programme has been extended and will run until March 2026, with applications closing when all funding is allocated. Since its inception, FiPL has funded over 4,600 projects, engaging more than 7,000 farmers and land managers. The program has received some criticism locally for not reaching enough commoners. It is not fully understood why the take up from commoners has been relatively low.

6.3 How Commoning Can Be Supported to Protect and Enhance the Key Features

Through identifying the Key Features and appropriate management principles we have established that the existing grazing system should be managed and supported in a way that:

- Promotes extensive grazing - Extensive grazing by both ponies and cattle is critical to sustaining the ecological processes and vegetation dynamics within the Study Area.

- Promotes mixed grazing - Maintaining a balanced composition of both cattle and ponies is important due to their differing behaviours and habitat preferences, which collectively help prevent scrub encroachment and maintain habitat mosaics.

- Promotes native breeds – Native breeds of cattle and New Forest ponies offer behavioural characteristics which make them more suitable for delivering conservation grazing. They are generally smaller and lighter than other breeds reducing undesired impacts such as compaction and poaching.

- Allows fluctuations in grazing pressure - It is important that the grazing pressure should be allowed to fluctuate within a tolerated range and shouldn't seek to fix the stocking density.

- Avoids Overgrazing and/or Under-Grazing at a landscape scale– whilst allowing fluctuations, it is important that over or under grazing is prevented. Localised areas of high or low grazing pressure is acceptable within reason. Whilst recording and monitoring livestock numbers might be important for administrative purposes, there is no guidance in the SAC plan on what the optimum stocking density/grazing pressure should be. Through interviews with local Natural England representatives, we understand that the condition of the habitat should be the guiding principle.

- Prohibits use of harmful anti-parasitic medication – Ivermectin and closely related products appear to pose a serious threat to invertebrates.

We consulted commoners at an open meeting that we held in September 20204 and through an online consultation on a number of relevant matters. We sought to establish commoners feel they can best be supported to continue delivering effective and sustainable extensive grazing. Through our consultation process we have learnt the following:

- Incentives for participation in a future scheme appeal differently to different groups within the commoning community. Differentials include the age of the commoner, the area in which the commoner turns out their animals, the type of animal the commoner keeps and their herd size.

- The uncertainty of a future scheme appears to have been incentivising some commoners to mark additional animals in anticipation of a future headage-based reference year being set. Whilst there is no evidence that this will be the case, it demonstrates the importance of clear communication and some continuity when it comes to the development of future support schemes.

- We established that commoners' opinions can be associated with the total number of animals that they keep; recognising this might help target support to commoners in the future. Having analysed the consultation responses we feel that herd sizes can be grouped in the following way:

    - 1-3 head (micro commoner)
    - 4-9 head (small commoner)
    - 10-29 head (medium commoner)
    - 30-50 head (large commoner)
    - 50+ (very large commoner)

- DEFRA's policy to phase out direct payments is impacting the largest commoners and cattle commoners the most and could significantly reduce the number of animals (particularly cattle) available to graze the New Forest common land given that 48% of the ponies are owned by 10% of the commoners and 57% of the cattle are owned by 26% of the cattle-owning commoners. It is important that the needs of larger commoners are carefully considered when designing a future grazing scheme as their actions are likely to have a significant impact on the grazing pressure on the common.

- Larger commoners are noted for playing a more active role within the grazing system and commoning community as they often provide forage that is sold to smaller commoners. Larger commoners also often provide support and experience to smaller commoners in relation to livestock management and husbandry.

- Smaller commoners (we have defined as being those with fewer than 10 animals) advised us that headage payments have little to no influence on their grazing activity. This was particularly the case with those keeping just ponies. Those keeping cattle appear more influenced by financial support, which is likely to be due to the increase costs and administration associated with keeping cattle.

- There is a strong desire from New Forest commoners to be consulted on future incentives for grazing.

- Only 20% of commoners could confirm that their back-up grazing land had been entered into an agri-environment scheme. This offers an opportunity to increase the public goods being delivered on a significant acreage across the National Park.

- Supporting the next generation of commoners is key to ensuring that grazing continues to be delivered in the future. There are currently many hurdles making it difficult for people to establish themselves as a commoner, independent of support from parents. A DEFRA consultation on Basic Payment Scheme in the New Forest also identified a need to support young commoners.

- The lack of availability and affordability of property (housing and land) to both rent and buy in the National Park is a significant barrier. The New Forest is by far the most expensive National Park in which to buy property within the UK (Nationwide, 2024).

- Grazing support should consider the management of the common as a whole. Whilst this may need to allow for addressing localised grazing pressure, it is important to avoid a situation where one area is incentivising increased grazing pressure whilst the adjacent area is seeking to reduce it.

- There are concerns over the impacts of climate change and what can be done to improve resilience (particularly with livestock due to diseases such as Bluetongue).

- Commoners have adjusted their business structures in the past to make best use of available funding. Future incentives should have regard for this and have measures in place that will prevent any unintended consequences.

- 65% of commoners with herds greater than 50-head are over the age of 50. This may well have always been the case, but we recommend that this is monitored closely to ensure that larger herds and their associated holdings are being passed down to the next generations of commoners. If not, there could be a risk of a significant reduction in the grazing pressure over the next decade.

- The cost of commoning in the New Forest is increasing, which is reducing the viability of commoning as an enterprise. Many 'micro' and 'small' commoners advised us that they do not expect commoning to be profitable. Larger commoners, particularly cattle commoners, however, expect there to be some return for their efforts and as such are currently dependant on financial support.

The full findings of our Commoners' Consultation can be found in our New Forest Commoners Consultation report at **Appendix F**.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Support

Based on the requirements of the Key Features and how we believe the grazing should be supported to maintain and enhance these features, we consider it to be critical that commoners are:

1) supported to ensure that the necessary infrastructure, skills and breeds that deliver grazing across the landscape are not lost, and
2) incentivised to practise their grazing rights in a way that delivers the highest environmental outcomes.

We believe that there are a number of tools that have been adopted in the past that can continue to help achieve this, however the most important element in any future support to the grazing system needs to be dynamic and flexible enabling local governance to respond and adapt swiftly to changes in behaviour caused by both internal and external factors (including perverse incentives).

Headage Based Payments

The unquantified rights system in the New Forest makes it difficult to distribute fairly or allocate support without incentivising commoners to increase their livestock numbers. Direct payments that were allocated on a simple livestock headage basis without any checks or balances accounting for the requirements of the local area resulted in many people being wary of adopting any such system in the future. The VGS uses a headage-based system to support commoners at present and this appears not to have incentivised an increase in numbers. In fact, the number of animals marked in 2024 was considerably lower than in 2023. This is likely to be due to the relatively low payment rates awarded under the VGS. The scheme has incentivised best practices and has been able respond to changes in behaviour. The NFCDA considers that a headage-based payment is the only fair and practical way of supporting grazing activity in the New Forest, however it feels that such payments should be subject to caps, tiers and qualifying periods to prevent a scheme from being abused[5]. Such interventions would certainly help provide more targeted support. We know from our commoner consultation that smaller commoners are generally less influenced by financial incentives.

Headage payments could be supplemented by “top up” payments providing additional support and incentives for those that keep native breeds or qualify as a new and young commoner.

Herd Based Payments

As a variation to headage based payments, commoners could be supported differently depending on their herd size. We have identified different herd size categories which could be used to target support. ‘Small’ and ‘medium’ sized herds could offered smaller annual “maintenance payments” and have a lower cap on the capital grants that they are eligible for. Whilst larger herds sizes might be awarded a higher payment and threshold of grant value. These could also be coupled with the top up payments described above.

Capital Grants to Support Commoners’ Holdings

The VGS small grants scheme has supported commoners wishing to improve their holdings and working practices through investing in assets such as handling equipment, fencing and livestock trailers. The £2,000 cap limit might be appropriate for smaller commoners; however this is unlikely to make any significant improvement to holdings associated with larger herd sizes. Adjusting the cap according to herd size might provide more targeted support to larger commoners.

[5] https://www.realnewforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CDA-Principles-regarding-ELMS-27.08.20-221-1.pdf

Livestock Handling Infrastructure on the Common

The current HLS agreement operating on the Crownlands has replaced most of the permanent handling facilities or pounds around the common since 2010. It has also funded some fencing where former timber growing inclosures have been restored to heathland or wood pasture, but where fences are still required to help manage livestock. There are also many bridges and crossings across the Study Area which enable commoners and agisters to monitor and access livestock which sometimes require attention.

It is important that any new scheme has a sufficient capital works fund to enable funding of the proper maintenance of any infrastructure necessary to deliver extensive grazing. This infrastructure is the foundation of a functioning grazing system. It is important that the maintenance of previously funded structures is eligible to preserve their legacy. Under the current HLS agreement repairs are not funded.

Agister Support

During an interview with the Verderers' staff committee, which included a number of Agisters, we were informed that many commoners are becoming more dependent on the Agisters to monitor and, where necessary, catch their depastured livestock. While the livestock owner is primarily responsible for such matters, the Agisters are tasked with ensuring that welfare standards are maintained to a suitably high standard meaning they are often required to intervene. With many of Forestry England's timber inclosures being thrown open, the area that the Agisters need to manage is increasing. Increasing public pressure creates additional work for them, particularly where members of the public interfere with livestock through petting or feeding. It is felt that these combined pressures are causing the team of Agisters to feel increasingly understaffed. The importance of having a succession plan in place to help pass the knowledge to the next generation was also raised. The skills necessary to be an Agister are unique and can only be learnt through experience of the role itself. An apprentice program whereby two individuals could be trained with the relevant skillset would ensure that the Agister team had increased capacity as well as ensuring that valuable knowledge is not lost.

Back up Grazing

Enclosed land in the vicinity of the New Forest common land has for many years been, and remains, in extremely high demand. Demand stems from both commoners requiring land to accommodate livestock (for movement restrictions/standstill periods, for calving/foaling, other welfare issues or for forage production) and recreational users such as equestrian users. Landowners in the area have advised us that while they would like to support commoning and make land available to commoners, other competing land uses offer a much more competitive income opportunity. Providing incentives to local landowners who make their land available to commoners might help address this imbalance.

Flexible Support

The Verderers HLS agreement has found it has needed to be flexible in its approach; funding programs and projects that were not known about at the agreement's conception. Maintaining a high level of flexibility is essential, particularly with longer term management agreements. This is a key point that was highlighted in the FFG's vision statement (FFG, 2022).

7 Environmental Land Management

We have been asked to consider how the three schemes that form DEFRA's current agri-environment offering might apply to the New Forest. We have considered scheme eligibility and how multiple agreements across the landscape might interact.

7.1 Current and Former Habitat Restoration Projects

We have identified some of the ways in which the grazing system has been supported to date in section 6 above. There have also been many projects funding habitat restoration and management to date; Table 3 below provides a summary of some of the larger projects that have taken place in the past three decades.

Table 3: History of Funding Schemes for New Forest Habitat Management & Restoration

Funding Stream	Timeline	Amount of funding	Key Deliverables
Life 2	1997 to 2001	£5.25 million	NF SAC Plan 2001, Mire Surveys, Mire Restoration, Exotics Control within Open Forest and Inclosures.
Life 3	2002 to 2006	£3.18 million	Restoration of: • 261 hectares of riverine woodland (Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior)* restored to unfavourable recovering condition; • 18 hectares of bog woodland restored to unfavourable recovering condition; • 184 hectares of mires – incorporating alkaline fens and transition mires restored to unfavourable recovering condition; • 141 hectares of wet grassland – *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clay-silt-laden soils (*Eu-Molinion*) restored to unfavourable recovering condition; • 10 km of river restoration; • A Water Basin Management Forum established to facilitate the informed and integrated management of the New Forest SAC water basins at every level; Suitable conditions created for the regeneration of a significant further area of priority habitat. Applied to Open Forest & Inclosures and select areas outside the Perambulation boundary.
Hampshire Rural	2006 - 2008	£1.5 M (including	Restoration of a further 2000 ha of SSSI through a range of activities including large-scale stream restoration at Hawkhill Inclosure, Pitts Wood Inclosure & Markway Lawn.

Pathfinder Project		Final 4000 funding)	National Government initiative pilot to stream-line consents and improve stakeholder engagement for habitat restoration work. Applied to Open Forest & Inclosures.
Final 4000	2008 - 2009	£1.5 M (including Pathfinder Funding)	Restored approx. 1000 ha of SSSI habitat including stream and mire restoration in Howen Bottom, Milkham Inclosure and Warwickslade Cutting. Applied to Open Forest & Inclosures.
New Forest HLS Scheme	2010 to present (Due to end 2027)	~£23M to end 2020. Rolled over with ~£2M granted per annum thereafter.	On-going, but to date the HLS scheme has restored: • +20 miles of streams • +1000 ha of heath, mires and grassland • +23 miles of road verges • Provided funding & expert advice to hundreds of commoners and a range of initiatives to help commoning • LIDAR survey leading to thousands of archaeological sites being identified and recorded with an ongoing programme to manage them using volunteers • Educating the next generation with more than 18,000 children gaining a greater understanding of the New Forest • Removed/controlled range of invasive plants over an extensive area of the agreement land. Applies to Open Forest and Thrown Open Inclosures.

7.2 Introduction to ELMS

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has introduced the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), which it intends to be a cornerstone of its agricultural policy in England. Designed to replace the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, ELMS incentivises sustainable farming practices, enhances biodiversity, and addresses climate change. We have been asked to advise on which scheme or combination of schemes is most appropriate to deliver the Management Principles identified above.

ELMS consists of three main components:

- **Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI):** Rewards farmers for adopting environmentally sustainable practices.
- **Countryside Stewardship – Higher Tier (CSHT):** Focuses on actions that contribute to ecosystem recovery and local biodiversity.
- **Landscape Recovery (LR):** Supports large-scale environmental projects such as rewilding and habitat restoration.

These components aim to align agricultural activities with environmental objectives set out in the Government's 25-year Environment Plan, ensuring public funds deliver public goods such as clean air, water, and thriving wildlife populations.

There are a number of challenges presented when considering applying a land management scheme to the New Forest:

Complex Governance: as established in section 4, the land is held in multiple ownerships, and managed by multiple land managers. Stakeholders include commoners and public authorities, all of which need to be consulted on the process. This complexity can hinder decision making and the implementation of land management schemes.

Ecological Sensitivity: in section 3, we established both the complexity and importance of the habitats which require tailored management to balance conservation goals with traditional practices such as grazing.

Access and Use: Public access rights often intersect with conservation objectives, adding another layer of complexity to management efforts.

7.3 Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), has been rolled out iteratively since 2021. The most recent iteration is known as the "expanded offer for 2024". This has now closed to new applications but in the absence of knowing what will be available in 2025, we have based our research and subsequent advice on the 2024 offering and requirements.

Eligibility of Common Land for SFI

Registered common land, or land subject to rights of common, is eligible for the SFI provided it is under agricultural management. Eligibility requires that the land can support the delivery of one or more of the available SFI actions, such as soil health improvements, grassland management, or hedgerow maintenance. Where land is subject to environmental designations, additional consents from Natural England are required.

Application Process

Due to the nature of common land tenure, individual applications are not permitted unless the applicant holds exclusive rights over a defined parcel of land. For most commons, an SFI application must be submitted by a 'single entity' representing both the owners and the rights holders in relation to the scheme area.

Key requirements include:

- A single entity must apply for and hold the SFI agreement;
- It must have a legally enforceable internal agreement between the parties establishing responsibilities, payment distributions and recourse allowing DEFRA to recover payments from members personally if there is a breach;

- Each individual member who will benefit from, or contribute to, the delivery of the agreement must sign the agreement and be registered with the RPA;
- The single entity needs to be set up before an application can be made.

Implementation and Actions

SFI actions on commons must be tailored to local conditions, existing grazing practices, and any overlapping environmental designations. For example, options such as low input grassland management or assessing soil health can be applied across the common provided they align with sustainable stocking levels and the ecological character of the site.

Management plans must take account of:

- Existing common rights and seasonal grazing patterns;
- Environmental sensitivities, especially where designated features are present;
- The need for ongoing collaboration between multiple commoners and stakeholders, including statutory bodies.

Payments and Responsibilities

Under the SFI, payments are made to the main agreement holder, who is then responsible for distributing funds in accordance with the group's internal agreement. Payments are calculated based on the area of eligible land and the specific actions undertaken. The SFI agreement typically runs for a three-year term but many of the actions that would be most appropriate for the Study Areas habitats would be endorsed and may run for 5 years. Continued eligibility depends on the delivery of agreed actions and maintenance of cooperative governance.

Challenges and Considerations

While the New Forest's common land appears to be eligible for SFI, there would be many challenges associated with trying to get the common land area into an SFI agreement. The online application process is likely to be preventative due the scale and quantity of parcels involved. An internal agreement would need to be drafted and negotiated between the parties and whilst this is a likely requirement of any scheme, the resource required to achieve this is likely to be disproportionate to the scheme value, when taking into account the length of agreement. SFI is not intended to be used where habitat requirements and administrative systems are as complex as they are in the New Forest.

7.4 Countryside Stewardship (CS)

Countryside Stewardship was rolled out by DEFRA in 2014 as a successor to Environmental Stewardship. It originally had a Higher Tier and a Mid-Tier, with the more bespoke requirements associated with common land, woodland and designated sites typically only being eligible for Higher Tier. The Mid-Tier of the scheme was incorporated into the SFI expanded offer in 2024. The scheme rules concerning eligibility, available options, and payment rates have been reviewed in each year. The latest version of Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) is expected to open in the summer of 2025 (DEFRA, 2025). The scheme will offer targeted funding for land with significant environmental value, including many areas of common land. Our research and advice provided in this report is based on the guidance that DEFRA published on 25th February 2025.

Eligibility of Common Land for Higher Tier

Common land and shared grazing are eligible for CSHT agreements, provided they meet certain criteria:

- **Common land** refers to land registered as common under the Commons Act 2006 or land subject to rights of common within the meaning of that Act.
- **Shared grazing** denotes communal pasture where graziers have a legal entitlement to graze, but the land is not registered as common land.

Agreements can only include land that is part of the common or shared grazing; non-common land parcels must be applied for separately. Agreements may consist of one or more whole or part commons, provided they form a single grazing unit.

The applicant must be a single entity that represents all relevant stakeholders with the same requirements as SFI.

Application Process

Invited applicants will be able to submit an application as of summer 2025. Pre-application advice will be provided by Natural England and/or Forestry Commission. Applications for CSHT on common land or shared grazing must follow a structured process and the following requirements must be completed prior to an application being made:

- **Internal Agreement**: An internal agreement must be established and signed by all parties to the CSHT application. This document should outline each participant's responsibilities and the payments they may expect to receive.
- **Appointed Representative**: The parties must appoint a representative to act as the main business contact for the CSHT application and subsequent agreement. This individual will be responsible for maintaining the agreement on behalf of all commoners or graziers.
- **Consultation**: Prior to application, stakeholders—including landowners, common rights-holders, and other interested parties—must be consulted to ensure awareness and agreement on the proposed management activities.
- **Natural England and/or Forestry Commission Advisor**: An advisor will collaborate with applicants to develop a suitable application, providing guidance on appropriate CSHT actions and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations.
- **Consents & Permissions**: A key distinction between CSHT and former agri-environment schemes is the requirement for the applicant to obtain all regulatory consents, permissions and licences pre-application. This would include the requirement for obtaining any necessary planning applications and felling licences for the entire agreement period (10 years). This requirement is likely to be difficult if not impossible to adhere to for the Crownlands due to the complexity and time necessary to obtain planning permission for wetland restoration works. At present any felling taking place on the open forest is consented under a two-year felling licence.

Implementation and Management

Higher Tier agreements on commons are designed to support landscape-scale delivery of environmental benefits. Some of the Higher Tier actions that might be relevant to the Study Area include:

- **WD4**: Management of wood pasture and parkland (lowland)
- **GS6**: Management of species-rich grassland
- **LH1**: Management of lowland heath
- **SP6**: Grazing supplement for cattle

We have provided a schedule including all of the CSHT actions that we consider to be relevant to the study area at **Appendix H**. We have assessed each action against the Key Features.

Payments and Distribution

The Higher Tier agreement holder receives all payments and is responsible for administering the agreement and distributing funds to participating commoners. Payment rates are based on the area under management and the specific options applied.

Financial governance must be outlined in the Internal Agreement, and payments must reflect the level of participation and delivery by each party.

Challenges and Considerations

Entering Higher Tier on common land brings considerable opportunities for landscape-scale conservation and support for traditional grazing systems. However, the process is more complex and time-consuming than SFI, and it presents several key challenges:

- **Governance**: Reaching agreement among multiple stakeholders and formalising collective commitments.
- **Administrative burden**: Preparing detailed management plans and securing consents requires time and technical input. If all consents must be obtained prior to the start of the agreement, this suggests that there is limited flexibility to make adjustments to plans during the life of a scheme.
- **Long-term commitment**: Higher Tier agreements typically last 10 years, requiring sustained collaboration and delivery. If all or even just the majority of commoners are required to sign up to a 10-year management plan then this might prove difficult.
- **Monitoring and reporting**: The lead applicant must oversee compliance and record-keeping, with Natural England oversight.

Despite these challenges, Higher Tier remains a structured route for supporting the environmental management of commons and sustaining commoning culture and practice.

7.5 Landscape Recovery (LR)

The Landscape Recovery (LR) scheme is the most ambitious and large-scale component of England's Environmental Land Management (ELM) programme. It supports long-term land use change projects that deliver significant environmental outcomes, such as habitat restoration, climate resilience, and nature recovery. While not designed specifically for common land, commons and shared grazing

areas can form part of Landscape Recovery projects where the necessary collaboration and legal mechanisms can be secured. So far there have been two rounds of LR, the first round was restricted to large scale projects delivering environmental and climate focused outcomes with Rivers being the main theme. The second round approved 34 projects that focused on achieving net zero, protected sites and wildlife-rich habitats.

Eligibility of Common Land for Landscape Recovery

Common land may be included in a Landscape Recovery project provided it meets the general LR criteria:

- Projects must deliver public goods at scale, such as biodiversity improvement, carbon sequestration, water quality, and flood risk reduction.
- Common land is eligible where it forms part of the project's core delivery area and where rights-holders are willing to participate.

Eligibility considerations include:

- The common land must be legally and practically capable of supporting long-term land use change.
- The project must have a clear environmental objective that aligns with national LR priorities (e.g. species recovery, habitat connectivity, nature-based flood mitigation).
- Consent and cooperation must be obtained from all affected landowners and rights-holders.

Application Process and Structure

Landscape Recovery operates through multi-phase competitive rounds, with funding available for both project development (project preparation) and long-term delivery. Commons may be included in LR applications if legal and collaborative arrangements can be put in place to allow for secure, long-term land use change.

For common land to be included:

- All commoners and landowners whose rights and interests are affected must consent to participation;
- A legal entity (such as a charitable trust, community interest company, or partnership) should lead the application and hold responsibility for delivery;
- The project must have clear governance structures, with documented agreements on management, finance, and land use change;
- Projects must demonstrate they can deliver measurable, long-term environmental outcomes over 20+ years.

Where commons are involved, the application must clearly show how traditional rights (e.g. grazing) will be adjusted or managed to meet environmental goals, and how rights-holders will be compensated or supported during the transition.

Implementation and Management

The implementation of LR projects on common land is inherently complex due to shared use and overlapping rights. However, with effective collaboration, common land can offer a valuable foundation for large-scale ecological restoration, particularly in areas of high natural value or degraded habitats.

Examples of LR-compatible actions on common land may include:

- Restoration of peatland, wet heath, or lowland bog;
- Rewilding of undergrazed or ecologically sensitive uplands;
- Catchment-scale water quality improvement through land use reconfiguration;
- Creation of climate-resilient habitats that support carbon storage and biodiversity.

Projects may also include modifications to grazing regimes, scrub or woodland regeneration, and changes to land management infrastructure.

In all cases, formal consent and regulatory approval (e.g. from Natural England or Planning Authorities) will be required where designated sites or protected features are present.

Funding and Payments

Landscape Recovery provides two types of funding:

- Project Development Funding: To support feasibility studies, legal agreements, governance design, and baseline monitoring.
- Implementation Funding: For agreed land use changes and long-term delivery of environmental outcomes.

Payment structures are flexible and may include capital works, maintenance payments, and outcome-based funding over long periods. For common land, payments must be carefully structured to reflect the rights, contributions, and impacts on different commoners or stakeholders. Agreements on payment distribution must be formalised within the project governance and should reflect fair compensation for loss or change of use of grazing rights.

Challenges and Considerations

Including common land in Landscape Recovery projects offers significant potential but comes with specific challenges:

- Legal complexity: Securing long-term land use change on commons may require modification or temporary suspension of grazing rights.
- Collaboration and governance: Multi-party agreements and community engagement are essential for delivery and legitimacy.
- Land use transition: Traditional practices may need to adapt, requiring support for commoners and assurance of ongoing cultural and economic viability.
- Monitoring and compliance: Projects must deliver measurable outcomes and maintain transparency over decades.

Despite these challenges, commons can play a pivotal role in landscape-scale restoration, especially where commoning traditions are strong and stakeholders are motivated by long-term environmental benefits.

7.6 Land eligibility (Inclosures)

Based on our interpretation of the most recently published guidance for CSHT the inclosures meet many of the requirements such as being a minimum of 0.5ha , with a width of at least 20m. There would need to be a 10-year woodland management plan in place, which is likely to be covered by management plans that Forestry England already have in place.

Under CSHT you can apply for CWD2 (Woodland improvement) and associated woodland supplements to support the sustainable management of woodland in line with the UK Forestry Standard. You can also use other species actions, access actions and capital items to support your woodland management objectives.

The main concern over the New Forest Inclosures eligibility is whether there is an overlap with the Forestry Commission's own responsibilities (falling foul of the statutory duty rule), if management would conflict with existing requirements under the New Forest Acts, and/or may count as double funding if the activities are already covered by other funding sources.

Further, for whatever duration the Inclosures remain extant and identified as such, these areas will be distinct from common land. This is because these areas are free from all rights of common (among other rights) and would likely have to be treated separately to the common land/shared grazing lands for the purposes of CSHT.

Whether land remains enclosed is a matter for the Forestry Commission. These are niche and potentially detailed legal points, which goes beyond the scope of our present instructions. It might be that Forestry England can seek its own legal advice on this matter.

7.7 Requirements of a Land Management Scheme in the New Forest

The development of a future agri-environment scheme for the New Forest must be carefully designed to reflect the area's distinctive ecological, legal, and cultural context. While the landscape's scale is regarded as a significant ecological strength, it has presented considerable administrative challenges for those attempting to apply regulations and systems originally designed for more typical landholdings. In addition to its scale, the New Forest comprises a complex and evolving mosaic of habitats, shaped by ecological succession, traditional land management practices, and the growing impacts of climate change.

There has long been a call for a bespoke agri-environment scheme that is both flexible and tailored to the unique characteristics of the New Forest. In the absence of an opportunity to discuss the terms of such a scheme directly with DEFRA during the course of this study, we have set out below the key areas where flexibility and deviation from requirements traditionally imposed by previous schemes and management agreements are considered essential.

Flexible prescriptions

A primary requirement is that scheme prescriptions must not be geographically restrictive. Sufficient flexibility is needed to accommodate natural and management-driven changes across the landscape. For example, scrub should be permitted to rotate across the area, and changes in land cover should be supported. Some areas of grassland may be allowed to transition into scrub and eventually woodland, while certain areas of wood pasture may naturally evolve into more open grassland habitats. The scheme must enable these dynamic changes rather than attempt to fix land use types in place.

Dedicated application support

The volume and complexity of data associated with the Rural Land Register for the scheme area have historically caused significant difficulties with the Rural Payments Agency's (RPA) systems. We do not believe that it will be feasible to submit an application through the Rural Payments Service or any other standard online portal. It is therefore recommended that the RPA provide bespoke, tailored support to the a New Forest applicaiton.

Permissions, licences and consents

Given the administrative and ecological complexity of the New Forest, it is not practical for all permissions and consents to be secured before an agreement commences. Major environmental projects, such as wetland restoration, require extensive planning and community engagement, which cannot begin until there is a firm funding commitment. Therefore, the scheme must allow for staged permissions, recognising that some elements will be developed post-agreement.

Flexible grazing system support

Grazing remains an essential tool for managing the designated features of the New Forest. The Verderers have both the powers and a proven track record in administering the grazing system and supporting commoners. It is critical that financial and administrative support to the commoning system remains flexible. Local governance should retain the ability to adjust support mechanisms annually, to prevent perverse incentives and ensure the scheme's objectives continue to be met effectively.

Commoner participation

Due to the nature of the common rights system in the New Forest, it is not feasible to expect all rights holders to become signatories to a management agreement. Many rights holders are non-practicing and may be unaware of their rights; moreover, as the New Forest common land is not formally registered as a common, there is no central record of these individuals. Among the approximately 640 practicing commoners, there is a wide diversity in how rights are exercised and in personal motivations. Some individuals are unlikely to ever engage with a formal agreement. Consequently, it should not be a requirement for all practicing commoners to be party to a management or internal agreement. Crucially, our research suggests that grazing pressure can be effectively managed through behavioural influence and local governance mechanisms. A successful grazing scheme does not depend on 100% commoner participation.

Length of stakeholder commitment

While many stakeholders recognise the benefits of longer-term agreements (up to 30 years), many commoners expressed a preference for shorter-term arrangements that allow for greater flexibility. Feedback from our consultation indicated that the inclusion of break clauses, periodic reviews, and a governance model that enables local voices to shape scheme delivery would significantly improve confidence and encourage commitment to longer-term participation. The existing annual sign-up to the Verderers Grazing Scheme (VGS) has seen participation from over 500 practicing commoners, demonstrating the viability of shorter-term, flexible models.

Capital grants on land outside of the scheme area

Although commoners' holdings are typically located outside of the areas directly covered by any scheme operating over the common land, these holdings play a fundamental role in sustaining the grazing system. The Verderers Small Grant Scheme could be expanded to offer greater support for welfare, safety, and environmental improvements on these holdings, ensuring the broader infrastructure underpinning the grazing system is adequately maintained and enhanced.

7.8 ELM Conclusion

The Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) represents an opportunity to align agricultural practices with environmental objectives across England. Its effective application to common land, however, requires a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities such landscapes present. By fostering collaboration, streamlining administrative processes, and addressing specific barriers to entry, DEFRA can ensure that ELMS contributes meaningfully to the sustainable management of common land, benefiting both the environment and rural communities.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is not currently designed to accommodate landscapes of the complexity seen in the New Forest. Similarly, while the Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) may offer a more structured framework, it is likely to prove too prescriptive for this setting. If DEFRA is willing to make appropriate allowances—permitting exceptions to standard application requirements without exposing agreements to legal challenges, CSHT could provide a viable structure to build upon. Based on our discussions with stakeholders, we are of the opinion that the payment rates potentially available under a modified scheme could be sufficient to deliver the intended environmental outcomes. However, we consider the reduced rates currently received under the Verderers Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement to be inadequate for achieving those objectives.

The Landscape Recovery (LR) scheme offers significantly greater flexibility and would enable all of Forestry England's Inclosures to be incorporated under a single management agreement—maximising the potential for improving habitat connectivity across the Forest. However, uncertainty surrounding the availability of a third round of LR funding raises concerns about its viability as an option. The scheme's two-year development phase would allow time and resources to be dedicated to establishing an effective governance structure. Nevertheless, large areas of land are already outside any agreement, and with the Crown Lands HLS agreement due to expire in February 2028, there is a real risk of a funding gap. Even if an LR application were submitted in 2026, it is likely that interim funding would still be required to ensure continuity of environmental management.

8 Governance Structures

A successful Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme in the New Forest should be supported by a governance structure that reflects the area's habitat mosaic, traditional management practices, land ownership and existing governance structures. Governance must allow for effective and accountable decision-making while respecting the rights and responsibilities of multiple landowners, commoners and statutory bodies.

8.1 The Need for a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)

To coordinate delivery across multiple funding sources and ensure cohesive management of the landscape, this study recommends establishing a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV). The SPV would act as a legal entity capable of entering into funding agreements, commissioning land management activities, and holding collective responsibilities for monitoring and delivery.

The SPV would serve as:

- A central body to contract and administer grant funding;
- A platform to represent stakeholder interests and facilitate coordinated decision-making;
- A mechanism for collective compliance and risk management, helping insulate individual landowners from liabilities associated with breaches in complex funding agreements;
- And finally, a long-term custodian of a shared management plan for the New Forest common land.

8.2 Recommended Legal Structure

Following legal advice from Michelmores LLP, two governance models were evaluated in greater detail:

1. A private company, limited by guarantee
2. A community interest company (CIC), limited by guarantee

Each option offers different strengths depending on priorities. The CIC provides additional safeguards through an asset lock and community purpose test, which may be attractive to certain donors. However, it comes with greater administrative obligations and less flexibility. The company limited by guarantee offers a simpler, more flexible structure with fewer reporting requirements fitting the current emphasis on minimising administrative burden while enabling adaptation over time.

Recommendation: A company limited by guarantee is currently the preferred structure, with the option to evolve into a CIC if public perception or funder requirements suggest it would be advantageous.

8.3 Key Features of the SPV

Regardless of legal structure, we advise that the SPV should:

- Be non-profit distributing, with profits reinvested into land management objectives;

- Be capable of entering into multi-party agreements, including with government agencies and private funders;
- Maintain a management plan for the New Forest common as a core policy document;
- Facilitate centralised delivery of habitat restoration, grazing support, and nature recovery initiatives;
- Accumulate reserves to support long-term delivery and reduce reliance on short-term grants;
- Be structured to allow landowners to retain control over their own land, with engagement based on voluntary participation.

8.4 Governance and Representation

The governance model must ensure representation of the three principal stakeholder groups: landowners, the Verderers and commoners.

The SPV board should be composed of individuals representing these interests, with flexibility to include observers or non-voting participants where appropriate. Current options under consideration include:

1. A board of directors with voting representatives from landowners and Verderers;
2. Observers from the Commoners' Defence Association (CDA) or other commoning bodies;
3. Threshold voting rules or "reserved matters" that require wider consultation or supermajority agreement for major decisions;
4. A consultation protocol embedded in governance documents to ensure that all decisions affecting land use and cultural practices are informed by those directly affected.

It is recognised that commoners have differing views on how best to be represented, with some favouring the Verderers and others preferring the CDA. The governance structure should therefore remain flexible to adapt to potential evolving views on representation. A briefing note produced for New Park Consultancy by Michelmores LLP on the potential governance structures can be seen at **Appendix I.**

8.5 Next Steps

Establishing the SPV will require the following actions:

1. Drafting and agreeing Articles of Association;
2. Consulting stakeholders to confirm board composition and voting procedures;
3. Defining the relationship between the SPV and a Common Management Plan, to ensure that the management plan remains relevant;
4. Exploring resourcing options for early-stage operation of the SPV (e.g. initial member contributions, pilot grant funding).

A well-designed SPV will allow the New Forest to deliver the Management Principles and the objectives of the various stakeholders. It is hoped that it would also provide a platform for coordinated, long-term stewardship rooted in local governance.

9 Conclusion

The Key Features of the Study Area have been clearly identified, and it is evident that the single grazed unit, defined as the contiguous area of land actively managed through commoning, should serve as the primary geographical focus for future support. However, this unit does not operate in isolation. Its ecological integrity and long-term resilience are closely interconnected with the adjacent landscape, including land for back-up grazing and other connected areas. It is therefore essential that appropriate support is also extended to the surrounding areas, which play a vital role in maintaining the broader ecological and cultural fabric of the Forest.

The management principles outlined in this report should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders and form the foundation for decisions regarding scheme design and participation. To enable a coherent and unified approach to land and grazing management across the single grazed unit, we recommend the development and adoption of a comprehensive Management Plan. This Plan should:

- Place the Key Features identified in this study at its core;
- Embed an agreed set of management principles;
- Be developed through robust and inclusive consultation with stakeholders, including landowners, land managers, tenants, and common right holders;
- Clearly allocate responsibilities and establish working groups where collaborative action is required;
- Define the criteria and expectations for any environmental schemes intended to support the Key Features;
- Articulate key aspirations, including any significant capital works or proposed land use changes;
- Set out how the commoning system should be supported to continue delivering appropriate and sustainable extensive grazing;
- Function as a dynamic, living document, subject to regular review and refinement through continued stakeholder engagement.

With such a Management Plan in place, it will be significantly easier to enter into and administer one or more agri-environment schemes. Furthermore, it will provide a clear framework for determining which schemes are most suitable for implementation.

While the Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) offers relevant actions and a structured process for any agreement development, its application process may prove overly prescriptive and insufficiently adaptable to the unique context of the New Forest. The Landscape Recovery scheme offers greater flexibility; however, the requirement for a two-year development phase poses a risk of the Crown Lands temporarily falling out of scheme coverage, an outcome with potentially negative implications.

We believe that the governance structure is the foundation for considered and collaborative decision making in relation to future land management funding in the New Forest. It will be important to ensure that any governance structure provides effective, representative oversight and is given a clear purpose and focus from the outset.

Our recommendation is that a company limited by guarantee is the most appropriate structure to put in place as it offers the greatest flexibility and is relatively simple to administer in comparison to other structures.

We believe that ELMS can play an essential role in funding significant habitat management enhancement on an unprecedented scale in the UK. In order to achieve this, DEFRA and the FFG members will need to work closely together to deliver the greatest level of public benefit within the funding streams available. The key to this will be a dedicated line of communication with DEFRA, and it's supporting agencies, as well as the ability to deliver at such a scale.