AM 742/26

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 23 JULY 2026

BUDGET UPDATE 2026/27

Report by: Nigel Stone, Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Summary:

The Authority's original 2026/27 Budget was approved by Members in March 2026 (AM 735/26); this paper gives Members an update on the Authority's Budget for 2026/27 following confirmation of our core capital grant and a one-off revenue uplift.

A draft of this report was taken to the June Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and they have recommended approval of its content by the full Authority today.

Recommendation:

Members are requested to:

Approve the suggested additions to the 2026/27 Budget.

1. Budget Update 2026/27

1.1. Following the 2026/27 Budget being approved by members at the Authority meeting in March, both the core capital grant (£1.4m) and one-off revenue uplift (£1.7m) for the financial year have since been confirmed by Defra; below are the exact amounts and corresponding expenditure proposals for each from Officers.

1.2. Officers are still currently awaiting the formal grant agreement documentation from Defra, however due to the delays in that from a legal standpoint, they have recently paid over 50% of each of the grant amounts for the year to the Authority (with the final 50% due to be paid in early October).

1.3 All 2026/27 Defra funding must be spent during the financial year, not just be allocated, that is for goods or services to be fully and verifiably received on or before 31 March 2027. The Authority can however choose to prioritise the use of the Defra grants over use of its own earned income as set out in the plans below.

2. Protected Landscapes Capital Investment Fund 2026/27

2.1 The 2026/27 capital core grant has been confirmed as £1,406,722 – an equal split of funds amongst the ten English National Parks. The same amount has been set indicatively for the following two financial years. As previously, the funds must be spent on capital assets and for the purposes of either furthering 30x30 and/or income generation / invest-to-save.

2.2 The 2026/27 funding will be utilised in line with the Authority's Capital Strategy approved by Members in July 2025 and is overseen by a Capital Projects Group of senior officers from across the teams. As with all capital programmes, project details, dates and amounts are prone to change far more frequently than with revenue expenditure, plus are often subject to confidential elements/negotiations, and therefore an element of flexibility and manoeuvrability is required by officers within the overall approved budget parameters.

2.3 For 2026/27 it is proposed that our capital grant is used to fund (all figures estimated at this stage):

Foxlease, development of two properties ready for rental (as per original plans set out to the Authority last year)	c£420,000
Completion of website microsites and ICT replacement & renewals	c£80,000
Purchase of land/properties for main office and/or 30x30 and/or income generation opportunities.	c£900,000

2.4 These budgets will be closely monitored through the year by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

3. One-off Revenue Uplift 2026/27

3.1 The 2026/27 one-off revenue uplift has been confirmed as £1,720,000 – an equal split of funds amongst the ten English National Parks. Funds are to be utilised to further the financial stability and/or strategic goals of the Authority.

3.2 It is proposed that this is used to fund:

Offsetting existing earned income for 2026/27 to enable funds to be set aside in a Financial Stability Reserve for future years – will currently balance our full Medium-Term Financial Plan	£1,100,000
Develop baselines and evidence-based support for the new Partnership Plan development (place shaping)	£175,000

Complete remaining Green Links studies for the southern coastal area, Avon Valley and northern forest, plus a focus on the key links in the Core of the National Park and develop project list from the existing Waterside study	£100,000
Extend staff on short-term contracts ending in 2026/27 until end of the year (YouCAN, Comms, Volunteering, including support services), using this additional resource to develop strategic service plans for their teams	£110,000
Procure consultancy support for Officers / Members to develop and implement a full Income Generation Strategy for the Authority. To include initial analysis of our new Power of Competence opportunities / risks	£80,000
Develop an Organisational Development Strategy, delivered via our People Plan to include internal comms / values / brand / team reviews. Deliver initial investment in Learning & Development (for Staff and Members) this year	£80,000
Added to 2026/27 Programme Fund to be allocated in-year – likely support for future of Commoning, study into place shaping and landscape design in light of devolution, summer campaigns/NF Code messaging	£75,000

3.3 These budgets will be closely monitored through the year by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

Recommendation:

Members are requested to:

Approve the suggested additions to the 2026/27 Budget.

Contact: **Nigel Stone,** nigel.stone@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Previous papers: **AM 735/26 Budget 2026/27**