

AM 743/26

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 23 JULY 2026**

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PARTNERSHIP PLAN REVIEW

Report by: Paul Walton, Head of Environment & Rural Economy

Summary:

All National Park Authorities are required to have a Management Plan for their area to help guide the collective work of all those with responsibilities or an interest in the National Park. It is arguably the single most important document for the National Park, setting out the overall vision and approach in delivering the two national park purposes and duty. The New Forest National Park Management Plan – now known as the Partnership Plan – is due to be updated in 2027.

This report provides an update on the approach to reviewing the Partnership Plan, for publication in July 2027. We will be looking to 2050 and the work that will be needed to ensure the special qualities of the National Park are nurtured for future generations

Recommendation

Members to note the content of this report

1 Review of the Partnership Plan

- 1.1 The current version of the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan runs to 2027. The Environment Act 1995 prescribes that “*every national park authority shall review its national park management plan at intervals of not more than five years*” and submit the Plan to the Secretary of State. The central role of the current Plan is to guide and coordinate the work of all those with an interest and influence in the National Park in delivering the National Park purposes and duty. It is a Plan for the place, not the National Park Authority.
- 1.2 Over the next six months we will be working with partners to prepare a draft Plan that can be consulted on by February next year, endorsed by partners in May/June and published in July 2027.
- 1.3 Defra guidance on management plans for Protected Landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes) sets out requirements that should apply to all Protected Landscapes. As well as this national guidance the Plan will also reflect feedback from local stakeholders, many of whom regularly highlight issues specific to the New Forest that are not suitably reflected in national targets and monitoring.

2 **National requirements**

The national guidance on management plans for Protected Landscapes in England requires the NPA to:

2.1 **Produce a climate adaptation plan by 2028**

Climate change is perhaps the single most important issue facing the National Park. The risks to the habitats and species, heritage and landscape that make up the special qualities of the New Forest National Park are set out in a Climate Risks and Opportunities Assessment produced in 2025. This assessment will be the basis of the climate adaptation plan and the Partnership Plan will highlight key actions to mitigate and adapt to our changing climate.

2.2 A topical example is the recent agreement by all National Park Authorities to include wildfire management in future Partnership Plans. This will include specific wildfire management objectives that drive action across partner organisations.

2.3 **Align the monitoring of the Plans' targets and indicators with the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)**

We have national targets and measures agreed in 2024 and to be included in the new Partnership Plan, to reflect the role of Protected Landscapes in delivering the aims of the UK Environment Improvement Plan 2025. These include targets for thriving plants and wildlife; mitigating and adapting to climate change and enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment. In consultation with the Partnership Plan Officers group and Leaders Panel we have set the local ambition for three of these targets:

- Protect and restore wildlife-rich habitats outside of Protected Sites (eg SSSIs) by 2042 – 4000ha by 2042 (average 235 ha / yr)
- Restore peat by 2050 – 20ha by 2050 (0.8ha/yr)
- Tree and woodland cover by 2050 - 550ha by 2050 (22ha/yr)

2.4 Other local targets for the National Park will also be established (see below)

2.5 **Comply with the biodiversity duty set out in the Environment Act 2021**

Since 1 January 2023, all public authorities have been under a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The NPA has since reported annually on this, but National Park Authorities have the option of including information about how they have complied with the biodiversity duty in the National Park Management Plan reporting and monitoring. Consequently, we will examine how the review of the Partnership Plan can incorporate the biodiversity duty.

2.6 **Identify the factors that are likely to drive change in the National Park, now and over the next 5 years**

The following "Major issues" were set out in the current Partnership Plan:

- Climate and nature emergencies
- Responding to recreational pressures
- Traffic and Transport
- Commoning, farming and land management
- Affordable housing
- Connecting with people
- Working together

2.7 A Partnership Plan Leaders Panel workshop in March reviewed these current themes, noting the local importance of issues such as future agri-environment funding to support commoning, recreation management and climate change (including flooding).

2.8 Formally consult on the management plan.

We will use established channels to consult with stakeholders, such as the Partnership Plan Leaders Panel, Parish quadrant meetings, New Forest Consultative Panel and Youth Board; plus workshops and meetings with interest groups, many of whom have made regular representations regarding the current Plan (eg the New Forest Association), to further examine these key issues, the data and evidence available to inform future actions and effective monitoring. Members days will be offered on key areas of interest.

2.9 The New Forest Show at the end of July will be an opportunity to begin to seek views from the wider public.

3. Local issues and opportunities – developing a shared vision

Local Government Reorganisation

3.1 The Partnership Plan is for the place and there are many organisations and audiences who can and will support the delivery of actions to achieve its ambitions, with statutory bodies having a “duty to further” the purposes of the National Park when carrying out their actions. Achieving a truly shared vision is the key to ensuring partners take action to help achieve it.

3.2 The timetable for local government reorganisation in Hampshire presents a challenge in ensuring the continued support for and engagement in the Partnership Plan by our local authority partners. Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and Test Valley Borough Council are due to be replaced by new administrative organisations from 2028. We will continue to work with our existing local authority partners and the shadow bodies for the new authorities as the anticipated changes take effect. The current plan was formally adopted by Authorities and Statutory Partners and we will want to do the same with the next iteration.

Key Local priorities

3.3 The factors likely to drive change referred to in para 2.6 above are broad in scope but there are a number of local priorities that have been highlighted over the

period of the current Partnership Plan that will continue to be a focus for action. These include:

- **Nature recovery**

The ReNew Nature Partnership helped identify the key areas for nature recovery, adding a spatial dimension of the “Core and Four” that will continue to guide our nature recovery work.



Our recent Species Survival Fund project restored 243 hectares of wildlife habitat and created a further 21 hectares, delivered in partnership with landowners and conservation bodies. We can build on this experience to ensure the Partnership Plan is an effective framework for nature recovery in the New Forest, looking beyond the national 30by30 targets and ensuring investment is targeted in this world capital for wildlife.

- **The future of commoning**

Changes to agricultural policy have yet to provide the support needed to ensure New Forest commoning can continue. Grazing livestock are critical to the management of the New Forests' open heathland habitats but the ability of commoners to maintain cattle herds is under severe pressure. Ensuring commoners are adequately supported for the services they provide in the New Forest will be a primary focus of the next Partnership Plan.

- **The quality of freshwater habitats**

The Campaign for National Parks Rivers at Risk report in 2025 put a focus on the declining trend in water quality in National Parks. Yet the New Forest has some of the cleanest waters in lowland England. These headwater streams, ponds and water bodies need to be the foundation from which to drive improvements to water quality into wider area.

- **The level of financial investment in the environment of the National Park**

Nature recovery and the provision of facilities for recreation costs money and we need to ensure that the National Park is receiving the level of investment from

public, private, philanthropic and commercial sources that it needs to deliver everything that is expected of it.

- **Traffic and transport**
One of the key ways new development in the region affects the national park is through increased traffic and transport. Added to existing traffic, this results in increased impacts on the National Park including on wildlife, tranquillity, air and water quality, commoning, local communities and the visitor experience. Transport is also the largest contributor of local carbon emissions. The Partnership plan provides a focus for collaboration of effort to reduce the impact through better sustainable transport information, integration and infrastructure.
- **Recreation management**
The benefits to health and wellbeing of spending time in nature are increasingly understood and the New Forest is readily accessible to many who are seeking those benefits. As the population local to the National Park continues to grow the need for investment in local greenspace and appropriate recreation facilities increases.
- **Green skills and jobs and the next generation**
The knowledge and skills required to develop and support a society that protects the natural environment and is resilient are in demand and the National Park is a key area in which to inspire interest in green careers. Partnership working can unlock new investment in programmes, training and youth initiatives to help people experience and learn skills that provide resilience for the future of the New Forest.

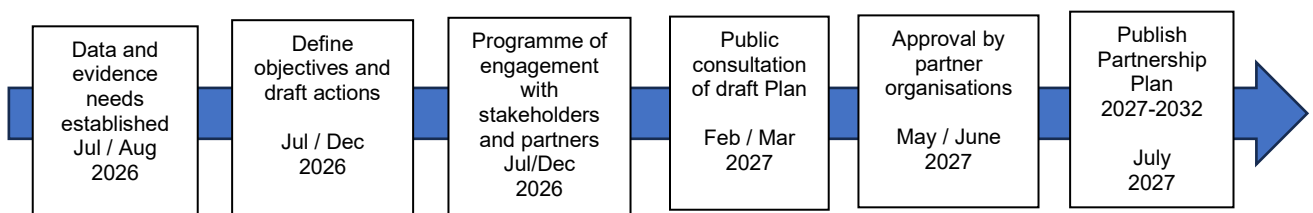
4 Data and evidence

- 4.1 The Protected Landscapes Partnership, a collaboration between National Parks England, the National Landscapes Association, National Trails UK and Natural England has been established to provide data and evidence that can inform Partnership Plans, particularly regarding the PLTOF and SSSIs. We also receive data on progress towards the National Park's net zero pathway.
- 4.2 Locally, the county records centres provide the NPA with biological data and can share data from the Local Nature Recovery Strategies. We will also draw on the information sources for the State of the Park report, the emerging Local Plan and the Climate Risks and Opportunities Report. Key partners will be able to provide data on water quality and Water Framework Directive condition assessments.
- 4.3 Particular themes will require us to commission evidence bespoke to the New Forest including:
 - Establishing a spatial understanding of opportunities for nature recovery and recreation in the National Park and beyond the Park boundary
 - Establishing a statement of account for nature recovery in the New Forest, including the need for maintenance as well as habitat creation.

- Assessing the costs and benefits associated with commoning as key component of nature recovery in the National Park
- Scoping the opportunities for financial investment in the New Forest additional to public funding
- Understanding interactions between National Park and surrounding areas for the delivery of objectives for climate, nature, people and place

5 Partnership Plan timetable

5.1 Our aim is to have the new Partnership Plan published in the summer of 2027 with an indicative timetable as shown below:



Recommendation:

Members to note the content of this report

Papers:

AM 732/26- Future Partnership Plan

Equality and Diversity Implications:

There are no specific equality or diversity implications arising out of this report.

Contact:

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