

RAPC 603/26

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 7 SEPTEMBER 2026

GRANT FUNDING UPDATE – September 2026

Report by: Fiona Wynne, Grants Officer and Jim Mitchell, Access and Learning Manager

1 Summary:

- 1.1 The New Forest National Park Authority has a strong track record of securing grants to deliver our Partnership Plan work and leverage our own core Business Plan / Defra National Park Grant.
- 1.2 This paper updates members on several key grant funding initiatives and requests members' approval for future grant funded opportunities. The Authority's Scheme of Delegation requires all formal funding bids over £50,000 to be approved by this Committee.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The Authority has always had a strategic focus on securing external funding to support our work in delivering our core purposes and socio-economic duty and the objectives of the Partnership Plan.
- 2.2 Our annual target is to achieve 20%+ of total income derived from sources other than the Defra National Park Grants – our result for 2025/26 was 36%. These funds support the work of the Authority and its partners to deliver landscape-scale improvements. Externally-funded revenue is particularly important, both so as to directly deliver with staff on the ground in the National Park and to consider / develop those future larger capital-funded schemes.

3 Landscape Connections

- 3.1 Good progress continues to be made in developing the Landscape Connections proposal with the Re:New Nature Partnership. The National Lottery Heritage Fund approved the Expression of Interest in December 2025 and invited the National Park Authority to submit a development phase application. The proposal could secure up to £10 million over ten years to support the New Forest National Park as a working landscape that is better for nature and people, more able to welcome people from all backgrounds, and capable of delivering significant and enduring improvement.

- 3.2 The proposal is focused on the practical conditions needed to support lasting change across the New Forest National Park. This includes stronger governance, skills, investment, collaboration and delivery capacity, so that benefits can continue beyond the lifetime of individual projects. Through the Re:New Nature Partnership, the programme is being shaped around nature recovery, connected habitats, inclusion, access and participation, and the long-term stewardship of the New Forest National Park.
- 3.3 Recent work has concentrated on evidence gathering and partner / community engagement. This has drawn on learning from previous projects, partnership plans, specialist reports, workshops, surveys and discussions with partners. The work has helped clarify the main pressures affecting the New Forest National Park and identify where longer-term investment and collective action could make the greatest difference.
- 3.4 The application is currently being prepared for submission to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in November 2026. This work is also helping inform wider discussions about the future National Park Partnership Plan and the long-term role of organisations and communities in caring for the New Forest. If successful, the development phase would then begin as soon as possible in 2027.

4. Youth for Climate and Nature

- 4.1 The Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN) programme concludes at the end of August, marking the completion of a three-year, £1.4 million partnership programme led by the New Forest National Park Authority and supported by The National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund. Working with partners across the New Forest and surrounding urban areas, the programme delivered more than 700 activity sessions and supported over 28,000 participations including over 10,000 young people aged 11-25. Activities included ranger programmes, internships and volunteering opportunities to creative projects, festivals and the establishment of the New Forest Youth Board. Early evaluation findings indicate that the programme has been highly successful in increasing young people's understanding of climate and nature issues, strengthening their connection to nature, and motivating them to take positive action within their communities.
- 4.2 To ensure the programme's benefits are not lost as funding ends, additional funds of £117,000 have been secured from The National Lottery Community Fund. This represents a 10% uplift on the original grant of £1.17 million. This opportunity is focused on embedding learning, strengthening legacy and supporting a smooth transition beyond the life of the grant. Planned activities include refining and extending climate literacy training, developing accredited learning opportunities, supporting youth-focused conferences and networks, capturing evidence and case studies, and preserving resources, partnerships and approaches developed through YouCAN. The emphasis is on consolidating what has been achieved, understanding what worked best, and creating a platform for future action rather than simply bringing the project to a close.

5. Local Enterprise Partnership Legacy Funds– Supporting the Future of the New Forest Tour

- 5.1 In March, members gave officers delegated authority to progress with the application 'Supporting the Future of the New Forest Tour', which is seeking funding from Hampshire County Council, who are administering the allocation of former Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) legacy reserves. The funds support projects that deliver sustainable economic growth, infrastructure resilience and long-term value for Hampshire.
- 5.2 The project comprises a **£2.29 million** application to the fund to cover purchase and conversion of three new electric open-top buses, electric charging infrastructure at Lymington, future-proofing electrification of the fleet and new branding, fit-out audio commentary. The funding request is matched with £1.45m revenue (income) funding from the operation of the Tour over 10 years.
- 5.3 The bid has been successful and HCC's cabinet approved the project to go ahead at its meeting on 7 July. We are awaiting further details on the due diligence that HCC will require regards subsidy control processes and have done some initial work internally to investigate the best way to ensure that the project complies with subsidy control regulations and also protects the Authority from risk.
- 5.4 A paper to a subsequent RAPC will set out the final proposals with financial, legal and governance arrangements for approval.

6. Landscape Enhancement Initiative (National Grid) Fund

- 6.1 In March 2024, Members gave approval of three applications to the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) Fund; Breamore Railway Line, New Forest Woods & Heaths and Franchises Further Improvements. All three applications were confirmed successful, bringing in much needed funds for staffing and delivering landscape restoration projects on the ground.
- 6.2 The Breamore Railway Line project is halfway through year two and is progressing well with much of the underlying survey work complete and path works already underway. The New Forest Woods and Heaths started in March 2026 and we are waiting for permissions before works start at Holbury Manor. Franchises Further Improvements has more recently been approved and will begin in February 2027.
- 6.3 Applications to the LEI scheme are welcome until 2031 and we intend to take full advantage of this funding source by submitting a new £300,000 project proposal every year. We seek member approval to agree this annual application strategy, with the next likely project, in partnership with HCC, returning to the Breamore Railway line for further landscape improvements to access and nature. Projects in year three will be determined and members kept informed, they will be aligned with the Partnership Plan and other initiatives such as Landscape Connections and the 'green links' studies that are looking at how the core of the Forest is connected to the areas surrounding it.

7. Other funding updates

- 7.1 Following member's approval of an education / youth-focussed application to The National Lottery Community Fund's Reaching Communities Fund, our Expression of Interest was developed into a full application, and this was submitted in July. The project is called '**Rooted in the future**' and we now await the outcome and, if successful, we intend to start the project in early 2027.
- 7.2 In further National Lottery Community Fund news, members may recall an education-based Expression of Interest for **£3 million** was submitted by all 15 UK national Parks for submission to the National Lottery Community Fund's UK Fund, that would result in circa £75k per year per Park for three years – unfortunately this was not approved for the next stage yet, but feedback has been given which can enable an adapted version to be submitted in future.
- 7.3 As discussed at the Authority meeting in July, Nigel Stone is currently working up a proposal for a new multi-year Income Generation Strategy for the Authority. This will likely involve an initial independent review by consultants as to our current position in terms of all fundraising (much wider than just grants) and the 'art of the possible' for us moving forward into this space. The subsequent project phase will focus around upskilling our internal resources to achieve the agreed plan and/or what external support / systems / processes we will need to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That members:

- (i) **note the contents of the update report; and**
- (ii) **approve the continuing programme of applications to the National Grid to support our current and future Partnership Plan and work programme.**

Equality and Diversity Implications:

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

Contact: Fiona Wynne
fiona.wynne@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Jim Mitchell
jim.mitchell@newforestnpa.gov.uk