

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PLANNING COMMITTEE – 13 OCTOBER 2026

REVIEW OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY LOCAL ENFORCEMENT PLAN

Report by: Lucie Cooper, Planning Enforcement Manager

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The New Forest National Park Authority adopted its current Local Enforcement Plan in June 2013. Since then, there have been significant changes in national planning policy, planning legislation, enforcement powers, working practices, public expectations and the way in which planning information is communicated and accessed. The adopted Plan therefore requires updating to ensure that it remains relevant, accurate and effective.
- 1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance continue to emphasise the importance of local planning authorities publishing local enforcement plans to explain how alleged breaches of planning control will be investigated, prioritised and resolved. The revised Local Enforcement Plan reflects the Authority's current approach and ensures that the service remains transparent, proportionate and aligned with national guidance.
- 1.3 The revised document has been prepared following a comprehensive review of the Authority's existing Enforcement Plan, consideration of current national guidance, review of enforcement plans adopted by other local planning authorities, and extensive officer input across a range of planning, legal, governance and communications functions.

2. Purpose of the Review

- 2.1 Planning enforcement plays an important role in maintaining public confidence in the planning system and helping to protect the special qualities of the New Forest National Park. The Authority receives a significant number of reports relating to alleged breaches of planning control each year and it is important that those affected by enforcement investigations clearly understand how the process operates.
- 2.2 The principal objective of the review has been to create a document that is more than simply a statement of enforcement priorities. The revised Plan is intended to become the Authority's primary source of information on planning enforcement processes, procedures and powers.
- 2.3 The revised document has therefore been designed to:
 - explain clearly what planning enforcement can and cannot do;
 - provide realistic expectations regarding timescales and outcomes;
 - improve transparency and understanding of enforcement decision-making;

- assist complainants, landowners, agents, applicants, parish councils and members;
- reduce avoidable enquiries by providing readily accessible guidance;
- support consistency in decision-making and service delivery; and
- act as a practical reference document for officers when dealing with enforcement matters.

2.4 The review also reflects the Authority's wider commitment to continuous improvement, openness and providing clear public information through digital channels.

3. Key Changes in the Revised Local Enforcement Plan

3.1 While the overall purpose of the Plan remains unchanged, the revised document represents a significant expansion and modernisation of the previous 2013 version. The adopted Plan comprises approximately 12 pages, whereas the revised document provides substantially greater detail on the enforcement process and associated legislation.

3.2 Key changes include:

Greater clarity on what constitutes a breach of planning control

The revised document includes expanded guidance explaining what is, and is not, a planning matter. This should assist members of the public in determining whether their concerns fall within the Authority's remit before a report is submitted.

Improved explanation of investigation procedures

The updated Plan provides significantly more detail on how reports are assessed, prioritised, investigated and resolved, including clearer service standards and anticipated response targets.

Enhanced guidance on enforcement outcomes

New sections explain the range of possible outcomes, including circumstances where no breach exists, where a breach is immune from action, where a retrospective application may be appropriate, and where formal action may not be expedient.

Greater transparency around decision-making

The revised document places greater emphasis on the principles of proportionality, expediency and public interest which underpin all enforcement decisions. This reflects national planning guidance and provides a clearer explanation of how enforcement powers are exercised.

Expanded information on enforcement powers

The revised Plan includes substantially more information regarding the statutory powers available to the Authority, together with explanations of appeals, compliance and prosecution processes.

Comprehensive supporting information

The inclusion of appendices, terminology guides, legislative references, frequently encountered issues and process diagrams is intended to make the document more accessible and easier to navigate for a wide range of users.

4. A Living and Accessible Resource

- 4.1 A key objective of the review has been to move away from a document that is updated infrequently and instead establish a resource that can evolve over time as legislation, national guidance and local procedures change.
- 4.2 The revised Local Enforcement Plan is therefore intended to function as a living document that will be published and maintained on the Authority's website. This approach will allow updates to be made more efficiently and will ensure that users continue to have access to current information without waiting for a full future review.
- 4.3 This approach is particularly important within planning enforcement where legislation, appeal decisions, national guidance and case law continue to evolve. Providing a document that can be updated periodically will help maintain accuracy and relevance whilst reducing the risk of information becoming outdated.
- 4.4 The long-term vision is for the Local Enforcement Plan to become the first point of reference for planning enforcement related queries within the National Park. Whether used by members of the public, members, parish councils, agents or officers, the document should provide a clear, reliable and consistent explanation of enforcement procedures and expectations.

5. Publication of the Section 188 Enforcement Register

- 5.1 Alongside the review of the Local Enforcement Plan, the Authority has also completed a significant programme of work to make its statutory enforcement register available online.
- 5.2 The publication of the Section 188 register represents a substantial improvement in public accessibility and transparency. The work involved the transfer of historic records, verification of enforcement data and quality assurance checks to ensure that information published online is accurate and reliable.
- 5.3 This exercise has required a considerable officer resource commitment over an extended period. The completion of the project provides improved public access to enforcement information while supporting the Authority's wider objectives around openness, customer service and digital accessibility.

- 5.4 The publication of the online enforcement register, together with the revised Local Enforcement Plan, represents a significant step forward in improving public understanding of the Authority's planning enforcement function.

6. Why Enforcement matters in a National Park

- 6.1 The New Forest National Park is a protected landscape of national importance, designated for its natural beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and opportunities for public understanding and enjoyment. The National Park contains internationally protected habitats, extensive areas of common land, nationally important heritage assets and a distinctive landscape character that is highly sensitive to change. The planning system plays a critical role in safeguarding these special qualities and planning enforcement is an essential component of that system.
- 6.2 Effective planning enforcement helps maintain public confidence that planning decisions, planning conditions and other controls are applied fairly and consistently. It ensures that those who seek planning permission and comply with planning requirements are not disadvantaged by those who undertake unauthorised development. National planning policy recognises that effective enforcement is an important means of maintaining confidence in the planning system and encourages local planning authorities to adopt and publish enforcement plans.
- 6.3 The Authority receives reports relating to a wide range of issues including unauthorised operational development, changes of use, residential occupation of land and buildings, breaches of planning conditions, works to listed buildings, damage to protected trees and other activities which may affect the special qualities of the National Park. While formal enforcement action is discretionary and not every breach will justify intervention, it is important that the Authority has clear and robust procedures in place to investigate concerns, assess planning harm and take proportionate action where necessary.
- 6.4 The revised Local Enforcement Plan supports the delivery of the Authority's wider statutory purposes and planning responsibilities by providing a transparent framework for responding to alleged breaches of planning control. It explains how decisions are made, the factors that influence enforcement priorities and the steps available to remedy unacceptable harm. In doing so, it helps ensure that the planning enforcement service operates consistently, proportionately and in the public interest.
- 6.5 Together with planning policy and development management, planning enforcement form an interrelated trilogy within the planning system. Planning policy establishes the framework for managing change, development management applies that framework when determining proposals, and enforcement responds to unacceptable breaches of planning control. Working together, these functions help deliver the Authority's statutory purposes by conserving and enhancing the National Park's natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.

- 6.6 The Authority's objective is not simply to pursue enforcement action, but to focus our enforcement work on securing positive planning outcomes that protect the special qualities of the National Park. The revised Plan provides the framework through which that objective can be delivered whilst balancing the interests of complainants, landowners, businesses, residents and visitors.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Planning enforcement is a key tool in protecting the special qualities of the New Forest National Park and maintaining public confidence in the planning system. The review of the Local Enforcement Plan provides an opportunity to modernise a document first adopted in 2013 and ensure it reflects current legislation, policy, working practices and public expectations.
- 7.2 The revised Plan provides considerably greater clarity regarding the Authority's enforcement processes, priorities and powers. It supports transparency, consistency and public confidence while helping officers to deliver a fair, proportionate and effective enforcement service.
- 7.3 The document is intended to serve not only as a public guide but also as a practical operational framework that officers can refer to and rely upon when undertaking enforcement work.
- 7.4 The availability of both the revised Local Enforcement Plan and the online Section 188 register demonstrates the Authority's commitment to making planning enforcement information more accessible, transparent and easier to understand.

Recommendation:

Members of the Planning Committee:

- (i) Endorse the revised Local Enforcement Plan attached at Appendix 1;**
- (ii) Note the publication of the Authority's online Section 188 Enforcement Register;**
- (iii) Delegate authority to the Head of Planning and Place or Planning Enforcement Manager to make minor factual, typographical, legislative and administrative updates to the Local Enforcement Plan following its endorsement; and**
- (iv) Authorise the publication of the Local Enforcement Plan on the Authority's website.**

Papers:

Annex 1 – Revised Local Enforcement Plan – Final Draft

Equality and Diversity Implications:

The revised Local Enforcement Plan seeks to improve accessibility, transparency and understanding of the planning enforcement process for all users. No specific adverse equality or diversity implications have been identified.

Contact:

Lucie Cooper

Planning Enforcement Manager

01590 646642

enforcement@newforestnpa.gov.uk