

RAPC 608/26

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 2 NOVEMBER 2026

UPDATE ON FUNDING APPLICATION TO LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS

Report by: Fiona Wynne, Funding Development Manager

Summary:

The New Forest National Park Authority is currently leading on a bid to The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections strategic initiative. With the deadline for submission of the application later this month this paper provides an update on progress.

Recommendation:

Members are requested to note the paper.

1. Landscape Connections

- 1.1. Landscape Connections is a strategic initiative from The National Lottery Heritage Fund aimed at supporting Protected Landscapes and other significant landscapes across the UK to become better for nature and more able to welcome and involve people from all backgrounds. Funding is intended to support those who live in and care for these landscapes to address the underlying barriers preventing long-term improvement for nature and people. The programme places particular emphasis on nature recovery and creating significant and enduring change.
- 1.2. The Authority's initial Expression of Interest was approved in December 2025, enabling us to develop a full application within 12 months.
- 1.3. Our proposal is currently expected to have a total value of around £15 million, subject to further development and confirmation of costs. The National Lottery Heritage Fund can provide a grant of up to £10 million. The balance would need to come from partner contributions and other match funding during the life of the programme.
- 1.4. The scale and long-term nature of the funding opportunity provides a rare chance to address some of the pressures affecting the National Park in a more joined-up way. Our proposal is therefore aimed at using the investment to strengthen the ability of people and organisations across the National Park to respond to change over the long term.

2. Landscape Connections in the New Forest

- 2.1. We have worked extensively with partners to identify the challenges facing the landscape and shape a coherent programme that can deliver lasting change.
- 2.2. Our proposal is focused on securing lasting benefits for nature, cultural heritage and people by strengthening the way organisations, land managers, Commoners and

communities work together across the landscape. It combines practical, place-based activity with investment in the skills, relationships, capacity, evidence and approaches needed to sustain action over the longer term.

- 2.3. Four Shared Landscapes have been identified as the place-based focus for the programme. They have been selected because there is already evidence, activity, partner interest and opportunity on which to build. They will enable different approaches to nature recovery, stewardship and collective action to be developed and tested.
 - **Dark Water** will take a whole-catchment approach, bringing organisations, land managers, Commoners and communities together around freshwater habitats, climate resilience and shared stewardship.
 - **Beaulieu** will explore community and estate stewardship, looking at how residents, Commoners, businesses, landowners, the Beaulieu Estate and public bodies can combine their decisions and resources around the long-term care of place.
 - **Northern Landscape** will focus on greater connection across habitats, landholdings, commoning, access, communities and investment, building on existing protected sites and land-management activity.
 - **Forest to Foreshore** will connect inland and coastal landscapes and explore how nature recovery, land management and adaptation can be developed alongside community involvement and long-term stewardship.
- 2.4. This approach has been taken with the knowledge that the core of the National Park, the Crownlands, are the subject of a potential Landscape Recovery proposal (funded through the agricultural Environmental Land Management Scheme), which may replace the existing Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. The strategic aim is to avoid duplication of activity between the two programmes, with the Landscape Connections work leveraging the benefits that may come from the successor to the HLS. Examining how this will be best achieved will be part of the development phase.
- 2.5. These are not intended to operate as four separate projects. Together, they will provide places for learning, collaboration and investment, allowing us to understand more clearly what each landscape needs, what is preventing progress, where investment can have the greatest long-term value, and how we work together to achieve that.
- 2.6. Crucially, the Shared Landscapes will help us develop a stronger pipeline of well-evidenced and investable future activity. By bringing together evidence, communities, land managers, delivery partners, funders and other potential investors, we want to make future investment needs and opportunities more visible and better understood. The ambition is that Landscape Connections helps unlock further action and investment beyond the life of the funded programme, rather than creating activity that ends when the funding ends.

3. Partnership and participation

- 3.1. The programme has been developed with the Re:New Nature Partnership, building on previous project development, evidence and partner workshops. Three workshops in 2025 brought together Re:New Nature Partnership members, Authority staff and wider stakeholders to explore existing work and opportunities, barriers to progress and where greater collective action could make a difference. Subsequent evidence reviews and partner discussions have helped refine this into the emerging programme.

3.2. Five organisations are proposed to form the core development phase partnership, bringing complementary expertise:

- New Forest National Park Authority
- Freshwater Habitats Trust
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
- Countryside Education Trust
- Foundation for Common Land, subject to confirmation.

3.3. A development phase of 18 – 24 months will deliberately reach much wider than these five organisations. Partners will have opportunities to check the evidence, shape outcomes and priorities, develop and test proposals, clarify their potential contributions and consider how activity can be sustained over the longer term.

3.4. A programme of workshops and other participation opportunities is planned throughout the development phase to bring more voices, knowledge and experience into the programme. We also intend to broaden involvement beyond organisations engaged in landscape management, reaching communities, businesses, universities and researchers, educators and the creative and heritage sectors, alongside Commoners, landowners, farmers, communities, volunteers and young people. This will help us draw on a wider range of ideas, expertise and relationships and create more opportunities for people to influence and participate in the programme.

4. Development and long-term delivery

4.1. The application will set out our overall ambition for Landscape Connections, including a high-level programme of activity expected during the subsequent delivery phase. The development phase will allow us to work with partners and communities to test, refine and strengthen that proposition, recognising that individual activities, costs and delivery arrangements may change as evidence and proposals develop.

4.2. Development will include establishing clearer outcomes for each Shared Landscape, filling critical evidence gaps, testing feasibility, developing proposed interventions and determining the arrangements needed for participation, monitoring, investment and long-term stewardship. It will also build the relationships and capacity required to move into delivery.

4.3. Subject to the findings of the development phase and approval of a subsequent delivery-phase application by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the delivery phase would then put the programme into practice, over a period of 8 years. This would combine activity within the four Shared Landscapes with programme-wide work on participation, commoning, skills, evidence, learning, partnership capacity and investment.

4.4. Learning will be a deliberate part of delivery. Experience from the Shared Landscapes will be shared between them and used to improve approaches across the programme, inform future investment and contribute to a wider understanding of how long-term change can be achieved in complex protected landscapes.

5. Legacy

- 5.1. Landscape Connections provides an opportunity to strengthen the national profile of the New Forest National Park, share learning from the programme and build relationships with funders, researchers, businesses, universities, the creative sector and others.
- 5.2. The programme also provides an opportunity to give greater national visibility to two important aspects of the New Forest National Park: commoning as a living system of land management and cultural heritage, and water as a connecting feature across habitats, communities, land management and the coast. Through the Shared Landscapes and programme-wide activity, we can test how the conditions needed for commoning can be strengthened and how a stronger understanding of water can inform nature recovery, climate resilience and investment.
- 5.3. By building stronger evidence, relationships, investment opportunities and national connections, the programme aims to create a strong legacy. The New Forest National Park can demonstrate how people work together to secure the future of an internationally important living and working landscape, while continuing to attract ideas, expertise and investment after The National Lottery Heritage Fund support ends.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. Detailed activities, costs, governance and delivery arrangements are currently being agreed. We are working towards submission of the development phase application in November 2026, following which Members will be updated on the outcome and next steps.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to note the paper.

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

Previous papers: RAPC 560/25 Grant Funding Update

RAPC 598/26 Update on application to Landscape Connections

RAPC 603/26 Grant Funding Update September 2026