

New Forest National Park Authority

Health and Well-being

Topic Paper

August 2026

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1. Introduction and background

1.1. This background paper has been prepared to support the New Forest Local Plan 2024 – 2043. Its purpose is to explain how the Local Plan addresses a number of health issues identified during preparation of the Local Plan and set out in other evidence.

1.2. This paper also adheres to the requirements of Hampshire County Council's Public Health in Planning Position Statement, which refers to the principles of health and well-being being enshrined in local plans.

1.3. Health and well-being is a topic that cuts across a number of areas in spatial planning and can influence health outcomes of communities either directly or indirectly. This paper therefore reflects various sources of evidence and how the Local Plan responds.

National Park Purposes and Duty

1.4. The New Forest National Park was designated in 2005 and covers an area of 220 square miles within the counties of Hampshire and Wiltshire. The National Park operates within a detailed planning policy and legislative framework which is set out below. National parks have two statutory purposes that set out the main reasons for their designation and describe the overall focus for their management. The two Park purposes as set out in primary legislation are:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the New Forest; and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the New Forest by the public.

1.5. In pursuing the National Park's two statutory purposes, national park authorities also have a duty under Section 62(1) of the Environment Act 1995 to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park. Together, these purposes, the related socio-economic duty, and the strengthened legal requirement to further them through the Authority's planning functions form the 'golden thread' running through the Local Plan.

1.6. The vision and strategic objectives expressed in the Local Plan are drawn from these purposes, duty, and the following special qualities of the National Park:

- The New Forest's outstanding natural beauty
- An extraordinary diversity of plants and animals and habitats of national and international importance
- A unique historic, cultural and archaeological heritage
- An historic commoning system
- The iconic New Forest pony
- Tranquillity
- Wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation
- A healthy environment
- Strong and distinctive local communities

1.7. All national parks are required by statute to have a management or partnership plan for their area. This plan helps to guide the work of those with responsibilities for, or an interest in, the National Park. It also aligns with the Local Plan, which focuses on land use matters. The latest Partnership Plan (2022) consistently recognises the contribution of the Park's natural environment to health and well-being, including describing the Park as a 'Natural Health Service'.

National Policy and Guidance National Planning Policy

1.8. Paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) discusses the three dimensions of sustainable development and the roles that the planning system plays to achieve this, through three overarching objectives: economic, social environmental. The social objective states: *"to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being"*. Application of the social objective should not be undertaken in isolation but alongside the economic and environmental objectives.

1.9. Chapter 8 of the NPPF discusses the role of planning policies and decisions in promoting healthy and safe communities. Paragraph 96 requires that policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places, through enabling healthy lifestyles through provision of accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food and encouraging walking and cycling.

1.10. In addition to making the explicit links between health and planning, the NPPF requires consideration of wider factors known to influence health, including access to high-quality open space and opportunities for sport and recreation.

1.11. Under Chapter 9 Promoting Sustainable Transport, paragraph 111 requires that planning policies should provide for attractive and well-designed walking and cycling networks, with supporting facilities. Paragraph 198 requires new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects of pollution on health and opportunities to improve air quality or mitigate impacts should be identified.

1.12. Chapter 12 Achieving Well-designed Places, refers to creating places that are safe, inclusive, accessible and which promote health and well-being, with reference to the national Model Design Code at Paragraph 138 and using assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life.

1.13. Chapter 14 Climate Change and Chapter 15 the Natural Environment, intrinsically cover matters pertinent to health and well-being.

1.14. The policy set out in the NPPF is expanded upon by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The PPG a section on Achieving Healthy and Inclusive Communities states that local planning authorities should consider health, well-being and health infrastructure in both plan-making and planning decisions.

Other Planning Guidance

1.15. In addition, to specific policy and guidance related to planning, the topic of health and well-being has in recent years been subject to much debate. Organisations such as The Town & Country Planning Association have published a range of documents, with a focus on health and actively promote a campaign for Healthy Homes with a pledge that states *"The Healthy Homes Pledge recognises everyone has a right to a healthy, affordable and secure home in a healthy environment"*.

1.16. In 2020, the Royal Town Planning Institute, published its Dementia and Town Planning practice note in recognition of the fact that there are around 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK and this is projected to increase to 1.6 million people by 2040. People living with dementia may experience the built environment differently to other people. Evidence has shown that good quality housing and well-planned, enabling local environments can have a substantial impact on the quality of life for someone living with dementia, helping them to live well in their community for longer. Key features include varying fascades and frontages to assist with recognition and ensuring that places are simple to navigate.

1.17. These considerations also apply to planning for neurodiversity. This includes clear wayfinding, the provision of quiet areas within public spaces, and sensory-aware layouts that create calmer, less overwhelming environments for all users. Nature-based interventions, such as green and blue infrastructure, can further support sensory regulation by providing calm, restorative settings.

Health and Social Care Act 2012

1.18. The Health and Social Care Act 2012, places the duty of improving the health of populations, through encouraging healthier lifestyles and addressing health inequalities, to upper tier and unitary authorities such as Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council as the responsible bodies.

1.19. Health and Well-being boards were established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to act as a forum in which key leaders from the local health and care system work together to improve the health and well-being of their local population.

1.20. The Hampshire and Wiltshire Health and Well-being Boards exist to advance health and well-being and to promote integrated working between organisations that commission or provide health or social care services in Hampshire or Wiltshire.

1.21. Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) were legally established on 1 July 2022, covering all of England. These built on partnerships that were already in place across the country, with the aim of:

- improving outcomes in population health and healthcare;
- tackling inequalities in outcomes, experience and access;
- enhancing productivity and value for money; and
- helping the NHS support broader social and economic development.

1.22. ICSs bring together NHS organisations, upper-tier local authorities, the voluntary sector, social care providers, and other partners to improve local health and well-being. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board (ICB) is the statutory body responsible for setting the NHS strategic plan for Hampshire. The equivalent organisation in Wiltshire is the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire ICB.

2. What is the evidence telling us?

2.1. Evidence on health matters for the Local Plan is limited, as data is not typically collated for the National Park but for wider local authority areas (typically districts and boroughs).

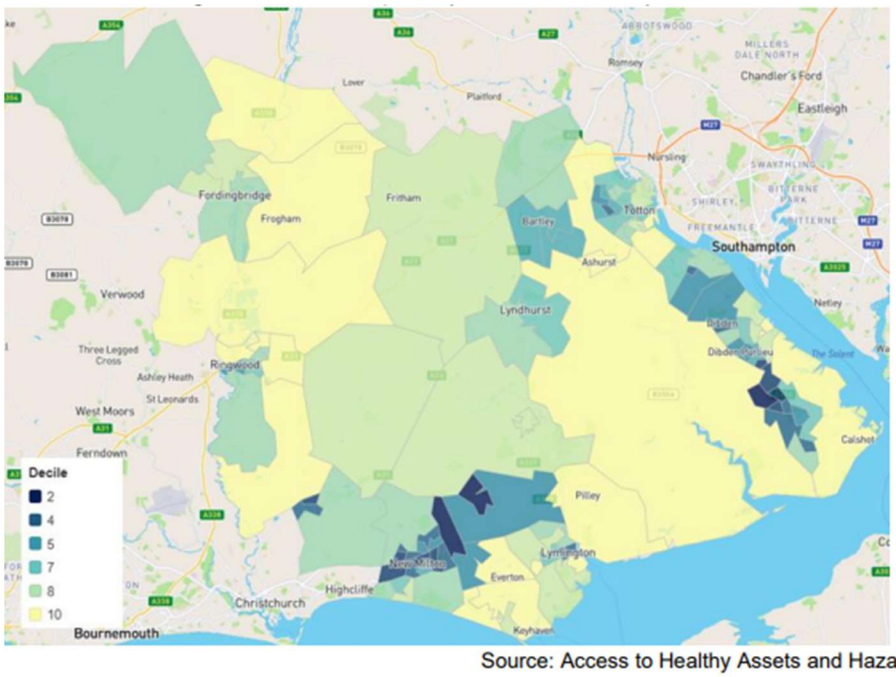
Hampshire Public Heath Data

2.2. In 2024, the Hampshire Public Health Team published a Healthy Places Report for the New Forest District, covering matters such as physical environment, home environment, social and economic environment, community safety and climate. The maps present selected extracts from the report, providing an indicative visual interpretation of the available data for the National Park area.

Physical Environment

2.3. Green infrastructure, such as parks, woodlands, fields, allotments, and features like green walls, plays a vital role in supporting public health and well-being. These spaces facilitate access to both green and blue environments, which can be particularly significant in rural areas where the extensive open forest and associated land uses of the New Forest dominate. As such, the National Park generally performs well in terms of access to natural spaces (Figure1).

Figure 1. Access to green and blue space (1 = worst access), 2021



Source: Access to Healthy Assets and Hazards

2.4. Green spaces can offer substantial community health benefits, such as enabling access to nature, supporting good mental health, and providing recreational opportunities. They can also encourage physical activity, social interaction, and outdoor play, which can reduce stress and support childhood development. Green environments also mitigate air and noise pollution and help moderate temperature fluctuations. Additionally, green environments can foster social cohesion and by providing venues for community gatherings, strengthening relationships, and promoting healthy behaviours, thereby reducing health risks. Nevertheless, accessibility can be an issue, especially for individuals with disabilities, and poorly maintained spaces can pose safety concerns for users.

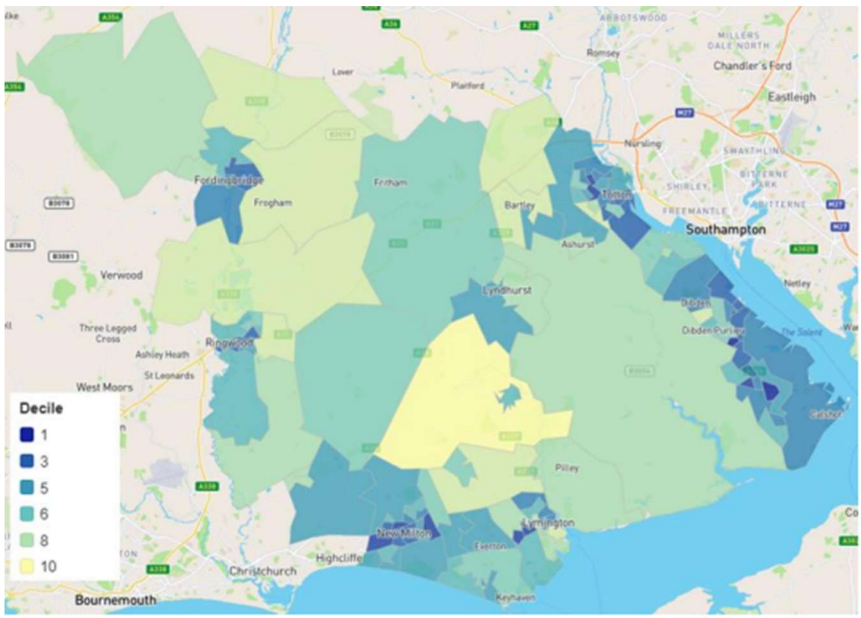
2.5. Well designed and managed green and blue infrastructure can further enhance health and environmental resilience. Benefits include flood risk reduction, carbon capture and sequestration, and shelter from the elements.

Home Environment

2.6. Food security refers to access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Food insecurity can affect people for a variety of reasons, including low income, reliance on benefits, poor mental health, and lower levels of educational attainment. Physical factors also play a role, such as proximity to bus services, distance to employment and food shops, and the availability of reliable internet connections.

2.7. The map below (Figure 2) indicates that the National Park generally performs well in relation to food security, although there are pockets of areas that are less well served.

Figure 2. Food insecurity index (1 = highest insecurity), 2023

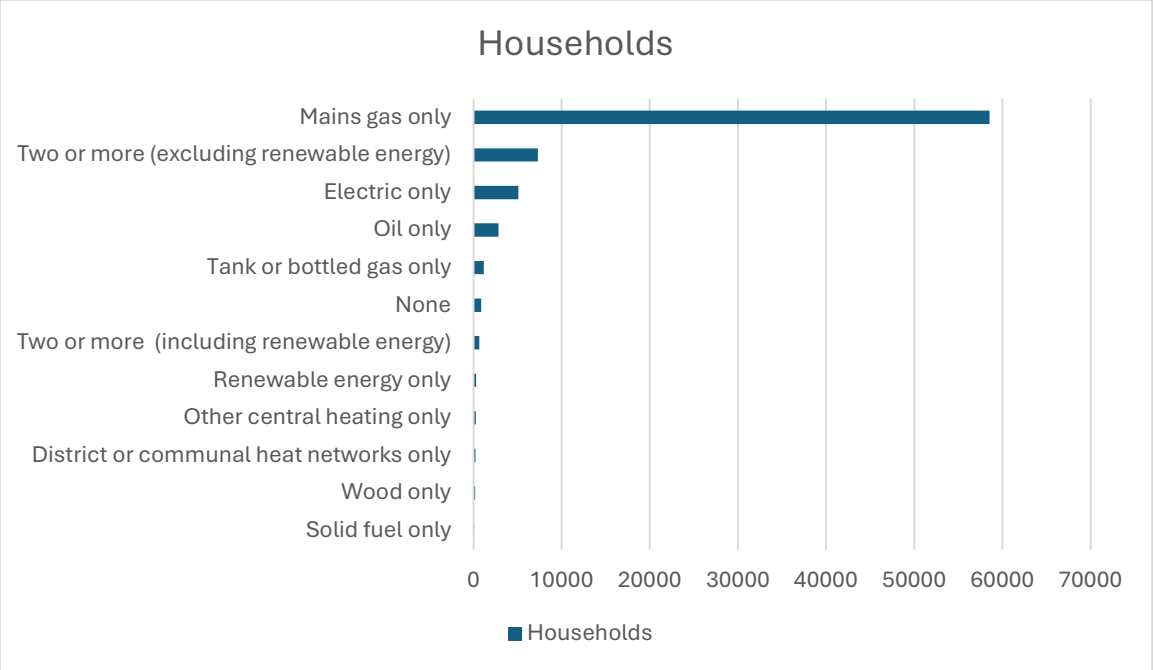


Source: University of Southampton Food Insecurity Index

2.8. Housing significantly influences health outcomes, with poor-quality or unsuitable homes adversely affecting both physical and mental well-being. Conditions such as cold homes and fuel poverty are directly associated with increased winter mortality rates. Data from 2021 indicates that in the New Forest, a higher proportion of homes are owned outright compared to Hampshire and England, while the availability of social and private rental housing is limited due to rising house prices in the area. The New Forest exhibits a lower rate of overcrowded homes, at 1.7%, compared to 2.2% in Hampshire and 4.4% nationally. Additionally, the rate of homeless households per 1,000 households was lower in the New Forest (2.5) during 2022/23 than in Hampshire (3.1) and England (6.6).

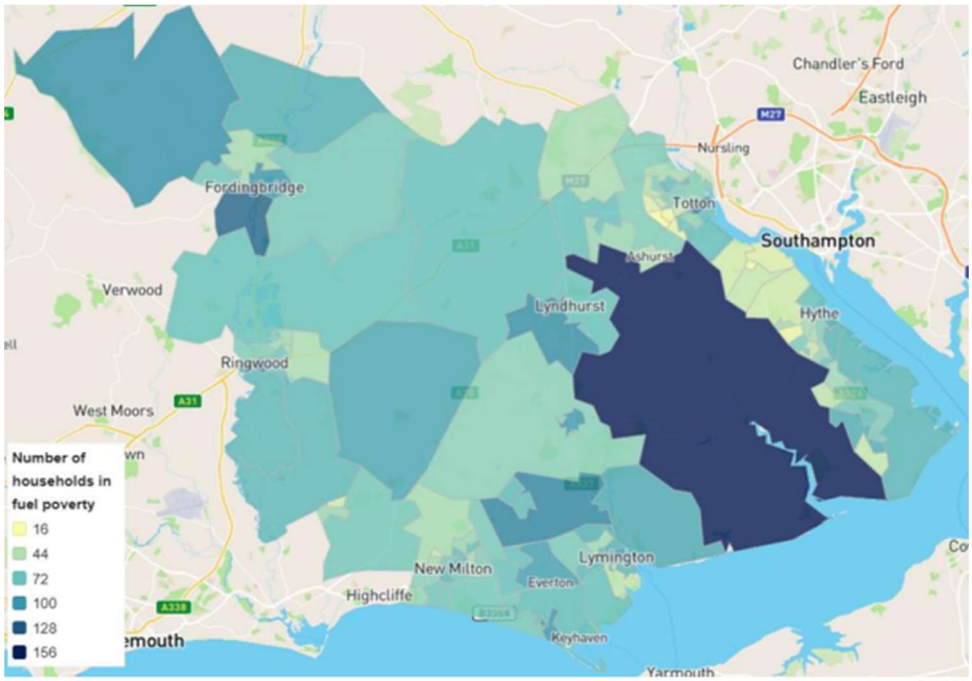
2.9. Poor housing quality and fuel poverty contribute to cold indoor environments during winter, increasing the risk of excess winter deaths. The New Forest National Park faces challenges related to fuel poverty, largely due to dispersed settlements and isolated homes that may rely on off-grid or alternative heating fuels. Census 2021 data reveals the variety of fuels used for central heating (Figure 3), while 2022 data shows that 9.3% of households in the New Forest experience fuel poverty, higher than Hampshire at 8.2% but lower than England at 13.1% (Figure 4). The rural area around Beaulieu has the highest number of households affected by fuel poverty within the New Forest.

Figure 3. Types of central heating used within the New Forest



Source: Census 2021

Figure 4. Fuel poverty within the New Forest, 2022



Economic and Social Environment

2.10. Employment contributes to a sense of well-being and provides financial stability, which can reduce mental health issues. According to Census 2021 data, individuals in occupations that typically demand higher academic qualifications and offer higher salaries tend to reside in rural parts of the New Forest. Conversely, those in roles requiring fewer qualifications are more commonly found in its urban settlements. Higher income levels typically lead to improved living standards and housing quality, serving as a financial cushion during economic downturns or adverse events. The data indicates that lower income households are more likely to be situated in settlements within the broader Forest area, outside the National Park boundary, where a greater proportion of residents claim benefits.

Figure 5. Rate of people claiming benefits (all ages, per 1000 population), 2023



Source: DWP

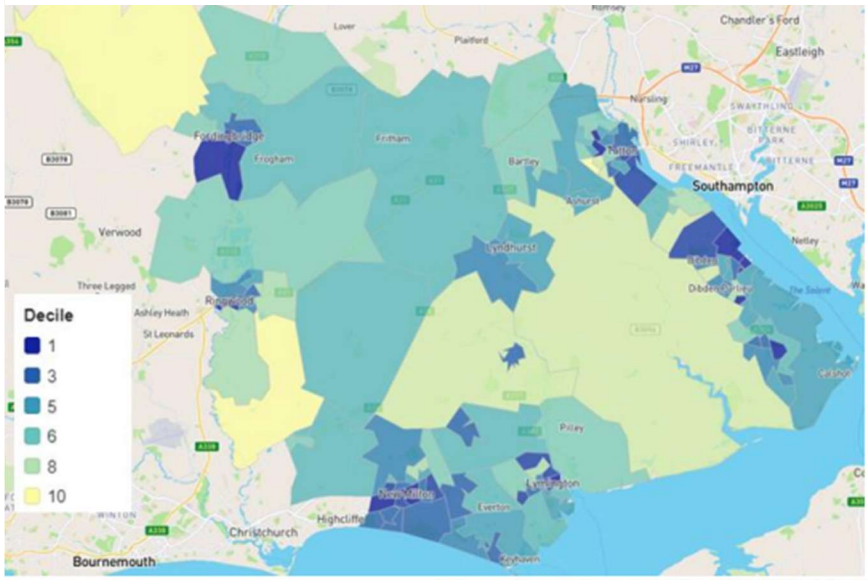
2.11. As a rural area, the Park lacks large employment centres that benefit from a critical mass of workers and local markets for goods and services. This results in a dispersed and diverse local economy, offering various employment opportunities.

2.12. While locations with a reliable internet connection support home working and business opportunities, nearby towns like Lymington, Ringwood and Totton, along with larger urban areas including Southampton/Eastleigh, Romsey/Salisbury and Bournemouth/Poole, provide additional employment options for those willing or able to commute. Key institutions within the wider Forest include Totton College in Totton, New Forest District Council in Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst College in Brockenhurst. However, the majority of businesses with the National Park – around 85% - are classified as micro-enterprises with fewer than 10 employees.

2.13. According to the Economic Needs Assessment (2025), employment growth is expected to be driven by sectors such as health, agriculture, forestry and fishing, among others. While the health sector generally involves daily contact with other people, sectors such as agriculture and forestry can involve a much greater degree of social isolation.

2.14. Social isolation refers to the lack of social contacts, community involvement, or access to services. It is associated with negative health outcomes, as it can lead to feelings of loneliness – an emotional state characterised by unwelcome solitude and absence of companionship. Typically, the National Park scores favourably in this respect, although some isolated pockets may experience higher levels of social disconnection:

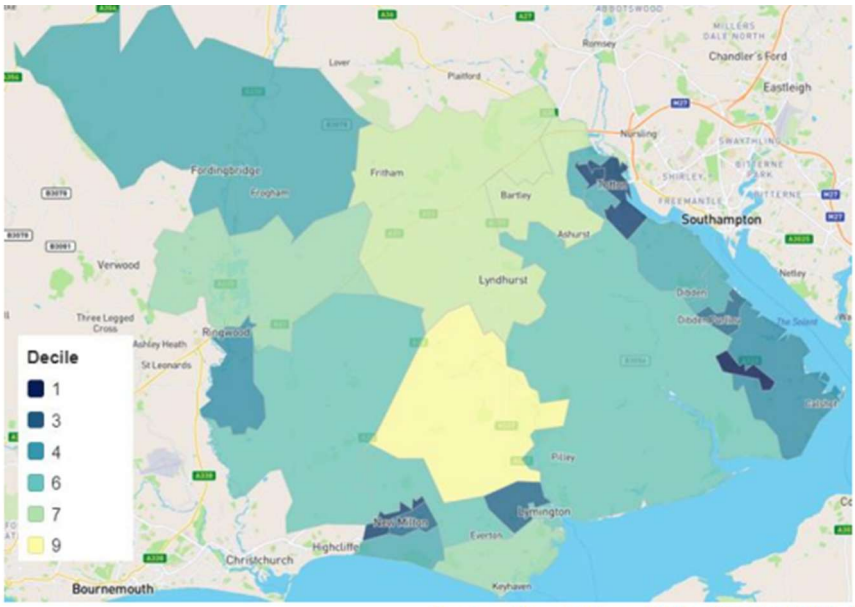
Figure 6. Social isolation index (1 = most at risk), 2023



Source: Hampshire and Isle of Wight Public Health

2.15. Hampshire and Isle of Wight Public Health developed a Mental Health and Well-being Index in 2023 to identify where residents may be at greater risk of poor mental health and well-being. The New Forest exhibits a higher proportion of 1-person households occupied by residents aged 65 and over compared to Hampshire. It also has elevated levels of this age group providing unpaid care. Factors such as long-term health conditions, disabilities, or caregiving responsibilities can limit social interactions by restricting mobility. The rural geography of the New Forest further exacerbates these issues, making access to support services more challenging for vulnerable groups.

Figure 7. Mental health and well-being index (1 = most vulnerable), 2023



Source: Hampshire and Isle of Wight Public Health

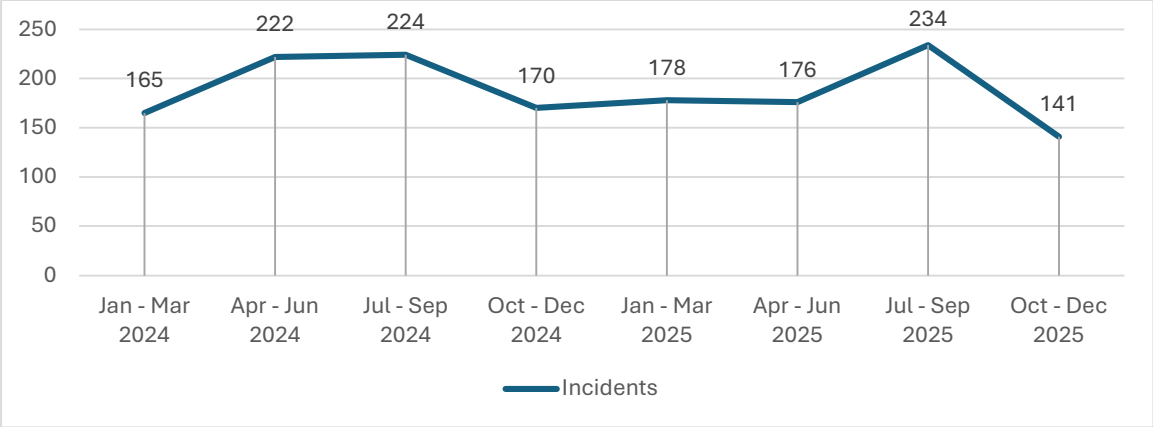
2.16. Workplaces often serve as primary venues for social engagement and contribute to individuals' self-esteem. Conversely, those not engaged in employment or education are at increased risk of social isolation and loneliness, partly due to the absence of daily social interactions and potential financial constraints that hinder the development of social networks.

2.17. The built environment significantly influences social connectivity. Its design affects physical access to family, friends, public services, shops, and community spaces. Evidence indicates that traffic congestion and unsafe roads can impede access, thereby reducing opportunities for social interaction. Conversely, well-maintained, attractive public spaces with accessible green areas promote social engagement. In rural areas, reliable and affordable transport is crucial to prevent community severance, which occurs when road traffic limits local access. Prioritising walkability and active transportation options fosters social cohesion and can improve overall community well-being.

Community Safety

2.18. Published crime data for the New Forest National Park from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary shows that crime increased during the summer months between January 2024 and December 2025, likely reflecting higher visitor numbers (Figures 8). While crime levels varied across the Park, the main spikes occurred in the larger settlements, with low levels consistently recorded in car parks.

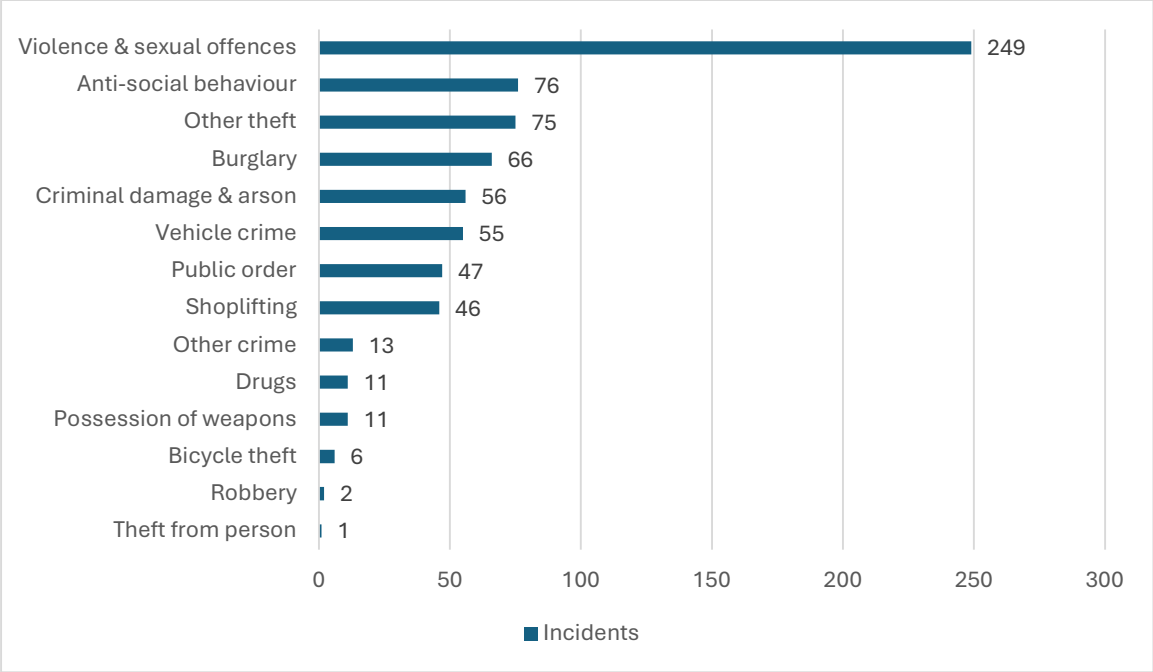
Figure 8. Recorded crime levels within the 'New Forest Heart' area in 2024 and 2025



Source: Police.UK

2.19. In the 12 months from April 2025 to March 2026, violence and sexual offences were the most common crime type, accounting for 34.9% of recorded offences. Anti-social behaviour, 'other theft' and burglary made up 30.3%, while criminal damage and arson, vehicle crime and public order offences accounted for 22.1%. shoplifting represented 6.4%, and drugs and weapons offences remained low at 3% (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Recorded crimes by type in 'New Forest Heart' area Apr 2025 to Mar 2026



Source: Police.UK

Climate

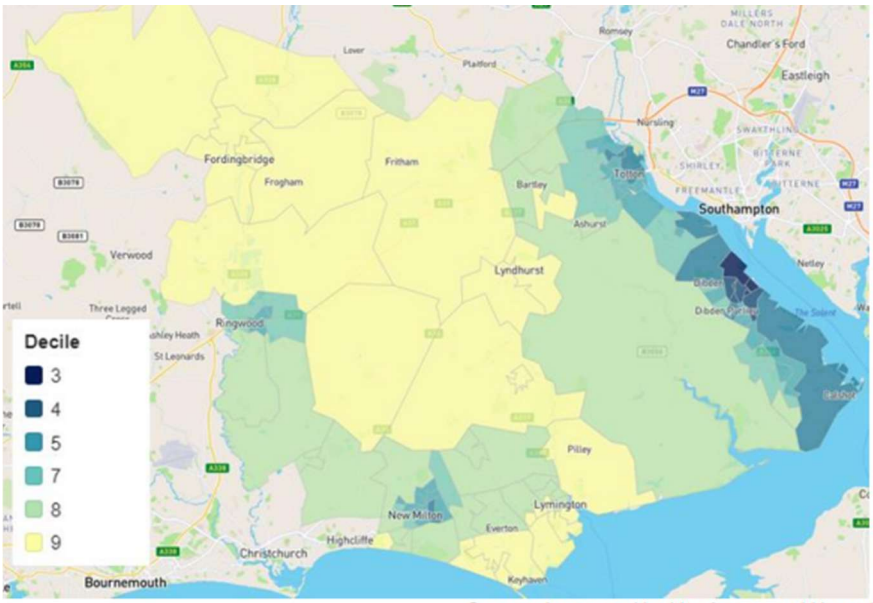
2.20. Air quality poses the most significant environmental health risk in the UK, with long-term exposure linked to chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, lung cancer and decreased life expectancy. Daily and seasonal impacts include exacerbation of asthmas, coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath, especially during higher temperature periods. Vulnerable groups include the elderly, children, individuals with existing cardiovascular or respiratory conditions, pregant women, residents near busy roads, and low-income communities.

2.21. Sources of air pollution are emitted both natural and anthropogenic, stemming from activities such as transport, industrial processes, agriculture, energy production and domestic heating. Transport infrastructure quality and service adequacy directly include public health outcomes. Promoting active travel modes such as walking and cycling offers physical and mental health benefits, reduces road accidents and lowers harmful emissions. Since 2020, there has been a gradual increase in walking and cycling, although many residents still rely on private cars for commuting, particularly within the New Forest area.

2.22. Transport is the primary contributor to CO2 emissions, accounting for 80% of greenhouse gases. Particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) are both major pollutants, with additional concerns from sulpher dioxide, ammonia, ozone, and carbon monoxide. The New Forest has a lower pecentage of its population exposed to medium or high levels of NO2 cmpared to Hampshire overall. However,

a larger proportion of residents are exposed to higher levels of PM than in the broader Hampshire area. The eastern areas of the National Park, adjacent to areas of major industrial activity, tend to have poorer air quality due to higher pollutant levels (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Air quality, all pollutants (1 = worst quality), 2019

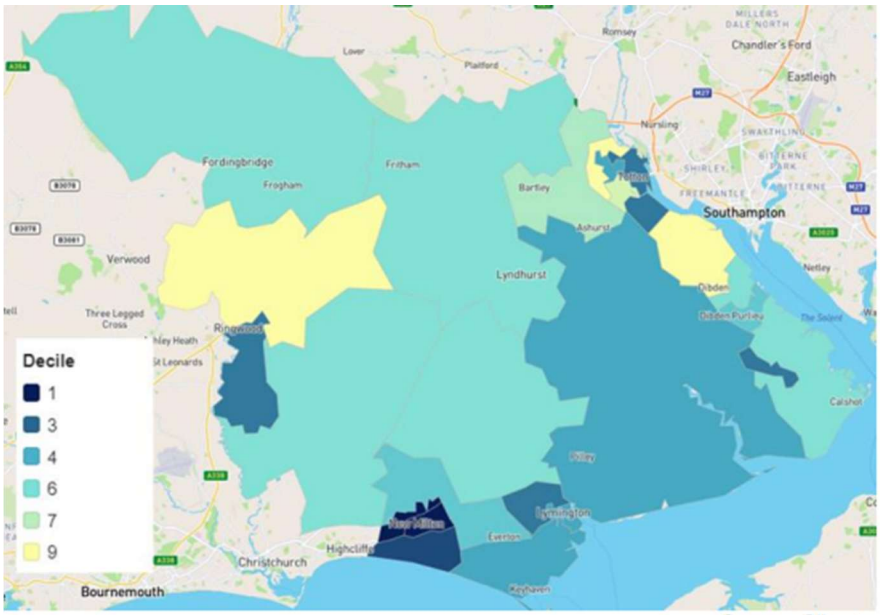


Source: Access to Healthy Assets and Hazards

Heat

2.23. Temperature increases across the UK, especially in the south, are expected to lead to more frequent and prolonged heatwaves, higher average summer temperatures, and warmer winters. These changes have signficant health implications, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, individuals with chronic health conditions (including heart, lung, diabetes, kidney, Parkinson's, dementia, or mental illnesses), and those with disabilities or mobility challenges. The following map shows parts of the national park being more vulnerable and, in part, reflects areas with concentrations of elderly reidents:

Figure 11. Heat vulnerability index (1 = most vulnerable), 2018



Source: Climate Just

2.24. People with increased exposure – such as outdoor workers, residents in poorly adaptable housing, or those in deprived areas – are at heightened risk during heatwaves. In the New Forest, specific at-risk groups include commoners, forestry and fishing workers, construction workers, and older adults, especially those aged 70 and above, with sever health issues, or living in older, heat-retentive properties. Overheating is more prevalent in flats and overcrowded dwellings. While air conditioning can provide relief, it also raises energy consumption and contributes to environmental heat through the release of hot air.

2.25. Rising temperatures are associated with increased hospital admissions and mortality during hot weather. Conversely, milder winters may reduce cold-related health issues but can also facilitate the spread of winter illnesses and vector-borne diseases like Lyme disease, as pests survive and reproduce earlier. The natural environment of the New Forest, with its extensive trees and vegetation, offers some protection by providing shade and moderating temperature and humidity levels, thereby reducing the risk of heat-related incidents. However, rural areas such as the land between Brockenhurst and Dibden, are vulnerable to wildfires, many of which are caused by human activity. Notably, this area experienced the highest number of wildfires in Hampshire during the period from 2018 to 2023.

Flooding

2.26. Flooding may occur from a range of sources, including the coastal flooding, rivers, surface and groundwater. The map below (Figure 12) shows the proportion of properties assessed as being at medium or high risk of flooding from the sea, rivers and surface water.

2.27. While over 4,000 homes were recorded as at risk from flooding within the New Forest in 2023, the area designated as National Park performs well in relation to flood risk, with a relatively low proportion of properties falling within higher-risk categories. Where higher levels of flood risk are present, these tend to be localised and associated with specific watercourses, low-lying areas or the coastal fringe.

Figure 12. Proportion of properties at medium or high risk of flooding, 2023



Source: Environment Agency

Risk Status of Locations

2.28. The New Forest District Healthy Places report shows that as a predominantly rural area, the New Forest has a relatively high proportion of older residents and generally low levels of deprivation. Rurality presents specific challenges, particularly limited access to leisure facilities and shops across large parts of the Forest. The following table summarises the key outputs and and identifies that, within the National Park, most areas are considered to be at lower risk across the topics assessed. In terms of green space provision, the adopted New Forest National Park Local Plan (2019) delivers a new 1 hectare community greenspace in Sway and further enhancements have been delivered in the village.

Table 1. Locations most or least at risk, by topic

Topic	Areas Most at Risk *(those in the National Park shown in **bold**)*	Areas Least at Risk *(those in the National Park shown in **bold**)*
Deprivation	Totton, Netley View, Blackfield, Pennington, New Milton	**Brockenhurst, Ashurst**, Lymington, Bransgore, Fordingbridge
Green space	Totton, Holbury, New Milton, **Sway**	**Most areas**
Private gardens	New Milton, Lymington	**Rural areas around Burley, Bransgore and Linwood**
Transiency	Ringwood, Totton	**Bartley and the north**
Sports	Totton, Dibden Purlieu	**Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst,** south of Ringwood
Food insecurity	Totton, Netley View, Blackfield, Pennington, New Milton	**Rural areas around Brockenhurst**
Fast food outlets	Totton, Hythe, Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood	**Rural areas**
Fuel poverty	**Rural area around Beaulieu**	West Totton, Marchwood, Dibden, Bransgore
Social isolation	Totton, Hythe and Dibden, Netley View, Blackfield, Lymington and Pennington, New Milton, Ringwood, Fordingbridge	West Totton, Bransgore
Digital	Totton, Hythe, Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood	West Totton, Marchwood, Bransgore
Mental well-being	Totton, Holbury, Lymington, New Milton	**Brockenhurst and Sway**
Income/benefits	Totton, Blackfield, Pennington, New Milton	**Brockenhurst and Sway**
Crime	Totton	Bransgore, Waterford, Barton on Sea, Langley
Air quality	Hythe, and areas along the Solent	**Most other areas**
Heatwaves	New Milton, Barton on Sea	Dibden, West Totton, north Ringwood
Flooding	Marchwood, Bransgore	**Most areas lower risk**

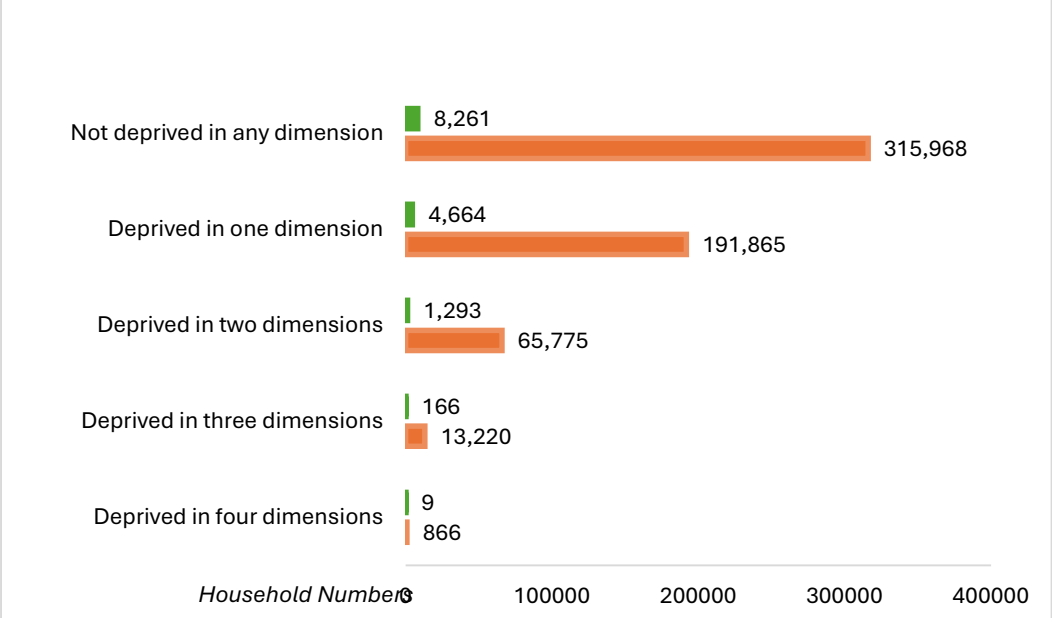
Source: Healthy Places (March 2024), Hampshire County Council

Census 2021

2.29. The Census 2021 data includes some New Forest National Park specific data sets, which allows for assessment of the following headline data:

- 17.2% of residents are registered disabled under the Equality Act;
- 83% consider their health very good or good, compared to 0.04% with bad or very bad health;
- 33% of the resident population is aged 65 and over (16% being aged 75 and over) – with older people generally experiencing health and mobility issues;
- In terms of household deprivation 32% of households are deprived in 1 dimension (that is having any person falling into one of the specified four categories being education, employment, health and housing); 9% 2 dimensions; 1% 3 dimensions and a small proportion in all 4 dimensions (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Deprivation by dimension of New Forest households



Source: Census 2021 New Forest National Park Household Deprivation

Local Transport Plans

2.30. Covering the period up to 2050, health and well-being are central to Hampshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4, which prioritises people and places over vehicle-focused planning and promotes active travel to support healthier lifestyles. The Local Transport Plan advocates a 'Healthy Streets Approach' based around ten healthy streets indicators to improve health outcomes and encourages walking and cycling for local jourenys through the creation of liveable, 20-minute neighbourhoods. It also places strong emphasis on improving air quality, recognising it as the greatest environmental risk to public health, with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups.

2.31. Although addressing a smaller area of the National Park, Wiltshire Council's Local Transport Plan 4 also seeks to improve health and well-being. The Local Transport Plan encompasses the period up to 2038 and promotes safe, inclusive and sustainable travel, reducing car dependency and emissions, and supports active and accessible transport. By improving public and digital connectivity – particularly in rural areas – the intention is to help reduce social isolation, improve access to services, enhance quality of life, address health and safety inequalities, and support economic resilience across the county's communities.

New Forest's Green Halo Partnership

2.32. Established in 2016, the Partnership is managed by the National Park Authority and brings together partners from all sectors to focus on recognising, protecting,and enhancing the value of nature and its benefits in terms of:

- Improving health and well-being
- Encouraging sustainable living
- Enhancing the natural environment
- Supporting the local economy

2.33. The Green Health Hub is a directory of activities supporting well-being in the natural environment. Organisations are also referred to collectively as the Green Health Network *"ensuring that our natural assets – from woodland, rivers and open spaces to our diverse wildlife – can help improve people's mental and physical health and wellbeing. In doing so, we will help protect and enhance those assets, and so secure the benefits they offer society"*.

2.34. The outcomes of the Green Halo Partnership feed into the National Park Partnership Plan, with particular reference to objective 6 An Inclusive National Park, in recognition that *"People need nature and culture for their physical, mental and spiritual health"*. This objective has three priorities:

1. Promotes Health and Well-being by:
    - Building a strong, mutually beneficial partnership between the health and environment sectors, including a five-year programme of ‘Health Education Fellowships’ and facilitating effective local networks
    - Addressing health inequalities locally and regionally through improved green space, targeted interventions and nature-based referrals
    - Increasing uptake of walking for health, inclusive cycling for health and volunteering for health programmes.
2. Connects People with Nature and Landscape by:
    - Removing barriers to participation and access – physical and perceived, e.g. affordable public transport
    - Recruiting more rangers, part of whose role is to help people understand and enjoy the New Forest, including apprentice rangers
    - Using data and evidence to create a more accurate picture of the current and possible users of the New Forest National Park and barriers to participation
    - Developing comprehensive and inclusive programmes of health and youth engagement and outreach to build relationships with diverse communities and audiences, including a Youth Action Project and bespoke education activity.
3. Leads inclusive place making, celebrates beauty and safeguards our cultural heritage by:
    - Assisting communities and local organisations to lead and shape cultural and natural heritage projects that foster identity and a sense of place
    - Bringing together cultural heritage and archaeological datasets, identifying gaps and surveying identified areas to achieve a complete picture for future management
    - Interpreting and disseminating landscape, cultural and natural heritage through specific outreach such as the New Forest Knowledge website.

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment

2.35. As part of the Local Plan preparation, a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required under the statutory regulations. The initial stage of this process is the Scoping Report, which establishes the baseline conditions and identifies key issues to be addressed.

2.36. The scope of the appraisal is structured around a series of environmental themes, including a dedication section on *'Communities, Health and Wellbeing'*. Other themes – such as climate change, economy and employment, housing, and transport – also have potential implications for health and well-being.

2.37. The scoping report identifies the key health and well-being issues that are relevant to the Local Plan review:

- There is a continued need to monitor NO2 and particulate emissions from road traffic and local industry, particularly in areas adjacent to major routes through the National Park such as the A31 and A35;
- Health impacts, including increased risk of respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses during heatwaves, higher vulnerability among elderly and low-income populations, and mental health impacts associated with extreme weather events;
- An ageing population is expected to increase demand for accessible healthcare, social care, housing, and community infrastructure, particularly in rural areas with limited service provision;
- The modest projected population growth of the National Park and the surrounding areas may place additional pressure on existing services and facilities, especially in settlements already experiencing constrained access to healthcare, education, and public transport;
- Limited ethnic diversity across the National Park suggests a need to ensure inclusion and equitable access to services for all residents, including under-represented and marginalised groups;
- The rural nature of the area may increase risks of social isolation, particularly among older people and those with disabilities or limited mobility;
- While access to green infrastructure is generally high and supports physical and mental well-being, pressures from tourism and uneven distribution between settlements may affect local access and recreational opportunities and the integrity of designated sites;
- Despite forecasted surpluses in school places, potential new development may require localised school provision or improvements;
- Crime levels are generally low but there are pockets of deprivation related to crime and the living environment, highlighting the need for ongoing community

safety measures and improvements to the quality of housing and local environments.

2.38. The assessment has then informed the Sustainability Appraisal objective: *Support healthy, inclusive, and safe communities by improving access to services, promoting well-being for all ages, and reducing inequalities related to age, disability, deprivation, and rural isolation*. This objective has been used in the assessment of the Regulation 18 Part 2 Plan in late 2025 and also the Regulation 19 Local Plan, published in late Summer 2026.

Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Local Plan

2.39. A further legislative requirement is for the Local Plan to be assessed under the Habitat Regulations. This assessment considers the potential effects of the Plan on internationally important nature conservation sites within and around the Plan area. These sites represent the highest level of environmental protection in the UK and a significant proportion of the National Park is designated accordingly, reflecting their international importance for nature conservation.

2.40. In total, 33 European sites fall within a 20km radius of the Plan area, of which 11 are located within or directly adjacent to the National Park. These include the New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site, which encompasses extensive heathland, woodland and wetland habitats, along with associated species, as well as adjoining coastal areas (the Solent Maritime SAC, Solent & Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC, and the Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar).

2.41. The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Report assesses the Local Plan through an initial screening and considers the potential for likely significant effects in relation to a range of impact pathways and at least one European site:

- General urban effects
- Mobile species and functionally-linked land
- Recreation
- Water quality
- Water quantity; and
- Air quality

2.42. In relation to health and well-being, air quality is a key consideration, as poor air quality can have detrimental effects on human heath. However, within the HRA, air quality impacts are assessed specifically in terms of their potential effects on protected habitats and species.

New Forest National Park Housing Needs Assessment

2.43. A key part of the Local Plan is understanding the housing needs of the National Park over the plan period to 2043. To support this, a New Forest Housing Needs Assessment was commissioned. The assessment included analysis of demographic data to identify likely future changes and their implications for the Local Plan review.

2.44. One of the key findings is that the population of the National Park has been steadily declining since around 2011. This trend is largely driven by an ageing population, with deaths consistently exceeding births (negative natural change). The age profile of the population is particularly skewed towards older age groups, with a relatively low proportion of residents aged between 20 to 39 and a significantly higher proportion aged 40 and over.

2.45. Looking ahead, the number of older residents is expected to continue to increase over the plan period (Table 2). Consequently, a growing proportion of the population is likely to experience age-related health and mobility issues, which will have implications for future housing needs and service provision.

Table 2. Projected change in population of older persons between 2023 to 2043

Age range	2023	2043	Change in population	Change %
Under 65	21,782	19,274	-2,508	-11.5%
65-74	5,368	5,676	308	5.7%
75-84	4,200	5,377	1,177	28.0%
85+	1,785	2,872	1,087	60.9%
Total (all ages)	33,135	33,199	64	0.2%
Total 65+	11,353	13,925	2,572	22.7%
Total 75+	5,985	8,249	2,264	37.8%

Source: New Forest Housing Needs Assessment, 2025

Table 3. Projected changes to population with a range of disabilities

Disability	Age Range	2023	2043	Change	Change %
Dementia	65+	759	1,088	329	43.4%
Mobility problems	65+	1,924	2,596	672	34.9%
Autistic spectrum disorders	18-64	163	145	-17	-10.6%
	65+	94	116	22	23.1%
Learning disabilities	15-64	421	374	-47	-11.2%
	65+	208	253	45	21.8%
Impaired mobility	16-64	1,209	1,043	-165	-13.7%

Source: New Forest Housing Needs Assessment, 2025

2.46. In addition to age-related health and mobility issues, the data indicates a potential need for specialist accommodation, including residential care, nursing care, and extra care housing. The Housing Needs Assessment also considers the proportion of the population who currently – or are anticipated to – use a wheelchair and may therefore require adaptable housing (Table 5).

Table 4. Specialist housing need using adjusted SHOP@Review assumptions for 2023 - 2043.

Housing type		Housing demand per 1,000 75+	Current supply	Current demand	Current shortfall/ surplus (-ve)	Additional demand to 2043	Shortfall / surplus by 2043
Housing with support	Market	63	236	374	138	142	280
	Affordable	52	21	309	288	117	404
Total (housing with support)		114	257	683	426	258	685
Housing with care	Market	28	0	170	170	64	235
	Affordable	13	0	76	76	29	104
Total (housing with care)		41	0	246	246	93	339
Residential care bedspaces		37	240	219	-21	83	61
Nursing care bedspaces		41	506	246	-260	93	-167
Total bedspaces		78	746	465	-281	176	-106

Source: New Forest Housing Needs Assessment, 2025

Table 5. Estimated number of wheelchair user households between 2023 - 2043.

	Prevalence rate (% of households)	Households 2023	Households 2043	Wheelchair user households (2023)	Wheelchair user households (2043)
24 and under	0.6%	70	63	0	0
25-34	0.5%	589	577	3	3
35-49	1.7%	2,298	2,174	38	36
50-64	1.8%	4,746	4,000	87	74
65 and over	4.3%	6,724	8,389	292	365
All households	-	14,427	15,203	421	478

Source: New Forest Housing Needs Assessment, 2025

Local Plan Regulation 18 Part 1 Consultation

2.47. Over 80 representations were received in response to the consultation on the *Strategic Direction of Travel* document, which ran between February and March 2025. Responses were submitted by statutory consultees, local organisations, and members of the public. Although the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board was consulted, no specific response was received. None of the representations raised issues specifically related to health and well-being.

Local Plan Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation

2.48. Over 1,000 representations were received during the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation on the draft Local Plan, held over six weeks from November to December 2025. Few comments related specifically to either health or well-being; those that did reflected views from both organisations and individuals, consistent with the previous consultation.

2.49. Natural England expressed support for access to open space for health and well-being, while calling for stronger wording on climate adaptation, including tree planting to moderate temperature fluctuations and to improve air quality.

2.50. Hampshire County Council advised that development should promote health and well-being through inclusive design that supports physical activity, social interaction, and mental well-being. They suggested that proposals should improve access to green space, support safe walking and wheeling, and contribute to climate resilience through features such as shading, cooling, and flood mitigation. In addition, the County Council proposed that specialist housing for older people should follow HAPPI principles[1], providing high-quality, accessible homes with good space, light, and links to outdoor areas, in keeping with the National Park's character.

2.51. Other comments gave support to the tranquillity policy, recognising the clear and well-established health benefits of tranquil environments. Improving walking and cycling routes, with strong links to public transport across the Forest was welcomed for its benefits to environmental protection, public health, and climate objectives. However, there were concerns that new development may increase car usage, leading to higher levels of air pollution and associated health impacts. Feedback also suggested that essential local facilities should provide accessible toilets to avoid disproportionate impacts on women, disabled people, and those with health conditions.

[1] Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI). https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design-building/HAPPI/

3. Key issues and how the Regulation 19 Local Plan addresses these

3.1. The draft local planning policies emphasise the importance of health and well-being, particularly within the context of the National Park's landscape designation. Policies such as SP30: Specialist Housing for Older People support proposals that address local needs for age-appropriate accommodation, including extensions to existing facilities, thereby promoting health and social inclusion for the ageing population.

3.2. Specific site allocations, including policies SP33: Land at Ashurst Hospital, SP36: Land at Calpe Avenue in Lyndhurst, and SP38: Land to west of Brighton Road, in Sway, focus on Class 2 care homes and extra care facilities. These allocations aim to enhance access to suitable care services, supporting the health and well-being of vulnerable groups.

3.3. Policy SP29, which governs new residential development within the National Park, underscores the importance of housing types and tenures that meet local needs. It mandates that new housing complies with Building Regulations M4(2) for accessibility and that a proportion of affordable housing also meets M4(3) standards for wheelchair users, where local need is demonstrated. This approach ensures that housing developments are inclusive and accessible, directly contributing to improved health outcomes.

3.4. Throughout the Local Plan, there are references to the intrinsic link between landscape, health, and well-being. Policy SP15 on green and blue infrastructure emphasises the role of natural environments in enhancing mental and physical health by providing spaces for recreation, relaxation, and social interaction. The spatial strategy promotes development within existing settlements to minimize social isolation and foster community cohesion, which are vital for mental health.

3.5. Community facilities are a key focus, with Policy SP54 supporting the retention and development of local amenities that serve as social hubs, thereby supporting community health. Similarly, Policy DP60 aims to retain retail facilities within villages, ensuring access to essential services that contribute to residents' well-being.

3.6. While air quality is primarily discussed in relation to habitat impacts, it also has implications for human health. The Plan advocates for limited new development, concentrated within existing settlements, to mitigate environmental impacts that could affect health.

3.7. The Plan recognises that the National Park has a lower incidence of disability compared to national averages but anticipates an ageing population with associated health and mobility challenges. Policy SP29's focus on accessible housing and affordable options supports this demographic, ensuring that housing remains suitable for those with health needs.

3.8. Health and well-being are integral to the vision and strategic objectives of the Local Plan, notably objectives 4, 6, and 9. Policy SP1, which supports sustainable development, highlights the role of natural assets in promoting health through ecosystem services such as flood regulation, soil erosion prevention, and disease control. It also emphasises opportunities for informal recreation and access to open spaces as means to improve physical and mental health.

3.9. Additional policies reinforce this focus. Policy DP2: General Development Principles advocates for safe, inclusive, and navigable environments that support community well-being. Policy SP15: Green and Blue Infrastructure promotes the creation of recreational and social spaces, while Policy DP16: Open Space encourages the provision of formal parks, sports facilities, and recreational land.

3.10. Design principles outlined in Policy DP27 aim to create safe, inclusive environments that foster community interaction and well-being. Policies SP42 on affordable housing and SP43: Rural Exception Sites facilitate access to suitable housing for those in need, directly supporting their health and social stability.

3.11. Overall, the Local Plan underscores a comprehensive approach to health and well-being, integrating housing, natural environment, community facilities, and accessibility to foster healthier, more resilient communities within the National Park.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Overall, the evidence indicates that the New Forest National Park benefits from many of the conditions that support good health and well-being, including extensive access to green and blue space, generally low levels of deprivation, low overall crime, and a high-quality natural environment. However, the evidence also highlights a number of important and locally specific challenges. These include an ageing population, increasing demand for accessible and specialist housing, risks of rural isolation, uneven access to services and facilities, pockets of fuel poverty and food insecurity, and environmental health pressures such as air quality, heat and flooding. While many of these issues are less pronounced within the Park than in surrounding urban areas, they remain significant considerations for particular communities and locations.

4.2. Taken together, the evidence supports a Local Plan approach that promotes healthy, inclusive and resilient communities by focusing development in the most sustainable locations, safeguarding and enhancing green infrastructure, supporting local facilities and services, improving housing choice and accessibility, and responding to the implications of climate change. The Plan cannot address all health inequalities directly, but it can help shape the social, environmental and built conditions that influence health outcomes. Continued monitoring of demographic change, housing need, accessibility, climate-related risks and environmental quality will therefore remain important to ensure that the Local Plan continues to respond effectively to the health and well-being needs of the National Park's communities over the plan period.