

CONSULTATIVE PANEL MEETING – 4 September 2025

CHAIR'S REPORT

Report by: Brian Tarnoff, Chair, New Forest Consultative Panel

1 Chair's Notes on the Previous Meeting 5th June 2025

1.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire

Laura McCulloch, Head of Spatial Planning, Hampshire County Council.

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- Have hedgerows been mapped as part of the Strategy
 - Hedgerows are among the priority outcomes for the Strategy, and projects to deliver them may map them, but they've not been mapped for the Strategy itself. Happy to consider making case studies.
- How much has climate change and natural flood management has been included.
 - Natural flood management is mentioned many times, and they've mapped the flood plains to hold back water to rewet river valleys, and are continuing working with the Environment Agency on those issues.
- It was noted that the New Forest SSSI itself is excluded from the LNRS
 - All SSSI's have their own statutory / regulatory framework that is separate from the areas covered by the LNRS.
- Some wide ranging discussion on having a restoration target closer to 40% than 30% for Hampshire, the potential in the South Downs for restoration and involvement of their National Park Authority on the steering group, and pushing for more funding from Government.
- The Chair hazarded questions about future funding and interactions with planning
 - A funding review was imminent in ensuing weeks, but due to only fund one year. The spending review is coming quite late, and some councils will have already shed staff from their LNRS teams before delivery funding arrives.
 - Local Authorities are required to take account of LNRS when they are published, and then decide how best to use it to safeguard areas, and how to deliver the strategy. This doesn't directly restrain planning, but forms a material consideration.

1.2 “Pass the PEDALL”

Richard Taylor, Trustee “Friends of PEDALL” described the cycling charity PEDALL and their “Pass the PEDALL” fundraising event.

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- What are PEDALL's running costs?
 - Around £160k per annum.
 - They only have 2 permanent employees, 2 seasonal employees, and the rest is done by Volunteers. One bike cited cost £7k.
- One Panel member merely commented on their own experience taking park in last year's fundraising event as a highlight of that year.

1.3 Forestry England – Richard Burke

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- Could APR cameras be used at Forest entry points to charge for parking instead.
 - Not practical, particularly due to multiple entry points to the Park, those working / living here, or those who merely drive through.
- Dog Fouling – Not enough publicity around new message to bag and remove replacing the old "Stick it and Flick it"
 - Campaigns do publicise the message, as well as the efforts of other groups including NFDOD. Around 40 bins are available (out of the 130 Car parks).
- Track Maintenance – Is there a way for the public to inform FE about tracks in need of repair / maintenance?
 - Email: southern.enquiries@forestryengland.uk with description including location and if useful, photos.
 - Also, due to current funding challenges, and the need to finely prioritize work, some tracks may not be in as good condition as they may have been.
- Does that relate to the possible reduction of bridges.
 - FE doesn't have the same obligation to provide bridges as authorities would that manage public rights of way.
 - Challenges to maintain bridges that are prioritized for operational needs of Forestry and the working Forest, as much as for access.
 - A very few bridges removed for habitat restoration and some reclassified pedestrian / cycle only for safety.
- Car park charging, what arrangements will be made for local residents
 - April 2026 "switch on", unavoidable.
 - FE National Membership (currently £94 per annum, register up to two vehicles)
 - ("Local" memberships exist elsewhere for £48 Forest of Bere, Alice Holt, but no such scheme has been proposed for the New Forest)
 - Contention that car park revenue would be used to cover funding for other Forest work. (i.e. filling the shortfall in funding).
- Displacement parking – Verge parking, will Dragon's teeth be used?

- Can't comment on individual areas.
- Dragon's Teeth, ditch and bank, education, Traffic Regulation Orders are options that will be used.
- Displacement parking into village
 - FE only have jurisdiction on their land, villages would come under Highways Authority, etc.
 - Working with Hampshire County Council, also happy to discuss with parishes directly. Suggestion to invite and give guidance to Parishes taken on board.
- West of the Forest, multiple land/verge owners / car park managers. Small FE Car park closed, HCC Car Park likely to charge at Abbotswell. Will this be joined up to minimize verge displacement parking.
 - Working with HCC who are going to charge for Abbotswell, will co-ordinate launch of charging.
 - Also working with the National Trust in that area to see verge parking mitigated.
- Tree felling during Bird Nesting season, New Forest Association have been looking for FE's justification for possible breach of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
 - This is being progressed through Mike Pittock, and represents a National policy / practice by FE
- Knightwood Oak work may have led to felling of an Ancient Beech, which should have merely been made safe, and left as habitat supporting standing dead wood.
 - The beech was not felled for the Knightwood Oak work, but as a hazard.
 - Some discussion of other alternatives that would have put conservation ahead of access/recreation, including moving the path to a safe distance.
- Contention that those with rights of common in the Forest have a legal right of access and shouldn't be charged for car parking on the Forest.
 - Car park charging wouldn't be restricting commoners rights of access to the Forest, just their parking in the FE Car Parks.

1.4 National Park Authority– Nigel Stone

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- A326 presents many hazards for pedestrians and cyclists attempting to access the Forest. Two recent incidents had life changing consequences. User groups affected must be consulted in any changes going forward. (some strongly felt derogatives were aimed at HCC proceeding regardless).
 - This will be passed onto David Illsley in his new role as interim head of planning. And Nigel said he'd also been involved in discussions with HCC that included these issues. (Chair Notes: in a more recent query, HCC's

target of submitting planning October 2025 seems to have slipped to “End of” 2025)

- Fawley Waterside / Fawley Quarry, the Parish council received something about the Quarry, are they related?
 - This query would be forwarded onto David Illsley in Planning.

1.5 NFDC – Derek Tipp

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- “Has anyone asked the Government why they’re going to train planning committees to do absolutely no work?”
- Local Government Reorganization, will that effect the governance of the National Park
 - The operational governance of the park, no change.
 - 12 of over 22 members are appointed by local authorities including HCC, NFDC, Test Valley and Wiltshire, so changes on those levels will result, ostensibly, in a different set of appointees on the Board.
- Any other news on LGR?
 - No. They’re still talking about it. We don’t know who our partners might be, whether Test Valley or Southampton.
 - The Government have yet to answer the questions put to them by the leaders of the councils and HCC. This included querying how tightly the “rules” presented needed to be adhered to.
 - The notion that no boundaries could be changed had been watered down to suggest districts could be carved up if “beneficial to both parties”.
 - Population size requirements seem to be wavering.
 - Onus has been put on local authorities to argue their case for their proposals.
 - HCC may engage in a public consultation at some point.

1.6 Verderers

Anthony Pasmore expressed the Verderers concerns about waste disposal changes by NFDC.

1.7 AOB

The Chair moved to table discussion of a proposal to start panel meetings at 7:00pm or 7:30pm. This is earlier in the September Agenda to ensure that the discussion will be held.

2 Statutory Member Updates and Current Presentations for September Meeting

Due to the usual summer doldrums, previews of the statutory organizations presentations have been sparse, and may be seen merely as headlines in the Agenda.

2.1 National Park Authority – Nigel Stone, CFO / Head of Resources

2.2 Forestry Commission – Craig Harrison

Craig (or perhaps Richard or Sam) will present the progress made over the summer on the Car Park charging proposals, High Level Stewardship works planned this winter and also results of biodiversity audits done on previously restored sites, and a general update on summer activity.

2.3 NFDC – Derek Tipp

Derek will update the Panel on the Local Plan and also talk about the Council's Skills Partnership and other economy initiatives.

2.4 New Forest Commoners as a National Minority – Brice Stratford, Lyndhurst Parish Councillor

National Minority Status was established in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). The FCNM is an international treaty that the UK has ratified, aiming to protect the rights of minority communities. Recognition affirms a group's right to preserve and develop its distinct culture and identity.

Brice will introduce the ongoing effort to have New Forest Commoners recognized with this distinction. And how this status may produce practical, useful outcomes, by giving New Forest Commoners, and their vital role in the preservation of the Forest, standing in local decision making.

2.5 Panel Discussion – Future Panel Start Time

This is admittedly a very arbitrary thing, and any choice is likely to disadvantage some. As Chair I will kick off discussion with a brief non-binding vote for 7pm, 7:30pm, or "No preference". This will not decide the matter. Any decision will be held through an advertised vote at the December Panel and normal Panel voting rules will apply.

3 Consultations / Other Pertinent Information

3.1 Local Government Reorganization Consultations Results

Despite multiple surveys regarding the fate of Hampshire's councils (HCC ended 17th August, 12of15 Councils including NFDC & TVBC 27th July), and the looming 26th September final proposal submission date, results have not been made publicly available.

While I'm hopeful that more may be known by our meeting, I won't speculate here.

On 25th of July 2025 Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution sent this letter to Hampshire and other areas in this phase of LGR.

Local government reorganisation: letter to areas invited to submit final proposals

Apart from adding supplementary guidance on social care and financial arrangements and decision making it states two things. It allows councils to stray from the 500k population target, as long as they “set out the rationale for the proposed approach clearly”. Inevitably it also gives an ultimatum to call the matter into the Secretary of State for areas where councils are not making “every effort to work together within an area on the development of their final proposals”.

This report on the options on the two surveys, with assessments was presented to the members of the New Forest National Park Authority for their meeting on 24th July. It provides a very good summary, as well as statements of principles for the Authority while engaging in both the proposals for the Hampshire Mayoral Combined County Authority and for Local Government Reorganisation in Hampshire.

Update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

I would like to draw panel member's attention to the debate on the report's recommendations at the Authority which may be heard (video limited to a fixed view of the Chair, CEO and officers, sound not ideal). The Chair does invite a very open debate, and suggests that there is an opportunity to “nail our colours to the mast”.

This link should start the video from the 1 hour 35 minute point, and will eat around an hour of your time, if you're so inclined.

Authority Meeting 24 July 2025

I was at this meeting and what I saw was one half of the room understood the brief before them and the other didn't. They were asked to endorse principles, but also given the option to simply form and express a consensus on the options presented to the public in surveys. The debate includes a great deal of speculation tangential or irrelevant. I'd editorialize further, but I'll leave those with interest, time and stomach to judge for yourselves. It was one of the most frustrating things I've seen in two decades of attending Authority meetings.

The members did vote for the recommendations in the end, but did fail the opportunity to unambiguously endorse specific options. I have expressed my thanks to those in the room, officers and members, who kept their heads.