

AM 723/25

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY AUTHORITY MEETING – 16 OCTOBER 2025

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 24 July 2025. The report has been formatted to accord with our statutory purposes and duty; these are delivered by the Re:New Forest themes of 'Climate, Nature, People, Place, Partnership and Achieving Excellence' from our agreed Business Plan, summarised as follows:

 Re:New Climate	 Re:New Nature	 Re:New People	 Re:New Place	 Re:New Partnership
Establishing data and evidence baseline and implementing nature-based climate solutions.	Making space for nature and mitigating recreational pressures.	Increasing green skills and jobs - supporting New Forest business / green tourism. Sustainable land management and securing the future of commoning.	Promoting health and wellbeing through contact with nature.	Establishing stronger partnerships within the boundary.
Building a New Forest coalition for a Net Zero economy.	Enhancing natural capital.	Increasing the National Park's resilience to the effects of climate change.	Connecting people with nature and landscape.	Leading the green agenda beyond the New Forest.
Activating communities and increasing sustainable travel.	Supporting nature recovery through Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).	Increasing the availability of affordable housing.	Safeguarding cultural heritage.	Developing a centre of excellence of insights and innovation for the New Forest.
Re:New Organisation: Achieving Excellence				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering high-quality services through a capable and motivated staff team• Maximising resources and using them efficiently and effectively• Modernising our use of the office space and our wider ways of working				

Recommendation:

To note the report.

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Equality and Diversity

The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination in respect of certain protected characteristics and places us under a duty to have due regard to the advancement of equality in the exercise of our functions. We aim to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity throughout all aspects of our work. More details regarding our projects and initiatives, such as PEDALL, are set out in the relevant reports and Equality Impact Assessments.

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Major schemes which will affect the National Park have progressed significantly since my last report in July.

Funding for the Forest remains at a crisis point with a 50% cut in our National Park core budget over the past decade and commoning on a knife-edge and facing the end of its agri-environment funding with no future scheme yet secured. Meanwhile Forestry England is also facing a national deficit and has announced its plans to introduce car park charges across the whole of the Crown Lands – 129 car parks – covering half of the National Park. We are calling for further consideration of the overall budget needed to secure the Forest's future and to ensure that there is more clarity on how money generated by the car parking scheme will be invested into the Forest to deliver the shared Partnership Plan actions for the National Park.

Associated British Ports announced its 'Solent Gateway 2' early proposals for Dibden Bay and launched an informal consultation. The proposals include an automotive terminal, country park, access road and nature area. The illustrative plans indicate the footprint of the overall scheme would go into the National Park. Any final proposals will likely be considered as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project determined by central government with the Authority as a statutory consultee.

This period has also seen the submission of proposals from across Hampshire for the shape of unitary authorities following local government reorganisation. We have ensured our asks for the National Park agreed by Members have fed into the consultations for emerging proposals.

As part of our 20th anniversary campaign, we set out the challenges and opportunities ahead at a reception at the New Forest Show with an accompanying press release picked up by regional media. These issues were also discussed on tours of National Park partnership projects with our local MPs over the summer and during a visit to the New Forest Show by MHCLG Minister Baroness Sharon Taylor.

Our planning policy team has been focused on preparing our draft Local Plan and the key evidence base behind it. All planning authorities are required to have a Local Plan, which sets out the planning policy framework for the National Park area, guiding decisions on planning applications. The next phase of public consultation will begin in November, working towards examination in public by a government inspector in 2027.

With a focus on our maritime history, over 20 NPA volunteers worked with our archaeology team, University of Southampton and the Buckler's Hard Shipyard Trust to uncover the shipbuilding slipway at Buckler's Hard. The three-week excavation revealed some exciting finds and was a fantastic collaborative effort.

Efforts to improve sustainable transport in the National Park have taken steps forward this last quarter with the adoption by Hampshire County Council (HCC) of the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. If approved by the Authority at this meeting, it will help to prioritise actions to improve walking and cycling in the National Park. Work to improve the crossing of the A35 at Rhinefield for walkers and cyclists will be undertaken over the winter and we're waiting to hear if Active Travel England funding is forthcoming for other projects. A strategy for how people can move around the National Park sustainably will be scoped out at a Transport Summit we are organising in November. Volunteers have also been helping with access improvements to the former Breamore Railway Line.

Training, advice and grants for Commoners have been at the forefront over the summer with the New Forest Land Advice Service holding a series of workshops focused on veterinary care. Our Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme which we deliver on behalf of Defra has also developed a bespoke grant pot to support commoning.

Rangers and the communications team continue to promote the New Forest Code. Concerningly, more than 30 animals have died on Forest roads – a large increase on this time last year - and efforts to reduce animal accidents include preparing to launch a New Forest Drive Safe campaign in conjunction with Commoners and Forestry England to encourage businesses to educate their staff. Rangers attended a series of community events to share key #passwideandslow messages and led a session for Brockenhurst College student drivers. One of the Operation Mountie sessions with FE and the police which targets speeding drivers was assisted by a ranger and the session featured on BBC South Today.

The YouCAN youth for climate and nature scheme is demonstrating clear results both with young people and their communities. Junior ranger sessions are booked out; over 500 people attended the first New Forest Thrive Festival in Ringwood – a great result for a new event; and our dedicated Youth Board has already clocked up over 600 hours of volunteer time which is both greatly appreciate and truly impressive.

Other uplifting events this period have include the National Park Awards with the CLA which were presented at the New Forest Show. The awards celebrate those going above and beyond to support the sustainability and landscape of the Forest and included a new Commoning Champion award to mark the 20th anniversary of the National Park. Our inclusive cycling charity PEDALL held its second Pass the PEDALL fundraising event in September at New Park, Brockenhurst, and doubled attendance with over 400 people helping to fundraise for its important work helping people of all ages and abilities to connect with nature in the National Park.

As we go into the Autumn, we continue to champion the importance of the National Park and the vital role we all have in sustaining the unique nature and culture of this special landscape for the future. It is a crucial time for us and our partners to act as 'Team New Forest' to ensure the Forest has a voice as significant plans for the future of our area, its governance and funding are progressed.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

The report has been formatted to accord with the statutory purposes and duty, which we often refer to as Protect, Enjoy and Prosper. These are delivered through our Re:New 'Climate, Nature, People, Place, Partnership, Organisation' objectives from the agreed Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the first page.

Our Business Plan is delivered through annual Work Programmes, progress on which is set out in these reports alongside the formal quarterly reporting under the six themes to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee; at the end of each year we produce an Annual Review document.

The final section of this report lists the Members', our Chair's and the Chief Executive's activities and events.

1 First Purpose: Protect

Nature Recovery

Partners are now moving into the final delivery phase of the Species Survival Fund project with the practical projects needing to be completed by the 31 December deadline. The summer period has enabled survey work to be carried out on many of the SSF sites. A highlight was the discovery of Little Arboreal Ladybirds which were recorded on four sites across the forest. These were the first confirmed British records for these ladybirds which normally live in continental Europe but have now colonised southern England as a result of warming temperatures.

Maintaining the quality of National Park habitats through programmes such as the Species Survival Fund and Higher Level Stewardship scheme is important for those species associated with those habitats but also to support species that are adapting to climate change by expanding their range.

Development Management

87 planning applications were received from 1 July to 23 September. In the same period 127 planning applications were determined with an approval rate of 91%.

During this same period, four appeal decisions were received. Three were dismissed and one was allowed.

We have been pleased to welcome Lindsey Chamberlain back from maternity leave as a Planning Officer and Carly Cochrane as Senior Planning Officer. Liz Young will also be joining the team as a Senior Planning Officer on 1 October.

Liz Marsden will be retiring on 3 October after four years working for the Authority and 37 years working in planning. We would like to thank Liz for all her hard work during her time with the Authority and wish her every happiness in her retirement.

Planning Enforcement

Since June the enforcement team has been busy dealing with the initial assessments on 56 new enforcement cases and concluding 62 cases. Two enforcement notices have been issued, both in respect of unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller plots, one of which has already lodged an appeal against the Notice and as a result we are currently dealing with eight enforcement appeals.

The Authority has also secured compliance with two Breach of Condition Notices avoiding the time and expense required to prosecute the owners for non-compliance with those notices within the compliance period.

Prosecutions are being pursued in respect of a continuing breach of planning control relating to the unauthorised use of an area of woodland that has been subdivided and used for leisure and accommodation purposes, the use of land for open storage and the continued use of land for a residential mobile home.

Policy

The primary focus of the Policy team's work over the summer has been preparing the draft New Forest National Park Local Plan Review. This has involved the consideration of a series of key evidence base reports focusing matters including housing needs, employment needs and the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the emerging Plan. A series of member workshops has been held in recent months, and the team has also engaged neighbouring local planning authorities and town and parish councils. It is important the National Park continues to be covered by an up-to-date local plan to contribute to delivering the statutory National Park purposes and related socio-economic duty through our statutory planning functions. Further details are set out in the separate report being considered at this meeting.

The National Park Authority has been represented at the examination hearing sessions into the draft Hampshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan. This draft Local Plan covers the whole of the New Forest National Park (including the area within Wiltshire) and will, once adopted, replace the adopted Minerals and Waste Local Plan which was adopted in 2013.

The team continues to engage with local communities in preparing neighbourhood plans. The Examiner's Report into the draft Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan has been received for fact checking. Fawley Parish Council is currently consulting on its draft Neighbourhood Plan before its submission to the NPA and New Forest District Council

(as the Fawley Neighbourhood Area includes land within both planning authorities' jurisdictions) for the next stage in the plan-making process.

In mid-September Associated British Ports (ABP) published information on its planned port development on the eastern edge of the National Park, branded 'Solent Gateway 2'. The scale of the proposals means they are likely to be considered through the 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project' (NSIP) process, rather than a planning application to the relevant local planning authorities. We responded to this initial consultation by the deadline of 13 October and will continue to engage as the proposals develop.

Archaeology

The team consulted and progressed 31 planning applications (17 NFNPA and 14 NFDC). With the limited opportunities for any large-scale archaeological excavation within the New Forest National Park, consulting on the planning applications for NFDC continues to help us better understand the range of archaeological material surrounding the New Forest National Park.

For the SLA with Forestry England the team progressed 22 sites and made visits to sites across Forestry England's southern district. For the Higher-Level Stewardship scheme the team progressed 10 sites and conducted six site visits. Providing these services to FE and the HLS Scheme provides ongoing opportunities to identify, record and protect a range of heritage assets within the National Park that could easily be damaged by the heavy vehicles used in forestry and habitat restoration. It also facilitates the ongoing detailed assessment of LiDAR data of the New Forest and its surroundings which has often led to new archaeological discoveries.

The team has recently made great strides in streamlining the ways in which the heritage data from our FE and HLS surveys is brought together in GIS and delivered to the Historic Environment Record. This will enable more research to be conducted by us and others, helping to grow our understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the New Forest.

In August, we took part in the three-week archaeological excavation of one of the historic slipways at Buckler's Hard along with 24 NPA volunteers. This is a partnership project between the Buckler's Hard Shipyard Trust, the University of Southampton's archaeology department and the NPA. The project was hugely successful, and a next excavation season is anticipated in the summer of 2026 with our continued involvement.

We are continuing with the LoCATE (Local Community Archaeological Training and Equipment) scheme, supporting archaeological societies and community groups from across Hampshire and Dorset in accessing geophysical survey equipment in partnership with Bournemouth University. The equipment has been in constant use and is being actively shared between different societies. Some good examples of the results obtained

using the project equipment can be found on the Avon Valley Archaeological Society website: <https://avonvalleyarchsoc.wordpress.com/reports>.

The New Forest Knowledge website is no longer getting its regular technical support updates. This has started to affect the site functionality, and it is not possible to gain visitor number/view stats for this period. However, the site is still live and currently working. The New Forest Heritage Centre has informed us that they will be shutting down the NFK website by the end of 2025. Their intention is to transfer selected content from NFK, formally depositing it into their collection and adding selected content to a section of their new main website. This will ensure some of the content is retained and we are continuing to look specifically at NFNPA-produced content and how that can be retained and kept publicly accessible.

Building Design and Conservation

We continue to have a high planning caseload relating to designated (e.g. Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas) and non-designated heritage assets (e.g. locally listed buildings) in the National Park. The team's work also includes liaising with the enforcement team where unauthorised development has taken place that impacts on the built heritage of the National Park. We are working with Netley Marsh Parish Council on the review of the Forest North East Conservation Area.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Environmental Land Management (ELM)

Projects continue to be supported through the FiPL programme, with NPA advisors working with the Commoners Defence Association to develop a scheme that can directly support young commoners with the acquisition of equipment, the cost of which is often a barrier to younger commoners in particular.

Rhys Morgan in the NFLAS team, supported by Higher Level Stewardship scheme funding, teamed up with a local veterinary practice to run two workshops for livestock owners who turn out cattle and pigs on the New Forest. A cattle event was held earlier this year and in September a similar event was held for owners' pigs ahead of the pannage season. The team has also joined with the North Wessex Downs Protected Landscape to jointly present a workshop on grazing systems for equine owners, due to be held at Sparsholt College.

2 Second Purpose: Enjoy

Education and Youth

This summer school term finished with more school visits on the Open Forest and coast in all weathers, benefitting 168 school aged pupils in July. Positive feedback from teachers and requests to book in advance for next year continue to be high.

We received the following feedback from a teacher at New Forest Academy:
'The visit met and exceeded all objectives. The students completed a range of fieldwork techniques and activities. Students got to experience the National Park and coastline with expert guidance and information from the education team which was invaluable.... Your staff responded well to the needs of our students and took the extreme weather conditions into consideration. Sessions were well planned and engaging..... One student enjoyed the year 7 trip so much he took his family to Milford on Sea when we had an inset day and taught his mum and grandma what he has learnt during the trip.....Thank you to Helen and Ella for all their help and support without you I doubt we'd be able to offer these opportunities to students.'

We also hosted eight more year 10 pupils for a week each of work experience - seeing the breadth of green careers the NPA and the wider New Forest has to offer. The quote below from their collective email to staff who hosted them really sums it up.:

'We really appreciated everybody's help and kindness throughout the week... We especially enjoyed PEDALL as we found it very interesting to learn about inclusivity and it was fun! We enjoyed being immersed in nature too... It was great to see the school trip and learn how to be responsible for others and learn leadership skills. Expressing our creativity through making the clay pots for the New Forest Show was great, it was fun to paint the signs too. The most rewarding part of our week was the litter pick at Calshot - it was so satisfying! Thank you all."

The team was sad to say goodbye to Ella Abbott as Education and Youth Officer (Maternity Cover), but also pleased to welcome back Amy Moore from maternity leave. We are looking forward to a busy autumn including a number of school career fairs.

Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN)

NFNPA elements of the YouCAN project continue to go from strength to strength and allows us to reach new audiences for a meaningful and ongoing connection with climate and nature of the New Forest. Our Youth action programme continued to offer a bespoke junior ranger programme for home educated students which will be running again. Over the summer holidays, the team ran sessions with both Southampton Young Carers and New Forest Young Carers - 120 young person days in all.

Our weekend junior ranger programme provided 25 day opportunities and those more dedicated who have attended multiple sessions and met the requirement on their junior ranger passport received their Bronze award and junior ranger hoodies for their efforts.

The highlight of the season has been the New Forest Thrive festival. This new community focused event in Ringwood on 6 July welcomed more than 500 visitors, and included contributions from local green groups such as Ringwood Repair Café, YouCAN Partners including excerpts from Theatre for Life's 'Bringing the outside in' climate play, PEDALL, the nightjar project, Freshwater Habitats Trust, the Parks Foundation and many more. We were pleased to be able to support Theatre for Life in turn by engaging with the audience prior and after performance of 'Bringing the Outside In' at MAST theatre in

Southampton. It was a privilege to be part of the first audience and we found it very impactful.

The Youth Board played an important part in our stand at the New Forest Show, collecting responses for their young person's survey, taking part in the NPA 20th Anniversary celebrations and working as a team with staff.

One year on from the inaugural youth board meeting, the 15 people (aged 18-30 years) have achieved over 600 hours of volunteer work, including everything from attending forum meetings, working groups, generating their own survey, running a guided walk, supporting NPA staff and representing the youth board at events and finally- this September- a youth board residential event to reflect on their successes of the last year and look forward to the next. An incredible amount has been achieved starting from nothing one year ago and the youth board are to be congratulated and thanked for all for their time, dedication, enthusiasm, cooperation and open mindedness throughout.

Public and community events / rangers / recreation management

It was another busy summer for the team and despite the challenges of reduced capacity (wishing two of our three Area Rangers well in new ventures in May), we engaged with 5,937 members of the public across the period.

The team used the mobile information units to provide patrols across the National Park as well as engagement pop-ups in key car parks. Literature was continually supplied to local businesses and accommodation providers. We attended fewer public events than in previous years but ensured our presence at those which provided good opportunity to promote the New Forest Code and encourage responsible use of the National Park by both visitors and local users; these included Ellingham Show, Burley Show, Hythe Community Action Day and Lymington Picnic in the Park.

Two Wild Play Days were delivered for Downton Family charity which saw over 140 attendees, many experiencing the National Park for the first time, despite living so close.

Rangers and members of the Education and Youth team joined the Forestry England HLS Team for a useful information-sharing and training morning to increase understanding of our work and identify ways we can increase ways of working together.

In September, we attended Brockenhurst College Freshers Week to promote responsible use of the National Park to new students, in particular road safety and promoting the do not feed and touch livestock messages to the large number of students attending from outside the National Park boundary.

Rangers continue to support wider NPA teams, including leading Junior Rangers sessions and supporting nature recovery volunteer tasks for Access and Learning as well as pop-up campsite monitoring for Planning and Enforcement.

Hayden attended the Europarc and Atlantic Isles Board meeting in her role as Trustee, giving NFNPA a voice in a UK–Ireland network of protected areas and being able to represent the southern National Parks on the EAI Board.

Recruitment to replace the habitat mitigation funded Area Ranger role is currently underway with a significant number of applications so far. Interviews will be held in mid-October.

Communications

As part of our 20th anniversary campaign, we highlighted the challenges ahead for the National Park over the next 20 years at a New Forest Show reception and in a press release which was picked up online and in the media. These challenges were also highlighted in a series of summer tours with our MPs Sir Julian Lewis, Sir Desmond Swayne and Caroline Nokes to highlight issues and the impacts of Partnership Plan projects across the Forest.

Campaign for National Parks issued a Rivers at Risk report and we provided a response on our website and longer feature about the water environment in the National Park and the work we are doing through the Partnership Plan, as well as calling on the regulator and water companies to take more urgent action.

Associated British Ports has issued its proposals for the 'Solent Gateway II' development of Dibden Bay, including an automotive terminal, access road, country park and natural habitat area. The four-week informal consultation will be followed by a formal consultation and the final decision on any development will be made by the Secretary of State for Transport, with the NPA a statutory consultee. We gave an initial statement to the informal proposals highlighting the National Park's protected status and that we would expect any proposal to maximise the benefit for nature and our communities.

Forestry England announced its scheme to introduce car parking across all 129 of its car parks. We called for funds raised in the Forest to be reinvested in the Forest, for a discount scheme for local people and robust measures in place to deter displacement parking.

Around 2,500 people attended our New Forest Show stand on the theme of YouCAN encouraging families to learn more about and get involved in care for the New Forest. African Activities helped people discover the amazing migration of the nightjar from Ghana to the New Forest and 'talk' with a nightjar through an AI app; people could make Roman pots and learn about the history of the Forest during that period; pledge to live more sustainably and find out about the Youth Board.

As part of our nature campaign this year, a press release about rare ladybirds discovered in the Forest through a survey from the Species Survival Fund project received international media attention. We profiled work to combat climate change at Brockenhurst

Park funded through our Farming in Protected Landscapes grant scheme, which included planting 130 trees.

Communications work to support commoning included warnings about pigs being turned out for the pannage season. A New Forest Drive Safe campaign is being launched to raise awareness of the dangers of animal accidents through businesses whose staff cross the Forest. We also promoted workshops run by the New Forest Land Advice Service and funded by the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.

The New Forest Thrive festival was a highlight of the YouCAN youth for climate and nature programme. Developing a new event from scratch with branding, marketing and capturing the event on the day ensured its success with over 500 people attending. YouCAN partner Theatre for Life's performances of climate play 'Bringing the Outside In' was a sell-out success and featured in The Guardian as well as local publications. We are now helping to promote the play as it tours locally.

We raised awareness of our health and wellbeing programme with reports on the health fellows, plus case studies and the Pass the PEDALL event, along with volunteering at the Breamore Railway Line improvements.

Communications support for our partner the New Forest Marque has included promoting its arts and crafts 'Inspired' scheme members taking part in Hampshire Open Studios; events including the Romsey Show and a sold-out showcase evening at Stanwell House Hotel in Lymington.

The next phase of the New Forest artists in residence projects was promoted in partnership with Sway-based arts and educational charity SPUD.

Our new Authority members were promoted in a press release with bios added to our website.

The autumn/winter issue of Park Life has been published, including features on commoning, the water environment, the Local Plan review and coastal birds.

Coming up we're promoting the Walking Festival, a Transport Summit, activities by the Green Groups and preparing for the Volunteer Fair.

Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Projects

We have been working with arts organisation African Activities (part of the creative Forest Folio group) on the Nightjar project, which highlights the migration of the Nightjar from West Africa and the New Forest, and uses this to help tell stories of belonging and inclusion. Artist Kwame Bakoji-Hume has created a large Nightjar sculpture which, accompanied by an activity to make nightjar models from empty milk bottles, has been present at several events over the summer including the Thrive Festival, New Forest Show and Southampton Mela. The nightjar project has been very well received at all the

events. We support the project through our New Forest Voices workstream, with a grant to enable African activities to develop the project further and seek funding from Arts Council England and other grant giving organisations.

Our two Health and Wellbeing Fellows have completed their year-long Fellowship with us. Laura and Jennifer are now helping with seeking the next cohort of Health Fellowships and placements. They presented at the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Resident Doctor Wellbeing and Awards Day on 29 September at Shirrell Health, where we led a nature connection walk for attendees.

PEDALL New Forest Inclusive Cycling

PEDALL has delivered 168 group riding sessions and 2,146 individual riding slots (excluding New Forest Show) in this period. We are on track to deliver 14% growth in riding numbers compared to the same period last year.

In a new and exciting project development, funded by the Lottery Community Fund and South Western Railway, we are delighted to welcome two new team members who have joined our 'supported employment' programme. Our new team members bring lived experience to the PEDALL project, sharing their insight and understanding with our riding community, volunteers and the wider NFNPA team. This programme includes training and development and will provide a pathway to future career opportunities.

We had a fun few days at the New Forest Show with partner Forestry England, where we delivered 900+ go-kart cycle rides as part of our fundraising and community outreach. We raised £3,500 during the event. Working alongside our engagement team colleagues, we also supported the NFNPA Thrive Event, offering families the opportunity to enjoy a PEDALL inclusive cycling circuit.

As part of our PEDALL Voices programme, we are delighted that our first two case studies have been published with the support of the NFNPA Comms team. These stories clearly highlight the wellbeing benefits of the PEDALL project. [Case Studies | PEDALL, New Forest National Park](#)

Mum of regular rider Poppy says:

'[Poppy's] obviously relaxed in this environment. It's just great to get away from computer games and the TV. It's simple, it's practical, and it's good for her motor skills, wellbeing, and mental health. It ticks all the boxes.'

Caroline, a committed and passionate PEDALL volunteer and Friends of PEDALL Trustee, said: 'PEDALL is about connection. Bonds form between families and others who cycle with us because people are going through some of the same challenges. People talk to each other through meeting at PEDALL.'

Our community celebration, awareness and fundraising event, Pass the PEDALL, took place on Saturday 27 September at New Park, Brockenhurst. We expanded the event

this year in true Team New Forest spirit, including the local Community Police, offering security bike marking, Cycle Experience offering free safety checks and self-guided rides, Camping in the New Forest hosting education sessions for attending families. Local New Forest food vendors kept us fueled throughout the day. Our regular riders inspired us as they helped us complete our dawn to dusk cycle relay challenge - to cover 1,400 kilometers, the distance from Lands End to John O'Groats, which we managed two and a half times! Our PEDALL project board partners, including Forestry England, Dementia Friendly Hampshire and Minstead Trust and our funding partners South Western Railway also participated.

We were thrilled to receive funding from New Forest District Council for improvement to our access facilities at Burley which will support our clients with disabilities.

Volunteering

Since the start of July our Conservation Volunteers, Access Surveyors and New Forest Ambassadors have provided 161 volunteer days on tasks across the New Forest. Flourish in Nature have supported 13 people requiring additional support across four sessions.

The highlight of the quarter were the two weeks spent at Buckler's Hard, assisting with the slipway excavation detailed in the Archaeology section. Twenty-five unique NFNPA volunteers, including five supported by Flourish in Nature and three YouCAN Volunteers were able to attend. Our volunteers received fantastic feedback from all the dig leads, and we aim to join Buckler's Shipyard Trust and the University of Southampton on the second half of the dig next summer.

Several vegetation clearance sessions at the Breamore Railway Footpath resulted in the uncovering of 11 out of a possible nine railway culverts, ranging from small brickworks to the foundations of bridges. The project also saw a visit from Desmond Swayne MP, who joined NFNPA staff to learn about the former railway and links to local development. Any members interested in learning more about the project are welcome to join the volunteers on a future excursion.

Our engagement volunteers, the New Forest Ambassadors, have supported the Education and Ranger teams at 16 different events/activities, including the bespoke Junior Ranger programmes for the Home Education Group and Southampton Young Carers, New Forest Thrive and the Ellingham Show. Our next steps will be upskilling our Ambassadors and Access Surveyors with Outdoor First Aid Training to give them both greater freedom and support in their roles.

Access and Rights of Way

Work on the gullied paths around Tatchbury Mount is underway and we are planning more access improvement works on the Cadland Estate involving new signposts, new interpretation posts and the replacement of four stiles with gates.

With the Defra Access For All Fund, we will continue our work upgrading accessible trails in partnership with Forestry England, supporting PEDALL and making repairs to our welfare van to aid the comfort of our volunteers.

The Solent-to-Sussex England Coast Path Trail Partnership continues its work to establish and maintain the National Trail from the New Forest to Shoreham. As members of the Trail Partnership, we continue to maintain the three miles of trail within the National Park and look forward to the route of the Highcliffe to Calshot section being determined.

3 Duty: Prosper

Re:New Forest Partnership Plan

The next meeting of the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan Leaders' Panel is due to take place in early November. This meeting will be hosted by New Forest District Council and will focus on the opportunities and challenges that Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution present for the New Forest and surrounding areas.

New Forest Marque

Dan Parsons, who has been Chair of the Marque for seven years stood down in September. We would like to express our thanks to Dan for all the work he has put into helping the Marque develop, including through some difficult times during the Covid pandemic; he leaves the Marque in good shape.

Fundraising

Following recent feedback from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, we are continuing to develop and refine our plans for a development phase application to the Landscape Connections strategic initiative. We are working towards submitting a development phase expression of interest soon and continuing to talk to the funder about our plans as they progress.

New Forest Skills Development

The GreenPrint Partnership has completed a green skills and jobs study, put together by a team led by the University of Southampton and the National Park Authority. The final design of the report is under way, and it will be available soon, informing both local skills development in the National Park and that in the wider area.

New Forest District Council have launched a Skills Action Plan, and we are working with the Economic Development team to support efforts to develop opportunities in the conservation, land management and forestry sectors in particular.

New Forest Tour

We delivered pre-season Forest-specific training to New Forest Tour drivers and produced suggested itineraries for customers. This season the Blue Route and Red Route each operated on 50% frequency with the Green Route maintaining full frequency. We await the final passenger numbers and will meet with the strategic and operational teams from the bus company to discuss the recent season and plans for 2026.

Sustainable Transport and Active Travel

We spoke at the recent Local Access Forum about sustainable transport in the New Forest ahead of our Transport Summit in November.

As a precursor to Hampshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) board meetings, we attended a stakeholder engagement workshop aimed at helping develop the Destination Management Plan.

We took part in HCC's Passenger Transport Forum as part of our efforts to increase sustainable transport to and within the National Park and will continue to liaise with neighbouring South Downs NPA to ensure we feature in future public transport developments.

The New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan was adopted by Hampshire County Council on 18 September. We are seeking adoption by the Authority through another paper at this meeting. This joint document will now inform other strategies and plans and also help us prioritise actions to improve walking and cycling in the New Forest.

We have completed the Active Travel England (ATE) National Park Capability Fund projects for 2025/26 and are awaiting news on ATE funding for 2026/27 which we are told will be confirmed soon. The 2025 active travel studies will soon be available on our website, and action on improved wayfinding and improved crossing of the A35 at Rhinefield and Boldrewood Ornamental Drive will be taken forward with our partners in the coming months.

We are planning a New Forest National Park Transport Summit on 20 November at Brockenhurst Village Hall, delivered in partnership with HCC, NFDC and Go New Forest. Wiltshire Council have also been invited to support the event.

This will be a flagship event for community groups, businesses, public transport industry leads, elected representatives and local organisations to help create a vision and strategy for how people move around the National Park in ways that protect and enhance our special, working landscape. We are working on an exciting agenda that will include a mix of hands-on workshops, panel discussions, Q&A, active travel demonstrations and site visits.

Affordable Housing

Good progress is being made on the consented development schemes at the site of the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel and land at Whartons Lane, Ashurst. Between them these sites are due to provide around 40 affordable dwellings for local people in housing need. The review of the New Forest National Park Local Plan is also being informed by updated evidence on development viability which will support the revised planning policy approach to affordable housing delivery, including on rural exception sites.

Procurement for the delivery (build) of our own two affordable homes in Burley should be underway by the date of this meeting.

Sustainable Communities Fund

Funds of £2,000 were awarded to the management committee and charity trustees of Hale Village Hall to replace the old fluorescent lighting with LEDs and install movement sensors in locations around the hall where the lights often get left on, such as storage rooms, toilets, and the lower ground floor hallway. Some of the fluorescent tubes are failing and can no longer be replaced. The new lighting will be more sustainable, efficient and cheaper to run. Additional funding has been secured from NFDC and other sources to install solar PV panels and a battery, as well as replacement lighting in the main hall. The hall is well used by Hale Parish Council and local schools as well as the Hale Local Food market, sports clubs, and other community groups.

A grant of £10,000 was awarded to African Activities CIC to deliver the second phase of its Nightjar Project in the New Forest. During the first phase, the project team gathered stories of migration, identity, and transformation, and shared these via a multi-site creative movement of paintings, sculpture, live performance, and film. Phase two focuses on testing these approaches in live settings at a series of festivals across the New Forest National Park. A workshop focused on co-creating and designing ways for more people to be able to express their own culture, heritage and identity. The outputs will be used to shape and build a collaborative and robust long-term programme to support the movement in the long term.

4 Organisation: Achieving Excellence

Human Resources

As of 5 October 2025, the total staff headcount was 82 or 69.11 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	Full Time Equivalents	Variation from previous report
Core funded	58*	– 3	50.62*	– 3
Funded by external projects	24	+ 2	18.49	+ 0.33
Total	82	– 1	69.11	– 2.67

*Of the core funded roles, one staff member (1 FTE) is working in shared services, one is on a fixed-term contract and 19 are part-time.

In the last few months, we recruited to the following roles:

Role	Contract type	How funded
Inclusive Cycling Ride Assistant	Fixed term for 6 months, part-time	Project funded (PEDALL)
Senior Planning Officer	Permanent	Core funded

We said goodbye to:

Role	Contract type	How role will be filled in future
Planning Officer x 2	1 x Permanent, core funded 1 x maternity cover, core funded	1 x replaced with Senior Planning Officer role 1 x return of postholder from maternity leave
Senior Planning Officer	Maternity cover, core funded	Return of postholder from maternity leave
Education and Youth Officer	Maternity cover, core funded	Return of postholder from maternity leave

We are currently recruiting for:

Role	Contract type	How funded
Ranger	Permanent	Funded by habitat mitigation contributions

IT & Cyber Security Services

Security / Infrastructure – Work is progressing on setting up Microsoft Purview for retention & sensitivity labels across the electronic data held within the authority. This is an essential piece of security and GDPR work.

Planning System - The newly-developed TPO portal is now live.

The microfiche is still with a specialist company for scanning. The Planning system had an upgrade.

GIS – a learning at lunch session for the new Intranet map will take place later in the year.

Microsoft 365 - The IT Champions programme is up and running again, and we have two champions trialling Microsoft Copilot AI. The team are conducting a SharePoint review and planning of future workshops / collaboration with teams on its efficient use is underway.

IT are looking to set up an onboarding/offboarding (starters & leavers) site to make the joining and leaving process smoother, with all information available in one area.

Mobile Phones – a new multi-year phone contract is now in place.

Training – ICT Team members attended a 365 Copilot webinar.

Other - IT ran a successful Discovery Day covering IT Helpdesk and AI. We also had three groups of work experience pupils spending time with the team.

Information management

Information requests

We have received 30 formal requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Of those 27 have been responded to within the statutory timeframes with one being late by one day and the remaining two have yet to be

responded to; we anticipate being able to meet the deadlines. This is three fewer requests than we received by the same time last year.

As in previous years, many of the requests (43%) relate to our planning work, including policy matters and specific planning applications and enforcement cases. The number of requests we receive relating to our finance and ICT arrangements has been steadily increasing over time and these also accounted for 43% of the total requests, and covered topics such as staff costs and expenses, late payment of invoices, spend on utility bills and grants. Four of the requests were received from the Taxpayers Alliance.

We endeavour to provide as much information as possible in response to requests and on only five occasions (17%) we withheld the information requested in its entirety, these related to either personal data, sensitive enforcement matters or in one case we considered the information to be commercially sensitive. In five (17%) of the requests, we did not hold the information that was being sought. The rest were either released in full or subject to limited redactions such as the personal data of third parties.

We have only received two requests for an internal review of our original decision; however, this figure may rise as some requesters still have time to request a review, if they wish. We currently have two requests with the Information Commissioner from the last financial year and are waiting to hear from their investigator. They relate to a single planning matter where we withheld some information because it was the personal data of a third party.

Complaints

We have received seven formal complaints to date this year compared to 13 in the same period last year. All were related to planning matters. They were all responded to within the 20 working day policy timeframe and none were upheld. Two complaints were considered by the Chief Executive at Stage 3 of the process, and neither were upheld. We are not aware of any being referred to the Ombudsman.

Personal Data Rights

We received eight applications from members of the public to exercise their right to restrict the publication of their personal information under the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). These all related to a single planning application where the objectors were asking us not to put their names and/or postal addresses on our website. As we are not relying on consent to process personal data in relation to planning matters, such requests are determined on a case-by-case basis and based on the particular circumstances of the data subject.

In light of this significant number of requests we reviewed and updated our 'guide to commenting' page on the website to ensure that our policy regarding public representations in connection with planning applications was set out clearly.

5 Members

5.1 Some Members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events

- 29-31 July – New Forest Show
- 19 August – Planning Committee
- 20 August - Informal Members Session – Local Plan Review
- 4 September – Consultative Panel
- 8 September – Resources Audit and Performance Committee
- 15 September – New Forest Access Forum
- 16 September – Planning Committee
- 17 September - Informal Members Session – Local Plan Review
- 1 October – Members Session – Member representation on external bodies & ABP 'Solent Gateway 2' discussion

5.2 Forthcoming Members activities include:

- 21 October – Planning Committee
- 23 October – Finance & Facilities Task & Finish Group
- 3 November – Resources, Audit & Performance Committee
- 18 November – Planning Committee
- 19 November - Finance & Facilities Task & Finish Group
- 4 December – Consultative Panel
- 11 December – Members Day – TBC
- 16 December – Planning Committee
- 17 December - Finance & Facilities Task & Finish Group
- 20 January – Planning Committee

5.3 Chief Executive's external engagements

- 25 July – Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne MP – tour of the Forest
- 23 July – Preparatory meeting for upcoming National Park City (NPC) seminar
- 28 July – English National Park Officers Group meeting (ENPOG)
- 28 July – Pre New Forest Show reception
- 29-31 July – New Forest Show including a visit by Minister Baroness Taylor (MHCLG), 20th Anniversary Reception, NPA/CLA Awards ceremony and lunch at the President's table
- 5 August – Attendance to Bucklers Hard archaeology dig
- 6 August – Business West meeting
- 6 August – Regular meeting with Chair, National Parks Partnerships (NPP)
- 7 August – Business South Summer Lunch event
- 7 August – Meeting with Seattle Parks & Recreation Senior Advisor

- 8 August – NPC International Steering Group meeting
- 12 August – Green Leadership programme planning
- 14 August – Visit by Chief Executive, Bannau Brycheiniog NPA
- 15 August – Visit by Dr Maxwell A Ayamba
- 18 August – Meeting with Deputy Director Food and Drink Quality & Partnerships, Defra
- 19 August – Meeting with local Foundation for Common Land representative
- 19 August – Meeting with Chief Executive, Exmoor NPA
- 20 August – Future of Commoning meeting
- 21 August – Meeting with South Downs NPA
- 22 August – Hampshire & Isle of Wight (HIOW) Public Sectors Leaders meeting
- 22 August – Meeting with Chief Executive, North York Moors NPA
- 26 August – National Park City meeting
- 27 August – Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP – tour of the Forest
- 27 August – Meeting with Chief Executive, Broads Authority
- 28 August – Meeting with Chief Operating Officer, Forestry England
- 29 August – Regular meeting with Chief Executive, NFDC
- 29 August – Rt Hon Sir Julian Lewis MP – tour of the Forest
- 1 September – Greenprint meeting
- 2 September – Meeting with NPAs and National Trust
- 2 September – ENPOG
- 3 September – Business South Board meeting
- 3 September – National Park City International Governance consultation
- 3 September – Green Leadership programme planning
- 4-5 September – St George's Fellowship Civil Service Future Conversation, Windsor
- 16-17 September – Meeting with Foundation for Common Land
- 17 September – Greenprint Steering Group
- 18 September – Nature Recovery Leaders meeting
- 18 September – Regular meeting with Chair, National Parks Partnerships (NPP)
- 19 September – Speaker at Women's Leadership in Protected Landscapes online network meeting
- 22-23 September – Hosting National Parks England (NPE) Board Meeting in the New Forest
- 24-25 September – HIWWT and Welsh Wildlife Trust Green Finance event
- 29 September – Regular meeting with Chief Executive, NFDC
- 29 September – ENPOG
- 30 September – Nature Recovery Strategy meeting
- 1 October – Regular meeting with Chief Executive, SDNPA
- 1 October – NPE Nature Recovery meeting
- 3 October – St Georges' Fellowship Windsor, Leader to Leader exchange
- 12 October – Speaker at IUCN World Congress

5.4 Chair's engagements

- 28 July - Pre New Forest Show reception
- 29 July - New Forest Show including 20th Anniversary Reception
- 1 August – National Parks England (NPE) meeting
- 12 August – Meeting with Chair, South Downs NPA
- 13 August – Housing Liaison Group meeting
- 15 August – ICOG meeting
- 21 August – Meeting with South Downs NPA
- 22 August – TV interview with That's TV Solent
- 29 August – NPE Directors meeting
- 2 September – NPE Board meeting agenda discussion
- 3 September – New member induction
- 4 September – Meeting with NPA Chairs
- 9 September – Meeting with Campaign for National Parks
- 10 September – NPE pre-meet
- 23 September – NPE Board meeting held in the New Forest
- 25 September – Forest Farming Group meeting

6 Recommendation

To note the report.