

AM 727/25

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 16 OCTOBER 2025

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2024 – 2043 REGULATION 18 PART 2 CONSULTATION

Report by: David Illsley, Interim Head of Planning & Place

Summary:

The Authority's statutory planning powers are key to the delivery of the two National Park purposes and related socio-economic duty. It is important that the National Park continues to be covered by an up-to-date Local Plan that strikes the appropriate balance between meeting the identified development needs of our local communities and other important objectives within the National Park. In accordance with the Authority's published timetable, the first formal step in the review of the New Forest National Park Local Plan was undertaken earlier this year, with a 6-week public consultation on the 'Direction of Travel' document which set out the areas considered to be in scope for review. Since this consultation closed in March 2025 the responses have been assessed and the recommendations of various evidence base studies and ongoing assessments have been received.

The Authority's adopted Local Development Scheme (July 2024) confirms that a further consultation under Regulation 18 of the relevant planning regulations will be undertaken in late 2025 to inform the preparation of the Regulation 19 Submission draft Local Plan (timetabled for Summer 2026). This report sets out the extensive work undertaken over the last 6 months and recommends that members endorse the initial draft New Forest National Park Local Plan 2024 – 2043 Review document (Appendix 1) for the purposes of a public consultation. It is important to highlight that this is a working draft Plan that is being published to invite feedback from statutory consultees and other interested parties to help inform the preparation of the Regulation 19 Submission draft Local Plan.

Recommendations:

Members:

- a) endorse the draft 'New Forest National Park Local Plan Review 2024 – 2043: Initial Draft Local Plan' in Appendix 1 for the purposes of public consultation; and**
- b) delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to make any necessary minor textual and formatting updates prior to consultation.**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 National policy recognises the town and country planning system as a key instrument in the achievement of the statutory National Park purposes and related socio-economic duty. National park authorities are legally the sole planning authorities for their respective areas under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, with statutory responsibilities for plan-making, development management and minerals & waste planning. The first National Park-wide local plan (the New Forest National Park Core Strategy & Development Management Policies DPD) was adopted in December 2010 and the current New Forest National Park Local Plan was adopted in August 2019.

- 1.2 At the March 2024 Authority meeting members resolved that work should commence on a partial review of the adopted New Forest National Park Local Plan (report AM 675/24). Throughout recent reforms to the planning system the Government has continued to reaffirm both (i) the primacy of the development plan in decision-making; and (ii) the benefits of having an up-to-date plan in place to ensure planning decisions are taken locally in accordance with the 'plan-led' system (rather than through speculative applications). There are significant risks in not have a development plan in place.
- 1.3 In January 2025 members endorsed the first formal stage in the review process with the 'Direction of Travel' document published for a 6-week consultation (report AM 702/25). The Consultation Statement that forms Appendix 2 to this report summarises the responses received during this consultation and how they have informed the preparation of the initial draft of the Local Plan document.
- 1.4 Government regulations and supporting guidance do not prescribe how the Regulation 18 consultation on the review of a local plan should be undertaken. The adopted New Forest National Park Local Development Scheme (July 2024) sets out a two-stage process at Regulation 18. This enables the Authority to seek views on the main planning policy areas identified for review – the stage undertaken in early 2025 - before a (non-statutory) draft Local Plan is published in late 2025 for further public consultation. It is this second part that members are now being asked to endorse.

2. Feedback from the Local Plan Review 'Direction of Travel' consultation

- 2.1 Appendix 2 to this report sets out in more detail the range of responses received during the 6-week consultation on the 'Direction of Travel' document held between February and March 2025. For the purposes of this cover report the details in the accompanying 'Consultation Statement' are not repeated here, but set out below is a precis of some of the key areas highlighted in the feedback and how we have responded to them.

Area of feedback	NPA response
National reforms: Uncertainty caused by Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and on-going national planning reforms (including the Planning & Infrastructure Bill and the proposed National Development Management Policies)	Government advice to all local planning authorities is to progress with local plans. The Authority is working to an agreed timetable to progress the Local Plan Review under the Government's transitional arrangements, with submission for examination by December 2026.
Climate Change: Climate emergency pressures within the New Forest National Park need more weight within the Local Plan. Greater policy weight should be given to zero carbon homes	A specific chapter on climate change is included, highlighting the importance of this issue. The main contributions the New Forest National Park can make to addressing the impacts of climate change – such as habitat restoration to support carbon sequestration – are outside the remit of the Local Plan Review. The Authority is not seeking to adopt net zero standards for development due to several factors, including the Government's upcoming introduction of the Future Homes Standard.

Spatial Strategy: Call to review the 'settlement hierarchy' in the New Forest National Park to help meet housing needs in communities across the New Forest.	As part of the Local Plan Review the longstanding existing settlement hierarchy has been reviewed and additional villages have been identified that offer potential to meet local needs and sustain local services.
Built Environment: Need to address conflict between maintaining local vernacular and the need to enable buildings to adapt/become sustainable and promote sustainable living.	The Local Plan Review refers to heritage statements, including reference to any climate change mitigation or adaptation measures that could impact on heritage assets.
Vibrant Communities: The revised Local Plan must respond to the demographics of the New Forest and reverse the declining population seen between 2011 – 2021	National planning policy recognises the need for small-scale, sustainably located development within national parks to support the socio-economic well-being of their communities, and the quantum of new development proposed under the review is predicted to off-set the population decline.
Former Fawley Power Station site: The Local Plan Review will need to set out an updated policy position on the land adjacent to the former Fawley Power Station (existing policy SP26).	The outline application for land adjacent to the former Fawley Power Station site was withdrawn in 2024 on the basis it was not viable. On this basis it is proposed that existing policy SP26 is deleted. The Authority remains committed to supporting the positive regeneration of the previously developed land at Fawley.
Local Economy and the Solent Freeport: Local Plan Review needs to refer to the opportunities offered by the Solent Freeport.	Part of the designated Solent Freeport (the Fawley Waterside Tax Site) falls within the National Park. This is reflected in Chapter 3 of the draft Local Plan Review document.

2.2 As set out in the Direction of Travel consultation document, the two statutory National Park purposes – originally set out in the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949 – and the related socio-economic duty remain unaltered by recent changes in national policy and primary legislation. The preparation of the revised planning policies for the National Park is a key way through which the Authority can further the two purposes and related socio-economic duty in accordance with our strengthened legal duty under Section 245 of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023. This includes setting out how development can enhance the habitats of the New Forest through the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain; how landscape character can be enhanced through planning decisions; and how local planning policies can support commoning through the provision of commoners' dwellings and the protection of back up grazing land.

2.3 Over the last few months the Policy team have held a series of internal workshops to brief members on the Local Plan Review, the headlines from the emerging evidence base studies and some of the main policy options. These sessions have provided a useful input into decisions on the structure of the Plan, including the strategic objectives, chapter headings and links to the National Park Partnership Plan.

3. Evidence base studies and the Duty to Cooperate

3.1 The review of the local planning policies for the New Forest National Park must be supported by evidence to justify the approach taken. The NPPG resource on 'Plan-making' emphasises the need for evidence to be proportionate and encourages the production of in-house and/or joint evidence base studies.

3.2 Key evidence base studies have been commissioned to inform the Local Plan Review. Many of these have been jointly commissioned with neighbouring planning authorities for efficiencies. In addition, the review is being informed by a Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment which include the consideration of realistic policy alternatives; as well as a Habitats Regulations Assessment which assesses the potential impacts of the emerging policy options on the internationally designated nature conservation sites in the area. The following table summarises the key evidence base studies and the role they have in informing the draft Local Plan Review document set out in Appendix 1 to this report. It is also important to note that some key evidence studies – including the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment – are in the process of being finalised and will inform the next stage of the plan-making process.

Plan theme	Main evidence base studies	Influence on draft policies
The Natural Environment	Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) – legal assessment of the potential impacts of the revised Local Plan on the integrity of internationally designated sites in and around the New Forest Hampshire & Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) Updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)	Wording in draft policy SP11 informed by initial HRA recommendations. Proposed site allocations include criteria highlighting HRA issues (e.g. water quality, urban edge impacts). Chapter 5 (Natural Environment) refers to the two LNRSs Draft policy SP8 refers to flood risk
The Built Environment	Review of Conservation Area Character Appraisals and on-going work on the New Forest National Park Local List	Chapter 7 on the built environment refers to designated and non-designated heritage assets
Vibrant Communities	Updated assessment of housing needs (including gypsy & traveller needs) – the National Park is not covered by the Government's standard method for calculating housing need and is required to generate its own 'policy off' figure to feed into the review A new 'Call for Sites' exercise will be undertaken	Draft Policy SP28 sets out the proposed quantum of development. The evidence on demographics and local needs has informed draft policy SP29 (Specialist housing for older people) and SP30 (Size of new dwellings) Housing Land Availability Assessment has considered all of the sites submitted

	Whole-Plan viability assessment undertaken at the appropriate stage	Viability evidence has informed draft policy SP41 (Affordable housing) and SP42 (Rural exception sites)
Rural Economy	Qualitative assessment of employment sites in the National Park Updated economic needs assessment (working jointly with New Forest District Council)	Evidence on employment needs have informed the drafting of policy SP5 (Land north of Fawley Waterside) and the proposed employment land allocation
Transport & Access	Emerging Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) covering the National Park	The revised policies in Chapter 10 of the draft Plan refer to the LCWIPs

Spatial Strategy

3.3 The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process and the local plan examination both require planning authorities to demonstrate how they have considered 'reasonable alternatives' to key policy choices in their draft local plans. This is particularly relevant to decisions over the 'spatial strategy', which essentially sets out where the new development planned for the New Forest National Park will be directed.

3.4 The existing strategy of identifying the four 'defined villages' of Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway has been in place for successive local plans. The Local Plan Review has provided an opportunity to review this approach and to consider the role other settlements in the New Forest could play in meeting local community needs. Following a review of local services and other evidence, the draft Local Plan (Appendix 1) proposes the identification of three additional 'defined villages' (Cadnam – Bartley, Landford – Nomansland and Redlynch). The latter two Wiltshire settlements had defined settlement boundaries under the Salisbury District Local Plan (2003) and would ensure a better geographic spread of defined villages within the National Park.

Meeting local housing needs

3.5 A key role of the Local Plan Review will be to set out an appropriate approach for how local housing needs can be met within the particular context of a nationally protected landscape. The Government has ambitious national targets for housebuilding in England and although national parks are protected from major development, there are still significant needs arising within the local communities of the New Forest. Revisions to national planning policy and the preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy by the Hampshire & the Solent Mayoral Combined County Authority may change how the planned delivery of housing is achieved in future, but currently national policy requires local authorities – including national park authorities – to identify their local housing needs and meet them where possible within their administrative areas.

3.6 The Local Plan Review has therefore been informed by an updated Housing Needs Assessment, jointly commissioned with New Forest District Council. Based on the methodology used in the Government's standard method for calculating housing need (existing housing stock and affordability are key inputs), the 'policy off' housing need in the New Forest National Park amounts to circa 260 dwellings per annum (4,940

dwellings over the plan-period to 2043). National planning policy confirms that this ‘objectively assessed need’ figure is the starting point for the plan-review process.

- 3.7 Given this significant housing need figure – allied to the challenges neighbouring planning authorities have meeting their own respective need figures – the Local Plan Review has included an assessment of potential development sites within the National Park; and the spatial strategy (or settlement hierarchy) which sets out where the limited new development that will take place within the National Park will be directed.
- 3.8 Following an assessment of the ‘Call for Sites’ submissions received earlier this year, the draft Local Plan (Appendix 1) proposes a limited number of housing site allocations. These comprise four allocations carried forward from the adopted Local Plan (2019) where development has not yet been completed, supplemented by six newly identified potential development sites. Many adopted national park local plans include site allocations and this approach is consistent with that taken in the adopted New Forest National Park Local Plan (2019), which includes allocations at Ashurst, Fawley, Lyndhurst and Sway. The proposed new housing site allocations in the draft Plan will continue to be assessed with feedback invited during the upcoming consultation. Following meetings with the respective landowners, it has been confirmed that none of the proposed new sites are used by commoners for back up grazing.
- 3.9 The proposals in the draft Local Plan make provision for circa 50 net new dwellings per annum over the plan period to 2043 through a combination of extant consents, proposed site allocations and windfall development. This is a similar scale of development to our adopted Local Plan (2019) and also the scale of development in several other English National Parks including Dartmoor, the Lake District, North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales where provision is made for between 30 – 80 net new dwellings per annum.

Meeting local employment needs

- 3.10 The Local Plan Review document has been informed by updated evidence on employment needs, also jointly commissioned with New Forest District Council. This assessment considers past rates of employment development, labour supply and other scenarios and identifies the need for circa 13,000 square metres of additional employment floorspace over the plan period to 2043. This is a similar level of development to that achieved in the New Forest National Park over the last couple of decades. The draft Local Plan Review document proposes to meet this need through criteria-based policies and an employment site allocation on land within the National Park that forms part of the Solent Freeport Fawley Waterside Tax site.

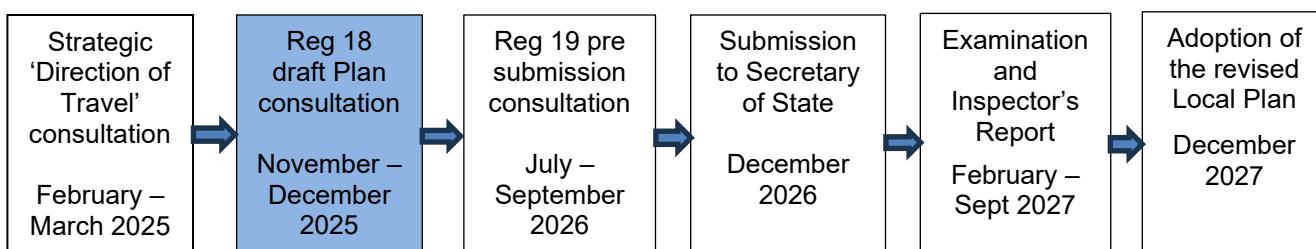
Duty to cooperate

- 3.11 Local planning authorities are required to cooperate with each other, and other bodies, when preparing their local planning policies which address strategic matters. The New Forest National Park Authority is well placed to fulfil this legal duty by virtue of: (i) the membership of the Authority, including the majority of members appointed by our four constituent local authorities; (ii) the functions the constituent local authorities continue to deliver within the National Park (e.g. highways, education, environmental health, economic development); and (iii) the Authority’s role in co-ordinating the delivery of the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan.

3.12 Authority officers have engaged key consultees during the preparation of the draft Local Plan, including Natural England to discuss their feedback to the ‘Direction of Travel’ document; and neighbouring planning authorities on matters including meeting identified housing needs and habitat mitigation. The consultation on the draft Local Plan Review document will provide the opportunity for further engagement.

4. Timetable and Next Steps

4.1 The New Forest National Park Local Development Scheme was adopted in July 2024 and can be viewed at [Local Development Scheme - New Forest National Park Authority](#). The approved timetable for the key stages in the review process is summarised below, with the next step – the Regulation 18 draft Plan consultation – highlighted in blue. It is important the Authority meets this published timetable to ensure planning decisions in the National Park are ‘plan-led’ and we meet the target date for submission for independent examination of December 2026.



4.2 This report recommends that members endorse the draft Local Plan document set out in Appendix 1 for the purposes of public consultation. This consultation would run for a 6-week period between November and December 2025 and would include a series of public drop-in sessions across the National Park as well as an on-line consultation platform. In addition, a wide range of statutory and local consultees will be directly notified of the start of the consultation and the consultation will be widely publicised through our social media channels.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The National Parks Circular (2010) confirms the statutory planning responsibilities given to national park authorities are, “...a vital tool for managing the impact of development on landscape and biodiversity and a key part of conserving and enhancing cultural heritage, including the built heritage in Park settlements....” (paragraph 136). Our planning powers are key to the delivery of the statutory National Park purposes and related socio-economic duty and it is important that the New Forest continues to be covered by an up-to-date planning policy framework to guide decisions.

5.2 The Government’s wider national policy agendas highlight the importance of National Parks to the delivery of nature recovery; tackling the climate crisis; driving economic growth in rural areas; and supporting health & well-being. The draft Local Plan document set out in Appendix 1 seeks to contribute towards the delivery of these objectives where appropriate within the remit of the land use planning system.

5.3 The Local Plan Review is being undertaken during a period of change in both local government in the area and also further national reforms to the planning system. There are challenges in ensuring the planning policy framework for the New Forest National Park is consistent with our legal duty to seek to further the statutory National Park purposes and the Government’s objectives of meeting local development needs.

5.4 Although there is no statutory requirement to publish a draft Local Plan at this stage in the plan-review process, it is considered right to consult on the emerging Local Plan to invite feedback. This will ultimately assist in the preparation of the Regulation 19 Submission draft Plan which will be considered by members in Summer 2026. A final period of public consultation will be held in late Summer 2026 before submission to the Secretary of State for independent examination by the Government's deadline of December 2026 to ensure the plan is examined under the current plan-making system. Members are asked to approve the draft New Forest National Park Local Plan 2024 – 2043 document in Appendix 1 for public consultation.

Recommendations:

Members:

- a) **endorse the draft ‘New Forest National Park Local Plan Review 2024 – 2043: Initial Draft Local Plan’ in Appendix 1 for the purposes of public consultation; and**
- b) **delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to make any necessary minor textual and formatting updates prior to consultation.**

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Papers: **NFNPA 727/25** – cover paper
Appendix 1 – New Forest National Park Local Plan Review – Initial Draft Local Plan (October 2025)
Appendix 2 - Regulation 18 Consultation Statement
Appendix 3 – Local Plan Review: Schedule of Revised Policy Numbers

Equality Impact Assessment:

No impacts have been identified at this stage. The review of the New Forest National Park will include an assessment of the impacts of the proposed planning policies on different groups, typically set out in an Equalities Impacts Assessment.