

NFDC Report to New Forest Consultative Panel September 2025

New Forest District Council Local Plan Update

The Council has held an Issues and Scope consultation from February to April 2025 which included public exhibitions. This saw quite an increase in numbers of comments received. Key themes from the consultation included the urgent need for affordable housing, improved infrastructure, climate resilience, and protection of the New Forest's unique character. Respondents also emphasised the importance of town centre regeneration, prioritising brownfield development, and ensuring that new housing is well-connected to employment and services.

The revised timetable proposes a further consultation on a draft local plan, known as a Regulation 18 plan in the coming weeks, focusing on spatial growth options (general indications of where development might take place) and emerging policy directions. This will be followed by a full draft Local Plan (known as a Regulation 19 plan) consultation in Autumn 2026 (containing specific sites for development), with submission to the Secretary of State planned by the end of that year. Officers are currently in the process of gathering all the necessary information to support the work.

There will also be reviews of Conservation Area Appraisals, starting with Eling and Breamore, to ensure alignment with current planning policy and heritage guidance. These reviews are expected to take approximately eight months and will be undertaken by the Council's conservation team.

This revised approach ensures the Council remains compliant with statutory duties, responsive to community priorities, and the work programme will continue to be kept under review as work progresses on local government reorganisation.

We are currently working with our current Local Plan in place which has insufficient development sites available over the next five years and so we are vulnerable to speculative development applications which planning inspectors may allow, contrary to the wishes of the Council or local people. A new Local Plan will deal with these issues, once adopted.

Local Government Re-organisation

Council Leaders and Chief Execs have continued to meet and try to reach agreement on the make-up of the new unitary authorities, but have not been able to agree on a single proposal to put to the government. New Forest District Council has continued to press for their preferred option which is for a rural focussed council combining with Test Valley, Winchester and East Hants.

A very detailed document that will form Hampshire and the Isle of Wight's submission to government on local government reorganisation has just been published (Wednesday 3 September).

It is called [Local government reorganisation proposal - 'Close enough to be local, big enough to be strong'](#) and sets out three options for how four new councils could be created.

Creating four new unitary councils for mainland Hampshire to replace the existing 14 councils, with the Isle of Wight remaining an independent island unitary council, would save at least £63.9 million a year - that's the finding of joint work by most of the councils in the county.

At meetings between now and the deadline for submission of proposals to the government on Friday 26 September, each council will formally consider approving the proposal.

Skills Action Plan

The New Forest Skills Action Plan (NFSAP) 2025–2030 is a highly ambitious scheme which sets out a clear, place-based strategy to ensure that all residents and businesses in the New Forest can thrive in a rapidly changing economy. Commissioned by New Forest District Council (NFDC), the plan responds to local challenges such as an ageing population, young people moving away from the area, skills shortages, and the need to transition to a low-carbon economy. It also capitalises on major opportunities, including the Solent Freeport and the redevelopment of the Fawley Power Station site.

The NFSAP sets out four strategic objectives to deliver this vision:

Inclusive growth

We will enable everyone in the New Forest to participate in and benefit from economic, social and environmental growth, being prepared to capitalise on emerging opportunities through entrepreneurship and with a particular focus on priority target groups to tackle inequalities in access to skills and employment.

A nature positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also supporting key established sectors

We will work with key partners to deliver key skills for conservation, land and forestry management, and renewable technologies to support a nature positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also strengthening the workforce in key established sectors.

Lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities for all

We will enable all residents to be empowered with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make informed career decisions about their education, training and career paths leading to improved employment outcomes, lifelong learning and prosperity.

Effective coordination of skills delivery

We will work with key education providers to ensure a coordinated and effective skills delivery programme for the New Forest that avoids duplication and addresses gaps in provision.

Priority Actions

To deliver the vision and achieve the strategic objectives the plan sets out 32 high-level actions. These will be developed over the coming months by the NFDC Economic Development Service with strategic oversight coming from the New Forest Skills Group. The group will be made up of representatives from key stakeholders in skills delivery across the New Forest. The Group has just had its first meeting on 3rd September.

Business Support

The Council's Economic Development Team offers a wide range of support for business which can be found on our website at this link: [Business support and advice - New Forest District Council](#)