



## **New Forest National Park Authority Biodiversity Duty Reporting**

### **February 2026**

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Since 1 January 2023, all public authorities have been under a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This statutory duty applies to Government departments, local authorities, planning authorities (including national park authorities) and statutory undertakers. The actions taken by relevant authorities for biodiversity will contribute to the achievement of the Government's national goals and targets on biodiversity.

The New Forest National Park is an 'ark for nature' and is one of the most rich and important places for wildlife in the UK. The National Park is home to an incredible variety of plants and animals, including:

- An estimated 20,000 species of animal, plant and fungus – approximately one third of the UK total
- Over 15,000 species of insect (two-thirds of the UK total)
- 44 species of mammal (including 13 of the 18 UK bat species)
- At least 12 species of reptile and amphibian. Including the Smooth Snake and Natterjack Toad
- A third of British wildflower species, including the New Forest Gladiola and the Small Fleabane
- Over 70% of British dragonfly species breed here, including the Southern Damselfly and the Southern Hawker
- Over 50% of the New Forest is designated as being of international importance for nature conservation – by far the highest proportion of any UK National Park
- Nearly 3,000 species of fungi, with new species identified each year. Species found in the New Forest include the rare Devils Fingers and the Bearded Tooth
- 1,000 ancient trees – the highest concentration in Western Europe
- 46 nationally and internationally rare plant species of ferns and mosses
- The UK hotspot for rare breeding birds such as curlew and Dartford warbler

### **Section 1: The New Forest National Park Authority's policies, objectives and actions**

In December 2023 the New Forest National Park Authority published a report setting out the main routes through which it delivers against the statutory biodiversity duty. These include the following:

- Co-ordinating the delivery of the **National Park Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027**. This includes a section on nature recovery which sets out a shared ambition to ensure habitats are more resilient, restored, expanded, connected and maintained to enable wildlife to thrive, both within and beyond the National Park.
- Linked to the nature recovery objectives of the National Park Partnership Plan, the '**Re: New Nature**' **partnership** identifies a portfolio of projects to deliver nature recovery across the New Forest and further details are available at [Re:New Nature - New Forest National Park Authority](#)
- The **New Forest National Park Authority Business Plan 2024 – 2027** sets out a medium-term work programme, updated annually. Nature Recovery is a key theme within the Business Plan.
- The adopted **New Forest National Park Local Plan** sets out a suite of policies to help protect and enhance the natural environment. These support the delivery of the first statutory Park purpose and include: (i) SP5: Nature conservation sites of international importance; and (ii) SP6: The natural environment. This is supported by the work the Authority is involved in with partners on the Bird Aware Solent mitigation scheme and the Authority's own New Forest Habitat Mitigation Scheme, which addresses in-combination recreational impacts on the designated sites. We have started a review of the Local Plan, with nature recovery 'in scope' to ensure planning decisions within the National Park support biodiversity.
- **Development Management:** Through our statutory planning powers we determine planning applications in accordance with current legislation and policy. This includes the Environment Act 2021 mandatory requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain which we have sought since Spring 2024. Through our statutory development management function we assess relevant proposals through a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Environmental Impacts Assessment (EIA), which consider impacts on designated sites and the wider environment. In doing so we consult Natural England and the National Park Authority's Ecologist as appropriate, having regard to their advice.
- The Authority has a statutory role as a 'supporting authority' for the **Hampshire and Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies**; supporting the creation of these strategies through provision of evidence and advice. Both Strategies were adopted in 2025, covering the whole of the National Park between them.
- **Recreation Management** – we work with partners to ensure people's enjoyment of the special qualities of the New Forest is not to the detriment of the species and habitats. This includes the provision of rangers working within the designated sites and the confirmation of two Public Spaces Protection Orders to help manage pressures on the New Forest's designated sites.
- Through the **Farming in Protected Landscapes** programme we invest in projects that support the natural environment, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide public access opportunities or support nature-friendly farming.
- We support the **New Forest Land Advice Service** in delivering independent advice to landowners and land managers in and around the National Park. This includes work to enhance local nature conservation sites.

- We are a co-host of the **New Forest Catchment Partnership**, providing supporting resources and officer time to facilitate collaborative delivery of actions to conserve and enhance the freshwaters and transitional waterbodies of the New Forest National Park. We also actively support the coastal partnership for the area - the **Solent Forum**.
- We support the **biological records centres** of both Hampshire and Wiltshire in order to facilitate collection, collation and holding of biological records to support the Authority's purposes and duty.

## Section 2: The National Park Authority's future actions

The New Forest National Park Authority delivers against its statutory Biodiversity Duty through both its statutory work within the National Park; and also its partnership work. The main routes are set out below.

### (i) *Through the Authority's statutory functions*

As the statutory planning authority for the National Park area, the planning system provides opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity. Set out separately in this report is the work the Authority is doing to deliver a net gain in biodiversity, both through mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain as required by primary legislation; and biodiversity enhancements required through local planning policies.

The review of the New Forest National Park Local Plan provides an opportunity to further embed Biodiversity Net Gain into local planning policy for the National Park area. The Regulation 18 Part 2 draft Local Plan includes a proposed local planning policy on Biodiversity Net Gain, as well as other requirements (such as bird bricks in new developments) that would help to enhance biodiversity. The draft Local Plan is due to be submitted to the Government in December 2026 for independent examination and is due to be adopted in late 2027.

Through our development management function we continue to secure both on-site and off-site biodiversity enhancements. The Authority has entered into a legal agreement with the landowner (Kingwell) and New Forest District Council to deliver a significant number of biodiversity units at Keyhaven. This strategically important site is located between the New Forest and the Solent. Major developments in the pipeline include the A326 proposals affecting the east of the National Park, the redevelopment of the former Fawley Power Station site and Solent Gateway 2, all of which would be required to deliver major biodiversity enhancements should they be consented through the relevant consenting regimes.

We will co-ordinate the update of the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan, due to be adopted in 2027. The revised Plan will embed the locally apportioned 'Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework' objectives for the New Forest National Park area, several of which focus specifically on nature recovery and enhancing biodiversity. The nature recovery work will be guided by a Re:New Nature Partnership, led by the Authority and made up of key National Park stakeholders

*(ii) Non-statutory actions*

The Government has confirmed its support for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme until at least March 2029. The Defra-funded grant will be used to continue to offer support for landowners helping to deliver nature recovery and enhance biodiversity. Details of some of the schemes supported can be found at [Case studies - New Forest National Park Authority](#). Through the work of the New Forest Land Advice team – and partners like the Freshwater Habitats Trust – the National Park Authority will continue to fulfil its biodiversity duty through landowner liaison. This includes working with Estates and other major landowners/managers (e.g. Forestry England) to support biodiversity.

Through the Youth for Climate & Nature Project (YouCAN), the New Forest National Park Authority has received £1.3 million to empower young people between 11 and 25 to understand and lead climate action within their communities. YouCAN also supports green skills and jobs, and an outdoor learning programme for young people from all backgrounds to explore urban, rural, coastal and freshwater areas. The projects within the scheme span 300 square miles across the New Forest, Southampton and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, and are led by the New Forest National Park Authority in partnership with the Countryside Education Trust in Beaulieu; Freshwater Habitats Trust; The Parks Foundation in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; Southampton National Park City project; Theatre for Life, and care and support charity Alabaré. As part of the YouCAN project the National Park Authority provides a 'Youth for Climate and Nature Placement Intern' role which was advertised in late 2025, with the successful candidate starting in January 2026.

### **Section 3: Biodiversity net gain information (for local planning authorities only)**

#### Background

Under the Environment Act 2021, all planning permissions granted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA) in England (with some exemptions), have been required to deliver at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) from 12 February 2024. BNG became mandatory for small sites from 2 April 2024. All off-site and significant on-site habitats must be secured for at least 30 years.

#### Authority response

Prior to the commencement of the legal duty, the Authority established an internal BNG Liaison Group including senior staff from planning and Environment and Rural Economy, as well key personnel from the planning team and ecology. This continues to meet to assess resourcing, process and administrative improvements as well as opportunities for local delivery of gains.

Following review of the market for products, in November 2024 the Authority procured the specialist software system Mycelia in order to support the assessment and monitoring of BNG. Resources for this licence are currently available through additional burdens budget awarded by the government specifically to prepare for the new statutory responsibility. The Authority intends to ensure sufficient resource is secured as part of monitoring fees in the future to maintain the access to this tool.

The quality of BNG submissions from applicants has varied and is improving as the development industry becomes more familiar with the legal requirements. Training has been provided to planning support and case officers who are helping to triage BNG during the registration process and support applicants. Applications and monitoring are also subject to input from the Authority's Ecologist who also works with applicants to improve the quality of submissions. The increased complexity of application information is resulting in significant additional time requirements on case officers and the ecologist. The implications of this, and potential solutions, continue to be monitored by the BNG Liaison group. The group also maintains oversight of training and skills development around BNG.

### Applications

The approach to BNG requires applicants to assess their site using a spreadsheet based metric to classify and measure habitats impacted. Where sites meet certain criteria, such as size and scale, applicants can choose to utilise a simplified version termed the small sites metric. To date only 6 applications have taken advantage of this option. This might be due to the fact that the small scale metric cannot be used where priority habitats and/or protected species are impacted by a proposal and that many applications in the Park are informed by an ecology report, so expertise to complete the more robust larger metric is available in design and application teams.

**Since the commencement of the legal duty, the Authority has registered 43 applications where the BNG requirements apply.** 8 of these have now reached a stage where final details of the required Biodiversity Gain Plan have been submitted for condition discharge and are due decision shortly. **Of the 43 applications, 25 have indicated they are delivering their required gains largely within the development boundary** (termed 'on-site' within the BNG guidance), although more may be achieved when gain final plans are received. **None involve the loss of priority habitat or high distinctiveness habitats** (i.e. as defined in the BNG metric including rare and threatened habitats such as heathland, species rich grassland, mixed deciduous woodland).

### Monitoring

Currently no applications where BNG is a requirement have been completed and so no monitoring has commenced. It is expected that in most cases monitoring will take place in some form in years 2, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 following the completion of habitat creation or enhancement. We are continuing to assess the resourcing implications and ensure that applicants make suitable contributions to this process via legal agreements. Our approach to BNG monitoring via proportionate developer contributions is similar to that adopted by other local planning authorities in the area.

### The use of BNG credits to deliver nature recovery in the Park and its surroundings

The BNG process allows for 'biodiversity credits' to be delivered and purchased away from the development area. This creates a market for landowners and managers to improve the quality of their land for specific habitats and then sell the credit uplift to developers under the provision of special registration and monitoring processes. It is hoped that in the future this will help drive investment in nature recovery in England.

Land banks of such improvements are being developed nationally by the private market, as well as a national fall back scheme being available through government credits. To date the Authority has been working closely with a small number of potential providers within the Park area or in strategically important locations in its halo to promote the potential benefits and secure schemes that would benefit the Park. It is early days for the market, and uncertainty around the government's commitment to it, as well as other sources of farm income such as agri-environment schemes, means few landowners locally have been willing to commit land to such a long-term scheme. However the Authority's officers are hopeful that a major strategic site will become live soon following extensive work.

## **Section 4: Information about the New Forest National Park Authority**

The New Forest National Park was designated in 2005. The Authority's work is guided by the statutory National Park purposes as originally set out in the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949, namely:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area; and
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

Working in partnership with other organisations, it is also the Authority's duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the New Forest National Park, which is home to over 34,000 people.

The New Forest National Park Authority took on its statutory roles in 2006. The Authority currently employs just over 50 full time equivalents, with circa half of these working on the delivery of the planning functions (development management, planning policy, minerals & waste and planning enforcement). The Authority also employs specialist officers in access, arboriculture, archaeology, building design & conservation, ecology and landscape.

The Authority's work is guided by its 22 members, with further details available at [Members - New Forest National Park Authority](#). 12 of the members are appointed by the constituent local authorities within the National Park (currently Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, Test Valley Borough Council and Wiltshire Council); 6 are appointed by the Secretary of State through an open recruitment.

The National Park Authority has very limited landholdings within the National Park (less than 1 hectare). Therefore our main way we can affect biodiversity is through our planning decisions (we determine around 900 planning applications per annum and prepare the Park-wide local planning policies); and the advice we give to landowners and managers. We also work closely with stakeholders, communities, residents and visitors through the ranger team and convening the New Forest Consultative Panel, New Forest Access Forum and Parish Quadrant meetings. Our Communications team uses a range of methods to reach a wide audience with key messages, including those aimed at supporting biodiversity and nature recovery in the National Park.

## Section 5: Top achievements

The New Forest National Park Authority works hard to enhance biodiversity through the delivery of the first National Park purpose. The following actions are highlighted:

- Through our planning decisions significant benefits for biodiversity have been delivered. For example, development sites such as Whartons Lane in Ashurst and Green Hill Farm in Landford have (or are in the process) of delivering significant on-site biodiversity gains in excess of the statutory minimum set out in primary legislation, illustrating how development can benefit biodiversity.
- The Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme has invested over £1 million for local projects in the New Forest that help to tackle the nature and climate emergency.
- The New Forest Code is now widely used by partner organisations across the New Forest - see [New Forest code - New Forest National Park Authority](#). The Code highlights the importance of keeping to the main tracks to help protect wildlife including ground nesting birds. The Code is used by National Park Authority rangers and others to engage the public and make sure the key messages are consistently relayed. Through our Catchment Partnership role we have also developed a Water code with our partners.
- The New Forest is a world capital for wildlife. The New Forest National Park Authority secured £1.04million from the Species Survival Fund to work with partners to enhance 250 hectares of land for nature across 25 sites. The two year project (March 2024 – March 2026) has supported habitat restoration and connectivity. Heathland restoration has benefitted three of our most threatened reptiles-sand snake, smooth snake and adder. The restoration of wildflower meadows and woodlands and the creation of wetlands has benefitted bats and a host of invertebrates.
- The Species Survival Fund has supported a total of 321 hectares of interventions between April 2024 and December 2025. This includes 243 hectares of restoration interventions (improving an existing habitat); 21 hectares of creation interventions (e.g. new ponds and hedgerows); 45 hectares of advice and site survey/data analysis to inform future interventions, 10 hectares of which have the potential for green finance investment in the coming months; and 11 hectares where the impact area of works undertaken by different partners overlapped.
- In terms of habitat areas impacted - 135 hectares of heathlands; 112 hectares of wetlands; 65 hectares of woodlands; and 19 hectares of meadow. Across all sites a total of 5,063 trees were planted as hedgerows and woodland improvements; 1,069 metres of hedgerow restored; 648 metres of new hedgerow created; 14 existing ponds and waterbodies restored; 24 new ponds created; 12 meadows seeded with site-specific wildflower mixes.
- The project included a total of 48 individual interventions across 31 landholdings. Of the 265 hectares of habitat restoration or creation, 107 hectares was outside of Protected Sites (SSSI). This 107 Hectares can contribute to our Protected

Landscape Target of 4,000 hectares of wildlife rich habitat created or restored within Protected Landscapes, outside of protected sites by 2042. New hedgerows will also contribute to the target for increased tree and woodland cover by 2050.

- The National Park Authority is a partner in the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme, one of England's largest environmental schemes. and restores and enhances Through the HLS, landscape-scale enhancements have been delivered to support the rich biodiversity of the internationally-important habitats of the New Forest – see [Higher Level Stewardship - New Forest National Park Authority](#).

## **Section 6: How the Authority has considered other strategies**

As set out above, the New Forest National Park Authority is a 'supporting authority' for the Hampshire and Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). For the Wiltshire LNRS (covering around 5% of the National Park) the National Park Authority was represented on the 'Wiltshire and Swindon LNRS Oversight Group and the Authority confirmed its support for the Strategy before it was formally endorsed by Wiltshire Council.

The Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy covers circa 95% of the New Forest National Park and was published in December 2025 following 2 years of consultation and preparation, including a workshop on the 'New Forest and Eastern Dorset Heaths'. The Strategy guides BNG, giving strategic significance to mapped areas for offsite gains.

The National Park Authority will use both LNRSs to identify suitable sites for biodiversity enhancements.

## **Section 7: How you've raised awareness and educated the community**

The National Park Authority places a strong emphasis on engagement in its work. This includes our liaison with key stakeholders through the preparation and delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan (which includes a section dedicated to nature recovery) and the support we offer the New Forest Consultative Panel.

In terms of wider community engagement, our rangers actively engage thousands of people each year through various campaigns and the New Forest Code – with nature recovery and enhancing biodiversity at the forefront of this engagement.

In March 2026 the National Park Authority hosts an Awakening Festival, a month – long celebration of nature, climate action and community. In 2025 more than 4,000 people took part in a variety of events, with a social media messaging reaching more than 1.4 million people.