

CONSULTATION ON DRAFT PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2021-2026

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 That the Cabinet:

- (a) Confirm support for the revised vision, objections and actions; and
- (b) Delegates authority to the Executive Head for Planning, Regeneration and the Economy to respond to the consultation on the Draft Partnership Plan 2021-2026 in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Infrastructure.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 All national parks are required by statute to have a management plan or partnership plan for their area. The Plan is for the National Park as a place and not specially of the National Park Authority or any other organisation.
- 2.2 National Parks have two statutory purposes that set out the main reasons for their designation and describe the overall focus for their management. The two national park purposes as set put in primary legislation are:
 - 1. To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the national park: and
 - 2. to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public
- 2.3 National Parks also have a duty to take forward the two national park purposes to seek to foster the economic and social well being of the local communities within the National Park.
- 2.4 The relationship between the purposes is commonly known as the ‘Sandford Principle’, which states that every effort should be made to reconcile any conflicts between the purposes, but that if such efforts fail then the priority must be given to the first purpose of conservation and enhancement. The primacy of conservation is especially important in the New Forest National Park which has the highest proportion of its land (56%) covered by international nature conservation designations when compared to other local authority areas in England.
- 2.5 All public and statutory bodies must have regard to national park purposes when making decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within the national park. This legal ‘duty of regard’ acknowledges that the fulfilment of the national park purposes rests not only with those bodies directly responsible for their management but also relies on effective partnership working.
- 2.6 More recently, the Landscapes Review (2019) called for management plans to be strengthened and to set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery and the response to climate change.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The first New Forest Management Plan was published in 2010 and updated in 2015. It includes a summary of the special qualities of the New Forest and describes a vision for how the New Forest should look and function in 20 years time.
- 3.2 The Plan was updated in 2015 and has been published as the Partnership Plan for the New Forest National Park. It includes updated priority actions for the period 2015 – 2020 to help deliver the two national park purposes and duty. The Plan also gives examples of recent projects and describes new issues affecting the National Park.
- 3.3 The Partnership Plan 2015-2020 was produced jointly by all the main organisations with interests and responsibilities in the National Park, including:
- Environment Agency
 - Forestry Commission
 - Hampshire County Council
 - Natural England
 - New Forest District Council
 - New Forest National Park Authority
 - Test Valley Borough Council
 - Verderers of the New Forest
 - Wiltshire Council.
- 3.4 All the organisations agreed the text and have contributed to many of the actions. Further actions were taken forward by more than 20 other local groups and organisations. The main partners meet regularly, progress reports are published annually to show progress of the actions.
- 3.5 Over the last year or so, work has progressed to review the next iteration of the Partnership Plan. The review will be guided by a slightly revised vision and agreed set of objectives. New themes and objectives have been included the draft Plan. The New Forest National Park Authority, on behalf of the partners, has produced a draft of the Plan, the Plan is now subject to a consultation period, which ends on 3 September 2021.

4. The Draft Partnership Plan 2021-2026

- 4.1 The collective experience of the pandemic has re-enforced the role the natural environment plays in supporting health and wellbeing. Like all national parks, the New Forest National Park has provided a vital space for respite and recovery. In turn, this has increased focus on the importance of the natural world and ensuring that the landscape and the nature it supports is sustained for future generations.
- 4.2 There is a national focus on how we rebuild after coronavirus; how we recover the economy, society as a whole and crucially, the environment – a 'green recovery'.
- 4.3 To reflect this the draft Partnership Plan sets out a refreshed vision for the Forest's future in this context of crisis and recovery.
- 4.4 **Proposed vision**
- 4.5 The vision for the New Forest to be a national beacon for a sustainable future, where nature and people flourish. In 2050, the National Park is a unique and immediately recognisable place where:

- people live and work sustainably, having successfully adapted to the impacts of the climate emergency and supporting nature's recovery and resilience
- tranquillity and a feeling of naturalness pervade large parts of the New Forest
- the mosaic of distinctive landscapes and habitats have been conserved and greatly enhanced, supporting wildlife to recover and flourish
- there is a strong sense, understanding of and support for the heritage and living culture of the New Forest, especially the local tradition of commoning
- facilities such as car parks, campsites, walking and cycling routes and community green spaces are in the right places to both protect rare wildlife and to provide a better, more informed experience for people
- all communities and visitors gain inspiration, health and wellbeing and enjoy the extensive areas accessible across the National Park whilst respecting the fragile nature and unique environment and culture of the New Forest
- local, regional and national organisations recognise and work to enhance the value of the National Park; there is an appreciation of its importance and role within the wider area
- everyone contributes to caring for the National Park as a special place for present and future generations.

4.6 In order to deliver the proposed vision, the Plan focuses on five theme-based 'agendas for action',

1. Nature Recovery – habitats are restored, expanded and maintained to enable wildlife to thrive, both within and around the National Park

Agenda for action:

- Produce a local nature recovery plan to (i) restore and expand habitats and help wildlife thrive and (ii) ensure recreation takes place in the most resilient areas
- Harness the benefits we receive from nature in the New Forest ('natural capital') to generate increased investment and projects
- Help landowners, farmers and commoners switch to the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which rewards working with nature.

2. Net Zero with Nature (NZWN) – significant cuts in land-based carbon emissions are secured through restoring natural habitats and carbon capture

Agenda for action:

- Develop a 'net zero with nature' programme with partners and communities to ensure the National Park is carbon neutral by 2050
- Promote and develop best practice in nature-based solutions to meet climate and nature goals
- Help communities to take action on the climate crisis.

3. Thriving Forest – a living, working Forest is sustained through support for cultural heritage, commoning, local produce, sustainable tourism, access to affordable homes and helping to attract high-value businesses and employees

Agenda for action:

- Support cultural heritage, commoning and local produce to sustain the landscape for future generations
- Invest in green skills and jobs, creating a centre of excellence for the future green economy
- Provide more affordable housing.

4. An inclusive National Park– people within reach of the New Forest, of all backgrounds, abilities and socio-economic groups, value the National Park as an important part of their lives and seek to care for it

Agenda for action:

- Create a ‘Natural Health Service’ within and beyond the National Park, through a programme of measures provided by communities and the health and environment sectors
- Help new and diverse audiences connect with nature, discover why the National Park is special and how to care for it, with a particular focus on young people
- Foster a greater pride in the New Forest, its landscape and cultural heritage.

5. Team New Forest – communities, businesses and organisations work together as a team to deliver the vision of the Partnership Plan, sharing knowledge, ideas and resources to deliver the best for the Forest

Agenda for action:

- Establish new ways of engaging with our communities and encouraging grassroots action
- Ensure the New Forest is leading the environmental agenda through our work regionally and nationally
- Develop a centre of excellence for data and evidence to underpin our collective decisions and actions and use technology to help us manage the National Park more effectively.

- 4.7 The Draft Partnership Plan sets out the shared vision, priorities and objectives for the next five years, a separate more detailed programme of work will be developed alongside the new Plan for the next two years. A revised annual work programme for years three, four and five.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 All consultation responses will be reviewed, with the NPA producing a report summarising all the feedback and how the draft Plan has been updated. This will be published in Autumn 2021 along with the final Plan.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No direct financial implications.

7. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Significant beneficial impact associated with the environmental actions.

9. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The final Plan will need to ensure there are no equality or diversity issues arising.

10. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None

11. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS – PLANNING, REGENERATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

11.1 The need for a Partnership Plan demonstrates that the New Forest is bigger than just a National Park, it represents an environment and community that has been forged over centuries.

11.2 Today's challenges may be different but they are no bigger than those that have come before and for the Forest to prosper we need to work together to address modern pressures whilst respecting the traditions that have moulded this landscape into such a rich and idyllic place.

12. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS – PARTNERING AND WELLBEING

12.1 There is no "I" in Team. It's an age-old motto that's both grammatically correct and very much relevant in team situations in sport and business – therefore we are most effective when we work in collaboration, understanding our place in the system and bringing together 'unusual friends' with different perspectives.

12.2 I very much welcome working with Diane on the Partnership Plan Consultation Response to produce "a shared endeavour" by Partnership.

For further information contact:

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Background Papers:

<https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/partnership-plan/partnership-plan-2021-2026>