



New Forest District Council
Appletree Court
Beaulieu Road
Lyndhurst
Hampshire
SO43 7PA

PETITION for FULL COUNCIL DEBATE

Protecting the Integrity of the New Forest District

01st April 2026

On behalf of the 5,350 individuals (and rising) who have signed this petition at the time of submission, we respectfully submit the following case for debate at Full Council. These residents are asking NFDC to **act urgently, decisively, and in the best interests of the communities you serve.**

As elected councillors, your duty is to represent the public. Your own consultation, together with this petition, shows an **overwhelming and consistent message** from local people. **We are asking you to honour that democratic responsibility and act on our behalf.**

Our Clear, Constructive Plan

We are calling on New Forest District Council to take two immediate steps:

1. Seek a formal Counsel Opinion

NFDC should urgently instruct a specialist public-law barrister to review the process, the criteria and the consultation evidence to determine whether there are solid grounds for legal challenge. This work could be carried out in collaboration with Test Valley Borough Council, who are also at risk of seeing parts of their area absorbed into Southampton. A joint approach would strengthen the case, share expertise and demonstrate unified local opposition. This is a standard, responsible step for any council facing a decision of this scale.

Seeking a formal Counsel's Opinion is a logical, proportionate and relatively inexpensive first step. It does not commit NFDC to legal action, it simply allows a specialist public-law barrister to assess whether the Government's decision-making process meets the required standards. This is the safest and most responsible way for the Council to 'test the waters' before considering a Judicial Review. It ensures that any further action is grounded in expert advice, shared evidence, and a clear understanding of the legal position.

2. Pursue a Judicial Review if the Counsel Opinion confirms there are grounds

If the legal advice supports it, NFDC must act swiftly and pursue a Judicial Review to contest the break-up of the New Forest District. The window to act is extremely short. Once the proposals move to the next stage, reversing them becomes far harder.

The Issue

The New Forest is more than a place on a map; it is our home, our community, and a defining part of our identity. For generations, its landscape, culture and way of life have shaped who we are. Yet today, the Government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) plans threaten to break the New Forest apart.

Under these proposals, large parts of our community would be forced into a new, urban-centred authority dominated by Southampton. This ignores the character, needs and values of the New Forest and contradicts the Government's own criteria for reorganisation, which state that existing district and borough authorities should form the building blocks of any new councils, and that local community cohesion must be of utmost importance. Instead of respecting that principle, the New Forest is being carved up.

What makes this even more unacceptable is that 97% of residents who responded to the public consultation opposed this break-up. Their voices have been ignored by the government on a decision that will reshape our home for generations.

Why This Matters Legally

We believe there is a credible legal basis for challenging the decision. The Government's own criteria have not been met, the consultation results showing overwhelming opposition were disregarded, and the decision-making process appears inconsistent with the principles the Government itself set out.

Some have pointed to Christchurch's unsuccessful challenge during the BCP merger, but the comparison is flawed. Christchurch was merged into a single authority in its entirety. The New Forest is being split apart, which was not proposed under the Government's criteria. This is a materially different situation.

A United Community

Local government reorganisation may be coming, but that does not mean our communities must be torn apart. The New Forest deserves to remain whole. Our shared history, our identity and the bonds that make this place our home must be respected. It is time for our centuries-old community to stand together and say clearly: **we will not be broken apart.**

On behalf of the 5,350 residents who have signed this petition (to date), and the many more joining each day, we ask NFDC to take the actions outlined above.

Thank you for your consideration.



James Hartley-Binns



Emily Hartley-Binns

Campaign Coordinators - New Forest Together