



## Protecting the Integrity of the New Forest through Local Government Reorganisation: Why the District Must Remain Whole

### Executive Summary

Local government reorganisation in Hampshire presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape governance. But proposals to fragment the New Forest District – particularly by removing the Waterside area – pose a significant risk to service delivery, community identity, and statutory obligations, and fail to meet the government’s own criteria for boundary change, which should be in exceptional circumstances, locally led, strategically justified, and subject to consultation.

Proposals must demonstrate how changes will improve outcomes, strengthen accountability, and respect community identity.

#### The Scale of Impact:

- The Waterside accounts for 37% of all homes in New Forest District – over 30,000 households.
- It contains 40% of the council’s housing stock, including 2,108 local authority-owned homes.
- The area currently contributes £1.24 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) annually, hosting nationally significant assets like:
  - The UK’s largest oil refinery (Fawley)
  - Marchwood Military Port
  - Solent Freeport sites with multi-billion pound investment with potential for significant increased contribution to GVA
  - Lepe Country Park, which would be split between two councils under current proposals

#### The Risk of Fragmentation:

- Service disruption: Splitting the district would fragment housing, waste, coastal protection, and electoral services – undermining economies of scale and operational resilience.
- Environmental harm: The Waterside is ecologically integrated with the New Forest National Park. Fragmentation would breach statutory duties under the Environment Act 1995 and Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. The ecology of the New Forest

depends on Commoning, which in turn depends on the Waterside both for accommodation for commoners and back-up grazing for livestock.

- Democratic instability: Electoral services would be compromised ahead of the 2026 Mayoral Combined Authority elections, risking legal challenge and public confidence.

#### Community views:

- 65% of Hampshire-wide respondents oppose splitting the district.
- 98% of New Forest business respondents support the keeping the forest whole.
- 87% of New Forest respondents reject boundary changes, whilst 70% support a new rural council for Mid Hampshire.
- Engagement shows deep emotional and cultural ties to the Forest in the Waterside – not to urban neighbours, including from the New Forest Commoner community.

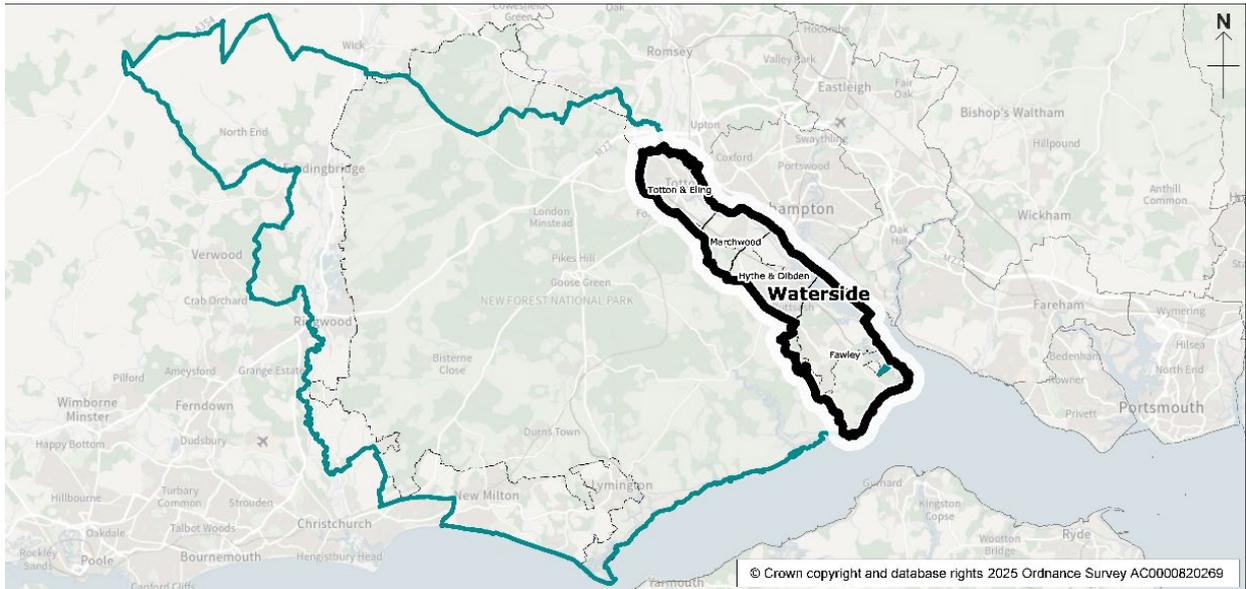
#### A Coherent, Unified District:

The New Forest is not a fragmented collection of communities – it is a functionally, culturally, and ecologically whole landscape. The Waterside is not an urban fringe but a distinct rural geography with shared values, traditions, and governance needs.

#### The Ask:

We urge the government to:

1. **Reject proposals** that remove the Waterside from New Forest District.
2. **Reject proposals** that create a 'rural bolt on' of the New Forest District, to the City of Southampton.
3. **Back the creation of a 'Forest Mid Hampshire' Council** – a model that protects the integrity of the New Forest, strengthens local democracy, aligns with statutory criteria and ensures sustainable service delivery for generations to come.
4. **Commit to a full and independent review** by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, should any model with boundary changes be taken forward by the Government for consultation, given the scale and impact of such changes.



## Introduction

1. Local government reorganisation presents a rare and valuable opportunity to reshape governance in ways that are more responsive, efficient, financially sustainable and locally attuned. If designed well the new unitary councils better reflect the places they serve, these new structures can unlock better service delivery, stronger democratic representation and neighbourhood empowerment, and more coherent planning across functional geographies.
2. However, these benefits can only be realised if reorganisation respects the lived identities of communities, the logic of place, and the environmental and cultural assets that define them. In the case of the New Forest, this means a local authority that takes opportunities to reflect the area's unique character and coherence, not a fragmentation of it. This includes recognising the New Forest's distinct business identity - rooted in its rural economy, visitor appeal, strong local enterprise networks, and vibrant marine sector. This requires governance that understands and supports its unique economic landscape.
3. The Waterside; comprising Totton and Eling, Marchwood, Hythe and Dibden, and Fawley parishes, is not a peripheral extension of the City of Southampton. It is a distinct, coherent, and deeply rooted community that forms an integral and historic part of the New Forest. Proposals to split the district and absorb these parishes into

a new urban unitary authority risk undermining centuries of cultural identity, ecological stewardship, and functional governance.

4. This document draws on:-

- Extensive place-based research
- A county wide survey of local government reorganisation options
- Extensive deliberative engagement with New Forest communities
- A service delivery analysis
- Assessment of environmental stewardship and protected landscapes
- The government's criteria for local government reorganisation
- The Local Government Boundary Commission for England's statutory criteria

### **A Distinct Identity, Not an Urban Fringe**

5. The Waterside is defined by its geography - where the New Forest meets Southampton Water and by a cultural identity that is deeply rooted in Forest traditions, not urban life. Residents describe the Forest not as a backdrop, but as a living presence that shapes their values, rhythms, and sense of belonging.
6. Any future local government reorganisation must protect the New Forest Commoners' culture, which is central to the area's identity and environmental stewardship as described in more detail in the appendices. For devolution to succeed, commoners must be able to engage with and hold a future administration to account. Local identity is key to this democratic connection and should remain a core criterion when establishing new unitary authorities.
7. The New Forest's strong sense of place directly supports the LGBCE's criterion of reflecting community identity. The Waterside is not a transitional zone - it is a coherent cultural landscape with shared customs, environmental stewardship, and intergenerational continuity. Redrawing boundaries to align it with urban authorities would sever these ties and impose a governance model that does not reflect lived reality.
8. The Waterside Engagement Project (Appendix 1) captured a powerful narrative of place attachment and civic pride. Residents

are not resistant to change - they want change to be meaningful, proportionate, and locally led. Highlights include:

- 97% of Fawley residents surveyed in May 2025 supported a rural identity and rejected urban alignment.
- Qualitative engagement across all parishes revealed deep concern about being absorbed into a city-led authority.
- Emotional Geography: The Forest is not just a location - it is a source of identity, memory, and belonging.

9. This evidence strongly supports the LGBCE's requirement to reflect community identity. The Waterside is not a statistical anomaly, it is a cultural and ecological whole that must be respected in any boundary review.

### **Governance That Reflects Reality**

10. The Waterside functions as a self-contained geography that is seen as 'belonging' to the New Forest. From school catchments and healthcare access to day-to-day retail patterns and transport infrastructure, daily life orients inward and towards the Forest - not outward to the City of Southampton.

- Ecological Stewardship: The Waterside forms an ecologically valuable interface and transition between the Forest and the Solent. Fragmenting governance would disrupt existing established and effective working arrangements with statutory and non-statutory organisations, land owners and managers in biodiversity management and climate resilience strategies.
- Planning Integration: The vision and strategy for the future development of the Waterside, A326 upgrade project, and Freeport development are all coordinated through cross-agency partnerships rooted in the New Forest context and helped to be funded from developer contributions generated from developments across the wider New Forest area.
- Democratic Representation: Residents, including commoners, expect governance that understands Forest culture and rural priorities, not urban bureaucracy with a fragment of a unique rural area bolted on.

11. These factors align with the LGBCE's requirement for effective and convenient local government. A unified governance model ensures

coherent service delivery, environmental regulation, and planning policy – all of which would be compromised by fragmentation.

*"If Southampton ran this area, they'd flatten the nuance. We're not just 'on the edge' – we're our own place with our own values."*

## **Service Realities**

12. The Waterside's infrastructure is already under pressure:
  - Transport: The A326 is a single arterial route with limited public transport and unsafe active travel options.
  - Healthcare: GP access is stretched, with long wait times and limited local provision.
  - Social Infrastructure: Youth centres, theatres, and pubs have closed, weakening community life and civic cohesion.
13. These challenges are best addressed through integrated, place-sensitive governance, not by absorbing the area into a larger urban authority with different priorities. This supports the LGBCE's emphasis on convenient and effective governance, ensuring that services are planned and delivered in ways that reflect local needs.
14. Splitting the operating geography of New Forest District would have significant implications for the delivery and coordination of operational services. Services such as housing, waste collection, street scene management, parking enforcement, and coastal protection are currently managed across a unified geography, allowing for economies of scale, consistent service standards, and streamlined governance.
15. A division of the area could lead to fragmentation in service delivery, requiring the establishment of separate operational teams, infrastructure, and administrative systems for each new geography. This would likely increase overhead costs, reduce flexibility in resource deployment, and complicate strategic planning, particularly for services that benefit from integrated approaches, such as coastal management and waste.
16. Local authorities have a statutory duty to manage their housing stock under the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), which includes over 2,100 local authority-owned homes in the Waterside – representing 40% of the district's total council housing. These

homes are not just assets; they are the foundation of secure, affordable living for thousands of residents. Fragmenting the district would disrupt the governance and financial integrity of the HRA, requiring complex disaggregation of housing assets, tenancy agreements, maintenance contracts, and rent accounts. This loss of housing stock to the wider district is particularly significant, given the constraints on new housing development across much of the New Forest, including areas within the National Park and other protected landscapes, where planning restrictions severely limit the ability to meet local housing need through new provision.

17. This risks undermining service continuity, increasing administrative costs, and creating disparities in housing standards and tenant support. It is also an approach that is at odds with the objectives of social housing regulation, which places the tenant voice at the heart of service design and provision. Such a significant change to the services they receive should require appropriate levels of direct engagement with those 2,100 tenants affected, particularly where there is such incongruity in the proposed service provision they may experience in future.
18. New Forest District Council's role as a landlord is rooted in local accountability, place-based service delivery, and long-term stewardship of housing communities. Any boundary change through local government reorganisation must demonstrate how these responsibilities will be upheld without compromising tenant rights, housing quality, or financial sustainability. The absence of a clear and credible plan for HRA division presents a material risk to tenants and to the Council's ability to meet its statutory obligations.
19. Given its existing geography, New Forest has three operational depots at Hardley (in Fawley parish), Ringwood and Lymington. Any splitting of the Waterside from the remainder of the Waterside would need to clearly demonstrate that the Waterside could continue to be serviced effectively and efficiently from the existing operating infrastructure of the authority it moves to. This is especially critical given the Waterside currently accommodates 30,958 (37%) homes and 2,108 (40%) local authority owned homes within the Waterside geography, identified under by the LGR boundary change option.

20. A practical example of service delivery changes presented by the splitting of the Waterside from the wider New Forest can be found at Lepe Country Park which is on southern coast of the New Forest. Under the boundary change option, the administration of this Park would be required to be split, with one new unitary council responsible for the visitor centre building, lower car park and shoreline, and another unitary council responsible for the nature reserve and upper car park. This unnecessarily fragments service delivery. There are many other examples that can be provided on request, including significant new developments currently under construction north of Totton which would be split into two separate administrations under the boundary change option.
21. Furthermore, the reorganisation could impact service equity and resilience. Differences in demographic profiles, housing needs, coastal vulnerabilities, and infrastructure across the newly defined areas may necessitate tailored service models, potentially leading to disparities in service levels and investment. Parking and street scene services, for example, may face challenges in maintaining consistent enforcement and maintenance standards across boundaries, while housing services could encounter difficulties in managing waiting lists, allocations, and homelessness support without a shared framework. The transition would also require careful stakeholder engagement, legal restructuring, and digital system reconfiguration to ensure continuity and minimise disruption to residents and businesses.
22. Splitting the district also presents a material risk to the safe and effective delivery of statutory elections. The complexity of disaggregating electoral services, systems, and data - particularly during a period of national electoral significance, could compromise preparations for the 2027 Shadow Authority elections and quadrennial town and parish council elections. Fragmentation would disrupt established electoral infrastructure, reduce resilience in staffing and governance, and increase the likelihood of administrative error or legal challenge. Continuity of electoral delivery is essential to uphold public confidence and ensure compliance with statutory duties during this critical democratic transition.

## **Community Voice: Clear and Consistent**

23. Independently facilitated deliberative engagement (see Appendix 3) has revealed that New Forest District is not a fragmented collection of communities, but a deeply interconnected and cohesive district. Residents across the Forest and Waterside areas share:
  - A strong place-based identity rooted in the natural landscape, cultural heritage, and shared values.
  - A sense of community that transcends individual towns, with many residents identifying as part of a wider New Forest community.
  - A protective attitude toward the Forest, its traditions, and its way of life, especially among commoners and long-standing residents.
24. This cohesion stands in stark contrast to the urban character and priorities of neighbouring authorities like the City of Southampton and Eastleigh.
25. Inclusive and representative samples provided robust evidence that residents in the Waterside areas see themselves as part of the New Forest, not as extensions of the City of Southampton or Eastleigh. Their concerns, values, and aspirations align with those of the wider district.
26. Residents express clear and consistent opposition to any reorganisation that would split the district or merge parts of it with urban authorities:
  - Loss of local representation: Fear that decision-makers in the City of Southampton or Eastleigh would not understand or prioritise the needs of New Forest communities.
  - Erosion of identity: Concern that the unique character of the Forest and its communities would be diluted or overridden.
  - Threats to the natural environment: Worries that urban-led planning would accelerate development and harm the Forest's ecology and heritage.
27. Waterside residents, in particular, voiced concerns about spillover effects from urban areas, such as crime and antisocial behaviour,

and stressed the importance of retaining local control to address these challenges effectively.

28. Maintaining the integrity of New Forest District is not just a matter of administrative convenience - it is a democratic imperative, grounded in the lived experiences and expressed will of its people.
29. Hampshire wide engagement has also identified that 65% of respondents strongly oppose or oppose the option to split the district at the Waterside.

### **A National Testbed for Sustainable Growth**

30. The Waterside is vital to the New Forest's long-term economy prosperity and resilience and a significant contributor to the national economy, generating approximately £1.24 billion Gross Value Added annually. It has unique geographic strategic advantages serving as a key driver of employment, innovation, and investment across the district. It is already positioned as a national exemplar of how economic regeneration can align with environmental stewardship to generate further significant economic value for the benefit of the New Forest, the wider region and national economy. The area hosts:
  - The UK's largest oil refinery (Fawley);
  - Calshot village;
  - A unique military port (Marchwood);
  - The former Fawley Power Station site which represents a significant regeneration opportunity; and
  - The majority of the Solent Freeport sites, with related multi-billion pound investment into the economy.
31. But this vision depends on governance that understands the landscape, not just the ledger. Fragmentation would undermine the delivery of nationally significant outcomes, from Freeport growth to biodiversity net gain and strategic nature recovery – and contradict the LGBCE's goals of community identity and effective governance.

*"This is not just green space — it is green memory, green need."*

### **Policy Alignment and Legal Duties**

32. The New Forest National Park is not just a landscape designation – it is a living, breathing system of ecological, cultural, and

community value. Under Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995, and reinforced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, all relevant authorities have a statutory duty to have regard to the purposes of National Parks in exercising or performing any functions in relation to or so as to affect land within a National Park.

33. This includes the duty to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public.

34. The Waterside's proximity and functional integration with the New Forest National Park – ecologically, economically, and socially, means that any governance model must actively support these statutory purposes. Fragmenting the district and aligning parts of it with a city focussed authority that does not share this duty would:

- Dilute accountability for National Park outcomes;
- Undermine cross-boundary planning for biodiversity, access, and landscape and cultural heritage protection; and
- Contradict national policy on protected landscapes and climate resilience.

35. The current governance structure, rooted in the New Forest context, is uniquely positioned to uphold these duties. It ensures that opportunities for planning, service delivery, and community engagement are maximised to align with the Park's statutory purposes – something that would be lost under a fragmented model.

36. The principles adopted by other authorities considering local government reorganisation in relation to national parks, including in Devon, set a clear precedent: proposals are being shaped to minimise impacts on the governance and integrity of national parks.

37. The same principle must apply in the New Forest - any reorganisation must protect the statutory independence and environmental stewardship of the New Forest National Park

Authority. National Parks are not negotiable assets; they are protected landscapes with national significance.

38. This is particularly important for the New Forest in relation to the role of commoning, and commoners in the cultural identity and management of the area.

### **Conclusion: A Statutory Fit for Unity**

39. The case for retaining the New Forest as a whole clearly aligns with all six of the government's criteria for local government reorganisation. It demonstrates that a unified New Forest ensures coherent governance, operational efficiency, high-quality services, strong community engagement, balanced devolution, and empowered local representation. Fragmentation would undermine these strengths and risk the integrity of service delivery and democratic accountability across the district.
40. Elsewhere in England, early engagement, technical appraisal, and public consultation were used to assess a range of boundary options across all reasonable geographies. However the current proposals affecting the New Forest, particularly the suggestion to remove the Waterside, have not been subject to any comparable process.
41. No equivalent work has been undertaken in Hampshire to explore whether alternative boundary changes, such as those to the east of the City of Southampton, might better reflect functional geographies, service integration, or community identity. This absence of structured engagement and evidence gathering undermines the legitimacy of proposals to fragment the New Forest District and risks overlooking more coherent and locally supported options.
42. The evidence presented aligns directly with two particular elements of the LGBCE's statutory criteria:
  - Community Identity: Strong, coherent, and deeply rooted as a single 'New Forest' identity.
  - Effective and Convenient Local Government: Dependent on integrated service delivery and ecological stewardship.

43. We therefore urge the government to:
1. **Reject proposals** that remove the Waterside from New Forest District.
  2. **Reject proposals** that create a 'rural bolt on' of the New Forest District, to the City of Southampton.
  3. **Back the creation of a 'Forest Mid Hampshire' Council** – a model that protects the integrity of the New Forest, strengthens local democracy, aligns with statutory criteria and ensures sustainable service delivery for generations to come.
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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Waterside Engagement Report

Appendix 2 – Officer summary of key characteristics of New Forest, including commoning

Appendix 3 – Deliberative engagement outputs

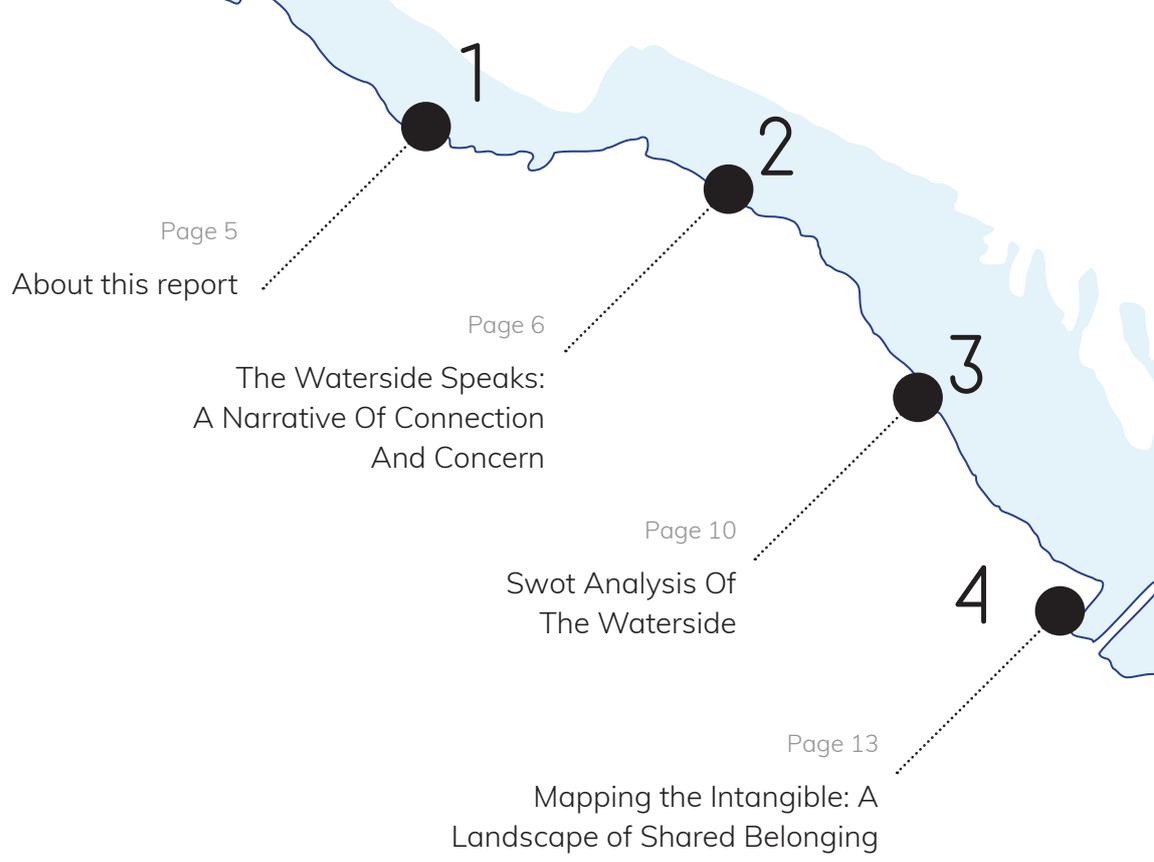
## **Background papers**

[Summary of engagement undertaken, including county wide engagement outcomes and full reports](#)

# WATERSIDE ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

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JULY 2025



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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Waterside Engagement Project is a place-focused research initiative designed to capture and articulate the identity, character and personality of the Waterside communities, including Totton, Marchwood, Dibden Purlieu, Hythe, Holbury, Fawley and Calshot. Commissioned by New Forest District Council as part of the current Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process, the project was designed and delivered by Feria Urbanism. It sets out to produce a rich, locally grounded understanding of these areas, beyond statistics or quantitative data.

The project's objectives are to develop an evidence base that is expressive, place-sensitive and resonant with local values; to inform both policy and engagement practice; and to showcase the diversity and distinctiveness of the Waterside communities in a manner that is both professional and poetic.

Its overarching aim is to gather qualitative insights and visual material that can inform future planning, governance or development work, ensuring that any LGR strategic decisions regarding new administrative boundaries reflect the lived realities and distinctive features of the Waterside communities themselves. Rather than imposing a top-down framework, the project draws from conversations, observations, and creative documentation to build a textured, respectful account of place and context.

The research process was organised into two main phases:



The first involved field-based and desk-based research, using photography and film, to capture the visual and spatial identity of the area.



The second phase centred on a series of qualitative conversations with individuals and representative groups from across the Waterside, allowing local people to describe their experiences in their own words.

These have been recorded, transcribed and annotated to draw out key themes.

# THE WATERSIDE SPEAKS: A NARRATIVE OF CONNECTION AND CONCERN

The research has allowed for the creation of a place-based narrative of the Waterside, shaped through in-depth, qualitative engagement with those who know it best. Over several weeks, focus group-style conversations were held with a range of parish councils and invited community representatives, from across the area. This allowed a deep-rooted knowledge of their communities, landscapes, and challenges to be shared. These structured discussions explored themes of housing, social cohesion, environmental identity, infrastructure and local governance, creating space for reflection as well as critique.

In the weeks before these sessions began, the researcher conducted a series of one-to-one and small-group conversations with local residents, capturing a broader spectrum of lived experience across ages, backgrounds, and places. These conversations were born out of informal but purposeful encounters while he explored the area on foot and by bicycle. The conversations were grounded in listening and allowing people to speak in their own terms, sharing not only practical concerns, but stories, memories, and aspirations. The process prioritised depth over breadth, enabling a textured understanding of what life on the Waterside truly feels like from the inside.

The narrative that follows is not a literal transcript of quotes, nor a summary of statistics. Instead, it is a synthesis: a carefully crafted account that brings together the emotional, cultural and practical dimensions of local life on the Waterside. It aims to reflect not just what was said, but the atmosphere in which it was shared.

Life on the Waterside unfolds between the quiet rhythms of nature and the pressing demands of modern transport infrastructure, shaped by a powerful sense of place that is both enduring and challenged. Framed by the New Forest on one side and the tidal expanse of Southampton Water on the other, the area retains a distinct identity: self-contained, deeply rooted, and emotionally aligned more with the Forest than the nearby City.

The community's attachment to its setting is profound. Residents describe the Forest not merely as an amenity but as a defining element of who they are. This connection runs deep through generations, traditions of commoning, and a lived understanding of the land. Southampton lies close by to the east, but cultural and emotional orientation remains fixed towards the west. The Waterside is not perceived as an appendage to the city but as an entity in its own right. A whole, that is coherent, and quietly resistant to imposed reclassifications.

Yet beneath this continuity, the challenges facing the Waterside are mounting. There is an acute perception that transport infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth and evolving needs. The area's transport network is under strain: the single arterial route of the A326 can feel overburdened, public transport options are limited, and in some areas, basic active travel provision – such as cycle paths, footways and pavements – can feel unsafe, or in some instance are simply absent. Long-standing concerns around unspent financial development contributions for transport investment and unfulfilled improvement active travel plans contribute to frustrations and a sense of being overlooked when wider strategic investment decisions are taken.

“ The area's really under pressure. It's like we've outgrown the infrastructure that was never quite right to begin with. ”

Like transport, the healthcare system can sometimes feel stretched, with reports of long waits for GP appointments. Residents expressed a disillusionment with current decision-making structures, describing consultation processes that feel repetitive and unresponsive. There is a growing view that traditional governance models do not adequately reflect the distinct values, practices, and expectations of the Waterside's communities. As a result, some view LGR as an opportunity to shake things up and improve the situation.

That said, there is an acute anxiety about LGR and what this might mean. Local people remain fiercely protective of their Forest identity and fear its erosion should administrative boundaries be redrawn, pulling them formally into the orbit of Southampton and the urban areas.

Like healthcare, housing pressures on the Waterside reflect national trends but are felt intensely here. There is widespread concern about the lack of affordable, family-oriented homes, with demand outstripping supply and significant numbers on waiting lists. At the same time, there is a clear call to protect the environmental and cultural integrity of the area, particularly the landscape edges where development pressures are most pronounced. Residents articulate a strong desire for growth that is locally sensitive: prioritising local people, respecting settlement character, and avoiding encroachment both beyond the A336 into the Forest and into the green gaps between settlements, that are considered to make a valuable contribution to place identity.

Social infrastructure has also been diminished. The closure of youth facilities, theatres, Sure Start centres and several local pubs has led to what can be called a “thinning” of community life, particularly for teenagers and young adults who now find themselves without meaningful spaces for gathering, creativity or growth. While some social and outdoor assets remain, such as libraries, parks, beaches, and a community cinema, they are perceived as fragmented and disconnected, lacking the coherence required for a vibrant civic life.

“ I know somebody with two boys, eleven and thirteen, and she won't let them out on their own in the parks in Southampton anymore. It's not safe, there's too much of that gang culture creeping in, and you never know what they'll come across. The only time they really get out and about, run free like kids should, is when they visit here and take them into the Forest. Out there, they can be themselves. It's the one place I know they're safe.

Economic opportunities remains fragile. Despite initiatives such as the recent Freeport designation, benefits have yet to materialise at the local level, and job creation has been limited. There is a scepticism that the Freeport will deliver what has been promised. While major employers, such as Exxon Mobil, have reduced their direct engagement in community activity, small independent businesses continue to act as the backbone of local resilience. The series of welcoming independent shops in Hythe were celebrated, with Black Wax, the record shop and café an example of recent high street innovations that have proved popular. There is strong appetite for the return of skilled employment and for local regeneration strategies that align economic growth with community and environmental priorities.



Finally, the Waterside's natural assets are not just valued, they are considered foundational. The confluence of Forest, sea, and estuary creates a rare environmental interface that informs the area's identity. There are rich ecosystems, including seagrass beds, salt marshes, and heaths and woodland that extend from east to west as fingers towards the water. A diverse bird life co-exists alongside long-established human practices. Yet development pressure threatens this balance. Calls to protect and integrate this landscape into future plans are not simply about conservation, they are about respecting a way of life.

In summary, the Waterside represents a community defined by deep place attachment, environmental sensitivity, and a strong civic ethos. The area's challenges – while significant – are not rooted in resistance to change, but in a desire for change that is meaningful, proportionate and locally led. Any future interventions must engage with this ethos directly, recognising that successful planning is not merely about infrastructure delivery, but about sustaining the relationships between people, place, and belonging.

# SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE WATERSIDE

The information contained in the narrative has been represented here as a more formal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis.



## Strengths:

Distinct identity rooted in strong place attachment to the New Forest and estuarine landscape.

Rich environmental setting including salt marshes and seagrass beds, the Forest edge and diverse wildlife.

Community cohesion through generational ties, small businesses, and local cultural and sporting traditions.

Proximity to employment centres in Southampton while offering a quieter, more balanced lifestyle.



## Weaknesses:

Strained transport infrastructure with a limited “one way in, one way out” A326 road access, limited public transport services, and unsafe pedestrian and cycle routes.

Under-provision of healthcare, with long waits and service access issues.

Insufficient social infrastructure, the loss of theatres, youth centres, and pubs has weakened community life.

Housing pressure experiences through a lack of affordable family homes, long waits for social housing, and limited development options.

“Biggest problem? You need a car. The bus service is appalling, and there's no rail link – it's isolating for people who don't drive.”

# SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE WATERSIDE

The information contained in the narrative has been represented here as a more formal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis.



## Opportunities:

Sensitive intensification of existing settlements with new landscaped development around the edges, respecting natural boundaries.

LGR offers the potential for stronger local governance structures that reflect local values and identity.

Reinvestment in social and cultural amenities to help rebuild youth and civic life.

Harnessing environmental assets (e.g. estuary ecology and the Forest tradition) as part of economic and ecological renewal.



## Threats:

Over development or inappropriate growth could erode landscape character and cultural integrity.

Disconnect between new governance structures and local identity risks loss of trust and civic engagement.

Unrealised economic initiatives (e.g. Freeport) may result in disillusionment and stagnation.

Environmental degradation due to creeping pressures at the Forest's edge and lack of stewardship platforms.



I didn't stay because it's perfect. I stayed because I love it. Forest on one side, water on the other – there's nowhere else like it.





# MAPPING THE INTANGIBLE: A LANDSCAPE OF SHARED BELONGING

This is not just a map. It is a living archive of memory and meaning, drawn not in borders, but in emotions, habits, and the rhythms of daily life. Here, where the water meets the woods, each word on the map is more than a visual record. The annotations – some tentative, others bold – reveal a region deeply known by the people who live there, not just described by cartographers.

It is an emotional landscape, where geography becomes biography. Every marked location is layered with memory, with voice, with the residue of first hand research conversations that were never quite finished.

Taken together, the map reveals a network of connections that are not just spatial. They are emotional, cultural, and temporal. This is a place moving forward, while not forgetting.

Each annotation and feature on this map captures the way people experience place: not as coordinates, but as continuity.

The labels are not destinations. They are moments paused in digital lines taken from people's voice:



Totton reaches outwards with confidence, not as a satellite, but as a gateway, its town centre rediscovered. It reveals itself as quietly dynamic, a place in motion without needing spectacle, but the bottleneck threat is ever present.



Eling leans in and listens more than it speaks. Positioned close to the tide, it embodies a gentle attentiveness, where water and memory shape the land together. The medieval church, rooted for centuries gazes across the water to the stack of multicolour global containers, flowing from all over the world.

# MAPPING THE INTANGIBLE: A LANDSCAPE OF SHARED BELONGING



Marchwood is poised in contrast: forest stillness on one shoulder, industrial murmurs on the other. It does not resist change but calibrates it. The silver dome hums as the clank of loading and unloading reverberates across the water.



Hythe knows how to hold space: for community, for ritual, for memory. Its rootedness feels deliberate, confident. Its high street always changing but ever present.



Further inland, places like Dibden Purlieu, Holbury, and Blackfield are more anchored to the Forest. They unfold through the language of familiarity. They are places of rhythm and landscape, morning routines, shared paths, quiet acknowledgments. They remind us that stability is its own kind of transformation.



Fawley, often seen as utilitarian, reveals a deeper texture here. It speaks with layered voices: one industrial, yes but also communal, persistent, and proud. The stacks, pipes and towers glimpses through the trees. A mechanical forest within the ancient and organic version.



And at the far edge, Calshot gazes out, not as departure, but as horizon. It holds clarity and space that comes from facing open water. Its openness is not emptiness, but invitation. The castle and the lighthouse, both welcome and marker.

Together, these places form a network of emotional topographies, defined not by infrastructure alone, but by belonging. This map reads as a shared gesture forward, grounded in the ordinary beauty of continuity.

# WATERSIDE. OR THE EDGE OF THE KNOWN WORLD

Based on the consultation findings, and using an artificial intelligence platform, the Waterside narrative is represented here in the vein of *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot, framed in a haunted, fragmentary, layered way, using memory and disquiet.

This evokes the area's spirit through myth, lament, and lived experience.

The following pages share this seven verse poem, "Waterside, or the Edge of the Known World", set alongside photographs that helped inspire it.



Early spring reveals itself not in blossoms,  
but in the tireless groan of the A326  
a road stretched too thin across  
decades of indecision.  
Grey hedgerows tremble under diesel breath.  
One bridge, one artery. The rest is pressure.





I saw commuters moving eastward  
figures under sodium light,  
faces lit by phones, not sun  
toward Southampton,  
the City of Certainty,  
where work pulses in towers and terminals,  
but belonging refuses to follow.  
"This is not where I end,"  
the trees mutter behind iron fences,  
"though the map says otherwise."  
But the maps lie.

We gathered once  
where the footpath meets the ferry.  
Now the signs are weather worn,  
and the handrails rust unnoticed.  
In Marchwood, a child weaves between traffic,  
where pavement should be.  
Funds were promised,  
Thousand pound dreams but plans delay,  
mired in process, in procurement,  
in someone else's priority.





At the café, teenagers hover,  
not patrons but ghosts  
of youth clubs long shuttered  
no stage, no pitch,  
just a car park lit in flickers.  
What rituals remain?  
The closing of pubs,  
the quiet burial of shared space.  
We mourn not just places,  
but the time when we knew  
why we stayed.

Between Calshot and Beaulieu,  
a different time persists  
when grazing was not regulation  
but rhythm,  
when commoners walked  
with more rights than titles.  
The verderers remember  
they speak in the language of bracken  
and hooves  
but few listen.





Policy deafens itself with plans.  
The boundaries redraw,  
the soul stays unshaken.  
**This is Forest,  
not fiction.**  
And to strip Waterside from it  
is to amputate quietly,  
expecting function to persist.

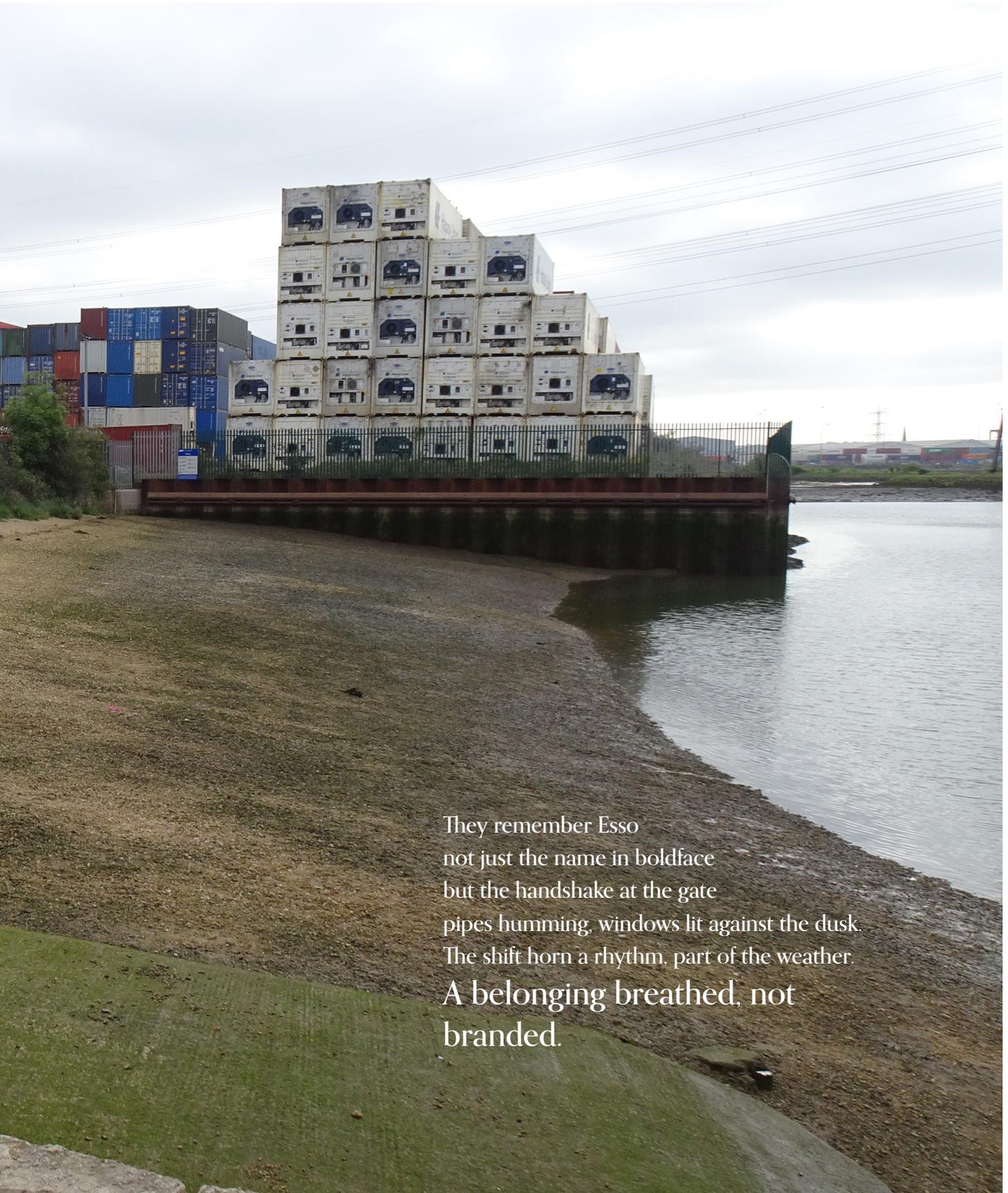




They sent for us  
with surveys,  
with tick-box truths.  
Fifty questions, none of them mattering.  
We responded,  
repeating ourselves through years and years.  
Still the decisions fall  
like ash from unseen fires.  
Governments change;  
trust fades.  
Local becomes distant,  
and distant grows louder.  
Representation?  
Only if it wears wellingtons,  
knows the tide tables,  
and remembers where the last theatre stood.



Along the waterside,  
the word *Freeport* echoes  
a promise on a billboard,  
but not yet in the shop till.  
Growth measured in rumours  
figures murmured like ghost tides  
what the streets already know.  
The trades persist,  
barbers and bakers,  
takeaways with handwritten signs  
they hold the line  
not for profit,  
but for presence.



They remember Esso  
not just the name in boldface  
but the handshake at the gate  
pipes humming, windows lit against the dusk.  
The shift horn a rhythm, part of the weather.  
A belonging breathed, not  
branded.

A wide-angle photograph of a coastal scene. In the foreground, shallow, rippling water contains patches of dark green seagrass. To the right, a rocky shoreline with sparse vegetation meets the water. In the middle ground, a calm body of water extends to a distant, tree-lined shore where a few buildings and a lighthouse are visible. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds.

Seagrass sways below waterline  
home to life,  
delicate as understanding.  
The birds move with instinct  
that the planners can't model.  
Where the Forest meets the salt,  
there is no metric,  
only meaning.  
This is not green space  
it is green memory,  
green need.



The salt line inching further in  
fields whispering silted lullabies.  
We lay foundations on forgetting,  
pile concrete over memory but the  
marsh remembers.  
The tide rehearses its arrival, soft as  
breath against glass.  
What future holds if it **cannot**  
**hold water?**



Waterside is not ruin.  
It is not past.  
But it is weary of waiting,  
of being seen through spreadsheets  
and heard through policy briefs.  
It is a place of edges  
between Forest and coast,  
between familiarity and neglect,  
between being asked,  
and being understood.  
Who walks here with intention?  
Who carries not just clipboard,  
but conscience?



Speak plainly,  
for the ground remembers  
every silence.

# WATERSIDE. OR THE EDGE OF THE KNOWN WORLD

Here is an annotated version of *Waterside, or the Edge of the Known World*, linking each poetic section to relevant planning concerns and community engagement insights gathered by the research that underpins this report. This annotated format allows the consultation summaries to be embedded into policy framing documents, or reports that aim to create poetic bridge between the emotive and the evidential.

## **I. The Approach**

Planning Concern: Transport infrastructure capacity and resilience

Insight: This section foregrounds the psychological weight of what is perceived as a failing road system and reliance on a single corridor (A326). It reflects lived experience of over-concentration and access constraints, suggesting that improvements should be about resilience, not just capacity.

## **II. Broken Lines**

Planning Concern: Social infrastructure and local investment delivery

Insight: Here the imagery of decaying footways, ghostly youth spaces and unspent planning contributions speaks to both material and symbolic disconnection. It conveys a narrative of broken trust and unmet expectations, signalling a need for transparency in how planning gain funds are to be spent and the need for reinvestment in civic-focused amenities.

## **III. The Forest Remembers**

Planning Concern: Cultural heritage and environmental identity

Insight: This section addresses the deep-rooted identity of the Waterside within the New Forest tradition, including practices like commoning. It raises the issue that policy language often fails to account for intangible cultural ties, and that potential changes to administrative boundaries resulting from LGR risk undermining place attachment.

#### **IV. Consultation**

Planning Concern: Democratic engagement and representation

Insight: The depiction of consultation fatigue and performative listening underscores residents' disenchantment with current methods. It highlights the mismatch between formal consultation processes and local expectations of recognition, trust, and genuinely responsive governance.

#### **V. Work Without Place**

Planning Concern: Economic regeneration and employment strategy

Insight: The disjuncture between national initiatives (the Freeport status) and local realities (rumours of low job creation) is made visible here. The poetic lament of 'promise on a billboard' critiques the gap between policy branding and ground-level benefit, pointing to the need for place-based economic planning and meaningful local employment, such as that as offered by Exxon Mobil.

#### **VI. In the Estuary's Dream**

Planning Concern: Environmental sensitivity and landscape-led policy

Insight: This section conveys the ecological fragility of the estuary-Forest interface and the importance of preserving natural identity, not just as scenery but as lived, meaningful environment. It lends weight to community advocacy for landscape-informed development frameworks, the need for climate resilient designs and highlights the limits of quantitative valuation.

#### **VII. Closing**

Planning Concern: Integrated planning and holistic visioning

Insight: The final section distils a call for joined up thinking that values memory, belonging, and emotional landscapes alongside physical infrastructure. It demands not just action but being in tune with the landscape and the culture, urging planners and decision-makers to enter as listeners, not just technicians.

“ Where the Forest meets the sea – that's what makes this place special. You change that balance, and you lose what makes people stay. ”

# WHAT MAKES THE WATERSIDE SPECIAL

This cannot be not captured in statistics alone. It resides in the convergence of place, memory, and identity. To understand this area is to recognise its texture: the particular blend of rootedness, environmental richness, and cultural coherence that shapes both how people live and why they stay.



## **Waterside Place**

The Waterside's identity emerges first from its geography. Flanked by the New Forest's ancient landscape on one side and the shifting tides of Southampton Water on the other. This duality offers more than scenic backdrop; it forms the emotional and ecological core of the place. The land and sea meet in a dialogue of past and present, where grazing rights are passed through generations and tidal rhythms echo in local knowledge. This is not suburban fringe. It is a self-contained geography, deeply understood and fiercely valued by those who live within it.

Quality of life here is anchored in this unique environmental relationship. This is not merely about access to green space but about living in rhythm with it. The Forest is a living presence, shaping community character, traditions, and outlook. The wildlife that is found along the Forest edge and estuary are not ornamental, they are part of the everyday fabric. Residents speak not only of beauty, but of peace, of safety, and of a gentler pace of life that cities increasingly struggle to offer.



We've all got strong ties to the Forest. It's who we are. You can't just cut that off and expect people to accept it.



# WHAT MAKES THE WATERSIDE SPECIAL



## **Waterside Memory**

This sense of coherence extends into social life. While some civic infrastructure has frayed, the remaining threads tie people to each other with purpose and care. Local businesses, long-standing customs, and familiar faces at the school gate reinforce belonging. There is a quiet civility here, a neighbourliness born not of nostalgia but of place-rooted continuity.

Even as many commute outwards for work, the emotional orientation remains inward. Southampton may draw economic flows eastwards, but the gravitational centre of identity pulls westward, back toward the Forest, the commons, and the sense of wholeness that comes from knowing where you are. Attempts to redefine the Waterside in administrative or functional terms, treating it as merely adjacent to somewhere else, risk missing this fundamental truth.



## **Waterside Identity**

In the Waterside, identity and quality of life are inseparable. The land informs culture, the culture sustains community, and the community – in turn – defends what it knows to be rare.

What makes this place special is not that it resists change, but that it understands deeply what it has to protect. Planning here requires more than delivery; it requires understanding.

# WHAT PEOPLE WANT



## **Environmental & Landscape Interventions**

Protection of grazing rights and commons that tie local traditions to the land

Support for commoners' practices through stewardship and local governance recognition

Habitat conservation projects for estuary and Forest wildlife as part of daily life, not as a distant or abstract ecological idea

Imaginative access to Forest and shoreline – such as quiet trails, viewpoints, and bird hides – that respect rhythm and pace

Maintain and enhance the visual connections across the water to the city, as these can help emphasize the difference between east and west.



## **Place-Based Infrastructure**

Investment in quiet, low-impact travel (e.g. cycle paths, green buses) that blend into the landscape

Place-specific signage and interpretation that can reflect local heritage and ecology, not generic branding)

Sheltered, informal gathering spots near schools, shops, or green ways to nurture neighbourliness – Holbury is an example of place lacking such a civic heart

Sensitive enhancement of key civic buildings (e.g. libraries, community halls, pubs) as anchors of shared identity.

# WHAT PEOPLE WANT



## Social & Cultural Revitalisation

Support for local businesses with deep roots, especially those tied to heritage trades or services

Revival of hyper-local traditions or festivals that express continuity, not nostalgia

Funding for schools and youth clubs that encourage intergenerational connection and local pride

Shared storytelling spaces (e.g. community arts, oral history, archives) to document and honour the lived experience.



## Planning & Governance Approaches

Planning strategies that start with identity, not zoning, to safeguard the emotional geography

Design codes and planning applications shaped by the Forest–water relationship, not suburban templates

Decision-making models with community guardianship at heart, giving residents custodial voices over future developments

Communications that frame Waterside as whole and distinct, not merely “adjacent to” Southampton.



The city-based councils don't get what makes us tick. They don't live here so they can't possibly understand the Forest culture.





# ARTICULATION & APPLICATION OF THIS IDENTITY

The identity and quality of life of the Waterside are not abstract concepts; they are lived realities woven through place, landscape, and community. This narrative, that has emerged from the in-depth engagement process comprising reflective listening and extended conversations – a synthesis of resident voices – reveals a rich tapestry of meaning that extends far beyond traditional metrics. What distinguishes the Waterside is a sense of belonging that arises from its interface with the New Forest and Southampton Water, its cultural coherence, and the continuity of local knowledge passed between generations.

These qualities must not remain anecdotal or peripheral in planning. They should directly shape how policy is conceived, implemented and communicated.

In this section, this narrative is re-framed through four distinct but interrelated policy lenses: Design Codes, Conservation Area Reviews, the NFDC Local Plan, and Community Engagement framing. Each represents a critical avenue through which planning can either uphold – or undermine – the identity and lived experience of local people. By interpreting the Waterside's values through these focused perspectives, this section demonstrates how technical frameworks can become more attuned to place, more aligned with community, and more accountable to context. In doing so, it offers a roadmap for policy approaches that are not only spatially effective but also culturally responsive and emotionally resonant.

## **1. Design Codes**

The Waterside's identity is not an aesthetic overlay but an embedded way of life, shaped by its interface with Forest and estuary. Any future design codes in this setting must draw from the language of place: the materials, form, rhythm and scale that reflect not generic typologies, but the particular character of a “wooded coastal fringe.” For example, new development should evolve a settlement grain that respects ancient tracks, views to tree lines, and the fluid movement between built form and landscape. Architecture is not neutral here. It is expected to listen and to express itself. In this context, design coding must protect continuity of community while allowing for contemporary expression that feels born of the place, not imposed upon it from outside.

## **2. Conservation Area Reviews**

These can empower communities to articulate the unique character of their Waterside built environment. Through research, mapping, and local workshops, residents can identify architectural features, historic views, landscape settings, and cultural associations that shape a place's special interest. Documenting these assets in updated appraisal documents will inform planning policies that can protect what matters most. Engaging people in the review process gives them a genuine voice in shaping policies that guide future development. Public exhibition of proposals, collaborative design guidance, and clear management priorities allow residents to influence decisions about change, repair, or new design. This authentic shared ownership strengthens community cohesion, and preserves heritage legacies for coming generations.

## **3. The NFDC Local Plan**

The vision for the Waterside must begin with what already exists: a community defined by a deep affinity to its environment, a landscape of lived meaning, and a quiet civility that stems from long-standing social coherence. Rather than treating the area as "room for growth" the NFDC Local Plan should articulate a narrative of "curated belonging" – where growth is conditional on environmental sensitivity, job creation, affordability for local families, and the reinforcement of social infrastructure. The Local Plan's legitimacy will hinge on its ability to reflect not just land availability, but cultural values. The vision here must express not aspiration in abstract terms, but commitment to stewardship.

## **4. Community Engagement Framing**

Engagement with the Waterside must recognise that the community is not fatigued by consultation but has previously been consulted poorly. Residents want to be heard as experts in their own environment. Listened to as custodians of knowledge that is experiential, not just anecdotal. The framing of engagement must respect this by asking fewer questions with greater depth, and by creating processes that return value in the form of visible influence. The tone should be invitational, rooted in respect for place and practice. Ultimately, engagement here is less about harvesting opinion and more about reaffirming the community's rightful place at the centre of decisions that shape their future. The qualitative approach to engagement used to produce this report was seen as innovative, unusual and was seen as a welcome development.

## What this means for LGR and future administrative boundaries

To respond meaningfully to the identity and quality of life findings from the Waterside narrative, any future local government reorganisation must first acknowledge that this is a place where boundaries are lived, not just drawn. The Waterside's coherence emerges not from statutory divisions but from cultural, ecological and emotional unity – a rhythm attuned to both land and tide, and a deep resistance to being re-categorised as part of large city bureaucracy.

Therefore, any future administrative realignment should preserve and reinforce the Waterside's distinct New Forest identity rather than fragment it or absorb it into a broader urban typology that fails to reflect its character.

What is needed is a governance model that groups Totton, Marchwood, Hythe, Holbury, Fawley, Calshot and the surrounding settlements into a wider New Forest administrative entity, one that also recognises an intertwined relationship with the New Forest National Park Authority. This approach would best support coherent policy delivery, planning, and community engagement. This boundary should trace the social landscape as much as the physical one.

Where new boundaries are required, they should:



Align with functional geographies of daily life, such as school catchments, local healthcare access, and retail patterns, which typically orient inward toward the Waterside rather than outward to Southampton.



Respect ecological cohesion, particularly the “coast–forest” continuum which underpins the Waterside's environmental identity. Administrative fragmentation of this corridor risks inconsistent landscape management.



Ensure democratic representation that reflects place-based knowledge. Decision-makers must understand the nuances of Forest culture, environmental stewardship, and rural-urban interdependence.



Allow flexibility for collaboration across boundaries, particularly where shared infrastructure (like the A326 corridor or the delivery of the Freeport) requires regional solutions.

Any boundary reorganisation must also be accompanied by a shift in tone from extraction to stewardship. Governance here should not merely oversee services but cultivate a sense of guardianship: of community voice, of environmental balance, and of cultural narrative. Doing this well means redrawing boundaries not to divide but to respect what already holds the Waterside together.

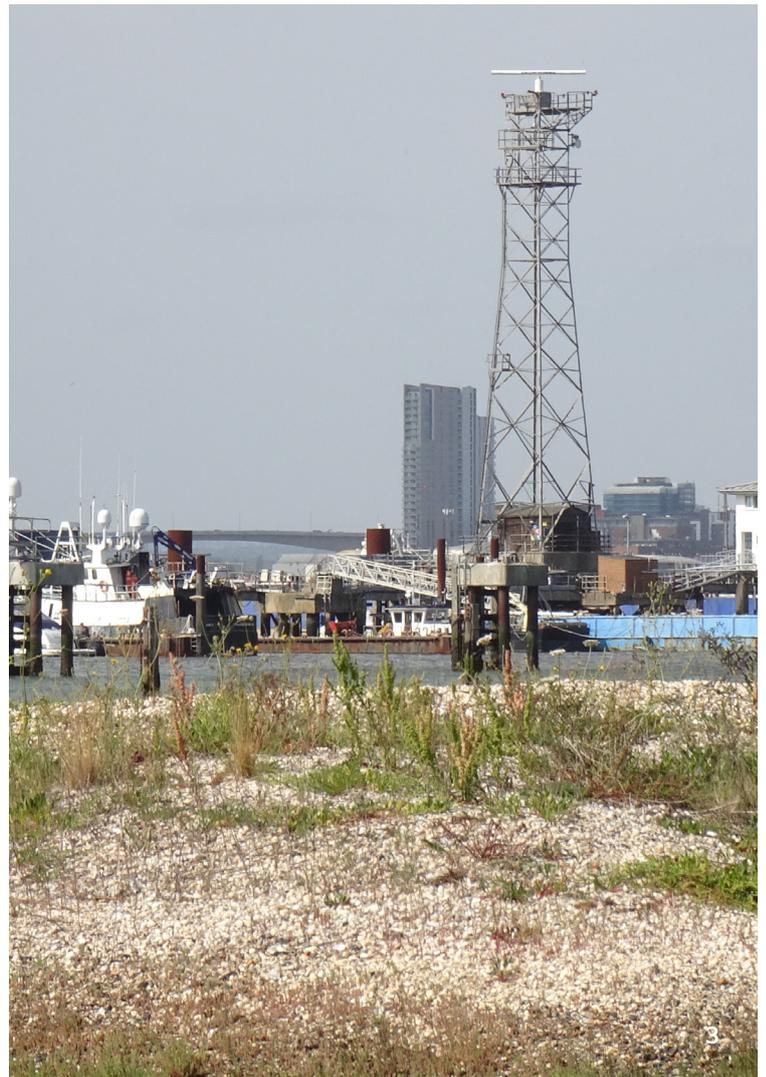


Image 3 Radar tower at Hythe Shipyard with the Itchen Bridge in the background

Image 4 Beach huts and shingle beach at Calshot



## Functional Waterside

Image 1 Visitor centre at Lepe

Image 2 Boat storage  
Marchwood



Connecting to its Green Roots

Image 1 and 2 Woodland near  
Frost Lane Hythe

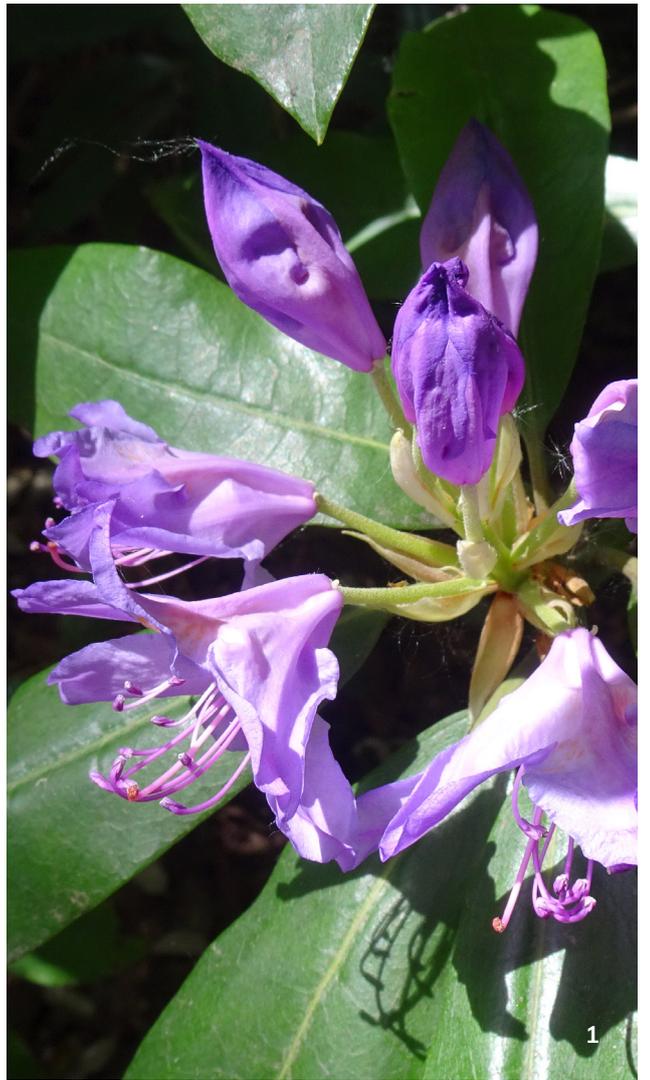




Image 3 Land behind the Church of St John the Apostle Marchwood

Image 4 Signpost at Ipley Cross with directions to the Waterside

## Pride & Care

Image 1 The Pilgrim Inn  
Marchwood

Image 2 Shops and  
community uses on  
Pylewell Road Hythe



1



3





2



4

Image 3 Flags flutter over Hythe High Street

Image 4 Beach huts and ice cream van in Calshot



Image 4 Painted door on the Attic Comedy Club in Totton

Image 5 Sculpture formed from a fallen tree in Marchwood





### Creativity & Personality

Image 1 Jellyfish mural Calshot

Image 2 Bespoke utility cover and bicycle shadow at Hythe Marina

Image 3 Metalwork on the gates of St Mary's Church Eling



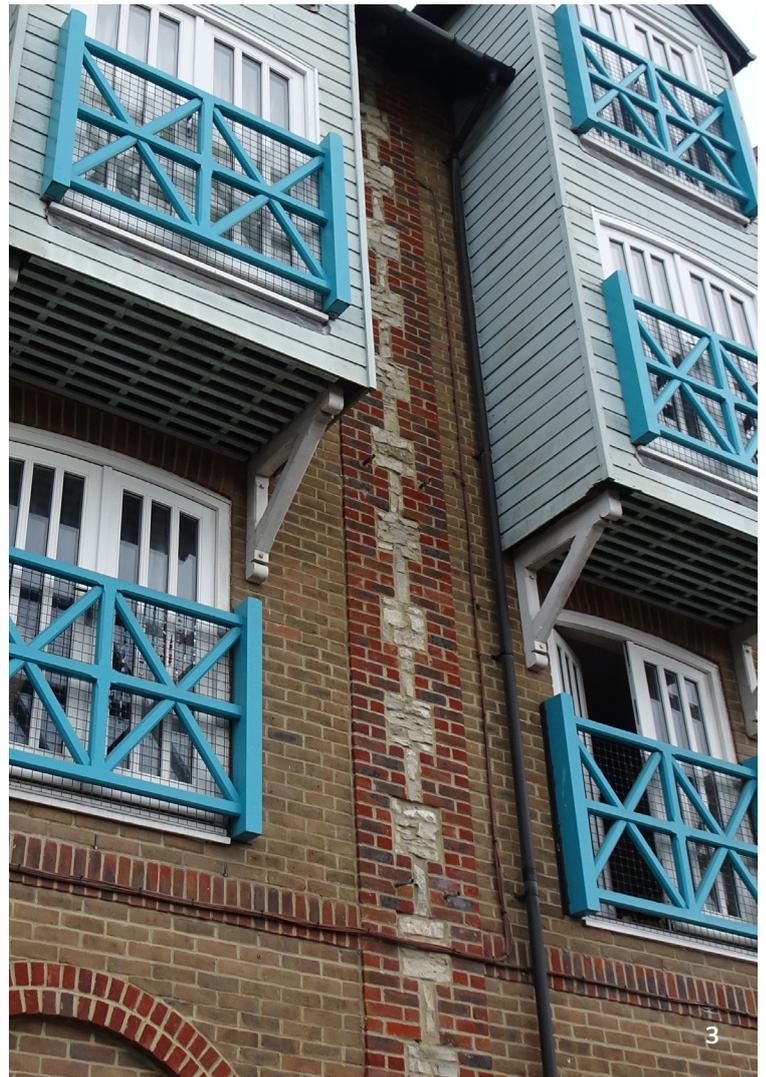


Image 3 Window details  
on Eling Tide Mill

Image 4 The train on  
Hythe Pier



### Connecting to its History

Image 1 Calshot Castle

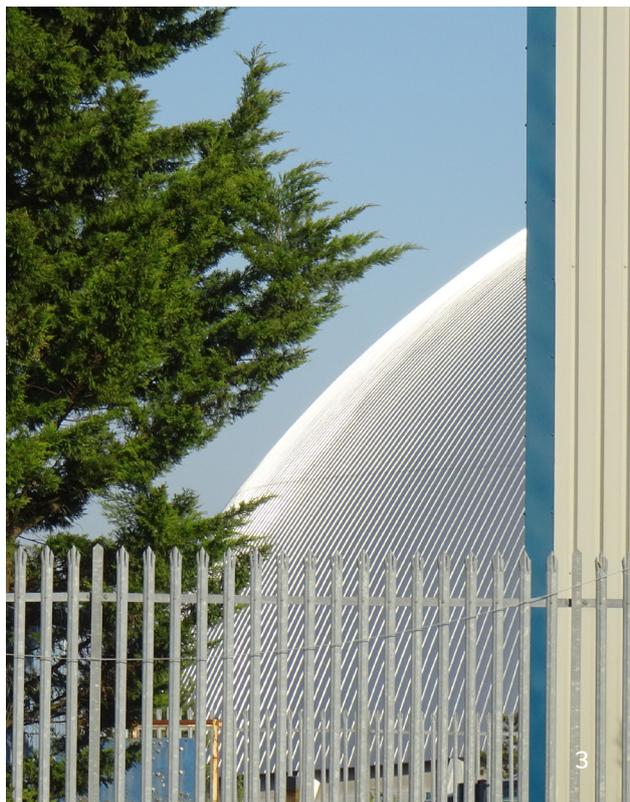
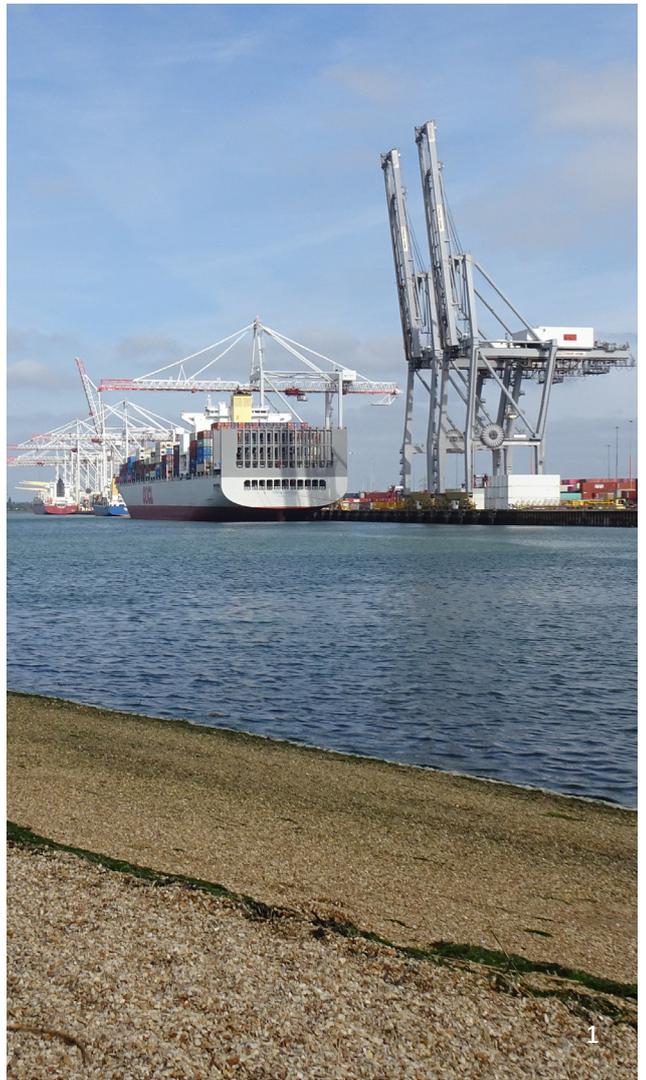
Image 2 All Saints Church Dibden



### Industry & Nature

Image 1 Cargo ship as seen from Marchwood Beach

Image 2 Cruise ship and fishing boat





2



4

Image 3 The silver dome of the Marchwood ERF

Image 4 The ERF dome as viewed across the yard of Marchwood Yacht club

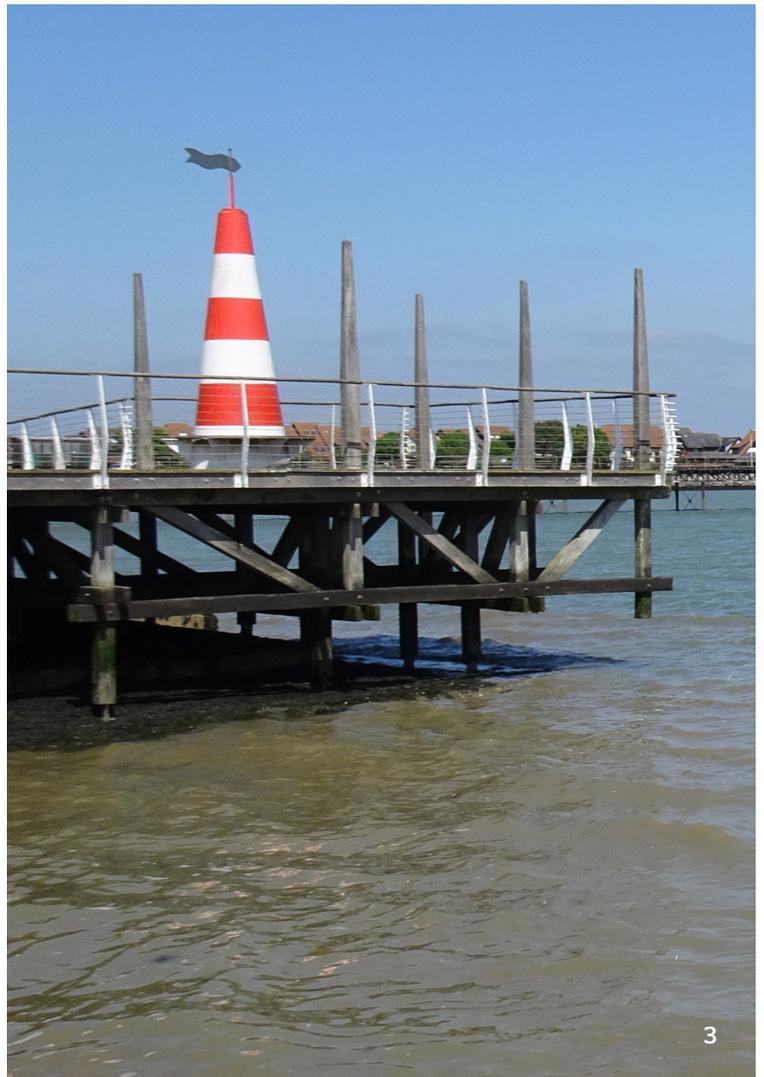


Image 3 Hythe Promenade

Image 4 Where road and rail intersect



## Connecting to its Surroundings

Image 1 Hythe Pier

Image 2 England Coast Path signpost on Shore Road Hythe



# APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES TO OTHER WORK

## **Report #1**

### **The Historic and Environmental Context for Local Government Reorganisation in the New Forest and Waterside Area**

This document provides an extensive evidence base to inform decisions relating to potential local government reorganisation (LGR) affecting the New Forest District and the Waterside area. It articulates the intertwined historical, geographical, ecological and socio-cultural characteristics that underpin the uniqueness of the area and argues strongly for coherent governance that reflects this distinctive identity. The material is framed around five interrelated themes: landscape, ecology, history, cultural identity, and function.

#### **Landscape Character & Spatial Integration**

The New Forest's landscape comprises a mosaic of ancient woodlands, unenclosed pasture, heathland, valley mires, and coastal salt marshes. The area's historic evolution through commoning and pastoral management has produced a visually and functionally distinctive landscape with a high degree of enclosure, irregular field patterns, and winding lanes. This extends into the Waterside, where many parts retain the character of "Ancient Forest Farmlands", especially between Dibden and Fawley.

A defining spatial attribute is the physical and perceptual continuity between the New Forest's core and its eastern edge along Southampton Water. Despite the presence of urbanised strips and industrial installations (e.g. the oil refinery and military port), remnants of the historic forest landscape extend into these areas, underscoring their embeddedness within the broader Forest geography. This relationship has been formally recognised through National Park boundary designations and further reinforced by landscape character assessments. The landscape setting is not simply visual; it informs ecological function, cultural practice, and policy delivery, demanding governance structures that uphold this continuity rather than segment it.

## **Ecology & Environmental Function**

The New Forest is nationally and internationally important for its ecological diversity, with habitats ranging from ancient woodlands and heathlands to estuarine wetlands. Waterside settlements form a critical ecological corridor linking the New Forest to the Solent, the River Test, and the wider coastal environment. The transitions between terrestrial and marine ecosystems in this area support a wide range of protected species and form part of a strategic green infrastructure network.

The ecological significance of the Waterside lies not just in static designations but in dynamic ecological flows: animal movement, habitat connectivity, and climate adaptation. The land here provides crucial “Alternative Natural Recreation Greenspace” and ecological buffers that help manage recreational pressure on core habitat areas. Furthermore, the need for permeability and landscape-scale restoration is increasingly urgent given threats from climate change, habitat fragmentation and invasive species. The area has strong potential for local nature recovery strategy (LNRS) such as through the creation of wildlife corridors that link areas of high nature value, e.g. the Forest to the coast. This requires a joined-up governance that treats the Waterside as an extension – not an adjunct – of the New Forest’s ecological matrix.

## **Historical Context & Governance Legacy**

Historically, the Waterside has always been aligned with the New Forest, both administratively and functionally. Evidence from Domesday Book entries, medieval parish formations, manorial systems and historical cartography all demonstrate a shared governance lineage between settlements such as Eling, Fawley, Marchwood and Beaulieu and the wider New Forest territory. Conversely, there is little evidence of a meaningful historical association between these areas and Southampton.

The development of Totton, Hythe, Dibden and Fawley in the 19th and 20th centuries stemmed from pressures internal to the Forest, particularly housing shortages, and from national industrial and military developments (e.g. the construction of Fawley Refinery and Power Station). These growth dynamics did not sever the historical ties to the Forest but rather reinforced the role of the Waterside as a Forest hinterland, supporting settlement, employment and infrastructure without loss of identity.

The New Forest District Council and its predecessors have historically acted as a buffer and integrator between the Forest core and outlying areas, helping to manage sensitive planning issues while supporting sustainable development. This integrated approach has proven effective in protecting landscape character, enabling appropriate housing and employment growth, and delivering shared public services.

### **Cultural Identity & Place Attachment**

A defining feature of the New Forest and its periphery is the enduring cultural identity tied to the land. For communities along the Waterside, this identity is not symbolic, it is lived. Many residents have direct or familial ties to the commoning system, forestry work, or farming traditions. Memories of open grazing in Totton, ponies in village centres, and education in “Forest schools” reinforce this heritage.

This lived identity persists even where formal perambulation boundaries (the legal Forest edge) do not extend. Commoning rights remain attached to properties outside the current boundary, with examples in Holbury, western Totton, and parts of Hythe. These rights are centuries old and form a critical part of the New Forest’s governance and land-use system. Their continuation depends on the availability of back-up grazing land, much of which lies in the Waterside.

Attempts to administratively disconnect the Waterside from the rest of the New Forest risk eroding this shared identity, undermining local confidence in governance, and exacerbating social fragmentation. Cultural geography, when ignored in boundary-making, leads to functional and symbolic misalignment. The report emphasises that communities do not perceive themselves as an extension of Southampton but as integral to the wider Forest region.

### **Functional Role & Environmental Stewardship**

The function of the New Forest ecosystem relies on the continuation of commoning, with freely roaming animals (e.g. ponies, cattle, pigs) shaping landscape structure, suppressing invasive vegetation, and creating the open woodland and heathland character for which the Forest is valued. The role of the Waterside in this system is essential. It provides back-up grazing land, seasonal relief areas, and supporting infrastructure for animal management.

In addition to its agricultural role, the area provides important recreational functions, contributes to biodiversity connectivity, and helps buffer development pressures away from sensitive core areas. The interplay between function and form is central to the argument for spatial integrity. Disaggregating governance structures could disrupt this delicate system, resulting in fragmented service delivery, inconsistent environmental regulation, and policy misalignment.

## Implications for Local Government Reorganisation

The evidence base presented in this document firmly supports a governance model that maintains the unity of the Waterside and New Forest areas under a single administrative structure. Key principles emerging from the document include:

- Geographical coherence: Boundaries should reflect landscape, ecological and settlement continuity, rather than arbitrary lines or population modelling.
- Ecological integrity: Biodiversity management and nature recovery require consistent and place-aware governance.
- Cultural alignment: Identity and heritage should not be sacrificed for administrative convenience.
- Functional integration: Commoning, planning and service delivery work best when designed with a shared environmental and spatial logic.
- Historic precedent: Over centuries, political boundaries have evolved to reflect the realities of landscape and community. There is no historical justification for splitting the Waterside from the New Forest.

The strengthened “duty to further” the purposes of protected landscapes under the 2023 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act places additional weight on governance bodies to protect and enhance the setting of National Parks. A realignment that weakens the Waterside–Forest connection would be difficult to reconcile with this duty.

## Conclusion

This document provides a detailed, multi-dimensional rationale for keeping the Waterside within the same local government framework as the wider New Forest. Any proposal that seeks to divide them would run counter to the area’s landscape character, ecological interdependence, cultural cohesion and functional needs. Moving forward, reorganisation efforts should build governance models that reflect this integrity, not bypass it.

# APPENDIX 2: REFERENCES TO OTHER WORK

## Report #2

### **A Vision for the Waterside: An Integrated Environmental Infrastructure Vision**

This report presents a bold, collaborative strategy to guide sustainable growth across the Totton and Waterside area on the western shore of Southampton Water. Spearheaded by New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority, and Hampshire County Council – alongside major stakeholders including ABP, Exxon Mobil, Solent Gateway, and Fawley Waterside – the vision seeks to deliver economic regeneration while enhancing the area’s sensitive natural environment.

At the heart of this proposal is the understanding that the Waterside holds nationally significant infrastructure, including the Fawley Refinery (20% of UK capacity), Marchwood Military Port (a unique dual-use facility), the Port of Southampton’s expansion landholdings, and the regeneration of the Fawley Power Station into a new sustainable marine-focused community. Alongside these economic assets, the area includes areas of international environmental importance such as the New Forest National Park and the Solent’s protected coastal ecosystems.

The vision proposes the delivery of around 5,000 new homes and 18 hectares of employment land, underpinned by a package of key investments. These include enhancements to the A326 corridor to reduce congestion, improved multi-modal transport connectivity, and critical green infrastructure to ensure net environmental gains and community wellbeing.

The strategy embraces an “environmental infrastructure” approach, treating nature as a core asset, not a constraint. This involves creating a connected ecological network, improving water and land management to build resilience, enhancing green public spaces, and linking the coast to the Forest. The goal is to produce multifunctional landscapes that deliver health, biodiversity, accessibility, and climate adaptation benefits.

Economically, the proposals anticipate the creation of 6,700 new jobs, a £566 million increase in annual Gross Value Added (GVA), and the attraction of over £3 billion in private sector investment. The plan seeks to upskill local residents, create knowledge-intensive employment opportunities, and strengthen the region's maritime economy.

Social outcomes are central to the vision. These include housing diversity, improved access to education and training, healthier lifestyles through walkable neighbourhoods, and reuse of brownfield sites like the former power station. Enhancing Totton as the area's key urban centre is a priority, as is delivering a shift away from car dependence through better cycling, walking and public transport options.

Crucially, this is not simply a development plan but a shared spatial commitment to deliver growth in harmony with place. The Waterside is presented as a national testbed for how economic vitality can be achieved alongside ecological stewardship and community inclusion. The vision frames a future where people, environment and economy are integrated, not traded off, delivering not only local but nationally significant outcomes through coordinated investment and policy alignment.

# APPENDIX 3: REFERENCES TO OTHER WORK

## Report #3

### **The A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme Information Pack**

This report outlines Hampshire County Council's (HCC) proposal to upgrade a critical transport corridor between Totton and the Waterside. The A326 is the primary route connecting Waterside communities to Southampton, the M27, and national transport networks. However, the corridor currently suffers from chronic congestion, unreliable journey times, and poor provision for walking, cycling, and public transport. It also acts as a barrier between communities and the New Forest National Park, and widening the road will exacerbate the barrier effect, especially in places away from designated crossing points.

The scheme is a central component of the wider Waterside Transport Strategy and Action Plan, adopted in 2022, and aligns with the broader Waterside Vision, a strategic initiative supported by local authorities, developers, and stakeholders to unlock up to 6,700 new jobs, 5,000 new homes, and £3 billion in private investment while protecting the area's sensitive environment.

The proposal focuses on two key sections. The North Section, between Michigan Way and Cocklydown Lane, includes 2.5 km of new dual carriageway, upgraded junctions, four new pedestrian and cycle crossings, and two new bridges. The South Section, from the Marchwood Bypass to Staplewood Lane, delivers a new southbound lane with targeted widening, improved access for public transport, and safer cycling infrastructure. Specific design options are under consideration at junctions such as Staplewood Lane and Twiggs Lane, balancing traffic improvements with landscape and heritage protection.

The overarching objectives are to improve accessibility, reduce congestion, support economic development, and protect the New Forest. The scheme is designed to relieve pressure on smaller local roads and encourage traffic back onto the A326, allowing for broader investments in cycling and walking infrastructure throughout the Waterside.

Environmental sensitivity is a core theme. Designs favour western side widening to preserve mature tree belts and mitigate landscape, biodiversity, and noise impacts. A minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is required, and a full Environmental Statement will assess effects on woodland, watercourses, bat roosts, invertebrates, fish, and other protected species.

The scheme, estimated to cost over £100 million, is being progressed under the Department for Transport's Large Local Majors programme. HCC are due to submit a planning application and outline business case, with full construction targeted for late 2026. The preferred scheme is subject to further public engagement and design refinement.

Ultimately, the A326 North Scheme seeks to enable strategic growth across the Solent Freeport and Waterside regeneration zones while respecting the area's ecological and cultural integrity. It is framed not simply as a road upgrade, but as a catalyst for integrated transport, economic renewal, and landscape stewardship.

# APPENDIX 4: FAWLEY PARISH COUNCIL CONSULTATION

As part of its own LGR consultation process, in May 2025 Fawley Parish Council presented two strategic options to the local community:

1. Option 1 proposed identifying the area as more rural, with a view to exploring merger opportunities with other rural councils.
2. Option 2 suggested identifying as more urban, initiating potential alignment with urban neighbours such as Southampton and Eastleigh.

To ensure local representation and data integrity, the survey was made available to residents through local channels for a limited 24-hour window. This brief availability was a deliberate measure to prevent the results being influenced by out-of-area submissions.

In total, 316 responses were received during the 24 hour period. The overwhelming majority of respondents – 307 individuals (97%) – expressed support for the rural identity and the corresponding strategic direction outlined in Option 1.

Only 9 respondents (3%) favoured the more urban alternative outlined in the second option.

This strong preference for the rural alignment provides a clear mandate for next steps, signalling widespread community support for a rural-based collaborative future.



FALCON INN

WELCOME

# APPENDIX 5: QUOTES FROM THE WATERFRONT COMMUNITY

These quotes were recorded and transcribed from the empirical research phase and were used to inform the narrative in the main body of the report, and subsequent interpretations.

## **General Quotes**

“The area’s really under pressure. It’s like we’ve outgrown the infrastructure that was never quite right to begin with.”

“We struggle terribly for doctors. You wait weeks just for an appointment – it’s not what it used to be.”

“The road system’s poor, and the buses are even worse. It’s like if you don’t drive, you’re stuck.”

“Honestly, I feel more connected to the Forest than to Southampton. That’s where our sense of place really lies.”

“Infrastructure is just... lacking. Whether it’s roads, healthcare, or even things like youth services, it feels like we’re always the afterthought.”

“With the Local Plan, people are worried – it’s all about the River Test and Southampton Water, but no one’s really asking us how it feels to live here. Until now.”

“There’s this gravitational pull towards Southampton – it’s where the jobs are, the services, everything really – but it’s not who we are.”

“It’s pleasant to live here because we’re so close to the Forest, but most of us commute into Southampton or even further. You have to.”

“Entertainment in the Forest used to be something special but it’s kind of vanished.”  
“There’s just not much for people to do now.”

“Leisure? It’s seriously lacking. Our young people, especially as there’s just nowhere to go, nothing to get involved in.”

“People used to come to Hythe and make a day of it. It was part of the fun. Park up, jump on the ferry across to Southampton, grab a coffee, walk the streets a bit, then come back. We miss that. We miss the way the ferry made us feel connected.”

“I didn’t grow up here. I’m from Essex originally, but what drew me was the Forest. It’s that feeling you get when you’re close to something ancient, something that’s still breathing. That’s why I wanted to be here.”

“She was about to set sail from Southampton on a cruise, but first, she took the Hythe ferry to visit us and buy some wool for her journey, she had a knitting project to complete while on holiday. And she chose our most expensive wool, a special issue from New Zealand. As we’re chatting at the till, making the sale, I ask where her cruise is heading. She says, ‘Southampton to New Zealand.’ So she’ll be taking the wool all the way back again, via Southampton and Hythe. We are all so connected in a way.”

“I was born in Hythe Hospital back in 1950, and I’ve always liked it here. I was brought up on a smallholding, not a farm exactly, but enough land to grow things, keep animals, live close to nature. That semi-rural feel, you can still sense it around the area. It hasn’t got too big, not like some places. There’s space here, space to breathe.”

“I know somebody with two boys, eleven and thirteen, and she won’t let them out on their own in the parks in Southampton anymore. It’s not safe, there’s too much of that gang culture creeping in, and you never know what they’ll come across. The only time they really get out and about, run free like kids should, is when they visit here and take them into the Forest. Out there, they can be themselves. It’s the one place I know they’re safe.”

“Marchwood and Holbury feel more like parades, just little runs of shops, while Hythe and Fawley, they’ve got real centres, places where the community sort of comes together. You feel the difference when you walk through them.”

“I was born in Holbury – home birth, second child – at number 11, Westbourne Avenue. My mum still lives there. And you know, when it was mentioned Holbury being, ‘... the bit between the two Co-Ops’ that really stuck with me. It hit a nerve. It wasn’t always like that. That place used to have a heart.”

“Long before the bypass and the service road, there was just Long Lane. That was the main road. My grandparents lived at number 155, just next to where the big Co-Op stands now. And back then, instead of the store, there were Nissen huts left over from the war. That was our village centre. That was life.”

“Across the road, where the smaller Co-Op stands now, that used to be the Holbury Inn. My nan worked there during the war, 1943, ‘44, around the time of D-Day build-up. She also worked down at The Falcon in Fawley. The road would’ve been packed with trucks, jeeps, tanks and everything lined up for Normandy. And next door to her house? There was a big Mess Hall Tent for the troops.”

“There’s this story my family tells... the American soldiers loved my nan, and for her birthday one year, they managed to get the Catering Corps to bake her a cake. During rationing! It should’ve been this amazing thing, a real gift. But when she realised it had been baked by a Black soldier, she wouldn’t eat it. She thought it was somehow tainted. I still feel ashamed of that. I carry that. It’s a reminder of how far we’ve come, and how much further we need to go.”

“Holbury might look a bit rough around the edges these days, but it has stories. It had character. It wasn’t just bookended by two supermarkets. And sure, it could use some love, some new investment, but that shouldn’t mean erasing what makes it what it is. I don’t want to see it swallowed into Greater Southampton. It deserves better than that.”

“We are a virtual peninsula, the Forest on one side and water on the other.”

“The peninsula brings a sense of isolation, but it also brings quality of life. We haven’t got that hustle and bustle.”

“Totton isn’t like those smaller coastal places with the cul-de-sac effect, we’re properly connected. But there’s a worry about how that plays out, especially with things like the port getting bigger, more industrial estates, more lorries. It’s just a different situation for us.”

### **Transport, Connectivity & Infrastructure**

“Biggest problem? You need a car. The bus service is appalling, and there’s no rail link – it’s isolating for people who don’t drive.”

“We’ve had £100,000 of Section 106 money earmarked to improve the footways, but it hasn’t been spent and there’s still no proper plan.”

“We probably see things a bit differently to the rest of the Waterside, because we’re Totton. We’ve got links to a wider area.”

“Walking in Marchwood’s a joke. Hythe and Dibden have pavements, but here? You’re dodging traffic.”

“Those 40 mph limits don’t make sense in built-up areas. It’s dangerous, especially for kids and older folks trying to cross. We need it to be slower.”

“Everything backs up. Just one bridge and one road in or out. You can widen the

A326 all you want, but the bottleneck doesn't go away."

"What we've heard is, when the parking charges came in here, people were already in their cars, so they just carried on through to Shirley. They can buy the same sort of stuff there, but park for free or a lot cheaper."

"Quality of life around here is measured in infrastructure and right now, it's not measuring up."

"We've got really good transport connections, easy access to the M27, straight to London, and the trains too."

"We used to catch the ferry over for football matches in Southampton."

"The buses into the Forest are practically non-existent. And with car parks being taken out to reduce the pressure, it's harder for all of us to get in. Which maybe is the point?"

### **Sense of Place, Identity & Attachment**

"I didn't stay because it's perfect. I stayed because I love it. Forest on one side, water on the other – there's nowhere else like it."

"We've all got strong ties to the Forest. It's who we are. You can't just cut that off and expect people to accept it."

"When we needed to shop, it is always Lymington or Lyndhurst. Southampton? No, we wouldn't go there. That isn't our direction. Our direction is the Forest, not the city."

"We've got all sorts of people here. Some families have been here for generations, and they've always looked to the Forest. That connection has become more complicated over time. Then you've got the people who've moved here more recently, they're usually drawn here by the Forest too. So we've got that in common."

"We can often look toward Southampton for work, but emotionally, spiritually we belong to the Forest."

"You take Waterside out of the Forest and you're removing a whole identity. It's like taking Fremantle out of Southampton, it doesn't make sense."

"We're a complete unit down here. Trying to shift us into someone else's jurisdiction? That's not just bad planning, it's disrespectful."

"Bridges take you somewhere else, across rivers, over boundaries, they take you into a different world."

“Totton’s got the bridge; it connects us in a way the rest of the Waterside isn’t. But we’re not Southampton, no matter what the postcode says or what autofill on a form tries to tell you.”

### **Housing & Affordability**

“There’s a massive housing issue – 2,000 families on the social housing waiting list, and we’re still talking about where to put them.”

“We know you can’t build right in the Forest, but you’ve got to be smart. Building on the edges of settlements make sense, if it’s done right.”

“We desperately need more affordable family housing. But keep it for local people. Don’t let the city swallow up the list.”

“When I grew up here, it wasn’t stressful to live. You had a job, a place, a sense of security. That’s disappearing.”

“A lot of people who’ve moved in over the last ten years, they’ve come for a more rural way of life.”

“Our countryside used to be the fields at Calmore. That’s gone now, lost to development.”

“Totton had about 10,000 people in the 1940s, now it’s up to 30,000. It started with Totton and Eling, then from Rushington grew, and it’s just carried on growing from there.”

“People who couldn’t afford to live in Romsey or Southampton ended up in Totton. And we’ve got commoners and Romany gypsies too, who’ve been priced out of the Forest.”

### **Youth & Community Life**

“There used to be so many clubs, youth centres, places to go but now, teenagers are left hanging around cafés or stuck indoors.”

“Our older teens, kids in their early 20s, they’re the ones that are struggling. There’s no night-life, no social spaces, nothing to make them feel they belong.”

“Sure Start was a huge loss, and local families really felt that one. You can’t remove these lifelines and not expect consequences.”

“We’ve got lovely parks, beaches, even a community cinema now but the cycle tracks don’t link up, and it all feels a bit patchy.”

“When the pub goes, the cohesion goes with it. These places aren’t just for a drinking. They’re the heart of the community.”

“We used to have a theatre in Hythe, but it got knocked down. There’s a plan to bring one back, but we’ve lost more than we’ve gained.”

“There’s not a huge amount of arts and culture across the Waterside, but it’s coming, I can feel it’s on the way.”

“Most of the culture happens in Southampton. We need more here, to serve the Forest. But there’s a risk that if we get absorbed into Southampton, all the funding will go straight there, not here. It’ll be about hierarchies, priorities.”

“Young people head into Southampton because there’s no night-life here, or anywhere along the Waterside really. We do have pubs and restaurants though, and a meal out in the Forest is actually pretty good these days.”

### **Governance, Decision-Making & Representation**

“Southampton’s close, and so’s BCP, but a lot of people don’t actually work in Southampton. They go to Winchester and BCP as well. So it’s not all about Southampton. A lot of people here don’t have much to do with it.”

“We’ve always had a strong relationship with the Forest, but also with Southampton. Both matter to us. That said, even though the city’s useful, it’s really all about the New Forest for us.”

“To be honest, I don’t see what benefit we get from NFDC anymore. I’ve got an open mind about a new local government role.”

“The city-based councils don’t get what makes us tick. They don’t live here so they can’t possibly understand the Forest culture.”

“There’s been loads of consultations, but sometimes it feels like they’re asking 50 questions without getting to the one that really matters.”

“If Southampton ran this area, they’d flatten the nuance. We’re not just ‘on the edge’ – we’re our own place with our own values.”

### **Work & Local Economy**

“Marchwood might be a Freeport, but no one’s really telling us how that’s going to benefit local people. Jobs haven’t materialised, and the community’s still waiting.”

“We’ve only had 16 new jobs in 8 years. That’s not regeneration, that’s stagnation.”

“Far as I’ve heard, there’s only been one new business from the Freeport, and that’s in Havant. It hasn’t benefitted us here. This area runs on small businesses, start-ups, freelancers, things that can grow if given the chance. Freeport and

ABP are focused on big business and big growth, and if it's not managed well, it could damage what we already have. If the boundary moves, that relationship's not in our favour. It doesn't feel like the decision-making includes us."

"It's the skilled jobs we need. People want to work, but they can't just settle for anything. And those kinds of roles aren't coming here."

"There's so many small businesses trying to make it work – independent shops, takeaways, local services – it's that spirit that keeps this place alive."

"Esso used to really invest in the area. It wasn't just handing out grants, it was part of the community. That's changed."

"You can hear the docks more clearly here. You can actually tell what the weather's going to be like by how the sound carries."

"There's big potential for green jobs here, we've got so many habitats. This place could become a training ground for eco-jobs, like the Biosphere over on the Isle of Wight."

### **Local Environment & Land Connection**

"You've got this incredible wildlife along the waterfronts – seagrass beds, birds, all kinds of species – but we're not making the most of it."

"The Forest isn't just a backdrop. It's part of our identity. The commoners, the grazing, the traditions. It's all stitched into how we live."

"The verderers and commoners have so much knowledge, but they don't have a platform. It's like they're invisible to the decision-makers."

"You can't build housing in the heart of the Forest, and rightly so but this means that there's pressure creeping in around the edges, and it has to be done carefully."

"Where the Forest meets the sea – that's what makes this place special. You change that balance, and you lose what makes people stay."

"Some families have commoners' rights, but they can't actually use them anymore because access is more restricted."

"Our relationship with the National Park is difficult. It's not really about countryside access anymore. It's more like a nature reserve now, and that shift has made it a difficult space for us."

## Sports & The Water

“You get lads coming down from all over, Marchwood, even as far as Fordingbridge, because Fawley Rugby Club, and the whole Waterside really, has this inclusive feel. It’s not just about how well you play; it’s about being welcomed, being part of something. That’s why they choose to be here.”

“Calshot’s always been more than just a centre, it’s where my kids learnt to kayak, where I first got on a windsurf”

“The thing about this community is, we don’t just watch sport, we live it. From early-morning paddle-boarders to indoor climbers, there’s something going on every day. It’s part of the way of life around here.”

“I still remember the first time I stood in the centre of the velodrome at Calshot. And then that banked wood under your wheels, it’s addictive. And knowing it’s right here, in our corner of Hampshire? That’s something special.”

“For a place that can feel so wild and coastal, it’s amazing how much structure and opportunity there is. Calshot offers possibility. You see kids turn into confident young adults out there on the water.”

“What I love is the mix. One moment someone’s learning to boulder indoors, and outside there’s a group heading off in sea kayaks. There are also lots of organised team sports.

“This isn’t a place where you have to be elite. You can be just starting out or working towards something big. Sport here doesn’t judge”

“Oh, the sporting rivalry goes way beyond just the pitch. I’m from Holbury, and I tell you what, back in the day I daren’t set foot in Hythe on match days. It’s all in good fun... mostly!”



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with thanks to the  
Waterside communities.

Key characteristics of New Forest  
Waterside

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# Executive Summary

- i. The key characteristics of New Forest Waterside can be grouped into 5 key areas, namely:
  - History
  - Function and commoning
  - Cultural Identity
  - Landscape; and
  - Ecology
- ii. Each of which are summarised below with further information provided in the main body of the report. Further historical background is included in the appendix.

## History

- iii. The New Forest and its connection to the Waterside have a history dating back millennia. Even before its proclamation as a royal hunting ground by William the Conqueror, it had an established system of governance all confirming historic administrations within the New Forest and northwards towards Romsey, but none into Southampton. Historic drovers' routes still show links between the Forest and the Waterside.
- iv. More recent development across the Waterside was a response to demand for housing not capable of being met within the core New Forest and homes provided to serve Fawley Oil Refinery and Power Station and the ports at Marchwood and Hythe.

## Function and commoning

- v. The historic Forest landscape of close-cropped verges, lawns and commons is in part maintained by free-roaming Commoners' animals (including the iconic ponies). The grazing animals suppress brambles, gorse and other coarse vegetation, thereby creating the landscape of open lawns and trees. Backup grazing land outside of the Forest is important to Commoners to accommodate depastured animals when necessary. The cost of land is often prohibitive and a serious constraint to the functional operation of commoning.

## Cultural Identity

- vi. For residents across the New Forest, both within the National Park and those in the wider district, there is a strong shared cultural identity.
- vii. People living in Totton, Waterside and Ringwood moved there as they become unable to obtain housing in the central core of the New Forest. Many residents are from commoning families or work in associated trades, such as farming or forestry, with historic and familial links to the Forest. They have living memories of an indelible link with the Forest, including growing-up on farms in the Forest, education in Forest schools, or regularly seeing ponies grazing in the centres of Totton, Marchwood, Hythe and Fawley.

## Landscape

- viii. The New Forest is a mixture of ancient woodland, heathland, rivers and mires, connected to a coastline of mudflats and saltmarshes. It has been shaped by man and by the grazing of animals over many hundreds of years. The Waterside landscape retains a strong sense of enclosure created by ancient woodlands and a network of winding, leafy lanes and drove roads linking small areas of remnant wayside common. In combination, these create a feeling of being 'in the Forest'<sup>1</sup>.

## Ecology

- ix. There are valuable green infrastructure links connecting the Waterside and the Forest. The habitats and associated species assemblages are under pressure from climate change, recreation, fragmentation, development, new diseases and invasive species. It is essential to build resilience and ensure permeability through the landscape to enable effective adaptation to these threats. Substantial parts of the district, including its coastline, are covered by statutory national, European and international designations<sup>2</sup>. In addition, there are many locally designated sites and priority habitats and species, not all of which will be within designated sites.

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<sup>1</sup> This inter-relationship with the rest of the New Forest was recognised in the formal designation of parts of the Waterside within the National Park as outlined in the Report of the Inquiry published Dec 2003. Further more recent studies by both the National Park Authority and the District Council confirm that key routes remain between Southampton Water and the New Forest (both inside and outside of NP) which should be strengthened as Green Infrastructure/links

<sup>2</sup> [Find protected areas of countryside - GOV.UK](#)

- x. Effective and joined-up management and decision-making, particularly in relation to infrastructure, is essential to enable landscape scale nature recovery, linking the New Forest biodiversity 'hotspot' out into the wider countryside. Green links to the Waterside, and the transitions of habitats must be protected to ensure the New Forest retains its value.

## Introduction

1. This briefing note outlines the significance of the Waterside to the wider New Forest. It provides evidence-based context for assessing the implications of proposed local government reorganisation (LGR), specifically the potential separation of the Waterside from the rest of New Forest District.

## History and organisation

2. The New Forest has a history dating back millennia, including its relationship to the Waterside. Even before its formation as a royal hunting ground it had an established manorial system with power vested in landowners, with the subsequent Hundreds system of governance and then Ecclesiastical Parishes all confirming historic administrations within the New Forest and northwards towards Romsey, but none into Southampton.
3. Key drovers' routes within the New Forest towards Southampton Water (at Bury Farm) and Romsey (through Wade Hill Drove) are still identifiable, reflecting again the history of the New Forest as having important connections to the coast and to Romsey and Winchester. There is little evidence of any substantive relationship to Southampton during these times.
4. The Domesday Book (1086) first refers to the area as the New Forest (Nova Foresta) and it is thought the royal Forest was created, possibly about 1079 by William I, 'The Conqueror' (1066-1087). There was already an established manorial system here from the late Saxon period (See Appendix).
5. Under William I, as under the English kings, vills were grouped together into 'hundreds'. Redbridge Hundred, which includes the northern Waterside, extended to include Romsey. Southampton is in Waltham Hundred. See Speed's Map of 1611 (figure 1).



Figure 1 Speed's map of 1611 showing the Waterside Hundred of Redbridge stretching northwards to include Romsey, but excluding Southampton.

- The ecclesiastical parish boundaries here date from the 14th century, the earliest and largest is that of Eling (1537) which is contiguous with Romsey Parish (1569) (figures 2 and 3).

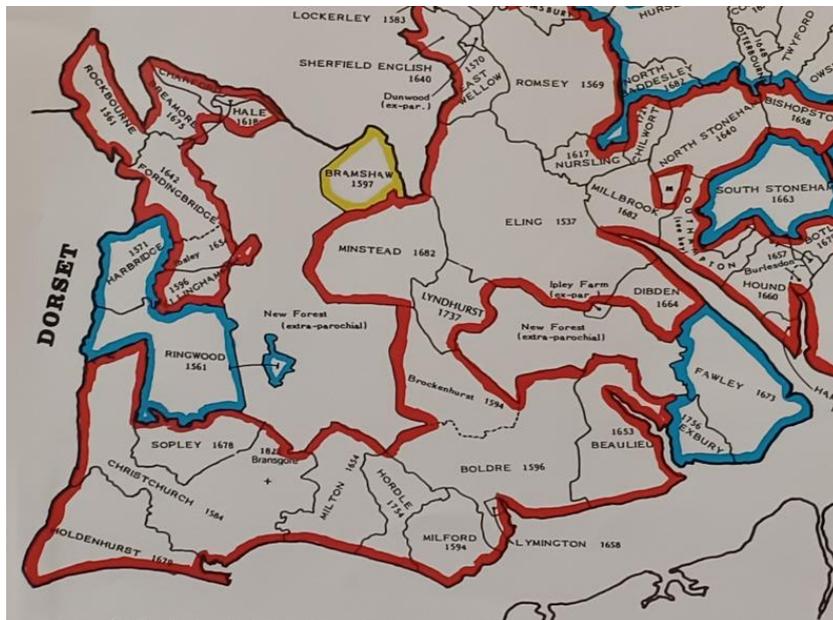


Figure 2 Ecclesiastical parishes in Hampshire, with date of commencement of parish registers. Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies 2000. (Bramshaw; Exbury; Fawley; Harbridge and; Ringwood were Peculiars)



Figure 3 1 Taylor 1759 Map with history boundary of Eling Parish overlaid.

7. The Poor Law Unions of 1834 developed out of the Parish System and formed the basis of the boundaries of the Sanitary Districts, which in turn formed the basis for the Rural and Urban Districts established under the 1894 Local Government Act (figure 4).



Figure 4 1888 Poor Law Union Map – Showing Southampton as part of Stoneham Union which included Eastleigh.

8. The 1927 Poor Law Union Map shows historic Poor Law arrangements for Southampton were still within the Stoneham Union and there were no historic shared organisational relationships with the New Forest area. Poor Law Unions were abolished under the 1929 Local Government Act with responsibilities passed to county councils.

9. New Forest Rural District Council (NFRDC) was formed in 1894 and included the Waterside parishes of Dibden, Eling, Fawley and Marchwood. NFRDC was dissolved in 1974, when responsibilities transferred to New Forest District Council which included Ringwood and Fordingbridge Rural District Councils.
10. The 1964 New Forest Act introduced the current perambulation (boundary) notably introducing cattle-grids and fencing, to prevent traffic accidents and property damage from animals freely strayed off the Forest into the surrounding land. The New Forest became a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1971 and was granted special status as the New Forest Heritage Area in 1985. In 2005, the central core of the New Forest was designated a National Park.

## Function and commoning

11. The New Forest National Park remains one of the few places in England where the ancient tradition of commoning is still widely practised, directly contributing to the landscape character of the New Forest. Commoning is a way of life with a long history in the New Forest with rights confirmed by statute in 1698. It consists of using the resources of the Forest for stock grazing and therefore reduces the amount of land required to practise subsistence farming, often undertaken with part-time working in woodland industries. Backup grazing land outside of the New Forest is vitally important for Commoners, providing support for livestock off the open Forest. The cost of land is often prohibitive and a serious constraint to functional operation of Commoning. In recent years development pressure for land outside the National Park has reduced the amount of back-up grazing land available for commoning.
12. The function of the Forest is in part helped by the role of free-roaming Commoners' stock animals (donkeys, mules, ponies, cattle, pigs and sheep). The grazing animals help suppress brambles, gorse and other coarse vegetation, thereby creating the landscape of open lawns and trees. Commoners' rights<sup>3</sup> are attached to land or property (rather than an individual) and commoning rights extend to properties outside of the Forest perambulation, notably into areas of the Waterside.
13. The ancient landscape, created by this grazing, creates a common visual characteristic, along the Forest settlements' roadsides of close-cropped verges, lawns and commons which run through some of some of the Forest settlements. The district, outside the National Park perambulation, functions as an economic hinterland and has long supported employment and work associated with the land.
14. Alongside this, backup grazing land outside of the open Forest is important to Commoners to accommodate winter grazing, animal welfare and forage production when necessary. The cost of such land, in reasonable proximity to the open Forest, is often very high and a significant constraint to functional operation of Commoning. Waterside parishes offer more accessible and extensive grazing land than that available within the National Park, making

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<sup>3</sup> Commoning rights were introduced in the Chart of the Forest 1225 [Charter of the Forest, 1225 - The National Archives](#)

them indispensable to the viability of communing, particularly for the eastern parts of the New Forest.

15. Backup-grazing needs to be planned for and managed on the hinterland with very real connections to the perambulation. Even now that connection is in danger of getting forgotten in important decisions about land use and is seriously under pressure from development. Splitting the Waterside from the New Forest would fragment oversight, risking weakening protections for, and the understanding of, grazing land.
16. Historically there has been no published map of where backup grazing land is, which makes it difficult to protect. The dependency of the New Forest on these parishes for back-up grazing to support commoning is supported by evidence presented in a report published by the New Forest Association in June 2025 titled Commoners' back-up grazing in the New Forest: extent and distribution ([https://newforestassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Final\\_back-up\\_land\\_report.pdf](https://newforestassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Final_back-up_land_report.pdf)).
17. Eligibility for commoning rights also exists in western Totton (built out for residential development in the 1980s) and potentially a number of other areas (the rights run with certain land parcels and therefore a field built on doesn't extinguish the rights).
18. This unusual governance is a factor that has largely shaped and preserved the present form of the landscape in and around the National Park area. Historic trackways and drovers' tracks further evidence these important connections, for example, at Bury Farm. This is one of the large farms described as typical in the landscape and historic settlement and farmstead assessments with Commoners' Rights. The Tithe map shows Bury Farm on the edge of Southampton Water with large tracts of relatively open ground to the west and this route is still visible on a modern OS map (figure 5).

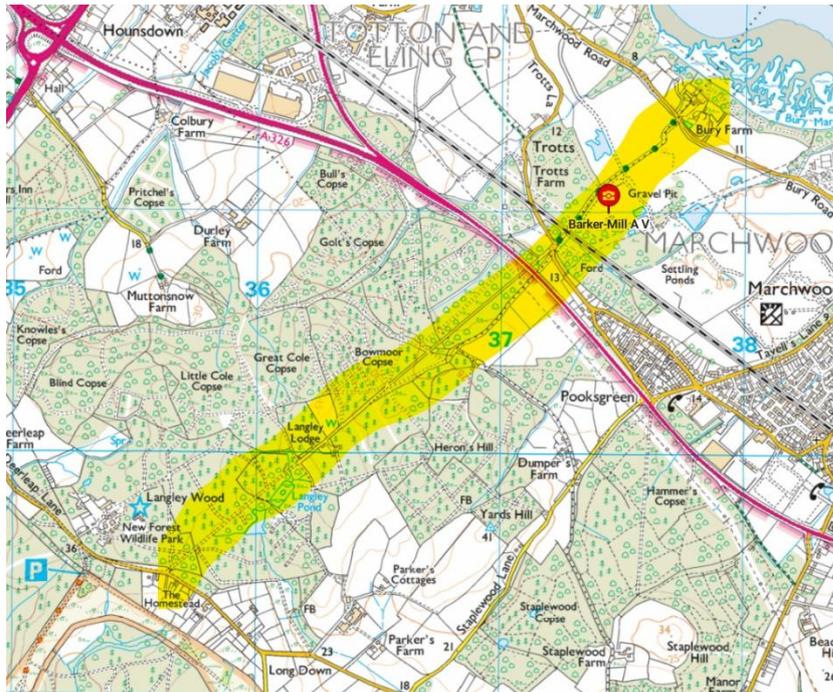


Figure 5 Historic driving link between the Forest and Waterside at Bury Farm.

19. A further historic trackway which evidences historic land uses and connections is the Wade Hill Drive, leading from Moorcourt, the site of the southernmost holding of Romsey Abbey, to common grazing land in the Forest (figure 6).

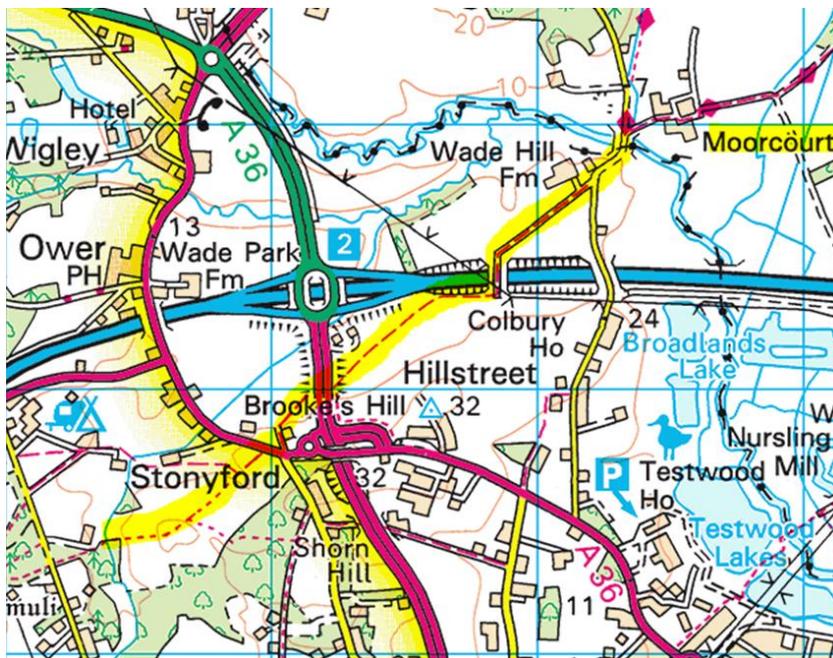


Figure 6 The route of Wade Hill Drive leading from the southernmost holding of Romsey Abbey into the Forest

20. Historic Commoners' Right of Pasture, Pannage etc were regularised in 1851. Commoners' Rights were then recorded in the 'Atlas.'. Commoners were required to re-register at Winchester Court in 1949. The 1964 New Forest Act

introduced the current perambulation (boundary) notably introducing cattle-grids and fencing, to prevent traffic accidents and property damage from animals freely strayed off the Forest into the surrounding land. Prior to this Denny Lodge Walk (see figure 7 below) connected to the western waterfront.

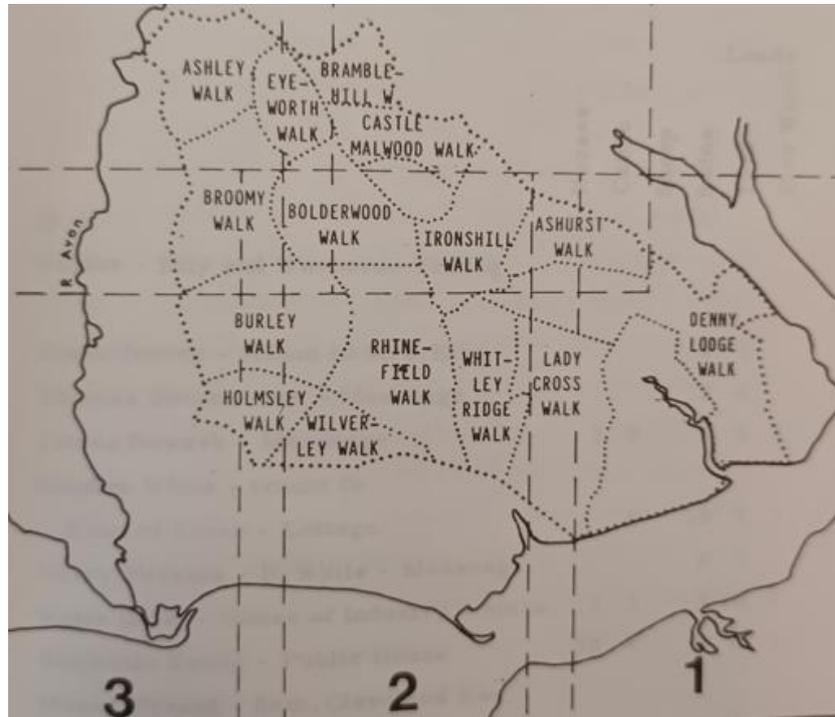


Figure 7.2 Administrative 'Walks' in the New Forest Cook, H.F. (2018). *New Forest : the forging of a landscape*. Oxford ; Havertown, Pa: Windgather Press, An Imprint Of Oxbow Books

21. These walks were preceded by nine Bailiwicks (figure 8), an administrative and jurisdictional area overseen by bailiffs working alongside verderers and foresters

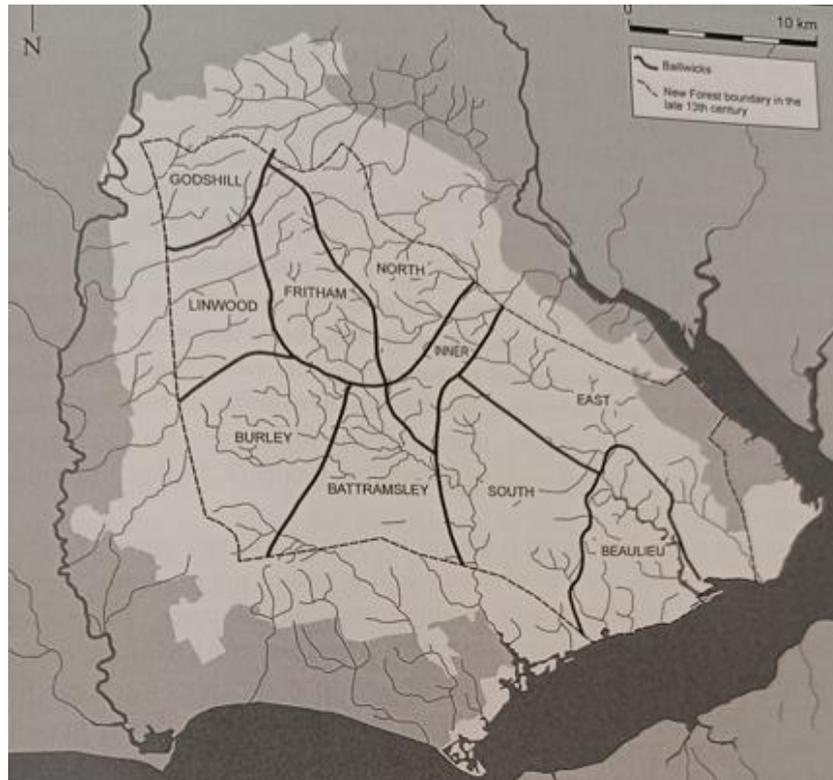


Figure 83 Bailiwicks in the New Forest in the late 13th century Cook, H.F. (2018). *New Forest : the forging of a landscape*. Oxford ; Havertown, Pa: Windgather Press, An Imprint Of Oxbow Books.

22. The commoning way of life has been under pressure in more recent times but residents today, still remember when it was possible to graze their stock right to the Waterside as this recent recollection testifies:

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I had a chat with an older commoner yesterday, he was telling me there was a pound in Brokenford Lane, Totton, which is quite central location, the ponies were herded to this pound when Totton was open Forest. The marshes at Eling were grazed and two landowners sold out for building, which was required to house the families of the Forest people. Marchwood was also open Forest. The same thing happened here.

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## Cultural identity

23. For residents across the New Forest, both within the National Park and those in the wider district, there is a strong cultural identity of 'living in the New Forest'.

24. People of the New Forest living in Totton, Waterside and Ringwood moved there as they become unable to build or acquire properties in the central core of the New Forest. They live there as part of that 'place' that was delivered in the 11th century. Many are from commoning families, or people who work in forestry or farming within the Forest. There continues to be a strong emotional connection with the Forest and living memories of an indelible link, including growing up on farms in the Forest, education in Forest schools, regularly seeing ponies grazing in Waterside settlements of Totton, Marchwood, Hythe and Fawley.

25. Historic uses and activities based upon Forest ways of life have shaped the landscape but also the 'sense of place' including, parish church connections (borne out of the historic parish boundaries), backup grazing, markets and social and cultural activities such as the New Forest Show, held annually since 1920.

26. The New Forest and its environs, with some exceptions, is a place of scattered rather than nucleated development this makes it particularly sensitive to large scale infill development.

27. A large portion of the Waterside was originally in one ownership, forming part of the Cadland Estate (dating back to c. 1772), stretching from Fawley in the south to Hythe pier in the north. In 1947 1,500 acres on Southampton Water were compulsorily purchased by the government to create the Fawley Power Station and Fawley Oil Refinery which provides much-needed employment in the area.

28. The industrial presence of the Fawley Oil Refinery plays a vital role in supporting the New Forest community by providing stable employment opportunities and contributing to the region's economic resilience. In 2021 they launched a new initiative helping to address the issue of expensive or hard to find backup grazing. ExxonMobil Fawley, which owns land on the edge of the New Forest, is renting some of its untenanted grazing land to young commoners at a reduced rate.

29. In 2021 Simon Downing, ExxonMobil Fawley Refinery Manager, said:

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This year marks 100 years of a refinery on this site and is the 70th anniversary of the opening of the new Esso refinery. As far back as 1951 the commitment to supporting the local community and to being a good neighbour has been a priority for Fawley. That has not altered over the last 70 years and I can't think of a more appropriate way of celebrating this special anniversary than by supporting a centuries-old New Forest tradition right on our doorstep."

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## Landscape

30. As part of its responsibilities under key environmental frameworks, Natural England maintains profiles for England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs). These areas are defined by shared natural features rather than administrative boundaries (figure 9).

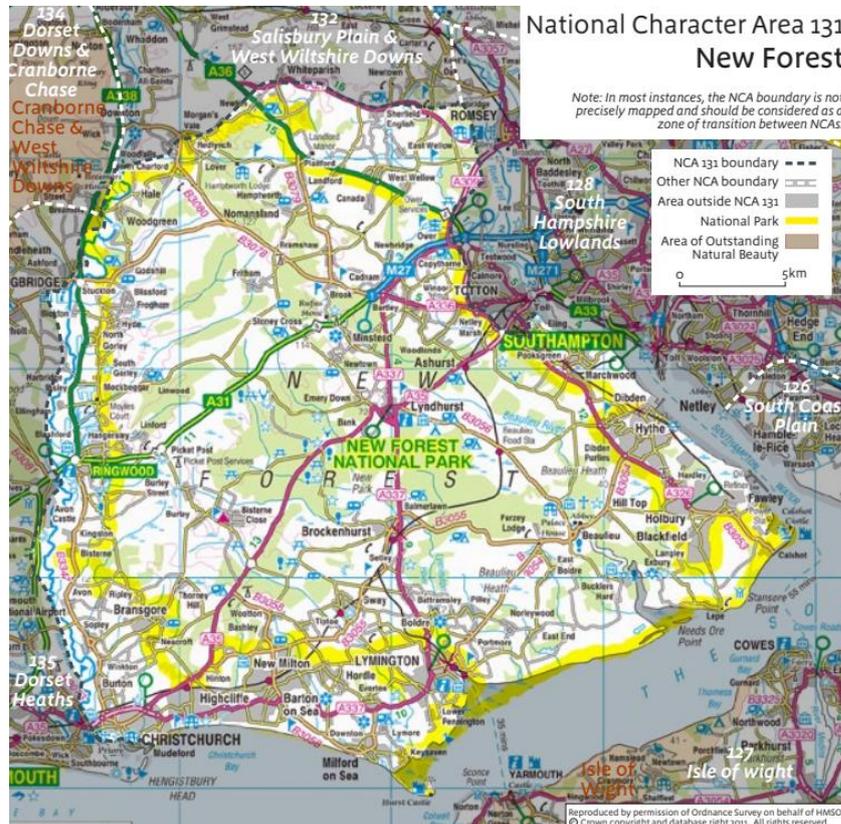


Figure 9 National Character Area 131: New Forest extends eastwards from the National Park, to the Waterside.

31. NCA profiles provide guidance to communities and stakeholders on managing landscapes sustainably. They support conservation efforts, inform Nature Improvement Areas, and promote collaboration through Local Nature Partnerships.

32. The key relevant characteristics of the New Forest NCA as described include:

- The 'Waterside' an urbanised and industrialised strip east of the A326 trunk road, including Marchwood, Hythe and Dibden, Fawley oil refinery and power station, and the Southampton Water/Test Estuary shoreline of salt marsh and mudflats. Remnants of the Forest stretch through the urbanised area to the coast and have been protected from development as 'strategic' or 'local' gaps

33. At a more local level the New Forest District Council Landscape Character Assessment (NFDCLCA) (2000) provides a more detailed study of the landscape.

34. Although developed in parts, the coastline has a predominantly natural edge along Southampton Water which is important to the setting of the New Forest backdrop when viewed from the east (figure 10).



*Figure 10 The northern edge of Southampton Water showing the predominantly rural edge in contrast with the industrial character of the southern side.*

35. The coastal edge between the Waterside settlements is relatively remote and inaccessible, with a mixture of Waterside industry and reclaimed land. It is often open in character, contrasting with inland areas containing remnant ancient enclosures, treed hedges, small ancient woodlands, lanes, and footpaths leading to the open Forest.

36. As described in the New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment, the underlying landscape type from Totton south to Fawley is 'Ancient Forest Farmlands', which extends up to the coastal fringe landscape type (along the estuary) to the east and to the north the valley floor of the River Test. Ancient Forest Farmlands is a farmed Forest landscape with a strong sense of enclosure and an ancient irregular enclosure pattern. Ancient woodlands are a feature of the landscape and create a feeling of being 'in the Forest'. A network of winding

leafy lanes and drove roads with roadside oaks and wide verges, links small areas of remnant wayside common.

37. The 1942 Land Utilisation survey (below) shows a clear distinction in pattern of usage between the north-east and south-west of Southampton Water. Land to the south-west, in the New Forest Waterside is predominantly given over to meadowland and permanent grass, in comparison with urban and arable uses on the north-eastern side of the Water (figure 11).

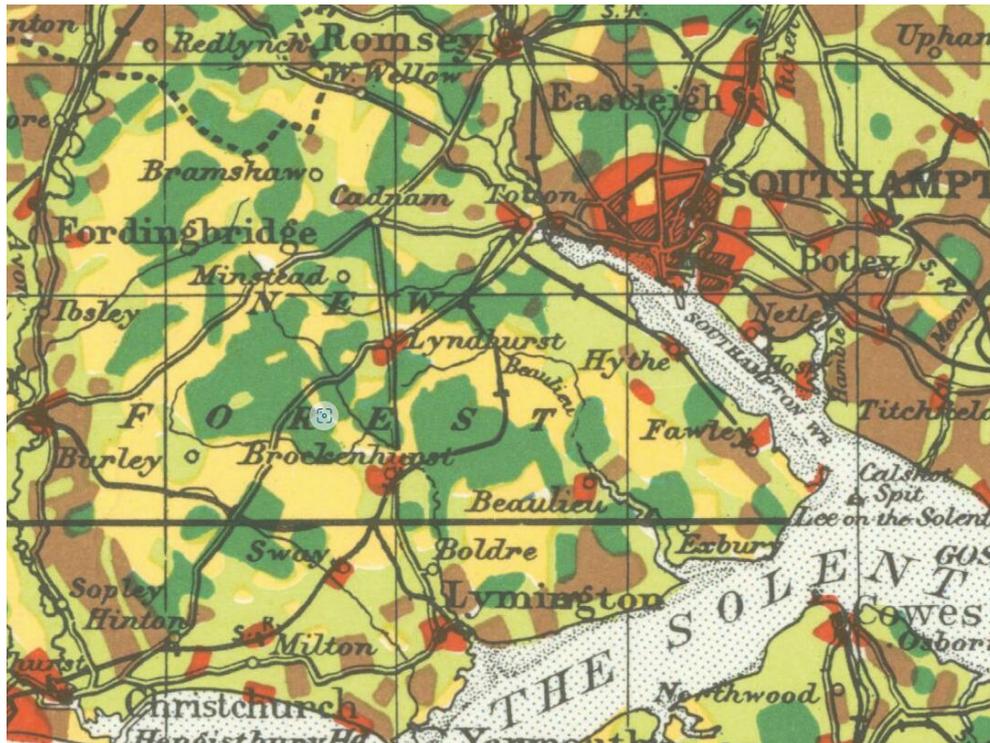


Figure 11 The 1942 Land Utilisation Survey showing different land use on north and south side of Southampton Water

38. Landscape character has evolved through combinations of all the above, to form what is valued in the wider New Forest.

39. Distinct areas shaped by historical farming practices are linked not only through their shared agricultural heritage within the National Park, but also by common features such as geology, soil types, climate, watersheds, and interconnected ecosystems. Together, these elements form a landscape that extends beyond the boundaries of the National Park, contributing to a broader ecological and cultural 'Place'.

## New Forest National Park

40. Under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), significant weight must be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of National Parks, the Broads, and National Landscapes. Development within these designated areas must be carefully limited in scale and extent.
41. The December 2024 revision to the NPPF introduces a strengthened requirement to ensure that proposals within the setting of protected landscapes must be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on their character and significance.
42. This principle is not new. A statutory duty already exists for all relevant authorities to consider the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty, including in areas outside the formal boundaries of designated landscapes. This duty originates from the Environment Act 1995 and was extended to National Parks under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
43. New Forest District forms part of the setting of the New Forest National Park. Section 245 of the [2023 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act \(LURA\)](#) amended the duty on relevant authorities, required in the Countryside and Right of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act), in respect of their functions which affect land and the setting of land in National Parks and protected landscapes.
44. Under the strengthened duty, which came into force on 26 December 2023, relevant authorities are required to “seek to further” the statutory purposes of protected landscapes, replacing the previous legal duty on them to merely ‘have regard to’ such purposes.
45. In planning terms, the “setting” refers to the surroundings in which a heritage asset or landscape is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may evolve over time. Elements within a setting may positively or negatively influence the significance of the asset, affect its appreciation, or have a neutral impact.
46. The Green Halo Partnership was established by New Forest National Park to bring together businesses, universities, and charities and to work together to ensure the world class environment in and around the New Forest National Park flourishes as an integral part of our wider area’s thriving economy and society. The New Forest is one of Europe’s best sanctuaries for nature, situated in the busy south-east of England and close to the significant urban areas of Southampton, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole and Salisbury. Beyond the National Park’s boundaries, from Cranborne Chase to Purbeck, the South Downs

to the Solent, much of this part of southern England is internationally valued because of the quality and quantity of the natural environment.

47. The Green Halo Partnership was born in the New Forest National Park, but the partnership seeks to identify, value, protect and improve those services across a much wider geography, including land and habitats around the National Park. A large proportion of this land lies within New Forest District and as such it has a key role to play in protecting the National Park and its setting.
48. The Green Halo Partnership wants to ensure that the natural environment is seen as an integral part of how people work and live. By recognising the contribution the natural environment makes to the local economy and society, the Partnership wants to ensure that both the National Park and its surroundings work to protect and improve that environment.
49. The character of the Forest is inseparable from its setting, it demands stewardship rooted in collaboration between professionals and community representatives who hold a genuine stake in its future and share ownership of the decisions that shape it. What the Forest does not need is to be fragmented or treated as a peripheral extension of another place—especially one whose history and landscape are fundamentally distinct. Subjecting it to external pressures and priorities risks eroding its identity and undermining the very qualities that make the National Park unique and special.

## Ecology

50. Green corridors connecting the Waterside, the Solent, and the River Avon are vital. These transitional habitats play a key role in preserving the ecological integrity of the New Forest and must be cared for as a distinct and interconnected landscape. Separating the Forest from its coastline would be detrimental to ecology, activity and a sense of where one is.
51. The important Waterside and hinterland to the Forest have existing strong green infrastructure and habitat connections and vital [Alternative Natural Recreational Greenspace](#) is provided within them. Significant opportunities exist to further enhance these links via the local nature recovery strategy delivered in part via biodiversity net gain.
52. There are existing valuable green infrastructure links from and between Waterside settlements to the Forest, and further initiatives are in progress to

improve access to nature, connectivity and these are informed by a recent review of open spaces.

53. Our habitats and associated species assemblages are under pressure from climate change, recreation pressure, fragmentation, new diseases and invasive species. It is essential to build resilience and ensure permeability through the landscape to enable effective adaptation to change. Effective and joined-up management and decision-making, particularly in relation to infrastructure, is essential to enable landscape scale nature recovery, enhancing the New Forest biodiversity 'hotspot' and taking opportunities to expand this into the wider countryside.
54. Substantial parts of the district, including its coastline, are covered by statutory national, European and international designations<sup>4</sup> nature conservation designations. Outside these, there are many locally designated sites and priority habitats and species, not all of which will be within designated sites.
55. Protecting and enhancing our natural environment in the area is fundamental to delivering a sustainable development strategy for the wider area. The natural environment is an essential and precious asset that underpins our wellbeing and prosperity. The natural environment is at the core of the approach to the spatial strategy in the current Local Plan and is expected to be a key element of our emerging Local Plan Review. There are legislative requirements to ensure that protected habitats are not harmed.

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<sup>4</sup> [Find protected areas of countryside - GOV.UK](#)

# Appendix - Background information

## Historic Organisational and Legislative Separation from Southampton



Figure 12.4 Presumed Anglo-Saxon Manors at Domesday within the New Forest Cook, H.F. (2018). *New Forest : the forging of a landscape*. Oxford ; Havertown, Pa: Windgather Press, An Imprint Of Oxbow Books.

- a. The history of association of Fawley and Exbury within Bishops Waltham Hundred appears limited. At the time of Domesday the manors of Fawley, Langley, Hardley, Stone and Stanswood are recorded as being in Redbridge Hundred (i.e. the same as Eling (and all the rest of the Waterside)) (figure 12).
- b. The initial association of Fawley with Bishops Waltham appears to date from an attempt to enlarge the Hundred in 1284 when it was determined that the men of the Bishop of Winchester's holdings in Bitterne, Fawley, Ower, and Stoneham should attend hundred court at Bishops Waltham. However, there is no evidence that the inhabitants of Fawley ever attended hundred court at Bishops Waltham. Indeed, in 1316 Holbury, Hardley, Butsash and Langley (all Fawley Parish) were recorded as being attached to the New Forest Hundred as was Exbury and Lepe. Fawley and Exbury continued to be absent from any of the court rolls up to the

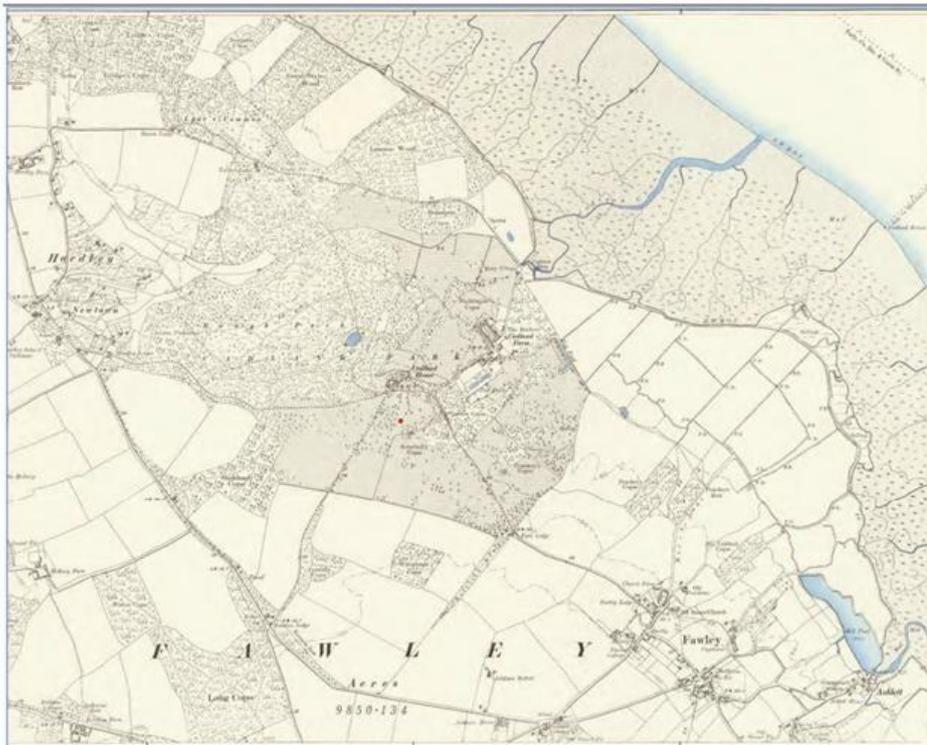
- final extant court roll of 1785. However by 1831 the manors of Fawley and Exbury had been formerly incorporated in the Bishops Waltham hundred. Although by this point the role of the hundred court appears largely redundant.
- c. The evidence would suggest that any legal connection between Bishops Waltham and the Waterside parishes is very slight.
  - d. The Speed Map 1611 (figure 13) showing New Forest Hundred stretching from Fritham and Burley in the north and west to Waterside and Calshot. Eling Parish was part of the Redbridge Hundred which, with exception of Redbridge included the Lower Test Valley and Romsey. Southampton is in Waltham Hundred. The pattern of Hundreds is as shown on the Norden Map of 1595.



Figure 13 Speed's map of 1611 showing the waterside hundred of Redbridge stretching northwards to include Romsey, but excluding Southampton.

- e. A large portion of the Waterside was originally in one ownership, forming part of the Cadland Estate (dating back to c. 1772), stretching from Fawley in the south to Hythe pier in the north and including grounds by Capability Brown (figure 14). Land was sold off around Hythe in 1895 and then in 1947 1,500 acres on Southampton Water were compulsorily purchased by the

government to create the Fawley Power station and Oil Refinery.



The historic Cadland House and Park as shown in 1898 Second Edition OS Map prior to the construction of the Fawley oil refinery

Figure 5.14 A picture of the Cadland Estate - which stretched to Hythe pier.

- f. The Victoria County History (VCH) is one of the longest-running historical research projects in the world, established in 1899 and originally dedicated to Queen Victoria. Its aim is to produce authoritative, encyclopaedic histories of every county in England, covering topics from early archaeology to modern-day developments. The VCH serves as a vital resource for understanding England's local history and continues to evolve, with new volumes and digital initiatives supporting place-based research and community engagement.

#### [The borough of Southampton: General historical account | British History Online](#)

- g. There is no obvious reference in Victoria County History (VCH) entries for Southampton demonstrating any historic links with New Forest. Annual fees for farms were associated with lands to the north of Southampton, not to the west along the River Test.
- h. The Poor Law Unions were developed out of the Parish System, which formed the basis of the boundaries of the Sanitary Districts. These in turn formed the basis for the Rural and Urban districts established under the 1894 Act (figure 15). Poor Law Unions were abolished under the 1929 LG Act with responsibilities passed to county councils.



Figure 15 **6** 1888 Poor Law Union Map – Showing Southampton as part of Stoneham Union which included Eastleigh.

Ordnance Survey Sanitary Districts, showing Civil Parishes, Hampshire

- i. The 1927 Poor Law Union Map shows historic Poor Law arrangements for Southampton were still within the Stoneham Union and there were no historic shared relationships with the New Forest area.

Ordnance Survey County Diagrams of England and Wales, Hampshire

- j. The 1882 Parliamentary Boundary Commission Report maps show the Lymington parliamentary area division, including Romsey, with the area subdivided by its petty session divisions (later forming the basis of Ringwood, Lymington, and Romsey Rural District Councils). All the Waterside is part of this historic political entity with Lymington, Ringwood, and Romsey.

H.M.S.O. Boundary Commission Report 1885, Hampshire

- k. Boundaries for the New Forest Rural District maintained in 1917 parliamentary division continued to encompass Lower Test Valley and New Forest area.

H.M.S.O. Boundary Commission Report 1917, Hampshire

- l. The 1922 Map of County division shows consistency of Poor Law Union and Rural district Council boundaries. Southampton political and poor law overlaps are with Stoneham in Eastleigh, rather than to the west.



15 August 2025

# Local Government Reorganisation

**Deliberative engagement findings**

**Report prepared for New Forest District Council**

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## 1. Background and objectives

The UK Government has announced that it will facilitate a programme of local government reorganisation. Where possible, there was a desire for existing two-tier areas – where services are delivered by both county and district councils – to be reorganised into unitary authorities. Councils are required to submit their proposals to the government regarding reorganisation later this year.

New Forest District Council (NFDC) want to ensure its proposal reflects and is grounded in ‘human’ lives, interests, and needs when it comes to reorganisation. Therefore, to support wider quantitative and technical research, it commissioned deliberative engagement with its residents. The aims of the deliberative engagement, were to:

- Explore residents’ experiences of their local area;
- Understand residents’ wants, needs and aspirations from local government;
- Generate a set of guiding principles which should underpin the proposal.

This research was designed to prompt residents to think about and answer the key question of **“How can your local government best work with and for communities in the future?”**.

## 2. Our approach

### 2.1. What did we do?

Thinks Insight & Strategy (Thinks) delivered deliberative engagement with 59 residents of New Forest District Council. This was conducted via:

- 2x 3-hour online workshops, with 43x residents in total
- 2x 90-minute in-person focus groups, each with 16x residents in total

The table below gives an overview of the fieldwork agenda.

<b>Pre-task</b>	All residents completed a short questionnaire before the workshop. Questions encouraged them to reflect on their local area and community (e.g. how would they describe their local area; what makes a great place to live; what makes a bad place to live).
<b>Welcome</b>	Introduction to the workshop, each other and the aims of the session.
<b>What does 'local' mean</b>	<p>In breakout groups, residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapped their local area using Google Maps, highlighting places that were important to them and where they spent time;</li> <li>• Discussed what makes a great and a bad place to live;</li> <li>• Discussed what community means and how, if at all, this is different to their local area.</li> </ul>
<b>Local challenges and reflections</b>	<p>In plenary, a representative from NFDC gave a short presentation about the New Forest district including facts about its geography, economy, key strengths and challenges.</p> <p>In breakout groups, residents reflected on the presentation including anything that stood out to them or felt surprising.</p>
<b>Local Government and what 'good' looks like</b>	<p>In plenary, a representative from NFDC gave a short presentation about how local government works at the moment. It included information about how services are delivered and how decisions are made.</p> <p>In breakout groups, residents discussed what the 'ideal' local government looks and feels like by 3 dimensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service delivery;</li> <li>• Decision making;</li> <li>• Place.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Reflections on reorganisation</b></p>	<p>In plenary, a representative from NFDC gave a short presentation about the plan for reorganisation and what impact it will have on residents. He then answered questions from residents.</p> <p>In breakout groups, residents reflected on the plan for reorganisation including what stood out to them and anything which felt surprising. They then focussed discussion on 2 considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The benefits of a more localised vs. a more centralised approach;</li> <li>• The benefits of delivering services online vs. in person.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Guiding principles</b></p>	<p>Finally, residents worked together to come up with guiding principles for the reorganisation proposals. These were shared in a final plenary session.</p>

We adapted this workshop plan for the 90-minute focus groups by removing plenary reflections and shortening presentations, Q&A, and the mapping activity time to reflect the different the smaller number of residents.

## 2.2. Who did we hear from?

59 residents from the New Forest district took part in this research. Residents were recruited to largely be reflective of the local population in terms of demographics (age, gender, ethnicity), with over-sampling of key groups who tend not to participate in other forms of engagement (e.g. young people). It was also important that this research include the voices of Commoners in the New Forest, as well as certain groups, such as older or digitally disengaged residents.

The sample of those who took part was:

<p><b>Age</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 x 16 – 24</li> <li>• 12 x 25 – 39</li> <li>• 30 x 40 – 69</li> <li>• 10 x 70+</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gender</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 x Men</li> <li>• 31 x Women</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ethnicity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 53 x White</li> <li>• 4 x Ethnic minority</li> </ul>
<p><b>Housing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 38 x Homeowner</li> <li>• 6 x Social renter</li> <li>• 5 x Living with parents / other family</li> </ul>

<b>Household composition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 x Live with a child aged 0 – 18 at least half the time</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 x Living with a long-term health condition and / or disability</li> </ul>
<b>Service usage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 x Users of adult social care (either directly or managed on behalf of a loved one)</li> </ul>
<b>Commoners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 x Commoners</li> </ul>
<b>Digital engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x digitally disengaged</li> </ul>
<b>Financial vulnerability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 x Financially more vulnerable (e.g. feel unable to cope with an unexpected £300 bill)</li> </ul>
<b>Ward</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 x Ashley, Bashley, and Fernhill</li> <li>• 1 x Ballard</li> <li>• 2 x Bransgore, Burley, Sopley and Ringwood East</li> <li>• 3 x Brockenhurst and Denny Lodge</li> <li>• 4 x Dibden and Dibden Purlieu</li> <li>• 6 x Fawley, Blackfield, Calshot and Langley</li> <li>• 1 x Fordingbridge, Godshill and Hyde</li> <li>• 3 x Forest and Solent</li> <li>• 1 x Hardley, Holbury and North Blackfield</li> <li>• 2 x Hythe Central</li> <li>• 2 x Hythe South</li> <li>• 4 x Lymington</li> <li>• 8 x Marchwood and Eling</li> <li>• 1 x Milford and Hordle</li> <li>• 1 x Milton</li> <li>• 1 x New Milton</li> <li>• 3 x Pennington</li> <li>• 3 x Ringwood North and Ellingham</li> <li>• 5 x Ringwood South</li> <li>• 3 x Totton Central</li> <li>• 1 x Totton North</li> <li>• 1 x Totten South</li> </ul>

### 3. Residents' experiences of their local area

#### 3.1. How do residents think about their 'local area'

Residents were encouraged to reflect and think about their local area. Many residents emphasised the importance of nature and the large role it plays in their concept of their local area. Unsurprisingly, the Forest itself constitutes a significant part of most residents' identity, both for those living within the bounds of the national park and those in the towns on its periphery. The majority of residents include within their 'local' area the rural and forested locations throughout the district, and feel especially connected to these natural spaces.

*"A lot of people who live in the New Forest consider it almost part of their like identity...people like to identify as being all part of [the] New Forest."*

*In person focus group*

*"[We have] a common love for the Forest...we may all have different views, but we're all protective of the Forest."*

*Online workshop*

While a wide variety of themes emerged across the workshops and focus groups, three were felt most strongly by New Forest residents:

- **The New Forest itself is a strong driver of local identity** and sets the area apart from other areas in the UK. The importance of environmental stewardship, respecting the local area, and preserving its unique cultural heritage was felt particularly strongly by those residing in the New Forest and by Commoners. These values are shared by residents in more built-up waterside communities fringing the New Forest, though they are balanced against other local considerations felt to impact urban areas more, like crime and policing.

*"Everybody uses the word 'unique'...there's nowhere else you can go where you're going to walk up the high street with a donkey. There's so much in the Forest that's unique, that you're not going to get somewhere else."*

*In person focus group, Commoner*

- **New Forest residents were highly concerned by increasing development**, which is seen to be encroaching on the natural environment. Residents felt that as the settlements surrounding the national park continue to grow, this is likely to have a negative impact on the natural spaces they treasure, and especially those in the Forest.

- Additionally, despite new housing being built, many residents express concern that it is not affordable for locals, making their ability to live in the New Forest more precarious.
- **Residents often identify their local area by the differences they see with more urban areas like Southampton and Bournemouth.** Many residents expressed a sense that the way of life in Southampton, specifically, is distinctly different from that of their own. They therefore felt that those living in, and involved in governing, Southampton cannot fully understand the local context within the New Forest, nor the needs of its residents.
  - Residents also perceived higher levels of wider societal issues in these urban spaces, such as crime and antisocial behaviour. As a result, they viewed the New Forest as a 'safer' and 'nicer' place to live. However, for some living in closer proximity to Southampton, such as the Waterside communities, there is a perception that some of these issues have begun to spill over into their areas – in part, linked to expanding urban/suburban development.

*"You certainly don't see uniformed police officers in the Waterside unless they're attending an emergency and one might show up three hours late. The police presence is virtually non-existent... There's a lot of like crime and antisocial behaviour where this was previously a very safe, very low-crime area."*

*Online workshop*

Residents were asked to think about the aspects of their local area that they consider good and bad. On the whole, New Forest residents took great pride in their local areas. Things which made the New Forest a 'good' place to live included:

- **The scenic environment and access to nature.** Residents value having nature on their doorstep. This is not limited to the forest; residents emphasised the variety of offerings in their local areas, including easy access to beaches and scenic spots on the coast. Residents enjoy taking part in activities associated with being outdoors, such as hiking, swimming, dog-walking, riding horses, and for Commoners, turning out their animals. With these opportunities for recreation, socialising, and cultural enrichment, New Forest residents can immerse themselves in the natural environment which forms such a large part of their identity.
- **A strong sense of community.** Local fetes, social clubs, park runs, cricket clubs and charity events are just a few ways that residents' communities come together. These social activities reinforce community bonds which are highly valued by New Forest residents, as well as friendly neighbours and a general sense of camaraderie.

- **A distinct local identity.** Many New Forest residents stressed that their local area is unique, with its own unique set of needs. They felt their life and identity are shaped in large part by the Forest, with some having multi-generational roots in their towns and villages. This is especially felt by Commoners, a cultural minority who are highly protective, and proud, of their customs. This strong sense of identity tied to the Forest is seen to set this area apart from other places around the UK.
- **Tourism in the local area.** Residents acknowledged the vital role that tourism plays in keeping the New Forest alive. It brings income to their local areas and provides job opportunities, while also incentivising the continued care and preservation of the Forest. Although it's important that visitors are respectful of the environment, the pride that residents have in the New Forest means they are generally happy sharing it with others.
- **Access to larger towns and transport links.** Despite mixed feelings towards cities like Southampton and Bournemouth, many residents appreciated the New Forest's proximity to larger towns, which is useful for shopping and transport. Additionally, some residents felt that the London commuter belt now encompasses parts of the New Forest, making travel to London easier.

*"As far as where we're situated, we're on the coast, we're quite near London, we've got Southampton Airport, Bournemouth Airport, we've got the motorways and reasonably good access out of the area."*

*In person focus group*

*"You can walk as far as you can. You can go for long walks, cycles in a beautiful unspoiled area where to me it's safe."*

*Online workshop*

While residents identified many of the things which make the New Forest a 'good' place to live, this was balanced against other more negative aspects of their local area. **Crime** emerged as a key concern for those living in the New Forest, along with associated activities like drug use, antisocial behaviour, and insufficient policing. While praising the peaceful and idyllic nature of the New Forest, residents acknowledged pockets of hidden deprivation, with strong disparities between communities in close proximity to one another. There is a perception among New Forest residents that these issues are worsening as the area becomes more developed, particularly in the waterside communities closer to Southampton.

*"It feels to me a lot less safe than where I live in Ringwood. I feel there's a lot more crime, possibly drug use."*

*In person focus group*

These views link with broader concerns around **overdevelopment**, which many residents see as placing the character and prosperity of their local areas under threat. Residents raised four key concerns associated with overdevelopment:

- **Strain on local infrastructure:** New housing developments are felt to be straining local infrastructure which is already seen as insufficient. Residents felt that this is making accessing services across the Forest increasingly difficult, while also leading to increases in traffic throughout the Forest.
- **Lack of affordable housing:** Residents explain that there are not enough affordable housing options for them and worry about being priced out of the area. Although residents are not opposed to newcomers, they perceive most of them as wealthy transplants who can afford to buy property or maintain second homes in the New Forest. Residents therefore point out that the area is becoming increasingly expensive and some Commoners can no longer afford to live in the New Forest where they turn out their animals.
- **Eroding sense of community:** For instance contributing to the closure of independent high street shops in favour of larger retail outlets, or increasing urbanisation along the edges of the forest. This is particularly alarming for Commoners, who feel the threat of overdevelopment more acutely, and consider it in the context of their culture, common land, and way of life.

*"The open forest is really important to Commoners – unfenced, open forest, so the animals can roam free. As a whole, that's a really important asset."*

*In person focus group, Commoner*

In addition, residents of all ages pointed out **diminishing opportunities for young people** in the New Forest. Limited recreational and job opportunities are encouraging younger generations to leave the New Forest for cities like Southampton, Bournemouth, and London. Residents emphasise the value of encouraging young people to remain in the area, as a way of preserving its character and securing its longevity.

*"If we are losing this big cohort of people who have nothing for them once they leave university and they don't then come back, or you've got your cohort of 16 year old leavers, that's when it creates some social disparity."*

*Online workshop*

### **3.2. How do residents define and think about community**

Residents were asked to consider whether their 'community' and their 'local area' held any different meaning for them. For many residents, their community is heavily focussed on their local area, such as their respective village or town. This is due in part to the rurality of the Forest and deep roots that some residents have in their towns. Living in and near the New Forest results in a highly place-based identity; residents point out that while they associate community with the towns where they live, they also conceive of a wider community across the New Forest. A similar balance is seen among Commoners, whose community firstly includes other Commoners, stemming from a shared identity, practices, and values.

For residents living outside the national park, particularly those in larger towns and in waterside communities, 'community' is thought of in broader terms and they are less likely to view their community as being limited to the town they live in.

However, for all residents, a sense of community is strongly influenced by socialising with and supporting one another, having similar values and experiences, and working towards a shared set of goals. Residents speak fondly about local community-organised clubs and events, like park runs, drinking clubs and fetes; however, there is a growing sense that this, and the character of the New Forest, is slowly changing as it becomes more developed.

*"There are community initiatives [in the Forest] that you can get involved in... So, you know, not only is the New Forest National Park a beautiful thing to be able to visit, but there are also things that bring people together."*

*Online workshop*

*"I find most of the people around here are really friendly, always happy to say hello, if not stop for a chat. And everybody seems to want the best for the area. So, I think that's sort of a really good community spirit."*

*Online workshop*

## 4. Perceptions of an 'ideal' local government

Following an introduction to how local government services are delivered in the New Forest District Council from a council representative, residents spent time discussing what 'ideal' local government looks and feels like for their area. This conversation was focused on:

- Good service delivery;
- Good decision making;
- Good 'place' based services.

Residents were asked to focus less on the specifics of these areas and instead think about how the experience of these areas should feel for residents.

### 4.1. What does 'good' service delivery look and feel like

Residents' views of 'good' service delivery was focussed on the practical delivery of functional council services. These discussions broadly centred on delivering these functional services well, and in a way that makes it easy for residents of the New Forest to access them. The core themes that emerged as part of this are:

- **Efficient:** Residents characterised 'good' delivery of services as that which works quickly and smoothly. For residents this looked like a local government that works collaboratively internally to deliver a seamless experience for its communities in how it delivers services. In terms of how residents would experience this, they described issues being dealt with quickly by the local council (i.e. potholes filled quickly following initial complaints), and those who need help from social care services receive it when they need it. Several residents said that, if services were being delivered efficiently, you would ideally not 'notice' local government was there.
- **Accessible:** Residents emphasised the need for services to be easily accessed for all. This means meeting people where they are to deliver services. For example, having touchpoints online or at in-person hubs where the public can speak to someone who can help them or at least point them in the right direction. Residents felt that a truly accessible council service is also proactively involved with the local community – in particular, having councillors who are active in local society and events. Many cited already knowing a member of a local council, and how that is a valued relationship in feeling connected to services. This was important to residents because these councillors will have a better understanding of the local area. Residents also felt reassured that they had a direct point of contact for any issues.
- **Communicative:** Building on discussions around accessibility, residents felt that council services should communicate frequently and in a timely manner with those accessing services. Residents described feeling that when they engage with the local council they often feel they are not well

updated by the council and that they are kept out of the loop. For a local government service to be described as 'good' residents felt it is important for them to provide updates and responses quickly.

- Further to this, residents also felt that if communication from local government was better, it would encourage them to feel services are being delivered with more transparency. For some, the lack of communication builds towards a feeling that information is being hidden, or kept secret from them.
- **Cost effective:** Value for money was front of mind for the residents we heard from. Broadly, this was about making sure that money was managed responsibly by the council. As taxpayers, it was important that local government spends its money wisely and effectively. For residents this meant not duplicating efforts across services, and is rigorously scrutinising spending.

*"I am sure they [the Council] are working as hard as they can with the provisions they are given, ... I know you're really busy, but people need to be heard and the best way to do that is to go and speak to them and be accessible."*

*Online workshop*

*"Transparency on budgeting, actual upfront transparency and saying this is our plan for the year."*

*Online workshop*

*"A really good system would be inclusive, you can access the services you need to and it takes into account the demographic of the area, not the reverse of that."*

*Online workshop*

#### **4.2. What does 'good' decision-making look and feel like**

Across the engagement, residents were clear that any decision-making about or for the New Forest should be driven by and rooted in the needs of the New Forest. For residents this means both:

- For the local communities living in the area
- And for the natural space of the forest itself

Residents, and especially those with commoning rights, felt it is the community's job to protect the natural landscape of the forest and the traditional way of life in the area. Therefore, with the unique nature of the landscape and population, good decisions have to be built on local, personal experience and understanding of the New Forest.

Residents were clear that 'good' decision making involves local people to ensure they are based on a solid foundation of local knowledge, its individuality and the needs of the community. For this to be delivered, residents emphasised the importance of:

- **Local decision-making that empowers local communities.** Whether through locally elected decision-makers, or through regular and frequent engagement with local communities, residents wanted to see clear routes established for local voices to be heard in decision making.
- **Evidence based decisions, made with local knowledge.** Residents felt it important that all decisions are grounded in the reality of life in the New Forest. This should be achieved through research and engagement with local people, and a detailed understanding of the Forest.

*"If you're going to retain services that are meaningful to people and where they live, the voice further down the ladder needs to be greater than some central person that hasn't got a clue about localised issues."*

*In-person focus groups*

Beyond this, residents also emphasised the need for **accountability** in decision making. Residents reiterated throughout the engagement, that mechanisms are needed to hold decision makers to account. They wanted clear measures in place to judge how cost-effective decisions were, and the impact of any made.

*"They should be accountable, their decision should be cost effective and they should be measured with some form of KPIs."*

*In-person focus group*

*"I think it is really important to know who made what decision and why, because we see some decisions that get made that end up with thousands of pounds lost"*

*Online Workshop*

#### **4.3. What do 'good' place-based services look and feel like**

As reflected on above, residents felt it is important that all services are thoroughly embedded in the place of the New Forest. There was a clear focus on both the natural landscape and the communities that live in and around the forest itself – which anchored their views on how services should be designed and delivered.

For services to be truly place based, they should involve the local community, be designed around them and their needs, and focus on protecting the natural landscape of the forest.

*"It's important to be locally based. It's probably quite important to have local people on roads, on the bins, maybe even social welfare things to a certain extent. Because they'll know that there's certain issues in certain areas."*

*Online workshop*

## 5. Considerations for Local Government Reorganisation

We shared a presentation with residents about the plans for local government reorganisation (LGR) and what this would mean for how services are delivered. Residents returned to their breakout groups and discussed the benefits of:

- A more centralised vs. a more localised approach
- Delivering services online vs. via local hubs

### 5.1. Initial reactions and overall considerations for the Local Government Reorganisation

Residents had a mixed response to the proposed LGR, with many approaching the topic with a sense of apprehension. This was broadly rooted in concerns about the loss of a local council that understands the needs of local people delivering services. For example, the prospect of merging into unitary authorities based around cities, such as Southampton, were worrying for most residents. They felt that the needs, priorities and identity of such places would be extremely different from those of New Forest communities – and that they, as the ‘smaller’ party would be at risk of being disregarded or overridden in decision making.

However, there were residents who recognised there would be some clear benefits to a more centralised and simplified system. Both sets of views are outlined below.

#### 5.1.1. Consideration 1: Local vs. centralised delivery of services

Many residents expressed immediate concerns that with a larger unitary government, it is more likely that decision makers will be based further away from the New Forest. They worried that this would mean decision makers no longer have a direct connection with the communities of the New Forest and the environment. This was raised as a significant concern by residents because of the uniqueness of their area, which they feel is distinct within Hampshire. There were several specific concerns raised by residents:

- **Loss of local representation.** Residents felt that with government centralised ‘further away’ from their local area, they would lose their ability to speak directly to those who make decisions about them and represent them. This would negatively impact the decisions made about the local area, as these decision makers will not be as connected to local needs and issues.
- **Potential loss of focus on the natural landscape.** Residents assumed that decision makers based further away are less likely to prioritise the protection of the Forest and natural landscape. With less direct knowledge of the area, residents felt they would not be able to deliver the appropriate services, or implement the needed protection to preserve the Forest from potential development.

- **Loss of traditional way of life.** The commoning community had specific concerns that their needs will not be heard within a larger form of local government. As a smaller group, they expressed fears that their traditional way of life would continue to be eroded, as they would not be considered a priority.

*"We'd still need to have, like, local offices that need to still be real feeling that local issues are being considered because the needs and wants of people in different areas are so different."*

*Online workshop*

*"If we merged into this super authority maybe the local planning would change. The New Forest might get whacked with a target of having 20,000 houses or something, then that might all just like appear in our neighbourhood. At the moment we've got the local councillors that will fight for us."*

*Online workshop*

However, there were those who felt that a more centralised system could potentially deliver better, more efficient services. Residents felt that the potential positive impacts of the LGR could be:

- **Less replication of work across different teams,** councils and regions, leading to more streamlined service delivery and better value for money.
- **Improved communication across teams and regions,** with council staff better connected and in more frequent contact. Residents felt this would improve service delivery and efficiencies.
- **Clarity as to who delivers what services.** In the New Forest especially, there are many different local authorities currently delivering overlapping services. Residents felt that with a more centralised local government, it would be easier to reach the right person for a specific issue, and hold them to account.

*"Because you've got similar areas within councils doing similar things. If you've got district councils, like Test Valley and New Forest, they're doing this exactly the same thing but in two different areas. If you remove that layer and unify across a bigger unitary authority, you remove that additional spending and hopefully that money can be put into other local services."*

*Online workshop*

*"Better communication between organisations and services is always great. ... The centralisation of records and organisations speaking to each other... They're all sharing ideas, resources, budgetary ideas."*

*Online workshop*

**5.1.2. Consideration 2: Online vs. local hubs to access services**

Residents felt that an online only approach to accessing services would not work for the New Forest, and that it would be important to incorporate in-person delivery as well. This is due to several reasons:

- The rural nature of the New Forest means that connectivity is not guaranteed in the area. With connectivity or digital provision patchy in different areas of the district, not everyone will be able to access services online effectively.
- With the New Forest's large older population, residents were concerned about lower levels of digital literacy. They felt that if local government services were only accessible online, this would exclude this group from getting the help they might need. Residents expressed worries that as one of the more vulnerable groups in the community, older residents are more likely to need to access services like adult social care, which can already be a challenge. Therefore they felt it important that barriers to access should be limited, especially for this group.

Residents recognised that in the future more people would be digitally literate and able to access services online. However, for the time being it would be essential that services are not delivered with a one-size fits all, online first approach. Therefore, residents felt it is important for future local government to ensure there is a balance of online and in-person services going forward.

*"And it's about opening up those accessibility options and just, you know, making it so that we can do online. But also that there is a centralized hub still that people can contact easily and not made overly complicated."*

*Online workshop, Commoner*

*"There are merits in centralising for sure, but you've still got to consider the local need."*

*Online workshop*

## 6. Guiding principles

At the end of the workshop, residents brought together the underlying guiding principles which sit beneath all of the discussions throughout the session. These guiding principles were centred around the core question of the research which was **“How can your local government best work with and for communities in the future?”**.

Residents were first asked to reflect individually, then as a group on what they felt should guide NFDC as it looks to develop its proposals for the Local Government Reorganisation.

These guiding principles are summarized below. These reflect the discussions from residents, consolidating and reflecting the consistent themes and priorities.

- 01 Rooted in place**, with a true understanding of the New Forest, its people, traditions and unique needs, to ensure it is protected for future generations.
- 02 Empowers local voices** to ensure that the needs of communities are heard and that decisions serve the local population in principle and in practice.
- 03 Accessibility**, to ensure the needs of all residents are met and everyone can access local services equally.
- 04 Accountability**, to ensure residents feel they can challenge things they feel are wrong, and trust their local government to do the right thing for their community.
- 05 Efficiency**, so that local services are delivered with value for money for the taxpayer, and to a high standard for those all need them.

If the new unitary council followed these principles, then residents expected they would feel supported, heard and optimistic about the future.

## 7. Appendix

Throughout the wider consultation process into the Local Government Reorganisation, the New Forest District council has also received direct contact from residents, organisations and councils in the district to share their views. These are summarised in the table below:

Category	Submitted by	Summary of Submission
Resolutions from Town or Council Parishes	Brockenhurst Parish Council	Resolution in favour of Option 1
	Fawley Parish Council	Resolution in favour of Option 1
	Beaulieu Parish Council	Resolution in favour of Option 1
	Bransgore Parish Council	Resolution in favour of Option 1 with the condition that there should be evidence on costing before full support. They do not anticipate receiving this until the Reorganisation takes place, and therefore cannot give full support.
	Burley Parish Council	Resolution in favour of Option 1
Public statements of preference for Reorganisation options	Roy Farmers	Preference for Option 1 as it is important that the New Forest be brought together with other rural districts, which are more similar. Also expresses a need for decision making in the New Forest to still be delivered from a hub within the Forest.
	The Crossings (homelessness charity based in Hythe), via Andy Clarke	Preference for Option 1
	Catherine Shepherd	Preference for Option 1, driven by a desire for the New Forest to be brought together with other rural councils, who are more likely to understand the needs of the area.
	Christopher Sturgess	Preference for Option 1
	Sophie Vandermeeren	Preference for Option 1, with caveat that the New Forest National Park maintains it's decision making authority.

Additional comments on the Local Government Reorganisation	Rosemary Hosier	<p>Significant concerns raised about the Waterside being merged with Southampton. These concerns are driven by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of shared cultural identity with Southampton</li> <li>• A sense of connection with forest life that should be preserved.</li> </ul>
	Gary Lynch	Expresses a desire for no change to the current system, and concerns about the process to introduce and implement LGR as undemocratic.
	Helen Wilkinson	Expresses concern about New Forest being joined with Southampton City Council as the outcome of the LGR.
	R D Neary	Expresses concern about any change to the current system, but especially concerned about the New Forest being merged with Southampton City Council due to perceived financial issues within that council.
	Colin Boulain	Expresses concerns about the New Forest losing its voice in its local governance as a result of the LGR process and outcomes.
	Sandra Crawford	Feels that NFDC in its current configuration does a good job, and is a "workable size", and integration with other councils will lead to unnecessary chaos.
	Captain Neil Evans	Expresses a desire for a fourth option to be offered to residents for those who feel NFDC should not participate or enact the Local Government Reorganisation.
Miscellaneous	Margaret Gore	Expresses challenges with completing the online Commonplace survey.
	Phil Naldrett	Querying to confirm Commonplace survey submission was complete and received.
	Anthony Miller	Querying the detail of Option 3, and how the boundary changes could potentially impact the New Forest.
	Caz Flood	Written submission following completion of the Commonplace survey to re-emphasise their desire for the New Forest to remain as a separate council.
	Eileen West	Written response alongside the completion of the Commonplace survey in support for Option 1.