

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY AUTHORITY MEETING – 29 JANUARY 2026

AM 731/26

BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORTING

Report by: Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Since 1 January 2023, all public authorities have been under a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Public authorities had 12 months (i.e. until 1 January 2024) to set out a plan confirming out how they will comply with this duty and the actions they can take. Thereafter, authorities must set appropriate policies and specific objectives; and then they must take action.
- 1.2 In terms of the legal context, the Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened ‘biodiversity duty’ requiring all public authorities in England to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Further details are available at [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK](#). Authorities must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity by 1 January 2024; and act to deliver the policies and achieve these objectives and report on them.
- 1.3 The first part of delivering the ‘biodiversity duty’ was to scope out the work of the New Forest National Park Authority that contributes towards the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. This requirement was set out in report PC 442/23 which was considered and approved at the New Forest National Park Authority Planning Committee meeting in December 2023.
- 1.4 The conservation and enhancement of biodiversity is core to the delivery of the statutory Park purposes, particularly in the New Forest given its rich and varied biodiversity. Report PC 442/23 highlighted the wide range of work undertaken by the Authority that supports biodiversity and helps us discharge this statutory duty. This includes, but is not limited to, (i) our work co-ordinating the National Park Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027, with the priorities around nature recovery particularly relevant to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity; (ii) the delivery of our statutory planning functions (including the mitigation strategies for the Solent Coast and the New Forest and securing Biodiversity Net Gain); and (iii) administering the ‘Farming in Protected Landscapes’ fund.

2. Biodiversity Duty Reporting

- 2.1 Having identified the main areas where the New Forest National Park Authority works to conserve and enhance biodiversity by the statutory deadline of 1 January 2024, we are now required to report on our biodiversity actions. Government guidance – see [Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK](#) – confirms that the end date of the first reporting period should be no later than 1 January 2026; and that authorities must publish all reports within 12 weeks of the reporting period end date (i.e. by the end of March 2026).

- 2.2 The Biodiversity Duty Report must include a summary of the action taken to comply with the biodiversity duty and any other information considered appropriate. Reports from local planning authorities – including National Park Authorities - must also include information on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), covering the actions carried out to meet BNG obligations; and details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans.
- 2.3 Annex 1 to this report sets out the National Park Authority's first Biodiversity Duty Report for the period up to 31 December 2025. There is no legally mandated template for the reports, but we have based the report on the framework set out in the relevant Government guidance. The report highlights the range of ways through which we support the biodiversity of the New Forest, including:
- **Through our statutory functions:** As the statutory planning authority for the National Park area, the planning system provides opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity. We work to deliver a net gain in biodiversity, both through mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain as required by primary legislation; and biodiversity enhancements required through local planning policies. We are currently reviewing the local planning policies and this provides a further opportunity to use our statutory planning powers to support biodiversity. We have also entered into a legal agreement with New Forest District Council and the landowner (Kingwell) to enable the delivery of biodiversity net gain on 244 hectares of land at Keyhaven on the edge of the National Park.
 - **Co-ordinating the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan:** We work with partners to deliver the priorities set out in the adopted Partnership Plan. The annual tour in Summer 2025 visited several projects designed to enhance biodiversity. In 2026 work will commence the update to the Partnership Plan and the revised Plan will embed the locally apportioned 'Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework' objectives for the New Forest, several of which focus specifically on nature recovery and enhancing biodiversity. We have worked with the Partnership Plan Leaders' Panel and Officer Group on the apportionment of the relevant national targets.
 - **Funding and Grants:** Delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme which the Government recently confirmed is extended to March 2026. To date the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme has invested over £1 million for local New Forest projects that help to tackle the nature and climate emergency. We have also supported the delivery of the Species Survival Fund - a two-year project (March 2024 – March 2026) which has enabled habitat restoration and connectivity.
 - **Strategy:** We are a designated 'supporting authority' for the Hampshire and Wiltshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies, which were both adopted in 2025. We actively engaged in the preparation of both strategies and confirmed our support for them prior to their adoption. In addition, the Re:New Nature part of the National Park Partnership Plan (see [Re:New Nature - New Forest National Park Authority](#)) focuses on nature recovery, highlighting the urgent need for action to make sure the National Park's habitats are more resilient, better managed for wildlife, bigger and more joined up.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The Biodiversity Duty Report set out in Annex 1 highlights the breadth of work undertaken by the National Park Authority that falls under the legal duty. The first statutory National Park purpose is to conserve and enhance the wildlife of the New Forest National Park and this is core to the National Park Partnership Plan and our own Business Plan and annual work programme. The Government's 'Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework' apportioned targets for the New Forest will further guide our future work on enhancing biodiversity, with several of the targets specifically focused on biodiversity. The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) intends to include references to the Biodiversity Duty Reports prepared by relevant authorities in future reviews of the [Environmental Improvement Plan](#).

Recommendations

It is recommended that members endorse the New Forest National Park Biodiversity Duty Report set out in Annex 1 as a summary of the work undertaken by the Authority to comply with the legal Biodiversity Duty.

Annex 1: New Forest National Park Authority Biodiversity Duty Report

Equality and Diversity Implications:

There are no specific equality or diversity implications arising out of this report

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