

AM 734/26

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2026**

DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2026/27

Report by: Paul Walton, Head of Environment & Rural Economy

Summary:

In 2022/23 the new Partnership Plan for the National Park was approved and adopted by all partners ([About the Partnership Plan - New Forest National Park Authority](https://newforestnpa.gov.uk) (newforestnpa.gov.uk)). The plan is for the whole of the National Park and sets out all the relevant outcomes to be delivered by 2027 by all the key organisations within the area. As one of these delivery organisations, we have derived and extracted our specific actions and outcomes into our internal Authority 'Business Plan'. The full Business Plan, covering the same period up to 2027, was approved by the Authority in July 2023. Each year, we produce a more specific annual Work Programme which will be overseen and its progress monitored by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

This paper sets out the key outcomes that we aim to deliver in the 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation:

Approve the Draft Work Programme 2026/27.

1 Development of the Draft Work Programme 2026/27

- 1.1 This Draft Work Programme is derived from the actions and activities set out in the Business Plan 2023-27. Priorities for the year are grouped under the key themes of the current Partnership Plan. A draft has been seen by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee, who have recommended it for approval.
- 1.2 Members will be aware of the challenging financial circumstances under which the work programme has been prepared, with formal confirmation of Defra grants for 2026/27 still awaited.
- 1.3 The Programme aims to be challenging but achievable within the resources we currently have. As usual we have asked staff and managers to focus on the specific outcomes of highest importance / key delivery and with measurable actions for this year. Given the constrained level of resources we are now working with, the Programme does include some elements of our work that in previous years may have been regarded as standard or business-as-usual work and as such would not have been included in the detailed Programme.
- 1.4 Progress on the Work Programme will be monitored internally through the Strategic Leadership Team, a project portfolio officer working group and by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

- 1.5 Members are encouraged to contact officers prior to the meeting to discuss any more detailed queries on the draft, or are of course free to raise them alongside more general points at the meeting itself.

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Equality Impact Assessment:

The Authority is confident that this proposed Work Programme has been drafted in an open and inclusive way, so as to ensure all members of our communities are treated equally and fairly by it. The Work Programme actions are primarily designed to improve the Forest and be positive for those who live in, work in and visit it.

ANNEX 1

Draft Annual Work Programme 2026/27

Re:New Climate – Net Zero with Nature

We understand the impacts of climate change on the special qualities of the New Forest National Park; we take the action needed to adapt to build resilience of the special features; and we strive to drive down emissions to be a net-zero landscape by 2050.

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework targets for the landscape (PLTOF):

- Net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050
- 20 hectares of peat restoration by 2050
- 550 hectares of new woodland and tree cover by 2050.

Draft outcomes	Draft Actions / Priorities
Establishing baseline data & evidence (Paul Walton)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and embed outputs from Climate Change Risk and Adaptation Opportunities Assessment across the themes of Lead, Learn, Enable, Restore, Maintain and Protect into NPA work. • Engage with Landscape Observatory, integrate outputs from AI mapping into development of spatial approach and Partnership Plan renewal process. • Review annual emissions data from Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and Small World Consulting to inform action on emissions reduction. • Report landscape emissions as actions as part of our commitment to Race to Zero.
Increase sustainable transport (Jim Mitchell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop at least two active travel schemes on the Lymington to Lyndhurst corridor (route 120) to the point of being ready to bid for capital funds. • Pilot approaches on the New Forest on-road leisure cycle network. • Work with the bus operator and drivers to manage and promote the three New Forest Tour routes, maintaining satisfaction ratings of at least 4.5 out of 5 and overall financial viability. • Seek investment in the New Forest Tour for the long term.
Motivating climate action (Paul Walton)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a New Forest climate literacy training scheme in partnership with Countryside Education Trust. • Work with partners such as through land advisors' network and Catchment Partnership to target actions for emissions reduction across farms and rural businesses.

Organisational net zero (Nigel Stone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and update the NPA's Carbon Reduction Plan, incorporating capital investment decisions.• Implement Carbon Reduction Plan to show progress towards net zero by 2030.
Increasing natural capital (Paul Walton)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build upon work undertaken to understand motivations of local business to invest in local nature projects.• Establish approach to connect carbon investment opportunities through National Parks Partnership to specific opportunities within the National Park.

Re:New Nature – Nature Recovery

Nature is restored, enhanced and connected to boost biodiversity and improve ecosystem health

PLTOF targets for the landscape:

- Increase wildlife-rich habitat by 4000 hectares by 2042 from 2025
- 80% of SSSIs in favourable condition by 2042
- 60% of SSSIs have ‘actions on track’ by 2042
- More priority habitats supported by agri-environment schemes
- 65% of land managers adopting nature-friendly farming.

Draft outcomes	Draft Actions / Priorities
<p>Making space for nature: Increase the amount of land managed for nature contributing to the 250ha annual target and identified improvements to the New Forest Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Paul Walton)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage funded delivery programmes (Habitats enhancement grant, Landscape Enhancement Initiative) to enable the restoration and management of a range of National Park habitats. • Encourage farmers and landowners/managers to develop Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) applications to restore / manage National Park habitats. • Support three key partnerships to deliver expansion of wildlife habitats: the New Forest Catchment Partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust, the Verderers HLS programme and Natural England’s Protected Sites Strategy for the New Forest and report on progress.
<p>Better understanding of the level of financial investment in nature in the National Park (Paul Walton)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help develop financial support for Commoning and nature recovery following the end of the Verderers Higher Level Stewardship scheme. Identify the current level of financial investment in nature in the National Park from public and green finance sources to help define the coherent National Park-wide offer and approach to attract and direct voluntary green finance for optimum impact. • Consolidate investment from compliance markets such as through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adopt a strategic mitigation scheme to address the in-combination recreation impacts arising from planned new development within the defined 13.8km ‘zone of influence’. ○ Biodiversity Net Gain.
<p>Enabling nature recovery in the National Park (Paul Walton)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the feasibility of introducing Local Development Orders (LDO) to enable nature restoration and recovery projects through the planning system. • Through convening the ReNew Nature Partnership, provide the strategic leadership for nature recovery in the landscape:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring strategies align and are complementary to NP priorities ○ Ensuring subject/geographic-specific groups collaborate and optimise opportunities at landscape scale.
<p>Engaging people in nature (Hilary Makin)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Celebrate nature through multiple communications channels to build connection, ownership and encourage proactive support ● Illustrate the clear links between long-term nature recovery opportunities and immediate individual/community action. ● Signpost opportunities for activities such as walks, talks, volunteering and citizen science projects. ● Engage members of the public through ranger presence in key locations to influence appropriate behaviours and share the New Forest Code.
<p>Protecting nature (Paul Walton)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Define and implement our approach to mitigating the increasing risks such as for wildfire and biosecurity ● Provide effective support to planning control, ensuring ecological and landscape impacts of applications are fully considered. ● Use the planning system to protect nature through the Local Plan, specific policies and supporting guidance such as for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Campsite Article to ensure campsite provision is appropriately managed to protect nature and enable people to enjoy the National Park ○ Protecting dark skies.

Re:New People – An Inclusive National Park

The benefits provided by the New Forest National Park are accessible to all who wish to enjoy them

PLTOF targets for the landscape:

- Increased accessible paths, toilets, rest stops, parking spaces, routes, gates and gaps by 2042
- Increased visits and volunteer days facilitated by new equipment by 2042
- Increased number of schools and volunteers engaged by 2042

Draft outcomes	Draft Actions / Priorities
<p>Inclusive volunteering helps deliver National Park purposes (Jim Mitchell)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver 20+ volunteering days directly to restore habitats and enhance nature, and 20+ volunteer days to improve access to and understanding of the special qualities, involving a minimum of 100 volunteers. • Deliver a minimum of 12 corporate volunteering events. • Adults with additional needs are supported to attend at least one volunteer session a month. • Run the 2027 volunteer fair (attended by 40+ volunteering organisations and 500+ prospective volunteers), the annual Volunteer organisation network event and signpost local opportunities online.
<p>Accessible routes are delivered (Jim Mitchell)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver access improvements through the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (Breamore Railway line, New Forest woods and heaths, Franchises Lodge) and the DEFRA Access For All grant (Breamore access routes, supporting Pedall, accessible trail surface improvements). • Establish and maintain sections 2 and 5 of the Highcliffe to Calshot stretch of England Coast Path and maintain section 1 of the Calshot to Gosport stretch.
<p>Enable more people to engage with the National Park and to have a say in its future (Jim Mitchell)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete our elements of the Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN) project. • Deliver community engagement through ranger presence – local events, literature distribution and supporting campaigns and conservation tasks • Facilitate the New Forest Youth Board to become an established voice for young people in decision making via six meetings per year and presence at a range of other events and forums. • Support cultural initiatives which engage audiences and enhance understanding of the New Forest (Culture in Common programme, Nightjar Project, Artist in Residence programme).

Develop and deliver high-quality, bespoke curriculum linked education for schools and colleges (Jim Mitchell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead activities to support children and young people, growing understanding of the National Park and the climate and nature emergencies so that they are equipped to take positive action in response.• Teach over 40 sessions for over 1,500 young people, in and about the National Park, in schools and colleges and through youth activities, providing meaningful connection to nature, meeting curriculum aims where appropriate and addressing social and mental wellbeing needs.
PEDALL inclusive cycling and other health opportunities are delivered (Jim Mitchell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver 500 guided rides and 5,500 riding slots for people with additional needs/barriers to accessing the National Park'.• Expand PEDALL client network by minimum of five new organisations per year.• Continue expansion of funding partners/streams to ensure sustainability of PEDALL.• Deliver a Health Fellowship in partnership with the NHS.

Re:New Place- Thriving Forest

The interdependence between economic growth and the unique natural beauty and cultural heritage of the landscape underpins a sustainable future for the New Forest National Park

PLTOF targets:

- Decreases in numbers of scheduled monuments and listed buildings 'At Risk' by 2042

Draft outcomes	Draft Actions / Priorities
Ensure economic and social objectives for our area informed by and contributing to the natural capital of the National Park working through the Green Halo Partnership, the Greenprint Framework and relationships with key partners (Paul Walton)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and expand the Green Halo Partnership and Greenprint partners as focal point for our work beyond the boundary of the National Park. • Work with New Forest Produce Ltd to reinforce the value of the New Forest Marque to primary producers, including commoners.
Support sustainable land management and securing the future of Commoning (Paul Walton)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the Forest Farming Group (FFG) in co-creating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a bespoke environmental scheme that sustains commoning and the viability of open forest grazing ○ a means of supporting commoners to maintain viable grazing herds during the transition period to a new scheme. • Evolve the New Forest Land Advice Service into a National Park-wide land advisors convening function.
Improve data and oversight of land use change in the National Park to inform land use decisions (Paul Walton)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a spatial approach to decision-making. • Deliver archaeological services via Planning, advice and guidance to further the sustainable management, protection, public understanding, access to, and enjoyment of the cultural heritage of the National Park. • Continue to deliver heritage advice and services for the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.
The New Forest National Park continues to be covered by an up-to-date planning policy framework (David Illsley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the updated Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan in July 2026. • Consult on the Regulation 19 Submission draft New Forest National Park Local Plan between August – early October 2026. • Submit the draft Local Plan and supporting evidence base to the Secretary of State for independent examination in December 2026.
Grow awareness of and opportunities to develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek funding and partnership opportunities to continue to employ staff in paid entry level roles (apprentices, interns etc).

green skills and careers amongst the New Forest workforce (Jim Mitchell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support a total of five weeks of high-quality work experience opportunities for 14 years+.• Promote green careers awareness via multiagency presence at local school and college careers events (six+ events) and by promoting green skills training events.• Develop green skills approaches in the New Forest (working in partnership with NFDC and University of Southampton and others).
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Re:New Partnership – Team New Forest

Everyone involved in advancing the Purposes of the National Park works together with trust, respect, inclusion and innovation.

Draft outcomes	Draft Actions / Priorities
<p>Consultation draft of New Forest National Park Partnership Plan review complete (Strategic Leadership Team)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership Plan is delivered as per the timetable set out at the Authority meeting in January 2026, led by the Leaders Panel and revised Defra guidance • The high-level vision and objectives are complete by end of Q2, detailed objectives and actions drafted in Q3 and a formal public consultation in Q4 • The Plan is engaging, challenging but deliverable for the key constituent bodies; fully developed with the Forest and all its communities / stakeholders.
<p>Community feedback (Hilary Makin)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully review, looking to maintain and expand, opportunities for two-way feedback and information-sharing between Forest communities and Partnership Plan bodies, including our Authority. • Maintain and enhance existing forums such as our meetings/committees, the Consultative Panel and quadrant meetings with town and parish councils.
<p>Shared experiences through Team New Forest (Nigel Stone)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance opportunities for shared learning, training and development across Team New Forest e.g. Green Leadership. • Ensure continued Authority support, often through use of officer time and/or fundraising support, for smaller stakeholders across the area, making us greater than the sum of our parts. • Landscape Connections grant submission co-designed and supported by a range of partners.

Re:New Organisation – Achieving Excellence

We lead by example; we strive to improve; we are dedicated to maximising value from public funding; we have a strong dedication to customer service; we are an engaged, motivated, safe and inclusive workforce

PLTOF targets for the landscape:

- Policies in place to ensure positive action to widen the diversity of staff, board and volunteers.

Draft outcomes	Draft Actions / Priorities
Capital grants programme delivered (Nigel Stone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully deliver, on time and on budget, all our 2026/27 capital programmes – core Defra capital grant, Access for All and Farming in Protected Landscapes. • Review and update the Authority’s Capital Investment Strategy.
Sustainable finances and facilities (Nigel Stone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the sustainability of the Authority’s medium-term financial position, including development of a full Income Generation Strategy. • Negotiate an affordable short-term main office space following the end of the current Town Hall lease. • Develop the hub approach, small operational bases across the National Park, starting with the Lyndhurst site at Foxlease. • Confirm a long-term plan for a future main office space, preferably owned and run by the Authority itself.
Provide effective and creative communications to drive behaviour change and create greater awareness, ensuring they are accessible and inclusive. (Hilary Makin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our external communications, including the new website, provide core information that is easily available and open to all. • Communicate the outputs of the Climate Change Risk & Adaptation Opportunities Assessment to be accessible to the full range of audiences. • Ensure widespread adoption of the New Forest Code and promote individual campaigns around protecting ground-nesting birds; reducing feeding/petting of livestock; wildfires and encouraging responsible dog behaviour. • Deliver the 2027 Awakening Festival showcasing local climate and nature action. • Refresh our internal communications.
Develop & Support Members role (Chair & Nigel Stone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Chair and Deputy Chair to review and develop the role of Members within the Authority. • Monitor upcoming direct and indirect impacts of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation on the Authority, its functions and governance.

People Plan Reviewed and Enacted (Nigel Stone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the results of the March 2026 Staff Survey and update our People Plan accordingly.• Renew our HR Function, investing resource to refresh and update our suite of policies and procedures.• Ensure detailed succession planning is considered across the organisation and identify key areas / roles to prioritise.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is embedded across the organisation (Jim Mitchell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain our New Forest Voices workstream, ensuring a sense of ownership and belonging within and around our organisation.• Review our Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy.