

**AM 730/26**

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
AUTHORITY MEETING – 29 JANUARY 2026**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

**Summary:**

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 16 October 2025. The report has been formatted to accord with our statutory purposes and duty; these are delivered by the Re:New Forest themes of 'Climate, Nature, People, Place, Partnership and Achieving Excellence' from our agreed Business Plan, summarised as follows:

 Re:New Climate	 Re:New Nature	 Re:New People	 Re:New Place	 Re:New Partnership
Establishing data and evidence baseline and implementing nature-based climate solutions.	Making space for nature and mitigating recreational pressures.	Increasing green skills and jobs - supporting New Forest business / green tourism. Sustainable land management and securing the future of commoning.	Promoting health and wellbeing through contact with nature.	Establishing stronger partnerships within the boundary.
Building a New Forest coalition for a Net Zero economy.	Enhancing natural capital.	Increasing the National Park's resilience to the effects of climate change.	Connecting people with nature and landscape.	Leading the green agenda beyond the New Forest.
Activating communities and increasing sustainable travel.	Supporting nature recovery through Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).	Increasing the availability of affordable housing.	Safeguarding cultural heritage.	Developing a centre of excellence of insights and innovation for the New Forest.
<b>Re:New Organisation: Achieving Excellence</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering high-quality services through a capable and motivated staff team</li> <li>• Maximising resources and using them efficiently and effectively</li> <li>• Modernising our use of the office space and our wider ways of working</li> </ul>				

**Recommendation:**

**To note the report.**

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**Equality and Diversity**

The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination in respect of certain protected characteristics and places us under a duty to have due regard to the advancement of equality in the exercise of our functions. We aim to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity throughout all aspects of our work. More details regarding our projects and initiatives, such as PEDALL, are set out in the relevant reports and Equality Impact Assessments.

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## **NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **AUTHORITY MEETING – 29 JANUARY 2026**

#### **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

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As we begin a new year we are reflecting on the results and successes of some of our important schemes for nature, climate and connection of people to nature.

Work to improve land equivalent to 350 football pitches (250 hectares) for nature under the Species Survival Fund (SSF) has come to an end and looks likely to have exceeded that target. The New Forest was the only national park to receive SSF funding and the focus has been on land at the periphery of the National Park boundary, expanding and linking habitats to the core Crown Lands, improving the Forest's climate resilience and contributing to nature recovery targets.

The £1.3m project has brought together five delivery partners with the NPA - Freshwater Habitats Trust; Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust; Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust; New Forest Commoners Defence Association and Wild New Forest - and is supported by the RSPB and New Forest Biodiversity Forum. Through events, volunteering and talks the project has recorded 34,000 engagements. Monitoring and evaluation is now taking place with some fascinating finds, such as the nationally rare Candelabra Coral fungus, already reported and receiving media coverage.

We are very pleased that Government has confirmed that the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme will be extended for a further three years to March 2029 and we are waiting to hear how much has been allocated to the New Forest. In the five years to this March, over £1m in grants will have been issued by us to farmers and commoners to improve their land for climate and nature and we are grateful to the grants panel and staff team, particularly Land Advice Service, for helping to demonstrate the value of the scheme to Government by delivering the scheme so effectively and with local buy-in.

We were also pleased that our expression of interest to develop a large-scale 'Landscape Connections' National Lottery Heritage Fund scheme was approved opening up an opportunity to secure £10m. We are now working up a development phase application with partners for submission later this year. The development phase itself can last up to two years, with the delivery phase then lasting up to eight years.

The Local Plan sets out the planning framework for the National Park, including the scale and location of new development and the need to conserve the area's local distinctiveness. It guides decisions on planning applications submitted within the National Park and must be reviewed by December 2026 to meet Government requirements. An up-to-date Local Plan is crucial in the context of changing planning policy and increased focus on meeting housing needs and boosting economic growth. Over 1,000 people attended online and in-person drop-in events spread across the National Park in the latest round of consultation in December. More than 600 responses were received. There will be a further consultation period in the summer to meet the December 2026 deadline for submission for independent examination by a Government inspector.

Meanwhile significant proposals are coming forward on the Waterside for a proposed hydrogen plant at the former Fawley Power Station, and a 'Solent Gateway 2' automotive terminal, with access road, nature area and country park. The team has been providing feedback from a landscape, nature, heritage and wider planning perspective.

Our volunteers are most active in the autumn/winter period when vegetation growth slows, visitors are fewer and it's the optimum time for tree planting. Recent highlights include planting 250 trees at Bramshaw where invasive rhododendron had been removed; ambassadors supporting events during a near sell-out National Park Walking Festival; 19 youth volunteers improving land for nature and Vodafone employees helping to restore heathland at Copythorne Common.

Inclusive cycling charity PEDALL held its second 'Pass the PEDALL' fundraising event reaching its target of raising £10,000 through business sponsorship and donations. The charity has increased its community network to providing rides to over 50 different organisations, support local people with additional needs.

Improvements to routes at Blackfield, Tatchbury Mount and Cadland have included path repairs, improved signage and replacing stiles with gates to make them more accessible. Funding from Defra Access For All has enabled us to buy two four-wheel drive 'tramper' mobility scooters to enable more people to enjoy the National Park.

Sadly, animal accidents have seen a significant rise this winter with 108 reported accidents and 47 animals killed (compared to 97 accidents and 37 deaths the year before) despite the launch of a New Forest Drive Safe campaign with partners to encourage businesses to raise awareness of animal accidents, with over 50 businesses signing up.

A Transport Summit we held in conjunction with Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and Go New Forest was attended by over 100 people and received positive feedback from participants. The discussions are helping create a shared vision for how people move around the National Park while respecting its special qualities.

Green careers are beginning to be understood as more than the obvious environmental jobs out in the field, extending across sectors and businesses from architectural design to health to name but two. As part of our lead role on Greenprint we jointly published, with University of Southampton, a report that gives recommendations on how we can improve visibility and access to green careers in Hampshire and the Solent. This quarter our education team also attended two careers fairs to promote environmental roles. Our green careers network (for those new to the sector) has also held two training days and we have marked Green Careers Week by highlighting different jobs available and how people have got into careers caring for the National Park.

We have been continuing to input to discussions on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), including participating in a NFDC hosted visit of the MHCLG team leading this area of work in Whitehall and submitting our consultation response to Government on options for LGR. The Partnerships Plan Leaders Panel also had their Autumn meeting focussed on how we can ensure the shared goals for climate, nature and people for our National Park can be supported by the proposed changes in administration and were pleased to be joined by colleagues from North Yorkshire NPA to share their recent experiences.

At the time of writing, we are looking forward to welcoming hundreds of prospective volunteers to our Volunteer Fair at Brockenhurst Village Hall on 26 January with around 50 different organisations to be represented. Nowhere is the sense of place and community more evident than at this event, serving to illuminate the incredible way in which organisations and individuals come together to care for the Forest. It's always an uplifting start to the new year, giving a real sense of hope and possibility for the future.

## **DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS**

The report has been formatted to accord with the statutory purposes and duty, which we often refer to as Protect, Enjoy and Prosper. These are delivered through our Re:New 'Climate, Nature, People, Place, Partnership, Organisation' objectives from the agreed Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the first page.

Our Business Plan is delivered through annual Work Programmes, progress on which is set out in these reports alongside the formal quarterly reporting under the six themes to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee; at the end of each year we produce an Annual Review document.

The final section of this report lists the Members', our Chair's and the Chief Executive's activities and events.

### **1 First Purpose: Protect**

#### *Nature Recovery*

#### Species Survival Fund

All capital work has now been completed, hitting the deadline of 31 December. Partners worked hard to ensure output by that date and that the investment being made into the New Forest by the Species Survival Fund was maximised at each site. Meadows have been planted, ponds and wetlands have been created, vast areas of heathland have been improved for reptiles and amphibians and woodlands have been improved. The sites are all around the periphery of the National Park, making the most of the high-biodiversity core of the New Forest, expanding outwards to connect and enhance these critical habitats, improving their biodiversity value and growing the National Park's resilience to climate change. We are now in the process of collating all the habitat and capital delivery data to get the final output figures but we are very confident that the 250-hectare target for the project has been met and exceeded.

A total of 229 engagement events and event days have been delivered through the project, reaching over 34,000 people! A fantastic achievement which has included a trainee surveyors programme, volunteer tasks and talks to local interest groups and stakeholders.

#### *Development Management*

112 planning applications were received from 1 October to 31 December 2025. In the same period, 109 planning applications were determined with an approval rate of 87%. The team has worked hard to improve the timeliness of our decisions, with the last quarter (October – December 2025) showing significant improvements due to further resources being available and the hard work of the team. Our planning performance statistics are reported to the Resources, Audit & Performance Committee for review.

During this same period, six appeal decisions were received. Two were dismissed and four were allowed. Appeal decisions continue to be reported to our monthly Planning Committee meetings, with the decisions of the Planning Inspectorate also feeding into the current review of our local planning policies.

The team has welcomed back Liz Young and Carly Cochrane as Senior Planning Officers, who bring many years of experience and knowledge as we deal with a wide range of planning applications. We are actively engaged in the emerging proposals for the Solent Gateway 2 site on the edge of the National Park; and are also expecting an application for the works to the A326 to be submitted by Hampshire County Council imminently. We would also like to thank Catherine Cluett for her hard work during her time with the team in the last year.

### *Planning Enforcement*

Over the past quarter, the Planning Enforcement team has continued to deliver its statutory responsibilities, undertaking initial assessments on 39 new enforcement cases and successfully concluding 49 cases. This has been a result of officers ensuring that remedial steps are taken by landowners which have included the submission of several successful retrospective planning applications and most notably the removal of a residential mobile home that has been on site for the past 20 years.

To assist with investigations the Authority has issued two Planning Contravention Notices formally requesting information in relation to activities which may constitute a breach. Formal action remains a last resort, and it has not been necessary to issue any Enforcement Notices in the last quarter.

We have also secured compliance with existing notices in several cases without recourse to prosecution, further demonstrating our commitment to resolving breaches efficiently and proportionately. This includes the removal of unauthorised structures and cessation of uses that were harmful to the special qualities of the New Forest National Park.

In addition, the team is actively managing 10 enforcement appeals of varying complexity and pursuing prosecutions in the magistrates court in relation to persistent breaches, such as unauthorised residential use and inappropriate land subdivision. These actions underline the Authority's determination to protect the landscape and uphold planning controls.

The Authority also proactively monitors new development to ensure compliance with approved plans and conditions along with agriculturally tied properties, minerals and waste sites and temporary campsites.

## *Policy*

The initial draft New Forest National Park Local Plan was subject to public consultation between 5 November and 19 December 2025. During this period we held five public drop-in sessions in communities across the National Park, as well as an online event. The sessions were well-attended, with over 1,000 people engaging with the planning team on the draft proposals and the timetable for the next steps in the Plan-making process. The consultation closed on 19 December 2025, and the Policy team is in the process of reviewing the detailed responses received. The Government has set planning authorities a deadline of December 2026 for the submission of their draft local plans for independent examination under the current plan-making system. This is a challenging timetable and the next formal milestone will be the consideration of the Regulation 19 'Submission draft' Local Plan which is currently timetabled for the July 2026 full Authority meeting.

The Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan – Partial Update is currently under examination by the Planning Inspector, appointed by the Secretary of State. Hearings were held between 4 and 13 February 2025, with an additional hearing being held on 9 September 2025 regarding the Purple Haze proposed allocation in Ringwood Forest (which explored the potential hydrological impacts of the minerals site allocation on the internationally designated Dorset Heathlands). The Hampshire Authorities have published proposed modifications to the Submission Plan, which are considered necessary to make the Plan legally compliant and/or sound. The Proposed Main Modifications and Policies Map Changes are subject to consultation running for 10 weeks between 4 December 2025 and 12 February 2026. The intention is to adopt the Plan – which will cover the whole of the New Forest National Park - by summer 2026.

There continue to be several active neighbourhood planning groups in the New Forest area. The Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a public referendum on 29 January 2026, where people eligible to vote living within the parish of Lymington and Pennington will be invited to vote on whether the draft Plan should be 'made'. The Regulation 16 draft New Milton Neighbourhood Plan was subject to consultation between 28 November 2025 and 23 January 2026, after which the draft Plan and the representations received will be considered by an independent examiner.

In mid-December 2025 the Government published its proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with further details available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>. The proposed reforms are described by the Minister for Housing & Planning as, '...the culmination of a sustained effort over the first 17 months of this Parliament to revamp our planning system so that it meets housing need in full and unleashes economic growth, and represents the most significant reform to national planning policy since the original NPPF was introduced more than a decade ago.'<sup>1</sup> Our Planning Committee received a briefing on the proposals at their meeting on 20 January and the National Park Authority's formal consultation

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<sup>1</sup> [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

response will be considered at our Planning Committee meeting on 17 February 2026, ready for submission by the Government's deadline of 10 March 2026. We are also liaising with the other English national park authorities in the preparation of a combined National Parks England response.

In November 2025 the Government launched their own consultation into the alternative options for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Hampshire – see Local government reorganisation in Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton - GOV.UK. Through the consultation the Government invited views on four alternative options that had been put forward by the existing local authorities in Hampshire. The National Park Authority previously agreed our position on LGR at the full Authority meetings in March 2025 and July 2025 through reports AM 713/25 and AM 717/25 which set out our key principles that LGR should seek to achieve. Our response to the latest Government consultation was submitted on 9 January 2026 and confirmed our position that of the options identified, Option 1 represents the best fit for the National Park Authority's priorities for nature, climate, people and place in the New Forest. This option would keep the New Forest as a whole, combined with the predominantly rural authorities of Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire. Around one third of this area is designated as national park and this new unitary authority would be well placed to work with the two national park authorities to deliver the Government's agenda for national parks. The Government is now reviewing the responses received and an announcement is expected within the next couple of months.

### *Landscape*

The landscape officer undertook detailed analysis of several planning applications, applying the information contained within the Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Action Plan for the required responses to the planning officers. This often involves analysing submitted Landscape Strategy Plans and assessing the landscape effects and visual impacts of the proposals. Local Plan policies that are most commonly referred to in these landscape responses are as follows:

SP7: Landscape Character

SP14: Renewable Energy (where appropriate)

SP15: Tranquillity (including light pollution)

SP17: Local Distinctiveness

A joint site visit has been undertaken by the landscape officer to the proposed Solent Gateway 2 site to assess the landscape setting and character of the site and surrounding areas, including the impact on the A326. Cross discipline discussions with specialist colleagues have also taken place regarding the proposals. A landscape response to the Environmental Impact Assessment scoping request for the site has been made.

A presentation of the Fawley Waterside proposals was attended by the landscape officer. The proposed housing allocation sites for the Local Plan Review have been visited by the landscape officer, with members of the Planning Policy team, to allow familiarisation of the location, setting and landscape character of each site.

### *Archaeology*

During this period, we consulted and progressed 36 planning applications (16 NFNPA and 22 New Forest District Council). With the limited opportunities for any large-scale archaeological excavation within the New Forest National Park, consulting on the planning applications for NFDC continues to inform our understanding of the range of archaeological material surrounding the New Forest National Park and which may well survive within.

For the SLA with Forestry England, we progressed 25 sites and made visits to sites across Forestry England's Southern District. For the Higher-Level Stewardship scheme the team progressed 17 sites. Providing these services to FE and the HLS Scheme provides ongoing opportunities to identify, record and protect a range of heritage assets within the National Park that could easily be damaged by the heavy vehicles used in forestry and habitat restoration. It also facilitates the ongoing detailed assessment of LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) data of the New Forest and its surroundings which has often led to new archaeological discoveries.

In November we attended Forestry England's historic environment meeting which brought together all their heritage advisors and Foresters from the Southern District. This was a great opportunity to share best practise and visits operational site that had benefitted from our advice over the past couple of years.

We have recently made great strides in delivering more of the heritage information gained through these works to the Historic Environment Record. This will enable more research to be conducted by us and others, helping to grow our understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the New Forest.

Continuing our positive working relationship with Southampton University, we attended its Arts and Humanities open day in November, where we engaged with the public about the New Forest's extensive Roman pottery industry using a hands-on pottery sculpting activity.

The popular LoCATE (Local Community Archaeological Training and Equipment) scheme continues, enabling us to support archaeological societies and community groups from across Hampshire and Dorset in accessing geophysical survey equipment in partnership with Bournemouth University. The equipment has been in constant use and is being actively shared between different societies. Some good examples of the results obtained

using the project equipment can be found on the Avon Valley Archaeological Society website: <https://avonvalleyarchsoc.wordpress.com/reports>. Our next equipment training day for community groups is planned for 28 January.

The New Forest Knowledge (NFK) website is end of life and will be removed by the New Forest Heritage Centre soon. Selected content will be moved from NFK, formally depositing it into their collection to a section of their new main website. We are exploring how we could save the content added to the NFK website by the NFNPA. We are identifying content that can be added to the new NFNPA website so that it can be kept publicly accessible.

### *Building Design and Conservation*

Our Building Design and Conservation officers have been working with the planning team and internal consultees on an array of sites, from the proposed hydrogen plant at the former Fawley Power Station, and Solent Gateway 2; extensive proposals at Brockenhurst Park; and continued discussions for the conversion of the Lymington Salt Barns which are on the National Park's Building At Risk register. The team has also had another significant meeting with Netley Marsh Parish Council over the review of the Forest North East Conservation Area followed by a joint site meeting where it was confirmed that the review will be concluded imminently.

The team is also working jointly with Test Valley Borough and New Forest District Council Conservation Officers on producing guidance for heritage assets and fire. The team continue to map the curtilage of listed buildings, collaborate with the communications team on the new website, reviewing non-designated heritage assets for the local list process, and working with the Policy Team on the Local Plan Review.

### *Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Environmental Land Management (ELM)*

A further four applications to the FiPL grant programme were approved by the panel during the reporting period, making 11 in total for 25/26. The largest application approved was for a strip till cultivator to support regenerative farming on a mixed arable-livestock system in the south of the National Park.

Earlier this month we were delighted to receive confirmation that the FiPL programme has been extended for a further three years, from 1 April to 31 March 2029 with the programme funding allocation confirmed for 2026/27. We are yet to have confirmation of the individual allocation for each landscape.

We continue to work with partners to develop a large-scale, long-term project to replace the Verderer's Higher Level Stewardship scheme. It is hoped that such a scheme will be supported by Landscape Recovery (part of the Environmental Land Management programme), with a further funding round anticipated later this year.

## **2 Second Purpose: Enjoy**

### *Education and Youth*

Despite wintry weather somewhat working against us we have had great feedback about our visits this winter including this from Mudeford Junior School:

'Thank you so much for such a great day today! We all loved it - and we were so luck with the weather. You planned, organised and adapted the day brilliantly.'

We attended two careers fairs this period; demand for our attendance remains consistently high for careers fairs across the region which our team support where we canso that we can have conversations with young people about how they might support the New Forest in a range of professional roles in their future. We met 178 pupils from local primary and secondary schools as well as two groups from Middlesex and Bournemouth Universities who gained insight into connecting their undergraduate and post graduate studies into how the National Park is managed in practice.

Bournemouth University undergraduate course tutor:

'The students enjoyed the day a lot and learned so much from the activities and discussions. Thank you for sharing your experience and insights with them in such an engaging way.'

In the meantime we have been working on funding bids to secure the future of our work as well as administering the travel grant for schools (now fully allocated for this financial year). The whole team has now undertaken Carbon Literacy training and will use it to improve our confidence in passing on knowledge and understanding to young people.

### *Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN)*

We are fully booked for youth action project opportunities until the end of the YouCAN project in August 2026. The programme has been hugely popular with groups outside mainstream education, including two programmes for home schooled students with their parents or guardians joining them. Over the winter period we had four returning groups running simultaneously, and luckily only three sessions had to be postponed because of stormy weather.

Noadswood School staff member:

'We cannot thank you enough for the last few weeks they have had a blast. What a success, and they're already nagging me what's next!'

New Forest Young Carers:

'Thank you for arranging them and being so patient when they got a bit distracted at times. It would be great to be able to look at doing some sessions again next summer maybe?'

Longspee Academy staff member:

'It was lovely to see our students learning more about trees, and you were a very knowledgeable and calming presence with them.'

Our weekend Junior rangers programme now has over 25 young people signed up. Despite postponing our December celebration session (due to bad weather again) we are looking forward to awarding 12 of the Junior Rangers their Silver Awards in January. These committed young individuals have attended a minimum of 10 sessions across different competency areas (twice). Our highest attender has come to 19 sessions!

The green careers network continues to have a strong following and two training sessions were held one on community research techniques (with Action Hampshire) and another on amphibian and reptile ID skills (with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust).

The Youth Board has been busy as ever, including two of its regular board meetings. Youth Board member Eva Wilcox travelled up to the National Lottery's 'Community Action Fund Festival' to participate as a panel member on the topic of 'young people leading change'. In October, they presented their annual report to the Authority meeting. Representatives attended the Transport Summit, the Young Commoners open committee meeting and a variety of training opportunities and the Youth Board responded (collectively) to the NFNPA local plan consultation.

#### *Public and community events / rangers / recreation management*

Rangers have continued to provide a visible presence across the National Park, undertaking patrols and public engagement sessions promoting responsible use of the New Forest to users. Despite the strong campaigning not to dump pumpkins on the forest, we were still unbelievably finding them into December!

We convened and facilitated the New Forest Dogs Forum, helping New Forest organisations with particular interests in dogs to work together and ensure we share key messaging and engagement ideas.

Rangers continued to support the volunteer team with tasks including a corporate day with employees from Vodafone restoring heathland habitat at Copythorne Common in conjunction with RSPB.

The team engaged with over 1,500 people in all weathers with a peak in visitors during school half term and the Christmas and New Year break.

The team will be very sad to say goodbye to our North Area Ranger Hayden Bridgeman at the end of January. She started as an Apprentice Ranger with the NPA in 2018 and after a brief spell with Hampshire County Council as Assistant Ranger at Lepe Country

Park, returned to her current role in 2021. She had had many achievements including championing our work with refugee and asylum seekers, including invites to speak at both the World Ranger Congress and the Europarc Conference on the subject. She will be continuing her career as Team Leader for the Peak District National Park, so we are keeping her within the family. Hayden has been an amazing example of the benefit and success of the New Forest Apprentice Scheme which we are currently seeking funding to continue.

Recruitment for both the North Area Ranger role and vacant South Ranger role took place in December, with over 130 applicants. At the beginning of January we welcomed the successful candidates into the team. We have welcomed back Leanne Atkinson who brings a wealth of experience including prior knowledge of the role from working as our Coastal Ranger from 2016-18. Naomi Addleton was successful in moving up from her Assistant Ranger role to the Area Ranger position. With a slight change in area boundaries, Leanne will take the west side of the National Park and Naomi the east.

### *Communications*

Nearly 1,200 people responded to our residents survey in November. We are currently analysing the feedback which will help shape the next work programme and Partnership Plan. The survey used a new community engagement platform which we introduced and which we also used for the Local Plan consultation. The consultation received over 600 responses following an online and five in-person drop-in sessions for the public attended by hundreds of people, which we supported with information panels plus newspaper and online promotions.

We have helped showcase the closing stages of work by Species Survival Fund (SSF) partners, including articles highlighting the discovery of the nationally rare fungus Candelabra Coral and the installation of a new eel pass to help eel migration.

Supporting the Commoners' Defence Association remains integral to our work while promoting the practice to the wider public through social media posts and blogs. This has coincided with the launch of New Forest Drive Safe, a group targeting businesses in and around the Forest to promote safe driving among their employees. More than 50 organisations signed up to the initiative within its first six weeks and we aim to push messaging further in 2026 to help reduce the number of accidents involving livestock.

We marked another successful year of the Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN) scheme with a three-part blog series highlighting the successes of the project and profiling each partner. We organised a training session on producing social media videos to upskill the partnership and help them to reach and engage with the YouCAN target audience better. A member of the comms team also represented the partnership alongside a member of the New Forest Youth Board at the Climate Action Fund Festival,

organised by the National Lottery Community Fund. We began promotion for the tour of Theatre for Life's 'Bringing the Outside In', a play exploring climate anxiety, air pollution and New Forest folklore. The second cohort of New Forest Young Content Creators was recruited and some of the projects of the first cohort were shared across social media and received high engagement. We also showcased the connection between the New Forest green groups and the New Forest Youth Board with a social media video produced during a workshop run by our comms team during the Youth Board's one-year anniversary residential. We also profiled some of the green groups and their successes as part of an ongoing social media series.

We celebrated the NPA education and youth team being nominated for a national award with a press release which was picked up in local news. The team was named finalists in Education/Learning Team of the Year category at the School Travel Awards.

For Green Careers Week we profiled Freshwater Habitats Trust engagement officer Georgia Staszynska and NPA archaeologist Hilde van der Heul. Georgia's story encouraged volunteering and showed her career progression from attending the New Forest National Park Volunteer Fair to years later running a stall. The blog also shows the synergies between YouCAN, SSF and New Routes to Nature. Hilde's blog highlights the importance of heritage and archaeology in the National Park.

We promoted and provided comms coverage of the inaugural New Forest National Park Transport Summit, organised by the NPA in partnership with Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and Go New Forest. The flagship event aimed to co-create a vision and actions for how people move around the National Park in ways that protect and enhance its special, working landscape. Around 100 people from across local parishes, community groups, businesses, elected representatives and local organisations attended. This received local media coverage.

We promoted and helped co-ordinate a near-sold-out New Forest Walking Festival in which over 350 people attended walks and explored the special qualities of the National Park in its 20th anniversary year. Highlights of the 2025 Walking Festival included a heritage walk on the Breamore Railway Line with the project leaders working on improvements, a series of ranger-led walks, a Young Commoner-led session, and multiple fungi identification events. Accessible and family-friendly sessions with Halloween, folklore, and woodland themes also proved popular.

The NPA and the New Forest Marque delivered a joint Halloween campaign highlighting the risks pumpkins discarded in the Forest can pose to livestock and wildlife. The campaign raised awareness of animal welfare and commoning whilst offering a positive alternative through collaboration with a Marque-accredited restaurant owner and chef to create a bespoke pumpkin recipe. The campaign was well-received on social media and in the press, encouraging responsible behaviour and recognition for local producers.

### *Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Projects*

We are hosting a placement from NHS England to work on the development of the Green Health Hub: [www.greenhealthhub.org.uk](http://www.greenhealthhub.org.uk). Phil Godfrey, Public Health Development Manager for NHS England, is working with us one day per week until at least March to lead a comprehensive review with a focus on building capacity and capability in the green social prescribing workforce. The Hub, a digital directory connecting people to nature-based wellbeing activities across the New Forest, is gearing up for a refresh, and Phil's role centres on making it more accessible and effective for underserved communities.

We are also planning to advertise for a new NHS / National Park Wellbeing Fellowship placement opportunity starting in August.

### *PEDALL New Forest Inclusive Cycling*

PEDALL had a strong finish to the year, delivering 141 inclusive group riding sessions and 1,307 individual riding slots, an increase of 9% in riding slots compared to the same period in 2024. We have connected with nine new organisations this calendar year, further extending our community network to 50+ organisations riding with us, all of which support residents of the New Forest (and surrounding areas) with additional needs, from primary school children with autism to people living with dementia.

Our two new Pedall team members on the project's 'supported employment programme' have continued to expand their skills and experience, including the completion of a Velotech Bronze Cycle Maintenance qualification. Bringing 'lived experience' to the Pedall project, sharing their insight and understanding with our riding community, volunteers and the wider NFNPA team, this programme includes training and development, providing a pathway to future career opportunities.

### Pass the Pedall 2025

Our major fundraising festival, Pass the Pedall 2025, took place on 27 September at New Park, Brockenhurst, and was a great success. We met our fund-raising target of £10,000 through business sponsorship and donations. We want to give special thanks to 'Chase the Sun,' our lead partner, which helped us to extend this festival to a wider audience through a 'family cycle relay.' We challenged all participants to cycle the equivalent distance between Lands End and John O'Groats, which was smashed collectively, as participants cycled over double this distance during the day. Our third objective was to make the event a truly 'inclusive cycle challenge' and it was joyful to see our regular Pedall riders alongside families from the wider New Forest Community coming together to raise essential funds and awareness for Pedall, whilst enjoying the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of cycling together.

For more: [www.pedall.org.uk/pass-the-pedall-25/](http://www.pedall.org.uk/pass-the-pedall-25/)

### Pedall Voices

With thanks to the NFNPA Communications team, we can share a further story from regular Pedall riders.

'We can get out in the Forest again thanks to PEDALL.'

Tricia and John's story shows how PEDALL has rekindled their shared love of cycling and the New Forest, helping them stay active, connected, and confident. Through inclusive rides, they've rediscovered the joy of being outdoors together, met new friends, and experienced the wellbeing benefits of nature and gentle exercise.

For more: [www.pedall.org.uk/case-studies/](http://www.pedall.org.uk/case-studies/)

Pedall rides are now closed until late February and our focus is on volunteer training, including the development of volunteers to become 'volunteer ride leaders' and cycle fleet maintenance. We are continuing to work with Friends of Pedall and aim to complete fundraising grant applications over the winter period.

### *Volunteering*

Since the start of October, our conservation volunteers, access surveyors, youth volunteers and New Forest ambassadors have provided 188 volunteer days on tasks across the New Forest. Flourish In Nature provided 19 places for adults requiring additional support across eight sessions. The volunteer festive task at Copythorne Common saw 30 volunteers engaging in scrub management and heathland restoration, by far the largest task we've run in recent years it and was a fantastic send-off for the year in volunteering!

New Forest ambassadors assisted the ranger team by providing a backstop on seven walks during the walking festival, and we will be introducing our two new rangers Naomi and Leanne to the Ambassador scheme as we continue to explore new ways to support the National Park's outreach and engagement goals.

Our Youth Engagement Co-ordinator Katie Barrow introduced the youth volunteers to invasive species management at Harrow Wood, scrub clearance at RSPB Franchises Lodge and ran a bird survey workshop at Keyhaven Marshes alongside Bird Aware Solent. 19 unique volunteers attended one or more of these sessions.

Working alongside the landowners, volunteers planted 250 trees at Bramshaw, including 10 disease resistant-elms. The task aimed to jumpstart the understorey of broadleaf woodland following the removal of a dense rhododendron infestation by the Species Survival Fund project. Notably we utilised a new soil biodegradable tree guard and we look forward to evaluating their effectiveness as we visit the site for future tasks. We were

joined by a representative from the National Lottery Community Fund to show the fantastic work carried out by the NFNPA volunteers and Flourish In Nature (and to join in the tree planting!).

Site owner: 'Thanks so much for all your work towards the tree planting today. I know that everyone here was so pleased with the way the day went. I was surprised how quickly it all happened! And what a lovely group of volunteers. I would be grateful if you can thank them all and I hope that in the future we can do some more activities.'

Our volunteer Christmas do hosted 60 volunteers, bringing together our conservation team, access surveyors, PEDALL, Youth Board, youth volunteers and Flourish In Nature.

A massive thank you to all our volunteers who've supported the National Park, and to the myriad of volunteering groups across the New Forest who give their time and energy to enhancing the character and accessibility of our home. We look forward to hosting the Volunteer Fair in January alongside over 50 exhibitors.

### *Access and Rights of Way*

Fourteen new signposts and six new interpretation posts have been added to the Tom's Down promoted route at Blackfield as part of landscape improvements funded by the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative. We have also replaced four stiles with gates as part of ongoing works with the Cadland Estate.

With the same funding, works to the gullied paths around Tatchbury Mount are now complete, and we have replaced two broken signs on this promoted walking route.

DEFRA Access For All funding has aided in the purchase of two trampers. Trampers are a Class 3 mobility scooter with four-wheel drive and rugged suspension for off-road use. Once the transport trailer arrives, they can be used by NPA staff, NPA Members, and members of the public to assist with mobility on site visits, volunteer events and guided walks.

### **3**     **Duty: Prosper**

#### *Re:New Forest Partnership Plan*

The New Forest National Park Partnership Plan Officers' Group and Leaders' Panel both met in early November 2025. The focus was on devolution in Hampshire and the Solent and the opportunities available. The Leaders' Panel received presentations on the Mayoral Combined Authority for Hampshire and the Solent; and also heard from colleagues at the North York Moors National Park Authority on the experiences of being a National Park covered in part by a devolved Mayoral Authority in an area that has also undergone local government reorganisation in recent years. The review of the National Park Partnership Plan will be undertaken in this context and the Leaders' Panel benefitted from the presentations from partners and a good turn-out from key partner organisations. Thanks to colleagues at New Forest District Council for hosting and chairing the meeting.

#### *Fundraising*

We are currently developing plans to apply to The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections strategic initiative which is designed to address long-standing heritage issues at scale and accelerate new ideas and innovations. Our expression of interest has been approved, so we are now working towards a development phase application. This phase can last up to two years and focuses on initial planning and feasibility in preparation for a delivery phase which can last up to eight years. We held three workshops with stakeholders and staff last year and gathered a wealth of ideas and content that will be used to help develop the content for our application. We are also continuing to talk to the funder about our plans as they progress.

#### *New Forest Skills Development*

The GreenPrint partnership report on ['Improving visibility and access to green careers in Hampshire and the Solent'](#) was published in partnership with the University of Southampton (UoS). We are continuing to work with UoS on disseminating the report and next steps and we presented to the New Forest Skills Action Group on 21 January. We are also gaining a placement to work on scoping the action identified in the report about developing green skills hubs and what this might mean in the National Park. The report has already been referenced in the Hampshire Skills Strategy that was adopted by Hampshire County Council in December.

#### *New Forest Tour*

On the back of the Transport Summit and the positive support from the community for effective bus routes and timetables, we are in discussion with the Tour operator regarding plans for this summer.

### *Sustainable Transport and Active Travel*

Around 100 people from across local parishes, community groups, businesses, elected representatives and local organisations attended the New Forest National Park Transport Summit at Brockenhurst Village Hall on 20 November to co-create a vision and actions for how people move around the National Park in ways that protect and enhance its special, working landscape.

There were several panels throughout the sold-out Summit on active travel (such as walking, cycling, running), sustainable public transport and the relationship between travel and local businesses and attractions. Panellists included sustainable transport planners, representatives from MoreBus, South Western Railway, Wightlink, Go New Forest, and Beaulieu National Motor Museum, as well as residents who regularly get around without a car. Talks also took place on the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, wayfinding, transport emissions, a Lymington to Lyndhurst active travel corridor, speed on New Forest roads, and public transport innovation in the Lake District National Park.

Attendees were invited to share ideas on what is good about transport to and within the National Park and what they would like to see improved. There were active travel demonstrations outside throughout the day on a fleet of specialist and adapted cycles. This included New Forest Inclusive Cycling charity PEDALL, New Forest bike hire company Cyclexperience, Jorvik tricycles, and a local carpenter who runs his business from his adapted cargo bike and electric van, as well as walks from the Hall to explore the concept of 'healthy streets'.

The New Forest National Park Transport Summit was hosted by the New Forest National Park Authority in partnership with Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and Go New Forest. The event was supported by Active Travel England's National Park Capability Fund. A summit report is being finished which will help inform partners' future work.

### *Affordable Housing*

Good progress is being made on delivering affordable housing at the New Forest National Park Local Plan housing site allocations at the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel, land at Church Lane, Sway and land at Whartons Lane, Ashurst. Between them these sites will deliver over 90 affordable dwellings for local people in housing need, helping to meet some of the needs arising in the New Forest National Park (where average house prices are over 12 times average annual earnings). As part of the review of the New Forest National Park Local Plan we are considering the best way to meet identified affordable housing needs, building on the recent track record of planning permissions.

### *Sustainable Communities Fund*

Funds of £938 were awarded to Ringwood RACE Against Time which owns two acres of land at Jack Wright Field that sits within the National Park. Accessed via public footpaths the area is being encouraged to regenerate into a mix of scrub, grassland and trees. The field is used to host groups of children and young people to explore and observe nature. The grant will be used to purchase a set of identification guides and wipeable maps that can be used to note species and habitats found on site. Additional seating will also be purchased to help a greater number of people interact whilst they are on site and increase the level of engagement.

### *Rural England Prosperity Fund*

In October we launched a small grant scheme for micro and small businesses with £20k funding from the Rural England Prosperity Fund. In partnership with NFDC we are offering small grants of up to £1,000 to help micro and small businesses to grow, adapt their ways of working or enter new markets. To date 9 businesses have had applications approved, including brewers, a firewood producer, jewelry maker and upholsterer.

The Fund closes on the 31 March 2026.

## **4 Organisation: Achieving Excellence**

### *Human Resources*

As of 31 December 2025, the total staff headcount was 80 or 67.84 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	<b>Headcount</b>	Variation from previous report	<b>Full Time Equivalents</b>	Variation from previous report
Core funded	57*	- 1	49.76*	- 0.86
Funded by external projects	23	- 1	18.08	- 0.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>- 2</b>	<b>67.84</b>	<b>- 1.27</b>

\*Of the core funded roles, one staff member (1 FTE) is working in shared services and 20 are part-time.

In the last few months we recruited to the following roles:

Role	Contract type	How funded
Ranger x 2	Permanent	Part funded by habitat mitigation contributions
National Park Intern (YouCAN)	Fixed term for six months	Project funded (YouCAN)

We said goodbye to:

Role	Contract type	How role will be filled in future
Planning Officer	Fixed term, core funded	N/A – end of fixed term contract
Inclusive Cycling Ride Leader	Fixed term, project funded (PEDALL)	Recruiting to role

We are currently recruiting for:

Role	Contract type	How funded
Inclusive Cycling Ride Leader	Fixed term	Project funded (PEDALL)

### *IT & Cyber Security Services*

**Security / Infrastructure** – Microsoft Purview – We began developing the Purview data management system together with the Data Protection Officer. This initiative will enable us to apply retention and sensitivity labels to electronic data, enhancing security and GDPR compliance.

Cyber Security Month - The IT Team rolled out a successful Cyber Security Month campaign, featuring activities for staff engagement, phishing simulations, and informative News posts to promote best practices.

Phishing Simulations – Conducted targeted phishing campaigns to boost awareness and assess our team's ability to respond.

The third Cyber Security Incident response plan tabletop exercise took place in November. As part of the exercise, we received a certificate of completion and await the final report.

Government Vulnerability System – We adopted the new national vulnerability alerting system for better proactive threat detection. We are the first National Park to join this

government-sponsored vulnerability management platform, which lets security researchers report website vulnerabilities directly to us. The reporting process is managed collaboratively by our team, members of the National Cyber Security Centre, and other central government partners.

Website Certificates – All the web server certificates were renewed ensuring continued secure connections.

Planning System – All the old Microfiche are now digitized and are available for planning staff to view electronically.

There was an upgrade to the core planning system which included Single Sign on and an enhanced media screen.

GIS – We have been involved with the walking routes for the new website. The team met with the new GIS Manager at NFDC. The GIS focus is a review of the data held by the Authority and the quality of the data.

Other - Mobile Phones – We have upgraded our older mobile phones.

Training – Team members attended a 365 Copilot webinar. The IT&CS Technician attended a Cadcorp SIS Desktop and IS (GB) data management training course.

IT Managers Network Meeting – We attended the National Parks IT Partnership meeting at the Peak District NP to exchange best practices and co-ordinate with wider sector initiatives.

## **Information management**

### *Information requests*

In the last quarter (Q3) we received 18 requests, which is similar to the five-year average of 17 per quarter. So far in the first three quarters of this financial year we have received 52 formal requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and subject access requests under the UK GDPR, compared to 46 in the same period last year. All but one were responded to within the statutory timeframe of 20 working days, with the average response time being 14 working days. There are currently three requests that were received at the end of December and have yet to be responded to; we anticipate being able to meet their January deadlines.

We endeavour to disclose as much information as possible in response to the requests received and have only withheld the requested information in its entirety on five occasions. In 25 of the requests we disclosed all the requested information or only made minor personal data redactions, such as email addresses; and a further six we partly disclosed the information. In nine cases we did not hold the information requested and where appropriate, we provided advice and assistance regarding which public authority

may hold the information sought. The remaining four were either handled informally or not pursued.

As in previous years many requests are for planning information (52%) and relate to specific planning and tree works applications, pre-apps and enforcement investigations, as well as more general requests about policy and statistics. Those which were not related to our planning function were predominantly concerned with our finance and IT arrangements (35%).

We are currently dealing with one internal review where a requester has queried a redaction and we are aware that one of the requests that we refused has subsequently been referred to the Information Commissioner. We are waiting to hear from their case officer.

### *Complaints*

We have responded to 11 formal complaints so far this year which is a decrease on the 14 received in the same period last year. Formal complaints are almost exclusively related to planning applications or enforcement investigations and this year is no exception. All were responded to within the 20 working day deadline, with the average response time being 16.6 working days. Eight were not upheld whilst three were partly upheld. In each of these three complaints, the planning application had been subject to delays and some inconsistencies in the advice provided. We have apologised, refunded the applicants fee and taken steps to improve our processes in the future.

### *Privacy and data protection*

During Q3, we received one request from a member of the public wishing to exercise their right to object to the processing of their personal data based on their particular situation under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). These types of requests remain relatively few and are considered on a case-by-case basis. The current one is under review and will be responded to within the deadline.

## **5 Members**

### **5.1 Some Members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events**

- October – 4 x Quadrant Meetings with Parish Councils
- 21 October – Planning Committee
- 23 October – Finance & Facilities Task & Finish Group
- 3 November – Resources, Audit & Performance Committee
- 18 November – Planning Committee
- 4 December – Consultative Panel
- 11 December – Members Day – Update on Major Proposals in the Waterside
- 16 December – Planning Committee

- 17 December - Finance & Facilities Task & Finish Group
- 20 January – Planning Committee
- January – 4 x Quadrant Meetings with Parish Councils

## **5.2 Forthcoming Members activities include:**

- 2 February – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 10 February – Members Day – Solent Gateway 2 Environmental Aspects
- 17 February – Planning Committee
- 24 February – Local Plan Review – Informal Members Session
- 2 March – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 5 March – Consultative Panel
- 9 March – New Forest Access Forum
- 17 March – Planning Committee

## **5.3 Chief Executive's external engagements**

- 20 October – National Parks England (NPE) Board meeting
- 21 October – Team New Forest Green Leaders session
- 23 October – Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) AGM & Conference
- 24 October – call with Solent Freeport Chief Executive
- 27 October – Regular meeting with National Parks Partnerships (NPP) Chief Executive
- 27 October – English National Parks Officers Group (ENPOG) meeting
- 29 October – Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Board meeting
- 29 October – Regular meeting with New Forest District Council (NFDC) Chief Executive
- 30 October – Greenprint Network planning meeting
- 30 October – Meeting with Deputy Director, Defra
- 30 October – Meeting with South Downs NPA (SDNPA) and NPE
- 31 October – call with Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England (FE)
- 4 November – Green Alliance Conference
- 5 November – NPP AGM
- 6 November – Business South Annual Conference
- 7 November – Hampshire & Isle of Wight (HIOW) Public Sector Leaders meeting
- 8 November – Rewilding Day at Knepp
- 9 November – Remembrance Sunday event
- 10 November – Regular meeting with NFDC Chief Executive
- 10 November – Partnership Plan Leaders Panel autumn meeting
- 11 November – Team New Forest Green Leaders session
- 12 November – Regular catch up with SDNPA Chief Executive
- 12-14 November – St George's Fellowship Conversation, Windsor Castle

- 24 November – ENPOG meeting
- 25 November – Business South Board meeting
- 25 November – Meeting with University of Southampton
- 26 November – Regular meeting with Deputy Surveyor, FE
- 27 November – Nature Recovery Strategy meeting
- 27 November – New Forest Heritage Centre – viewing and future plans event
- 1 December – Secretary of State Environmental Improvement Plan launch event
- 1 December – Meeting with Global Environment Lead, Common Purpose
- 3 December – National Parks UK Forum
- 3 December – Business South Festive event
- 4 December – Green Leadership preparatory meeting
- 4 December – Meeting with South East Area Lead, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
- 4 December – Meeting with Head of Nature Based Solutions, NPP
- 5 December – Judging at SPUD
- 5 December – Meeting with North York Moors NPA, SDNPA and NPP
- 9 December – Team New Forest Green Leaders Session
- 10 December – Meeting with Southampton City Council Chief Executive
- 11 December – Nature Recovery Leaders meeting
- 11 December – NPC Board meeting
- 12 December – Meeting re Women Leaders in Protected Landscapes
- 12 December – Leader to Leader Exchange, St George's Fellowship
- 15 December – South Western Railway VIP event at Southampton Railway Station
- 15 December – ENPOG
- 16 December – Meeting with previous PhD Greenprint associate
- 16 December – Campaign for National Parks (CNP) 'Our Radical Future' event
- 17 December – Regular catch up with Chief Executive, NFDC
- 18 December – NPC International Steering Group
- 18 December – Regular catch up with Chief Executive, NPP
- 18 December – Green Leadership meeting
- 18 December – Meeting with HCC regarding Local Government Reorganisation
- 18 December – Nature Recovery Strategy meeting
- 19 December – Regular catch up with Chief Executive, SDNPA
- 13 January – Team New Forest Green Leaders session
- 14 January – NFNPA / NPP workshop
- 15 January – Southern Water Independent Climate & Environment Group (ICEG)
- 16 January – Leader to Leader Exchange, St George's Fellowship
- 20 January – Sustainable South Action Group (Business South)
- 21 January – Meeting with NPP
- 22 January – Waterside Steering Group meeting
- 25 January – Volunteer Fair
- 26 January – ENPOG
- 28 January – HLS Board

#### **5.4 Chair's engagements**

- 20 October – NPE Board meeting
- 5 November – NPP AGM
- 5 November – Solent Freeport Board meeting
- 10 November – Partnership Plan Leaders Panel
- 12 November – NPE Directors meeting
- 14 November – Beaulieu Estate dinner
- 17 November – Call with Chair, SDNPA
- 20 November – Re-imagining Leadership in the Environment Sector workshop
- 25 November – Special Survival Fund (SSF) site visits
- 3 December – NPUK Forum
- 9 December – PfSH Joint Committee
- 11 December – NPE Board meeting
- 13 January – Quadrant Leads meeting
- 14 January – NPE Directors meeting
- 19 January – SSF pre meeting
- 20 January – Solent Freeport Board meeting
- 21 January – Meeting with NPP
- 27 January – SSF Quarterly Board meeting
- 28 January – SSF Post project meeting

Throughout various meetings with individual Officers and Members.

#### **6 Recommendation**

**To note the report.**