

AM 733/26

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

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 29 January 2026. 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.
Re:New Organisation: Achieving Excellence				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering high-quality services through a capable and motivated staff team • Maximising resources and using them efficiently and effectively • Modernising our use of the office space and our wider ways of working 				

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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As we move into spring and prepare our work programme for the new financial year, we are celebrating the Forest and all those who work to keep it special, working for nature, climate and people through our month-long Awakening Festival. Led by the New Forest National Park Authority and involving dozens of local groups, the annual festival features a packed programme of over 100 inspiring, hands-on events for all ages. Highlights include guided walks and talks with wildlife and nature experts, film screenings, creative workshops and art activities, farm experiences, repair cafés, litter picks and opportunities to meet local food producers <http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/awakening>. Always inspiring and a reminder of the passion and care for the Forest we are able to harness as we make plans for the year ahead.

A great example of partnership is the £1.3m Species Survival Fund scheme to restore New Forest habitats and increase wildlife which completed its two-year programme this quarter. Involving five partners working with us to help deliver Government's '30 by 30' target (Freshwater Habitats Trust; Amphibian and Reptile Conservation; Commoners Defence Association; Wildlife Trust; Wild New Forest), over 300 hectares were improved for nature across 31 sites including 21 hectares newly created for nature (24 new ponds, 648m of new hedgerow, over 5,000 trees planted, 12 meadows seeded). 135 hectares of heathlands were improved for nature, 100 hectares of wetlands created or restored, 65 hectares of woodlands restored or managed and 19 hectares of meadows created or restored. Over 38,000 people were reached through events, training, online promotion. Of the 560 volunteers who took part, 225 were new to volunteering with the partners. There were also fascinating finds, such as the nationally rare Candelabra Coral fungus. The programme has really exemplified the potential for us to work with partners to enhance nature around our boundaries and deliver targets set for the National Park by government, which will be a key focus for our next Partnership Plan to be developed over the coming year and launched in 2027.

The team has been reviewing all the many hundreds of responses to the draft Local Plan consultation, meeting with communities and preparing the next draft plan which will go out for people's views in the summer. A response to the New Forest District Council local plan has also been submitted following agreement by the Planning Committee, focusing

on the issue of meeting housing needs in the setting of the internationally important natural environment of the New Forest National Park.

Meanwhile, 90 affordable homes for local people in housing need are being delivered through our current Local Plan on the consented sites at the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel, Whartons Lane in Ashurst and Church Lane in Sway. The Development Control Team are also engaged in proposals for the Solent Gateway 2 site alongside other major applications such as for Ashurst Hospital, as well as determining 77 applications with an approval rate of 82% in the first 2 months of 2026.

This meeting we are also celebrating good design and how it contributes to the special qualities of the National Park through our Building Design Awards due to be presented at this Authority meeting. There were strong nominations across the categories of best residential; best non-residential; best conservation project; and best green project.

Work to improve responsible access to the National Park has received a big boost this period with a grant of £200,000 from Active Travel England being awarded to New Forest and all other English National Parks. Some of the grant will be used for crossing points on the A337 Lyndhurst to Lymington route and route improvements have been made at Lepe and Blackwater Arboretum. Two new sections of the England Coast Path through the National Park have also been approved and we will begin establishing these routes in April.

Preparations for the visitor season are underway with the production of the Pocket Guide 2026 and a meeting of the Visitor Information Communication Group of partners and organisations that offer information, literature and advice on responsible recreation - always a great opportunity to share knowledge and ideas and refresh collaboration for the season ahead. We're also waiting to hear if we've been successful in our bid for funding for electric buses for the New Forest Tour as well as making the usual preparations for the Tour season.

In the past year, nearly 2,200 young people experienced trips out into the National Park thanks to our travel grant, many of whom wouldn't have been able to access the Forest without the financial support. School visits and ranger assemblies have continued reaching almost 1,000 pupils since January and our work supporting young people into green careers has continued with talks, work experience interviews for up to 12 placements in the summer and welcoming National Park intern Eva Wilcock for six months (supported by the YouCAN youth for climate and nature scheme). This scheme continues to go from strength to strength as it moves into its final phase before funding ends in August. Highlights this period include a residential weekend for young carers at Cameron's Cottage at RSPB Franchises Lodge nature reserve and a second for young adults interested in learning practical conservation skills with many going on to sign up as

volunteers. The team and partners are also planning for the Urban Wild Festival in Southampton and New Forest Thrive festival in Ringwood.

Volunteering has been in the spotlight with a well-attended Volunteer Fair with over 50 organisations and 750 prospective volunteers attending. Many organisations reported they had good numbers sign up as volunteers thanks to the event. A highlight of recent volunteering tasks was planting 130 new trees at the last of the Species Survival Fund sites and a youth volunteer residential at Foxlease Park helping to plant a hedge and remove scrub at the site. At the same time, we were pleased to announce our purchase of a small part of the Foxlease Park estate, including two homes we plan to rent out to generate income after refurbishment and a bungalow we are exploring as a base for outdoor staff and volunteers to use. Our partnership with our new neighbours, charity Foxie's Future which owns Foxlease continues, with our volunteers taking part in regular conservation tasks.

The spring will also see more clarity emerge on the likely shape of local government in Hampshire as reorganisation and devolution discussions continue. We have been engaging with the process and partners involved to ensure the special qualities of the New Forest National Park, our natural and cultural heritage and identity are reflected in proposals. The work planned with partners towards our shared Partnership Plan this year will be vitally important in underlining the importance of the Forest to our wider area at this time of change, allowing us to agree a vision for the future and agree actions and resources to deliver it. As we close out our 20th Anniversary year with a family open day on Sunday 22 March, where people can find out about our work and share perspectives about the National Park, we look forward to a new financial year where we will play a key part in convening our partners and communities to refresh our shared commitment to secure the New Forest and its rich nature and culture for the next generations.

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

The £1.3m New Forest Species Survival Fund project ran from April 2024 and was completed at the end of February 2026. We were the lead partner, supported by Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, New Forest Commoners Defence Association, and Wild New Forest. The project delivered 321 hectares of improvements for nature against an initial target of 250 hectares as well as 165 engagement events for over 25,000 attendees.

Work was carried out across 31 landholdings and included:

- 5,063 trees planted as hedgerows and woodland improvements
- 1,069 metres of hedgerow restored
- 648 metres of new hedgerow created
- 14 existing ponds and waterbodies restored
- 24 new ponds created
- 12 meadows seeded with site-specific wildflower mixes

107 hectares was outside of Protected Sites (SSSI) meaning it can contribute to our Protected Landscape Target of 4,000 hectares of wildlife rich habitat created or restored outside of protected sites by 2042. New hedgerows will also contribute to the target for increased tree and woodland cover by 2050.

While the funded elements of the project ended on 28 February 2026, the capital works will continue to be monitored for a further three years with results available on an interim basis. This work will be carried out by Freshwater Habitats Trust and Wild New Forest and forms part of our match funding for the project.

Protected Sites Strategy

In a further example of partnership working, we have begun work with Natural England on developing a project that will examine the impact of deer on the condition of SSSIs in the New Forest. Enhancing the condition of protected sites is another of our Protected Landscapes targets and this work, while subject to confirmation of funding from Natural England, will lay the foundation for a coordinated approach to deer management across the National Park landscape.

Development Management

65 planning applications were received in the period 1 January to 24 February 2025. In the same period, 77 planning applications were determined with an approval rate of 82%.

In this period, 67 other applications were received and 121 pre-application enquiries.

Also in this period, two appeal decisions were received; one was dismissed and one was allowed. We have been involved in several recent appeal hearings with three more taking place shortly.

The team continues to be actively engaged in the emerging proposals for the Solent Gateway 2 site on the edge of the National Park; and is also progressing other large major applications such as Ashurst Hospital and Brockenhurst Park as well as cross-boundary prior approval applications and habitat regulation applications.

Monitoring site visits have been undertaken at three of the site allocations which are currently being built out: Lyndhurst Park Hotel; Church Lane, Sway; and Whartons Lane in Ashurst.

Continuing professional development has also been completed and this has involved a cob demonstration, biodiversity net gain and other technical planning matters.

The planning pages of the website have recently been reviewed to enhance user experience for planning agents and the public in readiness for the new NPA website launching soon.

Planning Enforcement

Over the past two months the Planning Enforcement Team has continued to meet its statutory responsibilities, applying a proportionate and effective approach to resolving breaches of planning control. We have undertaken initial assessments on 27 new enforcement cases and concluded 37 cases, leaving 297 live cases at the end of the February.

Two formal notices were issued—one Enforcement Notice and one Breach of Condition Notice - and the team is currently managing seven enforcement appeals. Notably, we

successfully defended an appeal against an Enforcement Notice issued earlier in the year. Voluntary compliance has also been secured in several cases, including full compliance with a notice requiring the cessation of the unauthorised use of a building as a dwellinghouse.

Formal action is being progressed where required, including work towards a prosecution for the continued stationing of an unauthorised mobile home, due for hearing at the end of the month, and preparations for a further trial scheduled for early April.

Policy

Following the conclusion of the public consultation on the draft New Forest National Park Local Plan just before Christmas 2025, the policy team has been reviewing the representations received in detail as the focus now moves to the drafting of the Regulation 19 'Submission draft' Local Plan which is due to be considered at the full Authority meeting in July 2026 prior to a final period of public consultation. As part of the review of representations further meetings have been held with several consultees.

At the February 2026 meeting of the Authority's Planning Committee, our response to the Government's consultation on proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was endorsed. The response was submitted by the deadline of 10 March 2026 and highlighted several areas that were supported (including the proposed revisions to refer to the 'natural beauty' of National Parks, rather than the existing 'scenic beauty'); as well as areas where significant concerns were highlighted (including the proposed revisions to the 'major development tests' relating to development in National Parks, currently set out in paragraph 190 of the NPPF, 2024). We also input into the joint response submitted by National Parks England on behalf of the nine English national park authorities and the Broads. The final version of the revised NPPF is due to be published later in 2026 and will be material to planning decisions from the date of publication.

At the March 2026 Planning Committee meeting our consultation response to the New Forest District Local Plan was endorsed. In this we recognise the challenges the District Council faces in seeking to address significant local housing needs in an area with a range of natural environment designations. We will continue to liaise closely with the District Council as both planning authorities progress towards the submission of their respective draft local plans for independent examination by the deadline of December 2026.

Archaeology

During this period, we consulted and progressed 24 planning applications (six NFNPA and 18 NFDC). With the limited opportunities for any large-scale development-created 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 in the New Forest.

For the SLA with Forestry England, we progressed 13 sites, provided advice regarding damage to Scheduled Monuments (outside of the National Park) and made visits to sites across Forestry England's Southern District. For the Higher-Level Stewardship scheme the team progressed 10 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 data of the New Forest and its surroundings which has often led to new archaeological discoveries.

With our recent improvements in data processing we have continued to deposit new and updated heritage information to the publicly accessible Historic Environment Record. Making heritage information publicly available is a cornerstone of public benefit transforming archaeology from a private academic pursuit into a shared social asset. It enables more research to be conducted by us and others, helping to grow our understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the New Forest.

Our latest LoCATE equipment training day for community groups was held in January. The day was well attended and the equipment is in constant use, 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>.

In February and early March, with the help and support of several staff members and volunteers, we cleared vegetation from Scheduled Monuments near Dibden. The work was funded by Forestry England and over several days volunteers endured howling winds and rain to clear thick gorse from several Bronze Age Barrows.

The New Forest Knowledge website is at end of life in its current guise. We are exploring how we could save the content added to the NFK website by the NFNPA. Some content has been identified that could be added to the new NFNPA website so that it can be kept publicly accessible.

Building Design and Conservation

Our Building Design Awards Panel met in February to review the shortlisted schemes for this year's awards. The panel was impressed by the quality of nominations and agreed to present awards in each of the main categories – best residential; best non-residential; best conservation project; and best green project. The awards highlight the positive impact development can have on the character and built environment of the National Park and illustrate the work that goes on between applicants, landowners and our officers to achieve high quality design.

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

The current Farming in Protected Landscapes programme ends at the end of March. A further four applications were approved in February by the Local Assessment Panel. As reported last time, the FiPL programme has been extended for a further 3 years, up to March 31 2029, having previously been extended annually for the past two years. We have also received confirmation of a budget allocation of £228,000 for 26/27, (£225k in 25/26). There will be an additional allocation to be administered through the FiPL programme, aimed at helping to deliver on our Protected Landscape target of creating or restoring wildlife-rich habitats. The three-year timetable provides an opportunity to carry out a light touch review of the programme with the Local Assessment Panel members.

The new FiPL funding is welcome, but we consider that the formula by which funding is allocated to agri-environment schemes does not reflect the global significance of the New Forest's biodiversity and the role that commoning plays in maintaining priority habitats. We continue to promote the contribution the National Park can make to national targets for nature recovery and highlight to Defra the shortcomings of basing funding allocations on national farming statistics that underplay the unique role that commoning plays in the land management of the National Park.

2 Second Purpose: Enjoy

Education and Youth

In January we welcomed Eva Wilcock to the team as National Park Intern (YouCAN) on a six month fixed term contract. We look forward to supporting her gaining as much experience as possible and her support in engaging with young people across all our projects.

Travel grant

The New Forest National Park Schools and groups travel grant this year has been supported in part by a National Parks Partnership with Forest Holidays allowing us to continue to offer £200 to local schools travelling to a venue within the National Park

including new Forest Wildlife Park, Avon Tyrell, Blashford Lakes, Tile Barn, Bucklers' Hard, Calshot Activities Centre and Minstead Study Centre.

The grant has been fully used and is currently oversubscribed, these funds have enabled 2,287 pupil days of learning for 2,165 young people (some visits are residential) and reduced the costs of coach travel passed onto parents by an average of £4.42. In many cases the coach travel added to the cost of the visit itself tips it over the point where families can afford to support these learning experiences. Schools are increasingly reticent to plan trips because of soaring coach costs with feedback from schools as follows:

Weston Secondary School (this refers to coach costs only):

'It allowed us to reduce the cost of the trip for pupils from £15.60 to £11.50 which makes a significant difference and the trip more accessible to pupils.'

Beaulieu Primary School

'If we had not been able to secure the grant the visit would have been too expensive for many of our parents to access.'

This term we have led 289 pupils on school day visits to the National Park so far. In addition, rangers have been into schools and spoken to another 668 pupils sharing the messages of the New Forest Code. We've continued to interview year 10 and 12 students who will be joining us in the summer for an in-depth insight into working for the National Park. We've also worked with local secondary schools and sixth forms to deliver bespoke green careers talks.

We've been preparing funding applications to enable continuity of our education programmes, refreshing resources, preparing content for the new website, and keeping up to date with the highest standards in outdoor learning.

Youth for Climate and Nature (YouCAN)

Our programmes enabling youth groups to take part in the Community Lottery funded YouCAN project are now full until the scheme ends in August 2026. Opportunities for young people to take part in Junior Rangers, Youth Volunteering and the Green Careers Network are in train as well as a reprisal of the youth focused New Forest Thrive festival this July. We are busy seeking funding to grow, develop and continue the youth programme beyond the summer.

Highlights from February 2026 included a residential experience for young carers at Cameron's Cottage (with thanks to RSPB and Cameron Bespolka Trust for providing the perfect venue to carry out practical conservation tasks, wildlife walks, campfires and to spot the first frogspawn of the year) and a second residential was held for young adults interested in learning practical conservation skills - attracting a lot of students who have now signed up as volunteers.

Youth Volunteer residential participant:

'I just wanted to say a massive thank you to you for this weekend. I can see how much effort you put in to making it enjoyable for everyone and it must have been exhausting but you are always very positive and upbeat!'

The Youth Board has lost and gained members, ran a highly successful joint workshop with NFNPA members, as well as having representatives invited to the NFNPA volunteer fair, Open Day, New Forest Biodiversity Conference and New Forest Association events. We have committed to continuing supporting the youth board beyond the end of the YOUCan project in August 2026 - although with reduced funding and staff support.

More than 215 people across Hampshire joined audiences at 'empowering' and 'highly emotive' performances of Theatre for Life's multivenuue tour of Bringing the Outside In. The production champions young people's views on the climate and nature emergencies, drawing on New Forest folklore and the nearby urban landscapes of Southampton. Around 150 young people were involved in research activities, rehearsals, and youth consultancy focus groups to develop the final production and five creatives aged between 18 and 25 staged the show, including actors, the lighting designer, and stage manager. Nearly 60 per cent of the tour's tickets were supported through the YouCAN scheme's access grant for young people (covering Pupil Premium, young carers, those in receipt of free school meals/school or college bursary, SEND, SEMH and/or home educated). Combined audiences for the theatre tour and debut performances totalled more than 400 people. In addition, reviews of the performance took place at festivals attended by a combined 1,300 people held through the wider YouCAN scheme in summer 2025.

Public and community events / rangers / recreation management

During this period our two new Area Rangers continued their site familiarisation, including introductions to land managers and businesses. A follow-up visit to Maybush Copse was completed at the request of the quadrant meeting, ensuring that community-raised issues are being addressed in a timely manner.

Joint operational work continued, including two Operation Mountie patrols targeting key high-risk locations and times associated with previous animal accidents. We represented the NPA at multi-agency planning meeting with the Police and partners to plan for the next six months, agreeing coordinated fly-tipping checks, joint business visits to increase participation in the Drive Aware initiative, and the introduction of positive-reinforcement 'thank you for driving under 40' sessions. The trial early morning car park surgery at Longdown with Police, Forestry England and New Forest Dog Owners Group was successful and has now been scheduled to move around key car parks monthly.

We continue to engage with partners and communities on a regular basis. We have met with Forestry England Keepers to coordinate priorities ahead of the ground nesting bird season and completed a joint patrol with Bird Aware Solent to share best practice and

knowledge along the coast. We were pleased to be support the well-attended Walking in Partnership events at Wootton and Milkham. We are continuing to discuss outreach sessions with underrepresented groups such as Downton 4 Families and joint visits to RSPB's Cameron's Cottage. We continued to support multiple volunteer sessions at Copythorne and Harrow Wood removing rhododendron and heathland regeneration.

Rangers attended Sense Active training to increase knowledge and understanding in preparation for inclusive guided walks. The team benefitted from listening to many of the presentations through the online Recreation in Nature conference and attendance at sessions of the New Forest Biodiversity conference. It is exceptionally useful for the team to understand the vast array of work that is happening across the National Park to manage and protect species and habitats and helps when engaging with members of the public and communities when out on engagement sessions or leading walks and talks. Rangers have also been learning about biofluorescence and training to use it to enhance night-walk content delivery.

Communications

The team has been focused on developing a new NPA website and writing, sourcing and uploading content. It includes new features to make the planning process easier and save time for the planning team; a new section on climate change in the National Park; Partnership Plan reporting; plus enhanced accessibility and sustainability. We are also working on new websites for the Higher Level Stewardship scheme, Green Halo Partnership and Green Health Hub.

The Awakening Festival throughout March was launched with over 100 events from dozens of different organisations, highlighting how special the New Forest is, the climate and nature emergencies and work being done to tackle them.

The announcement of our purchase of a small part of the Foxlease estate at Lyndhurst, becoming neighbours with the Foxies Future charity, was well received.

We launched the next round of young content creators as part of the YouCAN scheme, plus touring performances of the climate theatre youth production 'Bringing the Outside In' by Theatre for Life.

The Species Survival Fund (SSF) project has come to an end and we have promoted features, blogs, films and social media posts on the remarkable discoveries and results. Funding has been found after the SSF project ends to continue our work providing communications support for the Commoners Defence Association.

New case studies have been provided for PedALL focusing on riders and volunteers working with the charity, to drive fundraising and further support.

In our support of the New Forest Marque, we promoted the new Chair vacancy, Everton roadshow and 20 new members as well as writing features for this year's Local Produce Guide.

Publications including the Pocket Guide for 2026, Essential Guide with Forestry England and Park Life have been prepared, plus reprints of a wide range of wildlife leaflets.

Forestry England, New Forest Dogs Forum and the NPA are jointly working on a campaign to raise awareness of rare ground-nesting birds during the breeding season, asking people to keep themselves and their dogs on the tracks to avoid disturbing the birds.

To mark the end of the National Park's 20th anniversary year the NPA staff team arranged the first National Park Open Day at Lyndhurst Community Centre featuring talks and activities for all the family.

Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Projects

We ran a joint New Forest NPA / NHS Green Health Hub event on 3 March, attended by over 35 social prescribers, NHS staff and people from the groups that make up the Green Health Hub. Connections were made between prescribers and providers and we discussed ways to improve how people can join green health activities in the New Forest and surrounding area. The event will be written up, and future events will be planned later in the year. The Green Health Hub will be relaunched later in the spring.

PEDALL New Forest Inclusive Cycling

Pedall has been focused on maintenance in this period, with Patrick Lafford, Pedall Ride Leader and mechanic, fully servicing our fleet which needed attention following a very busy autumn and winter.

Pedall volunteers have been busy participating in training courses led by Gareth Jones, Operations Manager, including Ride Leader, Ride Assistant and Trackside Repair training. 10 volunteers and two members of the Project Team gained their Outdoor First Aid Training certificates. Safeguarding training for volunteers took place in March.

We have facility improvements underway at Burley Yard, with thanks to New Forest District Council funding. We also have exciting new additions to our cycle fleet (funded through Defra Access for All funding) ready for the new riding season, including two new power assisted 'Ice Trikes' which will support riders that require assistance with balance.

Pedall enjoyed a successful day at the NFNPA Volunteer Fair, and we have already seen newly recruited volunteers supporting rides.

Our rides commenced on 24 February, and we have a busy five day per week schedule across our two sites at Ashurst and Burley. We are delighted to welcome a new group

from Bartley Primary School, where students have made a strong start in their 'Pedall cycle maintenance and skills' course.

A NFNPA Members Pedall experience ride took place on 12 March.

Volunteering

Since the start of January, our conservation volunteers and youth volunteers have provided 165 volunteer days on tasks across the New Forest. Flourish In Nature provided 14 places for adults requiring additional support across six sessions.

The New Forest Volunteer Fair 2026 brought together over 50 organisations to engage nearly 750 members of the public with volunteering opportunities. A massive thank you to the Youth Board who ran the NFNPA stand for the day, and to all our staff, volunteers and members who came together to make the event possible. We've had fantastic feedback from the attending organisations, who are already asking how they can sign up for the next one!

In February 12 youth volunteers (18-30s) joined the NFNPA at Foxlease Park for a volunteering residential weekend (with an additional five joining for just the Saturday). Saturday took us to Pondhead Conservation Trust to assist with hazel coppicing, learning about charcoal production and woodland management. Sunday saw the group planting a mixed native hedgerow and cutting back scrub at Foxlease Park itself.

A highlight of recent tasks was planting 130 new trees at the last of the Species Survival Fund sites, replenishing a broadleaf understorey. Please see the lovely message received following the task:

'Everyone involved worked very hard on our stony sub-soil, but good humour was evident all day long. What a charming group of excellent people.'

'Thank you very much indeed for everything you have contributed to this little bit of woodland improvement.'

Access and Rights of Way

The routes of section 2 and section 5 of the Highcliffe to Calshot stretch of England Coast Path have been determined. This means that we will start establishment work in April 2026. We are in the process of contacting landowners and look forward to establishing a further 10 miles of National Trail along the stunning New Forest coast with a special emphasis on accessibility.

The Defra Access For All fund is delivering improved bridges and gates along the Lepe Loop promoted walking route. The Blackwater Arboretum accessible trail will benefit from improved surfacing, fencing, and signage. Both these improvement projects will be finished by the end of March.

3 Duty: Prosper

Re:New Forest Partnership Plan

The New Forest National Park Partnership Plan officers' group and Leaders' Panel both met in mid-March. The focus of the meetings is on reviewing the current Partnership Plan and preparing a new Plan. This will be the first to be prepared following the publication of the Government's Protected Landscape Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) and the updated national guidance on partnership plans.

Fundraising

We continue to examine opportunities to diversify our sources of income to reduce our reliance on the Defra grant and seek grant funding for key projects.

In January we held a workshop with National Parks Partnership, looking at the potential opportunities for income generation that might be provided by philanthropy, campaigns and individual giving; commercial sponsorship and emerging markets in nature-based solutions. We will be working with NPP throughout 26/27 to develop aspects of this work.

We have also submitted an Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Community Fund's regional Reaching Communities Fund for up to £1million over five years to sustain and grow its nature and climate-based education and youth engagement work beyond the conclusion of the current Climate Action Fund grant in August 2026.

We are also part of a UK Parks bid to the National Lottery Community Fund national programme that has a focus on embedding and strengthening youth voice and representation within National Park governance and decision-making. This could potentially provide £60-70k to support our youth work.

(More information on these bids, and the bid to the LEP legacy fund - see below - can be found in the RAPC paper 590/26)

Greenprint

In February a Greenprint network session took place on Green Finance, supported by the NFNPA and the Partnership for South Hampshire. This was well attended by local authority and Business South representatives and identified next steps and knowledge gaps for the region to take more advantage of green finance opportunities. The University of Southampton is funding a four-month placement with Greenprint and the NPA. Miranda Willis has joined us and will be assisting the Greenprint project as well as developing a report on how we frame the value of the Greenprint framework (and natural capital more widely) with businesses and the economy. Entitled 'A great place to live and work', this

study will be finished by the Autumn and will help shape future Greenprint work as well as help local authorities and businesses engage with the sustainability agenda as the new Mayoral Authority starts work.

New Forest Tour

The New Forest Tour will continue with the same number of buses as 2025, i.e. two on the Green route, and one on each the Blue and Red routes. The likely dates of operation are 4 July – 13 September. A significant change this year is the reversal of the Red route including Brockenhurst as a stopping point. This will improve east-west connectivity, enabling travel to and from Brockenhurst and Burley. November's Transport Summit demonstrated a demand for better public transport links across the Forest, so we are pleased to be able to meet this need during the summer season. The New Forest National Park Transport Summit Report is currently available on our website.

We are awaiting news on whether our application (in partnership with Go South Coast, the Tour operator) for future New Forest Tour funding from Hampshire County Council's LEP Legacy Fund has been successful. In early March RAPC supported our initial application and if we are offered a grant, we will bring a paper to RAPC later this year to set out the options for us receiving the grant to purchase new buses and electric charging infrastructure.

Sustainable Transport and Active Travel

We held our twice-yearly Visitor Information Communication Group meeting with partner organisations and local businesses who offer visitor provision in the form of literature and advice on responsible recreation. This is an opportunity to share knowledge, ideas and news ahead of the summer upcoming season and to identify areas on which we can collaborate.

We have been awarded a further year of Active Travel England's National Park Capability Fund (£200k) which we will use to develop two crossing points on the A337 as part of the Lyndhurst to Lymington Active Travel Route, as well as pilot approaches on the on-road leisure network identified in the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

Affordable Housing

Development continues to progress on the consented sites at the former Lyndhurst Park Hotel, Whartons Lane in Ashurst and Church Lane in Sway. Between them these sites are due to deliver over 90 affordable dwellings for local people in housing need, helping to deliver the Authority's legal duty to foster the socio-economic well-being of local communities within the National Park. The housing needs assessment work that forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review confirms the need to maximise affordable housing delivery on sites given the finite land supply within the National Park.

New Forest Marque

Following the resignation of the Chair of the Marque in the autumn and the ending of subsequent interim arrangements, a process of recruitment of a new Chair is underway. This voluntary role can play a key part in maintaining and developing the Marque for its members and leading its board of directors, all of whom contribute a huge amount to keep the Marque as a thriving network for local producers and craftspeople.

4 Organisation: Achieving Excellence

Human Resources

As of 6 March 2026, the total staff headcount was 80 or 67.38 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	Full Time Equivalents	Variation from previous report
Core funded	57*	0	49.27*	- 0.49
Funded by external projects	23	0	18.11	+ 0.03
Total	80	0	67.38	- 0.46

*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
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
Ranger	Permanent, core funded	Like for like replacement
Administration Assistant	Fixed term, project funded	N/A – end of fixed term contract

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

- Ongoing collaboration between the Data Protection Officer and IT teams on the Microsoft Purview Project, focusing on data retention and sensitive data tagging.
- Applied urgent firewall security patches to address vulnerabilities related to Fortinet SSO.
- Responded to Defra and National Cyber Security Centre security checks.

General

- Launched the refresh of the AI Champions and IT Champions programme; staff have been invited to express their interest in joining either group.
- Implemented Single Sign-On (SSO) of the planning system, to enhance security and reduce login issues.
- Developed a structured IT Work Programme for 2026, outlining planners, ownership, and prioritisation across security, M365, infrastructure, and user services.
- Conducted a review of aging laptops and equipment, identifying devices aged 5–7 years and preparing replacement or refurbishment options pending capital budget confirmation for 2026/27.
- We are pleased to say the recently received sustainability report, from the company used to dispose of our old IT equipment, showed how it had been reused and with zero waste going to landfill.

Information management

Information requests

This year, as at 5 March, we have received 63 formal requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations, and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which is six fewer than last year (- 8.7%). We have met the statutory deadline in all but one of the responses sent to date. There are five which have only recently been received by us so are currently outstanding; however, we anticipate being able to meet the deadline in all cases. We are aware of three requests which have been referred to the Information Commissioner's Office (the ICO), however they have yet to be allocated to an ICO case officer for investigation. Two of these are from two different requesters asking for the same document and have been with the ICO

for over a year. The third one is more recent and was only lodged with the ICO mid-December.

Complaints

The number of complaints received so far this year is 11, which is significantly down on the same period last year, when we received 19. All are related to planning matters; specific planning applications, enforcement investigations or pre-application enquiries. We met our policy response deadline of 20 working days in all cases. Eight complaints were not upheld. The remaining three complaints were partly upheld. In each of these three cases, we refunded the application or pre-app fee, and planning staff worked with the complainants to progress their applications expediently. Currently we have no outstanding complaints and are not aware of any referrals to The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman).

In January the Ombudsman issued a decision in relation to a complaint about how we handled a Prior Notification application. In summary the Ombudsman decided that *“We will not investigate this complaint about the Authority’s handling of a prior notification application. There is insufficient evidence that fault by the Authority has caused the complainant a significant personal injustice.”* The decision notice is available at this link.

[New Forest National Park Authority \(25 001 944\)](#)

The Ombudsman published a new Complaint Handling Code (the Code) in 2024. They have indicated that the Code will be applied to all complaints received by them after 1 April 2026. As we are not a council there is no statutory obligation on us to comply with the Code, however we have aligned our own Complaints Process with it, as far as it is reasonable to do so, given the small number of formal complaints that we receive. Our updated process will be used to consider complaints received from the start of the new financial year. We were already complying with most of the recommendations in the Code. The most noteworthy updates are the change in the name of each stage and the first stage response deadline is reduced from 20 working days to 15, but it can still be expended where the matter is complex or there are exceptional reasons to do so. We do not anticipate that the changes will have a significant impact on staff workloads or the outcomes for the complainants.

Privacy and data protection

We continue to review and update our website, documents and privacy notices to improve transparency and compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the new [Data \(Use and Access\) Act 2025](#) (DUAA). The DUAA requires us to have a formal complaints procedure in place to consider data protection matters by June 2026; these requirements have been incorporated into the complaints process as described above.

So far this year we have received 11 requests from individuals wishing to exercise their rights under the GDPR and DPA. This is a large increase on the two received last year, however eight of them related to a single planning application, where the representees

asked us not to put their name and address on our website. The remaining three were from other individuals who also wished to restrict the information that is placed online. Under the GDPR, data subjects may object to the processing of their data based on 'their particular situation' and therefore these types of requests are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Some were complied with and others refused.

5 Members

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

- 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

5.2 Forthcoming Members activities include:

- 2 April – Members Day TBC
- 15 April – Local Plan Review Informal Members Session
- 21 April – Planning Committee
- 12 May – Standards Committee
- 19 May – Planning Committee
- 1 June – Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
- 4 June – Consultative Panel
- 8 June – New Forest Access Forum
- 11 June – Local Plan Review Informal Members Session
- 16 June – Planning Committee
- 24 June – Members Day TBC
- 21 July – Planning Committee

5.3 Chief Executive's external engagements

- 30 January – Women in Protected Landscapes (WiPL) meeting
- 31 January – Theatre for Life performance
- 4 February – NPA / National Trust Liaison meeting
- 10 February – Protected Landscapes Capital Grant Scheme evaluation workshop
- 11 February – Meeting with Natural England
- 12 February – Meeting with National Parks Partnerships (NPP)

- 12 February – Meeting with founder National Park City movement
- 13 February – Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) Chief Executive's meeting
- 20 February – South Hampshire Forest Park meeting
- 25 February – Meeting with Exmoor National Park Chief Executive
- 26 February – National Park City International Group meeting
- 26 February – Meeting with Cllr Heron, NFDC
- 27 February – Greenprint Network event – Green Finance
- 27 February – Intro meeting with new UoS Greenprint associate
- 2 March – Governance in Protected Landscapes workshop
- 2 March – Speaker at New Forest Rotary Club meeting
- 3 March – New Forest Biodiversity Forum
- 3 March – Meeting Deputy Surveyor
- 4 March – Preparatory meeting for WiPL online event
- 5 March – Introductory meeting with new Executive Director, NPE
- 5 March – Regular meeting with NFDC Chief Executive
- 5 March – New Forest Heritage Centre Exhibition – Forest Firms
- 6 March – Speaker at Women's Leadership in Protected Landscapes webinar
- 6 March – Meeting with Southampton City Council
- 9 March – Meeting about International Women's Day (IWD) future event
- 9 March – Nature Recovery Leads national meeting
- 11 March – NPE Board meeting
- 16 March – Meeting with Mezzana Partners
- 16 March – Nature Recovery Leads national meeting
- 18 March – Meeting with NPA CXs
- 18 March – Meeting with Deputy Director of Universal Services, HCC
- 19 March – Meeting with Brockenhurst College Chief Executive
- 19 March – Meeting with Natural England
- 22 March – New Forest National Park 20th Anniversary celebration day
- 23 March – Meeting with Friends of New Forest
- 24 March – Business South Action Group Chairs meeting
- 24 March – Partnership Plan Leaders Panel
- 25 March – Regular catch up with NFDC Chief Executive

5.4 Chair's external engagements

- 4 February – Meeting with the Deputy Surveyor
- 12 February – Meeting with NPP
- 24 February – Meeting with Commoners Defence Association (CDA) Chair
- 5 March – Introductory meeting with new Executive Director, NPE
- 5 March – Consultative Panel
- 10 March – NPE Board meeting
- 17 March – Introductory meeting with NFDC Leader and Chief Executive

- 24 March – Meeting with the Official Verderer
- 24 March – Partnership Plan Leaders Panel

6 Recommendation

To note the report.