

CONSULTATIVE PANEL MEETING – 4 December 2025

CHAIR'S REPORT

Report by: Brian Tarnoff, Chair, New Forest Consultative Panel

1 Chair's Notes on the Previous Meeting 4th September 2025

1.1 Commoners National Minority

Brice Stratford, Lyndhurst Parish Councillor described the scheme which might benefit New Forest Commoners. National Minority Status was established in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). This is an international treaty, UK ratified, to protect the rights of minority communities. Recognition affirms a group's right to preserve and develop its distinct culture and identity. The possible practical outcome could give New Forest Commoners legal standing in local decision making.

The Q&A heavily featured informal debate between Lyndsey Stride, New Forest Commoner, Foundation for Common Land staff, and, as it transpired, "place based identity" is amongst her specialist subjects. While the Chair gave this conversation its head perhaps too much for some panel members – admittedly it at times fell into 't'is! / 't'isnt! – it did tease out these aspects of the proposal, which may need fleshing out in future iterations of the report:

- There are many other Commoning Communities, in that respect the New Forest is not unique, is there a danger that these other communities would also bid for status
 - Not opposed for other groups who fit the criteria to seek status.
 - Conversation briefly fell into a rabbit hole of comparison of the continuity/history/legal standing of Dartmoor vs New Forest Commoning
- Not convinced there is full support from the Commoning community
 - (Chair's retroactive note: supposing any monolithic opinion of Commoners, even, say with support from CDA, is treading thin ice).
- DEFRA already recognizes/meets with Commoning Groups, it might not make a difference. Cornish and Ulster Scots seem to have only secured funding for language preservation, with no other benefits.
 - Cornish MP is currently arguing in Parliament that the Status be taken into account to grant them a different devolution deal in the Local Government Reorganization. Julian Lewis has already asked a question in Parliament pointing out that divorcing the Waterside (as part of LGR) would be negatively impact Commoning, the minority status could help that argument.

- Self-Identification is problematic and may be misused, taken advantage, or thereby disadvantage more genuine claims.
 - The status does not create any new framework for identification. This would rely on current definitions and practice by Verderers and Commoners Defence Association. It wouldn't be controversial; you would need to already be recognized as an actively practicing Commoner.

The Chair asked some practical questions:

- What is the timeframe for developing the proposal or any decisions?
 - The Council of Europe Advisory Committee for FCNM has a representative of each member country. Brice has engaged with the UK rep a University of Glasgow academic, who has passed it onto the secretariat.
 - The UK rep will be visiting the New Forest in the next few months to meet Andrew Parry-Norton, Chair of the CDA, and with Julian Lewis, the Verderers, NFDC, and the NFNPA.
 - After this the entire Advisory Committee may visit at some point in 2026 / 2027. The entire process may take 2-3 years, and will require much more formally reporting and endorsement from all parties.
- For comparison, how long did the Cornish and Ulster Scots status take?
 - Cornish took approx. 10 years.
 - Ulster Scots took a few months.
 - There isn't really a single set process. The UK Government now recognizes that our Commoners fall under this, and now it is a matter of working within the 5 year cycle of the Council of Europe.
 - If the Council of Europe recognize New Forest Commoners in this way, it may pave the way for other Commoning communities.

1.2 Discussion Panel Meeting Start Times

With no argument, but some hemming and hawing from the Chair over procedure, the Panel opted to shift the start time half an hour earlier to 7pm. **Please note: this takes effect at the December meeting. My previous report suggested that this might be held for a formal vote at the December meeting; the strong consensus for trialling the change rendered that notion obsolete.**

1.3 Forestry England – Richard Burke

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- Some clarification requested over previous meeting note about the FE Car Park at Ogdens.
 - Currently closed, under review, aspiration to reopen with improved access.

- Are FE liaising with Hampshire County Council and National Trust over car park plans?
 - HCC are bringing in charges, and are working to bring their charging in concurrently with FE. In discussion with NT over their less advanced plans.
- “No Riding Signs” on bridges, with the implication that riders are being singled out while Agisters and stock.
 - Those bridges were never designed to be used by horses. The bridge portfolio is being reviewed, and some designated as bridleway worthy have been redecked with much thicker timber. Agister’s use of bridges has been discussed, their practice includes mitigating measures and falls within their risk assessment.
 - Chair’s Retroactive Note: There are certainly differences in liability to FE over use of their bridges by employees, commoner’s stock and members of the public. The resources issues of maintaining bridges for amenity to standards of different users may not always be ideally balanced.
- Further comment that perhaps costs could be saved by not taking bridges to current specifications. Implication that Consultant Engineers signing off on bridges applying a stricter standard where compromises could exist.
 - FE has the obligation to make sure that their bridges are safe, and must take action to prevent risk and harm to the public, especially where some have failed in the past.
- Clearance of pine, replacing with natural woodland, any consideration to change in run-off.
 - Generally speaking, FE will take measures such as putting temporary heather bales in ditches during the harvesting as mitigation.
 - There may be some consideration in impact statement prepared for the Forest Design Plans
 - However, locally much of the Forest is relatively flat, so it may be less of an issue. This sort of restoration, supplanting Pine with natural woodland has been going on for about 25 years, and there’s been no noticeable flooding spike from this so far.
 - Concerns will be forwarded to the appropriate production team.

1.4 Verderers

Anthony Pasmore noted that the Verderers had not yet been formally consulted on the Commoners Minority Status proposal. He stated that his personal view was aligned with the issues raised by Mrs. Stride during the earlier Q&A.

The Verderers were hopeful that the NFDC’s had moved towards the Verderers position on the waste and food waste bins, placing restrictions on where they may be placed. However, the trial confining these restrictions to the pannage season, does not go far

enough. The bins are clearly not donkey resistant and there are record numbers of donkeys on the Forest.

Leisure Plots – an instance near Linwood where farm field has been split up into half acre plots being offered at at 60k per acre. The access to these plots will be through the open woodland of the Forest. The Verderers consider this a very dangerous precedent. They hope the National Park, particularly as the Planning Authority, are taking this very seriously. This will be a problem for other National Parks, and will be a future problem here if it is not curtailed.

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members:

- Brice Stratford, in his capacity as a Parish Councillor member of the Panel, observed that if the proposed Commoners Minority Status was in place, then NFDC would have been required by law to consult with the Verderers and the CDA about the wheelie bins before the currently problematic implementation, avoiding the current mess.
 - Anthony expressed putative delight over this speculative scenario.
- A panel member reported instance of some thin ponies seen in their area.
 - If you see ponies that are not in satisfactory condition, please ring the Verderer's office straightaway (NUMBER) and give details. The Verderers have standards that have to be complied with, if a pony falls below those standards it may be ordered off the Forest. Photos helpful, but location very important for Agisters to identify the haunt.
 - Some surprise over this instance as this Summer has been excellent for the Ponies with very few below the standard.

1.5 NFDC – Derek Tipp

Unfortunately, Derek was unavoidably absent. The Chair noted that Derek had provided a document that would be available on the Panel website:

[NFDC Update September 2025](#)

1.6 National Park Authority– Nigel Stone

The Q&A included points / questions made by Panel members, largely putting Nigel on the spot to answer queries about NFDC in the unfortunate absence of their representative:

- Will the Local Plans be relevant given the Local Government Reorganization? (particularly if NFDC is no longer the local authority)
 - Local Plans are required to be updated every five years. Under LGR the change will take place in April 2028. If the Local Plan isn't up to date in this interim, any planning decision could be challenged in court.

- NFDC are doing the right thing in updating their Plan for this reason, additionally, there are no certainties that LGR will progress.
(Chair's note: [NFDC have since paused the consultation on their local plan](#) so that it does not run concurrently with the LGR consultations).
- In the Local Government Reorganization's, many seem to support keeping the New Forest as a separate entity in the same way the Isle of Wight (the common element of all official proposals is leaving IOW as is). Why not?
 - The criteria given by the Government for new LGR unitary authorities included that they should have approx. 500k population. The IOW was given a pass from this criteria due to its obvious geographic division. The New Forest on its own, however much we might prefer this, would fall foul.
- A cynical comment forwarded from one of the Forest quadrant meetings was that LGR had "already been decided by Government".
 - Nigel ventured the opinion that Government do listen to local authorities. Time and money is being spent on these consultations. He was aware of the cynical view that had been expressed.

2 Statutory Member Updates and Current Presentations for September Meeting

2.1 National Park Authority – Nigel Stone, CFO / Head of Resources

Nigel will update us on the approved Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). Hampshire County Council formally approved the Plan on 18 September 2025. Hampshire County Council (HCC), New Forest District Council (NFDC), New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) and Forestry England worked to develop this LCWIP to deliver improvements across the New Forest area. The plan sets out the priorities for investment in walking and cycling in the New Forest area over the next 10 years.

[New Forest District and National Park LCWIP](#) [HCC Decision Report 18 September 2025](#)
[New Forest District \(Waterside\) LCWIP](#) [HCC Decision Report 7 November 2022](#)

Nigel will cover future developments for both the National Park Authority's work programme for 2026/27 and the timetable for their next Management/Partnership Plan.

2.2 Forestry Commission – Craig Harrison and Richard Burke

Craig and Richard will present the latest on the Car Park charging scheme rolling out in April 2026, as well as the usual operational updates.

2.3 NFDC – Derek Tipp

Derek will update the Panel on the Local Plan, Local Government Reorganization (see 3.1 below) and the state of play on the Council's Waste Collection.

2.4 Saving the High Street: Brockenhurst – Nicola Carass, CEO, GoNewForest

Ongoing Roadworks threatened access in Brockenhurst. We will hear a case study on the response to mitigate and assist local businesses.

Go New Forest for tourism promoters and partners: <https://gonewforest.com/about-us>.

Visit The New Forest, tourist portal: <https://www.thenewforest.co.uk/>

2.5 New Forest National Park Local Plan – David Illsley, Head of Planning and Place, New Forest National Park

At our March 2025 meeting, David presented on the “Direction of Travel” Consultation on the Park's next local Plan. The next stage of consultation is now upon us running from 5 November to 19 December 2025. The revised Local Plan will look forward to 2043 and is a key way through which the two statutory National Park purposes and related socio-economic duty are delivered.

Drop-in sessions about the consultation will be available as follows:

- Wednesday 26 November, 4.30pm – 5.30pm, online.
Join at: [Local Plan Online Consultation 2025 | Meeting-Join | Microsoft Teams](#)
- Tuesday 2 December, 2pm – 7pm, Redlynch Village Hall
- Thursday 4 December, 2pm – 7pm, Colbury Memorial Hall
- Friday 5 December, 2pm – 7pm, Sway Village Hall
- Tuesday 9 December, 2pm – 7pm, Lyndhurst Community Centre
- Friday 12 December, 2pm – 7pm, Landford Methodist Hall

[New Forest National Park Current Local Plan adopted 2019](#)

[Next stage of New Forest National Park Local Plan review open for comment](#)

[Local Plan Review Response Webpage](#)

3 Consultations / Other Pertinent Information

3.1 Local Government Reorganization Consultations Continue

As this issue, and the various options proposed progress, we now have another round of consultation, but now at a level that ostensibly will factor into the Government's decision. This consultation is from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It asks between 10-12 questions about 4 proposals put forward by various groups of councils for the portioning out of Hampshire into either 4 or 5 unitary councils.

[Consultation on Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton](#)

It will be of no surprise that my personal preference, if we must choose this change in government which has uncertain/unproven benefit, would be the proposal from NFDC which is the only one that both keeps the New Forest aligned with other largely rural areas of Hampshire, and keeps the New Forest area, including the Waterside, complete.

As Chair, if time allows under AOB, I may ask if the Panel has a significant consensus on these choices. The Panel rarely makes unified statements. The last time this occurred was over the encroachment of a private landowner excluding Commoning from the Common land owned. The Panel unanimously asked the then Chair to express the Panel's support for the Commoners effected and the Commoning community in general.

3.2 Hampshire County Council Countryside Access Plan 2025 to 2035

At our December 2024 meeting, Abby Sullivan gave the panel a presentation on The Countryside Access Plan (CAP) which includes the statutorily required Rights of Way improvement Plan (ROWIP) designed to set out how the Rights of Way network may be managed or enhanced it to meet the public's needs. The Consultation which I noted in my June 2025 report ran from 14th of May 2025 to 6th of August 2025. Following a decision at the HCC Executive Lead Member for Universal Services Decision Day on 22 September 2025, the draft Countryside Access Plan 2025-35 was officially adopted on 1 October 2025.

[Hampshire Countryside Access Plan Web page](#)

[Hampshire Countryside Access Plan 2025-2035](#)

[Hampshire Countryside Access Plan 2025-2035 summary](#)

3.3 Election for Chair, March 2026

Just a reminder to members that our March Meeting will begin with elections for Panel Chair. I am standing for the role again and welcome any sincere attempt to relieve me of the burden. I'll include this reminder again in my report for the March meeting.