



Verderers of the New Forest

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Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy A response by the Verderers of the New Forest

This note has been prepared by the Verderers of the New Forest in response to the consultation by Hampshire County Council over the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire. The response relates solely to the New Forest and the role of the Verderers.

The Court recognises that Local Nature Recovery Strategies originate from central government. Our understanding is that it is intended the strategies will guide investment by government (such as future agri-environment schemes) and will direct the response of industry to initiatives such as Biodiversity Net Gain and nutrient neutrality. The Strategy is also intended to define the obligations of all statutory bodies towards wildlife and to inform development plans. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-nature-recovery-strategies/local-nature-recovery-strategies> .

The Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy has been drafted by officers of Hampshire County Council who have followed the directions set by Whitehall. The draft Strategy is not the first exercise of recent years to consider strategic priorities for nature recovery in the New Forest. Detailed work on priorities and opportunities informed the *New Nature Challenge* which was produced in 2022 by an independently chaired partnership supported by the National Park Authority <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/protecting-nature/renew-nature/> . The resulting report informed the *National Park Partnership Plan*. <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/partnership-plan/>.

In addition, strategic priorities and targets for recovering nature within the New Forest Special Area of Conservation are set out in a management plan (2001- revised 2025). <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5661861545246720>.

Of fundamental importance to the Court is that all strategies are supportive of the Forest and do not contribute to the attrition of its special qualities. We look to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be redrafted to recognise the paramount importance of maintaining the pastoral economy of New Forest commoning, which in turn underpins the ecological process which drive the diversity of the New Forest commons as recognised in the New Forest SSSI, Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. This pastoral economy is dependent on the farmland which lies within and around those designated sites. Without this back-up grazing land the very existence of commoning is threatened and commoning is crucial to the continuance of the New

Forest - without commoning there is no New Forest! Therefore, this land needs to be protected from development pressures, or ill-advised tree planting schemes, for example. Loss of back-up grazing land is damaging to the New Forest.

The Court is concerned that the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy has not recognised priorities set out in the Partnership Plan nor the SAC Management Plan and has pursued an entirely different line of thinking.

The draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The Court recognises that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy includes a chapter specific to the New Forest (pages 60-66). There are other detailed matters pertinent to the Forest found throughout the other chapters. It is encouraging that the key issues identified as challenging the Forest (page 65) reflect familiar themes including the need for recreation management and for supporting the economics of commoning; however, the concluding priorities, entitled 'Opportunities for nature recovery' have an unfamiliar focus of hedgerow maintenance, tree planting, pond digging and a range of projects engaging people. Whilst having a generic value to the English farmed countryside, the opportunities do not offer a strategic response to the strategic challenges of the New Forest.

The draft Strategy represents a compilation of existing projects and enthusiasms with no attempt to analyse inherent conflicts between current initiatives or draw strategic themes from the eclectic elements presented. For example, there is resistance to heathland restoration (through perceived loss of birds of conifers p.65) whilst other sections promote heathland restoration (p.89). Indeed, the Strategy suggests that plantations are irreplaceable habitats, whereas heathlands are not. This runs directly contrary to the SAC Management plan which requires that plantation should be reverted to Open Forest habitats.

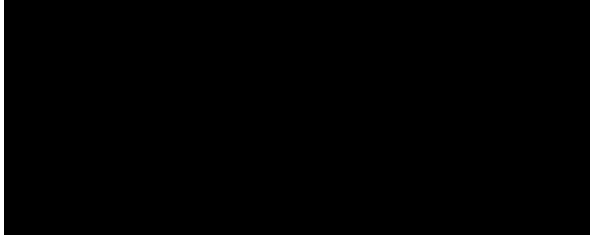
A way forward

The risk is that central government will adhere to the original purpose of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and redirect resources away from current priorities. Such an approach would have catastrophic consequences for the conservation of the Forest.

It is unclear what may be changed following the consultation.

Ideally, we seek a change in the 'opportunities' to shift the emphasis of the draft Strategy towards recognised pre-existing strategic priorities. We would be happy to work with the authors in articulating these priorities. If this was not possible, then we seek greater emphasis on these strategic priorities in the 'Challenges' section and to add caveats to the 'Opportunities' section to ensure that tree planting, pond digging and the other 'priorities' are only delivered where they are supportive of the Forest's commoning economy. This would safeguard the enclosed lands upon which the Forest's commoners depend. These lands include fields with common rights attached (as mapped in the Atlas of Claims) along with other farmland.

As it currently stands, the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy poses an existential threat to the New Forest through the diversion of resources away from true priorities. This harmful diversion of resources is compounded through support for initiatives which represent a risk to the farmlands upon which New Forest commoning depends.



20th June 2025.