



Care for the Forest, care for each other - 2021 Action Plan

New Forest organisations are calling on people to ‘care for the Forest, care for each other’ and have put together a joint action plan to help to manage the increased visitor numbers expected this year.

The plan aims to ensure that the New Forest can play a positive and active role in helping people to recover in the great outdoors from the toll taken by the lockdown, whilst also caring for this special place. It also aims to work closely with and support residents and the local business community.

Lessons from 2020

Last year was exceptional in many ways and saw greater numbers of people spending time in the countryside as outdoor space and exercise became critical. While the majority respected these landscapes, the New Forest, like many other places around the country also experienced a rise in anti-social behaviour.

Forest organisations, emergency services and communities worked to address these issues. Much was learned through this experience and progress made in several areas including: increasing the impact of patrols by pooling resources, gaining the support of over 50 local retailers to ban disposable BBQs, and recruiting over 400 New Forest Ambassadors with parish councils to help support the Forest. A co-ordinated campaign by local landowners was also put in place sticking hundreds of cars to discourage verge parking and gateway blocking. Joint communication about caring for the Forest reached over 6 million people.

2021 Action Plan

With overseas travel remaining uncertain, 2021 is set to be another challenging year with large numbers of visitors expected.

A plan has been developed jointly by Forestry England, the New Forest National Park Authority, New Forest District Council, and tourism body Go New Forest with support from The Verderers, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, and Hampshire Constabulary.

The action plan has been created to support the landscape and local community during this time, and encourage greater care and respect for the area among all those spending time here.

Its focus is on all organisations sharing resources in a concerted effort to be well prepared for and able to meet critical recreational pressure. It aims to ensure that the area can play an active role in helping people to recover in the great outdoors whilst also caring for the Forest.

Key aspects of the plan include...

1. Increased patrols & focus on visitor hotspots

Greater numbers of staff across all organisations - including increased numbers of FE rangers, New Forest National Park Authority rangers and apprentice rangers - will be

available for patrol duties with joint patrols focused on key locations and visitor hotspots. This highly visible and coordinated approach will make the best use of finite resources by focusing on managing demand and distribution of visitors at these key pressure points.

When the easing of restrictions allows, these staff will also be boosted by Forestry England's team of Volunteer Rangers.

New Forest Ambassadors, led by the National Park Authority and parish councils, will be helping with litter picking, reporting parking issues and creating a greater awareness of the New Forest Code.

Levels and types of littering will be closely monitored and, similar to last year, collections increased to help manage this. At coastal sites free litter bags will be made available making it easier for people to do the right thing and take their litter home.

2. Joined-up communication

A joint visitor campaign, is being rolled out with tourism body, Go New Forest and its membership of tourism providers. This will provide information for visitors both before and during their visit and how they can help care for the Forest whilst also caring for each other.

Core to the campaign will be The New Forest Code - a clear set of actions and guidance on how to care for the Forest. www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/news/new-forest-code/ Communications may also draw on national campaigns where relevant including the refreshed Countryside Code and Defra's Protect the Outdoors Campaign.

The 10 Camping in the Forest sites are planning to open this year, in line with government guidance and timetables. These locations together with other key visitor campsites and accommodation providers will be targeted with this information and patrols.

Messages about caring for the special qualities of the New Forest have also been included in the New Forest Essential Guide available at several New Forest car parks and at a wide range of tourism outlets across the area.

3. Increased and more prominent signage

The campaign will include prominent signage and targeted communications to all those spending time in the Forest. These will be visible in car parks and at key gateways to the New Forest.

Signage at all Forestry England's car parks and thresholds is currently being updated to clearly mark the Crown lands boundary, which is a Special Site of Scientific Interest. This signage can be easily adapted to reflect seasonal and priority messages.

4. Fire Safety - BBQ & fire ban

Last year saw a significant rise in the number of BBQs being used irresponsibly, presenting a major risk of wildfire with potentially devastating effects. In just one weekend rangers working with the fire service extinguished over 60 unsafe BBQs.

The NPA campaign to encourage retailers to ban the sale of disposable BBQs saw 50 retailers taking part, and a social media reach of 655,000 impressions and 65,000

engagements. The campaign will be continued this year with the aim of recruiting more outlets to support it.

To help reduce the risks, the New Forest Crown Lands have now been declared a complete **no BBQ and fire zone**. These are no longer permitted in car parks or areas of the forest managed by Forestry England. In line with this, all BBQ facilities at Forestry England sites have been removed. Highly visible signage is being installed at these sites, and prominent no BBQ messages displayed at Forestry England car parks and information points.

The ban will be widely communicated and joint patrols with the fire service carried out across the Forest at periods of peak fire risk.

5. Supporting the working forest

Greater support will be provided to the commoning community so that the working Forest can continue to operate with as little disruption as possible.

This will include providing additional patrol resources around key events such as drifts, and targeted information to discourage feeding and petting livestock, and promote animal safety.

6. Task Force

A task force of organisations will meet weekly to review the joint action plan and the response to any issues.

Working together - how to support the campaign

The ‘care for the Forest, care for each other’ message conveys the spirit of how we want to work with each other and our visitors. The countryside and the coast have an important role to play in people’s recovery from the pandemic and they also needs our care.

We all have a role to play in supporting the special landscape here in the New Forest and by working together we can really make a difference.

We would welcome your support and involvement in the action plan.

Support & Share the New Forest Code - Sharing the key steps we can all take to care for the New Forest and its wildlife is a great way to support the campaign. Copies of the code, posters and other communications materials are available including a downloadable exhibition for use in community spaces. To download and order these please

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/news/new-forest-code/

How your community can get involved - Those wanting to get involved in actively supporting the Forest could consider becoming a New Forest Ambassador you can find out more here - www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/communities/get-involved/what-you-can-do-the-new-forest-ambassador-scheme/

Disposable BBQ ban - Another practical way to get involved is to encourage a greater number of local retailers to support the ban on disposable BBQs. Information on the campaign can be found here www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/communities/get-involved/ban-on-bbqs/

Reporting/ Sharing Information - Local organisations and individuals can help us identify issues and hotspots across the area by sharing their observations. Details on where to report key issues can be found here www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/communities/get-involved/report-a-problem/

For more information, please contact:

Forestry England - southern.enquiries@forestryengland.uk

New Forest National Park Authority - enquiries@newforestnpa.gov.uk

New Forest District Council - customer.services@nfdc.gov.uk

Go New Forest - anthony@gonewforest.com