



Dear Laura (if I may)

Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy: New Forest

Thank you for your recent presentation to the New Forest Consultative Panel.

This representation is made by the New Forest Association in response to the Hampshire County Council's consultation on the draft *Local Nature Recovery Strategy*. The representation relates solely to the New Forest.

The New Forest Association is a charity, registered in England and Wales no. 260328. The Association was founded in 1867 in response to threats to the amenities of the Forest from enclosure and plantation forestry. The Association is the national park society for the New Forest and works in partnership with the Campaign for National Parks. The Association seeks to take a long view of strategic issues affecting the Forest and therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on the County Council's draft Strategy. In common with the draft Strategy, the Association takes a broad view of the extent of the Forest and considers both the Open Forest and the enclosed landscapes.

The Association recognises the potential importance of the *Local Nature Recovery Strategy* in the future funding of environmental initiatives in the New Forest. We were therefore active participants in the public meetings relating to this Strategy. At the public meetings we contributed our understanding of the strategic issues relating to the maintenance and recovery of nature in the New Forest. This understanding is drawn from many studies commissioned by the Association and others, all of which are in the public domain. In turn, the studies of the Association have informed the recent strategic review of wildlife priorities chaired by Mike Clarke which then fed into the National Park's *New Nature Challenge* which was incorporated into the relevant sections of the *National Park Management Plan*.

The New Forest supports one of the largest and most diverse wildlife-rich landscapes in the lowlands of North-West Europe. The scale and dynamism of the Forest's ecosystems means that nature rapidly reasserts itself whenever opportunities are presented and therefore represents one of the best value landscapes in England to receive investment for nature recovery. The main driver of these dynamic ecosystems is herbivory by large mammals (along with associated prescribed fires and ground disturbance), fundamental to which is the health of the Forest's commoning economy. The challenges are therefore to maintain what we have and to reconnect the Forest with the wider landscape. The consensus of those working on the *New Nature Challenge* was to focus on landuse change to reverse historical encroachments (and respond to coastal realignments), on targeted support for the Forest's pastoral economy along with

the effective management of recreational demands. The draft Strategy recognises some of these challenges but does not articulate the best available evidence which helps define these issues.

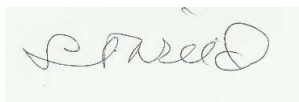
We are therefore disappointed that the draft Strategy does not address these challenges when identifying opportunities for nature recovery. Our criticism is twofold. The opportunities presented for nature recovery in the New Forest are generic actions more suited to typical lowland landscapes depleted of nature. They do not address the strategic needs and opportunities of the Forest. Worryingly, some of the proposed opportunities represent acts of attrition to the conservation of the Forest as they encroach upon the enclosed landscapes upon which the commoning economy is dependant. The emphasis on reinforcing field boundaries also runs contrary to reversing historical acts of enclosure which have diminished and fragmented the habitats for which the Forest has international importance. Secondly, the draft Strategy summarises a raft of current projects without seeking to identify strategic themes or assess the compatibility of individual and collective projects with the Forest's strategic needs. The risk is that funds will be redirected into projects which have no strategic relevance and may undermine the ecological drivers upon which the Forest's ecosystems depend.

There is a substantial threat to the conservation of the Forest's wildlife if central government redirect resources to align to the *Local Nature Recovery Strategy* as currently drafted. Current investment is reasonably well aligned to the *New Nature Challenge* and the *New Forest SAC Management Plan* which are informing bids for agri-environment schemes to replace the existing Higher Level Stewardship schemes. In its current draft, the *Local Nature Recovery Strategy* is not supportive of the initiatives of those whose work currently supports the Forest's wildlife.

We therefore request that the County Council revisit the draft Strategy and in response to the consultation, take the opportunity to recast the priorities and opportunities so they align with the *New Nature Challenge*, the *National Park Management Plan* and the *New Forest SAC Management Plan*.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss this with you, preferably as part of the wider group which has informed the development of the current consensus.

Yours sincerely,



Chair, New Forest Association