

Official Verderer, Verderers and members of public attending court today, I am Sarah Nield, Chair of the New Forest Association (NFA).

The National Planning Policy Framework doesn't sound as though it is something to trouble the Forest but believe me it does. It has led to increased housing targets in the local planning authorities surrounding the Forest. For example, NFDC is facing a call to increase house building by 101% from 700 homes to 1501 every year, Test Valley Borough Council faces a 75% increase and Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole an 88% increase. This all adds up to a lot of houses!

The NFA supports affordable, preferably social, houses but in the right place and as far as is compatible with the protecting and sustaining the Forest. So, what are the threats these increase housing numbers present? Let me give you two.

First as Jo Ivey's Report for the NFA¹ demonstrates there is a severe shortage of back-up grazing and commoners are forced to look further, and further, away to secure suitable land. The competition for suitable back-up grazing is only going to grow if more land surrounding the Forest is earmarked for development. We see this already happening with the planning approval to build 200 homes on back-up grazing land at Rolleston Road, Holbury.

Secondly, recreational pressure is only going to increase. Yet measures that might help to manage that pressure have stalled. The NFA have been calling for the creation of a recreational mitigation partnership which could bring £22 million over 10 years to fund recreational management within the National Park.² These funds are likely to only grow with increased housing targets and visitor numbers. We have also been pressing for the creation of alternative recreation areas, for instance country parks, which can draw visitors away from the Forest. The value of these measures stem from expert reports dating from 2020 and 2023 yet we are still waiting.³

The NFA has also been pressing for action on the recreational management strategy that has stalled for almost 18 months.⁴ We are told that the National Park's Partnership Plan in 2027 will kick start action, but time has been wasted and the mythical spatial plan to help manage recreation has still not seen the light of day.

¹ <https://newforestassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Back-Up-Land-Report-2025-Jo-Ivey.pdf>.

² <https://newforestassociation.org/final-report-on-recreational-mitigation-in-the-new-forest/>

³ See Footprint Ecology Reports at <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/document/new-forest-samm-report-by-footprint-ecology/> AND <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/document/new-forest-recreation-impact-mitigation-report-2/>

⁴ See NFA Presentment to the October 2025 Court and the National Park Authority's October 2025 Board Meeting.

One would hope that the implementation of increased in housing targets would be managed in a controlled way through updating local plans – local plans set out land allocation and earmark suitable development sites. Indeed, some local authorities are in the process of updating their local plans. **BUT and this is a BIG BUT** this is going to take time – there are proposals, consultations, enquiries, inspections. For instance, BCP local plan has been rejected by the planning inspector, Wiltshire’s too has been withdrawn because rejection by the inspector was expected. NFDC have started the process but, if their plan proposals are not approved by the end of the 2026 and it is feared they will not be, the process will have to start again – there would be another 2-3 years gone. And that is without the impact of Local Government Reorganisation.

In the meantime, developers will take advantage and bring forward speculative sites for development which planning committees will find difficult to resist. We see that with the Rolleston Road approval and the proposals for 1000 homes between Eling and Marchwood. It has been described as a “planning wild west.”

So, what can be done? The NFA planning experts are working hard to build the Forest’s case. We need all the support we can get – these issues are complex and the pressure to build intense. So, a co-ordinated effort is needed. We call upon the Verderers, and other Forest organisations, to add their voice and weight too. Developments may be beyond the National Park but its impact on the Forest will be considerable and must be addressed.