



Planning and Transport Committee

24 August 2025

reply to:

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Sent as attachment to Email to BCPlocal plan@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

Dear Team,

**BCP Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) 2028 -2043
Response to Scoping Consultation (closing date 27-07-26)**

1. The New Forest Association (NFA) is one of the oldest conservation and environmental groups in the UK. Founded in 1867 with aims to protect the Forest's unique quality and the tradition of commoning in the Forest. Those aims remain relevant today.

Q1. Is there anything missing from the key issues we have identified for the plan?

NFA assumes the bullet point *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment* includes arrangements for mitigating for the damage proposed population growth will have on the New Forest SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites. (Hereafter called NFSPA).

Q2. Are there any other topics or specific policies that should be in the Local Plan scope?

In responding, NFA has noted the contents of the BCP 13 page document headed *Detailed Scope of the BCP Local Plan*

NFA seeks BCP to include within its local plan documents details how the Authority proposes to safeguard the protected areas of the New Forest and mitigate for the damage an increasing population will inevitably bring.

The most critical factor in safeguarding the protected areas is to safeguard the future of commoning and this means safeguarding back-up land. Commoning (of pasture)

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in the New Forest is an ancient, community-driven system of livestock grazing that shapes the area's landscape. The grazing of the free-roaming cattle, donkeys and cattle creates the unique, globally important heathland and wood-pasture habitats of the NFSPA. The system relies on pasture away from the open Forest to allow stock to reside when they are required to leave the free-roaming area. The land is referred to as *back-up* land and is not restricted to the National Park. Its conservation is therefore a subject of consideration in the Local Plans of nearby PAs. New Forest District Council's emerging local plan for instance states *that any development which would result in the loss of land actively used for back-up grazing, or with potential for such use, will not be permitted*. NFA seeks similar protection for the traditional back-up grazing land in the east of BCP district.¹

There are three aspects of mitigation for the NFSPA that should be addressed in the BCP local plan or at least summarised and referenced to comprehensive details in subsidiary documents. These aspects are the need to progress a cross-Planning Authority strategic plan, monetary mitigation (SAMM²) and land mitigation (SANG)³

1. Strategic Response.

In 2018 six local planning authorities (Eastleigh Borough Council, New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority, Test Valley Borough Council, Southampton City Council and Wiltshire Council) were successful in a joint bid to the Government's 'Planning Delivery Fund'. This secured funding to support work to enable planned development to come forward while protecting the integrity of the New Forest's internationally designated sites. This follows the Local Plan Habitats Regulation Assessments (HRAs) undertaken by planning authorities in areas close to the New Forest, which were unable to rule out potential adverse impacts on the New Forest's designated sites from increased recreational pressures associated with new development.

The joint funding bid outlined the two phases of the project, confirming that the evidence from the Phase 1 research would be used in Phase 2 to:

- To establish a catchment area identifying where population growth would have an impact on the New Forest SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites; and
- To identify potential options for mitigating the impacts, leading towards a strategic mitigation framework, which includes establishing a robust approach for securing developer contributions.

¹ For information. There is extensive land with common rights in the BCP (Christchurch) area. The 2024 Verderers' marking fee data records 19 active commoners using back up land totalling 221 hectares.

² Strategic Access Management and Monitoring

³ Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

Footprint Ecology undertook primary research⁴ in 2018 and established a marked increase in recreational use of the designated sites (an 11.4% increase between 2018 – 2036 from new housing alone) and recommended that a strategic, proportionate and co-ordinated approach to mitigation be developed.

3.1 The Footprint Ecology report 'Discussion and analysis relating to the New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar and a zone of influence for recreation' (2021) recommended an appropriate 'zone of influence' of 13.8km.

The identification of the 13.8km 'zone of influence' for recreational pressures on the New Forest's designated sites in Footprint Ecology's additional report (2021) resulted in Fareham Borough Council, Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council (BCP) becoming part of the project Steering Group and party to discussions on the next steps.

In the light of the Footprint Ecology research findings and the advice from Natural England that it represents the best available evidence to inform the decisions of 'competent authorities', the local planning authorities party to the Memorandum of Understanding commit to following a precautionary approach. The authorities also commit to each having in place effective and proportionate measures to address the in-combination recreational impacts arising from new development within their planning jurisdictions. These measures apply to both planning decisions and planmaking and operate within the legal and policy framework of the planning system, such as the use of planning conditions, Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 obligations.

The Memorandum of understanding, signed by BCP, goes on to say regarding long term strategy

5.1 Section 4 of this Memorandum of Understanding sets out the approach adopted by planning authorities party of this agreement. The planning authorities recognise that the Footprint Ecology research reports (2020 and 2021) represent the best available evidence for HRA purposes.

5.2 The planning authorities party to this agreement, working alongside Natural England and Forestry England, are also committed to working together to develop a longer term, strategic approach to mitigating recreational impacts. This reflects the recommendations of the Footprint Ecology research report on 'Impacts of recreation and potential mitigation approaches' (2020). The project Steering Group typically meets quarterly each year and is committed to working together on the next steps, recognising the benefits of the coordinated approach recommended in the Footprint Ecology research reports.

⁴ Research into recreational use of the New Forest's protected habitats - New Forest National Park Authority (newforestnpa.gov.uk)

5.3 The Executive Summary to the report states, "...the measures identified could form a 'package' of avoidance and mitigation measures that should resolve the cumulative impacts from recreation associated with housing growth around the New Forest. Such a package should enable Local Authorities to be able to rule out adverse effects on integrity to the New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar as a result of increased recreation associated with Local Plans. The measures will however not necessarily be easy to establish and will require significant impetus to achieve. Given the broad geographic scope and need for measures to dovetail, it will be important that there is a strategic, proportionate and coordinated approach, which will require partnership working across a range of local authorities and stakeholders."

5.4 Paragraph 4.2 of same report states, "Each planning authority should have a well-informed and articulated mitigation scheme, commensurate with the distribution of proposed development in relation to the New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar...In other parts of the UK, strategic approaches to mitigation have been established where multiple local authorities fund a series of consistent, agreed and implementable measures carefully designed to resolve the in-combination impacts associated with local development."

5.5 In taking the New Forest mitigation work forward, the local planning authorities are committed to working together to develop an appropriate strategic package of mitigation measures, based on a consistent evidence base and future research to supplement this evidence base. Each local planning authority will ensure mitigation measures are in place, proportionate to the impact planned development in their area will have on the New Forest's designated sites, taking account of evidence and assessments prepared as part of the plan making process. The mitigation will involve a package of measures, including measures within the respective local planning authority's areas (including effective mitigation delivered through existing strategies); and also measures delivered within or close to the New Forest's designated sites to mitigate the increase in visitors from the planned new development. This will enable the in-combination recreational impacts arising from planned development to be addressed.

PAs party to the memorandum developed interim mitigation schemes and the recommended strategic approach has not progressed. The existing approach of small SANGs and improvements to existing areas and footpaths off the NFNPA and the employment of rangers within the Forest is not working. The alternative locations are simply too different from the 30,000 hectares of the open Forest⁵. Using the *new standard method* around 130,000 new dwellings will be built within the zone of influence in the next 17 years and a better solution stemming from a cross PA strategic approach is essential. BCP with its extensive experience in dealing with

⁵ The open Forest is that area of unenclosed land within the New Forest National Park and is roughly area of the SPA, SAC, Ramsar sites

the Dorset Heaths may well consider it is in the best position to lead such a strategic approach and that to do so may be in the best interests of its residents.

2. Monetary Mitigation

There is generally an acceptance of the 13.8 km zone of influence(ZoI) by the Authorities falling within the ZoI and the use of a fixed payment per dwelling across the whole of the affected area. Where there are obstructions in accessing the New Forest SPA etc, (Solent and Southampton Water), payment is excused.

This is not the situation in BCP where the Authority has argued that the presence of mitigation arrangements for the Dorset Heath SPA suffice the mitigation requirement of the New Forest SPA etc. NFA contends that while this arrangement might have had merit historically, it is not the case in the period covered by this scoping consultation. The plan indicates the likelihood of extensive house building in the BCP South East sector and this, coupled with the extensive land offered in the recent BCP “call for sites” suggest there will be a significant population increase within a couple of kilometres of the boundary of the open Forest. It is beyond belief that the new residents in these areas will use the quite distant Dorset Heaths or SANGs such as Upton county park for recreation in preference to the adjacent New Forest or that SAMM type expenditure on the Dorset Heaths is an adequate and efficient way of mitigating damage to the forest.

The handling and use of cash mitigation varies between the Authorities within the Sphere of Influence. Even where arrangements are in place, it is often not clear if the money is asked for, is received, is separately accounted and would be transparent to inspection. Further it is rarely clear if the use has been used for its agreed purpose- that is mitigating the effects of new population on the NFNPA. While it is recognised that a significant proportion of the money can be effectively spent within the PA, it should not be used to carry out actions that are the responsibility of the PA under other legislation.

NFA will promote the creation of a group composed of representatives of the affected PAs to have an oversight of the “SAMM” expenditure.

3. Land Mitigation

The PAs within the zone of influence have generally accepted there should be an area of land set aside per 1000 new residents to act as an alternative to those residents increasing the footfall in the New Forest SPA etc. For example the rules of New Forest DC and Wiltshire C are that for 1-49 dwellings land is not provided but a flat rate financial contribution per bedroom is made to fund off-site council mitigation projects and for larger schemes within 13.8 km of the NFSPA, developers must

actively provide or fund SANG land at a standard of 8 hectares per 1,000 population, plus long-term maintenance provision.

While accepting that the overlapping of the “spheres of influence” of the two protected areas (New Forest 13.8km, Heaths 5 km) may require adjustments to the arrangements in use in other PAs, NFA will press at every opportunity for adequate SANG arrangements for the NFNPA.

NFA congratulates BCP on the creation of a 30 ha SANG addition to Upton Country Park, which suggests BCP may share NFA's view that larger SANGs will be more effective in seducing population away from the Heaths and the Forests than a series of (still valuable) smaller SANGS. NFA believe the progressing of the strategic approach mentioned above could yield such parks and BCP with its extensive experience in dealing with the Dorset Heaths may well consider it is in the best position to lead such a strategic approach and that to do so may be in the best interests of its residents.

Q3. Are there any other ways we should engage with people or organisations?

NFA make no comment

Yours faithfully,

Graham Baker

Secretary NFA Planning & Transport Committee for New Forest Association