



I am Sarah Nield, Chair of the New Forest Association.

The local planning authorities surrounding the Forest face a dramatic increase in housing targets. For example, NFDC is asked to increase house building from 700 homes to 1501 every year. The NFA supports affordable, preferably social, houses when compatible with the protecting and sustaining the Forest. But there are two key threats first to commoning and secondly increased recreational pressure.

There is a severe shortage of back-up grazing.¹ This is only going to grow if more surrounding land is earmarked for development. For example, the planning approval recently granted for houses on back-up grazing land at Rolleston Road.

Recreation and access are welcome but not if it threatens the primary purpose of the national park.² Measures that might help to reconcile those statutory objectives have stalled. The NFA have been calling for the creation of a recreational mitigation partnership to fund recreational management within the National Park.³ We have also been pressing for the creation of alternative recreation areas such as country parks, which can draw visitors away from the Forest. Those long held ambitions were reaffirmed by expert studies in 2020 and 2023; yet we're still waiting.⁴

The recreational management strategy too has stalled for nearly 2 years.⁵ We are told that the National Park's Partnership Plan in 2027 will kick start action, but time has been wasted and the spatial plan is more myth than reality.

One would hope that the implementation of increased housing targets would be controlled through updating local plans, but this is going to take time. Already there are setbacks to the BCP and Wiltshire Council's local plans. If NFDC's local plan is also delayed, there is the real danger that developers will take advantage and bring forward speculative development sites around the Forest which planning committees will find difficult to resist – witness the Rolleston Road approval. It has been described as a “planning wild west.”

What can the National Park do? You can lead; or support, co-ordinated efforts to reduce the impact of increased housing on the New Forest. Help to work out how to protect

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

² National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949 s5. The Sandford Principle gives precedence to conservation over access in the face of incompatibility.

³ <https://newforestassociation.org/final-report-on-recreational-mitigation-in-the-new-forest/>

⁴ 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/>.

⁵ The NFA has been pressing for action for some time see for example NFA Presentment to the October 2025 Verderers Court and the National Park Authority's October 2025 Board Meeting.



back-up grazing, get a mitigation partnership over the line, commit resources to a robust recreational management strategy, use your influence with neighbouring local planning authorities, speak to relevant ministers, all would help. As your National Park Society, the New Forest Association is here to work with you.