

Cabinet

9 December 2025

New Forest Recreation Mitigation Strategy For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr S Bartlett, Planning and Emergency Planning

Local Councillor(s): Cllr Parry, Cllr Hobbs-Chell, Cllr Julie Robinson, Cllr Shortell, Cllr Skeats, Cllr Bryan, Cllr Goringe, Cllr Atwal, Cllr Todd, Cllr Morgan, Cllr Lugg, Cllr Parkes, Cllr Chakawhata, Cllr Tooke, Cllr Bartlett, Cllr Piers Brown, Cllr Coombs, Cllr Flower, Cllr Gibson.

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

Report author and job title:

Sue Bellamy, Senior Planning Policy Officer

Email:

Sue.Bellamy@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Executive summary

- 1.1 Evidence commissioned by the New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) identifies a likely significant increase in impact of recreational activities on the New Forest Heaths (the New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar) arising from the increase in population that results from new development. The New Forest Heaths are protected under the Habitat Regulations, and the impact is similar to that on the Dorset Heaths.
- 1.2 The evidence looks at the impacts of visitors to the New Forest Heaths. It considers the distance people travel to the heaths and how this influences their activities and visits. It draws together some project types that could mitigate the impact of the increase in visitor activity.
- 1.3 As a much larger area and with the higher profile that the National Park brings, the New Forest Heaths attract visitors from much further afield than Dorset Heaths. The evidence concludes that 75% of visitors travel from areas up to

13.8km from the New Forest Heaths boundary. This includes eastern parts of Dorset. The evidence also indicates that larger developments of around 200 dwellings and over within 15km of the New Forest Heaths boundary are likely to have a significant effect on the New Forest Heaths and a second buffer is applicable to these sites (see Appendix 2).

- 1.4 Reflecting the evidence of recreational impact on the New Forest Heaths sites, Natural England have issued advice that the Council should not be authorising any additional residential development within the 13.8km impact zone or 15km for larger sites, without first securing appropriate mitigation. At present, Dorset Council is not granting planning permission for any residential development within either impact zone.
- 1.5 The NFNPA have led a group of 9 local authorities in developing a New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy 2025 (Appendix 1) that will enable the Council to resume granting planning permission in the identified impact zones. The strategy requires a contribution from new residential development towards the provision of mitigation in a similar way to the existing Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework.
- 1.6 The contributions vary between the affected local authorities based on frequency of visit and likely activity. For the eastern Dorset area within the impact zone, a contribution of £400 per dwelling is required. Contributions to the mitigation scheme will be subject to inflation annually using the Retail Prices Index. A proportionate approach will be applied to other over-night accommodation in a similar fashion to that for the Dorset Heaths and this will be developed on proportional contributions basis.
- 1.7 An agreement to enable the transfer of funds has been drawn up between the Council and NFNPA (yet to be signed) to enable mitigation to be secured. As a temporary measure the Council will pay into the NFNPA's existing mitigation scheme whilst a new scheme and governance structures are established. Unused monies from this interim scheme will be transferred into the new scheme once established. The agreement for transfer of funds has been written such that it can also be applied to the new partnership scheme once established.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) agrees the New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy 2025 in principle, with agreement to delegate any minor changes to the final version of the Strategy to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning in consultation with the Corporate Director for Planning,

- b) agrees to apply the Strategy within the 13.8km buffer and 15km buffer for larger sites to allow planning permissions to be granted,
- c) agrees that, as an interim arrangement, secured funding is transferred to the NFNPA to extend their existing mitigation scheme whilst the new partnership scheme is being established,
- d) delegate the agreement of guidance on proportional contributions for other over-night accommodation to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning in consultation with the Corporate Director for Planning.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 As a result of the evidence and on the advice of Natural England, Dorset Council are currently unable to grant planning permissions for new residential development within the 13.8km and 15km impact zones associated with the New Forest Heaths protected sites. This is because new homes within the impact zones result in an increase in recreational pressure on the New Forest Heaths and currently there is no mechanism in place to mitigate this impact. The New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy is the proposed approach for putting in place a long-term mechanism for delivering mitigation and enabling residential planning permissions to be granted.

3.2 Whilst the final arrangements for the Strategy's implementation are being put in place, temporary arrangements are proposed involving an expansion of the existing New Forest mitigation scheme to cover the affected parts of Dorset. This would enable planning permissions to be granted within the zones of impact. Once the Strategy's partnership mitigation scheme is in place any remaining funds from the interim arrangements will be transferred to the new mitigation scheme.

3.3 If Dorset Council was not part of the partnership mitigation scheme proposed in the Strategy, the Council would need to develop its own scheme which may be complicated to achieve given that the Council does not have any jurisdiction over the New Forest. As a consequence, planning consent for new homes in the impact zones could not be granted until alternative arrangements are developed and implemented.

4. The report

4.1 The New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Strategy 2025 (Appendix 1) sets out a framework and broad approach to ensuring that the cumulative impacts of new housing within the impact zones can be addressed. All

affected authorities have been working together to develop an agreed approach as established in the Strategy. The report focuses on mitigation measures within the New Forest Heaths designated sites, which will complement the package of measures being delivered by planning authorities within their own respective areas. Natural England have been advising the partnership on the development of the Strategy.

- 4.2 The evidence also identified that there is likely to be a need for additional infrastructure projects to deflect visitors from the more sensitive sites in the New Forest. Dorset Council commissioned a further report to look at the synergies between the mitigation projects delivered to mitigate impacts on the Dorset Heaths and that required for the New Forest Heaths. This additional report concluded that infrastructure projects delivered to mitigate the impact of new development on Dorset Heaths will be sufficient to provide enough strategic green space in Dorset without needing to contribute to additional green space to mitigate the impact on the New Forest Heaths. However, there is a need to provide strategic access management and monitoring measures for the New Forest Heaths to address the residual impacts from new housing in Dorset.
- 4.3 The Footprint Ecology New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring evidence was informed by an earlier Footprint report on the discussion and analysis relating to the New Forest SAC/SPA and a zone of influence for recreation, which draws on the findings of visitor surveys previously carried out, and identified a buffer zone of 13.8km based on the 75th percentile of local visitors (travelling from home). It also identified the potential impact from larger sites beyond 13.8km, up to 15km.
- 4.4 The joint New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy 2025 sets out a package of strategic access management and monitoring measures to mitigate the impacts from increased recreation associated with new housing growth on the New Forest Heaths. The strategy focuses on plan-led growth within the defined 13.8km zone of influence from the edge of the New Forest Heaths and covers the anticipated level of growth (around 45,000 dwellings in total across the zone of influence) to 2036. It is envisaged that this New Forest SAMM Strategy will be reviewed based on the latest evidence and monitoring data and continue to operate beyond this end date. However, should development rates increase considerably (as identified through monitoring), there may be a need for a more detailed review of the approach.
- 4.5 The package of mitigation measures relates to access infrastructure, engagement and monitoring and will cost around £22 million. Many of these costs are for 80 years (perpetuity), whilst other costs are for a shorter period and subject to a 5 year or 10 year review. The shorter-term projects are costed as

such as they may not be needed for the longer term or a more appropriate approach may be implemented making them superfluous.

4.6 The per dwelling tariffs are calculated based on visit rates from each local planning authority area within the zone of influence, providing a tiered tariff structure that means new housing coming forward closer to the New Forest's designated sites will contribute more than that further away. The SAMM strategy provides a framework and broad approach that ensures cumulative effects of housing can be addressed and that all nine planning authorities within the defined zone of influence are working together to a consistent, agreed approach.

4.7 As mitigation of the impact on the New Forest Heaths is a new requirement, a full mitigation scheme is yet to be established. Further work is needed to put the necessary legal and administrative arrangements in place and set up the joint scheme. In the meantime, mitigation can be secured by contributing towards the existing NFNPA mitigation scheme to enable it to cover the areas of Dorset that are affected by the mitigation requirement. Once the new scheme is set up then any unused funds can be transferred to the new mitigation scheme. A legal agreement is being drawn up that will be suitable for the stand alone NFNPA scheme and any subsequent partnership mitigation scheme.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 The Strategy is a joined up and coordinated approach to managing the impact of recreation on the New Forest Heaths protected area. An alternative to not adopting the approach in the strategy would be to not grant consents within the zone of impact. which could mean that we struggle to effectively meet the housing needs of this part of Dorset.

6. Legal considerations

6.1 As the competent authority under the Habitats Regulations, Dorset Council has to consider the impact on protected habitats sites and should only grant consents for development that is likely to cause an impact in very special circumstances where there are considered to be imperative reasons of overriding public interest. It is not considered that the delivery of new homes that would have an impact on the New Forest protected sites would meet the test of imperative reasons of overriding public interest. A mitigation approach is therefore necessary to grant planning permission for development resulting in overnight accommodation within the New Forest Heaths zone of influence.

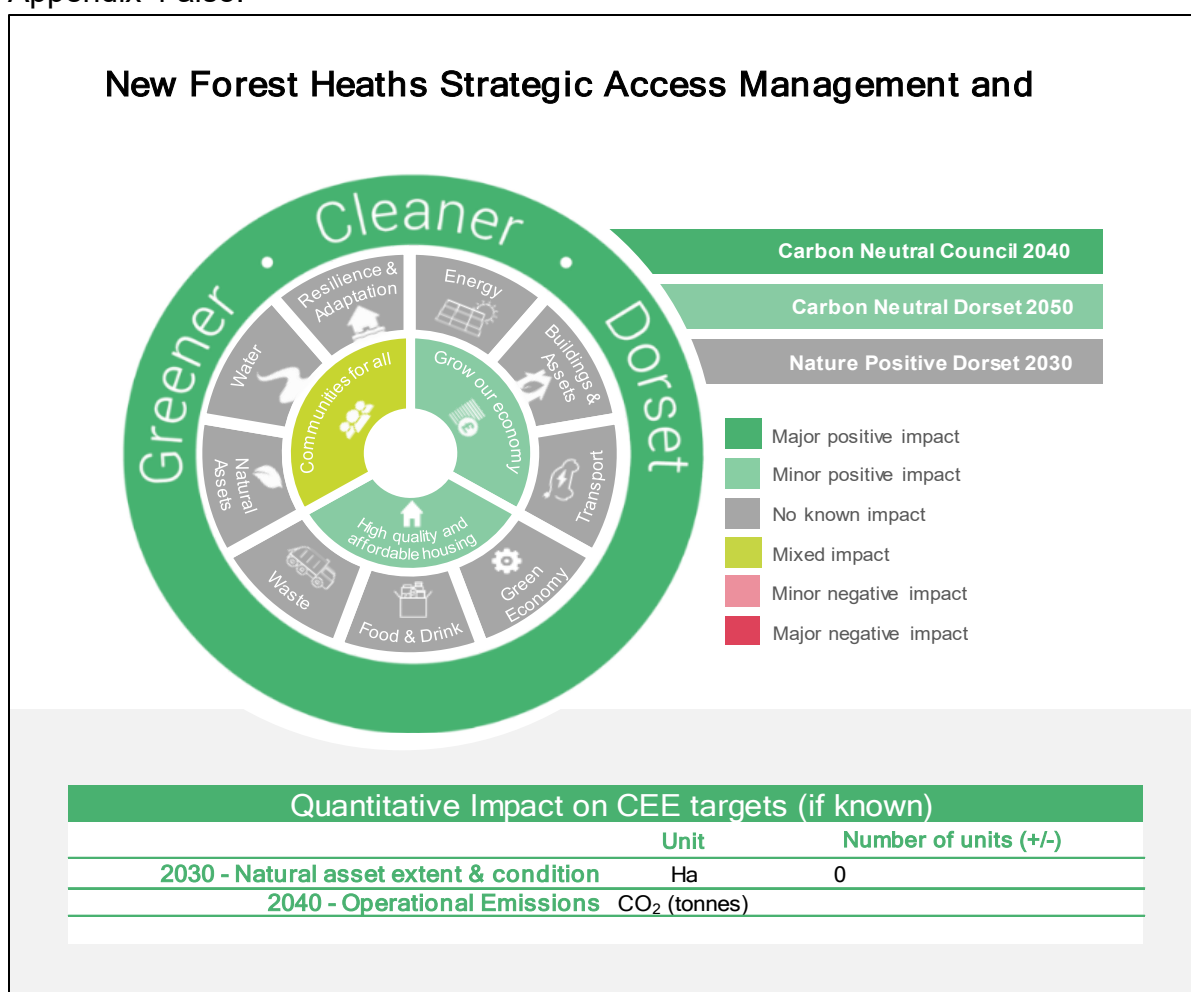
6.2 The Council's legal team are currently working with the New Forest National Park Authority to agree a process for making the necessary arrangements for transferring monies into the current, and any subsequent, mitigation scheme.

7. Financial implications

7.1 Mitigation will be funded through financial contributions from developers and secured through the planning process.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 The projects funded by the Strategy will provide mitigation for the impact of recreation from new development on the protected New Forest Heaths. See Appendix 4 also.



9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 There are no direct implications on well-being and health, although the projects to be funded should lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the New Forest Heaths.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 The main implication for the Council is not being able to meet the housing needs of the affected parts of Dorset. There are also reputational issues for Dorset if it does not put a mechanism in place to enable planning permissions to be granted and to mitigate the impact on the New Forest Heaths.

11. **Risk implications**

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Low

12. **Equalities**

- 12.1 It has been agreed that an EqlA is not required for the New Forest Heaths Recreation Strategy

13. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Draft New Forest Strategic Access Management & Monitoring (SAMM) Strategy October 2025

Appendix 2 Map of 13.8km and 15km zones

[Appendix 3 Visitor use of the New Forest by residents of Dorset and implications for the Dorset Local Plan](#)

Appendix 4 Climate and ecology implications.

14. **Background papers**

[Natural England advice regarding recreational impact on New Forest Heaths.](#)

[The New Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring evidence report 2023 by Footprint Ecology;](#)

[Discussion and analysis relating to the New Forest SAC/SPA and a zone of influence for recreation](#)

[Recreation use of the New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar: New Forest visitor survey 2018/19](#)

15. **Report sign-off**

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer),

the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).