

Cabinet

29 January 2026

New Forest National Park Local Plan response For Decision

Cabinet Member: Cllr S Bartlett, Planning and Emergency Planning

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team: J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

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Statutory Authority: Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The New Forest National Park Authority have recently published a draft of their Local Plan for consultation (regulation 18). Previously, there was a legal requirement under the Duty to Cooperate for councils to formally engage on an on-going basis on strategic cross-boundary issues, but this requirement has recently been removed. There is however still a need for councils to consider cross-boundary issues when preparing their Local Plans and therefore it is important that Dorset Council responds to the New Forest National Park's Local Plan consultation.
- 1.2 The National Park Authority have formally made a request for Dorset Council to assist in addressing the unmet housing need arising from the National Park, alongside assistance in meeting the need for gypsy, traveller and travelling showpersons pitches and plots. This request is included in Appendix A.
- 1.3 The response to the consultation in Appendix B also responds to these two requests. The consultation on the New Forest Local Plan closed on 19 December 2025 and as such, a response has been agreed with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning pending formal endorsement from Cabinet. Following consideration by Cabinet, if changes to the submitted response are required, it has been agreed with the New Forest National Park Authority that these can be submitted and will be considered as part of the consultation.

- 1.4 Once this consultation is complete, the New Forest National Park Authority intend to prepare and publish their full draft Local Plan prior to submission to the Secretary of State for examination in public in December 2026.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorse the response agreed with the Cabinet member for Planning and Emergency Planning.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 It is important that Dorset Council engage with New Forest National Park Authority in the production of their Local Plan and seek to address any cross-boundary issues constructively. The response to the consultation on the New Forest Local Plan is part of that on-going cooperation formally responding to the request for assistance in meeting the need for housing and gypsy, traveller and travelling showpersons pitches and plots.
- 3.2 The draft response in Appendix B has been submitted to the New Forest National Park Authority. This draft response has been agreed with the Cabinet member for Planning and Emergency Planning. After consideration by Cabinet, contact will be made with New Forest National Park Authority to either confirm that the submitted response is final or to adjust the response and submit a revised version to supersede the original draft response.

4. **The report**

- 4.1 New Forest National Park Authority is required to prepare a local plan covering the National Park area. This requirement is similar to that placed upon Dorset Council but there is flexibility for setting requirements for housing, employment and other needs, which are set locally reflecting local circumstances rather than government set housing targets. However, the needs of the area should be met through the Local Plan unless the implications of doing so would contradict national policy.
- 4.2 Although the New Forest National Park is given the highest level of landscape protection by virtue of its national park designation, and a large proportion of the park is designated as a habitats site, there remains a need for the National Park Authority to explore all available options for addressing the strategic matters within their own planning area.
- 4.3 In preparing the response to the consultation, officers have examined whether this national policy test has been met in the context of the national park and habitats designations.

Housing Need

- 4.4 Housing Need for a Local Plan is calculated using the Government's standard method. The calculation is based on the number of existing homes in the area and the ratio of house prices to earnings. However, due to the constraints in

national parks, and the fact that their boundaries do not follow local authority boundaries, a bespoke approach is used for a national park. This reflects the duty placed on the National Park authority to:

- conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the New Forest; and
- promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the New Forest by the public.

- 4.5 The guiding principle that the Authority apply is that the National Park should aim to meet the needs of its residents rather than play a part in meeting the strategic need from elsewhere. It therefore should consider the natural change in population and therefore households rather than the needs arising from migration.
- 4.6 The New Forest National Park Authority have examined the projected change in households as a result of births and deaths to arrive at a housing target that reflects the needs of the current residents of the Park. This approach is agreed with and gives rise to a need for 260 new dwellings per annum.
- 4.7 The draft Local Plan makes provision for 950 new dwellings or only 50 new dwellings per annum. This leads to a shortfall in provision of 210 homes per annum that forms the basis of the request to neighbouring local planning authorities for assistance in meeting.
- 4.8 The review of the proposed strategy for meeting the needs of the area fully accepts the challenges of managing development pressures in the protected national park landscape. The proposed strategy focuses on meeting needs at a relatively small number of villages within the park but does not consider fully opportunities at the fringes of the Park, adjacent to existing built up areas. As such, officers consider that there are further opportunities that could be considered which would increase the supply of new homes and therefore reduce the unmet need.
- 4.9 There is currently only one pitch proposed to meet the assessed need for nine pitches for Gypsies and Travellers and six plots for Travelling Showpeople. Again, officers consider that there may be further opportunities in the Park that could reduce this unmet need further.

Habitats Sites

- 4.10 The protected habitats of the New Forest (SAC, SPA and Ramsar) are vulnerable to recreational impact arising from increased population within 13.8km of the designated site boundaries. This requires a strategic approach to mitigation and Dorset Council have been working closely with the New Forest and other neighbouring Local Planning Authorities to develop an approach. Arrangements were agreed at Cabinet in December 2025 including an interim arrangement until the final strategy is fully in place. Dorset Council will continue to work alongside the New Forest National Park Authority in the

implementation of this strategy. It is considered appropriate for mitigation measures to be provided within the National Park boundary as this may be the optimum location for delivering certain types of mitigation. This suggestion is included in the response to the Local Plan consultation.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 Dorset Council is required by national legislation and policy to engage with its neighbours in the formation of Local Plans. As such, there is no option to consider other than responding to the consultation.

6. Legal considerations

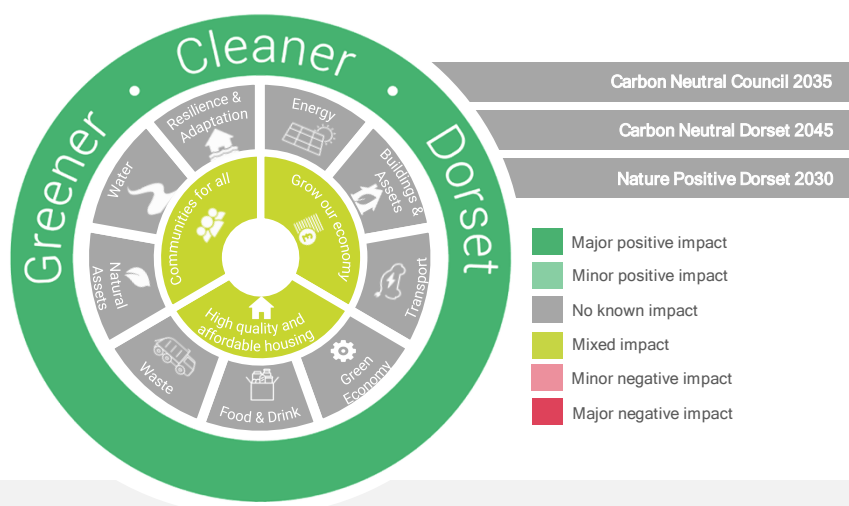
- 6.1 Although the legal Duty to Cooperate has been removed, there remains a need for councils to cooperate on the production of their local plans. If Dorset Council did not engage in this cooperation on strategic cross-boundary issues, it would be unlikely that the Dorset Council Local Plan would be found sound at the examination stage. A considered response to the consultation and on the two points where assistance has been requested is therefore essential.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The response to the New Forest National Park Local Plan consultation has been funded through existing budgets as business as usual. There are therefore no further financial implications arising from this report.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 This Cabinet report seeks endorsement of the response to the New Forest National Park Authority's emerging Local Plan consultation. As such, there are limited implications for the natural environment, climate and ecology for Dorset.



Quantitative Impact on CEE targets (if known)

	Unit	Number of units (+/-)
2030 - Natural asset extent & condition	Ha	Unknown
2040 - Operational Emissions	CO ₂ (tonnes)	Unknown
2050 - County Emissions	CO ₂ (tonnes)	Unknown

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The response to the consultation does not have any direct well-being and health implications for Dorset Council

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 If a response is not made to the New Forest National Park Authority's draft Local Plan, there may be implications for the examination of the Dorset Council Local Plan. The housing need of the New Forest could be met in Dorset but as the New Forest National Park is entirely within Hampshire and is influenced to a greater degree by the urban areas of Southampton and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, the implications for Dorset are less significant.

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

Current Risk: medium

Residual Risk: low

12. Equalities

- 12.1 The New Forest National Park Authority have undertaken an equalities impact assessment of their Local Plan as part of the plan-making process.

13. Appendices

Appendix A – New Forest National Park Authority unmet need request

Appendix B – Response to the New Forest National Park Authority Local Plan consultation

14. **Background papers**

New Forest National Park Authority Local Plan:

New Forest National Park Local Plan Review 2025 - New Forest National Park Authority

Duty to Cooperate update – Letter from MATTHEW PENNYCOOK MP:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69286415345e31ab14ecf67d/Local_Plans_letter_to_PINS.pdf

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)