

## Update for 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### **Easing of C-19 restrictions**

Throughout 2020 unprecedented challenges were experienced in nearly every corner of the Public Forest Estate (PFE), with certain areas including the New Forest coming under extreme pressures. In response, the partnerships of the New Forest continue to work collectively to inform decision making and to target collective resources at the greatest areas of environmental and social risk. It continues to be an extremely challenging period of operation, but important principles and learning points have been established. These must now be built upon to enable the most effective operational response to the coming easing of lockdown in 2021.

### **Joint Partnership Delivery Plan**

A delivery plan for all organisations working across the New Forest has been agreed and implemented to manage visitor pressures as lockdown 3 restrictions are eased and warmer weather encourages more people to head to the New Forest and stay longer. It includes all significant areas of work, especially where joint working is important to gain maximum benefits. As part of Forestry England's response, we will be creating more seasonal Ranger roles and welcoming back or Volunteer's. This creates "boots on the ground" to patrol and focus on the significant risks to people, our assets and the environment.

The operational activity and response will be driven directly by visitor numbers/pressures. This to be based upon 2 clear 'levels':

- **Level 1** – Usual seasonal pressures = Business As Usual plus planning and preparation
- **Level 2** - Numbers beyond usual seasonal variance and that presents a risk to both the forest, its communities, and the visitors themselves = Focussed, targeted response.

### **BBQ's**

Last year's campaign for "no BBQs or fires" highlighted the high risk of fires in the New Forest and appealed to people to support a ban on all BBQs. Our experiences in 2020 showed that we needed to make the messaging clearer, and review the previous BBQ code, which allowed them to be used at some locations.

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We're experiencing hotter and drier conditions, as a result of climate change, fire is a major risk in the New Forest, which is increasing each year. Wildfires can be devastating and quickly destroy huge amounts of forest and wildlife. A fire can so easily be started from a single spark, a careless action that could take many decades for nature to recover.

From 2021, we are asking everyone coming to the New Forest to help us reduce the risk of a wildfire by **not** using BBQs, stoves, campfires or fire of any kind on New Forest crown lands that we manage.

## Current Closures

### Ground nesting birds

From 1 March - end of July, special quiet zones will be established around critical breeding locations for ground-nesting birds and a small number of car parks near to these closed. The locations are chosen based on survey work from the previous breeding season and ongoing analysis of the prime locations for different species of bird. Limiting activity in these small pockets helps reduce the likelihood of birds abandoning nests and exposing chicks to predators. The car parks closed will be - Crockford, Crockford Clump, Yewtree Heath, Clayhill, Hinchelsea, Shatterford, Hinchelsea Moor and Ocknell Pond. Alternative car parks are located near all of these areas.

### Cycle route closures

- The cycle route is currently closed until the end of March from post number 349 - 353, in Brockishill Inclosure, near Minstead, because we've currently felling trees along this route and it's not safe to ride here whilst heavy machinery is working.
- Cycle route is closed from post number 248 – 250, near Brock Hill Car Park (off Rhinefield Ornamental Drive). The recent wet weather and mud on the tracks from the harvesting machinery, has made this route unsafe to use. Once ground conditions dry-up, we will repair and improve this part of the cycle network.

## Forestry England Signage

Over the next few weeks, we will begin to install our new signage. This will be installed in a methodical manner, with the Key sites being the first to have new signage, followed by neighbouring sites so as not to cause confusion and a contrast of signage. The Cattlegrid/Threshold signs will be installed after this, followed by the smaller sites. We have been reviewing the location of our signage. We do not want to simply reinstall it and have developed a set of principles around how a sign sits in the landscape which will be adopted throughout installation. An example of these are; to seek backdrops to signage and avoid creating a feature on the skyline.

Here is what they will look like.



## **Tree Safety Management**

Forestry England are legally obligated to undertake a formal assessment of tree health annually. All of our Recreational sites, car parks, waymarked trails, cycle routes, undergo this tree safety inspection. As I'm sure you can imagine, due to the scale of this infrastructure in what is a densely wooded area, there is often a programme or remedial works to be undertaken. When the leaves are off the tree, fruiting bodies are on show, inspections are undertaken. Remedial works have been happening over the past few weeks, prior to bird nesting.