

# New Forest Habitat Mitigation Scheme

New Forest Access Forum Meeting – 12 September 2022

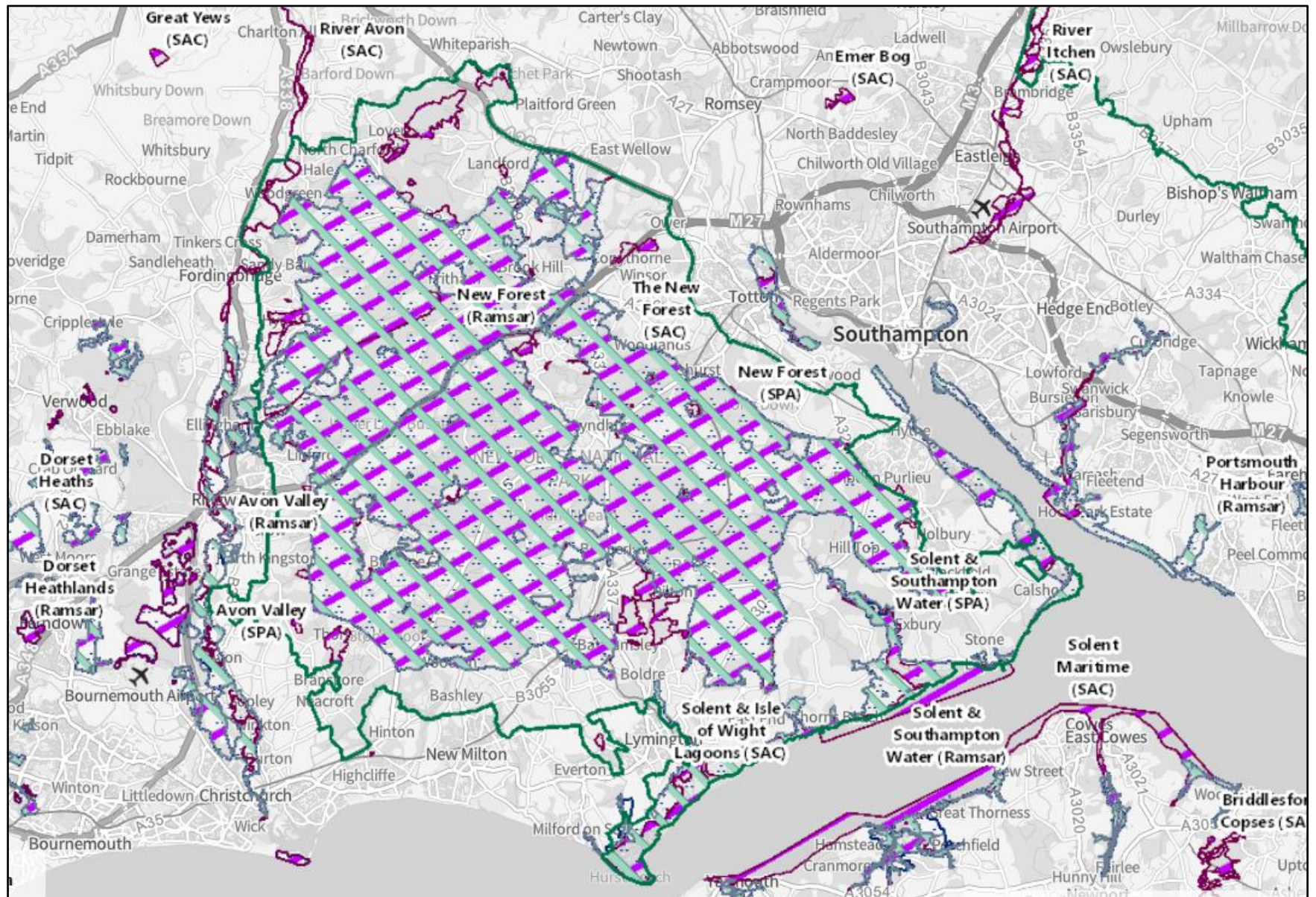


# Hierarchy of nature conservation designations

Name	Level of Protection	Protection Type	Description and examples
<b>Ramsar</b>	International	Statutory	Wetland of international importance (e.g. Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar)
<b>Special Protection Area</b>	International	Statutory	Sites supporting important bird species (e.g. Avon Valley SPA)
<b>Special Area of Conservation</b>	International	Statutory	Sites conserving important habitats (e.g. New Forest SAC)
<b>Site of Special Scientific Interest</b>	National	Statutory	Representative samples of British habitats (e.g. Landford Bog SSSI, New Forest SSSI)
<b>National Nature Reserve</b>	National	Statutory	Areas managed to preserve features of special national interest (e.g. Langley Wood NNR)
<b>Site of Importance for Nature Conservation</b>	County/Local	Local policy	Sites designated by local authorities (e.g. Tom Tiddler's SINC, Calshot)



# New Forest National Park – international nature conservation designations



# Comparison to other planning authorities

Planning authority	Approximate area internationally designated for nature conservation*
<b>New Forest National Park Authority</b>	<b>56% designated as SAC, SPA and/or Ramsar</b>
Dartmoor National Park Authority	27% designated as SAC, SPA and/or Ramsar
Lake District National Park Authority	17% designated as SAC, SPA and/or Ramsar
South Downs National Park Authority	3% designated as SAC, SPA and/or Ramsar
Test Valley Borough Council	2% designated as SAC, SPA and/or Ramsar
Wiltshire Council	7% designated as SAC, SPA and/or Ramsar

(\*estimates based on Natural England's 'Magic Maps' information and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) data)

# The legal requirements of the Habitats Regulations

- Apply to all relevant ‘plans and projects’. For the NPA’s planning role this includes plan-making as well as planning applications.
- Development can only proceed once it is ascertained that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the protected sites.
- ‘Competent authorities’ are required to carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment - to test if a plan or project could harm the designated features of the site. ‘Competent authorities’ include:
  - a public body that decides to give a licence, permit, consent or other permission for work to happen, adopt a plan or carry out work for itself, such as a local planning authority
  - a statutory undertaker carrying out work (e.g. water company)
  - anyone holding public office, such as a Planning Inspector.



# Key tests of the Habitats Regulations for plans and projects

- **‘Precautionary Principle’:** This is at the heart of the Regulations as a matter of law. Where there is reasonable scientific doubt as to an impact then decision makers must err on the side of caution.
- **‘Alone or in combination’ test:** Each project or plan must consider likely effects either on its own, or in combination with other relevant plans or projects. This is why even small-scale proposals (e.g. a single dwelling) are caught by the Habitats Regulations.



# Recreational Pressures – New Forest

- Not possible through the HRA process to rule out ‘in combination’ recreational impacts from net new dwellings and other forms of overnight accommodation (e.g. hotel extensions, campsites) anywhere in the National Park
- Mitigation therefore required to ensure legal compliance
- NPA’s mitigation scheme was updated in 2020 in our SPD sets out the package of mitigation measures, agreed with Natural England



# Recreational Pressures – New Forest

- **Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD (2020)** adopted following consultation. The package of mitigation includes:
- *Access management within the designated sites:* Facilities and physical changes ‘on the ground’ to reduce impacts, e.g. signage
- *Alternative recreational greenspace sites and routes outside the designated sites:* New and improved sites, routes and facilities to accommodate recreation, including close to where people live
- *Education, awareness and promotion:* Initiatives that enhance people’s understanding of the designated species and sites, e.g. ranger work, education, publications, social media campaigns
- *Monitoring and research:* Collating data and evidence to assess the implementation and effectiveness of the mitigation measures
- *In perpetuity funding* is required to ensure that mitigation will last as long as the effects of new development



# Revised Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD (2020)

- The level of received contributions is proportionate to the scale of new development in the National Park.
- During the 2020 – 2021 reporting year circa £35,000 of received developer contributions were spent.
- Expenditure is set out in the SPD and overseen by an advisory group including Natural England, RSPB, NFDC and HIOWWT.

Mitigation Element	Indicative proportion
Access management within designated sites	5% of spend
Alternative recreational greenspace & routes	20% of spend
Education, awareness & promotion (e.g. rangers)	60% of spend
Monitoring and research	12% of spend
Implementation (e.g. staff costs)	3% of spend

# Recreational Pressures – New Forest

## Summary of our ranger work on mitigating recreational impacts:

- Developer contributions are used to employ additional seasonal rangers from March to September to help people learn about the importance of the New Forest, its protected species and promote key 'caring for the Forest' messages to reduce their impact.
- Their first three months are focused on raising awareness of 'ground nesting birds' and reducing disturbance by Forest users during the very sensitive months of their breeding season.





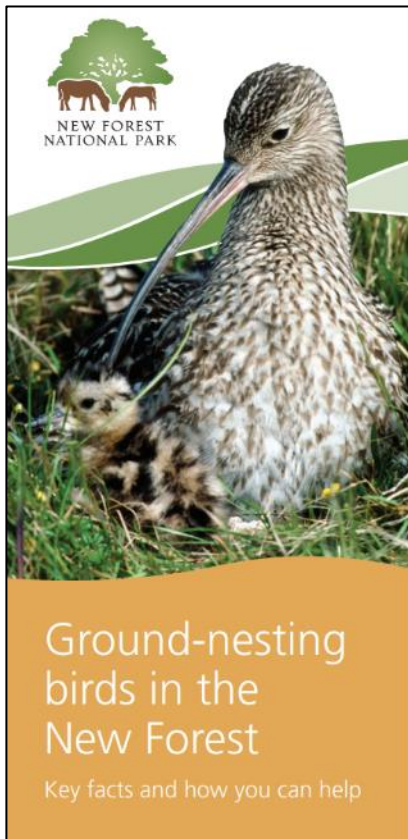




# Recreational Pressures – New Forest

Summary of our communications and awareness raising work:

- Mitigation funds have supported the dissemination of key messages through publications (e.g. *Park Life*) and via the NPA's social media channels including Facebook, Twitter and online.



# Help protect restaurants and runways for our birds

**The New Forest is one of the best places for rare birds and for some species it's their last UK stronghold.**

In winter, some of our ground-nesting birds head to the coast for a holiday, leaving their breeding sites on the New Forest's heathlands behind.

Our areas of saltmarsh, mudflat and coastal grazing marsh provide birds such as the curlew, snipe, redshank and lapwing with a fantastic winter buffet. When the tide is right these vital habitats provide a wealth of eelgrass, shellfish, worms and crustaceans.

Yet these coastal wintering birds are vulnerable.

The twice-daily tidal cycle and the fact that many birds can't feed when it's

dark means that the time-slots when feeding is possible are very restricted.

Birds are particularly wary of dogs that stray from well-used paths – an off-lead dog on the foreshore can create mass panic, lost feeding or roosting time and a waste of flying energy searching for somewhere safe to land.

We can help make a difference maintaining these important 'restaurants and runways' for the birds by keeping our distance, staying on the main tracks in winter, and causing minimal disturbance.

It's vital that the birds are in tip-top condition so they can cope with bad winter weather, and stay strong enough to travel and lay eggs in the spring.



## Snipe

In the New Forest, snipe are fairly widespread but still rare, with perhaps 100 pairs in total. They are decreasing dramatically in southern England so the New Forest population is an important stronghold.

You can see them in winter along the coast or along river valleys. They usually feed around the edges of marshy lagoons, and roost tucked away among grassy tussocks – scan the margins of pools between Keyhaven and Lymington to find them.

## Redshank

The Hampshire-wide population has contracted to become largely coastal – the Solent is an important area for them in southern England. Redshanks on the Open Forest are now restricted to a small area in the south east, with no more than 5-10 pairs.

In the New Forest, one of the best areas to find redshanks is the coast between Keyhaven and Lymington. Here you can walk the raised coastal path and see them feeding on the mudflats or around the pools at any time of year and any time of day.



## Lapwing

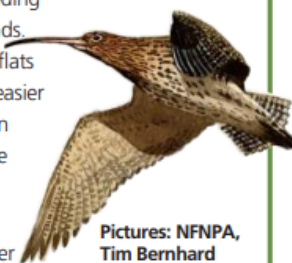
Lapwing still breed throughout Hampshire but in much smaller numbers than in the past. In the New Forest they breed both in the central open heaths and grassland (around 150 pairs) and in the surrounding farmland. If you want to see lapwings, especially their displays, then the most reliable areas are the short grazed grasslands at the coast near Lymington. They flock together in winter and are often seen at this time of year.



## Curlew

The number of breeding curlew in the UK has declined by half in the last 25 years and have now been added to the UK red list for endangered species mainly due to loss of habitat. The New Forest is now one of the few areas in south east England where the curlew still breeds. Sadly, curlew numbers in the New Forest have declined by as much as two-thirds in the last two decades, with just 40 pairs left. Curlews head for coasts after they have finished breeding on grassy or boggy heathlands. They like large areas of mudflats and saltmarsh, so it's much easier to find them there in autumn and winter than inland in the summer.

■ Find out more at [www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/discover](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/discover)



**Pictures: NFNPA, Tim Bernhard**



# Recreational Pressures – New Forest

- **Summary of our work on PROW enhancements:**
- The promotion of 'off-designation' rights of way to encourage people to use more robust areas of the National Park.
- Installation of improved waymarkers planned for subsequent years.



## New Forest National Park Walks

40 walks with GPS navigation

[New Forest National Park Authority](#)

Designed for iPhone

#99 in Navigation

★★★★★ 4.7 • 1.7K Ratings

Free







Walking is a wonderful way to experience the tranquility of the New Forest National Park and see it up close.

There are many possible New Forest walks to take you into the woods, by sea, over heath or by rivers and streams, with the freedom to ramble across unfenced land.

From February to August there may be signs asking people to avoid certain areas to limit disturbance to rare breeding birds, such as snipe, curlew and redshank, which nest on the ground.

The best way to follow our New Forest National Park walking routes is by downloading our free app for iPhone and Android. The app contains 27 routes for you to try, with GPS navigation that shows you where you are on the route in real time as you walk. It works without mobile phone signal too, perfect for exploring the Forest.

- Download free walking routes for iPhone.
- Download free walking routes for Android.

Please be aware of the New Forest Code when walking in the National Park.

## Follow the New Forest code

The New Forest is a unique place with rare wildlife and free-roaming livestock. Thank you for helping us care for this special place by following the simple New Forest code:

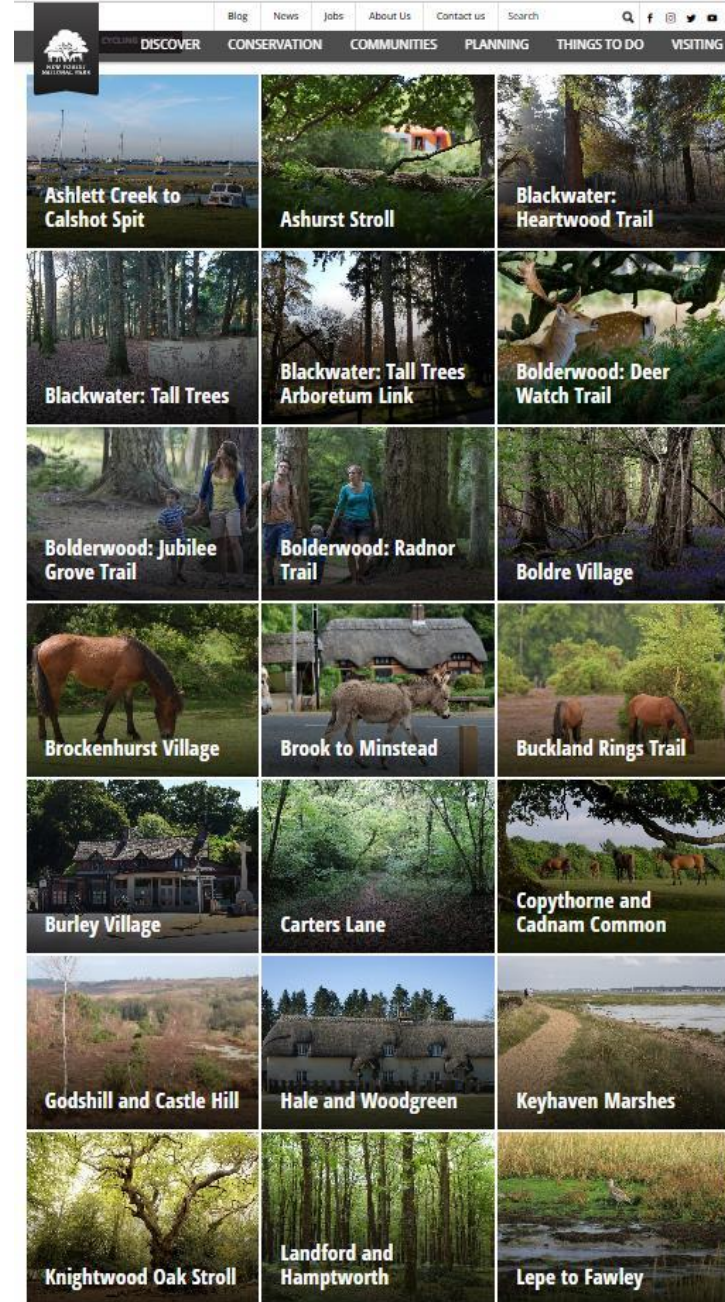
 <b>Keep your distance from the animals – don't feed or touch them</b>	 <b>Keep dogs under control. Don't let dogs approach or chase any animals</b>	 <b>Stick to the permitted cycle tracks</b>
 <b>Take home litter and dog waste</b>	 <b>Park only in car parks</b>	 <b>Drive with care – animals on the road!</b>
 <b>No fires or barbecues</b>	 <b>No wild camping</b>	 <b>Help wildlife by keeping to the main tracks</b>











# Recreational Pressures – Solent Coast



Not possible to rule out ‘in combination’ recreational impacts from net new dwellings and other forms of overnight accommodation.

Research identifies a **5.6km** ‘zone of influence’ for Solent coast designations.

# Recreational Pressures – Solent Coast

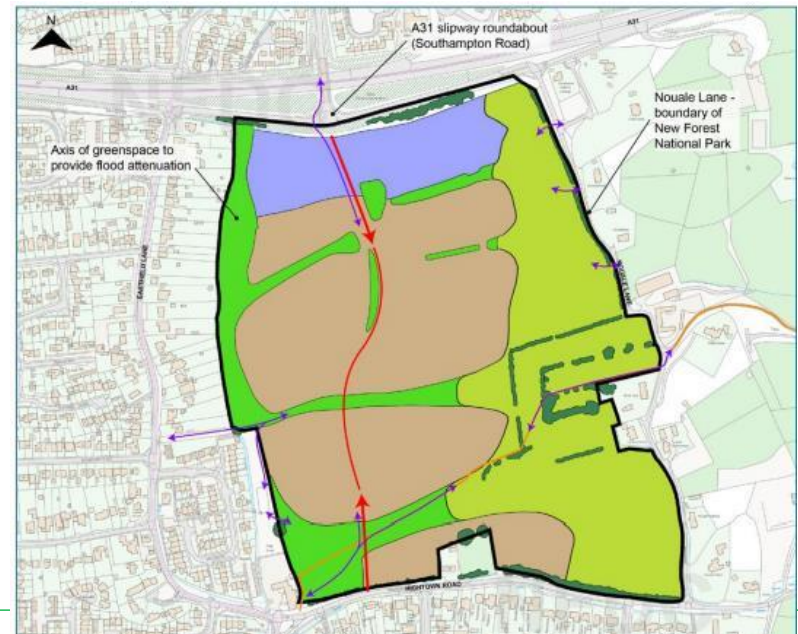
- Solent Bird Aware Mitigation Strategy adopted by 14 planning authorities along the Solent coast (including the NPA)
- Contributions range from £390 - £1,014 per dwelling
- Mitigation scheme includes:
  - A team of rangers
  - Communications, marketing and education initiatives
  - Initiatives to facilitate and encourage responsible dog walking
  - Site-specific visitor management and bird refuge projects
  - A delivery officer ('Partnership Manager')





# Work with surrounding planning authorities

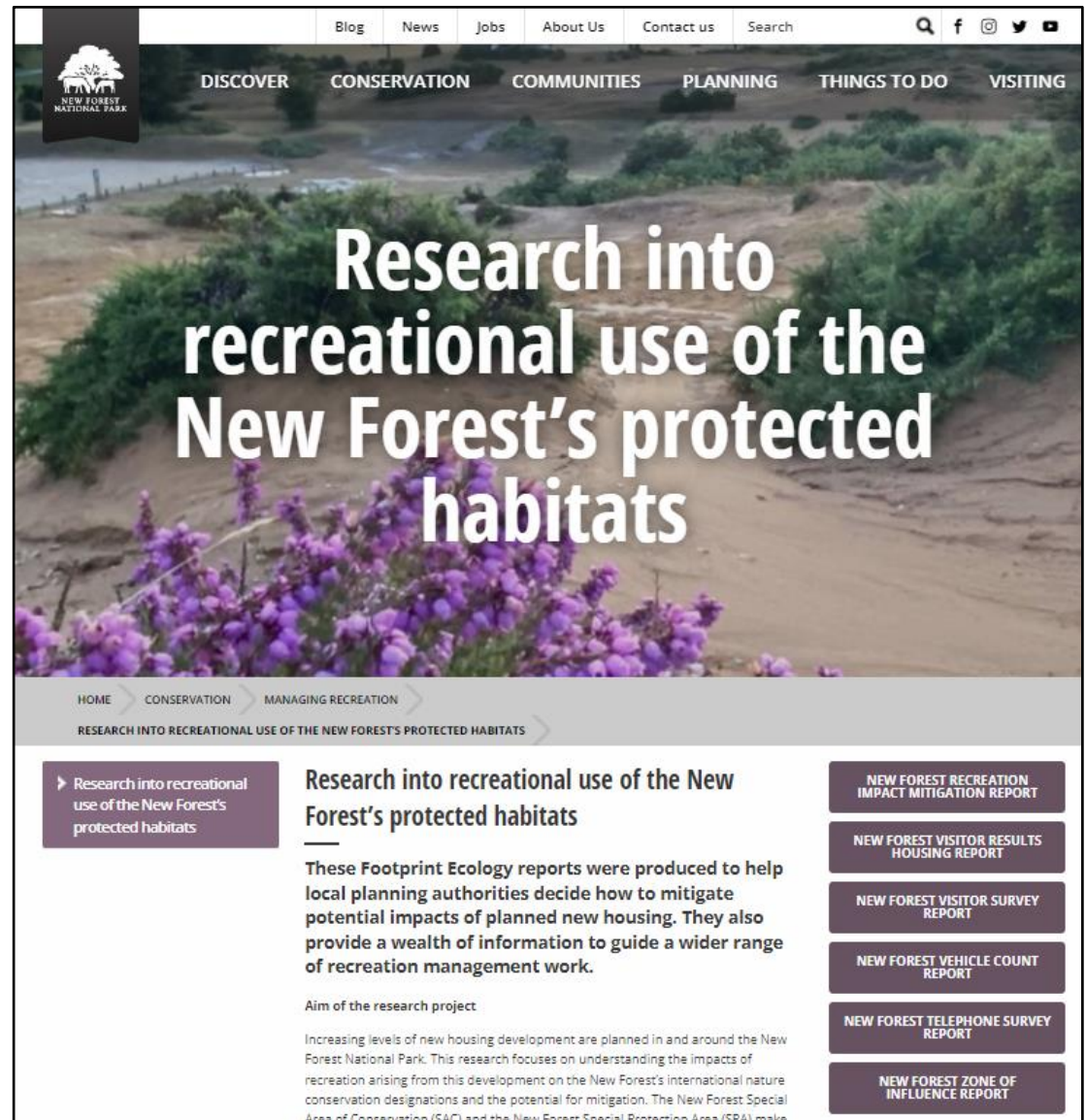
- Habitats Regulations are 'boundary blind', so all authorities must consider impacts of their planned development on designated sites.
- NFDC, TVBC, EBC, WC all have adopted or emerging recreation mitigation strategies for the New Forest. Measures include:
  - 120+ ha of new greenspace provision (ANRG) in New Forest District
  - Additional ranger provision in the New Forest, funded by new development in surrounding areas



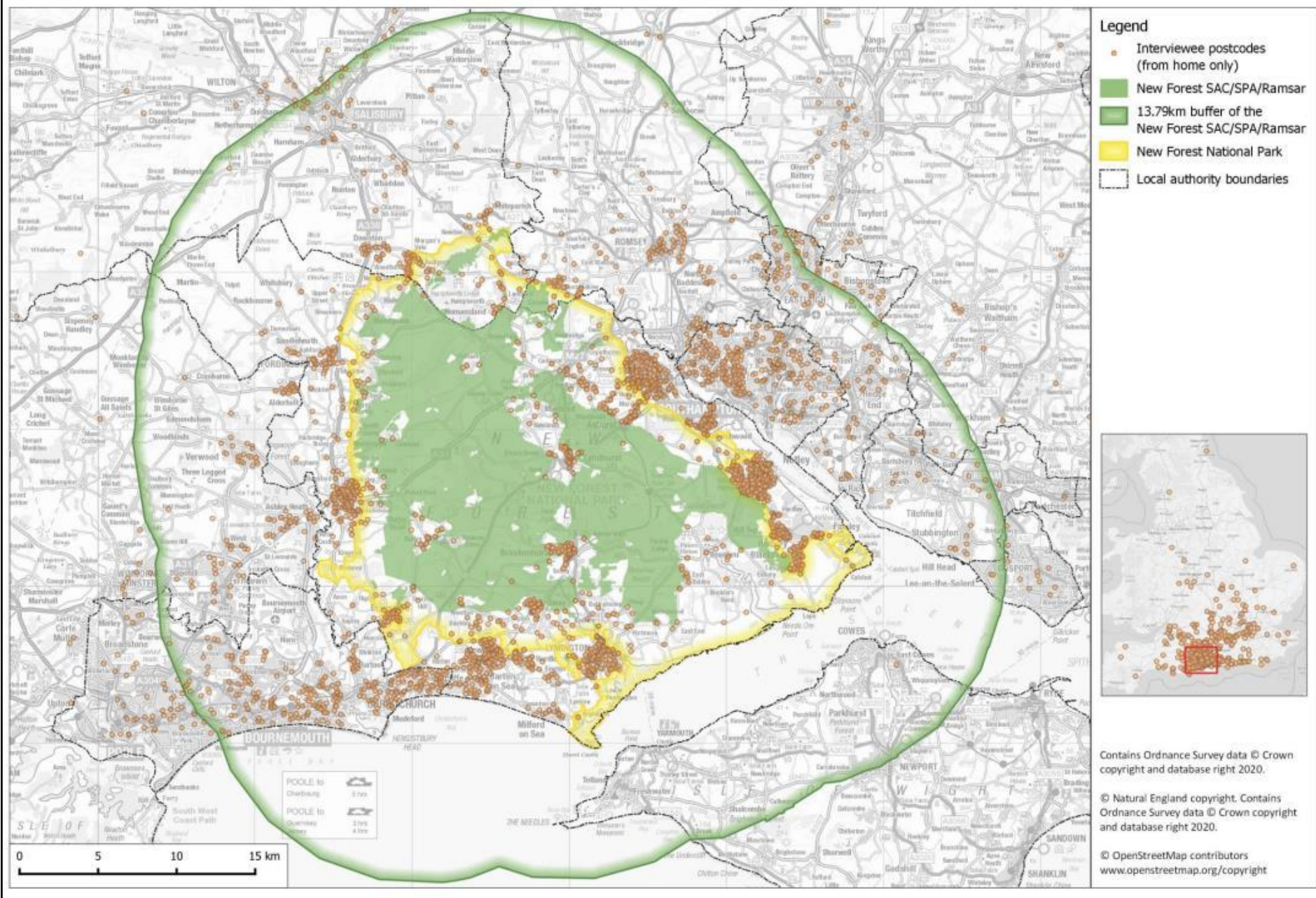
# Work with surrounding planning authorities

The Footprint Ecology research reports identify a range of potential impacts from the projected increase in visitors to the New Forest arising from the planned development.

The reports recommend a strategic, proportionate and co-ordinated approach is developed across local authorities within the zone of influence.









# Closing Comments

- With over half the National Park internationally designated for nature conservation, the Habitats Regulations are key to our work.
- The SPA, SAC and Ramsar designations protect some of the most important areas of the New Forest and its coastline.
- The Habitats Regulations bring legal protection that can't be weighed in the planning balance (unlike 'material considerations').
- The NPA has been mitigating recreational pressures from new development since 2012 and our mitigation scheme was updated in 2020. The package of mitigation measures is proportionate to the scale of planned development in the National Park.
- The NPA works in partnership with others to address the potential impacts identified through the HRA process and this will continue.

