

# **New Forest National Park Partnership Plan**

**2022 – 2027**

**Final version for Authority approval**

**March 2022**

## Foreword

As we reflect on what has been an incredibly difficult period, our collective experience of the recent Covid pandemic has made us realise just how much we rely on the natural environment for our health and wellbeing. Like all National Parks, the New Forest National Park has provided a vital space for respite and recovery. In turn, this has increased focus on the importance of the natural world and ensuring that the landscape and the nature it supports is sustained for future generations. An urgent step change is needed - many agree that now is the time to redouble our efforts to tackle the twin challenges of our age – the decline of nature and biodiversity and the fundamentally connected threat of the climate crisis. This has been reflected in conversations at a national and international level, such as COP26, measures in the 2021 Environment Act, the Government’s response to the national Landscapes Review (2022)<sup>1</sup> and locally in our discussions and the projects that have emerged in partnership with local organisations and communities where local action is at the fore.

Nationally attention is on a ‘green recovery’, on how we recover the economy, address societal needs as a whole and crucially, the environment is leading to measures to move us towards a greener future. It is not only the UK which has undergone this realisation; globally there is a clear desire to see change.

In this Partnership Plan, we set out a refreshed Vision for the New Forest National Park’s future in this context of crisis and recovery. This renews our collective commitments to deliver the purposes for which our National Park was designated - to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and to promote understanding and enjoyment of the Forest’s special qualities. In so doing we also have a duty to foster the social and economic wellbeing of our communities.

The Government has confirmed its support for strengthening the role of National Park Management/Partnership Plans. The new Partnership Plan is a call to action for individuals, communities, businesses, public bodies, voluntary sector and other organisations to work together to deliver a positive future for this special place.

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<sup>1</sup> Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs): government response, January 2022

## Introduction

National Parks are protected landscapes recognised to be of the highest national importance for the natural beauty of their landscapes, the value of their wildlife habitats and cultural heritage, and the opportunities they give for many people to enjoy these qualities.

The New Forest has long been recognised as an exceptional landscape, shaped over millennia by the people who have lived and worked here. It is one of the most important areas for nature conservation in Europe and its open landscape, coastline and unique natural beauty have inspired generations of local people and visitors alike.

In 2019, we celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 which led to the designation of the first National Park in England, the Peak District National Park.

We now have 10 National Parks in England and the New Forest was one of the last to be formally designated in 2005. Covering 220 square miles on the central south coast of England, it is the smallest National Park in the UK, other than the Broads. Yet it is also home to more than 34,000 people and 2,500 local businesses. More than 16 million people live within a 90-minute drive of the New Forest and its ease of access make it one of the most visited National Parks in the country.

Our National Parks are the 'breathing spaces' for the nation and 73 years on from the first designation, the Government recognises National Parks as our most iconic and beautiful places, representing our shared heritage and national identity, and home to many of our rural communities and businesses. The Government sets out a vision for nationally protected landscapes as 'A coherent national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces that all parts of society can easily access and enjoy. Protected landscapes will support thriving local communities and economies, improve our public health and wellbeing, drive forward nature recovery, and build our resilience to climate change.'<sup>2</sup>

## Plan of action

Looking beyond the Covid pandemic, we need to respond to the climate and nature emergencies and as we transition to a new way of life outside the European Union, now more than ever we need a clear, up-to-date plan of action to equip the Forest for the future.

The central role of this Plan is to guide and co-ordinate the work of all those with an interest and influence in the National Park in delivering the National Park purposes and duty. This includes organisations with statutory responsibilities, land management interests, businesses, local communities and user groups. It is a Plan for the National Park, not the National Park Authority. All those with interests in the

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<sup>2</sup> Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs): Government response, January 2022

New Forest National Park should take account of the Partnership Plan's vision for the area and embed the relevant actions within their own work programmes.

This Plan outlines the key drivers and challenges facing the National Park and sets out how these will be addressed collectively. It sets out an overall approach to managing the National Park for the next five years, which will frame more detailed policies and actions over this period. It will guide and align the priorities and resources of the National Park Authority with those of partner organisations, businesses and communities who are key to the implementation of our collective ambitions. Our intention is that it will also influence wider decisions and investment of all those who have a part to play in protecting this most special landscape. It will also enable the support and engagement of communities in and around the New Forest who have a crucial role in achieving a positive future for the National Park.

We are building on many achievements from the previous Partnership Plan. Its legacy includes success in securing and managing grants for projects across the Forest together, such as the Heritage Lottery funded 'Our Past Our Future' and the Verderers' Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. More recently grant funding has been secured due to this track record of successfully delivering large partnership projects.

This Partnership Plan has been prepared with input and support from the main statutory organisations who share responsibility for delivering the aims and objectives of the Plan. Its scope was set by a widely advertised call for views at the New Forest Show in 2019, followed by a public 'snapshot' survey in 2020 with over 2,700 responses. The resulting draft Partnership Plan received responses and feedback from over 380 individuals and organisations as part of the public consultation in Summer 2021. The feedback and comments received from partners and the local communities have undoubtedly helped to strengthen the Plan.

## Our Vision for the New Forest National Park

The Vision for the New Forest is to be a national beacon for a sustainable future, where nature and people flourish. In 2050, the National Park is a unique and immediately recognisable place where:

- people live and work sustainably, having successfully adapted to the impacts of the climate emergency and supporting nature's recovery and resilience
- tranquillity and a feeling of naturalness pervade large parts of the New Forest
- the mosaic of distinctive landscapes and habitats have been conserved and greatly enhanced, supporting wildlife to recover and flourish
- there is a strong sense, understanding of and support for the heritage and living culture of the New Forest, especially the local tradition of commoning
- facilities such as car parks, campsites, walking and cycling routes and community green spaces are in the right places to both protect rare wildlife and to provide a better, more informed experience for people
- all communities and visitors are better informed and gain inspiration, health and wellbeing and enjoy the extensive areas accessible across the National Park whilst respecting the fragile nature, unique environment and rich culture of the New Forest
- local, regional and national organisations recognise and work to enhance the value of the National Park; there is an appreciation of its importance and role within the wider area
- everyone contributes to caring for the National Park as a special place for present and future generations.

## The Qualities that make the New Forest special

The [special qualities](#) of the New Forest are those qualities that define it, make it unique and immediately recognisable and, when taken together, distinguish it from all other parts of the country. These qualities are fundamental to the two National Park purposes and are the underlying reason for its designation.

***The New Forest's outstanding natural beauty:*** the sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland with large veteran trees, heathland, bog, autumn colour and an unspoilt coastline, with views of the Solent and Isle of Wight.

***An extraordinary diversity of plants and animals and habitats of national and international importance:*** the mosaic of lowland heath, mire, ancient pasture woodland and Forest lawns that forms the Open Forest is unique in Britain and Europe. In addition, the Solent coastline comprises extensive areas of mudflats, salt marsh and shingle, backed in places by low cliffs, supporting large populations of wintering wildfowl and waders. In total 56% of the National Park is designated for its national or international nature conservation value - a far higher proportion than any other English National Park.

***A unique historic, cultural and archaeological heritage,*** from royal hunting ground, to shipbuilding, salt making and 500 years of military coastal defence. The cultural landscape of the New Forest has developed continuously from prehistoric times to the present. The National Park has 214 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, constituting almost 10% of all scheduled monuments in the south east region, together with many important unscheduled sites.

***An historic commoning system*** that maintains so much of what people know and love as 'the New Forest' forming the heart of a working landscape based on farming and forestry. The New Forest remains one of the few extensive lowland commons where rights are still widely practised and a strong commoning culture continues. The right of mast allows the turning out of pigs to feed on the acorn crop, while common pasture allows the grazing of ponies, cattle and donkeys.

***The iconic New Forest pony*** together with donkeys, pigs and cattle roaming free. The grazing of ponies and cattle has always been central to the pastoral economy of the New Forest. They are one of the most obvious and distinctive features of the area, and for many visitors they are undoubtedly a very important part of their experience of the New Forest.

***Tranquillity*** in the midst of the busy, built up south of England. The tranquillity and sense of remoteness that can still be found in many parts of the National Park is a quality of importance to many people. This contrasts with the increasingly built up and intensively managed landscape of southern England and provides a means of release from the pressures of modern life.

***Wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation,*** learning and discovery in one of the last extensive gentle landscapes in the south including unmatched open access on foot and horseback. There is open access on foot or horseback to more than 30,000

hectares (116 square miles) in the centre of the National Park, and an extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths across the rest of the area.

***A healthy environment:*** fresh air, clean water, local produce and a sense of 'wildness'. The coastal location and prevailing south westerly winds means that air pollution is generally low, and water quality in the New Forest rivers and streams, and on the coastal beaches, is also good. The variety of food and other products produced and sold locally continues to increase, giving the opportunity for people to live healthily and sustainably and at the same time support the local economy.

***Strong and distinctive local communities*** with a real pride in and sense of identity with their local area. The New Forest communities have a strong cultural identity, with a wealth of local traditions and a thriving commoning community. Many local people have a strong sense of the Forest's history and are deeply committed to the protection of the area and many volunteers support local organisations improve the Forest environment, its culture and local communities.

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## The role of the Partnership Plan

All National Parks are required by statute to have a Management Plan (often known as the 'Partnership Plan') for their area, to help guide the work of those with responsibilities or an interest in the National Park. The Plan is for the National Park as a place and not specifically for the National Park Authority or any other organisation.

National Parks have two statutory purposes that set out the main reasons for their designation and describe the overall focus for their management. The two National Park purposes as set out in primary legislation are:

1. to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park; and
2. to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public.

National Park Authorities also have a duty in taking forward the two National Park purposes to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities within the National Park.

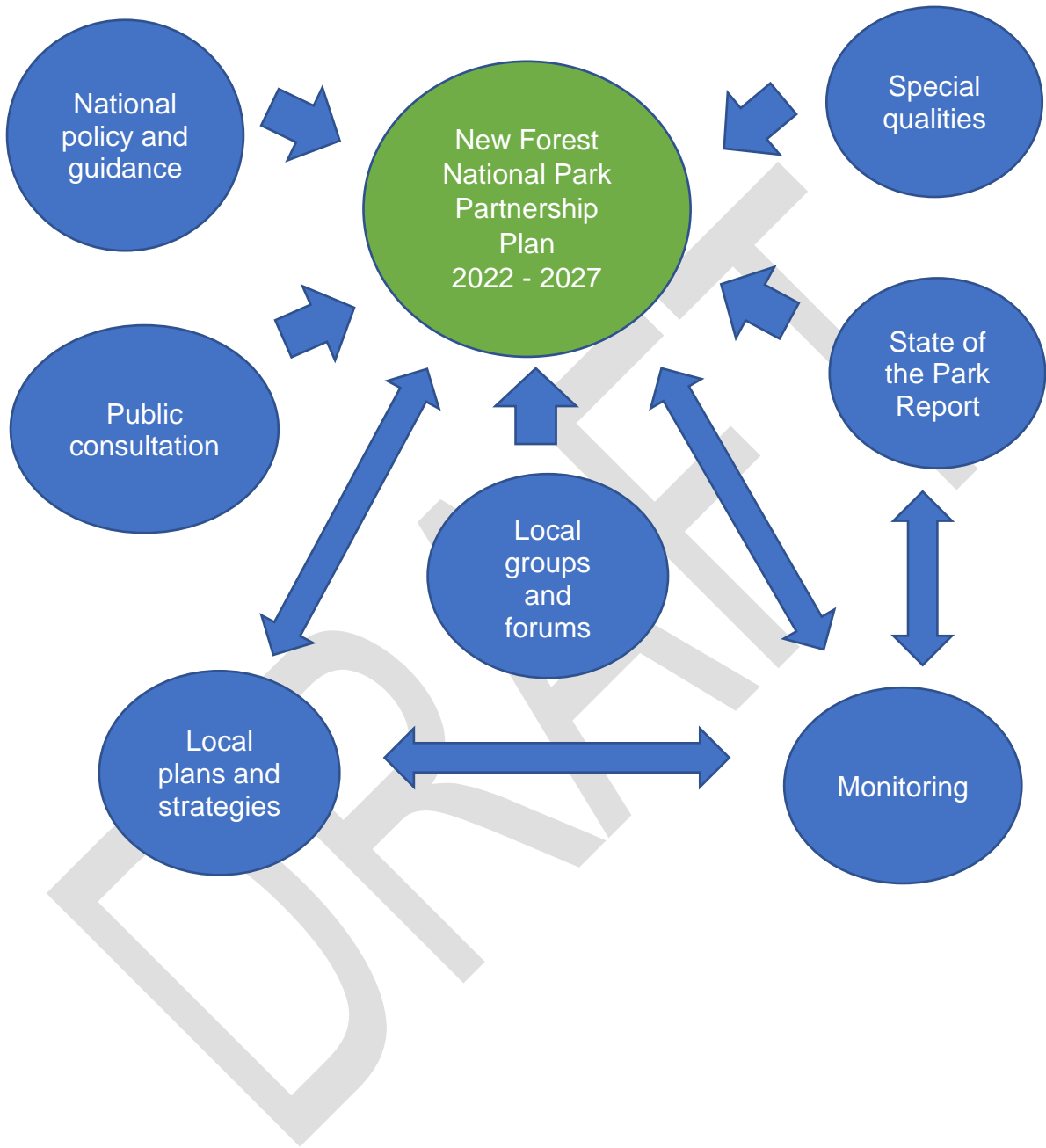
The relationship between the purposes is commonly known as the 'Sandford Principle', which states that every effort should be made to reconcile any conflicts between the purposes, but that if such efforts fail then the priority must be given to the first purpose of conservation and enhancement. The primacy of conservation is especially important in the New Forest National Park which has the highest proportion of its land (56%) covered by international nature conservation designations when compared to other local authority areas in England.

All public and statutory bodies must have regard to National Park purposes when making decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within the National Park. This legal 'duty of regard' acknowledges that the fulfilment of the National Park purposes rests not only with those bodies directly responsible for their management but also relies on effective partnership working.

The Government is now looking to strengthen the role of National Park Management Plans and has highlighted their importance in setting priorities and actions for nature recovery and our response to the climate emergency.



## How the new Plan brings together existing forums, policies, plans and strategies



## Major issues for the New Forest National Park

The New Forest faces a period of significant change as the country recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, confronts the twin challenges of the climate and nature emergencies and adapts to life outside the European Union. New and emerging domestic legislation and reforms are likely to have a profound and lasting impact on how the National Park is managed in the future, although the future direction of national policy and funding is still to be determined at the time of preparing this Plan. So whilst this Plan sets out our shared Vision, priorities and objectives for the next five years, a more detailed set of actions and targets to guide our collective work over the next two years has been produced. Thereafter, we will review and publish a revised annual work programme for years three, four and five.

### Climate and nature emergencies

In 2019 the UK became the first national government to declare an Environment and Climate Emergency. That decision marked a renewed sense of urgency in tackling climate change with the Government legally committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The Government has recognised the key role of protected landscapes in addressing the [climate and nature emergency](#)

In the New Forest National Park, we are already seeing wetter winters, hotter, dryer summers, rising sea levels, an increasing frequency of extreme weather events and longer periods of higher fire risk. Combined, these factors have far reaching implications for our biodiversity, our communities, land managers and local businesses.

More than two-fifths of UK species including animals, birds and butterflies have seen significant declines in recent decades. The State of Nature report (2019), which draws on scientific monitoring since the 1970s, showed that there has been no let-up in net losses for the UK's wildlife. More intensive agriculture is still driving declines in farmland nature, while climate change is also having an increasing effect, with average UK temperatures rising by 1C since the 1980s. The state of wildlife in the New Forest remains a major concern, with just over 50% of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) judged to be in 'favourable condition'.

#### Key state-of-play indicators:

- Only 53.22% of SSSIs in favourable condition
- Sharp decline in ground nesting birds, in some cases more than 50%
- 33% decline in breeding waders

#### However:

- 44ha of grassland and heathland has been restored
- 12.5km of wetland sites (channels and drains) restored
- Over 90% of respondents to a recent local public survey (2021) want to see the environmental improvements seen during the pandemic continue

## Responding to recreational pressures

A challenging issue for nature conservation and recovery in the New Forest is how to respond to increasing demand for access without compromising the integrity of protected wildlife sites.

Before the pandemic, it was estimated that there were over 15 million day-visits for leisure and recreation each year to the National Park. 75% of these visits arose from just 300,000 relatively local people travelling from home on a regular, often daily basis. The remainder of the visits were by just over one million people who were on holiday. These large numbers and the fact that well over 50% of the National Park is designated for its rich wildlife create a unique management challenge.

In 2019, an extensive consultation known as '[Future Forest](#)' debated and sought views on recreation in the New Forest National Park and surrounding area. Through this work partners have already agreed a comprehensive series of [actions](#) to manage recreation across the New Forest and beyond. Several of the most fundamental actions have been incorporated into this Partnership Plan. In addition, several local planning authorities in and around the New Forest have adopted planning policies and associated mitigation schemes in place to ensure the recreational impacts arising from new development do not impact on the integrity of the New Forest's internationally protected habitats.

Linked to this, one of the Partnership Plan actions is to move towards a more coordinated, strategic approach to mitigate the recreational impacts of the significant levels of new housing proposed in the areas surrounding the National Park. Up and until now, this has largely happened independently in local authorities around the New Forest, but the benefits of a more coordinated, strategic approach are recognised.

For the foreseeable future, there is likely to be an increased demand for 'staycation' holidays and further recreational demands placed on the National Park. A joint 'care for the Forest, care for each other' action plan was put in place for 2021 (and will be repeated in 2022) but we recognise that we need to take forward the longer-term actions that have already been agreed to manage these increasing recreational pressures. This is likely to entail a fundamental review of an increasingly outdated and fragmented infrastructure that includes campsites, car parks and the waymarked off road cycle routes. There is also a need to secure opportunities for significant new nature-rich green spaces for recreation close to where people live, to both take pressure away from the protected habitats of the New Forest and to create healthy communities for the future, such as exploring the feasibility of a new country park to benefit the growing resident populations on the Waterside.

### Key state-of-play indicators:

- Estimated increase in the level of recreational access to protected sites of around 11%, solely from new housing within a 25km radius of the New Forest's internationally designated nature conservation sites.
- Almost 130,000 new dwellings / 16.4% increase in housing within 25km of the New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites by 2036

## Traffic and Transport

Transport is absolutely fundamental to the sustainable future of the New Forest – how we move affects how we live, work and interact; how we experience places; how our businesses operate; and our health and wellbeing.

The New Forest is one of the most visited National Parks in England and traffic within the National Park is a major issue for many residents and visitors. The New Forest also has some of the highest car ownership in the country and the vast majority of visitors travel to the area by car. With a limited range of alternative transport options, an ageing population and lack of connectivity, the opportunities for active travel for some journey types are more limited. There is evidence to show that whilst there was a reduction in traffic in Hampshire during the pandemic lockdowns, traffic levels quickly bounced back to more typical 'pre-Covid' levels.

High levels of car dependency can affect the quality of life of local communities, the quiet enjoyment of the National Park, the welfare of livestock and the integrity of the Forest's landscape and habitats. It is also a significant local contributor to climate change and air quality, with roads and road transport generating the highest emissions in the National Park. Other matters of concern include the volume of traffic generally, verge parking, animal accidents, maintenance of minor roads, congestion in the larger villages (particularly Lyndhurst), failure to observe speed limits, lack of sustainable transport alternatives and commercial lorries'/vans' use of minor Forest roads.

Reducing CO2 emissions from transport is a major priority. The Government's Decarbonising Transport Strategy (2021) sets out the commitments to fully decarbonise transport by 2050, including greater promotion of cycling and walking. Both Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council are preparing new Local Transport Plans with a focus on sustainable transport and reducing dependency on the private car.

### Key state-of-play indicators:

- Total carbon footprint in the National Park was 500kt of CO<sub>2e</sub> (kilo tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) in 2021 with the largest emissions coming from road transport (40%)
- 50 commoners' animals killed on the roads in 2020
- Only 7% of visitors travelling to the New Forest are car free
- Over 100km of off-road cycle paths, although not always well connected to enable round trips/active travel between destinations

## Commoning, farming and land management

The New Forest is celebrated as a living, working landscape where sustainable farming and land management systems deliver many benefits to society – increasingly known as 'public goods'. The unique and ancient system of common grazing is a critical component of ensuring the Forest survives as an extensive, intact cultural landscape.

This new Plan coincides with the start of a period of ‘agricultural transition’ following the UK’s departure from the EU. Funds will be diverted from Direct Payments to farmers into a new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) from 2024. This will replace the Higher Level Stewardship scheme that over 12 years has provided more than £22 million to help restore and enhance the internationally-important habitats of the New Forest. Partners on this scheme are now working together to understand what is needed to deliver public goods into the future. From 2021-24, a Farming in Protected Landscape programme will support farmers and land managers in the National Park deliver environmental outcomes and contribute to Government priorities for nature, climate, people and place.

Key state-of-play indicators:

- 22,919 hectares of landcover within the National Park classified as high importance for pollinating insects
- 20 new commoners’ dwellings built since 1992

### **Affordable housing**

The provision of affordable housing in the New Forest is consistently raised as one of the biggest challenges facing local communities in the National Park. The affordability of housing is a major barrier to sustainable communities in the New Forest, where the average house price is around 15 times average earnings – making the New Forest the least affordable National Park in the UK.

The high proportion of larger properties, and the associated high price of housing, make it particularly hard for young people and young families to secure low-cost housing that would enable them to continue living in the area.

There is some early evidence to suggest that the pandemic has accelerated people moving from high density urban areas to the countryside, which together with more people choosing to work from home, is likely to increase pricing pressures on the National Park’s limited housing stock.

Key state-of-play indicators:

- Most expensive National Park in England: average price for a house within the National Park was £643,371 in 2019, about 15 times the average wage of people living in the National Park
- Over 200 eligible applicants on New Forest District Council’s and Wiltshire Council’s housing registers waiting for affordable housing opportunities in the National Park
- 51 new affordable homes have been completed in the National Park since 2006

## Connecting with people

The English National Parks were created in part to provide a healing space, both mentally and physically, in the aftermath of the Second World War. The pandemic has similarly raised many fundamental questions about the way we can sustain healthy lives in harmony with our environment. There is a greater appreciation of our natural environment and the benefits of having accessible green space on our doorstep. Just as in the 1940s, National Parks are well placed to be inclusive and accessible places that support the nation's health and wellbeing and to lead the way on sustainable tourism and opportunities for people to volunteer and engage in community projects for the benefit of all. Government is responding to calls for these opportunities to be improved and more open to all by supporting a renewed focus in protected landscapes to reach and welcome people and remove barriers to access to National Parks for all parts of society.

### Key state-of-play indicators:

- One of the lowest 'easy to use' footpath network rating compared with other National Parks (taking account of factors such as obstructions, overgrowth, and condition of gates)
- Visitor surveys reveal that of people within 5km of the National Park boundary, 89% of those living in the 10% least deprived areas had visited in the previous year compared to 58% of those in the 10% most deprived areas. This trend continues as you move further from the boundary (source Footprint Ecology 2019)

## Working together

There is a huge and diverse range of organisations, charities, groups and fora working in and for the New Forest, with healthy levels of public engagement and participation. There are some excellent examples of partnership working but equally there are many areas where organisations and communities could work better together and pool resources to achieve more and in doing so strengthen the understanding of the New Forest beyond our boundaries, presenting a more unified, powerful voice to national and regional policy and decision makers.

At the time of writing, the Government is consulting on how partner organisations can work together more effectively in protected landscapes. It is also widely recognised that strengthened management plans would secure greater ambition for our special landscapes and to better reflect all parts of society. This Plan takes account of the proposed direction in the Government consultation and is written in

anticipation of a strengthened role for management plans and requirement for public bodies to work more collaboratively going forward.

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## Our shared ambition

In order to deliver the proposed Vision, we have focused on five theme-based 'agendas for action' which describe in more detail what we want to achieve and how we plan to do it. The themes do not cover all of the work that will be ongoing within the National Park but instead highlight the areas where we intend to work together to achieve transformational change. The themes are intended to be taken together as an integrated package of measures that reinforce one another and work across the landscape. The agendas for action in this new Plan are very ambitious, and we recognise that they will be challenging to realise, but their inclusion in the Plan is intended to drive and target efforts to work as a high-performing partnership for the New Forest National Park and to secure the funding and resources required.

For the next five years, our collective endeavour will focus on achieving outcomes in five key interlinked areas:

- **Nature Recovery** – habitats are more resilient, restored, expanded, connected and maintained to enable wildlife to thrive, both within and beyond the National Park
- **Net Zero with Nature** – significant cuts in land-based carbon emissions are secured through restoring natural habitats and enabling carbon capture
- **Thriving Forest** – a living, working Forest is sustained through its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and support for commoning. There is a vibrant local produce market, access to affordable homes and a growing green economy featuring sustainable tourism and green businesses
- **An inclusive National Park** – people within reach of the New Forest of all backgrounds, abilities and socio-economic groups value the National Park as an important part of their lives and seek to care for it
- **Team New Forest** – communities, businesses and organisations work together as a team to deliver the vision of the Partnership Plan, sharing knowledge, ideas and resources to deliver the best for the Forest



## Key themes at a glance

	<b>What we are seeking to achieve</b>
<b>Nature Recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce a local nature recovery plan to (i) maintain, restore and expand habitats so that they are resilient and support thriving wildlife (ii) mitigate recreational pressures and (iii) ensure recreation takes place in the most resilient areas</li> <li>• Harness the benefits we receive from nature in the New Forest ('natural capital') to generate increased investment and projects to enhance nature and the services it provides</li> <li>• Help landowners, farmers and commoners move to the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which rewards working with nature</li> </ul>
<b>Net Zero with Nature (NZWN)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a 'net zero with nature' programme with partners and communities to ensure the National Park is carbon neutral by 2050.</li> <li>• Promote and develop best practice in nature-based solutions to meet climate and nature goals</li> <li>• Help communities to take action on the climate emergency</li> </ul>
<b>Thriving Forest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect cultural heritage assets and support commoning and local produce to sustain the unique natural beauty of the landscape and culture of the New Forest for future generations</li> <li>• Invest in green skills and jobs, creating a recognised reputation as a centre of excellence for a growing green economy</li> <li>• Provide more affordable housing</li> </ul>
<b>An inclusive National Park</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop opportunities to deliver a 'Natural Health Service' within and beyond the National Park, through a programme of measures provided by communities, businesses and the health and environment sectors</li> <li>• Foster a greater appreciation of the New Forest, its landscape and cultural heritage</li> <li>• Help new and diverse audiences connect with nature, discover why the National Park is special and how to care for it, with a particular focus on young people</li> </ul>
<b>Team New Forest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish new ways of engaging with our communities, hearing their ideas and encouraging grassroots action</li> <li>• Ensure the New Forest is leading the environmental agenda by delivering exemplary projects and partnerships and showing how these can support and shape policy and sustainable decisions beyond our boundaries, both regionally and nationally</li> <li>• Develop a data, evidence and insights capability to underpin our collective decisions and actions and use up to date technology to help us manage and communicate across the National Park more effectively</li> </ul>

# 1. Nature Recovery

## Outcome:

Habitats are more resilient, restored, expanded, connected and maintained to enable wildlife to thrive, both within and beyond the National Park.

## Why is it important?

The New Forest National Park is one of the most valuable areas for wildlife in Europe and has the highest proportion of designated nature conservation sites of any National Park in the country (54% of the National Park is a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or Ramsar Site and a further 5% is non-statutory sites (SINCs)). Even though they remain important we can no longer simply protect nature from harm through special sites and reserves. The unique mosaic of heathland, mires, grassland, woodlands rivers and ponds of the Open Forest; the fields, hedges and woodlands of the forest fringe; the species-rich floodplains of the Avon Valley; and the grazing marshes and saline lagoons of the coastal plain - all are under threat from a variety of factors including climate change, recreation pressure, new diseases and invasive species.

The condition of the New Forest SSSIs has shown a slight increase in recent years as a result of large-scale habitat restoration work under the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship scheme, with 53% in favourable condition (2022). There is no comprehensive assessment of the condition of non-statutory wildlife sites. Urgent action is needed to ensure our habitats are more resilient, better managed, bigger and more joined up. Ecosystems need to be restored and wildlife needs to be able to move through the landscape freely if it is to adapt to change, which means looking beyond the Open Forest and working across the wider countryside.

The New Forest is well placed to drive a nature recovery network locally, in particular through increased connectivity within and beyond the boundaries of the National Park. Nature cannot recover if it is restricted to isolated pockets and therefore we need to ensure the nature recovery network is joined up across a landscape scale.

Nature Recovery is a major commitment in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the Government is putting National Parks at the heart of driving forward and delivering nature recovery and building our resilience to climate change. The Government has also committed to protect 30% of land in the UK by 2030 to support nature recovery. By bringing together partners, legislation and funding, we can make an important contribution to this target and provide nature-based solutions that will restore ecosystems, habitats and prioritise key species for recovery and reintroduction.

## Our priorities

We will work together, and at scale, to maintain, reconnect and enhance nature. We commit to developing a nature recovery programme for the National Park that:

### 1.1. Makes more space for nature through:

- 1.1.1. Restoration and expansion of the Open Forest heath, mire and pasture woodland habitats; inclosures suitable for restoration and sites that share a common boundary with the Open Forest
- 1.1.2. Enhancing grassland and open habitats, rejuvenating hedgerows, woodland and arable habitats of the forest fringe
- 1.1.3. A programme of river, wetland restoration and pond creation
- 1.1.4. Opportunities for coastal realignment and saltmarsh restoration
- 1.1.5. Opportunities to reduce flood risk by working with natural processes within catchments
- 1.1.6. A programme of halting and reversing the decline of priority species, supporting species recovery, reintroduction of native species where appropriate and control of invasive species

### 1.2. Enhances Natural Capital by:

- 1.2.1. Valuing and accounting for the public goods provided by the New Forest
- 1.2.2. Providing accessible nature-rich green space near to where people live
- 1.2.3. Incorporating natural capital in our policies and programmes
- 1.2.4. Generating opportunities for increased investment in ecosystem services
- 1.2.5. Coordinating research to better understand the role of peat and other carbon stores in the New Forest

### 1.3. Supports nature recovery through the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) by:

- 1.3.1. Working with and through the 'Forest Farming Group' to develop a common approach to land management which delivers on the 25 Year Environment Plan's ambition of 'public money for public goods'
- 1.3.2. Taking a collaborative approach with private landowners, farmers, land managers and conservation charities
- 1.3.3. Continuing to provide advice to landowners, farmers and commoners
- 1.3.4. Providing support for ELMS Test and Trial projects and farm cluster groups across the National Park

### 1.4. Ensures developers deliver a wider range of environmental benefits over and above the full environmental impact of the proposed development by:

- 1.4.1. Having clear and up-to-date planning policies and new supplementary planning guidance that maximise this Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through new development
- 1.4.2. Adopting a Design Code for new buildings

1.4.3. Developing a better understanding of the impact of development and activities on dark night skies and taking opportunities to mitigate those impacts

1.5. Mitigates recreational pressures by:

1.5.1. Developing a spatial plan for where recreation should be accommodated in the New Forest and surrounding areas

1.5.2. Agreeing a strategy to facilitate changes to the location and capacity of car parking on the Open Forest and adjacent commons

1.5.3. Developing a strategic approach to mitigate the potential impacts associated with increasing recreational pressures arising from planned new housing and visitor accommodation on the internationally designated habitats

1.5.4. Increasing the level of funding available for recreation management so that it is sufficient to address both existing and future needs

1.5.5. Using appropriate and proportionate enforcement strategies to deter illegal use of the Forest

## 2. Net Zero with Nature

### Outcome:

Net zero carbon emissions is achieved by 2050, through significant cuts in land-based emissions and the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, to both reduce emissions production and remove emissions from the atmosphere.

### Why is it important?

Climate change, along with biodiversity loss, is the greatest long-term challenge of the present day. The impact of climate change on the New Forest is likely to be wide reaching, with warmer, wetter winters, hotter, dryer summers, rising sea levels and an increasing frequency of extreme weather events, the effects of which are already being seen. The overriding challenge for the Partnership Plan is to make a significant contribution to both mitigating and facilitating the adaptation of people and wildlife to a warming world.

The National Park Authority declared a climate and nature emergency in January 2020, with a commitment to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2030. Many of the partner organisations have made similar declarations and we all recognise that progress can only be made through collaborative working and a collective ambition to achieve net zero with nature.

The natural environment is the most important and effective solution we have for capturing and sequestering carbon long-term. As a partnership we will work to safeguard the New Forest landscape, restore habitats to sequester carbon and combat biodiversity loss as well as support behaviour changes to ensure the National Park continues to be a treasured landscape for the nation.

### Our priorities

We will provide leadership to reduce carbon emissions and increase carbon sequestration, working towards the National Park being 'net zero with nature' by 2050. Net zero is achieved when the amount of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) emitted by human activities on a global scale are equal to that being removed by the natural environment. We will do this through a programme of work that:

#### 2.1. Establishes baseline data and evidence by:

- 2.1.1. Working collectively to both identify relevant emissions and the pace at which they need to be reduced to meet net zero by 2050
- 2.1.2. Researching and monitoring likely impacts of climate change and how that affects the National Park's ability to maintain its carbon stores and continue to sequester carbon
- 2.1.3. Developing research agendas and links with national level research bodies
- 2.1.4. Mapping both existing carbon storage and sequestration (carbon removal from atmosphere) rates across the National Park, as well as the potential increase in carbon sequestration the Park could support.

- 2.2. Implements nature-based climate solutions by:
  - 2.2.1. Identifying the range of nature-based climate solutions in the National Park and working collectively to agree actions to implement these, e.g. the most appropriate type of habitat restoration, preferred areas for tree and hedgerow planting, woodland creation including natural woodland regeneration ('the right tree in the right place')
  - 2.2.2. Providing advice on low carbon and nature-friendly practices and engaging farmers / landowners in the uptake of agricultural practices that both reduce carbon emissions and increase carbon sequestration (carbon removal from atmosphere where it causes climate change)
  - 2.2.3. Training advisors on low carbon and nature-friendly farming practices
  - 2.2.4. Taking action to protect our existing carbon stores by building resilience into our ecosystems e.g. maintaining genetic diversity within our woodlands to combat pests and diseases that threaten tree survival
  - 2.2.5. Exploring the potential for both public funding and private finance to fund nature restoration at the scale required to tackle the climate crisis
- 2.3. Builds a New Forest coalition for a net zero economy by:
  - 2.3.1. Creating forums for working collectively to reduce carbon emissions across all sectors
  - 2.3.2. Carefully integrating infrastructure projects with the wider natural environment
  - 2.3.3. Promoting measures to reduce demand, increase energy efficiency and use energy from renewable energy sources
  - 2.3.4. Promoting investment opportunities to fund nature recovery that increases carbon sequestration and protects our existing carbon stores
- 2.4. Activates communities through programmes of education and engagement by:
  - 2.4.1. Supporting our communities to take action by encouraging low carbon living and sustainable purchasing
  - 2.4.2. Encouraging visitors to adopt low carbon forms of travel to access the Park
  - 2.4.3. Enlisting more volunteers and support for the New Forest Ambassadors' Scheme
- 2.5. Increases Sustainable Travel by:
  - 2.5.1. Producing and delivering an agreed New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)
  - 2.5.2. Campaigning for lower speed limits across the Forest where appropriate and evidenced, to secure quieter, slower and reduced traffic impacts
  - 2.5.3. Developing a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to sustainable transport through the relevant Local Transport Plans and by developing a New Forest Transport Strategy
  - 2.5.4. Supporting bids for schemes that enable us to decarbonise the transport system

### 3. Thriving Forest

#### Outcome:

A living, working Forest is sustained through its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty and support for commoning. There is a vibrant local produce market, access to affordable homes, a growing green economy featuring sustainable tourism and green businesses.

#### Why is it important?

The New Forest is one of the last remaining extensive areas of unspoilt countryside and semi-natural habitat in lowland Europe. It is a cultural landscape of exceptional natural beauty, shaped over the millennia through the close relationship between the land, the history and culture of its people. It is also a living working landscape that has survived largely because of the persistence of a pastoral economy based on the exercise of common rights of grazing and mast. The New Forest is now one of the few remaining extensive systems of common rights operating in lowland Europe. There are nevertheless concerns about the longer-term viability of commoning, which is particularly vulnerable to recreational pressures.

Maintaining a high-quality natural environment can also contribute substantial economic benefits by supporting the growing green economy, including sustainable tourism and helping to attract high-value businesses and employees. Local produce and local businesses are vital to the health and wellbeing of our rural environment and local economy.

The Government's National Parks Circular confirms that by harnessing the economy to environmental ends, tangible economic benefits can be delivered in National Parks through the delivery of the two statutory purposes<sup>3</sup>. The New Forest National Park itself is home to 35,000 people and around 2,500 local businesses. Tourism and the visitor economy make a significant contribution to the local economy. It is estimated that tourism-related activities generate over £528 million annually and provide nearly 20% of all local jobs.

For these reasons, national policy recognises the need for small-scale, sustainably located development within National Parks to support the socio-economic wellbeing of our communities. We need to support community and green economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and at the same time take steps to address societal issues such as the high cost of housing and an ageing population.

#### Our priorities

We will sustain a living working Forest through a collective programme of work that:

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<sup>3</sup> National Parks Circular, 2010 - [Policy paper overview: English national parks and the broads: UK government vision and circular 2010 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/papers/policy-overview-english-national-parks-and-the-broads)

- 3.1. Increases green skills and jobs by:
  - 3.1.1. Recognising the National Park as a centre of excellence for green skills and jobs and a hub for investment in natural capital
  - 3.1.2. Developing a strategy and opportunities for young people through education and training
  - 3.1.3. Designing an apprenticeship programme building on the 'Our Past Our Future' (OPOF) ranger scheme
  - 3.1.4. Creating a green recovery / investment fund
- 3.2. Supports Sustainable Land Management by:
  - 3.2.1. Developing new business models with landowners to support the delivery of public goods
  - 3.2.2. Maintaining, continuing and enhancing public goods through commoning and farming; safeguard vital back-up grazing
  - 3.2.3. Facilitating the Forest Farming Group
- 3.3. Champions the future of New Forest Commoning by:
  - 3.3.1. Securing the future of commoning by collaborating with relevant organisations to protect and promote commoning
- 3.4. Supports New Forest Business and Green Tourism by:
  - 3.4.1 Encouraging investment by businesses to halve emissions by 2030
  - 3.4.2 Supporting the development of activities delivered by local businesses that provide authentic, sustainable experiences linked to the landscape
  - 3.4.3 Supporting local produce through the New Forest Marque
- 3.5. Increases the availability of affordable housing by:
  - 3.5.1. Providing more affordable housing for local communities, commoners and forestry keepers where appropriate, and retaining the existing stock of affordable and occupancy restricted housing
  - 3.5.2. Facilitating site finding, community involvement and application process through the 'rural exception route'
  - 3.5.3. Better monitoring and reporting of availability of restricted housing stock (conditions/leases/tenancy agreements)



## 4. An inclusive National Park

### Outcome:

People within reach of the New Forest, of all backgrounds, abilities and socio-economic groups, value the National Park as an important part of their lives and seek to care for it.

### Why is it important?

People need nature and culture for their physical, mental and spiritual health. The future of the New Forest depends on 'future generations' understanding and valuing this internationally-important landscape – and helping to care for it. Education officers across Forest organisations teach 10,000 children and young people a year with sessions tailored to learning about the New Forest and rangers work with thousands more through their family-focussed events and activities. Many more are engaged through the media, print and online platforms.

We want to encourage greater understanding and appreciation of the National Park, whilst ensuring minimum impact, and support the social and economic benefits that visitors bring in a sustainable way. We also want to specifically help people who face barriers or particular challenges to access so that they can benefit equally from engagement with the National Park. Effective engagement, interpretation and communication programmes with new and existing partners will be required to ensure we are a National Park for all.

### Our priorities

We will do this through a programme of work that:

#### 4.1. Promotes health and wellbeing by:

- 4.1.1. Building a strong, mutually beneficial partnership between the health and environment sectors, including a five-year programme of 'Health Education Fellowships' and facilitating effective local networks
- 4.1.2. Addressing health inequalities locally and regionally through improved green space, targeted interventions and nature-based referrals
- 4.1.3. Increasing uptake of walking for health, inclusive cycling for health and volunteering for health programmes.

#### 4.2. Connects people with nature and landscape by:

- 4.2.1. Removing barriers to participation and access – physical and perceived, e.g. affordable public transport
- 4.2.2. Recruiting more rangers, part of whose role is to help people understand and enjoy the New Forest, including apprentice rangers
- 4.2.3. Using data and evidence to create a more accurate picture of the current and possible users of the New Forest National Park and barriers to participation

- 4.2.4. Developing comprehensive and inclusive programmes of health and youth engagement and outreach to build relationships with diverse communities and audiences, including a Youth Action Project and bespoke education activity.
- 4.3. Leads inclusive place-making, celebrates beauty and safeguards our cultural heritage by:
  - 4.3.1. Assisting communities and local organisations to lead and shape cultural and natural heritage projects that foster identity and a sense of place
  - 4.3.2. Bringing together cultural heritage and archaeological datasets, identifying gaps and surveying identified areas to achieve a complete picture for future management
  - 4.3.3. Interpreting and disseminating landscape, cultural and natural heritage through specific outreach such as the New Forest Knowledge website.

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## **5. Team New Forest**

### **Outcome:**

Communities, businesses and organisations work together as a team to deliver the vision of the Partnership Plan, sharing knowledge, ideas and resources to deliver the best for the Forest.

### **Why is it important?**

The long-term survival of the New Forest is just as dependent on what happens around the boundary, regionally and nationally as within. We need to consolidate our networks and influence, nurture a culture of collaboration and enable delivery of policies and a package of measures to ensure the National Park landscape, economy and communities thrive. We need to be better than the sum of our parts to meet the challenges ahead and to ensure we are as efficient and effective a team for the New Forest as possible.

We want to harness the wealth of experience, skills and views in delivering this Partnership Plan. The Plan will be a living programme of work that will evolve over time, adapting and improving to new challenges and changing agendas. As well as building effective and impactful working arrangements to deliver, we also need to ensure that we hear and take account of all sections of our community and incorporate their ideas and innovations as we move forwards.

Everyone stands to benefit when we embrace and value the diversity of thoughts, perspectives and ways of working that people from different backgrounds, experiences and identities bring to the National Park. Our work and our National Park will be richer and more impactful if we take account of and include the views, talents and skills of all sections of society.

We will ensure a range of interventions are in place to enable all sectors of our community to have their say, take part and influence action in the National Park.

Data, evidence and understanding of the context we work in must underpin and help guide the Partnership Plan and our work with different organisations and groups. It will also be needed to monitor and measure impact. We will establish a National Park insights capability with universities, businesses and other stakeholders to ensure that our decision-making is anchored in robust research, that our action is monitored and that we are able to capture regular insights into the views of the community and of relevant social, economic and policy context.

### **Our priorities**

We will do this through a programme of work that:

5.1. Works with a wide range of people in our community and beyond by:

5.1.1. Growing understanding of each other and our audiences

5.1.2. Enabling enriching experiences for a diversity of people

5.2. Establishes strong partnerships and relationships within and beyond boundaries by:

- 5.2.1. Increasing the breadth and depth of our engagement by helping recreational users to understand their impacts on the National Park and the changes residents could make to help contribute to nature's recovery and tackle the climate emergency.
- 5.2.2. Establishing a new Partnership Board
- 5.2.3. Advocating regionally, nationally and internationally; identifying key means by which we can realise the ambition of the Partnership Plan
- 5.2.4. Expanding and consolidating links from the New Forest to Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire
- 5.2.5. Activating and channelling people's enthusiasm for caring for the New Forest and learning more about it (such as New Forest Ambassadors Scheme); harnessing and supporting existing movements within our communities

5.3. Leads the green agenda; seeking to influence, shape and innovate by:

- 5.3.1. Ensuring blue-green infrastructure is in place, connecting key network areas to help solve climate challenges by building with nature
- 5.3.2. Managing recreation across the area effectively, seeking new opportunities for sites where people and nature can benefit
- 5.3.3. Working with the national parks and wider protected landscapes to ensure they are recognised as central to providing nature-based solutions to the climate emergency and recovery of people.
- 5.3.4. Positioning the Green Halo Partnership to cement our role as thought leaders, influencing, developing and implementing policy in this area
- 5.3.5. Championing and helping to deliver the green recovery and the 'Greenprint' aspirations of the wider area
- 5.3.6. Working with Southampton City Council on developing its National Park City campaign
- 5.3.7. Exploring the National Park City region bid with Southampton City Council, South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

5.4. Develops our reputation as a 'centre of excellence' through our work together for the National Park and wider area by:

- 5.4.1. Understanding our evidence needs, the gaps and how to fill them; we are known as a centre of excellence for evidence, data and insights – in its commission, collation and application
- 5.4.2. Successfully scanning horizons using up-to-date evidence and data
- 5.4.3. Developing a 'SMART' National Park ambition with greatly improved broadband connectivity and use of up-to-date technologies where they can help solve National Park issues and take beneficial opportunities
- 5.4.4. Working with each other efficiently, effectively and with respect.

## **Annex 1 - Actions to deliver the Partnership Plan priorities**

The Partnership Plan is an overarching strategic document for the National Park and sets the framework for more detailed plans and strategies, including the annual business plans prepared by the National Park Authority and partner organisations.

A new partnership group will be established to oversee the implementation of the new Plan and to lead the review of future updates of the Plan. This new partnership group, comprising a small core membership of key partner organisations with an independent chair, will also activate and monitor the actions in the new Plan.

Delivery and performance of the Plan will be evaluated by tracking progress against identified measures of success. An annual progress report which will be published detailing key outputs and case studies from projects and other activities. We shall share this information widely with the public and all those helping to deliver our shared ambition for the National Park.

SEE SEPARATE ANNEX

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