



## **New Forest Commoners Defence Association (CDA) response to the “Future Forest” consultation on a revised Recreation Management Strategy for the New Forest.**

**12<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

In our August 2017 response to the Call for Views we argued for four priorities focused on the welfare of commoners’ livestock given their central role in maintaining the Special Qualities for which the New Forest is designated, protected, and enjoyed. We will, therefore, judge the proposed actions against these priorities:

1. Safer Roads
2. Controlling or Preventing Activities with the Greatest Impact
3. Raising Awareness and Understanding
4. Recreational Spaces around the Perimeter

Our response is limited to commentary on the list of draft actions included in the consultation. We have not responded to the online survey, which was designed to provide very limited opportunities for thoughtful critique of the draft strategy and its proposed actions.

**The draft strategy lacks detailed analysis of the challenge being faced**, and does not offer benchmarks against which future actions could be judged. As with the current Strategy the commitment to data gathering is included, but it is once again unlikely to be delivered. The actions are, therefore, based more on a need to identify boxes that can be readily ticked than a desire to make a real difference by setting challenging, measurable targets.

**We do not believe that this a strategy that could be acceptable to anyone who cares about protecting the Special Qualities of the New Forest for future generations to enjoy, and for commoning to continue to thrive as the core element of these Special Qualities.**

## 1. Safer Roads

The action at 4.2 for safety improvements where routes cross busy roads would be welcomed by all Forest users, provided these improvements are well designed for use by all, including people leading or riding their animals. Other than this small commitment, however, **the document reveals an appalling lack of vision for Forest roads.**

Perceptions that Forest roads are unsafe simply drive recreational walkers, cyclists and riders onto the grazed Forest; prompting them also to arrive and leave by vehicle. Over time the perception of danger becomes reality, leaving our roads to become the preserve of the motor vehicle, save for commoners' livestock.

**If a Recreation Management Strategy is to benefit the Forest then it must offer an innovative vision for making our roads safer, and a willingness to experiment with bold solutions.**

## 2. Controlling or Preventing Activities with the Greatest Impact

Under "*Objective 2: Addressing significant and/or widespread negative impacts*" **the strategy still lacks any data on impacts from specific activities, or forecasts of future impacts.** Without these data it reverts to a simple "everything is a priority" approach that will achieve very little in practice.

Regardless of the impact of pursuit of the stated first objective in the consultation, relating to public understanding and behaviour change, enforcement will, sadly, be an ongoing necessity. **The harmful activities cited are growing and a significant investment in enforcement is urgently required,** with far too few rangers available in view of the scale and impact of the problem being faced and the emergence of new harmful activities. Even people with understanding of the New Forest will follow the crowd if activities such as verge and gateway parking, littering, drone flying, etc., are seen to be the norm and face no enforcement (The inclusion of verge parking in the action at 4.4 is, of course, welcome, but requires real investment).

The New Forest benefits from a significant group of well-motivated people, very willing to help, whether as rangers, litter-pickers, or guides, and the Strategy should offer more support to beneficial behaviours as well as addressing harmful behaviours. Doing good should be made the easy option for everyone.

The intention in "*Objective 4: Sustainable recreation in the right places*" - to develop a long-term vision for the landscape, gateways and core routes is laudable, but **risks making protection the exception rather than the rule.** The description of possible delivery at 4.2 should be reversed, with the presumption that all of the Forest warrants protection of its special qualities, but with identification of the existing "honey pot" sites to be better managed, to sustainably accommodate any increased activity and the shifting of any growth in activity to sites beyond the protected Forest.

### 3. Raising Awareness and Understanding

We were very pleased at the priority given to awareness and understanding by a wide range of respondents to the 2017 survey. The draft actions represent sensible steps towards this goal.

The statutory bodies do have some power to reinforce the take-up of good quality information by commercial providers of recreational facilities, and they should **avoid any promotion of organisations or facilities that do not actively seek to inspire respect for the special qualities of the New Forest.** Clear charters could be developed against which these might be judged for their commitment to the New Forest.

The Education Toolkit being developed within the *Our Past, Our Future* project should be included in the action on educational programmes.

The Strategy should seek to achieve much better voluntary co-ordination of messaging between agencies and New Forest organisations, so that common core messages are delivered, achieving greater consistency than in the past.

### 4. Recreational Spaces around the Perimeter

The draft actions included under Objective 5 are welcome, given the focus on developing new recreation facilities around the perimeter of the Forest and close to new housing developments.

**This section does, however, lack any detailed commitment to change.** There is, for example, no mention of the Green Halo partnership, which could provide the basis for sustainable future recreation management, offering benefits to the surrounding communities and their local economies and ensuring that any increases in visitor volumes are well accommodated in the Forest fringe, preserving the Forest itself for small scale, quiet, and sustainable recreation consistent with the protection and enjoyment of its special qualities.

### Conclusion

In sum, the CDA is deeply disappointed that the actions are too ambiguous and cautious to have any measurable effect on meeting the severe challenges that now threaten the special qualities of the New Forest. We would urge a wholesale reconsideration if the Recreation Management Strategy is to be made fit for purpose.