

Supporting information for the Forestry England presentment to the Verderers of the New Forest Court on 18/09/24 - A proposal for promoting responsible cycling and improving the New Forest off road cycle network.

INDEX

- A) The Proposed Revised Network
- B) Digital Mapping
- C) Revised Waymarking and Paper Mapping
- D) Revised New Forest Cycle Guide
- E) Cycle Ambassadors
- F) Communicating the Revised Network
- G) Ongoing Review and Monitoring Process

A) The Proposed Revised Off-Road Cycle Network

1. The objective of this proposal is an improved and better-connected off-road cycle network, combined with measures to increase adherence to that network by the cycling community, both visitor and local.
2. This proposal was put together using the principles in the New Forest Recreation Management Strategy, and the New Forest Partnership Plan (Re:New Forest). Particular consideration was given to possible effects on the commoning system on which the New Forest depends.
3. All routes were considered individually and included or rejected based on these principles. Possible further amendments will form part of the ongoing review and monitoring process outlined in G) below. Many routes initially requested by the Cycle Working Group members have already been removed from this proposal following discussions with the Verderers in the joint working group.
4. The revised network would need to be introduced in a phased way. Some routes on gravel tracks for large forestry vehicles could be added quickly, some will need surface improvements, a few will need additional approvals from other bodies and significant work before they can be added to the network, however their inclusion as key future links is important to the integrity and useability of the network. None will be introduced before all the necessary permissions are in place along with suitable waymarking. We anticipate that routes could start to be added in 2025 subject to suitable waymarking (see C) below). Those requiring surface upgrading would take longer - up to 3 years, with the most challenging requiring statutory approvals taking up to 5 years.
5. Ideally all cyclists will stick to the network, though in reality this will be difficult to achieve. Measures outlined in B), C), D), E), and F) below are aimed at increasing adherence to the network and encouraging behaviour change.
6. A MAP OF THE PROPOSED REVISED NETWORK CAN BE SEEN AS A SEPARATE PDF FILE:

DRAFT Forestry England Proposed New Forest Cycle Network Sep 2024.pdf

B) Digital Mapping

1. The Cycle working group convened a mapping subgroup to develop an approach to address inaccuracies in the many digital mapping applications available. The group met three times and consisted of six members of the CWG and representatives from Forestry England and NFNPA. The group was also assisted by a representative from Komoot, a digital mapping application.
2. The group identified that popular applications such as Komoot, Google maps, Strava, All Trails and Ride with GPS all use a common base map known as Open Street Map. Open Street Map has a complex data system behind it which currently allocates many trails on the New Forest Crown Lands as being permitted for cycling as a default (possibly due to the horse riding / walking access rights). However, this can be amended by any user as the system is 'open source'. Trails that are not on the network can be changed to 'not permitted' for cycles, and this then carries through to the many applications such as Komoot, Strava and Google.
3. The group tested this in several key areas, with the resultant routes now not guiding off the network. This was demonstrated to the Verderers / CWG subgroup on 15 January 2024. It is proposed that following a new network being agreed, CWG volunteers assisted by FE/NFNPA can systematically work through the many hundreds of trails, paths and tracks on Open Street Map and give the correct permission to each. It is not possible to do this via a blanket across a wide area, each trail needs to be individually processed. It is expected that this work could be completed in a period of approximately three to six months. This will need to be an ongoing action which would form part of the review and monitoring process in G) below.
4. The effect of incorrectly routing people onto inappropriate tracks via digital mapping apps should not be underestimated, and we are certain that this is real. Once a new network is adequately represented on these apps, many cyclists who are currently unaware they are off route will no longer be routed that way. In addition, platforms such as Komoot are taking a proactive approach and have worked with FE /NFNPA to ensure that their platforms curate and offer correct information and promote only routes that are on-network whilst also promoting the New Forest Code.

C) Revised Waymarking and Paper Mapping

1. Waymarking for the proposed revised network of off-road cycle tracks will need to be updated. It is proposed to use a more route-based approach making it easier and more attractive for cyclists to stick to the revised network for both recreational and utility journeys, and easier to promote these routes. This will need to be introduced in a phased way to reflect the phased introduction of the revised network. This approach is fully in line with the principles on which this proposal is based, and with the objectives of the recent Active Travel England grant to National Parks.
2. Developing plans for the new waymarking for the revised network could start in late 2024/early 2025 with some funds earmarked for this via the NFNPA should the revised network be approved.
3. The joint working group would provide a forum to ensure this is done in a co-ordinated way as part of the ongoing review and monitoring process outlined in G) below.
4. Forestry England paper maps of the off-road cycle routes in the New Forest will be kept up to date with the phased introduction of new routes.
5. Ordnance Survey will be kept informed of the changes as they are introduced.

D) Revised New Forest Cycling Guide.

The Cycle Working Group convened a further subgroup to look at messaging issues. This group met 3 times and has provided significant input into the development of the New Forest Cycling guide below, and the communications strategy outlined in F).

New Forest Cycling Guide

The New Forest is a world capital for wildlife and a working landscape with commoning and forestry operations all year round.

Scan me to find out more 


Know where to go



- Use a map to check and plan your route.
- Stay on the waymarked network marked with wooden posts.
- Avoid the smaller, narrow pathways made by animals – using these can cause real damage to wildlife and nature.


 Thank you and enjoy your ride.

Be aware and be safe




- Be prepared to stop quickly – other cyclists, walkers, horse-riders and free-roaming animals can be on the tracks at any time.
- Obey all safety and diversion signs – some tracks may be temporarily closed for safety reasons.
- Keep to a safe speed – look out for potholes, uneven surfaces, and cattle grids.
- Take care at underpasses – make sure they are clear and safe before entering.
- Watch out for large forestry and farm vehicles on the tracks.

Look out and look after



- Pass forest animals and horse-riders wide and slow.
- Use your bell or call out a warning when passing other people – allow them plenty of room.
- Take litter home.
- Close gates behind you.
- Respect the tranquillity of the Forest.

newforestnpa.gov.uk forestryengland.uk/new-forest NPA 01249

The New Forest Cycle Guide has been developed to be straight forward and approachable. The Graphics are aligned with those of the New Forest Code. In this format it will be easier to share both digitally and physically. It highlights the ongoing nature of commoning and forestry operations and the need to be aware of them at all times.

E) Cycle ambassadors

1. Cycle ambassadors are volunteers who will assist members of the public in using the cycle network. They have two broad roles:
 - Helping users of the cycle / multi-user network navigate the network; and
 - Engaging people on the network about the way cycling is managed in the New Forest and the importance of keeping to the network, through sharing the New Forest Code and the New Forest Cycling Guide.

In addition, cycle ambassadors may share other information they know about the New Forest, for example about its wildlife, habitats, history, or indeed any local knowledge such as good places to go, where to access services etc.

2. Should the revised network be approved cycle ambassadors will be recruited from the cycling community, from riders who are often out and about on the network. We know that many local cyclists already engage with others on the network, helping with enquiries if people are lost. The ambassador scheme will create structure around this - signing people up and providing training and support for more people to do this more effectively.
3. The New Forest Cycle working group provides the community from which people can be recruited. The New Forest National Park Authority and Forestry England can provide the training and support for the roles. At a recent cycle working group meeting, many groups offered their support for this scheme.
4. Recruitment will take place in early 2025, and it is expected that a first cohort of 15-20 ambassadors will be trained and active by Spring 2025 subject to suitable waymarking being in place. The programme will be reviewed annually in the autumn and a new round of recruitment and training provided. Because people will be doing this in their own time, the eventual numbers of ambassadors can grow to give good coverage across the Forest as well as there being more chance of users meeting an ambassador.
5. Because the ambassadors are cyclists themselves, this peer-to-peer engagement will result in better understanding of the way the Forest is managed and how cycling fits into that picture, for the benefit of the Forest.

F) Communicating the Revised Network

1. If approval for a revised network is given, then a plan for implementation will be required. Forestry England will take a phased approach to any additions, as some will need further approval, and some will need surface improvements or other work (see A4 above). Communication to the cycling community and to the wider public will be key to ensuring the revised network is understood and adhered to.
2. Once the phasing plan is finished, then areas of the network can be brought into operation. Each phase gives an opportunity for coordinated communications, led by Forestry England and the NFNPA and supported by the Recreation Management Strategy partners and advisory group, including the Cycle Working Group. By working together on communication, then the vast majority of users can be made aware of the changes and the reasons for those changes, to enable greater understanding of how cycling is managed in the New Forest and how riders themselves can help look after the Forest.
3. The following channels of communication are proposed:
 - Websites- key visitor and locally focussed websites can be utilised, including NFNPA, FE, Hampshire County Council, NFDC, Go New Forest (thenewforest.co.uk), Cycling UK, Cycle hire businesses, local cycling group websites, local parish council websites.
 - Social media- co-ordinated social media campaigns will promote the New Forest Cycle Guide alongside information with where new additions to the network have been opened, supported by information on how and why to keep to the network.
 - On the ground- Rangers, keepers, agisters, volunteer rangers and cycle ambassadors can be coordinated to ensure as many people as possible are aware of any changes and the rationale behind them.
 - Media outlets- Online and print media can be contacted and press releases used to convey the messages to the wider Forest community.

4. The communication reach of the above will ensure that messages are widely conveyed and understood. The Cycle Working Group represents many local cycling groups who may not access visitor publications, so this provides a way of talking with and engaging local cyclists.

G) Ongoing Review and Monitoring Process

1. The effectiveness of the revised network and measures to improve adherence to it will be subject to an ongoing long-term review and monitoring process to be undertaken by the joint working group.
2. Improvements to behaviour change measures will be evaluated.
3. Possible further network amendments will be considered based on the principles used to develop this proposal as outlined in A). Crossing points of the A31 for all users, and East/West connectivity from the Waterside are key strategic areas which need improvement if current difficulties can be resolved.
4. This long-term commitment to the network is essential if suitable strategic decisions are to be made regarding maintenance, improvements, waymarking and mapping of the network.