

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 18 MAY 2006 AT 09.30 HOURS AT THE ASHBURN HOTEL, FORDINGBRIDGE

#### **Present:**

##### *Members*

Ted Johnson (Chairman)  
Mel Kendal (Deputy Chairman)

Susan Achmatowicz	Clive Maton
Clive Chatters	Bob Morris
Lee Dunsdon	Vicky Myers
Tony Gentle	Leo Randall
Diana Halford	Barry Rickman
Jeremy Heron	John Sanger
Kathy Heron	Stan Wade
Julian Johnson	Alan Weeks

##### *Officers*

Lindsay Cornish, Kevin Gardner (Monitoring Officer), Alison Parker, Stephen Trotter, Jeff Haynes, John Ward, Pat Higgins, Janet Purnell, Nigel Matthews, Nick Evans, Karen Evans, David Stone and Rosalind Alderman.

#### **PART I – OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

##### **18. Apologies for absence**

1. Peter Frost
2. Roger Heape
3. Alan Rice
4. Pat Wyeth

##### **19. Declarations of interest**

5. On advice from the Monitoring Officer, Local Authority members accepted and declared a personal but not prejudicial interest on agenda items which related to their role as County, District or Parish members.

##### **20. Chairman's announcements**

6. None.

##### **21. Minutes of meeting on 25 April 2006**

7. Diana Halford said Item 16, paragraph 42, of the draft minutes should be amended to refer to NATS Limited rather than National Air Traffic Limited.
8. Subject to the previous point, the Minutes were agreed as a true record.

9. Stan Wade said that he had given apologies for his absence from the meeting on 25 April 2006 and requested that this be noted in the minutes.

**22. Public Question Time**

10. There were no questions or statements from the public.

**23. Chief Executive's report**

11. Lindsay Cornish introduced the report (NFNPA 87/06) and advised that there were now 41 permanent members of staff at the Authority, up from 32 staff at the time of the last report. She introduced Nigel Matthews, previously at Kent Wildlife Trust, and explained that Nigel would be working with Jeff Haynes in Understanding and Enjoyment as Head of Visitor Services. Lindsay also introduced Karen Evans, previously at Southampton City Council, and explained that Karen would be working with Martin O'Neill as Communications Officer.
12. Lindsay then responded to questions from members on efforts to resolve the technical difficulties experienced with the Authority's website, the possible amalgamation of posts - which she said was kept under review as part of the overall recruitment process - and the status of the Authority's response to Defra on funding issues, where she advised that the response had been delayed as a result of the recent ministerial reshuffle, although she had spoken with Defra. The letter would be copied to members once finalised.
13. The Deputy Chairman informed members that at the recent ANPA conference in Cheltenham he had an opportunity to meet privately with a Defra official responsible for national park policy and sponsorship and involved in the funding process and the drafting of the Minister's letter. The official did not think the high cost of staffing in the South East should be taken into account in reviewing the Authority's grant, pointing out that other national parks suffered from a rural sparsity problem.
14. Mel Kendal said the Minister's letter envisaged the Authority remaining in its current premises for five years to recoup more of the resources invested in the building. The Deputy Chairman had pointed out that some items would be transferable to future premises and their cost clearly identified. The Chairman said he was concerned by the result of the meeting as the resolution of the accommodation problem was critical to the Authority's long term success.
15. Clive Chatters drew members' attention to paragraph 6 of the report (Planning Policy). He welcomed the proposed presentation of a paper to the meeting on 15 June setting out the Authority's recommended response to the consultation on the draft South East Plan, and in view of the short period of time between 15 June and 23 June when comments would be due, asked whether there was preliminary work members could be doing in the meantime. Lindsay Cornish said she would discuss progress with John Ward and would ensure members received copies of the relevant points of the plan or references to it.
16. Julian Johnson suggested that a seminar should be run for members by a senior planning officer on the South East Plan consultation. The Chairman

agreed this might be useful, although the members involved did understand the complexity of the draft. The problem was the added pressure on members' time. Lindsay Cornish agreed to consider providing a members' seminar with John Ward and advise members accordingly.

**Resolved:** That the report of the Chief Executive be **noted**.

#### **24. Draft Code of Practice for Corporate Governance**

17. Pat Higgins introduced the report (NFNPA 88/06), which recommended the adoption of a Code of Practice for Corporate Governance, as considered by the Authority's Standards Committee. Pat Higgins explained that she, as the Authority's Section 151 Officer, together with the Monitoring Officer, would conduct an annual review as to the Authority's compliance with the Code of Practice and would submit a report and recommendations. The first review would be based on 2006/07 performance and reported in June 2007. Pat Higgins drew members' attention to Annex 2 of the report which set out a proposed framework of documents that should be in place, some of which already existed and some of which would need to be generated later in the year.
18. Jeremy Heron drew members' attention to paragraph 2.2 of the draft Code which referred to the requirement for the Authority to establish appropriate relationships with, among others, businesses, and asked how the Authority would approach this. Lindsay Cornish said that the Authority had not yet taken any specific action on the point, which would be progressed in the near future.

**Resolved:** That the Code of Practice for Corporate Governance, set out in Annex 1 to report NFNPA 88/06, be adopted.

#### **25. Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2006/07**

19. Pat Higgins introduced the report (NFNPA 89/06) on treasury management as part of the Authority's financial framework. She explained that treasury management activities were strictly regulated by statute, the investment guidelines issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and a professional code of practice issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy. There was little scope for variation. The draft Policy and Strategy which the Authority was required to adopt had been kept simple. It was unlikely that the Authority would carry out material investment or borrowing in the current financial year, but nevertheless the policy and strategy needed to be put in place as a protocol. Pat said she had tried to include only the relevant basic prudential indicators within the report. The Prudential Code of Practice governed borrowing, including borrowing on a short term basis for cash flow exercises, which it was possible the Authority would undertake within the current financial year. The Authority did not propose to arrange any long term borrowing at this stage. The treasury management practices the Authority had put in place already had earned £43,000 in interest during the preceding financial year. Interest earnings had not been taken account of in the 2006/07 budget. The performance indicators were based on estimated figures as there was currently nothing on which they could be based.

20. Pat then responded to questions from members on the method by which the grant from Defra would be made available to the Authority. During subsequent discussion on ethical investment, Clive Chatters pointed out that it would be unreasonable for the Authority to invest in organisations that ran counter to the interests of the Authority and suggested that officers should be asked to determine what flexibility existed, in order that informed decisions could be made on investment that would further the Authority's interests. Mel Kendal referred members to paragraph 2.2 of Annex 2 to the report, which set out the list of permitted investments.
21. Susan Achmatowicz said she was concerned there was no cash flow projection for the next year, and asked who was managing the Authority's cash flow and whether this was carried out in a manner that would maximise potential for interest to be earned. Pat Higgins said there had been a cash management forecast in place during the preceding year, but it had had to be frequently revised to take account of expenditure on, among other things, staff appointments and IT. The Authority would attempt to refine the cash management forecast for the current year. In response to a further question, Pat Higgins explained that interest from investments would be included in the regular budgetary control reports.
22. Lindsay Cornish confirmed that she and the Chairman were considering governance arrangements and would bring a proposal to the Authority on establishing a resources and performance committee. Part of the role of the committee would be to review cash flow management.

**Resolved:** That the Treasury Management Policy outlined in Annex 1 to report NFNPA 89/06 be approved.

**Resolved:** That the Strategy for Treasury Management for 2006/07 to 2008/09 outlined in Annex 2 to report NFNPA 89/06 be approved.

**Resolved:** That the Prudential Indicators for 2006/07 to 2008/09 outlined in Annex 3 to report NFNPA 89/06 be adopted.

## **26. Final Draft of the Corporate Plan**

23. In introducing the report (NFNPA 90/06), Lindsay Cornish thanked the members and Janet Purnell for their hard work in inputting to the development of the Plan. The Authority and all local authorities have to produce a "Best Value Performance Plan" and the requirements governed the overall structure and content of the Corporate Plan. The District Auditor would look at the Corporate Plan as part of the annual audit of accounts and would comment in the budget letter in September as to how far the Authority had met its requirements.
24. The plan provided an outline of what the Authority hoped to achieve in the next two years and who would be involved in the processes; it was a key document for staff to identify how their work as individuals fitted within the work of the Authority as a whole. The document was also useful for the Authority's stakeholders and partners. Lindsay Cornish pointed out that in future years the Authority would be required to review its performance

against the targets and milestones set out in the Plan, so next year's Plan would look very different, including improvement plans.

25. The Corporate Plan covered a range of strategy and policy development which would feed into the new National Park Management Plan in two years' time. It was not comprehensive, covering key tasks and actions rather than 'business as usual' work such as responses to consultations. A summary of the National Park's special qualities had been included in the final version of the plan. In addition, a section on the Authority's Values would also be included once members' comments had been received.
26. Lindsay Cornish said that the plan as currently drafted was ambitious. It was possible not all actions would be achieved, but it was important that they were all started: the activities included in the Plan were all considered by members to be critical. Progress would be dependant on the speed with which the outstanding staff recruitment was completed.
27. Lindsay said that, following helpful informal sessions with members, their comments were summarised in the addendum to the report, copies of which had been tabled at the meeting. These comments would be incorporated into the Plan in the final draft.
28. Janet Purnell and the Chairman echoed the Chief Executive's thanks to the members and staff involved in the drafting.
29. The following matters were raised during the discussion:
  - a) Drafting the Plan was comparatively easy; monitoring progress against the Plan would be more difficult. When monitoring reports were presented to members clear cross-references to the relevant parts of the Plan would be needed.
  - b) Would it be possible to monitor the ability of the Authority's partners to cope with their input to the work?
30. Lindsay Cornish said there would be a quarterly review of progress against the Plan, alongside a review of the 'risk register' which would identify risks – such as partner input – to delivery of the Plan and therefore to its impact on delivering national park purposes.

**Resolved:** That the final draft of the Corporate Plan as set out in Annex 1 to report NFNPA 90/06 be approved, subject to the points raised in discussion and the amendments contained in the addendum tabled at the meeting, and that the publication of the plan be approved.

## **27. Statement of Community Involvement Pre-Submission Draft Consultation Stage**

31. John Ward introduced the report (NFNPA 91/06) as one of the compulsory elements of the new planning regime. The Statement of Community Involvement covered how to involve the community in preparing local planning policy documents and carrying out the Authority's Development Control functions. Once the Statement was adopted it would be used by the Planning Inspectorate every time a policy document was submitted, to test that document's soundness. John Ward pointed out that the Statement did not prevent the Authority from carrying out additional activities, but everything set out in the Statement must be followed. The

Statement was based on New Forest District Council's Statement which the Authority had supported in principle in September 2005.

32. John Ward explained that the process for developing the Statement involved: (i) a pre-consultation phase; (ii) a consultation phase; and (iii) submission of the document followed by a further consultation phase. Stage (i) was complete - the Authority had written to other local authorities and Parish Councils; their responses were included in the report. If the Authority now approved the draft, the process would move to phase (ii), wider consultation on the draft Statement which would then be 'fine-tuned' in the light of comments received and submitted to government.
33. The following points were raised in the discussion:
- a) Regarding the list of consultees at page 29 of the pre-submission draft, Parish and Town Councils should be given their correct titles.
  - b) Regarding policy SCI-7, it was important that consultees should be able to find whether or how their comments had been taken into account in the revision of the draft.
  - c) Small organisations, such as a Parish Councils, have practical difficulties in dealing with large documents requiring comment. Would it be possible for consultation documents to be broken down into smaller units, as some items would be relevant to certain organisations and not to others? On parish plans, more active involvement was needed guiding them on content.
  - d) On SCI-10 at paragraph 9.3, there was concern that the Annual Monitoring Report would only be available as a press release, on the Authority's web site and at the Authority's premises, and would therefore not be very accessible. It should be placed in local libraries.
34. John Ward said he would seek to place the consultation documents in libraries but as it was beyond the Authority's control to ensure they were accessible he did not want the Authority to fail the soundness test which would be the case if he altered the policy.

**Resolved:** That, subject to the comments made at the meeting, the Pre-Submission Draft Statement of Community Involvement (Annex 1 to report NFNPA 91/06) be approved for formal consultation, as required by Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004.

**28. Interim Statement of Special Qualities for the New Forest National Park**

35. Stephen Trotter introduced the report (NFNPA 92/06) on the interim statement, as work in progress based on the work of members in workshops and further comments from members and staff. The statement was fundamental to the work of the Authority and would define what the Authority sought to protect. The process of developing and securing agreement to the statement would be as important as the final product.
36. The following points were raised in discussion:

- a) The statement should, as a matter of fact, include the Forest's hunting heritage and associated art;
- b) The reference to the New Forest pony stock being under threat from poor quality breeding was questioned – ponies were exported all over Europe and fetched high prices; on the other hand more work was needed to continue to improve the quality of Forest stock;
- c) The reference at 2.4 to the Forest's long history and tradition of tourism was questioned; rather the Forest had been created as a royal recreation ground in which hunting was the chief activity – in other words it is recreation which is traditional to the area.

**Resolved:** That:

- (i) the Interim Statement of Special Qualities contained in Annex 1 to report NFNPA 92/06 be **noted**; and
- (ii) The outline process for producing a final version of the Statement of Special Qualities, bearing in mind the points raised in discussion at the meeting, be approved.

**29. New Forest Consultative Panel Report**

**Resolved:** That issues of interest at the meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel on 4 May 2006, and in particular points relevant to the Authority under paragraph 6, be **noted**.

**Resolved:** that the date of the next Panel meeting on Thursday 6 July 2006 be **noted**.

**PART II – ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ON THE GROUNDS THAT EXEMPTED INFORMATION MAY BE DISCLOSED**

37. There were no agenda items for consideration under Part II of the agenda.

The meeting closed at 10.35 hrs

Signed ..... (Chair)