

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 26 MARCH 2009 AT 09.30 HOURS IN THE CHARCOALS SUITE, BURLEY MANOR HOTEL, BURLEY

Present:

Members

Clive Chatters (Chairman)

Barry Rickman (Deputy Chairman)

Tony Gentle

Roger Heape (until minute item 70)

Jeremy Heron

Kathy Heron

Maureen Holding

Ted Johnson

Julian Johnson

Bob Morris

Vicky Myers

Leo Randall

Alan Rice

John Sanger

Alan Weeks

Pat Wyeth

Officers

Lindsay Cornish

Chief Executive

Kevin Gardner

Monitoring Officer

Richard Lemon

Director of Strategy and Planning

Martin O'Neill

Director of Information and Visitor Services

Steve Trotter

Director of Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

Ron Meekings

Deputy Chief Finance Officer

David Stone

Head of Member Services

Nick Evans

Senior Planner

Bryan Wilson

Senior Tree Officer

Mark Stephenson

Building Conservation Officer

Rosalind Alderman

Member Services Officer

Jo Murphy

Member Services Administrator

Also in attendance:

John Pemberton, Secretary of State appointed Authority member from 1 April 2009

Kevin Stubbs, Consultant

PART I – OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

61. Apologies for absence

61.1 Apologies for absence were received from Lee Dunsdon, Peter Frost, Mel Kendal, Clive Maton and Stan Wade.

62. Declarations of interest

62.1 On advice from the Monitoring Officer, Local Authority members accepted and declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in agenda items which related to their role as County, District or Parish members. Members of Hampshire County Council would have a personal but not prejudicial interest in minute items 67 (Chief Executive's Report), 68 (Oral report from Resources and Performance Committee), 69 (General Fund Revenue Budget for Financial Year 2009/10) and 73 (Report on New Forest Access Forum). Members of New Forest District

Council would have a personal but not prejudicial interest in minute items 67 (Chief Executive's Report) and 70 (Europarc Sustainable Tourism Charter).

- 62.2 The Monitoring Officer also advised that any member who owned (or a member of whose family or a close personal associate of whom owned) land within the proposed revised boundaries of the Fritham with Eyeworth and Burley conservation areas, would have a personal, and possibly prejudicial, interest in minute item 71 (Conservation Areas Review – Fritham with Eyeworth and Burley: character appraisals and proposed changes to boundaries). No declarations of interest were made as a landowner in connection with this report, but Kathy Heron declared a personal but not prejudicial interest as the area fell within her electoral division as a Hampshire County Councillor.

63. Chairman's announcements

- 63.1 The Chairman welcomed Jeremy Heron to his first meeting as a (Secretary of State-appointed) Parish representative. He also welcomed John Pemberton, whose appointment as a Secretary of State member would start on 1 April and who was present to observe proceedings.
- 63.2 The Chairman reminded members that there would be an informal oral update on the National Park Plan after the formal meeting closed.

64. Minutes of meeting on 29 January 2009

- 64.1 The minutes of the meeting on 29 January 2009 were agreed as a true record.

65. Public Question Time

- 65.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

66. Appointment to the New Forest Court of Verderers

- 66.1 Lindsay Cornish presented the report (Paper NFNPA 288/09), explaining that a vacancy had arisen for a member to represent the Authority to the Verderer's Court, following the death of Diana Halford in September 2008. Members were asked to decide whether to make a permanent or interim appointment immediately or defer an appointment until the Annual Authority meeting in June, with Peter Frost (a member of the Court) being asked to represent the Authority's interests informally until that time. It was pointed out that he would not be able to vote as the Authority's appointed Verderer during that period. If the appointment was deferred, members who were interested in putting their names forward for this appointment would have an opportunity before the Annual meeting to familiarise themselves with the work of the Court.

Resolved:

That the National Park Authority's appointment to the New Forest Court of Verderers, to fill the current vacancy, be made at the June Annual Authority meeting with Peter Frost representing the Authority's interests informally during the intervening period.

Voting: none voting against

67. Chief Executive's Report

- 67.1 The Chairman said he was pleased to welcome back Leanne Atkinson (as seasonal Coastal Ranger jointly appointed with Hampshire County Council) and Andy Brennan (as the Seasonal Mobile Unit Ranger). Lindsay Cornish then introduced the report (NFNPA 289/09).
- 67.2 Members raised the following questions and comments:
- (a) Would the lessons learnt from the workshop with Hampshire and Dorset County Councils to discuss the Dorset Rural Roads Protocol (referred to on page 7 of the report) also apply in Wiltshire? The Chief Executive confirmed that all three authorities had been represented at the National Park Plan Working Group on Traffic and Transport and that more generally action would be co-ordinated as far as possible between these authorities. The Chief Executive also said that the record of issues raised at the working groups would be circulated to members and made available to the public via the Authority's website. Members also reiterated the need to curb the proliferation of signage within the National Park.
 - (b) Referring to the query on the consultation process for the first conservation area-specific management plan, and the draft Building Design Guide (mentioned on page 7 of the report), the Chief Executive said she would refer to officers the suggestion that the consultation should closely involve local people and Parish Councils.
 - (c) Members raised a number of queries and comments on the progress of the National Park Plan consultation. Recent suggestions in the press that the Authority had chosen to open the current series of consultation workshops on the Plan only to its supporters were disputed by some members, who felt that although there had been some consensus at these workshops a healthy diversity of opinions had been expressed. It was important to involve local people as well as representatives of stakeholder groups.
 - (d) In discussing the report on the recent litter pick jointly instituted by New Forest District Council, the Forestry Commission and the Authority, members emphasised the need to educate people on the importance of properly disposing of litter.
 - (e) Members who had recently had dealings with the Authority's Human Resources team commended the team's cheerfulness and efficiency.
 - (f) Referring to the potential replacement of the A35 bridge over the railway line at Holmsley referred to at the bottom of page 8 of the report, Alan Rice asked that he be kept informed of developments.
 - (g) Leo Randall raised the issue of the continuation of his appointment to the Authority following the creation of a unitary council for Wiltshire that would take place on 1 April 2009, and thanked the Chief Executive for all her efforts on his behalf.
 - (h) Members commended the new National Park signs that had been put up at Canada.

67.3 The Chairman reminded members that they could make comments and ask questions of officers on these and other issues at any time and did not need to raise everything at an Authority meeting. Members then noted the report.

68. Oral report from the Resources and Performance Committee

68.1 Draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee on 10 March 2009 had been circulated to members with the agenda papers for the current meeting. The most significant issues to report were on the General Fund Revenue Budget, to be discussed as the next agenda item, and Roger Heape, the Committee's Chairman, accordingly reserved his comments until that point.

68.2 Members then noted the report.

69. General Fund Revenue Budget for financial year 2009/10

69.1 Ron Meekings introduced the report (NFNPA 290/09) which had been discussed in detail and supported for recommendation to the Authority by the Resources and Performance Committee. He said that the total gross budget, comprising the elements shown in paragraph 2.4 of the report, was slightly more than £5.6 million. This figure represented an increase of 6% in cash terms and, allowing for inflation, about 3.5% in real terms over the previous year.

69.2 Monitoring would be by way of regular budget reports to the Resources and Performance Committee. These reports would also include updates on the general reserve position of £900,000, comprising the £400,000 risk assessed level of reserve and £500,000 to cover the Heritable Bank investment. Referring to this latter point, Ron Meekings reported that there would be further news on the investment during April following meetings facilitated by the Local Government Association.

69.3 Roger Heape then drew members' attention to Annex 3 of the report which demonstrated that the budget emphasis on the two main purposes was increasing with expenditure in the areas of conservation, recreation and visitor services increasing from 39% in 2008/09 to 44% in 2009/10.

69.4 Referring to paragraph 2.5 of the report and the £1.7 million in the new Programme Fund, he said that although the draw down on the reserve funds would not be significant in 2009/10, in the longer term, the Authority could not afford to continue this process and income and expenditure projections were that the Authority's reserves would be exhausted by the end of 2011/12. Accordingly, a full review of future spending would be required during the summer towards achieving a balanced budget position in the longer term. In other words, the current level of expenditure would probably be a relatively short term enhancement.

69.5 Pointing out that the Authority was ultimately accountable to the public, some members raised concerns at the 6% increase in budget spend in the current difficult economic climate and of ensuring value for money on the Authority's operations. Roger Heape and Ron Meekings referred members to paragraph 2.3 of the report which highlighted the difficulty in predicting the speed of programme spend. This had resulted in underspends in the current year and having to catch up during 2009/10, particularly with implementation of programmes associated with staffing up to the correct levels. They also drew attention to the very positive

value for money assessment which had followed the Authority's last annual audit. Both external and internal audit processes ensured that budgets were aligned to key objectives.

- 69.6 Responding to a request from Kathy Heron on the possibility of members receiving a breakdown of expenditure within the provision for conservation, recreation and sustainable development, Ron Meekings pointed out that Annex 1 provided analysis of the various types of expenditure. However, he undertook to forward a more detailed analysis of this information to members and include a comparison with the previous year.
- 69.7 Officers then responded to further queries raised by members in connection with the review of ranger services, the New Forest Tour, financial provision for the Authority's new premises, uncertainty of fees income in the light of the reduced number of planning applications and the resulting impact on work within Development Control and concerns on the planning and housing delivery grant. On this final point, Lindsay Cornish reported that she, together with the Deputy Chairman from ENPAA and another officer from Dartmoor National Park Authority, had recently met the Housing Minister, Margaret Becket, and discussed the need for the grant criteria to reflect the special circumstances of national park authorities. This had been a constructive meeting and the Minister had undertaken to consider the points raised, including the practical and financial constraints in delivery of rural affordable housing.
- 69.8 Jeremy Heron noted that in the past the Authority had prepared both an overview and a detailed budget book and requested that he be provided with copies of both for the 2009/10 financial year.

Resolved: That

1. The General Fund Budget for 2009/10 be **approved** at a total gross spend of £5.616 million, consisting of gross expenditure of £5.453 million as set out in paragraph 2.1 of paper NFNPA 290/09, plus £163,000 carried forward from 2008/09 as set out in paragraph 2.4 of that report.
2. The underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve, remaining at £0.4 million but with a minimum of £0.9 million to be retained pending resolution of the position of assets frozen in Heritable Bank, be **noted**.
3. The implications on the General Fund Reserve of the proposed budget for 2009/10, in particular the setting up of a Programme Fund, be **noted**.
4. The risk assessment and Section 25 Statement contained in Annex 4 of paper NFNPA 290/09 be **noted**.
5. The Treasury Management Strategy 2009/10 - 2011/12 at Annex 5 of paper NFNPA 290/09 and the associated Prudential Indicators at Annex 6 of the report be **approved**.

Voting: none voting against – 4 abstentions

70. EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charter

- 70.1 Martin O'Neill introduced the report (NFNPA 291/09), explaining that members were being asked to make a decision on whether the Authority should continue

with an application for the EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charter, which had been deferred at the December 2008 meeting to enable Mel Kendal to investigate potential European sources of funding for sustainable tourism during a forthcoming trip to Brussels. This research suggested that membership of EUROPARC would not significantly alter the Authority's European funding opportunities.

- 70.2 Members considered that the standard of sustainable tourism in the National Park was already high and had been recognised as such in a number of fora; it was not felt that the potential benefits of attempting to secure Charter status outweighed the costs and risks involved.

Resolved:

That work on the submission be discontinued, focusing saved resources on action that makes a difference on the ground.

Voting: 12:0 (4 abstentions)

71. Conservation Areas Review: Fritham with Eyeworth and Burley

- 71.1 Mark Stephenson introduced the report (NFNPA 292/09), explaining that this was the third tranche of the review of existing Conservation Areas to come forward for agreement. Members were also asked to approve the Character Appraisal for the two areas, which provided a detailed description.

- 71.2 Some members were of the opinion that, because the designation of a conservation area would result in the reduction of householders' rights over their land, it would only be appropriate to designate an area that was the subject of an immediate threat. Others felt that it was necessary to designate areas in order to preserve the landscape character from the start, particularly unique areas such as those that were presently under discussion. It was pointed out that the conservation areas that were the subject of the current debate already existed and members were only considering amendments to the designated boundaries.

- 71.3 In response to queries from members, Bryan Wilson explained that one of the issues arising from conservation area designation was the requirement that residents give six weeks' notice to the Authority when they intended to fell or prune trees of any species with a trunk diameter of 7.5 cm or greater measured at a height of 1.5 m above ground level. Although some members felt that this was onerous to residents, it was pointed out that the size of tree to which the rule applied was designated by central Government, it did not cost anything for householders to give notice to the Authority and if the Authority did not respond within six weeks the works could then be carried out. Members of the public would also receive the benefit of expert advice relating to their trees. Landowners who had a number of trees requiring works could reach a one-off agreement with the Authority whereby the general scope of tree works to be carried out over a certain period would be agreed and further notice need not be given. Bryan Wilson agreed to circulate copies of central Government advice on tree works to all members. One member asked officers to consider a mechanism whereby Parish Councils could express their objections to tree works to the Authority; officers would report back to members on this point.

Resolved: That

1. In accordance with the powers contained in Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the revised boundaries of Fritham with Eyeworth and Burley conservation areas be designated as shown on the plans at Annexes 2 and 3 to Paper NFNPA 292/09, and that notice of the designation be duly given and advertised in accordance with the provisions of Section 70 of the Act;
2. The character appraisals of Fritham with Eyeworth and Burley conservation areas, including illustrations and maps, be **adopted** and published.

Voting: 10:3 (1 abstention)

72. Creating strong, safe and prosperous communities – duty to involve

- 72.1 Lindsay Cornish introduced the report (NFNPA 293/09). She explained that the report set out the background to the duty on local authorities, from 1 April 2009, to involve representatives of local people in their activities. This was one of a suite of measures that central Government was putting in place to enable local communities to become involved in shaping their future. The report outlined the extent to which the Authority involved the public in its activities and this list was not inconsistent with the activities of other national park authorities. Following the response to the Authority's consultation on the National Park Plan, however, it seemed sensible for the Authority to review the mechanisms it used, and whether there was more that should be done. Such a review would need to take place once the pressures of work on completing the Park Plan were largely over.
- 72.2 Members suggested consulting with certain stakeholder groups as part of the review, including the New Forest Consultative Panel. It was also important that, during the review, the Authority consider engaging with individuals in the Forest as well as representatives of groups and organisations. It was suggested that the review be used to strengthen communication with the Parish Councils, assisting the Authority to engage with particular areas of the Forest.

Resolved: That

1. The requirements of the new duty to involve be **noted**; and
2. A review of the Authority's 'engagement' processes, taking cognisance of members' views in 72.2 above, be conducted after the approval of the National Park Plan, and a small member/officer working group be established to take the work forward at the appropriate time.

Voting: Unanimous

73. Report on New Forest Access Forum meeting 2 March

- 73.1 Steve Trotter introduced the report (NFNPA 294/09).

Resolved: That

1. Issues of interest discussed at the meeting of the New Forest Access Forum on 2 March 2009 be **noted**.
2. The date of the next New Forest Access Forum meeting on 1 June 2009 be **noted**.

Voting: none voting against

74. Report on New Forest Consultative Panel (5 March)

74.1 Steve Trotter introduced the report (NFNPA 295/09).

Resolved:

- 1. That issues of interest at the meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel on 5 March 2009 be **noted**.
- 2. That the date of the next Panel meeting on Thursday 7 May 2009 be **noted**.

Voting: None voting against

75. Urgent Items by the Chairman

75.1 The Chairman advised that there were no matters of urgency that he intended to raise under this item.

The meeting closed at 11:36 hours.

SignedDate:.....
(Chairman)