

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2006 AT 09.30 HOURS AT SOUTH EFFORD HOUSE

Present:

Members

Clive Chatters (Chairman)

Barry Rickman (Deputy Chairman)

Susan Achmatowicz

Lee Dunsdon

Peter Frost

Tony Gentle

Diana Halford

Roger Heape

Jeremy Heron

Kathy Heron

Julian Johnson

Ted Johnson

Mel Kendal

Clive Maton

Bob Morris

Vicky Myers

Leo Randall

John Sanger

Alan Weeks

Officers

Lindsay Cornish, Kevin Gardner (Monitoring Officer), Pat Higgins, Steve Avery, Emma Rigglesworth, George Trevelyan, Claire Gingell, David Stone, Rosalind Alderman and Carolyn Hoole.

PART I – OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

88. Apologies for absence

88.1 Alan Rice, Stan Wade and Pat Wyeth.

89. Declarations of interest

89.1 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.

89.2 Kathy Heron, Diana Halford, Peter Frost and Clive Maton each declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in minute item 102 (Commoning Review).

89.3 Mel Kendal declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items as Leader of New Forest District Council, Executive Member for the Environment at Hampshire County Council and Chairman of the Improvement Board of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association.

90. Chairman's announcements

90.1 The Chairman announced that there would be a confidential item to be discussed during Part II of the meeting. The meeting would be followed by lunch and a presentation on rural affordable housing.

91. Minutes of meeting on 21 September 2006

91.1 The minutes of the meeting on 21 September 2006 were agreed as a true record.

92. Public Question Time

92.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

93. Chief Executive's report

93.1 Lindsay Cornish introduced the report (NFNPA 135/06) and welcomed Barry Holland, the new Director of Corporate Services.

93.2 Members sought clarification on the following issues:

(a) The need for the Authority to work closely with local organisations to ensure National Park messages were being spread, in particular with the New Forest Tourism Association on publicity literature. Lindsay Cornish explained that the Authority's Tourism and Transport Officer's remit would cover such issues but that he had only been in the post for one week. Clarification would be sought from the New Forest Tourism Association on some of its material.

(b) Images that would be compatible with sustainability objectives were available from the "Britain's Breathing Spaces" campaign of the Association for National Park Authorities and were available to partners.

(c) On the development of the recreation and visitor management strategy (section 7 of the report), Lindsay Cornish said that the work was being managed as a project with a clear project plan, that relevant material would be circulated to members in due course and that officers were considering how members could best be involved in the process, such as a workshop and/or a members' working group.

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

94. Appointment of Authority representative to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association

94.1 Lindsay Cornish introduced the report (NFNPA 136/06) and emphasised the importance of maintaining and strengthening the Authority's links with local government.

94.2 No volunteers to represent the Authority on the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association came forward at the meeting and the matter was delegated to the Chief Executive, acting in consultation with the Chairman.

Resolved: That the Chief Executive, acting in consultation with the Chairman of the Authority, progress the appointment of a member to represent the Authority on the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association for the period up to the next Annual meeting of the Authority in 2007.

95. Appointment to vacancies on the Planning Development Control Committee

- 95.1 Lindsay Cornish introduced the report (paper NFNPA 137/06) and explained that new appointments were needed to fill vacancies on the Committee and would need to maintain the balance between Secretary of State and local authority appointed members. Ted Johnson and Alan Weeks had volunteered to serve on the Committee and were duly proposed and seconded for appointment.

Resolved: That Ted Johnson and Alan Weeks be appointed to the Planning Development Control Committee.

96. Establishing the functions of an Audit Committee in the New Forest National Park Authority

- 96.1 Pat Higgins introduced the report (paper NFNPA 138/06) and explained that fulfilling the audit committee function was part of the Authority's corporate governance framework; the Authority was required by legislation to ensure that an adequate and effective system of financial management was in place. It was suggested that in an organisation the size of the Authority, it would not be appropriate nor desirable to appoint a separate audit committee; these functions could be taken on by the Resources and Performance Committee.

Resolved:

- 1 That the terms of reference of the Resources and Performance Committee be amended to include the functions of an audit committee, as set out in Section 4 of Annex 1 to report NFNPA 138/06.
- 2 That the delivery of the audit committee function by the Resources and Performance Committee be reviewed after operating two full years of the audit function.

97. Oral report from Resources and Performance Committee

- 97.1 Roger Heape, Chairman of the Committee, reported on the Committee's first meeting on 8 November as follows:

- (a) Susan Achmatowicz had been appointed as Deputy Chairman of the Committee.
- (b) The two principal functions of the Committee were to provide support to officers in obtaining funding and to monitor the Authority's performance. The Committee's work would be guided by the Risk Register.
- (c) In the medium term the Committee would focus on the Authority's financial matters, accommodation and staff turnover; in the short term the emphasis was on reviewing resources for planning and setting performance indicators for the Authority. The Committee had also been looking at risk management issues.

- 97.2 Lindsay Cornish said the National Parks Minister was keen that the Authority should arrange for an independent assessment of its funding needs and opportunities from 2008/09 onwards; the Authority would issue an invitation

to tender for this study shortly. In response to a query, Lindsay Cornish agreed to consider whether there were other potential partners with whom Authority could work to improve the funding situation by sharing resources.

Resolved: That the oral report be **noted**.

98. Budgetary Control Report for the period to 30 September 2006

98.1 Pat Higgins introduced the report (paper NFNPA 139/06) which had been considered in detail by the Resources and Performance Committee. The current forecast predicted a significant underspend. However, a further report would be brought to the Committee at the end of the third quarter, at which time a clearer picture should be available.

Resolved: That the report be **noted**.

99. The Corporate Plan – Development of Local Performance Indicators

99.1 George Trevelyan introduced the report (paper NFNPA 140/06) and said that a members' workshop would be held with senior managers early next year to discuss the development of local performance indicators. Members were asked to advise Roger Heape if they were interested in attending the workshop.

Resolved: That progress made in this area be noted, and the action proposed by the Resources and Performance Committee in paragraph 2.6 of Report NFNPA 140/06 be endorsed.

100. World Heritage Site Status for the New Forest

100.1 Lindsay Cornish introduced the report (paper NFNPA 141/06). The Authority had three options: to withdraw the New Forest from the UK tentative list of World Heritage Sites, to remain on the tentative list but not actively pursue a full listing, or to remain on the tentative list and prepare a project plan to assess the feasibility of securing the UK nomination at a future date. She explained that there would be significant costs and resource implications to proceeding to prepare a full bid, and members needed to consider carefully the potential benefit of achieving World Heritage Site status.

100.2 Members were then afforded an opportunity to express support for, and comment on, their preferred option, during which the following points were raised:

(a) Option A – some members felt the relative benefits of achieving World Heritage Site status did not outweigh the costs and resource implications; and that the New Forest was not yet equipped to handle the impact of more tourism. The area already had National Park status. It was agreed that if Option A were chosen the notification to the Department for Culture Media and Sport should reflect the nature of the discussion members had had and explain the Authority's funding issues.

(b) Option B - if the Authority withdrew the New Forest from the tentative list altogether it would not be easy to achieve reinstatement (particularly given the impending review and refinement of the list by

the Department for Culture Media and Sport). Against this it was pointed out that it could be embarrassing for the Authority if the New Forest was removed from the list as a result of the Authority's failure actively to pursue a full nomination.

- (c) Option C – some members said they thought full recognition would bring advantages to the Authority and this option should not yet be rejected, although it was not clear at this stage that there was much public support for achieving the status, nor was it certain that the status would be awarded to the area.

Resolved: That the Authority withdraw the New Forest from the UK tentative list of World Heritage Sites as per Option A of the report.

101. Commoning Review

101.1 Emma Rigglesworth introduced the report (paper NFNPA 142/06), and, in summarising progress with the commoning review, said that the steering group would report back by the end of June 2007.

101.2 Members raised the following points during discussion on the matter:

- (a) the current commoning situation, including the legislative position, should be subject to full examination with no topics left “off limits”;
- (b) the steering group should particularly consider the age profile of commoners and sources and continuity of funding, particularly with a view to encouraging younger commoners. Emma Rigglesworth responded that this would be taken into account, and the most recent demographic studies of commoners would be updated to reflect the current position.

Resolved: That progress made with setting up the commoning review be noted and the approach taken be supported by the Authority.

102. Corporate sustainability and green issues

102.1 Claire Gingell introduced the report (paper NFNPA 143/06) and said that the aim was for an in-house Environmental Management System to be put in place within the next year.

102.2 The following questions and comments were made by members:

- (a) The in-house Environmental Management System should closely reflect one of the accredited recognised standards so that the Authority could move towards certification under an accredited standard in the future, possibly the Green Dragon Environmental Standard. Members agreed that the second recommendation on the paper should be amended along these lines. The Authority needed to baseline its current performance.
- (c) Once the Authority achieved certification, this should be publicised in order to provide an example to other organisations in the New Forest.

Resolved:

- 1 That the progress made by the Environmental Practices Group be noted and Barry Rickman be nominated to oversee and lead on sustainability issues.
- 2 That officers be authorised to develop an in-house Environmental Management System, selecting aspects of best practice from the range of recognised standards and examples available, and that the Authority move towards certification under an accredited and recognised standard.
- 3 That the proposed Environmental Policy be adopted.

103. Planning enforcement

- 103.1 Steve Avery introduced the report (paper NFNPA 144/06) on the approval of the draft guidance note and reminded members that this matter had been deferred from the Authority's previous meeting to allow them an opportunity to comment on the draft before sending it to parish and town councils. Further amendments had now been made and it was proposed that the revised note be now sent to parish and town councils for their comments.
- 103.2 It was suggested that the Authority's fax number be included in the guidance note, and paragraph 7.5 should be amended to state whether complainants would be kept informed of progress on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Officers were asked to clarify whether a report of a breach of planning control should be made by telephone or in writing.
- 103.3 Typographical errors were pointed out at paragraph 1.4 ("acquire have" a criminal record) and 8.2 (incorrect spelling of "dependent").
- 103.4 It was requested that paragraphs 3 and 12.2 (which explained that complainants' details would be kept confidential unless a request was made under the Freedom of Information legislation and no exemption from disclosure applied) be amended to state that disclosure of complainants' details would be strongly resisted by the Authority. The Monitoring Officer explained that requests for release of complainant's details would need to be dealt with under the Freedom of Information Act. He added that, although such requests were likely to be refused under the Act, each case would need to be considered on its merits.
- 103.5 Members agreed that the second recommendation on the paper should be amended so that the draft would be sent to the New Forest Association of Local Councils for comment as well as parish and town councils.
- 103.6 It was agreed that the date by which local councils should respond be extended to allow them adequate time to consider the guidance; comments could be reported to members at the Authority meeting scheduled for 22 February 2007. Officers were requested to follow up with parish and town councils if a response was not made by the date for reply.

Resolved:

- 1 That the revised draft guidance note 'Planning Enforcement – Policy and Practice' be approved.
- 2 That the revised draft guidance note be sent to the parish and town councils, and the New Forest Association of Local Councils, for their comments and thereafter reported back to the Authority.

104. New Forest Consultative Panel report

- 104.1 Officers agreed to supply copies of the Environment Agency consultation document and the briefing note on Natural England, which had been distributed at the last meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel, to members for their information.

Resolved:

1. That the issues of interest at the meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel on 2 November 2006 be **noted**.
2. That the date of the next Panel meeting on Thursday 4 January 2007 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

Resolved: That the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during that item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, for the reasons set out in the report.

The public, press and staff of the Authority were accordingly requested to leave the meeting.

105. Phase 3 Accommodation

- 105.1 The Monitoring Officer reminded members that, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, information disclosed in private session is confidential. Lindsay Cornish then updated members on the position regarding long term accommodation for the Authority. (This is a summary of a minute which contains exempt information).

Resolved: That developments in the search for accommodation be **noted**.

The meeting closed at 12:10 hrs

Signed (Chairman)