

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 10.00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, LYMINGTON

#### **Present:**

##### *Members*

Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre (Chairman)

Edward Heron (Deputy Chairman)

Sally Arnold

George Bisson

David Harrison

Penny Jackman

Julian Johnson

Phil Marshall

Harry Oram

John Pemberton

Leo Randall

Barry Rickman

John Sanger

Marian Spain

Pat Wyeth

##### *Officers*

Alison Barnes

Steve Avery

Julia Mutlow

Paul Walton

David Illsley

Hilary Makin

Nigel Stone

David Stone

Jo Murphy

Vicki Gibbon

Chief Executive Officer

Executive Director, Strategy and Planning

Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Head of Environment and Rural Economy

Policy Manager

Communications Manager

Chief Finance Officer

Corporate Services Manager

Information and Data Protection Officer

Member Services Administrator

#### **17. Apologies for absence.**

- 17.1 Apologies for absence were received from Keith Mans, Gordon Bailey, Andy Moore, Richard Frampton, Ken Thornber and Russell Wynn.

#### **18. Declarations of interest.**

- 18.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### **19. Chairman's announcements.**

- 19.1 The Chairman informed Members that he was saddened to learn that Nick Evans, the Authority's Senior Policy Officer, had taken early retirement on health grounds. He reminded Members that Mr Evans had been part of the New Forest Committee well before the formation of the National Park Authority (NPA) and that he had been involved in the writing and refining of the NPA's policies right from the beginning. He commented that Mr Evans' gentle but persistent manner had brought people together and he thanked him for all his hard work for both the NPA and the New Forest. On behalf of the Members and the Authority the Chairman wished him well.

- 19.2 The Chairman drew Members attention to the recent ban that had been introduced on picking fungi on the Crown Lands of the New Forest. He said that the NPA welcomed the ban and supported this approach in protecting the fragile ecosystem. He also explained that the Forestry Commission had issued some guidance for the public to inform them of the changes that had been instigated.

## **20. Minutes of meeting on 14 July 2016.**

- 20.1 The Chairman requested the following amendment to paragraph 6.2 of the minutes to provide further expansion and clarity:

*Sir John de Trafford advised that there were three reasons for his presentation to the Authority meeting: the first was to bring the matter of the Local Government Ombudsman's report and decision in the case concerning the building of a Commons dwelling in Brockishill Road to members' attention; secondly he sought clarification from the Authority as to how it intended to review the need for Commons' dwellings and queried whether the Authority would ensure that the Local Plan review produced fresh proposals that helped those most in need; and thirdly he requested a proper apology from the Authority to the residents' association, particularly those whose homes had been affected.*

- 20.2 The minutes of 14 July 2016 were then agreed as a true record, subject to the above amendment.

## **21. Public Question Time**

### **21.1 Future River and Wetland Restoration and Public Relations**

Brian Tarnoff of the New Forest Association addressed members with regard to the above matter and said that although the NFA had never made a secret of its support for the Forestry Commission's wetland restorations, he was of the view that the Association had not made its case often enough, publicly enough, or well enough.

He said that this had become an emotive subject in the New Forest with opposition groups generating significant publicity against the Latchmore project which he felt needed to be responded to particularly around threats to wildlife, inconvenience to residents, and the uncontested beauty of the Forest.

There had been 2,119 completed river restoration projects in the United Kingdom since 1994 and one of these, the Cumbria River Restoration Strategy, which restored 14 km of river across three catchments to a more natural form, won the 2016 UK River Prize. Some of the projects had habitat objectives and some were done for flood risk, fisheries, etc and 120 were as a result of community demand. He added that, with this many projects over 22 years, the dire consequences forecast by those opposing wetland restoration would have become apparent by now.

Mr Tarnoff also disputed the negative figures for HGV movement of materials which may cause disturbance and inconvenience to those along the delivery routes and advised that the route via Ogdens would only generate approximately 7 deliveries in three years of the project. The NFA would be publicising these numbers in its newspaper later that day.

He said that many were rightfully concerned about the future beauty of the Forest but that the restoration projects would not make the areas less beautiful and again mentioned the prizewinning project in Cumbria, which was twice the size of Latchmore and now an iconic landscape. The completed projects at Warwickslade Cutting and Fletchers Thorns were further successful examples but it was unrealistic to expect an instantaneous transformation and time needed to be allowed for natural coverage of the restoration works.

## **22. Chief Executive's Report (NFNPA 506/16)**

- 22.1 Alison Barnes commented that although it had only been a little over two months since her last report to the Annual Authority meeting, that officers had been busy over the summer period. She drew Members attention to the Local Plan Review process which was a separate item on the agenda. Ms Barnes informed Members that the number of planning application received had increased but that the team had still determined 90% within the statutory timescales. She was pleased to report that the Authority's longest running enforcement case had finally been closed and that this success was down to the tenacity of the team.
- 22.2 Ms Barnes reminded Members that the Our Past Our Future (OPOF) project had been running for almost a year and that there had been many notable events that had taken place, such as the to week long Arts Festival and the 30 training courses that had been arranged to promote and support rural skills. The NPA had hosted a visit by Ros Kerlake the New CEO of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and had shown her some of the work that had been undertaken and introduced her to some of the landowners, commoners and others who had benefitted from the project. Ms Barnes also spoke of the Business South Workshop on the 'Green Halo' which had been attended by a wide variety of people including utility companies, universities and other businesses, and she said she was very encouraged by the support for working beyond the National Park boundaries.
- 22.3 Under the 'Enjoy' programme Ms Barnes commented that the New Forest Show, which is an important event in the Forest Calendar, had been a great success and that the NPA had won the Best Large Stand award. A number of high profile visitors including Sophie, the Countess of Wessex and the new Chief Constable for Hampshire had visited the stand, she said. Ms Barnes explained that the two seasonal Rangers had now moved on but that they had engaged with over 3,000 visitors during the summer season.
- 22.4 Under the 'Prosper' programme Ms Barnes reported that passenger numbers on the New Forest Tour bus were up 13% on last year, although she accepted that some of the increase was likely to have been down to the warm weather. She thanked the travel concierge staff at Brockenhurst station, who had sold a large number of tour tickets and maps.
- 22.5 Ms Barnes drew Members attention to the recent visit by Caroline Nokes MP and said that she was pleased to report that the importance of National Parks was highlighted in the Secretary of State's State of Nature report.
- 22.6 In response to a query about the high proportion of staff whose posts were funded by external projects, Ms Barnes confirmed that the majority were involved in the OPOF projects and that there was no risk to the core business.
- 22.7 Members noted the report and also added their thanks and good wishes to Nick Evans.

**23. Oral report from the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meeting on 5 September 2016**

- 23.1 David Harrison, the Chairman of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee highlighted the key discussion points from the meeting. He stated that the majority of the actions in the progress report were flagged green, but that there had been some debate as to whether some should be amber. He explained that there were occasions when the delays were outside the control of the NPA. Mr Harrison commented that the Authority's budget was on track for the time of year.
- 23.2 Mr Harrison advised Members that three new risks had been added to the risk log and that the Committee had supported a £90,000 funding bid submission to the Arts Council which would be used to build on the success of this year's inaugural New Forest Arts Festival.
- 23.3 Mr Harrison informed Members that the Committee had debated at length the New Forest Marque and the role of the NPA in supporting it. He referred Members to the report on the agenda (NFNPA 508/16), in which the Committee had recommended that £25,000 be allocated to the New Forest Marque from the 2017/18 budget.

**24. New Forest National Park Local Plan Review – Consultation Draft (NFNPA 507/16)**

- 24.1 David Illsley presented his report, reminding Members that the Authority was currently undertaking a review of the local planning policies covering the National Park to ensure consistency with the national planning policy framework and the Park's purposes. Work commenced on the review of the Local Plan in autumn 2015 with the adoption of the Plan due to take place in summer 2018, following an independent examination.
- 24.2 Mr Illsley advised that much of the draft Local Plan builds on the existing core strategy policies and reflects national planning policy in key areas such as local housing need. Members were requested to endorse the draft Local Plan document for public consultation in October and November 2016, which would then feed into the preparation for the submission of the draft Local Plan in 2017.

**Resolved**, that the Authority endorse the New Forest National Park Local Plan – Consultation Draft, attached to the report as Annex 1, for the purpose of public consultation from 3 October to 28 November 2016.

*Voting: unanimous*

**25. Sustainability of New Forest Marque (NFNPA 508/16)**

- 25.1 Paul Walton introduced his report, pointing out that the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee, at its meeting on 5 September, had considered the level of financial support which should be given to the Marque and had recommended that a grant of £25,000 be allocated from the National Park's 2017/18 budget; this recommendation was now before members for consideration. He mentioned that Members had been sent a copy of the business plan for the New Forest Marque following the RAPC meeting.
- 25.2 Following discussion, Members agreed that it was important to support the Marque and help to build the brand, they accordingly agreed to endorse the recommendation from the Committee.

**Resolved**, that the Authority allocates a grant £25,000 to the New Forest Marque from the 2017/18 budget.

*Voting: unanimous*

**26. Charging for Pre-Application Advice (NFNPA 509/16)**

- 26.1 Steve Avery presented his report to Members commenting that this year's corporate work programme (2016/17) included an action to introduce charging for pre-application advice. He mentioned that the Authority actively encouraged applicants to seek pre-application advice as this led to better informed applications and avoided unnecessary work for applicants and the Authority.
- 26.2 Mr Avery advised that the process would be kept as simple as possible with the developments set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report being excluded. A duty planner would still be available to give free planning advice. The above process would begin from 1 October and a review would take place in six months' time.

**Resolved**, that the Authority introduce charging for formal pre-application advice as per the submitted report, to take effect from 1 October 2016.

*Voting: unanimous*

**27. Future External Auditors Arrangement (NFNPA 510/16)**

- 27.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report and advised that the current external audit arrangements (with Ernst and Young LLP) were due to expire at the end of 2017/18 and that in terms of recent legislation, the Authority was obliged to appoint its auditors for the 2018/19 financial year by 31 December 2017. These arrangements needed to be in terms of one of the following three possible options which had been set out in his report:

- A the Authority could undertake an individual auditor procurement and appointment exercise,
- B it could do so in partnership with other bodies or,
- C it could opt in to a sector led body.

Referring to the third option, he advised that the Authority had been approached by the Local Government Association to participate in a sector led procurement scheme under a body specifically set up for this purpose – Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd. In order to opt into this scheme, a formal decision was required by the Authority's full membership.

- 27.2 Mr Stone recommended that the Authority not pursue Option A which would be costly and involve the creation of an Audit Panel to consider the tender process. There was also likely to be little interest from large accounting firms considering the NPA had relatively straightforward audit requirements and the small annual audit fee involved.
- 27.3 He advised that officers would wish to undertake further evaluation of options B and C over the next few months as more details become apparent. He drew attention to the timetable for completion of the LGA scheme and advised that Option C, which was likely to be the most practical and cost effective for the Authority, required interested bodies to opt into their sector led scheme by the end of December 2016. As the next Authority meeting was not until January 2017, he recommended that members delegate the decision as to which option to pursue to the Chief Executive

in consultation with the Authority Chairman and Chief Finance Officer. This would allow officers to continue with the evaluation of options B and C and to opt into the LGA scheme before the above deadline if it was concluded that this was the preferred option. He stated that he believed that the majority of National Park Authorities were also considering option C.

- 27.4 Whilst expressing support for the proposal, members requested that the wording of the recommendation be amended to link the delegation to this specific contract from 2018/19 rather than to the Authority's general audit arrangements for an indefinite period.

**Resolved**, that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Authority Chairman and Chief Finance Officer, to determine the future audit arrangements of the Authority for the contract from 2018/19, specifically including the option to 'opt-in' to a sector-led agreement.

*Voting: unanimous*

**28. Update on the Bransgore Affordable Housing Scheme (NFNPA 511/16)**

- 28.1 Steve Avery updated Members on the recent affordable housing scheme at Bransgore, the two houses had now been completed and subsequently let. The aim of the scheme was to deliver bespoke, small scale affordable homes in the National Park with a view to encourage similar schemes to come forward in the future.
- 28.2 Mr Avery stated that an official opening of the scheme took place on 16 September, where Members had an opportunity to meet with all those involved in the project.
- 28.3 Members duly noted the report.

**29. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent**

- 29.1 The Chairman advised Members that the current four-year appointment of the two Independent Persons who were appointed under the Localism Act 2011 to assist the Chairman of the Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer in assessing member complaints had expired and requested that both appointments be extended for a further four year term.

**Resolved**, that John Moore and Andrew Sherman be appointed as Independent Persons under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 for a further 4 year term.

*Voting: unanimous*

The meeting closed at 11.50 am.

Signed: .....  
(Chairman)

Date: .....