

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE MICROSOFT VIRTUAL TEAMS MEETING OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 25 MARCH 2021 AT 10.00 AM

Present:

Members

Gavin Parker (Chairman)

Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chairman)

Gordon Bailey

Sue Bennison

David Bence

George Bisson

Richard Clewer

David Harrison

Edward Heron

Alexis McEvoy

Victoria Mander

Keith Mans

George Meyrick

Neville Penman

Caroline Rackham

Leo Randall

John Sanger

Ann Sevier

Stephen Tarling

Richard Taylor

Steve Trow

Officers

Alison Barnes

Chief Executive Officer

Steve Avery

Executive Director, Strategy and Planning

Rosalind Alderman

Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Nigel Stone

Chief Finance Officer

Nigel Matthews

Head of Recreation Management

Paul Walton

Head of Environment and Rural Economy

David Stone

Corporate Services Manager

Sarah Applegate

Senior Policy Officer

Vicki Gibbon

Member Services Administrator

13. Chairman's Introduction to Conduct of Remotely held Meetings on Microsoft Teams, live events.

14. Apologies for absence.

14.1 An apology for absence was received from Barry Rickman.

15. Declarations of Interest.

15.1 Edward Heron declared an interest under part 2 section B (non-pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 25 as a member of Hampshire County Council and also minute item 27 as a member of New Forest District Council.

Keith Mans declared an interest under part 2 section B (non-pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute items 25 and 27 as Leader of Hampshire County Council.

Sue Bennison declared an interest under part 2 section B (non-pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 27 as a member of New Forest District Council.

Ann Sevier declared an interest under part 2 section B (non-pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 27 as a member of New Forest District Council.

George Meyrick declared an interest under part 2 section A (pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute items 23 and 25, and therefore he did not take part in the debate or vote on these items.

Neville Penman declared an interest under part 2 section B (non-pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 25 as a member of Hampshire County Council and also minute item 27 as a member of New Forest District Council.

16. Chairman's announcements.

16.1 There were no Chairman's announcements on this occasion.

17. Minutes

17.1 The minutes of 10 December 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.
Voting: 17:0, 3 abstentions

18. Public Question Time

18.1 The meeting received presentations from two members of the public in connection with item 11 on the agenda (options for managing exempted campsites in the National Park). A copy of the full presentation is available from Member Services.

19. Chief Executive's Report (AM 580-21)

19.1 The Chief Executive introduced her report, reminding members that the report covered the period from the last Authority meeting in December.

19.2 Ms Barnes began her presentation by reflecting back on the past year during the Covid-19 pandemic. She reminded members of how much things had changed and how exceptionally well the Authority had coped as a whole, whilst conveying her thanks to all staff and members for their hard work.

19.3 Under the *Protect* programme the Chief Executive drew members' attention to the launch of 'Care for the Forest, Care for Each Other' action plan which encourages those who visit the Forest not to destroy or damage what they have come to see. The full report was heard later in the agenda. Ms Barnes went on to explain that a lot had been learned over the summer of 2020, which was the third hottest on record since 1884 along with an unprecedented amount of visitors due to the pandemic. With the proactive approach that would be taken this year it was hoped that the Forest would not encounter issues on the same scale as last year.

19.4 Ms Barnes advised that the Ambassador scheme would be re-launching at the end of March, with an extra 250 litter picking kits being available; this had proven to be very popular with families during 2020. The last quarter had proven a very active period with regards to the future of forest farming, with the Agricultural Act having gone through. There had also been the extension of the Higher Level Stewardship scheme and the Authority were also continuing to support the Commons Test and Trial programme along with the Wildlife Trusts Test and Trial of management plan templates.

- 19.5 The Chief Executive highlighted that there had been a 25% increase in planning applications since the last reporting period with a large increase in enforcement cases. One enforcement case had included obtaining a High Court injunction to prevent further damage after 12 oak trees were illegally felled on land at Bartley. The Policy team had again been extremely busy with consultations both at national and local level including updating the waste and minerals plan in line with the Local Plan, responding to the Planning for the Future Government White Paper and using the Snapshot Survey of the National Park to feed into the updated Partnership Plan, which would be presented at the next full Authority meeting.
- 19.6 Under the *Enjoy* programme Ms Barnes highlighted the Awakening Festival which ran throughout February, this being the first online festival of its kind in the New Forest working in partnership with organisations focusing on climate and nature emergencies. The education team had also been focusing their school assemblies on climate and nature emergencies. Ms Barnes was pleased to say that a Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager had been appointed, Olivia McGregor, who would be taking forward a co-ordinated programme on nature and climate issues.
- 19.7 The Chief Executive advised that the Rangers had been and would continue to provide a visible presence throughout the Forest along with partner organisations and would be monitoring particular sites including potential 'hot spots'. The team had now been increased with three seasonal rangers and two new assistant kickstart rangers. Ms Barnes was pleased to announce the launch of the Dog Walking Charter, a joint venture with professional dog walkers to promote best practice and to ensure business can run responsibly and protect the forest. A campaign had also been launched to protect ground nesting birds with special quiet zones around critical breeding locations and a small number of car parks would close to accommodate nesting zones.
- 19.5 Under the *Prosper* programme it was reported that the Authority's recent work with the Green Halo Partnership had helped to initiate and gain support for a framework for 'green recovery' leading to the development of a 'Greenprint' for South Hampshire. The Authority would also be a key partner in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and Ms Barnes was pleased to announce the New Forest Tour season would be extended 60% from 29 May to 12 September.
- 19.6 Ms Barnes advised that health and wellbeing work continued in partnership with Bournemouth University developing a strategic approach and the Nature Health Network.
- 19.6 Under the *Excellence* programme Ms Barnes was pleased to announce that this quarter had seen a large amount of funding to various groups that the Authority had been engaged with. Ms Barnes thanked everyone for caring for each other and the Forest over the past year. Members then noted her report.
- 20. Care for the Forest, Care for Each Other – Managing Visitor Pressures as Lockdown Eases (AM 581-21)**
- 20.1 Steve Avery introduced his report, reminding members that during February a members' day was held to discuss what practical measures could be put in place to manage visitor pressures when lockdown was eased. He explained that since then the Authority had been working with partner organisations to develop a plan to ensure the New Forest could play an active role in helping people recover from the pandemic but not to the detriment of the Forest. He asked members to positively support the action plan as set out in the report.

- 20.2 Following discussion, it was mentioned that businesses in the Forest that were reliant on tourism would also need to be supported. Members then voted to support the plan.

Resolved, that members note and support the 'Care for the Forest, Care for each other' action plan as detailed in the report.

Voting: unanimous

21. Oral Report RAPC

- 21.1 David Harrison as Chairman of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee highlighted items within the minutes of the RAPC meeting on 1 March, including the internal audit report, the forthcoming 2021/22 Work Programme, the local cycling and walking infrastructure plan and the application to the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund. Members noted the report.

22. Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for the Financial Year 2021/22 (AM 582-21)

- 22.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report which set out the draft proposals for a revenue budget for the 2021/22 financial year. He said that the Authority had received 'flat cash' grants in recent years resulting in small cumulative reductions in the Authority's budget each year in real terms due to inflation. The Authority's budget had also decreased substantially since the start of austerity in 2010.
- 22.2 He said that the Authority continued to successfully attract significant externally-funded projects and for every £1 spent on partnership projects, £19 was generated from partner organisations to be spent in the New Forest.
- 22.3 Other areas of the report referred to by Mr Stone included the increase in projected employee costs for 2021/22, potential risks and uncertainties identified in 2021/22 and the projected budget shortfall which like previous years was anticipated to be manageable in terms of savings generated during the year.
- 22.4 Mr Stone then responded to queries in connection with the medium-term projection of the Authority's financial position up to March 2024 and the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy.

Resolved, that:

1. The General Fund Budget for 2021/22 be approved.
2. It be noted that the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve remains at £0.3 million.
3. the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2021/22 be noted.
4. the Risk Assessment and Section 25 Statement (Section 7) be noted.
5. The Treasury Management Strategy in Annex 3 of the report be approved.
6. The Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2023/24 and the Forward Projection in Annex 4 be noted.

Voting: unanimous

23. Options for Managing Exempted Campsites in the National Park (AM 583-21)

- 23.1 Steve Avery reminded members that the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 provided an exemption for temporary 'pop-up' campsites which allowed the use of land as a camping site for up to 28 days

without the need for planning permission. This permitted development right was extended to 56 days during 2020 and had been similarly extended for 2021 as a means of assisting the hospitality sector during the pandemic.

- 23.2 Mr Avery advised that concern had been expressed about the number of exempted campsites operating in the New Forest and the impact they were having on neighbouring communities. He explained that the report set out the relevant legislation and planning considerations affecting campsites in the National Park and sought views on the different options available to bring these sites under control.
- 23.3 Following discussion members voted to approve the recommendation as set out below.

Resolved that,

1. the Executive Director be authorised to prepare a guidance note and mitigation framework to assist temporary campsites in meeting the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017;

Voting: 20:0, 1 member not voting due to having declared a pecuniary interest

and

2. the Executive Director be authorised to make a non-immediate Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights (Schedule 2, Part 4, Class B) for larger and all new temporary campsites to take effect from 1 June 2022, supported by new policy/guidance against which future planning applications would be assessed.

Voting: 19:1, 1 member not voting due to having declared a pecuniary interest

24. Generation Green Memorandum of Understanding (AM 584-21)

- 24.1 Nigel Matthews reminded members of the Authority's partnership application to the Defra Green Recovery Fund, led by the Youth Hostel Association and South Downs National Park Authority, which had been made late last year. For the NPA, this equated to £65,450 of funding for two apprentice rangers and a part-time Wild Spaces Youth Officer for 2021/22.
- 24.2 Mr Matthews explained that as this was a partnership project, the Authority and other partners now needed to formalise the governance arrangements for the scheme by entering into a memorandum of understanding with South Downs National Park Authority, who would be the lead partner responsible for co-ordinating activity by the National Park Authorities. The draft form of the memorandum of understanding had been attached as Annex 1 to the report.
- 24.3 Queries were raised by two members regarding information on the overhead costs of the project and the composition of the Project Board. Nigel Matthews advised that he would revert back to the members concerned with this information.

Resolved that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to take all action as necessary to agree any minor amendments to the draft 'Generation Green' memorandum of understanding attached as Annex 1 to the submitted report, to enter into it on behalf of the Authority, and to take all such other action as necessary to give effect to the proposed arrangements.

Voting: unanimous

25. Hampshire Minerals and Waste Review (AM 585-21)

- 25.1 Sarah Applegate introduced the report and advised that the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan which covered the whole of the New Forest National Park, was adopted in 2013 and, in line with the requirement for a review of the Plan to be carried out at least every five years, it was reviewed in 2018. This review concluded that there was no need for an update at that time. However, in revisiting that decision in late 2020, officers found that fundamental policies in the Plan would benefit from a further review to reflect current national policy and guidance. The submitted report accordingly set out the findings of the 2020 review of the Plan; the proposed timetable for a partial update of the Plan; and asked for members to endorse the proposed approach and timescales.

Resolved that:

1. the conclusions of the 2020 Review of the Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan (as summarised in this report and the Executive Summary in Appendix 1) be endorsed and its publication be approved following agreement by the other minerals and waste plan-making partner Authorities.
2. The Authority approve the Hampshire Minerals & Waste Local Development Scheme as set out in Appendix 2 to this report, which sets out the timetable and programme for the partial update of the Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan (2013), subject to agreement by the other minerals and waste plan-making partner Authorities.
3. The Authority endorse the proposed approach that subsequent draft Minerals and Waste Plan Review consultation documents at the Regulation 18 and 19 stages will be considered at Planning Committee meetings; with the final adoption of the revised Minerals & Waste Plan to be considered at a full Authority meeting.

Voting: nem con (with one member having declared a pecuniary interest)

26. Review of Charges for Written Pre-application Advice (AM 586-21)

- 26.1 Steve Avery advised that there had been three reviews of the Authority's charging regime for providing formal pre-application advice since its inception in October 2016, the latest review being in March 2019. These charges helped to cover the cost of providing formal pre-application advice.
- 26.2 Following discussion, members agreed to support the recommendation in the report but asked that a report be submitted to the Planning Committee to consider the future level of charges in more detail.

Action: Steve Avery to submit a report to the Planning Committee on the future level of charges for pre-application advice.

Resolved, that the proposed increase in fees for written pre-application advice as set out in the report be approved, to take effect on 1 April 2021.

Voting: unanimous

27. Application to Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (AM 587-21)

- 27.1 Paul Walton introduced the paper, which had been considered by the Resources Audit and Performance Committee on 1 March when it had been agreed that an informal members’ group would consider further details about the proposed bid. He said that the group had met with the National Parks Partnership Development Director on Wednesday 10 March to scrutinise the proposal further. As a result of that meeting those members were happy to proceed with the bid.
- 27.2 Mr Walton also advised members of a minor change to the recommendation set out in the report. He responded to several queries in connection with the detail and outcomes of the application, after which members agreed to take the application forward as set out in the amended recommendation.

Resolved, that the New Forest National Park Authority works with Palladium and National Parks Partnerships Ltd. to submit an application to the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund, and that authority be delegated to officers to take all action as necessary in this regard.

Voting: unanimous

28. Any other items the Chairman decides are urgent

- 28.1 The Chairman drew members’ attention to an episode of Countryfile with an item on National Parks.
- 28.2 He mentioned that Defra’s response on the outcomes of the Glover Review was still awaited and if necessary a specific members’ session would be called to consider this response.
- 28.3 Keith Mans mentioned a survey carried out by Which magazine of National Parks. Members briefly discussed this matter and agreed that the relevant article be circulated to all members for information.

The meeting closed at 1.30pm.

Signed: Date:
(Chairman)