

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE MICROSOFT VIRTUAL TEAMS MEETING OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 15 OCTOBER 2020 AT 10.00 AM

#### **Present:**

##### *Members*

Gavin Parker (Chairman)

Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chairman)

Gordon Bailey

David Bence

Sue Bennison

George Bisson

Richard Clewer

David Harrison

Edward Heron

Victoria Mander

Alexis McEvoy

George Meyrick

Neville Penman

Caroline Rackham

Barry Rickman

Ann Sevier

Stephen Tarling

Richard Taylor

Steve Trow

##### *Officers*

Alison Barnes

Steve Avery

Rosalind Alderman

Nigel Stone

David Stone

David Illsley

Vicki Gibbon

Chief Executive Officer

Executive Director, Strategy and Planning

Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Chief Finance Officer

Corporate Services Manager

Policy Manager

Member Services Administrator

Apologies:

Kevin Suter and James Stuttaford (Ernst and Young LLP)

#### **1. Election of Chairman and Deputy Chairman**

- 1.1 The Chief Executive facilitated the election of David Harrison as Interim Chairman to oversee the appointment of the Chairman. Gavin Parker was nominated and duly seconded as Chairman of the New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) for the ensuing year. There being no further nominations, the nomination was put to the vote and carried. Gavin Parker was accordingly elected as Chairman.

**Resolved**, that Gavin Parker be appointed as Chairman of the Authority for the period up to the next Annual meeting of the Authority in 2021.

*Voting: Unanimous*

- 1.2 Gavin Parker thanked members for their support and confidence in appointing him as Chairman. He then oversaw the appointment of the Deputy Chairman. Patrick Heneghan was proposed and seconded and elected as Deputy Chairman of the NPA for the ensuing year.

**Resolved**, that Patrick Heneghan be appointed as Deputy Chairman of the Authority for the period up to the next Annual meeting of the Authority in 2021.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **2. Apologies for absence.**

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Keith Mans, Leo Randall and John Sanger.

## **3. Declarations of Interest.**

- 3.1 Edward Heron, Patrick Heneghan and Gavin Parker declared an interest under Part 2 section B (non-pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 17 as members of the Partnership for South Hampshire.

Edward Heron declared an interest under Part 2 section B (non-pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 14 as a Planning Consultant. He also expressed a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 15 as the portfolio holder for planning and infrastructure for the District Council along with being a cabinet member at the County Council.

## **4. Chairman's announcements.**

- 4.1 The Chairman thanked members for placing their trust in him to act as Chairman of the Authority and wanted to share his heartfelt gratitude to his predecessor Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre who had served the Authority and Forest so well. He also expressed his thanks to Patrick Heneghan as Deputy Chairman and interim Chairman. The Chairman explained that he and Patrick Heneghan would be focusing on a team approach as Chairman and Deputy to ensure increased collaboration with bodies and organisations and would reach out to members to assist and contribute to the Authority's aims. The Chairman went on to thank Alison Barnes and her team for working admirably over the last seven months during these challenging times.

The Chairman welcomed the new members, Alexis McEvoy, Victoria Mander and Stephen Tarling, to the Authority and asked them to introduce themselves.

## **5. Minutes**

- 5.1 The minutes of 9 July 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

## **6. Public Question Time**

- 6.1 Brian Tarnoff (Friends of the New Forest/New Forest Association) made a presentation to members on the England Coastal Path. The Chairman thanked Mr Tarnoff for his presentation. A copy of the full presentation is available from Member Services.

## **7. Chief Executive's Report (AM 566-20)**

- 7.1 The Chief Executive congratulated the Chairman and Deputy Chairman on their appointments and welcomed the new members to the Authority. She then introduced her report, reminding members that the report covered the period from the last Authority meeting in July.
- 7.2 Ms Barnes firstly gave a brief overview on how the Authority had been responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Authority had continued with virtual meetings including Authority meetings, Resources Audit and Performance Committee meetings, and monthly Planning Committees, and had continued to provide services across its remit.

She extended her thanks to all officers who had continued to work so efficiently. The Authority was continuing to receive a large number of enquiries and social media impressions continued to grow with 170,000 engagements. The Rangers had continued their presence on the ground working alongside Forestry England, the police and fire service to combat anti-social behaviour and had interacted with thousands of visitors to the Forest.

- 7.3 Under the *Protect* programme the Chief Executive advised that the planning casework had continued apace with case numbers similar to previous years, however there were some quite complex cases at the moment. The enforcement team were extremely busy with planning infringements and complaints regarding camping activities.
- 7.4 Ms Barnes reminded members that, back in January, the Authority made the pledge to be net zero with nature, which included the decarbonisation of nature in harmony with the natural environment. It was highlighted that the Solent LEP recovery plan features a decarbonisation and natural solutions hub which concerns the economic life of our area being linked to our ability to be low carbon and connect with solutions around nature benefits.
- 7.5 The Chief Executive explained that time had recently been spent with regional partners including the Solent Forum, Local Enterprise Partnership and Local Resilience Forum to look at how to build a Green Recovery Framework to implement a green print which would enable cooperation and collective leadership on this important issue.
- 7.6 Under the *Enjoy* programme Ms Barnes highlighted the importance of health and wellbeing particularly during the pandemic. A Nature Health Network with Bournemouth University and Public Health England had set up a sharing platform with seminars and online discussion along with working with Waterside GP's and health coaches to prescribe walking and outdoor art therapy.
- 7.7 Under the *Prosper* programme it was advised that a number of schemes had come to fruition including the Green Recovery Challenge fund and connecting with other national parks on the kickstart scheme which would look at skills and job creation.
- 7.8 The New Forest Tour did manage to go ahead this year, although there were a lot of challenges to ensure it was Covid-19 secure and a shorter season of six rather than nine weeks was possible with the patronage only declining by 25% which was a great achievement by the team.
- 7.9 Under the *Achieving Excellence* programme the Chief Executive highlighted the recent staff virtual discovery days that had taken place, which helped staff to discover and learn about different aspects of the Authority's work and mix between teams. Mental Health awareness training had taken place over the last few months with 90% of staff attending which would provide ongoing support moving forward.
- 7.10 Ms Barnes advised that the Partnership Plan in conjunction with all main partners would be the main focus over the coming months; this sets out the direction of the National Park for the next five years. The walking and cycling festival would still be going ahead on a virtual basis and would begin on 17 October for two weeks. Members then noted the report.
- 7.11 Following the Chief Executive's report a short video was played to celebrate the winners of the CLA awards. The winners were:

Best Support of Local Produce – New Forest Hamper Company  
Young Environmental Champion – Daisy Scott  
Young Farmer / Commoner – Peter Fogarty  
Sustainability Champion – Kathy Sirl

## 8. Covid-19 Update (AM 567-20)

- 8.1 Nigel Stone presented his report which provided members with an overview of the Coronavirus pandemic since the last update at the Authority meeting in July. He said that a similar update had been given to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee at its meeting on 7 September.
- 8.2 He then highlighted various aspects of the report including continued public engagement and support for campaigns in the Forest by the Rangers team working with partners, restarting Pedall, and the continued provision of a high quality planning service within the constraints of the pandemic.
- 8.3 Mr Stone said that an official consultation with staff had been held in September on the measures which had been put in place to ensure the safety of staff under the Authority's Risk Assessment and Guidance on the use of the Town Hall offices. This guidance was currently being reviewed in accordance with input from the consultation as well as up to date government guidance. Following on from the last survey of staff in June/July, a further staff survey would be conducted shortly to gain further insight and ideas from staff as the winter months approached, as well as possible longer term changes to working arrangements. Maintaining or improving on the Authority's current lower CO2 emissions brought on by the pandemic would also be looked at.
- 8.4 Referring to the finances of the Authority, Mr Stone advised that this position remained stable but would be kept under constant review and members would be updated on any change to the situation. Members then noted the report.

## 9. Appointments of Committees (AM 568-20)

- 9.1 David Stone presented the report and listed the local authority and Secretary of State appointed members on the Planning Committee, Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and Standards Committee as set out in the report which were duly proposed and seconded. Members then endorsed the Committee appointments, which are summarised in **Annex 1** to these minutes.

### **Resolved**, That:

1. appointments be made to the Planning Committee as set out in Annex 1 to these minutes for the period until the next annual meeting of the NPA in 2021 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership;
2. appointments be made to Resources, Audit and Performance Committee as set out in Annex 1 to these minutes for the period until the next annual meeting of the NPA in 2021 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership; and
3. appointments be made to Standards Committee as set out in Annex 1 to these minutes for the period until the next annual meeting of the NPA in 2021 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**10. Appointment of Representatives to external organisations (AM 569-20)**

- 10.1 The Chairman presented the report and listed and proposed the Authority appointments on outside bodies.
- 10.2 Members then endorsed the appointments which are summarised in **Annex 2** to these minutes.

**Resolved**, that the appointments to external organisations for the period up to the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2021, as listed in Annex 2 to these minutes, be approved.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**11. Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee**

- 11.1 David Harrison advised that much of his report was covered elsewhere on the agenda through the Chief Executive's report and various financial reports. He welcomed the new members and explained that the Committee dealt with monitoring the Authority's Work Programme as well as financial and resource matters. He referred to the Authority's response to the COVID 19 pandemic and commented on how well officers and members had dealt with the challenges which this had presented.
- 11.2 He advised that the Authority was involved in supporting a range of significant projects in the Forest such as Pedall, an all-inclusive cycling project. He encouraged new members to contact the relevant lead officer to learn more about these projects.

**12 Auditors' Report (AM 570-20)**

- 12.1 Nigel Stone updated members on the draft Audit Results Report for the year ended 31 March 2020.
- 12.2 Mr Stone said that as a result of COVID-19, new Regulations had been published by the Government which changed the publication date for final, audited accounts from 31 July to 30 November 2020 for all relevant authorities. The audit of the Authority's financial statements for 2019/20 was ongoing but had been substantially completed baring the small number of outstanding issues set out in the report - these would be addressed before the November deadline. Subject to the resolution of these issues, the Auditors expected to issue an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements and a value for money conclusion. Following brief discussion, the report was then noted by members.

**13. Draft Financial Report 2019/20 (AM 571-20)**

- 13.1 Mr Nigel Stone introduced the report which contained the latest draft of the Authority's Financial Report for the 2019/20 financial year. He drew members' attention to the Auditors' Report (Minute 12 above) and said that following settlement of the outstanding issues identified by the Auditors, the Financial Report, Governance Statement and Letter of Representation would be officially signed by the Chairman and Officers before the new deadline set by the Government of 30 November.
- 13.2 He then highlighted various aspects of the statements for members' information and advised that the Comprehensive Spending Review had been delayed and was now

expected in November. The Authority together with its partners was feeding into this process.

**Resolved**, that the Financial Report, the Accounting Policies and Annual Governance Statement contained therein, and the Letter of Representation be approved, subject to any further changes required in relation to the outstanding issues identified at the meeting for which delegation is given for these to be mutually agreed by the Chief Finance Officer, Chief Executive and Chairman.

*Voting: none voting against, 6 abstentions*

#### **14. White Paper: Planning for the Future (AM 572-20)**

- 14.1 Steve Avery introduced his report advising that many members would be familiar with the report and the proposed planning reforms. He asked that members consider and agree the key points for the Authority's formal response to the consultation.
- 14.2 He advised that these key proposals were quite unlike anything that had gone before with the Government making clear its intention to replace the current system with a completely new system to speed up the application process and simplify local plans.
- 14.3 Mr Avery highlighted section two of the document where National Parks England were providing a joint response on behalf of all the English National Parks. The Authority was helping to coordinate this and the consensus view was to ensure that the response was expressed positively and to help government officials refine the proposals and to provide alternatives as they affect the National Parks.
- 14.4 It was explained that there were parts of the White Paper that were welcome, however there were also some concerns that were listed in the report. More clarity was required on the role and status of the National Parks as they cover 10% of the land in England. It was assumed that National Parks would be protected under the new zoning regime, however this was not explicitly stated in the White Paper, and there was no mention of the Glover Review which covered protected landscapes. Many of the issues were discussed at a workshop in September which were summarised in section 3 of the report. Mr Avery ran through some of the concerns which were highlighted in the report and asked members to consider and agree to the main headline points as set out.
- 14.5 Following detailed discussion, members agreed to endorse the recommendation as detailed below with the additional comments which were discussed.

**Resolved**, that, having considered the comments arising from the recent Members' workshop as listed in 3.1 of the report and, subject to any additional member comments, authority be delegated to the Executive Director to prepare the Authority's detailed written response to the White Paper in consultation with the Chairman of the Authority.

*Voting: none voting against*

#### **15. Vision for the Waterside (AM 573-20)**

- 15.1 Steve Avery introduced his report, reminding members that the report had already been considered by the Planning Committee. The report considered the joint working

approach for the Vision for the Waterside and the significant amount of development which would be taking place. Mr Avery asked members to endorse the draft Vision for the Waterside document.

**Resolved**, that:

- a) the Vision for the Waterside document be endorsed, subject to the amendment stressing the importance of fibre broadband in addition to existing references to 5G in the area; and
- b) authority be delegated to the Executive Director to make and agree minor amendments to the document in consultation with the Chairman of the Authority.

*Voting: none against, 2 abstentions*

## **16. Establishing a new Partnership Plan Board (AM 574-20)**

- 16.1 Steve Avery introduced his report updating members on the work which was taking place on reviewing and updating the Partnership Plan for the National Park, which was a highly strategic and important document. As part of this work, it was considered that establishing a Partnership Plan Board to oversee the implementation of the new Partnership Plan and to lead reviews for future updates would be feasible.
- 16.2 Mr Avery went on to highlight the current arrangements for dealing with the Partnership Plan and the wide range of organisations included to contribute. With the current structure there was a deficit in political representation to help steer the direction of the Plan and to discuss big issues and reach a common ground. Through this paper it was requested that a Member Task and Finish group be established to investigate the terms of reference for a new Partnership Plan Board. Following discussion members agreed to the recommendation as detailed below.

**Resolved**, that a Member Task and Finish Group, supported by the Executive Director, be established to investigate the feasibility of, and terms of reference for, a new Partnership Board, the recommendations of which would be reported to the Authority meeting in March 2021.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **17. Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) (AM 575-20)**

- 17.1 David Illsley introduced his report advising members that since August 2019 the Authority had been a member of the Partnership for South Hampshire. During the Joint Committee meeting on 30 September 2020, the Partnership agreed an updated Statement of Common Ground and each individual local planning authority was now required to sign the document in order for it to be published.
- 17.2 Mr Illsley explained that section 2 of the report set out the statement of common ground and working together across local authorities on strategic planning matters which was a legal requirement and tested at examination. Section 3 then detailed the next steps. Following the publication of the document it would then be available to help local planning authorities demonstrate constructive and positive cooperation on strategic matters. He then asked members to endorse the recommendation as detailed below.

**Resolved**, that the signing of the Statement of Common Ground for publication be endorsed to inform the future production of a PfSH Joint Strategy.

*Voting: none against, 1 abstention*

**18. Any other items the Chairman decides are urgent**

18.1 There were no items on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 1.20pm.

Signed: ..... Date: .....  
(Chairman)