

# NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

## MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2020 AT 10:00 HOURS

### **Present:**

#### *Members:*

Gordon Bailey  
David Bence  
Sue Bennison  
David Harrison (Chairman)  
Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chairman)  
Victoria Mander  
Alexis McEvoy  
George Meyrick  
Neville Penman  
Ann Sevier  
Gavin Parker, ex-officio member (Authority Chairman).

#### *Officers:*

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Stone	Chief Finance Officer
Nigel Matthews	Head of Recreation Management and Learning
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

#### *Also in attendance:*

Bruce Rothnie (Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England)

### **1. Election to fill the vacancy of Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee**

- 1.1 David Harrison was duly proposed and seconded as Chairman of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and Patrick Heneghan was duly proposed and seconded as Deputy Chairman of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee for the period up to one year until the next Annual Authority meeting in October 2021.

**Resolved**, that David Harrison be appointed as Chairman and Patrick Heneghan be appointed as Deputy Chairman of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee. The duration of the appointments will be for one year until the next Annual meeting of the Authority.

*Voting: Unanimous*

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

- 2.1 An apology for absence was received from John Sanger.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**4. Chairman's announcements**

4.1 The Chairman welcomed Alexis McEvoy and Victoria Mander who had recently been appointed to the Committee.

**5. Minutes**

5.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

5.2 The Chairman noted a few actions from the minutes of the last meeting which mentioned members' days. David Stone advised that due to the present Covid situation members' days would still be organised via Teams wherever possible and on-site events would likely not take place this year.

5.3 In answer to a query regarding the bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, which was mentioned in minute item 143, Paul Walton reported that unfortunately the application had been unsuccessful. He said that it was a national scheme with potentially £40m for a range of projects which received over 200 expressions of interest totalling £270m. He added that there had been strong competition from a number of applicants for the funding.

5.4 On behalf of members, the Chairman expressed his thanks for the hard work that Paul and his team had done. Mr Walton said he would pass the thanks on to Fiona Wynne who was instrumental in putting the bid together.

**6. Public Question Time**

6.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

**7. Half-Year Progress Report 2020/21**

7.1 Members raised a number of queries with regard to aspects of the key performance indicators and progress against the action points under the second quarter progress report.

7.2 In response to a query in connection with location of the five ancient monuments in the New Forest, Paul Walton undertook to contact the member concerned with details of the whereabouts of the monuments.

7.3 In discussing research opportunities proposed with local universities (Data and Evidence on page 4 of the Work Programme), members were advised that local universities were inputting research work through the Green Halo Partnership whilst specific input was being provided by Southampton University through a PhD placement in support of the Green Recovery Strategy and with Bournemouth University on the Nature Health Network and an Archeology placement. In addition,

research opportunities were being explored through the wider public via citizen science work.

- 7.4 In considering the action under revising and publishing a list of non-designated heritage assets (page 15 of the Work Programme), members were advised that the Government had recently launched a campaign to encourage local communities to nominate locally important historic buildings which they value most for inclusion in their local authority's local list. Funding in the amount of £700,000 was available to the 10 English county areas to develop new or updated lists and officers were proposing a joint bid with Winchester City Council and Southampton City Council to secure funding for this work through the above source. This needed to be submitted by 13 November and officers recommended that an application be made for this funding.

**Resolved**, that application be made in conjunction with Winchester City Council and Southampton City Council to secure funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to be used in working with local communities in identifying buildings for inclusion in the Authority's local list of non-designated heritage assets.

*Voting: Unanimous*

- 7.5 A member referred to the presentation to the Annual Authority meeting on 15 October 2020 by Mr Brian Tarnoff of the Friends of the New Forest raising concerns on the English Coast Path. Following discussion on this matter, Nigel Matthews was requested to consider how members could be briefed on issues concerning the Coast Path and to liaise with Mr Tarnoff in connection with the issues contained in his presentation.

**Action:** Nigel Matthews to:

- consider how members could be briefed on issues concerning the local route of the English Coast Path; and
- liaise with Mr Brian Tarnoff of Friends of the New Forest in connection with the issues contained in his presentation on this matter to the Annual Authority meeting on 15 October 2020.

Members then noted the report.

## **8. Half-Year Budgetary Control Report 2020/21**

- 8.1 Nigel Stone provided a summary of the financial performance of the Authority which covered the period from April to the end of September 2020. The key figures were expenditure that showed £2.35m spend over the first six months of the financial year (53% of budget) and the income position which showed £2.33m received (53% of budget). Overall, after the first six months of the financial year the budget figures were on-track.
- 8.2 Mr Stone informed members that our treasury holdings had generated a small amount of interest, but the interest rates had got significantly lower due to Covid 19. At the beginning of the year it was projected that we would receive around £12,000 of interest but this had now reduced to approximately £4,000.

- 8.3 Nigel Stone said there were some financial savings, such as the New Forest Show not taking place this year, and there had been a few staff vacancies which had not been filled over the summer. Overall, the Authority was likely to be within the budget that had been set in March of this year which was a very positive position to be in.
- 8.4 Mr Stone explained that Defra would likely get its 2021/22 budget figures from the Government on 25 November and the Authority would hopefully know its grant settlement figure by mid-December, though no specific dates had been given. Mr Stone commented that it would be more difficult to plan for the future as only a single-year settlement would be received.
- 8.5 In response to a query on the pension scheme Mr Stone advised that the benefits to pensioners would not change as it was a defined benefits scheme, but the Authority might have to make top-up payments to the fund, should it be struggling in coming years due to the pandemic/investment impacts; in the past these had been between £100-200,000 per year.

**Resolved, that the members note the current income and expenditure position, including the potential savings and pressures identified.**

Voting: Unanimous

## **9. Accord Between the Forestry Commission and National Parks England**

- 9.1 Paul Walton reminded members that in 2018 Forestry Commission and National Parks England signed a national accord to set out the shared ambition for the management of land within the national parks and how the two organisations would work together across a wide range of projects. There were five priorities and those were:
- Decision making that enhances National Park landscapes and the woodlands in them
  - Woodland creation and expansion in National Parks
  - Exemplary FE and National Park Authority owned/managed woodlands in National parks
  - Woodland grant schemes fit for the future
  - National Parks woodlands for the people
- 9.2 Mr Walton said that 50% of the New Forest National Park was under the management of Forestry England (FE) which meant there was a strong relationship between the two organisations and so had worked together to develop local outcomes that interpreted the national accord at the local level.
- 9.3 Bruce Rothnie added that he had always been supportive of officers working together on topics of mutual interest and in particular where FE as a landowner had a significant part to play in the delivery of those ambitions. He too thought that the relationship between the two organisations was strong and reflected on the summer months, in particular the pressures that were placed on the Forest from the pandemic, and was pleased with the way the teams on the ground connected and communicated.

- 9.4 Mr Rothnie reflected on how the two organisations could work to make the accord work even better, on how to join up the business plans, action plans, and about the strategic ambitions and vision for the Forest. He thought that in the last few years he had seen an unprecedented change in the way that society looked at the way FE used the national parks, and needed to address some of the major problems that were envisaged due to climate change, and so, more than ever he said that teams needed to join up in terms of how resources were to be deployed.
- 9.5 Bruce Rothnie said that due to Covid 19, the next two to three years were going to be a challenge, so this should be a start of working together in a way that would deliver the broader vision.

## 10. Coronavirus update report

- 10.1 Nigel Stone said there had been a meeting of the Executive Board where sickness statistics information was gathered up to the end of September (Q2). The short-term sickness showed a downward trend even during the most recent period of the pandemic. The long-term sickness statistics were instead rising; however they had been skewed by one to two instances of long-term (non-Covid) sickness.
- 10.2 He informed members that the staff Wellbeing Group continued their excellent work putting on events such as mental health awareness sessions and coffee chats for colleagues to keep in touch with each other.
- 10.3 Mr Stone commented on the Government's month-long lockdown, which was announced at the weekend, but confirmed that no Government guidance had yet been released. He explained that the Senior Leadership Team had a meeting on Wednesday to make any further decisions that might be necessary in the light of the lockdown.
- 10.4 Nigel Stone said a lot of information had been sourced through the staff survey about ways of working during the pandemic. He would put the salient points in the Members' Bulletin for members' information, but a few of the statistics and responses are set out below:
- Staff were asked about IT usage and 55 of 81 staff said they were happy with their set up. He said staff have continued in some cases to use their own equipment, but all staff would shortly have to use NPA equipment for security reasons
  - Use of Town Hall offices:
    - 35% of staff rarely/never use the office
    - 40% of staff occasional access to office
    - 25% of staff needed regular use of the office for their particular work
- 10.5 Mr Stone advised that the sustainability plan, which was mentioned in the work programme, could start to be put together as Andy Brennan had gathered a lot of information over the past couple of years of how people were working and how they

could work going forwards. He said reducing commuting and business miles was high on the agenda, whereby staff could work in the office for two to three days rather than five days. He said this would make the most significant difference on the Authority’s CO2 impact, because commuting mileage in particular was more detrimental than all our other emissions put together.

- 10.6 Nigel Stone mentioned the well-being initiatives and how a lot of the of the work on them had been done in September and October. He said the Authority was working with other National Parks on a staff survey to send out a standard number of questions to staff so data could be compared.

Members then noted the report.

**11. Future Work Programme**

- 11.1 David Stone introduced the report, which looked at the preparations for the new Business Plan and Work Programme over the next six months and finalisation of the new Partnership Plan as well as how members would like to be involved in inputting their views on the priorities, structure and content of these documents.
- 11.2 Members expressed their interest in opportunities to input into the above documents and supported the recommendation contained in the report.

**Resolved, that** Officers identify opportunities for members to be involved in the planning process for the new Business Plan and Work Programme and new Partnership Plan.

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

- 12.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

**13. Date of next meeting**

- 13.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 1 February 2021.

The meeting closed at 13:15 hours

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