

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 19 AUGUST 2021 AT 10.00 AM AT THE GATES HALL, LYMINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE, NEW STREET, LYMINGTON SO41 9BQ

Present:

Members

Gavin Parker (Chair)

Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chair)

Gordon Bailey

Sue Bennison

David Bence

David Harrison

Alexis McEvoy

Victoria Mander

Caroline Rackham

Barry Rickman

John Sanger

Ann Sevier

Stephen Tarling

Richard Taylor

Michael Thierry

Steve Trow

Officers

Alison Barnes

Steve Avery

Rosalind Alderman

Nigel Stone

Paul Walton

David Stone

Vicki Gibbon

Sam Greatorex

Chief Executive Officer

Executive Director, Strategy and Planning

Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Head of Environment and Rural Economy

Corporate Services Manager

Member Services Administrator

Systems Support Technician (Attending Remotely)

Also in attendance:

James Stuttaford – Ernst & Young LLP

56. Apologies for absence.

56.1 Apologies for absence were received from George Bisson, Richard Clewer, Zoe Clewer, Keith Mans, George Meyrick and Neville Penman.

57. Declarations of Interest.

57.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

58. Chair's announcements.

58.1 There were no announcements on this occasion.

59. Minutes

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2021 be approved as a true record.

Voting: unanimous

60. Public Question Time

- 60.1 Brian Tarnoff (Friends of the New Forest) made a presentation to the Authority on Camping on the Forest's Protected Crown Lands, a copy of which is available via the Member Services Team. Members noted the presentation.

61. Chief Executive's Report (AM 601-21)

- 61.1 The Chief Executive introduced her report, reminding members that the report covered the period from the Authority meeting in March 2021.
- 61.2 Ms Barnes began her presentation by highlighting the Partnership Plan Review Consultation which was launched in June. She reminded members that this was a partnership with fellow organisations within the New Forest. It was important to encourage people to respond to the consultation. With regard to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic Ms Barnes explained that in consultation with Authority staff there would be a gradual return to the office, and reception was now open to the public; however, it was felt that the Council Chamber was unsuitable for larger groups or meetings and that these would continue to be held off site for the time being.
- 61.3 Under the *Protect* programme, the Chief Executive welcomed Olivia McGregor to the Authority who had recently been appointed as the Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager. Ms Barnes also highlighted the work to develop a model to encourage private investment in habitat restoration for climate and nature in conjunction with Palladium and two estates (Barker-Mill and Cadland). The Green Halo partnership had recently celebrated five years with an online conference which was attended by over 130 people with speakers including Prof. Sir Dieter Helm, CEO of Solent LEP and Fawley Waterside. A recording of the conference can be found here - <https://youtu.be/ABKcHSx5bRw%C2%A0>
- 61.4 Ms Barnes went on to highlight that the Authority continued to invest resources into nature recovery work with a Nature Recovery Officer, Alison Levy having been appointed in July. The Authority had also continued to develop a Greenprint for recovery post-Covid which identified five key priorities including net zero with nature, a natural health service, world class blue green environments, creating great places through quality design and build, and a centre of excellence in green skills and jobs.
- 61.5 Continuing with the *Protect* programme, the Chief Executive highlighted the recent launch of the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme, which encouraged farmers, commoners and landowners to apply for funding through the Authority along with working together to improve access and deliver bigger and better for environment, people and places. The planning team continued to be busy over the last quarter with 298 applications being received along with ongoing large developments including the Lyndhurst Park Hotel and Fawley Waterside. With the recent adoption of the New Milton Neighbourhood Plan in July the Policy team were continuing to liaise with local Town and Parish Councils to progress their Neighbourhood Plan work. A Waterside Transport strategy briefing had also recently been held which considered how the New Forest links to the Waterside.
- 61.6 Under the *Enjoy* programme, Ms Barnes was pleased to announce that volunteering groups were back up and running again along with educational sessions and travel grants. A recent crowdfunding campaign with partner organisations had generated £9,000 to support volunteering programmes. The 'care for the Forest, care for each

other' programmes had been continuing at pace, with the recent instalment of digital signage at three key entry points in the Forest along with working closely with emergency services and rangers attending local events and fairs.

- 61.7 The Chief Executive highlighted Generation Green, which provided opportunities to connect young people to nature across England and Wales. The Authority now had a Kickstart Education Assistant in place along with new Seasonal Rangers, and the Wild Spaces Youth Officer was also now in position helping 14-24 year olds engage with nature. Ms Barnes advised members that five new historic routes had been launched and that the recent Festival of Archaeology had two sell out walks for WW2 at Lepe. Following the recent relaxation of Covid restrictions PEDALL was once again up and running, attracting a wider range of riders, and were also offering post-Covid confidence rides aimed at those who had lost their confidence during lockdown.
- 61.8 Under the *Prosper* programme, Ms Barnes was pleased to report that the New Forest Tour season had been extended until 12 September and that it remained very popular with many routes being fully booked. The New Forest Marque membership remained stable with 158 members and the launch of the Taste of the New Forest subscription box had proved to be very popular. Health and wellbeing workshops had recently been held along with 39 organisations to develop a strategy and approach to look at what nature gives for free. Ms Barnes also highlighted the Sustainable Communities Fund which had recently awarded several grants to local community projects including £2,000 to Hythe Pier Heritage and £2,000 for a compost toilet at Lyndhurst Cemetery along with several micro-grants to schools.
- 61.9 Under the *Excellence* programme, the Chief Executive highlighted the recent visit by Sir Desmond Swayne to the Forest where he became an 'ambassador' and tackled litter picking. Finally, Ms Barnes wished Nigel Matthews a long and happy retirement. Nigel Matthews had left the Authority at the end of July after 15 years. He would be thoroughly missed by all staff and was an invaluable member of the team. Members then noted the report.

62. Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee (7 June 2021)

- 62.1 The Chair of the above Committee (David Harrison) referred briefly to the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2021 and expressed his thanks on behalf of members to staff for their efforts in maintaining the business of the Authority over the difficult Covid period and for taking forward key Authority projects.
- 62.2 Members supported the above comments and then noted the report.

63. Ernst & Young LLP – Auditors' Report 2020/21 (AM 602-21)

- 63.1 James Stuttaford of Ernst & Young introduced the report and drew members' attention to the executive summary of the audit results report (Annex 2 of the report) and advised that there were two outstanding matters before the auditors could complete the audit and provide an opinion. The two outstanding items were the receipt of the IS19 assurance letter from the Hampshire Pension Fund Auditor and the testing of members' allowances – this latter item had now been completed and the only outstanding matter was the assurance letter from the Pension Fund auditor, which was expected before the deadline of 30 September 2021.
- 63.2 Mr Stuttaford advised that the value for money audit commentary would be provided in the Auditor's annual report and would be given at the same time as the opinion.

However, he added that, subject to the content of the Pension Fund's assurance letter, no significant risks had been identified in the audit.

- 63.3 Referring to the audit fee, Mr Stuttaford said that the report reflected the audit fee for 2020/21 (£10,226). Mr Stuttaford and Mr Stone confirmed that no decision had been reached by the PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments) in response to the request from Ernst & Young for a scale fee rebasing of the audit fee by an additional £27,418 for the year. Mr Stone added that the Authority would be consulted by the PSAA before any decision was made and there would be an opportunity for the Authority to present its case. Following further brief discussion, the report was noted by members.

64. Draft Financial Report (AM 603-21)

- 64.1 Nigel Stone advised that the financial report was for approval by the Authority, subject to any changes required in relation to outstanding issues such as the assurance letter from the Pension Fund auditor mentioned earlier under the previous item. If approved by members, these changes would be delegated to relevant officers and the Authority Chair, with the Financial Report (inclusive of these changes) being approved by the end of September.
- 64.2 Referring to the overall financial position for 2020/21, Mr Stone reported that the final figure to be taken from reserves to balance the budget was £2,000 - a net saving of £16,000 on the forecast figure and well within an acceptable tolerance margin.
- 64.3 In approving the report, members drew attention to the importance of the Authority being less reliant on Defra funding and stressed the need to source other income streams in order to ensure longer term financial sustainability. Members noted the initiatives taken by the Authority in this regard and in promoting the important work of the Authority at a national level.

Resolved, that the Financial Report, the Accounting Policies and Annual Governance Statement contained therein, and the Management Representation Letter 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 Chair.

Voting: unanimous

65. Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (AM 604-21)

- 65.1 Paul Walton introduced his report, reminding members that at the last Authority meeting in July members had affirmed their support for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme which was then officially launched at that time. It was agreed that a Local Assessment Panel would be created to consider applications over the value of £5,000. Mr Walton was pleased to report that, following discussions with individuals and organisations, the membership of the Panel had now been proposed as detailed in the report. Members were asked to endorse the appointment of these members on the Panel.

Resolved that the Authority ratifies the appointment of the members of the Local Assessment Panel for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for the New Forest National Park as set out in the report.

Voting: unanimous

66. Standing Orders Update (AM 605-21)

- 66.1 Rosalind Alderman introduced her report, advising that a recent review of the Authority’s Standing Orders had been conducted to ensure their consistency and fitness for purpose. It was noted that, amongst other amendments, changes were recommended to the voting procedures for the election of Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Committees and the appointment of Authority representatives to external bodies.
- 66.2 Ms Alderman recommended a further revision to the Standing Orders to clarify the procedure where more than two candidates put themselves forward for a particular role. It was proposed that the rules be amended to clarify an existing ambiguity to make it clear that, if a first ballot did not result in one candidate receiving both more votes than any other candidate and over 50% of the overall vote (a ‘clear majority’), the person with the fewest votes would be struck off the list and successive rounds of voting would take place by way of ballot until one candidate had secured a clear majority. Members supported the proposed amendments and delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair to make the necessary revisions to the Standing Orders covering the further amendment to the voting procedures.

Resolved that

- 1. Authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair to amend the wording of the Standing Orders to give effect to the amendment detailed at minute item 66.2; and
- 2. The revised Standing Orders (as set out in Annex 1 to the report, together with amendments to the voting procedures as detailed above) be adopted by the Authority.

Voting: unanimous

67. Any other items the Chair decides are urgent

- 67.1 There were no further items.

68. Date of next meeting

- 68.1 Thursday 21 October 2021 at 10.00am – Venue – TBC

PART II ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ON THE GROUNDS THAT EXEMPTED INFORMATION MAY BE DISCLOSED

None

The meeting closed at 11.50am.

Signed: Date:
(Chair)