

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 20 OCTOBER AT 10.00 AM AT THE LINDEN HALL, LYNDHURST COMMUNITY CENTRE, CENTRAL CAR PARK, HIGH STREET, LYNDHURST SO43 7NY

#### **Present:**

##### *Members*

Gavin Parker (Chair)

Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chair)

Diane Andrews

Gordon Bailey

David Bence

Sue Bennison

Richard Clewer

Zoe Clewer

David Harrison

Victoria Mander

Keith Mans

Alexis McEvoy

Neville Penman

Caroline Rackham

John Sanger

Ann Sevier

Stephen Tarling

Richard Taylor

Michael Thierry

Steve Trow

##### *Officers*

Alison Barnes

Rosalind Alderman

Nigel Stone

David Stone

David Illsley

Vicki Gibbon

Simon Ludlow

Chief Executive Officer

Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Corporate Services Manager

Policy & Conservation Manager

Member Services Administrator

ICT Technical Officer (Attending Remotely)

#### In attendance

Kevin Suter

Ernst & Young LLP

#### **61. Election of Chair and Deputy Chair of the New Forest National Park Authority**

- 61.1 The Chief Executive opened the meeting and asked Authority members to elect an interim Chair to oversee the election of Chair of the Authority, and David Harrison was duly elected as interim Chair. Following a vote, Gavin Parker was elected as Chair of the Authority for the ensuing year with Patrick Heneghan elected as Deputy Chair.

**Resolved**, that Gavin Parker be appointed as Chair of the Authority for the ensuing year

*Voting: Unanimous*

**Resolved**, that Patrick Heneghan be appointed as Deputy Chair of the Authority for the ensuing year

*Voting: Unanimous*

#### **62. Apologies for Absence**

- 62.1 Apologies for absence were received from George Bisson and George Meyrick.

#### **63. Declarations of Interest**

- 63.1 Diane Andrews, David Harrison, Neville Penman, Michael Thierry, Sue Bennison and Alexis McEvoy each declared an interest under Part 2 section B (non-pecuniary

interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 74 in relation to their roles as District and/or County Councillors.

#### **64. Chair's Announcements**

64.1 None

#### **65. Minutes**

65.1 David Bence advised that he was present at the last meeting and asked that the attendance list for the meeting be amended accordingly.

**Resolved**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022 be approved as a true record, subject to the amendment detailed above.

*Voting: None voting against*

#### **66. Public Question Time**

66.1 Brian Tarnoff, speaking on behalf of the New Forest Association / Friends of the New Forest, made a presentation to members regarding Solent Freeport and Investment Zones.

66.2 Aldred Drummond, speaking on behalf of the Fawley Waterside Ltd., made a presentation to members regarding Solent Freeport and Investment Zones.

*Copies of both presentations are held by Member Services and available on request.*

#### **67. Chief Executive's Report (AM 632/22)**

67.1 The Chief Executive introduced her report, reminding Members that the report covered the period since the Authority meeting in July 2022.

67.2 Under the *Protect* theme, the Chief Executive began her report highlighting the Re:New Forest Partnership Plan which was officially launched at the New Forest Show; a five year plan for the whole of the National Park developed alongside partner organisations. Ms Barnes advised that work had continued on updating the Authority's 'local list' of buildings and features with the first tranche being approved by the Planning Committee.

67.3 The Planning service continue to be busy with four out of five major housing schemes set out in the Local Plan having been considered, along with a 91% approval rate on new applications. The new online planning system was now live. Recently some members had attended the annual planning tour.

67.4 Under the *Enjoy* theme, the New Forest show was highlighted along with the continued work of the Education team who had recently been teaching on special qualities of the New Forest and on plastic pollution. The Chief Executive informed members that the Ranger team had engaged with over 4,000 people during the last period and were currently providing support at drifts and during deer rutting season.

67.5 Continuing on the Enjoy theme, Ms Barnes updated members on recent campaigns including: 'Operation Mountie' in conjunction with the police, litter picking with the help of Ambassadors, and BBQ-free New Forest which was stepped up throughout the summer months during the heatwave. The walking and cycling festival was also

highlighted which began on 15 October and would run until 6 November; the festival was now in its tenth year with over 80 walks and cycle rides available guided by experts.

- 67.6 Under the *Prosper* theme, the Chief Executive was pleased to announce the positive feedback the New Forest Tour had received over the summer with a 4.7 rating on TripAdvisor. The Authority were sponsoring the Sustainable Business of the Year Awards with the winners due to be announced during an awards night in December. Ms Barnes advised that the Sustainable Communities Fund had provided micro-grants of up to £150 to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee to fund wildlife projects.
- 67.7 Under the *Excellence* theme, Ms Barnes advised that the Annual Review 2021/22 had now been produced. Natural England had recently awarded £7,000 - £10,000 to test 'myco-remediation' using locally sourced mushrooms to decontaminate water habitats and an evaluation was underway for Green and Blue Horizons from City to Forest Scheme. Along with the Chief Executive some members recently attend the NPUK conference in Exmoor National Park. Finally, Ms Barnes gave a tribute to the late Queen Elizabeth II on behalf of all at the Authority.
- 67.8 Following discussion, Members noted the report.

**68. Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee (5 September 2022)**

- 68.1 Patrick Heneghan referred to key aspects of the minutes of the above meeting including the First Quarter Progress report on the 2022-23 Work Programme and the First Quarter Budgetary Control report. In this latter regard, members requested that they be involved in setting the medium-term resourcing strategy and were advised that a paper would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on 7 November.

Following further brief discussion, members noted the report.

**69. Appointment of Committees (AM 633/22)**

- 69.1 David Stone introduced his report advising members that, in accordance with its Standing Orders, the Authority was required to appoint members for committees at its Annual Authority meeting. Following the results of a recent survey requesting members complete their committee choices, Mr Stone was pleased to advise that the membership of each committee had been achieved with sufficient membership. Members then approved the recommendations as detailed below.

**Resolved, that the Authority**

1. appoint the membership of the Planning Committee as set out in Annex 2 (7 local authority members and 6 Secretary of State members) for the period until the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2023 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership.
2. appoint the membership of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee as set out in Annex 2 (6 local authority members and 5 Secretary of State members) for the period until the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2023 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership.

3. appoint the membership of the Standards Committee as set out in Annex 2 (3 local authority members and 2 Secretary of State members) for the period until the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2023 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **70. Election of Chair and Deputy Chair on Authority Committees**

- 70.1 A vote took place to determine the Chair and Deputy Chair for each of the Authority Committees, as detailed below:

### ***Resolved, that***

1. Gordon Bailey be elected as Chair and Steve Trow as Deputy Chair of the Planning Committee;
2. Patrick Heneghan be elected as Chair and David Bence as Deputy Chair of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee;
3. George Bisson be elected as Chair and Diane Andrews as Deputy Chair of the Standards Committee.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **71. Appointment of Authority Representatives on External Bodies (AM 634/22)**

- 71.1 David Stone advised members that this report was for members to consider appointments to external organisations for the period until the next Annual Authority meeting in 2023. Annex 1 of the report detailed those members who were proposed to represent the Authority on each outside body.

***Resolved, that*** the appointments to external organisations for the period up to the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2023, as detailed in Annex 1 attached to the report, be approved.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **72. Ernst & Young – Auditors’ Report 2021/22 (AM 635/22)**

- 72.1 Kevin Suter of Ernst & Young introduced the report and advised that, subject to a number of small issues set out at the time of drafting the Executive Summary of the audit results report (Annex 2), he was prepared to issue an unqualified audit opinion of the Authority’s accounts and value for money / use of resources arrangements. Mr Suter 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.
- 72.2 The majority of items set out in the summary had now been completed and there were now only two items which remained outstanding – the valuation of the Authority’s land and buildings (which had essentially now been completed) and final assurances from the Hampshire Pension Fund auditors confirming the valuation of the Pension Fund assets through receipt of an assurance letter. It was anticipated that both issues would be resolved by the time of signing off the accounts at the end of November. Subject to the content of the Pension Fund’s assurance letter, no significant risks had been identified in the audit.

- 72.3 In response to a query with regard to the audit fee, Nigel Stone advised that this issue still remained undetermined and the process of agreeing the fee for each year was still under negotiation through the PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments) process.

Following further brief discussion, the reports were noted by members.

### **73 Draft Financial Report 2021/22 (AM 636/22)**

- 73.1 In introducing the report, 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. He drew members' attention to the significant negative amount shown on the balance sheet in respect of the Pension Fund and advised that although this scheme was fully funded, local government accounting practices required the amount to be set out in this format.
- 73.2 Mr Stone responded to a number of queries in connection with the pension fund liability and the Authority's contribution to the fund.
- 73.3 Mr Stone advised that a further report would be submitted to the next Resources, Audit and Performance Committee considering the finances of the Authority over the medium to longer term.

**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 Authority Chair.

*Voting: Unanimous*

### **74 Solent Freeport and Investment Zones – Update (AM 637/22)**

- 74.1 David Illsley introduced his report summarising the current position regarding the Solent Freeport; and the separate (but related) invitation for areas to apply for 'Investment Zone' status to boost investment and development which ran from 2 to 14 October 2022.
- 74.2 Mr Illsley explained that in March 2021 the Government had announced eight freeports in England, including the Solent. The Solent Freeport includes the Southampton Water Tax sites at Marchwood Port and the strategic land reserve at Dibden Bay, land adjacent to Fawley Refinery, land at Fawley Waterside, land at Southampton Airport, and Dunsbury Park, Havant. In addition to tax and customs benefits, guidance states that Freeports will provide a supportive planning environment through an extension of permitted development rights and incentivising the use of Local Development Orders.
- 74.3 It was noted that the Authority was not a Solent Freeport Board member but did attend meetings in a non-voting capacity. The Authority had sought to engage in discussions on the Solent Freeport in a constructive manner, with the aim of ensuring the Freeport delivered environmental benefits alongside economic outcomes. Mr Illsley explained that following the publication of Solent Freeport maps, the majority of the New Forest National Park falls within the Freeport's 'outer boundary'. In response to queries, the Government had confirmed that current NPPF policy for protected landscapes would continue to apply within these Freeport outer zones, and there would be no change to the current planning and environmental status of National Parks.

- 74.4 Mr Illsley went on to explain the aim of Investment Zones; which would be designated sites that would be subject to a more streamlined approach in gaining planning consent. Earlier in the month the Government had invited 'expressions of interest' for areas to be designated 'Investment Zones'.
- 74.5 Mr Illsley explained that an expression of interest to convert the Freeport to an Investment Zone had been submitted by the Solent Freeport on 14 October, which included land within the National Park as part of the Fawley Waterside Freeport Tax site. The Freeport's expression of interest noted that Government guidance lacked clarity and assurances on the rolling back of environmental protections and had therefore highlighted the need to protect the New Forest National Park.
- 74.6 In conclusion, Mr Illsley advised that his report recommended that the Authority did not support the principle of Investment Zone designation for sites within the National Park due to the incompatibility of a liberalised planning approach with the high level of protection afforded to the National Park and delivery of its purposes.
- 74.7 Following a full and detailed discussion, members were minded to include a further recommendation for the Chair of the Authority to write to the Secretary of State to explain in more detail the Authority's decision not to support the expression of interest with regard to the Solent Investment Zone.

**Resolved, that**

- a) the current position in relation to both the Solent Freeport and Government Investment Zone proposals set out in this report be noted;
- b) the position set out in the report in relation to the Solent Freeport (paragraph 4.2) and Investment Zone site designation (paragraph 4.3) be endorsed. Both the Freeport and Investment Zone programmes must be consistent with the protection afforded to National Parks in primary legislation; and
- c) the Chair of the Authority write to the Secretary of State DLUHC to further explain the decision not to support the Expression of Interest for the Solent Investment Zone.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**75. Any other items the Chair decides are urgent**

75.1 None

**76. Date of next meeting**

76.1 Thursday 26 January 2023 at 10.00am – Council Chamber, Lymington Town Hall, Lymington

**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 12:40pm.

Signed: ..... Date: ..... (Chair)