

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER 2024 AT 10.00 AM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON SO41 9ZG

#### **Present:**

##### *Members*

David Bence (Chair)

Gordon Bailey

Zoe Clewer

Mary Davies

Barry Dunning

David Harrison

Patrick Heneghan

Mel Kendal

Victoria Mander (Deputy Chair)

George Meyrick

Gavin Parker

Neville Penman

Caroline Rackham

Joe Reilly

Ann Sevier

Brice Stratford

Michael Thierry

Derek Tipp

Steve Trow

##### *Officers*

Alison Barnes

Rosalind Alderman

Nigel Stone

Paul Walton

David Stone

David Illsley

Jim Mitchell

Hilary Makin

Chief Executive

Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Head of Environment & Rural Economy

Corporate Services Manager

Policy & Conservation Manager

Access and Learning Manager

Communications Manager

Also present: Simon Mathers and Katie Lean - Ernst and Young, External Auditors to the Authority

#### **113. Election of Chair and Deputy Chair**

113.1 Alison Barnes, Chief Executive, opened the meeting and asked for nominations for an Interim Chair, Caroline Rackham was proposed and elected. She then oversaw the election of Chair of the Authority. David Bence was proposed and elected for the ensuing year.

**Resolved, that** David Bence be appointed as Chair of the Authority for the ensuing year.

*Voting: None voting against*

113.2 David Bence then oversaw the election of Deputy Chair with Victoria Mander proposed and elected as Deputy Chair.

**Resolved, that** Victoria Mander be appointed as Deputy Chair of the Authority for the ensuing year.

*Voting: None voting against*

**114. Apologies for Absence**

114.1 Apologies for absence were received from Richard Clewer and Keith Mans.

**115. Declarations of Interest**

115.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

**116. Chair's Announcements**

116.1 The Chair extended a welcome to Barry Dunning on his first meeting on the Authority. He also welcomed John Adams who was awaiting confirmation of his appointment as an NPA member from Defra.

**117. Minutes**

117.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2024 were approved as a true record.

**Resolved,** that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2024 be approved as a true record.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**118. Public Question Time**

118.1 There were no public questions on this occasion.

**119. Chief Executive's Report (AM 690/24)**

119.1 The Chief Executive presented the report which covered the period since the last Authority meeting on 25 July 2024 and which had been formatted to accord with the NPA purposes and duty and which had been delivered within the Re:New Forest themes from the Business Plan. Ms Barnes gave a detailed presentation using PowerPoint giving a thorough overview of the Authority's work over the last quarter under each of the purposes.

119.2 Of particular note Ms Barnes highlighted the £1.3m Species Survival Fund which was a scheme to restore New Forest habitats and increase wildlife; an update on future farming in the New Forest including the Farming in Protected Landscapes role and the work of the Environmental Land Management scheme to identify a successor scheme to Higher Level Stewardship. She also mentioned the first year highlights of the YouCAN (youth for climate and nature) project and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New Forest Tour.

Following discussion, members noted the report. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available on the website.

**120. Draft Financial Report 2022/23 (AM 691/24)**

120.1 Nigel Stone presented the draft Financial Report for the 2022/23 financial year which had been considered and recommended for approval by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee at its meeting on 5 June 2023.

120.2 He drew members attention to the national issues which have affected the audit process of the 2022/23 Accounts and said that whilst the Authority published its draft

Accounts on time and in the appropriate format, the full audit had not been undertaken by the NPA's External Auditors Ernst & Young LLP. He said that at the Authority meeting in March 2024, Members had received a clean Value for Money conclusion for the year, however the formal audit itself has not been performed.

- 120.3 Mr Stone emphasised that a disclaimed audit did not in any way reflect on any of the Authority's actions, or those of its officers and members, and the Authority's financial position was strong and stable.
- 120.4 The Authority would shortly receive the official 2022/23 Audit Results Report from the Auditors and the government had set a deadline for acceptance of this and the Financial Report as 13 December 2024. It was anticipated that the audit report will propose a 'modified' audit opinion, in that as the audit had not been completed, therefore the Auditors will disclaim responsibility for giving an opinion. As the current meeting was the only Authority meeting before the December deadline, Officers were recommending that Members approve the draft documentation, whilst delegating approval of the final versions in early December.

**Resolved, that** the draft Financial Report, the Accounting Policies and Annual Governance Statement contained therein, and the draft 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 at the appropriate time by the Chief Finance Officer, Chief Executive and Chair of the Authority

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **121. Ernst and Young – Interim Audit results report 2023/24 (AM 692/24)**

- 121.1 Simon Mathers and Katie Lean from Ernst and Young LLP presented the Interim Audit Results for the financial year ended 31 March 2024. They noted that there were still two key outstanding areas to complete in their audit, one around developer contributions (income) and the other being pensions.

- 121.2 Following brief discussion, members noted the report.

## **122. Draft Financial Report 2023/24 (AM 693/24)**

- 122.1 Nigel Stone presented the draft Financial Report for 2023/24 which had been subjected to external audit scrutiny by Ernst & Young LLP. He said that the original financial results had been considered and recommended for approval by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee on 3 June 2024. As per 121.1 above, there were a couple of items currently outstanding which have yet to be determined and agreed with the Auditors and members would be fully updated on the progress of these, though he did not expect either to have any significant impact on the bottom line figures.
- 122.2 He advised that the Authority and Auditors had up until the end of February 2025 to finalise the above issues if required, but expected this to be done sooner. Following settlement of these outstanding issues, the Financial Report, Annual Governance Statement and Letter of Representation would be officially signed by the Chair and Senior Officers, as agreed with the Auditors. Should any more significant changes be

required to the figures and/or documentation, Officers would bring a further paper back to the Authority meeting in January 2025 for consideration.

**Resolved, that** the draft Financial Report, the Accounting Policies and Annual Governance Statement contained therein, and the draft Letter of Representation be approved, subject to any further minor 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 of the Authority (any significant changes would be brought back to the Authority in January 2025)

*Voting: Unanimous*

### **123. Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 9 September 2024**

- 123.1 David Bence updated members on the salient points discussed at the last meeting of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee on 9 September 2024 – namely the first quarter progress reports on the 2024/25 Work Programme and 2024/25 budget and drew members attention to the forming of a Resources Task and Finish Group comprising seven member volunteers which would assist the Executive Leadership Team to review the future finances and facilities of the Authority.
- 123.2 He also advised that the Committee had considered a report on the review of the NPA's Data Protection and Access to Information Policies and received an update on the water quality of local streams in the New Forest.

Members noted the above report.

### **124. Appointment of Committees (AM 694/24)**

- 124.1 David Bence introduced the report advising members that, in accordance with its Standing Orders, the Authority was required to appoint members on committees at its Annual Authority meeting. Following the results of a recent survey requesting members complete their committee choices, the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee had sufficient members, however the Planning Committee had two Local Authority vacancies and one Secretary of State vacancy.
- 124.2 Members then considered and discussed the membership of Committees and agreed that the membership of the Standards Committee be increased to seven members with a membership as set out in Annex 1 to these minutes and that the Planning Committee be reduced to eleven members with a membership as set out in Annex 1 to these minutes, it being noted that, with its reduced membership, this Committee would not be carrying any vacancies.
- 124.3 The membership of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee was retained at eleven, with a membership set out in Annex 1 attached to these minutes.

### **Resolved that:**

1. the membership of the Planning Committee as set out in Annex 1 to these minutes (6 local authority and 5 Secretary of State members), be appointed for the period until the

Annual meeting of the Authority in 2025 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership;

2. the membership of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee as set out in Annex 1 to these minutes (6 local authority and 5 Secretary of State members), be appointed for the period until the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2025 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership;
3. the membership of the Standards Committee as set out in Annex 1 to the minutes (4 local authority and 3 Secretary of State members), be appointed for the period until the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2025 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership.

Voting: Unanimous

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

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

### **Resolved that:**

1. Steve Trow be elected as Chair and Mary Davies as Deputy Chair of the Planning Committee;
2. Mary Davies be elected as Chair and David Bence as Deputy Chair of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee;
3. Ann Sevier be elected as Chair and Mel Kendal as Deputy Chair of the Standards Committee.

Voting: unanimous

## **126. Appointment of Authority representatives on external organisations (AM 695/24)**

126.1 Members considered and agreed appointments to external organisations for the period until the next Annual Authority meeting in 2025.

126.2 Annex 2 to these minutes sets out those members who were agreed to represent the Authority on each outside body.

**Resolved, that** appointments be made to external organisations as detailed in Annex 2 attached to these minutes for the period up to the Annual meeting of the Authority in 2025 or such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the appointments.

Voting: Unanimous

## **127. Bird Aware Solent Partnership – revised strategy (AM 696/24)**

127.1 David Illsley presented the above report and advised that the Solent coast was of international importance for the range of birds it supports. This was reflected in the designation of three Special Protection Areas (SPAs) as set out in the report.

127.2 Research has shown that planned new development within 5.6 kilometres of the Solent will result in increased recreational pressures on the designated coastal sites. A package of mitigation measures in form of the revised Solent Recreation Mitigation

Strategy (funded through developer contributions) had been prepared to help protect site integrity from these recreational impacts.

- 127.3 The revised Bird Aware Mitigation Strategy attached as Appendix 1 to the report had been informed by the recommendations of the five-year review of the strategy and updated evidence on breeding summer birds using the Solent. The updated mitigation strategy had been endorsed by the Partnership for South Hampshire on 30 September 2024 and the NPA was now being asked to do the same.

**Resolved that** the New Forest National Park Authority:

- a) Endorses the Bird Aware Partnership's revised mitigation strategy (Appendix 1) and supporting financial model; and
- b) Permits the Appendix 2 financial model of the revised strategy to be updated over time, as required by emerging guidance, caselaw and local circumstances. This will be through delegated authority to the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) lead chief executive in consultation with the Chair of Joint Committee with any significant changes to be reported to the PfSH Joint Committee.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **128. Appointment of Independent Persons (AM 697/24)**

- 128.1 David Stone introduced the report and advised that, following shortlisting and interview in August 2024, three candidates had been proposed for appointment as Independent Persons for a four-year term commencing on 1 November 2024.

**Resolved, that** Wanda Fojt, Pete Barton and Jacqui Hartas be appointed as the Authority's Independent Persons in accordance with s28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 for a four year term commencing on 1 November 2024 and that approval is given for the continued payment of an annual allowance of £156 per person per year (index-linked in the same way as allowances payable under the Members' Scheme of Allowances), plus expenses.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## **129. Review of Section 106 and BNG monitoring fees (AM 698/24)**

- 129.1 David Ilsley advised that in December 2019 the National Park Authority had agreed a schedule of fees for monitoring Section 106 legal agreements which had come into effect on 1 January 2020. The fees were last reviewed in June 2022, taking account of inflationary pressures and were now due for a further review. The report accordingly sought members approval of a revised set of monitoring fees as set out in the report, which also included a new fee for monitoring the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain – a recently enacted requirement of the Environment Act 2021.

**Resolved,** that the National Park Authority agree the revised schedule of fees for monitoring s106 legal agreements and the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain as detailed in the submitted report.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**130. Date of next meeting**

130.1 Thursday 23 January 2025 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 13:00 hours.

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