

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 27 MARCH 2025 AT 10.00 AM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON SO41 9ZG

#### **Present:**

##### *Members*

Victoria Mander (Deputy Chair – in the Chair)

John Adams

Zoe Clewer (Left at 12.15pm)

Mary Davies

Barry Dunning (Left at 12pm)

David Harrison

Patrick Heneghan

Mel Kendal (Left at 12.15pm)

Keith Mans (Left at 12.15pm)

George Meyrick (Left at 12.15pm)

Gavin Parker

Caroline Rackham

Joe Reilly

Ann Sevier

Michael Thierry (Left at 12pm)

Derek Tipp (Left at 1.15pm)

Malcolm Wade

##### *Officers*

Alison Barnes

Steve Avery

Nigel Stone

Paul Walton

David Stone

David Illsley

Vicki Gibbon

Chief Executive

Executive Director Strategy & Planning

Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Interim Monitoring Officer

Corporate Services Manager

Policy & Conservation Manager

Member Services Administrator

Also in attendance: Simon Mathers - Ernst & Young LLP, External Auditors to the Authority

#### **146. Apologies for Absence**

146.1 Apologies for absence were received from David Bence, Gordon Bailey, Richard Clewer, Brice Stratford and Steve Trow.

#### **147. Declarations of Interest**

147.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

#### **148. Chair's Announcements**

148.1 The Chair asked members to complete their annual Register of Interest forms which had been placed on their desks.

#### **149. Minutes**

149.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2025 were approved as a true record.

**Resolved, that** the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2025 be approved as a true record.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**150. Public Question Time**

- 150.1 Dominic May made a presentment to the Authority on behalf of SLAK (Save Lymington and Keyhaven) detailing the Environment Agency's Strategy for Hurst Spit.
- 150.2 Brian Tarnoff, NFA made a presentment to the Authority on proposals by Forestry England in relation to car park charges.

A copy of both presentations is available from Member Services.

**151 External Auditor's Annual Report 2023/24 (AM 707/25)**

- 151.1 Simon Mathers (Ernst & Young LLP, External Auditors to the Authority) referred to the Annual Audit Report for 2023/24 attached as Annex 1 to the report and highlighted various points contained therein including the proposed audit fees for the 2023/24 financial year as set out in Appendix C, page 27.
- 151.2 Nigel Stone advised that Ernst & Young were proposing to increase the base audit fee, for the work they have already carried out, from £40,100 to £65,627 – a rise of £25,527 or 64%. He said that whilst it was acknowledged that some audit risks, rules or processes may have slightly changed since the original fees were set, such a steep rise in the fee was clearly unjustified, particularly given the disclaimed audit opinion. Ernst & Young were intending to submit a proposal in the above regard to the Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA), who oversee the appointment of the NPA's auditors, set the scale fees and arbitrate on any disputes. The evidence for Ernst & Young's proposal was set out on page 27 of the Annual Audit Report. Mr Stone recommended that the Authority accept the report but not the unilateral adjustment of the scale fee by Ernst & Young and pending the response from the PSAA on the above fee proposal.

**Resolved**, that the Authority accept the Annual Audit Report for 2023/24 attached as Annex 1 to the submitted report, but that it does not accept the unilateral scale fee adjustment figures set out in Appendix C.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**152. Chief Executive's Report (AM 708/25)**

- 152.1 The Chief Executive presented her report which covered the period since the last Authority meeting on 23 January 2025 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.
- 152.2 Ms Barnes was pleased to announce that 2025 was the New Forest National Park's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it had been marked by several activities so far including an ITVX/Meridian piece showcasing the Authority's work, a website blog and timeline and public and staff hedge and tree planting at New Park, Brockenhurst with many more activities to come.
- 152.3 Further highlights from the last meeting included the Local Plan review, Government planning reforms, an extension to the Farming in Protected Landscapes project, a very successful Volunteer Fair and an update regarding the proposals for devolution.

Ms Barnes reported on the sad death of Paul Brockman who had played an integral role in caring for the New Forest.

- 152.4 Members thanked the Chief Executive for a full and interesting report and detailed discussion took place.

Officers were asked if they would be discussing the Authority's future premises with Defra during their visit, Nigel Stone responded that Defra officials could be given the chance to visit the proposed sites and documentation on these sites had already been submitted to them.

A member asked if there was further detail from Forestry England regarding car park charging, particularly in relation to verge parking and overspill. Steve Avery responded that proposals were still evolving, and many details were still to be resolved, however FE would give an update to members when they can.

Members noted the report.

A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available on the website.

**153 Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 3 February & 3 March 2025**

- 153.1 Mary Davies, Chair of the above Committee reported on the above meetings which included the third quarter progress report on the 2024/25 work programme, third quarter budgetary control report for 2024/25 (meeting on 3 February 2025), the internal audit progress report for 2024/25, internal audit charter and plan for 2025/26, the draft general revenue budget for 2025/26 and draft 2025/26 work programme (3 March 2025). In concluding her report she thanked all officers for their hard work in preparing their reports and input at meetings.

- 153.2 Members noted the above report.

**154 Draft Work Programme 2025/26 (AM 709/25)**

- 154.1 Nigel Stone gave an overview of the draft work programme advising that this was not a stand-alone document and formed part of the wider Business Plan. He explained that the document would be overseen by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and had previously been agreed by that committee at their last meeting.

- 154.2 Following discussion, members approved the recommendations as detailed below.

**Resolved,**

that the Authority approve the Draft Work Programme 2025/26, as set out in Annex 1 of the report.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**155. Draft General Fund Budget for the Financial Year 2025/26, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (AM 710/25)**

- 155.1 Nigel Stone advised that the draft revenue budget attached to his report took account of the proposed 9% cut in core funding from Defra, although no written confirmation of the reduction had yet been received from Defra. It was anticipated that Defra would

commence discussions with National Parks during 2025/26 on further core funding grants and a possible multi-year funding projection.

- 155.2 Referring to capital funding in 2025/26, Nigel Stone advised that Defra had offered the potential of a significant grants to English NPAs for capital funding, up to a potential total of £15m, although the Authority's allocation was not yet known. Defra had also advised that the Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme would continue for another year, as would the Access for All grant scheme.
- 155.3 In response to queries from members, on the future financing of the Authority, Nigel Stone advised that the Finance and Facilities Task & Finish Group would continue to monitor the impacts of the cut in core funding on the Authority's finances. He drew members' attention to the Authority's financial stability reserves remaining and was confident the NPA would be able to balance the next financial year with the projected settlement figure. In the meantime, the Authority would continue to feed data into Defra's part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review the results of which was expected in June/July 2025.

**Resolved:** that the Authority

- 1 Approve the General Fund Budget for 2025/26
- 2 Note that the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve remains at £0.35 million
- 3 Note the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2025/26
- 4 Note the Risk Assessment and Section 25 Statement (Section 7)
- 5 Approve the Treasury Management Strategy in Annex 3
- 6 Note the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2028/29 and the Forward Projection in Annex 4.

*Voting: Unanimous*

#### **156. Amendments to Authority Documents – Scheme of Delegations (AM 711/25)**

- 156.1 Paul Walton, Interim Monitoring Officer, informed members that there would be a slight amendment to the recommendation, in that rather than the new scheme of delegations coming into effect immediately it would come into effect from 30 April 2025.
- 156.2 Mr Walton advised that the reason for the change in the effective date of the scheme of delegation was due to the upcoming departure of the Executive Director of Strategy and Planning, some further changes to both the Scheme of Delegations and the Delegations of Planning Functions would be necessary in the future as set out in the report.

**Resolved,** that

the Authority adopt the revised Scheme of Delegations, including its Schedule 1 'Delegations of Planning Functions', attached to this report as Annexes 1 and 2 respectively, effective from 30 April 2025.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**157. Appointments to Committees and External Representation (AM 712/25)**

- 157.1 David Stone advised that two new members had recently been appointed to the Authority, Malcolm Wade had replaced Neville Penman as HCC representative and John Adams had been appointed as Secretary of State (Parish) appointee.
- 157.2 Mr Stone explained that Neville Penman was previously appointed to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and therefore a vacancy existed for a local authority member on that Committee, it was proposed and seconded that Malcolm Wade be appointed to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee until the Annual Authority meeting in October 2025.
- 157.3 Mr Stone also advised that due to Neville Penman leaving the Authority there were reserve vacancies on two external bodies namely Bournemouth International Airport Consultative Committee and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association. John Adams volunteered to accept both reserve positions and members voted to endorse this.

**Resolved;**

1. That Malcolm Wade fill the vacancy for local authority member on the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee for the period up until the Annual Authority meeting in October 2025 or until such earlier time as the Authority wishes to amend the membership.
2. That John Adams represents the Authority on the following outside bodies for the period up until the Annual Authority meeting in October 2025 or until such earlier time as the Authority wishes to amend the representation.
  - Reserve on the Bournemouth International Airport Consultative Committee
  - Reserve on the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association

Voting: Unanimous

**158. Proposals for a Mayoral Combined Authority for Hampshire (AM 713/25)**

- 158.1 David Illsley began his presentation by advising members that in December 2024 the government published the English Devolution White Paper which sets out plans to move power back to local communities, ensuring every part of England was covered by Devolution. On 17 February 2025, the Government published proposals for establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and Southampton. Before taking the decision, views were being sought from interested parties including those who live and work in the area. The consultation closes on 13 April 2025 and this report sets out the key points which had been raised in the Authority's response. Mr Illsley emphasised that this consultation on establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Hampshire was separate from the process of local government reorganisation.
- 158.2 Mr Illsley concluded that with over a third of Hampshire falling within nationally designated landscapes, our National Parks should be seen as an asset. The proposals for the new Combined Authority should ensure the strengthened legal duty placed on relevant bodies to further the National Park purposes is delivered to protect

the integrity and resilience of the landscape, ecology and communities of the New Forest. If approved by Parliament, the Combined County Authority would be established in time for the first Mayoral election to take place in May 2026.

Following discussion members resolved to endorse the recommendation as detailed below.

**Resolved that;**

- (a) the role and remit of the proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority for Hampshire as set out in section 2 of the report be noted;
- (b) the key points set out in Section 3 of the report to form the basis of the New Forest National Park Authority's consultation response be endorsed; and
- (c) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to submit the National Park Authority's formal response to the consultation by 13 April 2025.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**159. Date of next meeting**

159.1 Thursday 24 July 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**

**Resolved that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, namely the need to avoid disclosing sensitive information relating to the Authority's financial and business affairs.**

*Voting: Unanimous*

**160 Oral Update on Vernon Dene**

161.1 This item was considered in Part 2 of the meeting and therefore was minuted as such.

The meeting closed at 1:30pm.

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