

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY HELD ON THURSDAY 23 MARCH 2023 AT 10.00 AM AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON SO41 9ZG

#### **Present:**

##### *Members*

Gavin Parker (Chair)

Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chair)

Diane Andrews

Gordon Bailey

David Bence

George Bisson

Sue Bennison

Zoe Clewer

Richard Clewer

David Harrison

Victoria Mander

Keith Mans

George Meyrick

Neville Penman

Caroline Rackham

John Sanger

Ann Sevier

Stephen Tarling

Richard Taylor

Michael Thierry

Steve Trow

##### *Officers*

Alison Barnes

Steve Avery

Nigel Stone

David Illsley

David Stone

Vicki Gibbon

Chief Executive Officer

Executive Director

Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Policy and Conservation Manager

Corporate Services Manager – Deputy Monitoring Officer

Member Services Administrator

#### **13. Apologies for Absence**

13.1 There were no apologies for absence.

#### **14. Declarations of Interest**

14.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

#### **15. Chair's Announcements**

15.1 The Chair welcomed Julian Johnson's family to the meeting, Mr Johnson had previously been Chair of the Authority and had sadly passed away at the end of 2022. The Chair presented the family with a rose and photo book and, on behalf of members, recorded his appreciation to Mr Johnson for his contribution to the Authority.

15.2 The Chair advised that an email had recently been sent to members regarding social media activity and a report on reviewing the Authority's relevant policies and procedures would be referred to the Standards Committee for consideration.

#### **16. New Forest National Park Building Design Awards 2023**

16.1 The Chair presented the Building Design Awards 2023 to the following –

Best Non-Residential Scheme Winner – Unit 1 Forest Corner Farm, Hangersley Hill

Architect – Sheerin Bettle Architecture / Owner – Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists

Best Non-Residential Scheme Highly Commended – Minstead Lodge Toilet Block  
Architect – TKLS Architecture / Owner – Minstead Trust

Best Conservation Project Winner – Wood End House, Near Lymington  
Architect – Sheerin Bettle Architecture / Owner – Mr & Mrs Stirling

Best Green Building Winner - Little Hill, Furze Hill  
Architect – David Hayhurst / Owner – David Hayhurst & Sarah Kinsella

Best Green Building Highly Commended – Pannage Green, Lyndhurst  
Architect – David Lovegrove Architecture / Owner Geoff Roles

## 17. Minutes

17.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 were approved as a true record.

**Resolved**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 be approved as a true record.

*Voting: None voting against*

## 18. Public Question Time

18.1 None

## 19. Chief Executive's Report (AM 643/23)

19.1 The Chief Executive introduced her report, reminding Members that the report covered the period since the Authority meeting in January 2023.

19.2 Under the *Protect* theme, the Chief Executive began her report by highlighting the recent programme extensions for both the Farming in Protected Landscapes project until 2025 along with the HLS Scheme being extended for a further five years. The Green and Blue Horizons from City to Forest work recently came to an end with some exceptional results including 19 jobs created or retained, 104ha of land improved for nature and climate resilience and the launch of the CET Fort Climate Centre which was opened by the Countess of Wessex.

19.3 Continuing on the *Protect* theme the planning team had determined 95 applications in the period with an approval rate of 97%. Ms Barnes advised members that there were two current government planning consultations open: increases to planning fees and performance and proposed changes to permitted development rights, which would affect supporting temporary recreational campsites, renewable energy and film making. The April Planning Committee meeting would consider a report on both of these consultations. Two neighbourhood plans (Ringwood and Wellow) were also out for consultation and once responses had been considered draft plans would be submitted to the Authority for the next steps in the neighbourhood plan-making process.

19.4 Under the *Enjoy* theme, the Chief Executive was pleased to announce the launch of the new educational video 'Welly Wander' which was made in conjunction with the Comms team to highlight the importance of the New Forest Code. The Education team

had also provided 1,194 days of pupil learning so far this year with 181 children enjoying curriculum related visits.

- 19.5 Preparation was well under way for the 2023 visitor season with 40 new walking leaflets, visitor films, two proposed PSPO's and local information points. The New Forest Awakening Festival was taking place during March, which would highlight climate and nature emergencies with 80 events planned.
- 19.6 Under the *Prosper* theme, Ms Barnes highlighted Green Careers. 150 young people had heard about green careers at school and college careers fairs, along with an early green careers group which was attended by 20 young people from 12 different organisations. Two recent events had taken place, the New Forest Marque spring fair and 'Yarn in a Barn', both of which had proved very successful.
- 19.7 Under the *Excellence* theme, the Chief Executive commented on the recent visit from the Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use, Trudi Harrison. They had visited conservation projects at Roydon Woods and Fletcher's Thorns and were joined by officers from partner organisations. Finally, Ms Barnes highlighted International Women's Day which took place on 8 March; Authority staff had made a short reel dedicated to this and it was the Authority's most watched reel on Instagram, with 6,804 views.

Members noted the report.

## **20. Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee (6 February and 6 March 2023)**

- 20.1 Patrick Heneghan, Committee Chair, reported on the items considered at the RAPC meetings on 6 February 2023 and 6 March 2023. He said that the minutes of the 6 February RAPC meeting were available on the Authority's website and the 6 March minutes had been circulated to members prior to the current meeting.
- 20.2 Referring to the 6 February meeting, Patrick Heneghan mentioned the progress report and budgetary control reports considered by the Committee which had also considered the third instalment on Team New Forest, on this occasion focusing on the New Forest Marque. There had also been two Part 2 items considered at the meeting relating to the financial reserves and planning for the future.
- 20.3 Referring to the RAPC meeting on 6 March, Patrick Heneghan advised that some items covered by this meeting were on the agenda for the current Authority meeting, however, the Committee had also considered an update on local progress against the Accord between Forestry England and National Parks UK, an internal audit progress report for 2022/23 and the internal Audit Charter and Audit Plan for 2023/24. Other items considered were the draft 2023/24 interim work programme, a funding update and the corporate risk register.

Members noted the report.

## **21. Scheme of Members' Allowances (AM 644/23)**

- 21.1 Patrick Heneghan introduced the report and explained the background to the current recommendations to the Authority on a members' allowances scheme, namely that the proposals of the members' working group had been referred to the Standards Committee and then the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee with each

Committee considering the proposals in detail before making onward recommendations with amendments where considered appropriate. He said that at each stage, the formula which had originally been recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel in 2006 had been considered relevant to current allowances as a tried and tested formula. He then drew members' attention to Annex 2 which was the proposed scheme recommended for a 4-year period.

- 21.2 Members then received an explanation from the Chief Finance Officer on linking increases in members' allowances to increases at the lowest percentage rate of any future staff pay awards. After this the recommendations were supported.

**It was resolved that:**

1. the draft Scheme of Allowances as set out in Annex 2 to the Committee's report be adopted from 1 April 2023.
2. the Chief Finance Officer be authorised to liaise with the Standards Committee regarding any periodic adjustments to the amounts of subsistence allowance to cater for any inflation increases and recommend accordingly to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.
3. The current basic allowance of £2,132 pa be retained and linked to increases at the lowest percentage rate of any future staff pay awards
4. The duration of the Scheme, if adopted, be for a period of 4 years with the Standards Committee being authorised to monitor any unexpected economic or political impacts which may affect the duration of the Scheme and report accordingly to the Authority via the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee

*Voting: 19-1, 1 abstention*

**22. Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for the Financial Year 2023/24, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (AM 645/23)**

- 22.1 Nigel Stone began his report by advising members that since the last Authority meeting the accounts for 2021/22 had been signed off. He then went on to discuss the current financial year 2022/23, beginning with the good news of the £440,000 additional one-off grant from Defra - this would fund the work the Authority had already carried out and would be offset against the income in this year's budget. The current position for the end of this financial year was that the Authority would have a net income of around £40,000 which was a positive 2022/23 outlook.
- 22.2 Mr Stone explained that his report looked forward to the next financial year 2023/24 together with a four-year medium-term projection. Some of the key points were made including the task & finish group which had proved very useful in helping officers produce the reports, page three of the report discussed the frozen Defra grant which was now in its fifth year. Mr Stone said he was hoping that inflation would start to decline which would hopefully ease some of the pressures the Authority were currently facing.
- 22.3 Mr Stone also referred to the Authority's reserves on page 8 of the report, and explained that he had worked with the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee to check the adequacy of these reserves and had recommended a slight increase to the minimum fund reserve from £300,000 to £350,000. Mr Stone advised that he

would also like to increase the planning risk reserve to £200,000 which would cover any legal costs against the Authority.

- 22.4 Finally, Mr Stone drew members' attention to pages 10 and 11 of the report which detailed his opinion on the budget as Chief Financial Officer and said that the medium-term financial position had improved and this was a positive change. Following brief discussion members were minded to support the recommendation as detailed below.

**It was resolved that:**

- 1 the General Fund Budget for 2023/24 be approved
- 2 the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve increase to £0.35 million be noted
- 3 the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2023/24 be noted
- 4 the Risk Assessment and Section 25 Statement (Section 7) be noted
- 5 the Treasury Management Strategy in Annex 3 of the report be approved
- 6 the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2026/27 and the Forward Projection in Annex 4 of the report be noted.

*Voting: unanimous*

**23. Safeguarding Policy (AM 646/23)**

- 23.1 Nigel Stone introduced his report explaining to members that this was a new policy; although previously these risks had been largely covered by various other policies it was now good practice that the Authority had a specific Safeguarding Policy. The policy would apply to all staff, volunteers and members, and would give a support framework should the need apply. Both staff and unions had been consulted on this and the policy would be under constant review. Mr Stone opened the floor to questions and asked members to approve the recommendation as detailed below.

- 23.2 It was requested that:

- a contact link to MASH be added to the list of helpful organisations.
- given both the nominated lead officers were male, a third female officer should be added.

Mr Stone undertook to make the above Policy amendments accordingly.

A question was raised regarding the next steps and training. Mr Stone replied that the next phase would be a training and engagement plan and that there would be varying levels of training for different members of staff dependant on how much interaction they would have with vulnerable children or adults.

**It was resolved that:**

Subject to the amendments agreed under item 23.2 above, the Safeguarding Policy be approved.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## 24. Responding to Recreational Pressures – An Update on the Recreation Management Strategy (RMA) Actions (AM 647/23)

24.1 Steve Avery introduced his report explaining that the report and its annexes set out what had happened since 2019 and the current work in progress. He went on to highlight various aspects of the report including work being carried out to mitigate the potential impacts associated with visitor pressures arising from planned new housing developments and the introduction of PSPO's which would come into force at the beginning of July. Following a short discussion, members duly agreed to note the report.

## 25. Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) on Planning Matters – Update (AM 648/23)

25.1 David Illsley began his report advising that all planning authorities must prepare a 'Statement of Community Involvement' setting out how and when they would involve the community and other interested parties in the preparation of their planning policies and guidelines. He explained that the first SCI was adopted in 2007 with a subsequent revision in 2013, with varying changes in national policy in recent years it was now an appropriate time to revise the SCI in advance of work commencing on a review of the local planning policies.

25.2 Mr Illsley asked members to recommend the approval of the draft document for the purposes of consultation, with the final designed version and summary of comments being presented at an Authority meeting later in the year for formal adoption.

### It was resolved that:

- (i) the revised draft Statement of Community Involvement (Annex 1) be approved for a period of public consultation – subject to a minor factual revision to paragraph 10.8 to remove reference to the monthly Enforcement List being published online; and
- (ii) the final designed version of the Statement of Community Involvement be noted and that this will be considered at a full Authority meeting for formal adoption following consideration of the consultation responses received on the draft document.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## 26. Date of next meeting

26.1 Thursday 13 July 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 12:35pm.

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