

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 16 OCTOBER 2025 AT 10.00 AM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON SO41 9ZG

Present:

Members

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| Victoria Mander (Chair) | |
| John Adams (left at 12pm) | Caroline Rackham (left at 1.15pm) |
| Richard Clewer | Joe Reilly (left at 12pm) |
| Zoe Clewer | Ann Sevier |
| Mary Davies | Brice Stratford |
| David Harrison | Derek Tipp (left at 1pm) |
| Keith Mans (Deputy Chair) (left at 1pm) | Steve Trow (left at 12.50pm) |
| Ella Mason | Malcolm Wade (left at 12pm) |
| George Meyrick | James Wyler-Owen |
| Adarsh Parekh | |

Officers

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|--------------------|---|
| Alison Barnes | Chief Executive |
| Nigel Stone | Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer) |
| Gareth Hale | Solicitor & Monitoring Officer |
| David Illsley | Interim Head of Planning & Place |
| Jim Mitchell | Access and Learning Manager |
| David Stone | Corporate Services Manager |
| Vicki Gibbon | Member Services Administrator |
| Hayley Quarrington | Administration Assistant |

In attendance: Simon Matthers & Katie Lean – Ernst & Young Auditors
Toby Pearce & Eva Wilcock – Youth Board Members

180 Election of Chair and Deputy Chair of the New Forest National Park Authority

180.1 The meeting was formally opened by Alison Barnes, Chief Executive, who oversaw the election of an Interim Chair of the Authority. Mary Davies was duly appointed to this role.

Mary Davies facilitated the election of the Chair of the Authority for the forthcoming year, resulting in the appointment of Victoria Mander.

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

Voting: None voting against

The election of the Deputy Chair of the Authority then took place, with Keith Mans being successfully appointed.

Resolved, that Keith Mans be appointed as Deputy Chair of the Authority for the ensuing year.

Voting: None voting against

181. Apologies for Absence

181.1 An apology for absence was received from Gordon Bailey.

182. Declarations of Interest

182.1 There were no declarations of absence on this occasion.

183. Chair's Announcements

183.1 The Chair introduced a motion to vary the order of business pursuant to standing order 17.1.3 informed whereby agenda items would be revised to ensure that members with off-site commitments were able to participate and vote in key decisions. Consequently, agenda item 9 (chief executive report was moved down the agenda to item 15, and item 15 (New Forest National Park Local Plan Review) was heard at agenda item 9. The Chief Executive Report was heard ahead of agenda item 14 (Youth Board Report). The motion to vary the order of business was approved by all members.

183.2 The Chair welcomed three new members to the Authority: Adarsh Parekh, Ella Mason and James Wylor-Owen.

The presentation to David Bence (ex-Chair of the Authority) was made later in the meeting but is minuted under this item for ease of reference and minuting.

183.3 On behalf of members, the Chair thanked David Bence for his input and valuable contribution to the work of the Authority. She mentioned that he had commenced his appointment as Secretary of State in 2018 and during his appointment he had been both a member of the Planning Committee and the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee. In October 2023, he was elected Chair of the Authority, a position which he held until the end of his appointment in June 2025. He was also appointed as the NPA representative on a number of outside bodies, including the Forest Farming Group. She then made a presentation to David Bence and wished him well for the future.

184. Minutes

184.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2025 were approved as a true record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2025 be approved as a true record.

Voting: Non-voting against

185. Public Question Time

185.1 Presentments were delivered by Brian Tarnoff (New Forest Association) on Recreation Management, and by Sarah Nield (New Forest Association) on Byelaw Watch. Copies of both presentations are available upon request from Member Services.

186. External Auditor's Annual Results Report 2024/25 (AM 721/25)

186.1 Simon Mathers and Katie Lean from Ernst and Young LLP presented the Annual Audit Results Report for 2024/25 set out in Annex 1 of the report. Members noted the

proposal by Ernst and Young with regard to the increase in the base audit fee for work already carried out by them, the NPA's position in this regard given the likely disclaimed / qualified audit opinion and that the Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA), would set the scale fees and arbitrate on any disputes.

186.2 Katie Lean then highlighted various points contained in the report including:

- the fact that the backlog of historic audit opinions (including the 2022/23 Audit), had now been delivered,
- disclaimer of opinions had been issued in respect of the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial statements,
- areas of the current audit which remained outstanding were set out in page 10 of the report,
- the value for money conclusion on page 18 of the report where no areas of significant weakness had been identified, and
- the fact that the Auditors were required to issue an annual audit report by 30 October 2025.

186.3 On this latter point, Mr Mathers advised that, due to the resource issues set out in the report summary, it would not be possible to issue an opinion on the 2024/25 financial statements by the due date. It was accordingly proposed to issue an interim report on the financial statements with a final report on the audit results for the financial year being submitted to the Authority at its January 2026 meeting.

186.4 The above officers then responded to a number of queries raised by members, following which it was

Resolved, that the Authority accepts the report on the External Auditor's Annual Results for 2024/25

Voting: Unanimous

187 Draft Financial Report 2024/25 (AM 722/25)

187.1 Nigel Stone presented the draft Financial Report for 2024/25, including the Annual Governance Statement, Accounting Policies and Letter of Management Representation which had been considered and recommended for approval by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee on 2 June 2025.

187.2 He said that the report detailed the latest draft of the Authority's Financial Report for the 2024/25 financial year – key statements of which have been provided in Annex 1 to the report, with a link to the full draft document on the NPA's website.

187.3 He reported that there were a number of items currently outstanding which have yet to be determined and agreed with the Auditors and members (described in the Annual Audit report in Minute 186 above) and progress of these issues would be reported to members prior to the agreement with the Auditors on the final results report in January 2026.

Resolved, that the Financial Report 2024/25 as set out in the report be approved, subject to any further minor changes required, for which delegation is given for these to be mutually agreed by the Chief Finance Officer, Chief Executive and Chair of the Authority.

Voting: Unanimous

188 Chief Executive's Report (AM 723/25) (Heard as agenda item 14)

188.1 The Chief Executive presented her report, covering the period since the last Authority meeting held on 24 July 2025. The report was structured in alignment with the National Park Authority's statutory purposes and duty and delivered within the framework of the Re:New Forest themes outlined in the Business Plan. Ms Barnes provided a detailed PowerPoint presentation, offering a comprehensive overview of the Authority's activities over the past quarter, organised under each of the Authority's core purposes

188.2 Under the *Protect* theme, the Chief Executive addressed Forestry England's proposal to introduce parking charges in 2026. She acknowledged the necessity of generating additional income but emphasised that the Authority had requested further details regarding how the revenue would be reinvested into the forest, as well as what robust measures would be implemented to mitigate the impact of displacement parking.

Ms Barnes also drew attention to the Species Survival Fund, a £1.3 million initiative aimed at restoring habitats within the New Forest and enhancing biodiversity. Additional topics highlighted included the announcement of the Dibden 'Solent Gateway 2' proposals, developments related to the National Park Local Plan, and efforts to support sustainable commuting within the forest.

188.3 Under the *Enjoy* theme, Ms Barnes highlighted the success of the YouCAN Youth for Climate and Nature initiative, which has delivered impressive outcomes, including over 600 hours of volunteer work. She also noted that the Ranger team had engaged with approximately 6,000 members of the public, contributing to patrol efforts such as the Operation Mountie campaign, aimed at reducing animal-related accidents.

The Chief Executive was also pleased to report the positive reception of the New Forest Show, where the Nightjar Project was prominently featured. Additionally, she acknowledged the successful hosting of the annual CLA Awards, further showcasing the region's commitment to conservation and community engagement.

188.4 Under the *Prosper* theme, Ms Barnes highlighted initiatives focused on skills development and employment opportunities, including the promotion of Green Skills and Jobs. She also referenced progress in sustainable transport, noting that the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan had been formally approved by Hampshire County Council and would be discussed further during the meeting agenda.

Additionally, she shared that the Sustainable Communities Fund had recently supported Hale Village Hall with a £2,000 grant to install LED lighting and motion sensors, contributing to improved energy efficiency and community sustainability.

188.5 Under the *Excellence* theme, Ms Barnes drew members' attention to a number of recent activities, including MP tours and the hosting of the National Parks England

Board, both of which served to strengthen engagement and collaboration at a national level.

She also extended her gratitude to the outgoing Authority members—Patrick Heneghan, David Bence, and Professor Gavin Parker—for their valuable contributions. In turn, she welcomed the newly appointed members: Adarsh Parekh, Ella Mason, and James Wylor-Owen, expressing confidence in the fresh perspectives they will bring to the Authority.

188.6 Members noted the report.

189 Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 8 September 2025

189.1 The Chair of the above Committee reported on the items discussed at the meeting on 8 September 2025 including the first quarter progress report on the 2025/26 Work Programme and key performance indicators. Increased support for Commoning had been discussed with Committee members being advised that NPA officers had been in contact over the summer with Defra at the highest level over this issue and sustainable land management in the New Forest. Members had also discussed the second quarter budgetary control report for 2025/26 and had been advised of progress with the two affordable homes in Burley.

Members noted the report.

190 Appointment of Committees (AM 724/25)

190.1 David Stone introduced the report, advising members that, in accordance with the Authority's Standing Orders, committee appointments are required to be confirmed at the Annual Authority Meeting. Following the completion of a recent survey in which members submitted their committee preferences, and subsequent discussions with individual members.

190.2 Members discussed the membership of committees as set out in the report - David Harrison volunteered to fill the local authority vacancy on the Planning Committee and John Adams withdrew his interest in the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee leaving both Committees with the correct numbers and balance between local authority and Secretary of State members. All committee positions having now been successfully filled, members endorsed the recommendations as outlined below.

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 2026 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 2026 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 2026 or until such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the membership.

Voting: Unanimous

191 Election of Chair and Deputy Chair on Authority Committees

191.1 Members participated in a vote by show of hands to appoint the Chair and Deputy Chair for each of the Authority's 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 Malcolm Wade 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

192 Appointments of Authority Representatives on External Organisations (AM 725/25)

192.1 Members considered appointments to external organisations for the period leading up to the next Annual Authority Meeting in 2026.

The names of members appointed to represent the Authority on each external body were agreed at the meeting and are set out in Annex 2 to these minutes. A ballot was held in respect of the NPA representation on the Forest Farming Group following which Brice Stratford was elected as representative with Mary Davies being elected as Reserve.

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 2026 or such earlier time as the NPA wishes to amend the appointments.

Voting: Unanimous

193 Youth Board Report (AM 726/25) (heard as agenda item 15)

193.1 Hayley Quarrington, Toby Pearse and Eva Wilcock, members of the Youth Board presented the report and advised that the New Forest Youth Board had been formed in September 2024 with support from officers of the NA with an aim to use the expertise, experience and viewpoints of each member to represent the voices of young people to shape and influence the future of the New Forest and foster an appreciation for the special qualities of the New Forest.

193.2 Hayley, Toby and Eva then elaborated on the background and work of the Youth Board and reported on the future plans and objectives of the Board. This included working alongside a range of partner organisations and stakeholders to coordinate, collaborate and facilitate projects and tasks.

- 193.3 They advised that a Young Person's Survey had led the Board to decisions on which projects to work on during the forthcoming year and an analysis of the survey results had been conducted to understand how young people interact with the Forest, what matters to them and what issues they feel are most prevalent. A plan of work had been developed using the results of the survey.
- 193.4 Members expressed appreciation both of the report and for the work being carried out by the Youth Board and indicated that they would like to work in future with the Board.
- 194 New Forest National Park Local Plan Review – Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation (AM 727/25) (heard as agenda item 9)**
- 194.1 David Illsley commenced his report by reminding members that the Authority's statutory planning powers are fundamental to delivering the two core purposes of the National Park, along with its associated socio-economic duty. He stressed the importance of ensuring that the New Forest National Park remains covered by an up-to-date Local Plan. Mr Illsley outlined the extensive work undertaken over the past six months in preparing the plan and recommended that members endorse the initial draft for the purposes of public consultation.
- 194.2 Mr Illsley drew attention to several key sections of the report, including the Consultation Statement (Annex 2 of the report), which summarised the feedback received during the initial Local Plan Review – 'Direction of Travel' consultation held earlier in 2025. He also referenced a number of evidence base documents that underpin the draft plan, including the Economic Viability Assessment, the Habitats Regulations Assessment, and a Housing Needs Assessment, all of which contribute to ensuring the plan is robust, deliverable, and aligned with statutory requirements.
- 194.3 Finally, Mr Illsley outlined the timetable for the Local Plan review process and invited members to endorse the draft Local Plan for the purpose of a six-week public consultation, scheduled to run from November to December 2025. He noted that the consultation would include a series of drop-in sessions held across the National Park, alongside an online consultation platform, to ensure broad public engagement and accessibility.
- 194.4 Following the discussion, members emphasised the importance of addressing climate change within the Local Plan and sought clarity on the Authority's role in supporting climate-related initiatives. Members noted that key matters – including the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain, meeting identified housing needs and local sustainable construction standards – would continue to be assessed following the upcoming consultation. Subsequently, members agreed to endorse the recommendation as outlined below.

Resolved, that the Authority;

- a) endorse the draft 'New Forest National Park Local Plan Review 2024 – 2043: Initial Draft Local Plan' in Appendix 1 for the purposes of public consultation; and
- b) delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to make any necessary minor textual and formatting updates prior to consultation.

Voting: 17:0, 1 abstention

195 New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Plan (AM 728/25)

195.1 Jim Mitchell, Access and Learning Manager, introduced his report by informing members that the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) had been developed by Hampshire County Council as the lead partner, with support from the New Forest National Park Authority, New Forest District Council, and Forestry England. He noted that the plan had already received formal approval from Hampshire County Council, and the purpose of this report was to seek its adoption by the New Forest National Park Authority.

Resolved, that the Authority formally adopt the New Forest Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

Voting: Unanimous

196. Date of next meeting

196.1 Thursday 29 January 2026 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 1:30pm.

Signed: Date: (Chair)