

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26 MARCH 2026 AT 10.00 AM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, APPLETREE COURT, BEAULIEU ROAD, LYNTHURST

Present:

Members

Victoria Mander (Chair)

Gordon Bailey (*left at 11.45am*)

Zoe Clewer (*left at 12.30pm*)

Mary Davies

David Harrison

Mel Kendal

Keith Mans (Deputy Chair)

Adarsh Parekh

Barry Rickman

Brice Stratford

Derek Tipp

Michael Thierry

Steve Trow

Officers

Alison Barnes

Nigel Stone

Gareth Hale

David Illsley

Paul Walton

Vicki Gibbon

Rachel Bonathan

Chief Executive

Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Solicitor & Monitoring Officer

Interim Head of Planning & Place

Head of Environment & Rural Economy

Member Services Administrator

Administrator

209. Apologies for Absence

209.1 Apologies for absence were received from John Adams, Ella Mason, George Meyrick, Caroline Rackham, Joe Reilly, Ann Sevier, Malcolm Wade and James Wyler-Owen.

210. Declarations of Interest

210.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion. However, Gareth Hale, Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, reminded members that, as we were now in the pre-election period, members must ensure compliance with the standard pre-election rules.

211. Chair's Announcements

211.1 The Chair informed members that they were required to complete their annual Register of Interest forms, which had been placed on their desks. Completed forms should be returned to Vicki Gibbon.

She also advised that the Planning Committee currently had a Local Authority vacancy, and that a Secretary of State vacancy may also become available. It is important that the Committee has a full membership to ensure meetings are quorate and planning decisions can be made within the prescribed Government timescales. Members wishing to receive further information were directed to contact Steve Trow, Gareth Hale, or Vicki Gibbon.

Members further noted that a tree-planting event would take place at 1:00pm following the meeting, during which a Sycamore Gap sapling would be planted.

212 Building Design Awards

- 212.1 David Illsley along with Alex Harwood and Victoria Mander presented the Building Design Awards to the following. Members also commended the quality of the winning schemes this year:

Best Conservation Scheme Winner – Rose Cottage, Abbotswell Road, Frogham
Best Green Project Winner – Paultons Park Car Park Solar Canopies
Best Residential Building Winner – 8 Moorlands Close, Brockenhurst
Best Non-Residential Scheme Winner – Brockenhurst College Foundation and Independence Hub

213. Minutes

- 213.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2026 were approved as a true record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2026 be approved as a true record.

Voting: Non-voting against

214 Public Question Time

- 214.1 Presentments were made by Brian Tarnoff on Dibden Bay and ABP and Abigail Tebb on behalf of Saving Dibden Bay against ABP. Both presentments relating the ABP's proposals for the Solent Gateway 2 development, which will be considered through the Government's Nationally Significant Infrastructure (NSIP) process. A copy of both presentations are available upon request from Member Services.

215 Chief Executive's Report (AM 733/26)

- 215.1 The Chief Executive presented her report, covering the period since the last Authority meeting held on 29 January 2026. 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 since the last meeting in January 2026, organised under each of the Authority's core purposes.
- 215.2 Under the *Protect* theme, the Chief Executive was pleased to highlight the recent Awakening Festival, led by the Authority, which featured more than 100 events involving dozens of partner organisations. The festival successfully showcased the extraordinary landscapes, wildlife, and cultural traditions that make the New Forest so distinctive.

Turning to planning matters, she informed members that the Local Plan is due to enter its next phase of public consultation in late summer, with submission for independent examination scheduled for December 2026. She also provided an update on recent Government consultations and major planning applications.

Ms Barnes further reported on the successful completion of the Species Survival Fund, a £1.3 million programme designed to restore New Forest habitats and support wildlife recovery. She noted that the scheme had delivered significant environmental benefits and represented a major achievement for the Authority.

- 215.3 Under the *Enjoy* theme, Ms Barnes drew members' attention to the travel grant scheme, which provides £200 to local schools visiting venues within the National Park. She noted that the initiative has been highly successful.

She also highlighted the recent Volunteer Fair, which attracted 750 attendees, as well as the YouCAN scheme, which was now entering its final phase and was due to conclude in August.

Turning to Access, Ms Barnes was pleased to report that the next phase of the King Charles III England Coastal Path routes had now been designated. Establishment work would begin in April, with a particular focus on improving accessibility.

Ms Barnes further explained that the Ranger Team continued to work closely with partners on the Operation Mountie patrols and were also actively involved in the ground-nesting bird campaign alongside partner organisations.

- 215.4 Under the *Prosper* theme, the Chief Executive informed members that the Authority was currently hosting a placement from NHS England to support the development of the Green Health Hub. Phil Godfrey, Public Health Development Manager, would be working one day per week to lead a comprehensive review and further development of the hub.

Ms Barnes also provided a brief update on affordable housing, as well as ongoing work to promote green skills and jobs within the National Park.

- 215.5 Under the *Excellence* theme, the Chief Executive reported that preparation for the consultation on the next shared Partnership Plan was underway. She drew attention to the new Government guidance requiring the Plan to be aligned with the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF), which establishes a shared set of targets and indicators for all protected landscapes.

Ms Barnes also briefly referenced the recent Local Government Reorganisation announcement, which would see the Waterside area of the New Forest transferred to a new South West authority, while the remainder of the New Forest would fall under a Mid Hampshire authority. Local Government Reorganisation does not affect the boundary of the New Forest National Park.

She was pleased to announce the launch of the new Authority website, designed to improve accessibility, enhance user engagement, and make information easier to find.

Finally, Ms Barnes highlighted International Women's Day and the National Park Open Day.

Members noted the report.

216 Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 2 February 2026 and 2 March 2026

- 216.1 Mary Davies, Chair of RAPC, provided a brief summary of the Committee's two most recent meetings. She reported that at the February meeting, the Q3 progress report was presented, and noted that, in addition to the existing RAG status, a new column had been added to give further detail on items marked amber or red. This addition was intended to provide greater clarity on the actions required to bring those objectives back on track. She also confirmed that these indicators had now been aligned with the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF).

Ms Davies also highlighted that member attendance continued to be a recurring concern and emphasised its importance. She added that it had been proposed that the Authority Chair should follow up this matter.

She went on to explain that at the March meeting, the Committee reviewed the Draft Work Programme, the Draft Budget for 2026/27, and the External Quality Assessment Report, noting that the latter was performing above expected standards. She congratulated Nigel and the team for their excellent work.

Members noted the report.

217 Draft Work Programme 2026/27 (AM 734/26)

- 217.1 Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural economy, began his presentation by reminding members that the Draft Work Programme is derived from the actions and activities set out in the Business Plan 2023–27, with priorities organised under the key themes of the Partnership Plan. He explained that, while some of the aims were challenging, they remained achievable within the current financial context. He noted that progress on the Work Programme would be monitored internally through the Strategic Leadership Team, a project portfolio officer working group, and by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

Mr Walton then guided members through Annex 1 of the report, reviewing it page by page and highlighting the outcomes and priorities aligned with the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF). Members were encouraged to ask questions and participate in discussion throughout the presentation.

Resolved that:

Members approve the Draft Work Programme 2026/27

Voting: Unanimous

218 Draft Budget for the Financial Year 2026/27, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan (AM 735/26)

- 218.1 Nigel Stone, Head of Resources, provided a brief overview of his report, noting that it had previously been approved by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee. He explained that, in addition to the standard recommendations (1–6), an additional recommendation had been included to delegate authority to the Chief Executive acting in consultation with the Chair and the Chief Finance Officer to allocate any supplementary Defra funding that may be received, using the principles set out in the report, with a full update provided at the next Authority meeting. The need for this delegated authority arose from the possibility of receiving further Defra funding beyond the core grant.

- 218.2 Mr Stone outlined how the report sets out the proposed use of the core revenue grant from Defra to support delivery of the Authority's 2026/27 work programme. He emphasised that a significant proportion of the grant would be allocated to staffing resources, which, while representing the Authority's largest cost, also remained its greatest asset. Although formal confirmation of the 2026/27 Defra grant had not yet been received, a letter of comfort had been issued, forming the basis of the figures included within the report. Mr Stone acknowledged the substantial work undertaken behind the scenes to enable him to present the final budget to members and expressed his thanks to all those involved.
- 218.3 During the discussion, Keith Mans, Deputy Chair, proposed that an additional sentence be included within the recommendations: *"to take advantage of any opportunities that may arise following the publication of the Government's proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Hampshire."* He explained that, with the forthcoming dissolution of the County and District Councils and their replacement with four Unitary Authorities, it may be in the National Park's best interests to be positioned to respond swiftly to any resulting opportunities.

Nigel Stone agreed with the sentiment but expressed a preference not to amend the formal recommendation. Instead, he suggested incorporating this point into the broader paper, noting that it was already partially addressed under recommendation number 7.

Members unanimously voted to resolve the recommendations as detailed below.

Resolved that the Authority

1. Approve the Budget for 2026/27
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 2026/27
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 2029/30 and the Forward Projection in Annex
7. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair and Chief Finance Officer, to allocate any supplementary defra funding received, using the principles set out in the report, and reporting back to the next Authority meeting.

Voting: Unanimous

219 Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan Adoption (AM 736/26)

- 219.1 David Illsley introduced his report and informed members that, following the local referendum held on 29 January 2026, over 90% of participating residents voted in favour of the 'making' (i.e. adoption) of the draft Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan. As a result, the Plan could now proceed for adoption by the two local planning authorities: New Forest District Council and the New Forest National Park Authority. The District Council formally adopted the Plan in late February 2026.

- 219.2 Mr Illsley explained that the purpose of the report was to recommend the formal 'making' of the Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan for the part of the parish within the National Park. Once made, the Plan would form part of the statutory development plan for the National Park and would therefore be a key consideration in the determination of planning applications within the parish.

Resolved that:

the Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan (Annex 1 to report AM 736/26) be formally 'made' (adopted) and brought into immediate effect to form part of the statutory 'development plan' and the basis for planning decisions within the part of the National Park in the Lymington and Pennington parish.

Voting: Unanimous

220 Any Other Business

- 220.1 There were no further items.

221. Date of next meeting

- 221.1 Thursday 23 July 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 12:45 pm.

Signed: Date: (Chair)