

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE FULL AUTHORITY MEETING

Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS

Live Streamed

Wednesday 16 March 2022 from 10.24am – 2.15pm

Present:

Cllr John Riddle (NCC) (Vice Chair)	Cllr Mark Mather (NCC)
Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)	Cllr Denis Mullan (SoS Parish)
Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC) (part of the meeting)	Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)
Ms Liz Ellis (SoS National)	Cllr Mark Purvis (NCC) (part of the meeting)
Ms Marie Fallon (SoS National)	Ms Pippa Ross (SoS National)
Cllr Val Gibson (SoS Parish)	Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)
Ms Fiona Gough (SoS National)	Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)

In Attendance

Tony Gates (Chief Executive (National Park Officer)); Pauline Wall (Director of Park Management); Rosie Thomas (Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer); Mr Robert Mayhew (Head of Conservation and Environment); Hazel Fitzsimmons (Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer)); Ben Rogers (Performance and Intelligence Officer); Susannah Buylla (Head of Planning and Policy); Sharon Robson (Corporate Support Manager & PA to Chief Executive); Jayne Longlands (Corporate Support Officer), Tracey Craft (Finance Manager), Mr Tom Sunter (Legal Representative from Newcastle City Council).

The meeting commenced at 10.24am and was preceded by a Conserving Uplands Rural Landscape Environment & Wildlife (CURLEW) Contracts presentation and video presented by Jennifer Shaw.

Cllr John Riddle, Vice Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

NPA01-2022 Apologies for Absence

Received from; Ms Jean Davidson (SoS National) (Chair), Cllr Len Glen-Davison (SoS Parish) and Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell (SoS Parish) and Mr Seth Marber (Independent Member).

The Corporate Support Manager & PA to Chief Executive noted that we still had a vacancy for a NCC member.

NPA02-2022 Chair's Introduction

Having received the Chair's apologies for absence due to Covid, Cllr John Riddle informed members that he would be the Chair for the meeting.

Cllr Mark Mather was congratulated on his award from the High Sheriff for all his work following recent storms. Park staff were also thanked for their hard work during this challenging period.

The Chief Executive updated the meeting on the following key points: -

- A substantial focus of work recently had been the response to Glover Review. Deep Dive meetings held by Defra had involved several staff. It was noted the draft Glover response would be discussed later in the agenda.
- Regionally, we had been working with the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) and had supported Northumberland County Council in making a bid for resources to develop a rural investment plan. £500,000 had been awarded to NCC and partners from NTCA to work up a programme for rural investment over the next few years. The aim is to develop a plan based primarily on the natural assets of Northumberland, a very new and welcome approach. NCC were leading on this, and the Chief Executive sits on the working group.
- Borderlands: this was an Anglo-Scottish growth deal, with one of the themes being natural capital. There was a £5 million budget on the English side of the Border for natural capital investment from DEFRA. With this natural capital funding, a key focus would be placed on the Hadrian's Wall corridor, looking at natural capital from coast-to-coast; Hadrian's Wall Recovering Nature (HWRN) would aim to act as an exemplar which helped to align our work in this area.
- HWRN: this project was coming towards the end of its first year and a countryside stewardship scheme had now been agreed, a project officer employed, and project partnerships built with key organisations. Having developed a vision and work project for the next two years, the Authority were about to submit our second-year funding application to the Reece Foundation. The Chair of the Reece Foundation had been very positive about progress made, and a constructive meeting had been held with the Partners earlier that week.
- There had been a lot of planning work and substantial progress made with the Authority's medium-term budget preparations - this was a substantial and challenging task across the organisation.
- The Management Plan had kept officers very busy over recent months and there was a report later in the agenda seeking approval to go to public consultation on a Draft Management Plan.
- Engagement work through The Sill continued well and trading was also very good. Staffing had been and continues to be a challenge in recruitment of café staff.
- FiPL; the Park had allocated all of its money during the first year. Ms Marie Fallon and officers were thanked for this, which had been quite a challenge. We were still waiting for confirmation of the next two years funding from Defra.
- IT Systems: there had been significant work and progress in this area to help us work differently, including the supporting of blended working.

The Chief Executive thanked the staff team for the amount of work they had been doing over the last few months.

Details of new members of staff as well, as leavers and contract changes, had previously been issued to members; as set out below: -

New starters

- Louis Reed (Café Assistant) 20/12/21 Temporary
- Ty Dixon (Assistant Facilities Officer) 10/1/22
- Lizzie Cooper (Welcome Team Supervisor and Events Liaison) 18/1/22
- Thomas Orr (Café Assistant) 17/2/22 Temporary
- Hannah Teasdale (Café Assistant) 19/2/22 Temporary
- Anna Cook (Café Assistant) 28/2/22 Temporary
- Hannah Jones (Assistant Trail Maintenance Ranger) 8/3/22 Temporary
- Chris Bell (Café Manager) 11/3/22 Temporary
- Emma Curry (Café Assistant) 13/3/22 Temporary
- Julie McPherson (Reception/Administration Officer) 14/3/22 Temporary
- Will McKane (Planning Officer) 15/3/22

Leavers

- Marion Sloan (Café Assistant) 28/1/22
- Saffron Blamires (Café Assistant) 26/2/22
- Adam Ewart (Planning Officer) 4/3/22
- Michelle Trott (Café Manager) 6/3/22
- Karen Parker (Sill Visitor Welcome Team Assistant) 19/3/22

Changes to Contract

- Irene Humble (Administration Support Officer to Estates Support Officer) 1/1/22
- Heather Stimpson (Receptionist/Administration Officer to Farming and Protected Landscapes Administrative Support Officer) 28/2/22
- Heather Stimpson (Receptionist/Administration Officer to Administration Support Officer) 14/3/22

NPA03-2022 Questions received from Members of the Public

No questions were received from members of the public.

NPA04-2022 Declarations of Member and Officer interests

There were no declarations of member and officer interests.

NPA05-2022 Minutes of the Authority Annual Meeting held 15 December 2021

It was noted that the HWRN Report (as stated on page 4) had been issued earlier that week.

The draft Minutes of the Authority Annual Meeting held on Wednesday 15 December 2021 were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Mr Chris Mullin, and it was further

RESOLVED

- a. **That the draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 15 December 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Acting Chair.**

NPA06-2022 Report 1 – Third Quarter: Quarterly Project Update

Mr Ben Rogers provided members with an update on the delivery of the Authority's work programme, as well as the Management of Strategic Risks from September to December 2021. He noted that many projects had either been completed or were nearing completion. He noted, Risk 7 (Climate Change) had changed to include the wording of 'Storms'.

Following Mr Rogers' presentation, members made the following comments: -

- The Chair noted that the word 'storms' in Risk 7, whilst reflecting recent experience could be amended to include all 'extreme events'. This was supported by members and officers.
- Mr Andy Saunders suggested that, following all the storm many woodland footpaths may never be safe again. He was concerned about progress in making routes safe. The Chief Executive explained that we were in regular discussions with Forestry England; he noted that they were still assessing damage and the large-scale issues faced. The Acting Chair noted that Mr Alex MacLennan (from Forestry England) provided updates, explaining where they had had strived to make places safe and also listing those they continued to address.
- Mr Chris Mullin suggested the Park regularly liaise with Forestry England to establish what their schedule was and communicate this to members.
- Cllr Sue Bolam noted that much of the clearing-up where she lives had not taken place. She suggested that any help in order to assist would be greatly appreciated. The Chief Executive said that the Park had carried out some work with the NFU on this issue and had approached DEFRA to see if there might be a scheme to support farmers and landowners. We were awaiting a response.
- Ms Pippa Ross asked if learnings were captured when projects were completed (so that we could build on our learnt knowledge and apply this to future projects). The Chief Executive noted that this was a continuous process, with learning embedded continuously. However, he noted that capacity was an issue, some projects did come to a natural end and therefore it may not be possible to sustain everything. We used Project Initiation Document processes (PID's), which included consideration of how well the project fitted with what we were aiming to achieve, as well as considering outcomes and a review of what had been learnt.

- Ms Liz Ellis reinforced her congratulation to staff on achieving strong outcomes following difficult periods such as covid and the various storms. She asked if we could promote the traditional farm buildings project and show what could be done with public monies in order to gain public understanding.
- Cllr Val Gibson asked if members could apply for FiPL. Ms Marie Fallon replied there were still opportunities for people to apply for funding.

It was AGREED that: -

- a. Following the comment made by the Chair, that the word 'Storms' be changed to 'Extreme Events'.
- b. We would continue to progress liaisons with Forestry England with regards to clearing the damage caused by recent storms.
- c. The Corporate Support Officer would forward regular Forestry England updates from Alex MacLennan (following recent storm damage) to all members.

There being no other issues raised, the Chair drew attention to the recommendations in the report that were proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders, seconded by Ms Pippa Ross, and agreed unanimously by all members who

RESOLVED TO

- a. **Note the work underway by the Authority, it's performance in Q3 and how this will impact on the State of the National Park outcomes.**
- b. **Note the status of Strategic Risks to the Authority Business Plan.**

NPA07-2022 Report 2 – Bridging Work Programme

The Chief Executive (jointly with the Director of Park Management and Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer) gave a presentation on the development of a Bridging Operational Plan which guided the work of the Authority for the year from 1st April 2022 (whilst the Authority continued to develop the Management Plan review). It was noted that, once the Management Plan was approved, a new five-year Business Plan would be developed. Emerging priorities from the Management Plan, as well as the Glover Review, had been used to produce the Bridging Operational Plan.

Members made the following comments: -

- Ms Fiona Gough praised the presentation and content of this. She suggested we get a process underway to start developing the Business Plan, effective from 1st April 2023, and also requested a report detailing the delivery of the current Business Plan to come to Authority in September 2022.
- Cllr Mark Purvis asked about a representative of the Park attending the local area Council for Southeast Northumberland, and about school engagement from the Southeast of the County.

It was AGREED that: -

- a. Following Ms Fiona Gough's comment, the Chief Executive would present a report showing performance against the current Business Plan at the September 2022 Full Authority Meeting.
- b. The Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer would forward information showing the schools in the Southeast that the Park had worked with to Cllr Mark Purvis.
- c. Cllr Mark Purvis would contact the Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer with relation to attending a local area Council meeting in the Southeast.

The Chair drew attention to the recommendation, which was proposed by Ms Liz Ellis, seconded by Ms Fiona Gough, members voted unanimously and

RESOLVED

- a. **To note and endorse the work undertaken in developing a Bridging Operational Plan for the Authority.**

NPA08-2022 Report 3 – Third Quarter: Financial Performance and Budget Update

The Finance Manager presented on financial performance and budgets for the third quarter period (September to December 2021).

The Chair reflected on a pleasing report.

Ms Marie Fallon asked that all staff be thanked for their hard work in achieving the favourable figures shown.

There being no further questions raised, the Chair drew attention to the recommendations that were proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders and seconded by Cllr Mark Purvis and

RESOLVED TO

- a. **Note contents of the report.**

NPA09-2022 Report 4 – Medium Term Budget Plan 2022-23 and 2024-25

The Chief Executive noted that the Defra grant had yet to be confirmed although we had been asked by Defra to plan for the medium term (next three years) with a 'flat-cash' settlement. A significant real-terms cut was being proposed as a result, with the Authority having to save more than £500,000 over three years, which represented approximately 20% of our budget annual Defra grant. There were as a result some significant financial challenges in the years ahead and a need to generate additional income or lose capacity from the organisation. It was noted that the proposed medium-term budget plan would be funded from reserves, and that there was an ongoing deficit at the end of this budget period which would need to be addressed.

The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) highlighted some of the main assumptions as shown in the circulated report. She recapped on a challenging budget, with regular reviews and updates to be made as and when necessary.

The Chair noted that members of the Finance and Audit Group had previously considered all key assumptions withing the draft budget.

Members made the following comments: -

- Cllr Andy Saunders reiterated that the Finance and Audit Group had looked at the budget plan and gone through this document at length. He felt that there would be some difficult discussions to be had if Defra funding was not available. He thanked the Management Team and in particular the team of The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) for all their work in preparing the budget.
- Cllr Denis Mullan believed this was a conservative budget with regards to The Sill. He felt that a serious view of alternative energy such as photovoltaics would be a sensible approach (moving away from our reliance on other energy sources such as gas).
- Ms Marie Fallon asked about the fixed term Net Zero Project Officer post; the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) confirmed that this was now funded until halfway through the medium plan. Ms Fallon asked if Borderlands funding could be included in the budget as external funding; the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) accepted this was a potential source of income but suggested this could only be included when more work had been conducted.

The Chair thanked everyone for all their work on this budget plan.

It was AGREED that: -

- a. The Director of Park Management would feedback to members on her work with photovoltaics and the use of other alternative forms of energy at The Sill and elsewhere on the Authority's estate.

There being no further questions, the Chair moved to the recommendations, which were proposed by Ms Marie Fallon and seconded by Cllr Denis Mullan, and agreed in favour by all members who:

RESOLVED TO

- a. **Approve the Budget Plan for the three years 2022/23 to 2024/25 in Table 8;**
- b. **Approve the Budget earmarked reserves and level of General Reserves detailed in section 7;**
- c. **Note the key risks to the Budget Plan detailed in section 8; and**
- d. **Approve the Operational Boundary and Authorised Borrowing limits as set out in section 9.**

NPA10-2022 Report 5 – Management Plan 2022 Update

The Head of Planning and Policy reported on this item. She noted that the typographical errors within the document would be updated.

Members raised the following comments: -

- Cllr Andy Saunders suggested we have specific numeric targets included within the Management Plan, particularly with reference to Sitka Spruce, as well as a definition of deep peat and exact percentages of the land within the Park which was being referred to within Nature Recovery. He also asked that, as the demographics of people within the Park changed, that we make reference to this and encourage a more diverse population, perhaps asking a direct question as part of the consultation. The Chief Executive agreed that we could spell out our ambition; he felt we could frame the Plan with a statement about enhanced landscapes, as well as being more specific in our consultation questions. The Head of Planning and Policy confirmed that, in its current form, the Management Plan was incomplete and required fine tuning.
- Ms Marie Fallon supported the comments made by Cllr Andy Saunders; she queried how we would know when we had got to the outcomes we wanted. She felt that 'action' was more appropriate with regards to climate change, as opposed to the word 'inspire' and that this section should be rephrased.
- Ms Pippa Ross agreed with the incomplete nature of the Draft Plan and suggested that getting people involved and receiving high value responses was important (rather than people feeling that the Plan had already been signed, sealed and delivered). She considered that we needed to facilitate this process as much as possible in an effective way.
- Cllr Sue Bolam suggested that communities be encouraged to get involved in tree planting (as had taken place recently in her own area) and felt this could be included in the Management Plan.
- Ms Fiona Gough considered that more information should be included within the preamble about who owns and manages the land within the Park and therefore how the objectives of the Plan can be achieved (through partnerships, incentives etc.). She noted that within nature recovery, the aim of sustainable productive land management made suggestions towards farming or forestry, however in the fourth bullet it was noted that some nature first activity may take place which would not necessarily fit under these. She felt we should consider rephrasing this section to reflect this. She felt that climate change had not been considered throughout the full document, and also said that we needed to be bolder in some of our consultation questions and ambitions, and perhaps include items which provoked a response.
- Cllr Val Gibson asked about access for all and wondered how we could help people with disabilities to enjoy the countryside. The Chief Executive noted that this area of work would take some investment and that it was not possible to provide access for everyone in all situations, however he accepted that we needed to be able to make more places accessible to people with a wider range of abilities and accepted there was more to be done in this respect. Ideas on this could be tested through the consultation.

It was AGREED that: -

- a. As proposed by Ms Pippa Ross, members accept their role with regards to encouraging others to take part in the consultation process.

There being no further questions raised, the Chair noted the recommendations which were proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp and seconded by Cllr Mark Mather, members unanimously:

RESOLVED TO

- a. **Note the continued progress with the Management Plan Review.**
- b. **Once further work had been carried out as per members comments, authorise the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Chair) to approve the final draft Management Plan (Appendix 1) for public consultations.**

Cllr Eileen Cartie left the meeting.

Live streaming was paused at 12.08pm for lunch and recommenced at 12.40pm
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NPA11-2022 Report 6 – Response to Defra Consultation on Designated Landscapes

The Chief Executive introduced this item to the meeting. Members then made the following points: -

- Cllr Sue Bolam raised off-road traffic issues and associated ongoing problems caused, she felt this had not been included within the response. Mr Chris Mullin added he considered this a pertinent moment to address the issue. Members agreed that we should include a response to these questions.
- Ms Marie Fallon noted the last paragraph in question 10 of the response and suggested the word ‘burden’ should not be used as it was out of context. With relation to funding, she felt that the additional costs of climate change over time could increase costs. We should also refer to the need for Defra to work across Government on this.
- Ms Liz Ellis thought that the supporting statement was excellent. She said that the work on Public Health and Wellbeing within the Park was really good but was concerned throughout about the lack of resource. She suggested that Defra spoke to the Office of Health Disparities and Department of Health and Social Care; they needed to know what was required if we were going to make a difference in this area. She added that there was a real absence of references to Cultural Heritage and said Defra needed to be talking to DCMS, as there was no evidence from the response that they had been doing this.
- In response to Mr Denis Mullan’s question, it was noted that any typographical errors should be fed back to either the Chief Executive or the Corporate Support Manager & PA to Chief Executive for correcting.
- Ms Pippa Ross was uncomfortable with the reference in the Supporting Statement which indicated the Authority supported the National Landscapes Partnership (as opposed to the National Landscapes Service) as we did not know enough about what is being proposed. It was agreed that the Chief Executive would amend the first sentence and state there was little detail for us to say anything further.

- In response to Ms Fiona Gough’s question, it was agreed that the Chief Executive would expand the section in the Supporting Statement regarding building relationships and capacity, fleshing out what we do and how we do it – thus explaining why ‘core’ resources were required.
- The Chair felt that National Parks were the “Jewel in the Crown” and that there should be some further enticement for farmers to put environmental solutions into place.
- Cllr Mark Mather said that, agreed government needed to make the schemes more attractive for farmers in the Park. Money should be spent locally, training young people to keep them in the community, i.e., public money for public goods.
- Ms Fiona Gough noted that further collaboration with urban areas was required in order to fulfil our purpose of being a Welcoming Park for all, and this needed to be fully addressed as part of the review. The Chief Executive noted that, during Deep Dive meetings, this had been explored. The positive use of words about welcoming people, rather than enforcing them, had been included. Ms Gough asked that we challenge Defra and provide particular examples.

The Chief Executive noted that he would be re-drafting the Authority’s response over the next week or so. Therefore, if members had any subsequent comments to make after the meeting, then there would still be the opportunity for them to do so.

It was agreed that the comments made by members be included in the Authority’s response

The Chair noted the recommendations which were proposed by Ms Pippa Ross and seconded by Ms Liz Ellis, and agreed in favour by all members who:

RESOLVED TO

- Note the content of the Government’s response to the Landscapes Review published on 14 January 2022.**
- Review and comment on the draft response to the Defra public consultation questions issued as part of the above response.**
- Discuss and comment on the supporting statement from the Authority which sets out our wider views on Government’s response to the Landscapes Review; and**
- Authorise the Chief Executive to email out the revised response to the DEFRA Consultation to members and, following this, in consultation with the Chair, to agree and submit the Authority’s final response and supporting statement.**

NPA12-2022 Report 7 – Future Board Membership

It was proposed that the following members join the Task and Finish Group to explore proposals for Authority membership: -

- Cllr Andy Saunders; proposed by Cllr Sue Bolam.
- Ms Liz Ellis; proposed by Cllr John Riddle.
- Cllr John Riddle; proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp.

- Cllr Mark Mather; proposed by Ms Liz Ellis.
- Cllr Denis Mullan agreed to be part of this group.

The Chair noted the recommendations which were proposed by Ms Marie Fallon and seconded by Cllr Sue Bolam, and agreed in favour by all members who

RESOLVED TO

- Note the content of the report.**
- To appoint a Task and Finish Group (members noted above) to explore options for Authority membership and report back in September 2022.**
- To consider and agree the Terms of Reference of the Task and Finish Group as set out at Annex 2 to this report.**

Cllr Mark Purvis left the meeting.

NPA13-2022 Report 8 – Members Code of Conduct

The Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer presented this item which had been introduced following previous member training by Ms Bethan Evans.

There being no questions raised, the Chair noted the recommendations which were proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders and seconded by Cllr Alan Sharp, and agreed in favour by all members who

RESOLVED TO

- Approve a new code of conduct as set out in Appendix 1 to Report 8.**

NPA14-2022 Report 9 – Humshaugh Parish Neighbourhood Plan

The Head of Planning and Policy presented on this item.

There being no questions raised, the Chair noted the recommendations which were proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders and seconded by Mr Chris Mullin, and agreed in favour by all members who

RESOLVED TO

- Agree to designate Humshaugh Parish as a Neighbourhood Area.**

NPA15-2022 Report 10 – The Sill Quarterly Update

The Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer recapped on the circulated report.

It was AGREED that: -

- In response to Ms Pippa Ross's question, the Sill Advisory Board would meet one final time to wind-up this group and consider the Sill external evaluation report.

- b. The Chair of the Authority should write to the Sill staff expressing the appreciation of the Board for working so hard during such difficult times (as suggested by both Ms Marie Fallon and Cllr Mark Mather).

Cllr Alan Sharp noted that it was important we monitor the finances and performance at The Sill and Cllr Andy Saunders noted that The Sill would continue to be discussed as a standing item at every Finance and Audit Meeting.

There being no further questions raised, the Acting Chair noted the recommendations which were proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp and seconded by Cllr Sue Bolam, and agreed in favour by all members who

RESOLVED TO

- a. **Note the content of this report.**

NPA16-2022 Urgent Business

The Chair noted there was no Urgent Business.

Part Two: Confidential and Exempt Items

The Chair proposed members pass the resolution: "That under section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, press and public be excluded from this meeting as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act".

The reasons for the exclusion of press and public for this part of the meeting was clarified as:

Item NPA17-2022 contained exempt information as per Part 1, Paragraph 2 of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 [as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006]. This report contains exempt information relating to information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual and paragraph 3 relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Members were reminded that they are required to be satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing information.

Ms Marie Fallon proposed the resolution, seconded by Cllr Denis Mullan, that the meeting move into Part Two, approved by all members who

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from Part Two of the meeting.

<p>Part One of the meeting ended and live streaming stopped at 1.32pm, which concluded the agenda. Members of the press and public left the meeting, Part Two then followed.</p>

The Full Authority Meeting, including Part Two, ended at 2.15pm.