

**NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE FULL AUTHORITY MEETING
Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS
Live Streamed**

Wednesday 22 June 2022 from 10.32am – 2.54pm

Present:

Ms Jean Davidson (SoS National)	Cllr Denis Mullan (SoS Parish)
Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)	Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)(part of the meeting)
Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC)(part of the meeting)	Cllr John Riddle (NCC)
Ms Marie Fallon (SoS National)	Ms Pippa Ross (SoS National)
Cllr Val Gibson (SoS Parish)	Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)
Cllr Len Glen-Davison (SoS Parish)	Cllr Catherine Seymour (NCC)
Ms Fiona Gough (SoS National)	Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)(part of the meeting)
Cllr Mark Mather (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); Hazel Fitzsimmons (Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer)); Ben Rogers (Performance and Intelligence Officer); Sharon Robson (Corporate Support Manager & PA to Chief Executive); Jayne Longlands (Corporate Support Officer), Tom Jenkins (Legal Representative from Ward Hadaway), Seth Marber (Independent Person).

The meeting commenced at 10.32am and was preceded by a Visitor Development Strategy presentation from Duncan Wise, Visitor Development and Tourism Manager.

The Chief Executive welcomed everyone to the meeting.

NPA18-2022 Apologies for Absence

Received from; Ms Liz Ellis (SoS National), Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell (SoS Parish), and Cllr Mark Purvis (NCC).

NPA19-2022 Election of Chair for Northumberland National Park Authority

Tony Gates, Chief Executive (National Park Officer) presided over the election of the Chair.

The Chief Executive outlined his role in the elections and confirmed that one nomination for the role of Chair had been received, for Ms Jean Davidson, as nominated by several members. The Chief Executive asked if there were any further nominations for the position of Chair. There being no further nominations, Ms Jean Davidson was duly elected as Chair of Northumberland National Park Authority from 22 June 2022 until the date of the 2023 Authority Annual Meeting. The Chief Executive invited Ms Davidson to take the Chair for the rest of the Meeting.

NPA20-2022 Election of Deputy Chair for Northumberland National Park Authority

The Chief Executive reported that two nominations had been received for the role of Deputy Chair; Cllr Denis Mullan and Cllr John Riddle. Both candidates were provided with the opportunity to make a statement.

Cllr Denis Mullan's written address was circulated; members were granted five minutes to read this, after-which the following questions were then raised:-

- Ms Marie Fallon queried how Cllr Mullan would respond to the challenges faced by the changing landscape and other financial and climate change issues; Cllr Mullan replied that he would be able to work with and forge teams together, collaborating with those who had specialist knowledge.
- Ms Fiona Gough asked about observations of Authority membership; Cllr Mullan felt that training and information for new members was critical as the Authority was a complex organisation. He considered the breadth of members' experience impressive, adding challenges would be faced in working with reduced member numbers to achieve the same key aims and find a critical way forward.
- Cllr Catherine Seymour queried why the Park was so focused to the south region; Cllr Mullan agreed that he felt there was currently a greater focus on the Hadrian's Wall area. However, the Ad Gefrin development, together with other projects in the north, may help to redress the balance. He agreed that the north of the Park had a lot to offer but required further developments and people encouraged to travel there.

Cllr John Riddle then spoke to the room and made the following key points as part of his statement:-

- Cllr Riddle was born and bred in Northumberland and is a fourth generation farmer.
- He is the Bellingham County Councillor, having held this seat for 34 years; this area representing a large part of the Park and the largest geographical Council area in the UK. He was very much immersed in rural life.
- Cllr Riddle considered that the Park was for everyone, and we needed to cater for all demographics and reduce barriers to access.
- Farmers owned the landscape, and it was the people that lived in the Park who were the custodians of the land.
- Cllr Riddle agreed that the north-south balance needed to be addressed, with a larger focus required in the north.
- Closer working with the County Council was imperative particularly when facing such difficult financial times; Cllr Riddle also had strong crucial links with key relevant stakeholders including The Rt Hon Lord Benyon and Victoria Prentis MP.
- He considered he had the right level of experience and connections with key contacts to get the Park through this critical period.

Following Cllr John Riddle's address, the following member questions were raised:-

- Ms Marie Fallon asked how Cllr Riddle would respond to current financial and climate changes in the role of Deputy Chair. Cllr Riddle replied that, as a farmer he understands how other farmers think; we needed to have a gentle approach and take the farmers with us. With regards to woodlands, he said we needed to replant trees lost to Storm Arwen with broadleaves (rather than conifers) and avoid planting large numbers of trees in lowland areas.
- Ms Fiona Gough asked how Cllr Riddle saw membership trends developing and how he would do things differently. Cllr Riddle suggested that (if legislation allowed) video conferencing would be crucial in the future. In addition, he felt we could effectively reduce membership numbers down to 12. He added that it was important for the Authority to maintain its Planning control.

Voting then took place with a show of hands for the role of Deputy Chair; there were nine votes for Cllr Denis Mullan and six votes for Cllr John Riddle. Cllr Denis Mullan was then duly elected as Deputy Chair of Northumberland National Park Authority from 22 June 2022 until the date of the 2023 Authority Annual Meeting. The Chair said she looked forward to working with Cllr Mullan in the future.

The Chair thanked Cllr John Riddle for his help and support during his time as Deputy Chair; she had enjoyed working with him. Cllr Riddle said he would continue to work with Cllr Denis Mullan and would support the Authority to continue to go from strength-to-strength in the future.

The Chair welcomed Cllr Catherine Seymour as a new member to the meeting.

Mr Tom Jenkins from Ward Hadaway (Legal Representative) and Mr Seth Marber (Independent Member) were also welcomed to the meeting.

NPA21-2022 Chair's Introduction

The Chair reported to the room as follows:-

- She outlined what was happening at National Park England (NPE) and national level discussions with Defra. The Chair was sorry to report that the Norfolk Broads Authority had decided to leave NPE. This was regrettable, however NPE would continue with its important work on four delivery plans (including Governance proposals) where the Chief Executive had been representing National Park Authorities on a Defra Task and Finish Group, as well as working closely with Defra on the Landscapes Review.
- NPE were working closely with Defra in developing proposals for a Landscapes, Parks and Trails Partnership (LPTP); with plans to have this in place by early 2023.
- It was noted that the Park's Governance Task and Finish Group had met several times and would be meeting again later that day with developments being brought back to the September meeting.

- The Sill Advisory Board had met one final time and the final evaluation for the project to heritage funding had now been signed off; this group had run very well, and members were thanked for the contributions they had made.
- There would be a National Parks UK Conference in Exmoor from 27th to 29th September 2022 which members would be invited to express an interest in the small number of places available to the Authority.
- A Climate Change Authority Review Meeting would take place at Eastburn on Wednesday 29th June 2022; the Chair looked forward to seeing members at this event.
- A Policy Conference on Forestry would take place on Wednesday 13th July 2022 and all members were expected to attend which would involve site visits in the Park.

The Chief Executive then provided a verbal report on recent activities:-

- He had taken on the role of UK Lead Officer this year (which involved co-ordinating all Parks across England, Scotland and Wales); the first UK Chairs Forum had been held virtually, as well as two virtual Chief Executive Meetings. Key items emerging were collective work on climate change, with Small World Consulting doing baseline work for all Parks.
- National Parks Partnership Limited (NPPL); there was nothing further to bring back to members at present but, since being discussed in March, there had been significant developments. Defra have indicated that, under a CSR bid, there could be up to £3.5m available to NPPL to support green financing. Discussions with Defra were currently ongoing, and the Chief Executive would report back to members when there was a firm proposal emerging. For now, the proposal brought to members in March had been put on hold by NPPL. Ms Cat Hawkins had taken over as Chair of NPPL and it was hoped to have her attend a future meeting.
- National Members' induction training; NNPA had agreed to run this for the next two years on behalf of UK Parks. As part of landscapes review proposals, Defra were interested in member development and training and so we would be sending them a proposal, providing them with the opportunity to support this area of work.
- We would be hosting the 2024 UK Conference, with an outline proposal will be presented for members' discussion at the September Full Authority Meeting.
- The Chief Executive had taken the England and UK lead role on Landscapes for Everyone. He would shortly be convening an England Landscapes For Everyone Programme Board and would involve national park staff, members and external partners in moving forward this important area of work. He had already been speaking to member Ms Liz Ellis about this area of work.
- North of Tyne Rural Investment Programme; the Chief Executive and Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer were working closely on the development of a Rural investment Plan (RIP).

- Borderlands exclusive growth deal; the HWRN would be a specific pilot project to look at natural capital led approaches.
- The members at the Policy Conference on forestry would receive a proposal setting out a policy position and an ambition for woodland creation across the Park.
- We were working on two live visitor development strategy projects; one at Ad Gefrin (for a small car park) working with Northumberland County Council (NCC) and the Ad Gefrin Trust. We were also working with NCC on land transfer in Bellingham (to double the size of the popular car park at Hareshaw Linn).

Mr Chris Mullin asked if there would be a Forestry Commission representative attending the July Policy Conference visit; it was noted that the Regional Officer from this organisation would be invited, together with a representative of the great Northumberland Forest project.

Details of new members of staff, as well as leavers, had previously been issued to members and were noted.

NPA22-2022 Questions received from Members of the Public

No questions were received from members of the public.

NPA23-2022 Declarations of Member and Officer interests

There were no declarations of member and officer interests.

NPA24-2022 Minutes of the Authority Meeting held 16 March 2022

The Chair reminded members that, if they had not been present at the March Authority Meeting, then they could ask questions arising from the minutes, but not vote.

The draft Minutes of the Authority Annual Meeting held on Wednesday 16 March 2022 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 16 March 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.**

NPA25-2022 Report 1 – Chair’s Annual Report

The Chair drew attention to the various elements of her report.

Ms Fiona Gough asked about the reasons for a decline in membership attendance which she felt to be significant; the Chair said that Covid may have impacted on this. It was noted that Authority figures were still above Defra target levels. Ms Pippa Ross added that there had been a NCC member vacancy during the previous year.

There being no issues raised, the Chair drew attention to the recommendations (a) and (b) proposed by Ms Pippa Ross and seconded by Ms Fiona Gough and there being no objections or abstentions, members

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the contents of this Report on the governance of the Authority; and
- (b) Approve the publication of information on members' attendances and allowances, set out in Tables 1 and 2 of Appendix 1 to this report, on the Authority's website, and in relevant performance reports as part of the Authority's accounts

NPA26-2022 Report 2 – Chief Executive's Performance Review 2021/22

The Chief Executive noted the following key points:-

- A positive performance overall on our work programme, having returned to pre-covid figures, with 75% delivered to good performance and 25% to acceptable standards, with no poor performance on any actions.
- Mr Ben Rogers was invited to speak to the Board on evidence to support KPI performance. He stated that KPI's were provided by external organisations such as the Environment Agency and Natural England - some of which had been delayed due to external factors (such as Covid). He reassured members that efforts were being made to secure this evidence.
- The Chief executive reported that £116,900 of additional budget outturn had been generated over and above budget targets.
- With regards to our organisational development strategy, the actions were now 84% complete and we are moving to form our next medium-term organisational development strategy. A recent staff survey had shown high levels of staff engagement, and we had recently developed a EDI action plan as part of our organisational strategy.
- Health and Safety Policies were being refreshed and the BCP processes had now been stood down as we operated a 'Covid Aware' status.
- Staff were thanked for a strong year of delivery against a difficult background and increasingly uncertain challenges.. A strong financial performance would help going forward in the short-term; volunteers and partners were also thanked for their valuable contributions.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Ms Marie Fallon thanked everyone for their hard work over the year. With regards to treasury management, she asked if we were reviewing our long term investments. The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) said there was always a focus on getting the best interest rates.

- Mr Chris Mullin stated that the Cheviot Peat Project had been a big success and asked about the next focus for peat. It was reported we had been working on the Northumberland Peat Partnership and that funding had been received via the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to employ peatland officers through the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, some of whom would be based at our offices in Rothbury.
- Ms Fiona Gough queried, if we were struggling with KPI's, then how did we address this. She felt that shared thinking of members could support this. The Chief Executive replied that KPI's were five year business plan targets. Our management plan and new business plan require the Authority to refresh and review our indicators by February 2023.
- Ms Fiona Gough asked about member development, alongside that of staff. The Chief Executive accepted that member development, particularly given that we had a number of new members, had suffered as a result of the pandemic. He noted that Policy Conference may be an opportunity for members to develop shared thinking on some key themes and agreed perhaps there should be a specific focus on team building.
- Ms Marie Fallon observed that seeing things in different ways, such as including images as part of our reports, would be beneficial and would assist further with accessibility issues and engagement. Mr Ben Rogers reported that an Intranet for members was currently being planned, which would include pictures and visuals.
- Cllr John Riddle praised good performance and exceptionally low staff sickness levels, he added that staff were the Park's greatest asset and said we needed to award them for this. The Chair and Chief Executive do normally recognise appreciation for staff at the end of the year with some time-off. The Authority also provided staff with development opportunities, and it was noted that wellbeing was also supported at a high level by the Park. The Chief Executive said that continued appreciation by members meant a great deal to staff.
- Cllr Alan Sharp felt we needed to market ourselves further and gain the appreciation we deserved. The Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer said that the local press were working differently at the present time and it was becoming more difficult to get out stories promoted externally. However, a Digital Content Apprentice would be appointed to help with this area of work. In addition, a Farming Newsletter had recently been launched to members of the public.
- Cllr Eileen Cartie said that, when producing items for media, font styles (using upper and lower case, as well as readable styles) and paper colour were important, together with the inclusion of images as part of our reports; thus greatly assisting with accessibility. The Chief Executive undertook to look at how the accessibility of reports could be improved based on the feedback from members.
- Ms Pippa Ross queried the low number of near misses as opposed to accidents. She said that it was good to see we were reviewing our policies; she asked about work surrounding blended working arrangements and if this had been risk assessed. Ms Ross also asked about complaints as she had not seen any detail around this and said it would be good to receive relevant

information. The Director of Park Management replied that ethos was embedded in reporting near misses and said she would continue to remind the team to report these as we could continue to learn from this important data. It was noted that member training for Health and Safety would be taking place later in the year. The Director of Park Management was currently working through the Health and Safety Policy, carrying out an organisational strategy sense-check, and a risk assessment of home working had been carried out. We did not receive a large number of complaints - with relation to trail hunting on our land, we did not allow this. It was explained that sometimes issues came in as queries rather than complaints. The Director of Park Management stated that weekly meetings took place where any complaints were reviewed. Ms Ross felt it was important for members to receive information on complaints. It was **AGREED** that quarterly reports would include these figures in future.

- In response to a question regarding the residual risk level of engaging diverse audiences, the Chief Executive explained that this measured our risk to delivering the work set out in our current business plan and said we would be planning a review of the strategic risk register once the management plan was in place, we would then produce our next five-year business plan.
- In response to Cllr Andy Saunders questions, the Chief Executive confirmed that the evolution of our existing policy would be included as part of the Forestry Policy Conference. Cllr Saunders sought two requests for information, the first of which related to electrification of Upper Coquetdale. It was noted that the application had not yet been received; it was **AGREED** that the Chief Executive would ask the Head of Planning and Policy to provide an update on this. The second request was for sighting of the population chart - to view whether there was a reversed population trend; the Chief Executive replied that changes were negligible, and it was **AGREED** we would provide the most up to date census information. The Chief Executive confirmed that we were looking for opportunities to significantly enhance nature through the Park and envisaged more projects such as HWRH. Nature recovery was still one of our emerging key themes and members would get a chance to discuss this in due course.

The Chief Executive thanked members for their interest and input. There being no other issues raised, the Chair drew attention to recommendations (a) to (d) proposed by Ms Fiona Gough, seconded by Cllr Andy Saunders and, there being no objections or abstentions approved by members who

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the achievement of the Forward Work Programme to 31 March 2022 as set out at Appendix 1 to Report 2;
- (b) Note the budget outturn for the year as set out at Appendix 2 to Report 2;
- (c) Note the performance in the delivery of the Authority's Organisational Development Strategy; and
- (d) Note the Authority's performance in relation to Health and Safety during the past year.

NPA27-2022 Report 3 – Annual Assurance Framework

The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) provided a summary of her report.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Ms Marie Fallon was pleased to see that climate change was going to be considered and asked to see a copy of this report when it was produced.
- Ms Fiona Gough queried whether it would be the Park or the Authority for which climate change would be considered; or both. It was confirmed as both, then internal audit health check would show how we were doing with regards to our carbon footprint, with some benchmarking taking place.
- Cllr Andy Saunders enquired about the assumption on annual pay rises, it was confirmed that this was 2%.

The Chair thanked members for their input into this report; she also thanked Cllr Saunders for chairing the Finance and Audit Group and added that all members were welcome to attend future Finance and Audit Group Meetings. The Chair also thanked the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) for presenting such a full report.

There being no other issues raised, recommendations (a) to (e); proposed by Ms Marie Fallon, seconded by Cllr Denis Mullan and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Endorse the assurance framework set out in this report.
- (b) Approve the Annual Governance Statement as at Appendix 1.
- (c) Note the internal audit annual report 2021/22 as at Appendix 2.
- (d) Approve the internal audit strategic plan 2022/23– 2024/25 as at Appendix 3.
- (e) Approve the Authority Review Group work programme for 2022/23 as at Appendix 4

NPA28-2022 Report 4 – Appointments to all Committees and Groups

The Chief Executive circulated a document outlining the nominations to committees and other role. The following voting, elections and appointments then ensued:-

Development Management Committee (DMC): Chair

The Chief Executive announced one DMC Chair nomination for Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell. There being no further nominations Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell was duly elected, as approved by all members.

DMC: Deputy Chair

The Chief Executive announced one DMC Deputy Chair nomination received for Cllr John Riddle. There being no further nominations Cllr John Riddle was duly elected, as approved by all members.

Authority Review Group: Chair

It was noted that there were two nominations for the post of Authority Review Group Chair; for both Cllr Alan Sharp and Mr Chris Mullin.

Cllr Sharp declined his nomination and said he was happy for Mr Chris Mullin to serve as Chair for this group.

There being no other nominations, Mr Chris Mullin was then duly elected to the post of Authority Review Group Chair, as approved by all members.

Authority Review Group: Deputy Chair

There was one nomination for Authority Review Group Deputy Chair received for Cllr Alan Sharp. There being no further nominations Cllr Alan Sharp was duly elected, as approved by all members.

Ms Marie Fallon observed the gender imbalance of appointments, it was **AGREED** that this was something to be considered as part of next year's nominations.

DMC

Expressions of interest had been received from eight members; Ms Marie Fallon, Mr Chris Mullin, Cllr Sue Bolam, Cllr Alan Sharp, Cllr Val Gibson, Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, Cllr John Riddle, Cllr Len Glen-Davison. Cllr Catherine Seymour was proposed as an additional member of this group by the Chair, and seconded by Cllr John Riddle. There being no other expressions of interest or nominations, all members were in favour of the nominations, therefore the above nine members were duly elected.

Authority Review

Expressions of interest had been received from Ms Liz Ellis, Ms Fiona Gough, Cllr Alan Sharp, Cllr Val Gibson, Cllr Andy Saunders, Mr Chris Mullin, Ms Pippa Ross, Cllr Denis Mullan, Ms Marie Fallon and Cllr Catherine Seymour.

Cllr Andy Saunders suggested that the membership number for this group be extended to 10 and this proposal was duly agreed.

There being no other expressions of interest or nominations, all members were in favour of the nominations and the above members were duly elected

Standards and Appeals Committee

Expressions of interest had been received from Ms Liz Ellis, Ms Marie Fallon, Ms Pippa Ross, Cllr Eileen Cartie, Cllr Alan Sharp, Cllr Val Gibson and Cllr Catherine Seymour. There being no other expressions of interest or nominations, all members were in favour of the nominations and the above members were duly elected.

Finance and Audit Group

Expressions of interest had been received from Ms Fiona Gough, Cllr Alan Sharp, Cllr Mark Purvis, Cllr Sue Bolan, Cllr Andy Saunders and Mr Denis Mullan. There being no other expressions of interest or nominations, all members were in favour of the nominations and the above members were duly elected (together with the Full Authority Chair).

Representations associated with responsibilities and representation by individual members to outside bodies

Members had expressed an interest or had been nominated and with approval by all members of each nomination, representations were confirmed as follows:

UK ANPA Executive (sub: Deputy Chair)	Chair
National Parks England (sub: Deputy Chair)	Chair
Historic Environment Champion	Cllr Val Gibson
Equality Standard Champion	Ms Liz Ellis
Youth Engagement Champion	Cllr Mark Mather
Climate Change Champion	Ms Marie Fallon
Policy Conference Lead Member	Ms Fiona Gough
Campaign for National Parks	Mr Chris Mullin
Northumberland National Park and NCC JLAF	Ms Fiona Gough, Ms Marie Fallon (shared)
Harden Quarry Liaison Committee	Mr Chris Mullin and Cllr Len Glen-Davison

The Chief Executive announced the completion of all appointments.

Cllr Len Glen-Davison took the opportunity to reply to an earlier question held over from the pre-meeting presentation in respect of the Hadrian’s Wall bus, suggesting their regularity be increased over the summer months (as he could not see the benefit of having buses running on wet Winter days). It was suggested that Mr Duncan Wise would be able to answer this query during the lunch break.

Mr Chris Mullin left the meeting at 12.30pm.

Live streaming was paused at 12.30pm for lunch and recommenced at 1.07pm

NPA29-2022 Report 5 – Medium Term Budget Update

The Chair welcomed members back from lunch.

The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) reported and members commented as follows:-

- Cllr Sue Bolam felt the way in which we managed our assets may require review, via a separate company or Trust, to enable us to have future control over our finances and assets.

Cllr John Riddle queried whether this was permissible and asked if we had the powers to do this; it was **AGREED** that the Chief Executive would look into this via the Finance and Audit Group and seek advice.

- Ms Marie Fallon noted the cost of living rises, asking if there was there anything we could do to support staff, particularly in non-financial ways, and it was **AGREED** that this be given consideration. The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) said that financial assistance for those staff who had any issues was considered case-by-case.
- Cllr Mark Mather made the point that members do really appreciate the work of the Park's staff; he maintained that the Authority would do their best to ensure job security in the future.
- The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) replied to Cllr Denis Mullan query, stating that fixed term loans would not incur any financial deficit as interest rates were secured.
- Cllr Catherine Seymour asked if there had been any additional operating costs, particularly following Storm Arwen. The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) confirmed that Defra had provided an additional grant of £58,900 to cover associated costs (which was the amount the Authority had bid for).
- In response to Ms Fiona Gough's query, the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) said that we needed to budget £68,000 a year, which was paid back on the loan for The Sill.

There being no other issues, the Chair drew attention to the recommendation (a) to (c), proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Cllr Denis Mullan and with there being no objections or abstentions members

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Approve the carry forwards as detailed in Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 and paragraph 4g.
- (b) Note the transfers to earmarked reserves as detailed in Table 4.
- (c) Approve the treasury management strategy as detailed in sections 7 and 8 of the report.

NPA30-2022 Report 6 – Defra Financial Grant Agreement

The Chief Executive introduced his report. He considered that the Defra financial grant agreement was not fit for purpose and said we should be seeking an alternative. The chair confirmed the views on the suitability of this form of grant agreement were shared by the other English National Parks Chairs at a recent meeting. The chief executive noted that until the agreement was signed, the Authority would not be able to obtain the relevant funds from Defra.

Full discussions ensued and members made the following comments:-

- Cllr Sue Bolam felt that responses to the Chief Executive's questions had been weak. She added that it was a political issue and felt it important to maintain dialogue, with all National Parks working together on this issue. Cllr Bolam said that fundraising and income raised by the Park should be kept separate from the grants received.
- The Chair reported on a meeting recently held together with other National Parks Chairs; we were joined-up in our thought processes and they had asked the lead Chair to raise this with the Minister.
- Cllr John Riddle was disappointed and whilst accepting we had no option other than to sign the agreement; felt that if we believed it to be the wrong form of agreement and unfairly weighted against the Authority, it would provide the wrong signals if we decided to go ahead and sign the document. He did not feel he could agree to sign on this basis.
- The Chair suggested that receipt of a letter of comfort from Defra would help; however, whether this document would have any legal standing was questioned.
- Cllr Denis Mullan was happy to agree for the Chief Executive to sign the agreement as we were currently solvent, however, he was wary of going into this for a second year as we may not be financially able to operate beyond year one.
- The Chief Executive confirmed that the agreement was for three years but only the amount of funding for the first year of funding would be guaranteed.

Cllr Sharp left the meeting at 1.38pm.

- Ms Fiona Gough said we needed to work with Defra to get a bespoke agreement, she considered we should explore what working with AONB's would look like and be proactive in our approach, i.e. consider what worked from our perspective.
- Ms Pippa Ross felt we had no option but to sign the agreement. However, it needed to be ascertained that this was not being done in accordance with the usual procedure as the Authority was being asked to sign up to a new body on which we had no detail. Ms Ross noted the Defra response accepted this. The Chief Executive confirmed the detail on the proposed National Landscapes Partnership was missing from the agreement and he would not normally ask for members agreement in such circumstances.
- Ms Marie Fallon agreed that we needed to sign the agreement in order to progress. With regards to the National Audit Office, she said it would be useful to obtain the information supplied by them, to understand their viewpoint and check this was correct; we needed to ensure this body understood the Authority properly and how we operate. Ms Fallon considered that trust between the Authority and Central Government seemed to be missing from this agreement.
- The Chief Executive stated that the Defra grant accounted for only part of our budget. He added that, if we wanted to take a risk based approach, then we would have an unambitious

work programme (this is something we never did as we were ambitious and we would not wish to blunt our drive and determination).

- Cllr Mark Mather queried whether we had contacted the Secretary of State and asked if we should be lobbying MP's and involve Victoria Prentis MP; it was agreed that this action be added to the recommendations.
- Cllr Andy Saunders said we needed to be careful that we were signing an agreement which would leave us short on achieving desired outcomes as we would not be resourced sufficiently in order to meet requirements.
- Cllr Catherine Seymour asked about working more closely with AONB's. The Chief Executive replied that we currently worked in partnership with local AONB's, however the LPTP would bring our work together at a national level. Glover had noted more resources should be given to help these two organisations work more closely together; the reality was that there were increased expectations but less funding.
- Cllr Andy Saunders asked if we needed to fund the LPTP, to which the Chief Executive replied that funding was currently available to Defra via a Comprehensive Spending Review bid for this.
- Cllr John Riddle said that he could not support this agreement; he queried what Defra would do if National Parks did not sign the agreement.
- Cllr Eileen Cartie agreed with Cllr John Riddle and said she would not support this agreement
- Ms Pippa Ross queried what the risk of not signing the document would be, to which the Chief Executive replied that the Authority would become insolvent.
- The Director of Park Management suggested, when the Chair wrote to the Minister, that member reservations and repercussions of not signing may be added, i.e. risk of becoming insolvent. Cllr Sue Bolam said that the letter should come from the Chair; Ms Pippa Ross added it should be noted she would not wish to sign-off the agreement as it lacked the right level of assurance.
- Cllr Denis Mullan said one of the major flaws of the document was the ability for Defra to clawback money if they we did not spend it in the way they chose (albeit legally), resulting in insolvency.
- Cllr Denis Mullan asked we add to the letter; if funding for the second year was not secured, that we may be trading whilst insolvent.
- Cllr Catherine Seymour queried the deadline date; the Chief Executive confirmed there was no deadline, but funds would not be released until we signed the agreement.

- Cllr Sue Bolam queried whether it was realistic to get the legal terms and conditions of the agreement revised halfway through the three year period. Cllr Denis Mullan said that it was permissible for two parties to revise a legal agreement part-way through.
- Ms Pippa Ross said we needed to make it clear and public that we did not feel this was a fair agreement, and that we were signing under duress.
- Cllr Mark Mather reaffirmed the Government's strapline of 'public money for public goods' which included access to the countryside. This agreement should be adequate, legal and fit for purpose, providing sufficient money to deliver public money for public goods, and this was not the case. He suggested that Defra should abide by government principles.
- Ms Marie Fallon suggested that we invite the Deputy Director of Defra to our next Full Authority meeting to hear members concerns directly.

The Chair drew attention to the recommendations (a) and (b) (with new item (c) added), proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders and seconded by Cllr Denis Mullan (with 10 members voting in favour with 3 abstaining) and it was:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the changes to the Grant Funding Agreement and consider the concerns raised by officers and the Finance and Audit Group, and the assurances offered by Defra officials.
- (b) Authorise the Chief Executive to sign the Financial Grant Agreement on behalf of the Authority.
- (c) Authorise the Chair of the Authority to write personally with members concerns to the Secretary of State and Local MP's (Anne-Marie Trevelyan and Guy Opperman), highlighting concerns about signing; stating that we were signing under duress and would want to seek positive engagement and reach an alternative agreement before year two begins. We would be informing other National Parks of the actions we were taking.

Cllr Eileen Cartie left the meeting at 2.17pm

NPA31-2022 Report 7– Management Plan 2022 Update

In the Head of Planning and Policy's absence due to illness, the Director of Park Management provided an update. She noted that the Authority had been pleased with the level of responses and engagement received.

It was observed that collaboration with key stakeholders and working together with partners was required in the future, and we would be focussing on 'what next' over the following two weeks. A meeting for members would be held in the first week in September to work through the proposed changes and detail to be included in the next version of the plan. This would be arranged as soon as possible.

Members raised the following comments: -

- Ms Fiona Gough said we needed to be aware of how we attracted new visitors and add in an extra dimension. She asked if we were happy that we were being ambitious enough based on the responses received. The Director of Park Management said that we had consulted as widely as we could in engaging with people; social media coverage in particular had been extensive. The Chief Executive felt that our challenge was to work with partners and see where the real priorities were.
- The Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer replied to a query about those people we were not engaging with. She explained that, due to their very nature, it was hard to get engagement from some under-represented groups; however we had aimed to get representation from relevant key groups. Ms Fiona Gough urged the Authority to keep these groups in mind in the future.

The Director of Park Management thanked members for their support with the Management Plan.

There being no issues raised, the Chair drew attention to the recommendations (a), (b) and (c) and proposed by Ms Pippa Ross and seconded by Ms Marie Fallon and there being no objections or abstentions, members:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the progress being made with the Management Plan review;
- (b) Note the positive response to the six-week consultation process; and
- (c) Note the next steps for conclusion of the Management Plan review.

NPA32-2022 Urgent Business

The Chair noted there was no Urgent Business.

NPA33-2022 Members' Question Time

(a) **Nature Recovery Plan**

Ms Marie Fallon asked for a Nature Recovery Pilot; the Chief Executive replied that the pilot was complete and, although not active in the last couple of months, we had used some outcomes to inform the North of Tyne Rural Investment Plan. It was **AGREED** to provide members with a link to this plan.

(b) **Hareshaw Linn**

Cllr John Riddle asked for an update on the carpark at Hareshaw Linn; the Director of Park Management said that this was progressing, and she was in contact with NCC. She noted concerns about an area within the car park, which had been flagged with NCC.

(c) **Policy Conference**

Cllr Sue Bolam raised the Forestry Policy Conference based in the Rothbury area taking place on 13th July 2022; she was concerned about having ‘the right tree in the right place’ and whether woodlands should be managed or unmanaged. Cllr Bolam suggested that it would be beneficial to have an independent forestry advisor at this event. Ms Fiona Gough said that someone from Natural England would be attending the meeting.

The Chief Executive considered this presented an opportunity for the Authority to get on the front-foot and be proactive. He noted that the Park was not anti-forestry; and we needed the opportunity to state that we wanted more trees in the Park and be able to consider how this should be achieved. It was **AGREED** that any comments from members, about the issues to be discussed at Policy Conference, be fed directly to Ms Fiona Gough.

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 NPA34-2022 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.

Seth Marber left the meeting at 2.44pm

Part One of the meeting ended and live streaming stopped at 2.44pm, which concluded the agenda. Members of the press and public left the meeting, Part Two then followed.

The Full Authority Meeting, including Part Two, ended at 2.54pm.

Signed:
(Jean Davidson, Chair)

Date: