

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE FULL AUTHORITY MEETING
Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS
Live Streamed
Wednesday 14 December 2022 from 10.48am – 1.37pm

Present:

Ms Jean Davidson (SoS National)	Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell (SoS Parish)
Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)	Cllr Denis Mullan (SoS Parish)
Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC)	Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)
Ms Marie Fallon (SoS National)	Cllr John Riddle (NCC)(part of the meeting)
Cllr Val Gibson (SoS Parish)	Ms Pippa Ross (SoS National)
Ms Fiona Gough (SoS National)	Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)
Cllr Mark Mather (NCC)	Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)

In Attendance

Tony Gates (Chief Executive (National Park Officer)); Rosie Thomas (Director of Business Development); Hazel Fitzsimmons (Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer)); Tracey Craft (Finance Manager); Ben Rogers (Performance and Intelligence Officer); Mary Wallace (HR Officer); Jayne Longlands (Corporate Support Officer).

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

NPA57-2022 Apologies for Absence

Received from; Ms Liz Ellis (SoS National), Cllr Len Glen-Davison (SoS Parish), Cllr Mark Purvis (NCC) and Cllr Catherine Seymour (NCC).

The meeting commenced at 10.48am and was preceded by presentation by Cat Hawkins Chair of National Park Partnerships (LLP).

NPA58-2022 Chair and Chief Executive's Introduction

Ms Jean Davidson, Chair, opened the meeting and welcomed members, officers, and members of the public, some of whom were following via live stream. The Chair then provided the following update:

- She congratulated the team for winning the 'medium employer, inspiring female award' at The North East Chamber of Commerce Awards.
- Chairs of National Parks in England (including the NNPA Chair) had issued a joint letter to The Times regarding the impact of funding cuts.
- Several members and senior officers had met with local MPs Guy Opperman and Anne-Marie Trevelyan to discuss the current financial climate. Information had been issued to them following this and a further response was now awaited.
- A national induction course for new members from across the UK national parks had recently taken place at The Sill; members were thanked for giving up their time to attend.
- Northumberland County Council (NCC) had commissioned an inquiry report entitled 'Future of Farming, Northumberland;' both Cllr Mark Mather and the Chair had sat on the panel. This

document was available to view on the NCC website and it was **AGREED** that it be circulated to all members.

The Chief Executive then provided a short report as follows:

- Having attended a Boundary Review Meeting, it was proposed to retain the same number of NCC Councillors. This was now under public consultation, with electoral division revisions to be made in due course, and all in place for the next 2025 elections. It was noted that 4,000 would be size of each division.
- The levelling-up bill would be presented to the House of Lords. It was unclear if Defra would be tabling amendments to address the outcomes of the Landscapes Review.
- Management Plan; this document had been signed-off by the Board in October 2022. There would be a formal launch in 2023.
- Business Plan; production of this document was progressing in-line with the agreed timeframe. A meeting for all staff had been held, where all were given the timeframe of 22nd December 2022 to respond with suggestions and opportunities for the Park's future. The Chief Executive and Directors had attended recent staff team meetings to encourage thoughts, ideas and engagement.
- Rural Investment Plan; the Board of North of Tyne had approved £9 million of funding towards the implementation of this plan.
- North of England Committee of the National Lottery Fund; the Chief Executive informed members he had been appointed to this Board, and the Chair congratulated him on his appointment.

NPA59-2022 Questions Received from Members of the Public

No questions were received from members of the public.

NPA60-2022 Declaration of member and officer interests

There were no declarations of member and officer interests.

Ms Fiona Gough noted that the Policy Conference had been based on Priority Setting (rather than Nature Recovery) and it was **AGREED** that any notes from this meeting be circulated to members.

Ms Gough asked about the outcome of the Walltown Bid; it was **AGREED** that the Director of Business Development would distribute an email update to all members.

[It was noted that the livestream was currently offline due to technical issues.]

NPA61-2022 Minutes of Authority Meetings held on 23 September and 12 October 2022

The draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Friday 23 September were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Ms Pippa Ross, and it was further

RESOLVED

- (a) That the draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Friday 23 September, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

The draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 12 October 2022 were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Denis Mullan, seconded by Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, and it was further

RESOLVED

- (a) That the draft Minutes of the Authority Meetings held on Wednesday 12 October 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

NPA62-2022 Report 1 – Half Year Financial and Budget Update

Tracey Craft, Finance Manager, presented this item, outlining key figures and background information as featured in the report.

Following this presentation, discussions ensued as follows:

- It was noted that the two major planning applications were for; Otterburn Training Area accommodation blocks, and Harden Quarry.
- Ms Pippa Ross inquired about car parking income; it was noted that the largest decline in income was at Steel Rigg, although this was being closely monitored.
- Ms Marie Fallon queried the impact of the national rise in energy costs. The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) noted that the Park was currently on a fixed-term energy deal for the current year and officers were speaking with suppliers regarding future costs.
- Cllr John Riddle noted that, with current high electricity prices, it was cheaper to run a diesel car and he said we needed to monitor this situation.
- Cllr Andy Saunders stated we had a financial surplus due to good housekeeping and asked that the Board's compliments be passed on to staff.

There being no other issues raised, the Chair thanked the Finance Manager for her report and drew attention to the recommendations in the report that were proposed by Ms Marie Fallon, seconded by Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, and agreed unanimously by all members who

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the contents of the report
(b) Approve the allocation of £112,400 of the additional 2021/22 surplus from general reserves to the budget.

NPA63-2022 Report 2 – Half Year Corporate Performance and Risk Register Update

Ben Rogers, Performance and Intelligence Officer, presented on this item, noting the typographical errors within this document, which had since been corrected.

Board members then raised the following comments:

- Ms Fiona Gough queried how we were monitoring effectiveness in achieving farming outcomes. In response the following points were noted; there was a transitional period

between schemes, farmers were getting involved in working groups, and there was a successful drive for farm woodland creation.

- Ms Gough said it was good to see volunteer support continuing with Revitalising Redesdale (RR). The Chief Executive provided reassurance that the RR investment was being taken forward through legacy initiatives. It was **AGREED** that either an update or presentation would be provided on this, to include evidence of our monitored results.
- Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell said there was a woodland meeting taking place in Tasset later that evening.
- Cllr John Riddle noted that woodland was a delicate subject to Farmers (with some land being taken from tenant farmers in order to plant woodlands). The Chief Executive said that enhanced tree cover was something we wanted to promote in-line with farming, rather than instead of it.
- Ms Marie Fallon asked about NNPA/RSPB Curlew project and queried whether the number of birds was increasing or decreasing. The Performance and Intelligence Officer explained that the project was currently prioritising improvement to habitats and that we would provide figures for numbers in future years.
- Ms Fiona Gough asked whether we could capture the feedback on Apertura. The Director of Business Development **AGREED** to circulate a summary to the Board.

The Chair drew attention to the recommendations, which were proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders, seconded by Cllr Mark Mather and, there being no objections or abstentions, approved by members who:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the delivery of the Interim Work Programme.
- (b) Note the revisions to the Strategic Risk Register.

NPA64-2022 Report 3 – Health and Safety and HR Half Year Report

Mary Wallace, HR Officer, reported to the Board on HR matters and responded to members' questions as follows:

- The Chair asked if we carried out surveys for volunteers; the HR Officer confirmed we did and said volunteers were being invited to attend meetings such as the staff/member tour at Kirknewton. She noted that the Volunteer Officer regularly contacted our volunteers.
- Ms Marie Fallon thanked the HR Officer for her report and queried whether engagement was linked to low absence levels. The HR Officer reported on proactive measures including; counselling services, wellbeing programme, staff consultation, and the implementation of listening officers.
- Ms Fiona Gough asked if member development could be picked up in the Organisational Development (OD) and it was **AGREED** this be included.
- Cllr Mark Mather suggested there was scope for relationship building between members and staff and it was **AGREED** this be considered in the upcoming OD strategy.
- Cllr Val Gibson asked about public safety with cows in the countryside. It was noted that visitor behaviour and awareness had been considered at previous meetings and FiPL support provided

to farms involved. Cllr Mark Mather added there were national-level farm accident statistics, and it was **AGREED** there may be an option to provide an update to members in future.

- Ms Pippa Ross noted the four engagement days and asked if Board members should attend. The Director of Business Development said she would look into this and respond in due course.

The Chief Executive apologised that Pauline Wall, Director of Park Management, was not able to attend the meeting; it was noted that she would provide trends to Health and Safety figures at future meetings.

It was stated there would be Health and Safety Training for Board members on Wednesday 18th January 2023.

Ms Pippa Ross asked for information on the Walltown incident. The Director of Business Development noted this was linked to staff raising concerns about lone working and said that measures had been put in place to address this.

It was observed that no formal complaints had been received that year.

The Chair thanked the HR Officer for her report, she then thanked members for their input in this discussion and drew attention to the recommendation, proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp and seconded by Mr Chris Mullin, and it was:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the progress in achieving our Human Resources and Health and Safety objectives.

NPA65-2022 Report 4 – Authority Review Meeting: Rangers

The Chief Executive updated members on the Rangers Review which had taken place at Ingram, and involved partners, namely emergency service representatives. Members then highlighted the following key points:

- Cllr Sue Bolam noted that parish councils worked very closely with the Rangers.
- Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell said the Authority Review Meeting had been enjoyable. He felt that volunteer availability and the opportunity to attract those with necessary skills was limited in some geographic areas.
- Mr Chris Mullin suggested that the number of employed rangers would have an impact on how many volunteers we were able to train.

There being no other issues raised, recommendations (a) to (c); proposed by Mr Chris Mullin, seconded by Ms Pippa Ross and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the findings of the recommendations of the Authority Review meeting on Rangers held on 12th October 2022;

- (b) Consider the responses of the Leadership Team and actions proposed or currently underway; and
- (c) Endorse the actions as set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

Cllr John Riddle left the meeting at 12.00pm.

NPA66-2022 Report 5 – Annual State of the National Park Report

Ben Rogers, Performance and Intelligence Officer, introduced this report. He noted there were some typographical errors in the Appendix to this report which had subsequently been updated. Members commented as follows:-

- Ms Marie Fallon suggested that the qualifying text should mirror the figures provided, and the Performance and Intelligence Officer took these comments on board.
- Ms Fallon asked for some images to be added to the report.
- Ms Fiona Gough suggested the report should reflect something wider and asked for a collaborative approach, with partners contributing an item they were doing to work towards the headings. The Chief Executive agreed that an objective view of the health of the State of the Park was required.
- Cllr Alan Sharp noted poor services (such as broadband) in rural areas and felt that better facilities were required for people living and working in the Park.
- The Chair said that not all people on farms wanted, or were able, to diversify and/or continue in farming.
- Cllr Denis Mullan suggested communities could collaborate and assist external providers, such as in the setting up of broadband schemes.
- Ms Pippa Ross queried the term of 'Intersecting Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA).' The Performance and Intelligence Officer noted this was an Office for National Statistics term, and referred to the fact that many people lived just outside the Park's boundaries.

The Chair drew attention to the recommendation (a) to (c), proposed by Ms Fiona Gough, seconded by Ms Marie Fallon and, with there being no objections or abstentions, members

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note contents of the State of the National Park Report 2022;
- (b) Authorise the publication of the State of the National Park Report 2022 on the Northumberland National Park website; and
- (c) Note the upcoming changes which are occurring as a consequence of our revised Management Plan themes, and also the development of a national reporting framework for Government's 25-Year Environment Plan.

NPA67-2022 Report 6 – Taking Forward Governance Changes

Rosie Thomas, Director of Business Development, presented on this item with the proposal to form an Appointments Committee. Board members commented as follows:

- Cllr Denis Mullan nominated Ms Liz Ellis as a member of this committee (Ms Ellis was happy to have her name put forward).

- Cllr Sue Bolam identified the importance of having people with a broad range of skills on each committee, as was the case with local Parish Councils.
- Cllr Andy Saunders was happy to be nominated. He added that it was pertinent to identify skills gaps and seek people from specified backgrounds through positive action.
- The Chair invited Mark Mather to stand on the Appointments Committee; Cllr Mather said he would be willing to stand.
- Ms Pippa Ross suggested there was there an opportunity to involve other stakeholders and invite views from outside the Board on what the appropriate skills were, with openness and inclusivity both important. This would help to gain a fresh-perspective, with independent people coming in to challenge our ways of thinking. It was **AGREED** that an independent member would be invited, and Cllr Sue Bolam suggested that Seth Marber, the independent member, be approached.
- Ms Pippa Ross said that a broad and inclusive definition of skills was required; professional qualifications were important however softer skills were of equal value.
- It was explained that both the Chief Executive and Chair would attend the Appointments Committee, and this committee would be ongoing. There would be no formal interviews for Board members; members would self-assess their skills, it would then be the job of the appointments committee to consider gaps and decide whether we needed to co-opt people.
- Mr Chris Mullan said that, as well as skills, a broad range of interests was also important.
- Ms Fiona Gough added that bringing in experts with a fresh perspective for specific meetings was important. The Chief Executive noted that currently independent people could be brought in for each Review Panel meeting.

The Chair noted the recommendations (stating that she would stand on this committee) which were proposed by Ms Fiona Gough and seconded by Cllr Denis Mullan, and agreed in favour by all members who

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Establish an Appointments Committee in order to take forward the agreed recommendations of the 2022 Task and Finish Group on Governance.
- (b) Agree the membership of the newly created Appointments Committee to include; Ms Liz Ellis, Cllr Mark Mather and Cllr Andy Saunders.

NPA68-2022 Urgent Business

The Chief Executive noted changes to the charging of our pre-application system which he had signed off under delegated powers; it was **AGREED** this information would be sent to DMC members.

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 NPA50-2022 and NPA51-2022 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 Fiona Gough proposed the resolution, seconded by Ms Marie Fallon, 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.

Part One of the meeting ended and live streaming stopped at 12.46pm, 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 1.37pm.

Approved: Date: