

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE FULL AUTHORITY MEETING

Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS

Live Streamed

Wednesday 15 March 2023 from 10.00am – 12.35pm

Present:

Ms Jean Davidson (SoS National)

Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)

Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC)(part of the meeting)

Ms Liz Ellis (SoS National)

Ms Marie Fallon (SoS National)

Cllr Val Gibson (SoS Parish)

Cllr Len Glen-Davison (SoS Parish)

Ms Fiona Gough (SoS National)

Cllr Mark Mather (NCC)(part of the meeting)

Cllr Denis Mullan (SoS Parish)

Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)

Cllr Mark Purvis (NCC)

Ms Pippa Ross (SoS National)

Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)

Cllr Catherine Seymour (NCC)(part of the meeting)

Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)

In Attendance

Tony Gates (Chief Executive (National Park Officer)); Rosie Thomas (Director of Business Development); Pauline Wall (Director of Park Management); 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.

NPA01-2023 Apologies for Absence

Received from; Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell (SoS Parish), Cllr John Riddle (NCC) and Mr Seth Marber (Independent Member).

NPA02-2023 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:

- Two National Park Authorities had now left NPE; The Broads and Exmoor.
- A report, reviewing how NPE works and future priorities, would be going to the NPE Chairs in April. NPE would be working with political parties ahead of the next election. NNPA may be called upon to support this work and host visits.
- The NPUK Chairs Forum (all 15 UK parks) meets bi-annually; Tiffany Hunt (Lake District NPA) was elected the new Chair, with Alison Barnes (New Forest NPA) being Lead NPO.
- Review of joint working on the UK Comms unit began in February and a report to the CEOs would be expected in April. NPE were keen to have a clear focus on influencing government around NPA policy and resources.
- We had written to NPPL with concerns; there would be a meeting in January to vote on Defra funding supporting work with NPAs and AONBs on building green finance capacity. NNPA and two other parks (Dartmoor and New Forest) had abstained. A NPPL/Palladium/Revere presentation would be made to the June Authority meeting.

- Health and Safety Training; members were thanked for attending, future training would take place annually. Online training resources to be provided to those members unable to attend.
- The Management Plan (MP) had been launched on 28 February 2023 at a very successful event, all members would receive a copy of the document in due course (which was also available online).
- Special Authority Meeting to take place on 26 April 2023; to allow the Authority to sign off on our consultation response for the Upper Coquetdale electricity line proposal.

The Chief Executive then provided a report as follows:

- Defra Supplementary Grant Funding; an additional £440,000 had been received but too late to be incorporated into the draft budget. Guy Opperman MP had offered to host NNPA in London, for a meeting to help secure longer term funding.
- Business Review; we were taking time to reflect in light of the one-off additional Defra funding and a report would be presented to the June Full Authority Meeting.
- National Parks Conference; to take place from 24th to 26th September 2024 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Newcastle with the theme of 'Landscape for Everyone'. Members would receive an outline programme.
- Levelling-up and Regeneration; key legislation was currently going through Parliament with amendments tabled to the Bill, strengthening the place of NPAs and AONBs through a stronger duty on other public bodies. If agreed this would also give NPAs a power of competence to help strengthen resilience.
- Environmental Improvement Plan; this had been launched at the beginning of February, items to note included:
 - The extension of FiPL for a further year with a 50% uplift in funding.
 - Investment in the National Landscapes Partnership, confirming funding to enable the Partnership to be established (date TBC).
 - Commitment to strengthen Management Plans through new guidance, developing a new outcomes framework and targets for protected landscapes.
 - A new Access for All programme with £7.8 million of capital funding to NPAs and AONBs over three years; NNPA were using this to deliver disability access improvements.
- North of Tyne Rural Investment Plan (RIP); funding was available (in liaison with Advance Northumberland) to support a farm business support programme, safeguarding expanding the farming team and enhancing our offer. We were beginning to pull together proposals for an area based support programme; there would be two of these in the county (one in the coastal AONB and the other focussing on the areas in the south of the park between the North and South Tyne).

Board members then raised the following questions:-

- Cllr Sue Bolam asked about the power of competence and whether it required primary legislation; the Chief Executive replied that it would.
- Ms Fiona Gough asked about the implications of Exmoor and the Norfolk Broads leaving NPE. It was noted this was regrettable and would affect the income of NPE. The Chief Executive noted that a separate non-statutory body was currently being established with three main priorities being to support NPAs and AONBs national trails.
- The Chief Executive said that disability access funding was distributed on a similar formula to the FiPL grant, i.e., over three years with a heavier monetary weighting to AONBs.
- Cllr Val Gibson was pleased to see support for hill farmers facing a challenging future; she commended the help and support received through key networks.

- Ms Liz Ellis cited strengthening powers and queried how the Chief Executive saw this happening. The Chief Executive replied that regard to duty was currently weak, with duty to further being an active requirement; if amended, this would require key stakeholders to support effective delivery of national park purposes.

NPA03-2023 Questions Received from Members of the Public

No questions were received from members of the public.

NPA04-2023 Declaration of member and officer interests

There were no declarations of member and officer interests.

NPA05-2023 Minutes of Authority Meetings held on 14 December 2022

In reply to Ms Fiona Gough's question, the Chief Executive said that, following Board meetings, a list of actions were produced and agreed by the Leadership Team.

It was **AGREED** that:-

- (a) Board Meeting actions would be shared with members, after being considered by the Leadership Team, shortly after the meeting.
- (b) In future, a list of actions would be circulated together with the Board Minutes.

The Director of Business Development noted that Apertura feedback would be issued to Board members in the near future. A member development item would be presented to the June Board.

The draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 14 December 2022 were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Cllr Denis Mullan, and it was further

RESOLVED

- (a) That the draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 14 December 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

NPA06-2023 Report 1 – Third Quarter 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:

- Ms Pippa Ross queried the operating expenditure and surplus on general repairs. The Director of Park Management replied there had actually been a high team turnover, capacity was limited and new staff were currently getting up-to-speed.
- In reply to Cllr Len Glen-Davison's query, the Director of Business Development said that earmarked funds of £28,000 had been set aside to invest in getting The Sill Cafe staffing model right. The Head

of Business Support added that capital expenditure had been invested in items such as a new coffee machine.

- Ms Marie Fallon thanked the Finance Manager for a positive report. It was **AGREED** that the terminology within the report would be reviewed, updating the gross profit wording to aid Board members' understanding.
- Cllr Denis Mullan asked whether staff pay in The Sill Café was comparable to local businesses. The Director of Business Development noted we paid approximately £2 per hour more than competitors, plus enhanced terms and conditions. The Chair asked if it was easier for us to attract staff; it was noted that there was a good strong core team currently in place, but that in keeping with the sector this was ever changing.
- Cllr Mark Mather queried whether it was financially sustainable to continue with The Sill Café operation. The Chief Executive noted that this had recently gone out to tender and an offer was being considered but stressed that the café was an integral part of the overall Sill offer.

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 Val Gibson, and agreed unanimously by all members who:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the contents of the report

NPA07-2023 Report 2 – Quarter Three Performance and SRR Update

Ben Rogers, Performance and Intelligence Officer, presented on this item.

Board members then raised the following comments:

- Ms Liz Ellis noted the evaluation of traditional farm buildings, she felt that FiPL was currently under-addressed within this project. She said there was a good involvement of volunteers, although collecting data of who was involved was weak. The Director of Business Development replied that the intention going forward was to set an Employment Disability and Inclusion (EDI) baseline, with the visitor survey being issued in a different way as a key focus.
- Ms Marie Fallon noted that FiPL had looked at farm building feasibility studies and had invested in farm buildings, however they were steering away from putting cash into buildings as this was costly. However, some feasibility work within this area would still be considered. The Director of Park Management noted the current farm building project audit, which would result in opportunities being taken forward.
- It was noted that a complete review of risk register would take place in due course in the context of the new Management Plan and Business Plan. A separate risk meeting would be held for members.
- Cllr Alan Sharp noted the traditional farm buildings project review; he would be meeting with the University of Gloucester, and it was hoped that additional funding could be obtained. He queried how to get farmers involved in FiPL, raising communication to 'close the gap'. Cllr Sharp noted the increasing challenges faced by hill farmers, and said it was important that we were representative across the whole Park. The Chief Executive noted that the first farmer test and trials meeting had been held in the north of the Park, he added that the farm business support programme through the North of Tyne would provide NNPA with another forum and opportunity to contact farmers.
- Ms Marie Fallon noted the NFU representative would be replaced on the FiPL panel.

- Ms Fiona Gough asked about net zero capacity to provide full technical analysis and considered this needed to be advanced in terms of our ability. The Director of Park Management said this was high on the agenda and we currently benefited from a proficient specialist consultancy firm. We had also obtained free advice through the North of Tyne; the results would be combined and a decision made that was right for us. A company called Amber Infrastructure would provide assistance through the grant process, delivering good sense-checking of the work delivered.
- Cllr Mark Mather noted that larger farms would have the capacity to secure future funding, although we needed to support smaller farmers. He said we should not be frightened to charge for high quality services to farmers.
- Cllr Mark Mather said that Defra had three paid positions available on their non-executive Board. He felt it was important for the Park to get people onto this Board and have our voice heard. The tight closing deadline of 19th March 2023 was noted. There were some big issues facing agriculture in the future and we needed to be on the front-foot.
- Cllr Mather noted the challenges facing farming, with rural communities facing difficult times including some asset stripping; we needed to consider how current issues fed into the Park.

[Cllr Mark Mather and Cllr Catherine Seymour were out of the room when voting took place] The Chair drew attention to the recommendations, which were proposed by Ms Liz Ellis, seconded by Mr Chris Mullin and, there being no objections, approved by members who:

RESOLVED TO

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

Cllr Mark Mather and Cllr Catherine Seymour both returned to the meeting room.

NPA08-2023 Report 3 – Business Plan 2023–2026

The Chief Executive presented the Business Plan (BP) 2023–2026 to the Board, explaining the two key considerations for Board members, which were; whether we had got the process right, and if the content was correct.

In reply, Board members provided the following feedback for the Chief Executive’s consideration:-

- Cllr Sue Bolam noted the various ambitions requiring capital funding and said it would be useful to have a discussion around this. The Chief Executive considered that we needed to focus on the areas which were realistically achievable.
- Mr Chris Mullin noted the four new gateway hub locations of; Wooler, Rothbury, Bellingham and The Sill. All would have a minimum set of facilities and require significant external investment.
- Mr Chris Mullin queried the self-generated income which looked like an ambitious target; the Chief Executive felt the set figures would be realistic to achieve.
- Ms Marie Fallon thanked the team for the report. Within the looking back section, she queried whether we include a reference to FiPL. Although the content was good, Ms Fallon suggested it would benefit logically from being set out as a table to be followed. She suggested that outcomes and activities could be shortened. Ms Fallon would be happy to look at this from an independent perspective, adding that accountability could be included within the Plan. She proposed that JLAF

could be included as access improvements were outlined. Surveys were noted, which would be regularly matched to our Business Plan.

- Ms Marie Fallon asked whether we should capture farming as a key priority and consider key risks; perhaps focusing on farmer engagement and the impact of long-term changes and it was **AGREED** that the Chief Executive would consider what this might look like. The Chief Executive said that farmers were actively engaged in groups within the NNPA and this could be added into a table to aid visibility.
- Ms Fiona Gough liked the values but said the BP would benefit from impactful measurements. She felt the document would benefit from exploring new projects and the consideration of funding viability, with intent to grow and change. She found the sections within each heading complex. For FiPL, she queried whether there was there a way of outlining what we wanted to achieve and include some outcomes. She said we needed to be on the front-foot with regards to carbon credits and green investment and should say a little more on this within the document. The Chief Executive **AGREED** to make the wording clearer to link with this element. It was also **AGREED** that access infrastructure and nature recovery vision should be included to a higher level with a link back to the bigger picture. Ms Gough asked for a strategic view to highlight the RoW network and other access routes, with opportunities for people to enter the best of the Park and help serve visitor needs. It was noted the visitor development strategy would help to develop the four gateway hubs.
- Cllr Val Gibson considered that, in measuring performance, most of the points were achievable. She was interested in the historic environment, and queried the figure set for reducing the number of scheduled monuments at risk. The Chief Executive considered the report figure as achievable.
- Ms Liz Ellis thanked the team for production of the BP. She noted that large cultural shifts were taking place and the plan had highlighted this. She said that ambition and resourcing dynamics needed to be managed well from a communication point of view, particularly with relation to farming issues. Ms Ellis noted the delicate balance between ambition and resourcing that the Park were having to achieve.
- Ms Pippa Ross mentioned outcome 1 and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), the Chief Executive said that favourable conditions and unfavourable recovery made up the baseline figures and it was **AGREED** that this would be clarified in the final document. Ms Ross said that measures of performance were important as they were where we placed our attention and resources. Rather than looking at single sites, we should be focusing on a range of sites.
- The Director of Park Management noted that an action plan to take us to net zero would be in place by 2026 and it was **AGREED** that the wording would be adapted to reflect this.
- Ms Pippa Ross queried where we wanted to include all items within a Business Plan as some matters would be things we would be doing anyway (Business as Usual), some matters being more operational rather than strategic. It was **AGREED** that the Chief Executive would look at this and set out in table format.
- Cllr Catherine Seymour praised the plan and said it was good to get extra Defra funding to allow us to invest in its delivery. She queried whether we could do some borrowing and consider other funding sources; the Chief Executive noted we were currently considering appropriate measures where we could.

Cllr Eileen Cartie left the room.

- Cllr Mark Purvis asked about staff surveys; it was noted that they were carried out every two years and it was **AGREED** that the most current staff survey results would be issued to Cllr Purvis. The Chair noted the high level of engagement and positive results which were ahead of other organisations similar to the Park.

Cllr Eileen Cartie re-joined the meeting.

- The high level of member engagement was noted and commended.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his report, she then thanked members for their input in this discussion and drew attention to the recommendation, proposed by Cllr Denis Mullan and seconded by Ms Liz Ellis, and it was:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Agree the content of the new Business Plan 2023 - 2026 as detailed in Appendix 1, subject to the comments received. An updated version would be updated in due course, with members given the opportunity to provide a final comment.

A further recommendation, as proposed by Ms Pippa Ross and seconded by Cllr Val Gibson, was approved and it was:

RESOLVED TO

- (b) Agree to hold a separate meeting of the Authority to set the risk appetite and inform the Strategic Risk Register for the Authority.

NPA09-2023 Report 4 – Medium Term Budget Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26

Hazel Fitzsimmons (Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer)) provided a report on the medium term budget plan for 2023/24 to 2025/26. Members then made the following points:

- Cllr Andy Saunders and Cllr Denis Mullan noted that the Finance and Audit Committee had spent two hours looking at the budget and were happy with the numbers, having given the papers a high level of scrutiny. Ms Pippa Ross thanked the Finance and Audit Committee for their sterling work.
- The Chair commended the fact that we had two Chartered Accountants on the Finance and Audit Committee; she also thanked the Head of Business Support for producing the report.
- Mr Chris Mullin queried where the extra revenue would come from. In reply, the Head of Business Support noted tables 4 and 5, plus income generation from The Sill (table 7), which provided evidence of the projected budget and she considered this was a reasonable assumption to make.
- Cllr Alan Sharp said that the RoW contribution needed to be met by NCC funds, other assumptions were showing an optimism that we would receive key areas of funding sources (although they were not a given).

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

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Approve the Budget Plan for the three years 2023/24 to 2025/26 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.

NPA10-2023 Urgent Business

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 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.

Cllr Alan Sharp proposed the resolution, seconded by Ms Pippa Ross, 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 12.28pm, 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 12.35pm.

Approved:

Date: