

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE FULL AUTHORITY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS
Live Streamed
Wednesday 21 June 2023, from 10.30am – 2.00pm

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)(part of the meeting)	Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)
Ms Liz Ellis (SoS National)	Cllr Mark Purvis (NCC)
Ms Marie Fallon (SoS National)	Cllr John Riddle (NCC)
Cllr Val Gibson (SoS Parish)	Ms Pippa Ross (SoS National)
Cllr Len Glen-Davison (SoS Parish)	Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)
Ms Fiona Gough (SoS National)	Cllr Catherine Seymour (NCC)
Cllr Mark Mather (NCC)	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)); Ben Rogers (Performance and Intelligence Officer); Mary Wallace (HR Officer); Jayne Longlands (Corporate Support Officer); Adam Chaffer (Independent Member); Tom Jenkins (Legal Adviser).

The Chief Executive welcomed everyone to the meeting.

NPA17-2023 Apologies for Absence

None received.

NPA18-2023 Election of Chair for Northumberland National Park Authority

The Legal Adviser presided over the election of the Chair; he confirmed that one nomination for the role of Chair had been received, for Ms Jean Davidson, as nominated by several members. The Legal Adviser asked if there were any further nominations for the position of Chair. There being no further nominations, **Ms Jean Davidson** was nominated by Cllr Denis Mullan, seconded by Cllr Catherine Seymour, and unanimously elected as Chair of Northumberland National Park Authority from 21 June 2023 until the date of the 2024 Authority Annual Meeting.

The Chair thanked members for voting her into the role of Chair.

NPA19-2023 Election of Deputy Chair for Northumberland National Park Authority

The Legal Adviser reported that one nomination had been received for the role of Deputy Chair, for Cllr Denis Mullan, as nominated by several members. He asked if there were any further nominations for the position of Deputy Chair. There being no further nominations, **Cllr Denis Mullan** was nominated by Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, seconded by Cllr Len Glen-Davison and unanimously elected as Deputy Chair of

Northumberland National Park Authority from 21 June 2023 until the date of the 2024 Authority Annual Meeting.

Ms Davidson was invited to take the Chair for the rest of the Meeting.

NPA20-2023 Chair's Introduction

The Chair welcomed Mr Adam Chaffer, newly elected Independent Member, who then introduced himself to the Board. As a Solicitor, Mr Chaffer explained that he specialises in the Litigation of Property and Building Disputes. He looked forward to working with NNPA in the future.

The Chair was sad to note the recent bereavement of Cllr Anthony Murray from Wooler, one of the Authority's longest serving members. At Cllr Murray's funeral, held on 8th June, the Authority had been delighted to afford him a guard of honour outside St Mary's Church in Wooler. As a mark of respect and, to recognise the great esteem that Cllr Murray was held within by this Authority, a minute's silence was then observed by the Board.

Following the minute's silence, the Chair noted that this would be the last AGM for both herself and Ms Fiona Gough, as their SoS period of membership would end during 2024.

The Chair then provided the following updates:-

National Parks England (NPE)

- NPE held its AGM on 8th June and both the Chair and Chief Executive had attended this virtually. Neil Heseltine, Chair of YDNPA and a local farmer, was elected as Chair, and Vanessa Rowland, Chair of South Downs NPA, as Deputy Chair.
- NPE had conducted a review of its priorities and structure going forward. This would see an influencing focus on behalf of English NPAs, with a view to enhancing policy and funding support from government and others.
- A new Executive Director was currently being recruited; they would assume the single leadership of NPE, answering to the NPE Chair and Board. The role of Lead NPO (which saw each NPA give its CEO a second job for a year) had been removed.
- It was noted that our subscription remained the same.
- The Chair had been invited, along with other English Chairs, to meet The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, SoS, that same day but was unable to attend. An update on the purpose of exploring the Landscapes Review (the subject matter of the meeting) would be provided in due course.
- Work continued behind the scenes on the development and launch of the proposed Protected Landscapes Partnership, which was one of the Landscapes Review recommendations. A co-coordinator had already been recruited and was being hosted by Natural England. Plans were developing for the appointment of a Chair and an EDI Champion for the Partnership whose three priorities were; Green Finance (NPPL), Nature Recovery, and EDI. The Chief Executive and Director of Business Development were actively helping shape and inform EDI proposals.

UK

- A review of the UK Communication Unit has been completed resulting in a new single unit being agreed. This would provide marketing comms for all UK parks, policy comms for NPE and partner and campaign comms for National Park Partnerships. This review had resulted in no additional net cost to the NPAs.

- At a recent Chair Forum, Chairs received a report on the successful new member national induction training held at The Sill last October. Members were very grateful and expressed thanks to Northumberland. We would run the second event this year and thereafter we expect future training years to be tendered across the 15 UK Parks. We would of course bid to run the course in future. Members and staff were thanked for delivering this excellent programme.
- UK Chairs also received an update on plans for the 2024 UK Conference hosted by NNPA in Newcastle. The outline programme, which members were due to receive, was welcomed and all 15 UK Parks had confirmed that they would book at least four places, giving us our first 60 attendees.

It was noted that NNPA still needed to agree their NPPL subscription for the current year from April 2023. A paper would be received for consideration at the September Full Authority Meeting.

In response to Ms Fiona Gough's question, the Chief Executive said that one of the key recommendations of the Landscapes Review was to get protected landscapes, NNPA's and AONBs working together, and this had now been expanded to include National Trails. As a group, they would be working within the Environmental and Improvement Plan, with the Government intention being to establish a Protected Landscapes Partnership (PLP). A PLP Coordinator post (hosted by Natural England) had been appointed; there were also plans to recruit a Chair and EDI Champion. A formal launch of the PLP would take place in due course.

Cllr John Riddle said he hoped NNPA would meet and engage with The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP. He noted that uplands payments were now being increased in-line with lowland payments, and therefore the government was now recognising the value of moorlands.

NPA21-2023 Questions Received from Members of the Public

No questions were received from members of the public.

NPA22-2023 Declaration of member and officer interests

There were no declarations of member and officer interests.

NPA23-2023 Minutes of Authority Meeting held on 15 March 2023

Ms Gough asked if the Board Minutes could be issued soon after future meetings; it was **AGREED** that, subject to the Chair and Chief Executive having sufficient capacity, minutes could be circulated sooner.

In reply to Ms Pippa Ross's query the Chair confirmed that relevant online Health and Safety Training had taken place.

Ms Marie Fallon queried the action regarding the process and timescale for the approval of the Authority Business Plan. The Chief Executive said he hoped that this strategic document would be signed off and issued to Board members by the end of June 2023, although it was noted this would be subject to staff availability.

Subject to Board member comments, the draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 15 March 2023 were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Ms Fiona Gough, and it was further

RESOLVED

- (a) That the draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 15 March 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

NPA24-2023 Minutes of Authority Meeting held on 26 April 2023

The draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 26 April 2023 were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, seconded by Ms Pippa Ross, and it was further

RESOLVED

- (a) That the draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 26 April 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

NPA25-2023 Report 1 – Chair’s Annual Report 2022/23

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

Ms Marie Fallon queried the figures for her attendance at Board Meetings during the year; it was noted that this matter to be raised directly with Corporate Support after the meeting.

Subject to Ms Marie Fallon’s query, the Chair drew attention to the recommendations (a) and (b) proposed by Cllr Mark Mather and seconded by Ms Pippa Ross 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 publication of information on members’ attendances and allowances, set out in Tables 1, 2 and 3 of Appendix 1 to this report, on the Authority’s website, and in relevant performance reports as part of the Authority’s accounts.

NPA26-2023 Report 2 – Chief Executive’s Performance Review 2022/23

The Chief Executive recapped on his written report which included four key recommendations within the following areas of work; delivery of work programme, budget outturn, delivery of OD Strategy, and Health and Safety. He thanked staff, members and volunteers for their contributions and achievements throughout the year, and summarised on a promising future, with many projects either taking or due to take place.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Ms Pippa Ross asked for further information on the internal health and safety audit; it was noted that this would be available on request.
- Ms Liz Ellis said members would wish to praise staff for the quality of their achievements in the context of a difficult and challenging climate, to which the Chair endorsed this comment and requested that it be minuted.

- Ms Fiona Gough hoped we could work towards the new Business Plan as soon as possible. She also noted Appendix 1 but queried; what did it mean, what was good and why were there issues in some areas? She suggested that this information could be annually scrutinised by members.
- Cllr Denis Mullan noted Appendix 2, which provided useful, succinct and valuable information.
- Mr Chris Mullin noticed that staff sickness had doubled. The Chief Executive explained there had been increased long-term sickness, and NNPA were also better at addressing presenteeism. It was noted that figures were well below the private sector as well as other government organisations, and the Park would continue to closely monitor any changes.
- Ms Pippa Ross queried the contents of Table B around the percentage of land in favourable and unfavourable but recovering conditions and the large shift changes to these figures. In response, the Performance and Intelligence Officer noted this could potentially represent 10-years' worth of landscape change (with some data being updated sporadically by external bodies, such as in the case of a wildfire). It was noted that the Park's Ecologist, who regularly consulted with Natural England, would be able to provide a full report if required.
- The Chief Executive said there was no risk involved with the Cheviot Hills Heritage Project as this was an ambition within the Business Plan. He added that £1.2 million of traditional farm buildings work had been delivered and it was likely that more would be taking place in the future. Heritage at risk was a key priority for the Park; the Chief Executive noted a dedicated focus would be considered to address this in the future.
- Ms Marie Fallon pointed to Appendix 2 and asked whether we had underplayed the risk and performance with regards to climate change. The Chief Executive explained that we had performed well within NNPA's limited resources; he added that there were changing landscapes and targets in the external environment – if we would not be Net Zero by 2030 then we needed to be honest and realistic about this.

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 Mr Chris Mullin and, there being no objections or abstentions approved by members who

RESOLVED TO

- Note the achievement of the Forward Work Programme to 31 March 2023 as set out at Appendix 1 to Report 2;
- Note the budget outturn for the year as set out at Appendix 2 to Report 2;
- Note the performance in the delivery of the Authority's Organisational Development Strategy; and
- Note the Authority's performance in relation to Health and Safety during the past year.

NPA27-2023 Report 3 – Annual Assurance Framework

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

Ms Marie Fallon requested a copy of the climate change internal audit report, and it was **AGREED** that the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) would provide this document.

There being no other issues raised, recommendations (a) to (e); proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Ms Fiona Gough 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 2022/23 as at Appendix 2.
- (d) Approve the internal audit strategic plan 2023/24– 2025/26 as at Appendix 3.
- (e) Approve the Authority Review Group work programme for 2023/25 as at Appendix 4

NPA28-2023 Report 4 – Appointments to all Committees and Groups

Appendix 1 outlined nominations to committees and other roles, the Chief Executive noted that we were not members of the LGA and explained this item would be removed from the original list. The following voting, elections and appointments then ensued:-

DMC

With ten members expressing an interest in becoming a DMC member, Cllr Catherine Seymour then opted to withdraw her nomination. Following this action, the following nine members were then unanimously duly elected to this committee; Ms Marie Fallon, Mr Chris Mullin, Cllr Sue Bolam, Cllr Mark Mather, Cllr Val Gibson, Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, Cllr John Riddle, Cllr Len Glen-Davison and Cllr Alan Sharp.

Authority Review

It was noted that all members were welcome to attend Authority Review Meetings.

Expressions of interest and nominations had been received from Ms Liz Ellis, Ms Fiona Gough, Cllr Alan Sharp, Ms Marie Fallon, Cllr Val Gibson, Cllr Andy Saunders, Mr Chris Mullin, Ms Pippa Ross, Cllr Denis Mullan, Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell 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. It was **AGREED** that the proposal, to formally amend the membership number of this group to be 'up to 11 members', be brought back to the Board as a future recommendation.

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

Cllr Andy Saunders noted that all members were welcome to attend Finance and Audit Group Meetings.

After some debate, it was **AGREED** that, whilst the current Terms of Reference for the Finance and Audit Group would remain the same, member representation groups should be recorded within the member lists.

Cllr Denis Mullan noted that both the Chair and Ms Fiona Gough would be leaving the Finance and Audit Group later in the year; he encouraged other members to think about joining the group.

Expressions of interest had been received from Ms Fiona Gough, Cllr Alan Sharp, Cllr Mark Purvis, Cllr Sue Bolam, Cllr Andy Saunders and Cllr 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 National Parks 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
FiPL Member	Ms Marie Fallon

Campaign for National Parks	Mr Chris Mullin
Northumberland National Park and County JLAF (2 members but only 1 voting place)	Ms Fiona Gough and Ms Marie Fallon
Harden Quarry Liaison Committee	Cllr Len Glen-Davison

Cllr Sue Bolam noted that, historically, a NNPA Officer attended the Harden Quarry Liaison Committee Meetings; it was **AGREED** that we ensure Officers are kept informed about future developments (either in person or via paper distribution).

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 there was one DMC Deputy Chair nomination received for Mr Chris Mullin. There being no further nominations Mr Chris Mullin was duly elected, 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.

The Chief Executive announced the completion of all appointments.

Live streaming was paused at 11.50am for a comfort break and recommenced at 12.00pm

NPA29-2023 Report 5 – Medium Term Budget Update

The 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:

- Ms Marie Fallon noted the earmarked reserves in terms of cabinet change and queried where we had a flat fee when we knew the risk was increasing; she felt we needed to monitor this and include a caveat that we may need to reassess the reserve allocation in future. The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer) confirmed that funding would be available for projects. The Chief Executive said he would produce a future paper to cover resources, investments and climate change, and consider what the future looked like from a fresh perspective. The Director of Business Development confirmed that positive conversations with future funders continued.
- Cllr John Riddle queried whether we had an indication of forthcoming Defra funding as it would be useful in assisting with future planning. The Chief Executive said we awaited news, although it looked probable it would be a flat-cash settlement. The Chair confirmed that, as soon as we had a funding update, we would update members.

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

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Approve the carry forwards as detailed in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3;
- (b) Note the transfers to earmarked reserves as detailed in Table 4;
- (c) Endorse the delegated decision to release £25,000 of reserves to the development of the Walltown Wider Horizons project detailed at Section 4, paragraph i;
- (d) Approve the proposal for the allocation of excess funds into the Medium-Term Budget Plan 2023/24 – 2025/26 at Section 4, paragraphs l to n; and
- (e) Approve the treasury management strategy as detailed in Section 7 and 8 of the report.

NPA30-2023 Report 6 – Strategic Risk Register (SRR)

The Chief Executive presented on this item; he explained that a PESTLE analysis had been conducted to consider our priorities and associated risks. He said that the nine established risks were changeable, in line with our developing and constantly changing external environment and noted that the SRR was monitored regularly by the Leadership Team, as well as the Finance and Audit Group. The Performance and Intelligence Officer then visually displayed the dynamic nature of the SRR, with various spreadsheet tabs involved in compiling this multifaceted document, including a red, amber and green ‘traffic-light’ monitoring system.

Following the SRR presentation, discussions ensued as follows:

- Ms Marie Fallon asked about climate change and the significant challenges being faced by the organisation, she felt we needed to stand back and spend quality time to review and understand the reality. She added that strategic thinking was required; perhaps we may need to do something radical with our assets - such as selling them. Ms Fallon considered this provided us with an opportunity to make some good decisions about the future and look at whether we would be able to realise our ambitions. The Chief Executive said that this action would be planned into work programmes for the following year; we needed to consider what resources were required, as well as

ensure we completed the loop - reviewing collated data and doing something with it to add value within this workflow.

There being no other issues raised, recommendations (a) and (b) were proposed by Ms Pippa Ross, seconded by Liz Ellis and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the process for developing the new Strategic Risk Register (SRR); and
- (b) Approve the Strategic Risk register and framework for categorising and reporting on strategic risks as they relate to the delivery of the Business Plan 2023 - 2026.

NPA31-2023 Report 7 – Organisational Development Strategy (ODS)

The Director of Business Development introduced the principles of the ODS and highlighted key focus areas within its production. The HR Officer then reported on this circulated evolving document which provided a model by which the Park could deliver their goals. Ms Wallace noted a large focus on EDI; reaching out proactively to under-represented groups as part of a reciprocal two-way process. Other emphasis areas included; development opportunities and career pathways, hybrid and agile working, as well as staff wellbeing.

Members commented as follows:

- Ms Fiona Gough raised the following points; she appreciated the inclusion of volunteers and members although queried the consistency of the wording throughout the document, she asked about the difference between values and living values. Ms Gough said volunteers wanted to be valued for the contribution they gave and noted wording which should be updated to read 'contribution' of volunteers. She added that the phrasing of 'new people fitting in' should be revised. In response, the Director of Business Development reported on the value of the volunteer opportunities the Park provided (as well as the opportunities that volunteers brought) which were important and valued, in particular those associated with wellbeing benefits.
- Ms Marie Fallon said she felt like the document appeared as a list and would like to understand; 'how will we know when we've got there?' The HR Officer confirmed there was a tracker available, which would evidence progress achieved and provide a valuable Appendix to the main report. The Chief Executive noted that regular staff surveys provided data information, enabling the Park to monitor key trends; he suggested use of an organisational dashboard would be a good means to evidence statistics. The Chair added that member and volunteer information could be added.
- Ms Liz Ellis queried whether there were there any critical friends or allies who were producing similar strategies well from which we could learn; the HR Officer confirmed she was currently looking into this. The Director of Business Development added that we had learnt a lot from our links with the New to Nature Partnership, such as obtaining video footage instead of a CV as part of their recruitment process.

There being no other issues raised, recommendation (a) was proposed by Cllr John Riddle, seconded by Ms Liz Ellis and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

RESOLVED TO

- (a) Approve the Organisational Development Strategy, which is an appendix to the paper, incorporating edits as suggested by members.

The Chair said it was the Director of Business Development's last NNPA Board Meeting. The Chair thanked Rosie Thomas for the help and support she had provided over the previous years; the Chief Executive added that the Director of Business Development had gone over and above the level of work that was expected of her and said he would miss her greatly. The Director of Business Development then thanked everyone for all their assistance over her period of employment within the Park.

NPA32-2023 Report 8 - Actions

It was noted that this item had been discussed earlier at the meeting.

NPA33-2023 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 NPA36-2023 and NPA37-2023 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 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.

Part One of the meeting ended and live streaming stopped at 12.54pm, 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 2.00pm