

## NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE FULL AUTHORITY MEETING

Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS

Live Streamed

Wednesday 13 September 2023, from 10.45am to 12.12pm

#### Present:

Ms Jean Davidson (SoS National)  
Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)  
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)

Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell (SoS Parish)  
Cllr Denis Mullan (SoS Parish)  
Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)  
Cllr Mark Purvis (NCC)  
Cllr John Riddle (NCC)  
Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)  
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); Jayne Longlands (Corporate Support Officer).

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, apologising for the slight delay in starting the meeting.

#### **NPA38-2023 Apologies for Absence**

Received from; Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC), Ms Pippa Ross (SoS National), Cllr Catherine Seymour (NCC) and Adam Chaffer (Independent Member).

#### **NPA39-2023 Chair and Chief Executive's Introduction**

The Chair provided an update on the following items:-

##### **National Parks England (NPE)**

- Paul Hamblin, former Executive Director for NPE, had sadly passed away; our sympathies were conveyed to Paul's family.
- NPE had appointed a new Executive Director, Jayne Butler. NPE has taken the decision to close their London Office; future meetings would take place either online or at different Parks throughout the country.
- The briefing of MPs ahead of party policy drafting and party conferences had continued during the Summer.
- The NPE Chair and Deputy Chair had written an open letter (jointly with the Campaign for National Parks) to The Times earlier that week on the Levelling-up Bill. The Chair was happy to share the content of this letter on request.

##### **UK National Parks Collaboration**

- An upcoming meeting of UK Chairs would be taking place in Kendal, Cumbria.
- All Parks had been briefed on the 2024 NPUK Conference being hosted by NNPA. This had been met positively with all agreeing to take up their four allocated places.
- The next National Members' Induction would take place at The Sill on 8th and 9th November 2023.

#### **National Parks Partnership Limited (NPPL)**

- We would bring an update on NPPL progress and the 2023/24 subscription to the next Full Authority Meeting in December 2023.

The Chief Executive informed members of the following developments:-

- **Future Forestry Consultations;** a note had been circulated to members earlier that week on proposals to change longstanding arrangements.
- **Business Review;** this document had now been fully implemented.
- **North of Tyne Rural Investment Plan;** a joint bid with NCC had been submitted and approved by North of Tyne Combined Authority. We can bid to take forward some of the early capital investment projects and would need to work quickly as final bids were due for submission to NCC by the end of November 2023. We had bid for; improvements at Walltown and Hareshaw Linn, the Green Pathways to Employment scheme, and the Healthy People Healthy Park initiative. This would result in capital and revenue funding over the next two years.
- **National Lottery Community Fund: Northumberland National Park Carbon Sync;** an expression of interest had been submitted in July with a six-week turnaround for a £1.5m bid. We hoped to hear about stage one approval within the next couple of weeks.

#### **NPA40-2023 Questions Received from Members of the Public**

No questions were received from members of the public.

#### **NPA41-2023 Declaration of member and officer interests**

There were no declarations of member and officer interests.

#### **NPA42-2023 Minutes of Authority Meetings held on 21 June 2023**

In response to Ms Fiona Gough's query, it was noted that the proposed meeting with The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP did not take place.

The Director of Business Development **AGREED** to circulate a final copy of the Organisational Development Strategy to members.

The draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 21 June 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 21 June 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

### **NPA43-2023 Report 1 – Annual Accounts and Audit Report 2022/23**

Mr Rob Young, Audit Partner from Ernst & Young LLP, and the Finance Manager were both in attendance to present on this item; each drawing attention to the various elements within their respective reports.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Ms Marie Fallon appreciated the fact that the Authority was in a positive financial position and thanked the team. It was **AGREED** that reference to the word Chairman be adjusted to that of Chair within the circulated report as previously agreed by the Authority for all such references. Ms Marie Fallon queried what the numbers on the mortality assumption table of note 19 represented; Cllr Denis Mullan noted this related to the number of years that males and females were expected to live after retirement. Ms Marie Fallon questioned the Multi Asset Credit category in the asset allocation table of note 19, the Audit Partner said that they refer to a combination of asset classes (such as cash, equity or bonds). Ms Fallon also queried what the pensions funds were held in and the investment strategy, and it was **AGREED** that the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, would circulate the information strategy to Ms Fallon.
- Cllr Len Glen-Davison queried the figure of £105,000 on page 4; the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, noted that we provided a financial contribution to The Sill, supporting this facility to achieve a breakeven position. Cllr Len Glen-Davison also queried The Sill valuation; the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, said the cited figure was the value to the Authority of the building in use, which was the required methodology for the accounts.
- Cllr Denis Mullan suggested that 25 years was too short a lifespan for a building such as The Sill and queried why it needed an annual valuation. The Audit Partner replied that, due to the value of this facility, this was required as part of the accounts process.
- Ms Liz Ellis queried Ernst & Young LLP fees on page 31 of Appendix 2 and asked for clarification. The Audit Partner said that a summary of the costs had been submitted to PSAA, who would make a judgement on which ones should be recovered. The aim was to achieve the final figure by the end of March 2024.

The Audit Partner passed on his thanks to the Finance Team, noting they should be commended for their production of the accounts.

The Chair thanked both the Audit Partner and the Finance Team for their work. She then drew attention to the recommendations, subject to the amendments noted, (a) to (c) proposed by Cllr Denis Mullan and seconded by Mr Chris Mullin and it was

### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Note the Draft Statement of Accounts 2022/23 (Appendix 1 to Report 1);

- (b) Delegate responsibility to the Chairman and Chief Executive (National Park Officer) in consultation with the Chair of the Finance and Audit Group to approve and sign off the final accounts for issue upon receipt of the final audit report; and
- (c) Endorse the findings in the Draft Audit Results Report for the year ended 31 March 2023 from Ernst & Young LLP (Appendix 2 to Report 1).

#### **NPA44-2023 Report 2 – First Quarter Financial Performance and Medium-Term Budget Update**

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

Cllr Len Glen-Davison queried the financial variances; the Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, replied that there were no areas of concern and said that discrepancies sometimes arose because of timing differences.

The Chair drew attention to the recommendations proposed by Ms Marie Fallon, seconded by Ms Liz Ellis and, there being no objections or abstentions approved by members who

#### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Note the contents of the report.

#### **NPA45-2023 Report 3 – First Quarter Performance and Strategic Risk Register Update**

The Performance and Intelligence Officer provided a summary of his report.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Within the thriving communities' section, Cllr Sue Bolam noted the significant reduction in number of households and said she would like to understand the reason for this decrease. The Chief Executive said it may be due to a variety of reasons such as; vacant accommodation, the rate of census returns, or houses turned into holiday accommodation. Cllr Andy Saunders suggested, if it was due to the latter reason, then this may become an issue for the Park.
- Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell queried what failure to progress work programmes due to stakeholder polarisation meant. The Chief Executive noted that a great deal of our work was in partnership with others who had control over their own resources and priorities. If there were competing priorities this could impact on delivery.
- Ms Liz Ellis said she would like to see the evaluation of the traditional farm building information. It was **AGREED** that these findings would be circulated to members when available.
- Cllr John Riddle noted the potential business opportunity for income generation through the assessment of peatland restoration on moorlands and suggested that NNPA may be able to offer this service to landowners. Ms Marie Fallon said that FiPL were focusing on this area of work together with farmers, having achieved some great results and evidence, and there was scope to enhance and develop this service further.

- Cllr John Riddle queried potential limitations regarding the figure relating to eight new houses per year, and it was **AGREED** that this be updated to include the terminology of 'at least' eight new houses per year, whilst referring to this being identified in the Local Plan.
- Ms Marie Fallon said that she had met with the Director of Park Management earlier that week to review carbon targets as an Authority and look at how we manage that risk.
- As suggested by Ms Fiona Gough, it was **AGREED** that a report on progress of the Visitor Development Strategy be obtained from Duncan Wise, to be circulated ahead of the next Authority Meeting. It was noted that looking to the future was important rather than focussing on the past.

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

#### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Note the delivery of the Authority Work Programme.
- (b) Note the status of the Strategic Risk Register.

#### **NPA46-2023 Report 4 – Business Plan 2023 - 2026**

The Director of Business Development provided a summary of her report.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Ms Fiona Gough said she liked the SMART outcomes; however, she queried the following items:-
  - She wondered about our work in the future, work as a National Park family, the learning that goes on at officer level, the collaboration at Board level, influencing and communications nationally, and suggested there should be a marker for this work. It was **AGREED** that this be included as part of the narrative, as an area that staff would be working towards.
  - Page 7; Ms Gough queried whether the tone was correct within the first section of this page, as the wording used implied it would be something done to landowners.
  - Page 10; Ms Gough queried the figure of 27,000 participants, asking whether this figure was per annum or the total; it was **AGREED** that the Director of Business Development would check and clarify this number.
  - Page 13; we needed to include reference to volunteers and keep this wording consistent throughout the document; this action was duly **AGREED**.
  - Page 11; Ms Gough felt there was some ambiguity and queried whether we were providing the National Landscape Discovery narrative. She also asked if we were telling the story of the National Park (NP) or the National Park Authority (NPA). The Director of Business Development confirmed that we wanted to tell the story of the work of both the NP and NPA, as well as that of The Sill. It was **AGREED** that the narrative would be made clearer to clarify our aspirations and intent.
- Cllr Sue Bolam asked about woodlands and the coniferous element of having 2,500 acres restructured; she queried how counting would be implemented following the event of Storm Arwen. The Chief Executive noted that the strategy and figures had been agreed with with the

Forestry Commission prior to putting this into the Management Plan; we had specific woods in mind and our intent was to look at restructuring parts of forestry within the Park.

- Cllr Sue Bolam was keen for NNPA to progress with the development of the visitor development strategy and hubs; it was **AGREED** that a thorough update be provided at the December 2023 Full Authority Meeting. This would demonstrate how funding bids were aligned and how infrastructure would be put in place.
- Cllr John Riddle noted page 11, with The Sill having exceeded expectations as a visitor centre, however, he considered that landscape and archaeology were the more important points of interest to members of the public. He considered we should keep our main display area fresh and invest in this.

Subject to the noted minor amendments, the recommendation was proposed by Ms Liz Ellis, seconded by Cllr John Riddle and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

#### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Adopt the new Business Plan 2023 - 2026 as detailed in Appendix 1.

#### **NPA47-2023 Report 5 – Scheme of Delegation Amendments**

The Director of Business Development provided a report on the Scheme of Delegation Amendments.

Recommendations (a) and (b) were proposed by Mr Chris Mullin, seconded by Cllr Andy Saunders and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

#### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Approve the increase of the membership of the Authority Review Group from 10 to 'up to 11 members' and the resulting update to the Terms of Reference of the Review Group as set out at Appendix 1 to this report; and
- (b) Note the update to the Terms of Reference of the Chief Executive and Directors Performance Review Committee, following the decision taken at the June 2023 Annual General Meeting.

#### **NPA48-2023 Report 6 – Authority Review Meeting - FiPL**

The Chief Executive presented on this item.

There being no issues raised, recommendations (a) to (c) were proposed by Cllr Val Gibson, seconded by Cllr Alan Sharp and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

#### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Note the Review findings/recommendations of the FiPL Authority Review meeting held 15 February 2023.
- (b) Consider the responses of the Leadership Team and actions proposed or currently underway.
- (c) Endorse the actions as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

## **NPA49-2023 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 NPA50-2023, NPA51-2023 and NPA52-2023 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 Denis Mullan proposed the resolution, seconded by Cllr Andy Saunders, 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.**

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| <p><b>Part One of the meeting ended and live streaming stopped at 12.09pm, which concluded the agenda. Members of the press and public left the meeting, Part Two then followed.</b></p> |
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The Full Authority Meeting, including Part Two, ended at 12.12pm