

## NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE FULL AUTHORITY MEETING

Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS

Live Streamed

Wednesday 13 December 2023, from 10.36am to 1.03pm

#### Present:

Cllr Denis Mullan (SoS Parish) (Meeting Chair)

Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)

Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC)

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)

Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)

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

Cllr John Riddle (NCC) (part of the meeting)

Ms Pippa Ross (SoS National)

Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)

Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)

#### In Attendance

Tony Gates (Chief Executive (National Park Officer)); Hazel Fitzsimmons (Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, (S151 Officer)); Robert Mayhew (Head of Conservation & Environment); Ben Rogers (Performance and Intelligence Officer); Mary Wallace (HR Officer); Jayne Longlands (Corporate Support Officer).

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

#### **NPA53-2023 Apologies for Absence**

Received from; Ms Jean Davidson (SoS National), Cllr Catherine Seymour (NCC), Rosie Thomas (Director of Business Development), Pauline Wall (Director of Park Management).

#### **NPA54-2023 Chair and Chief Executive's Introduction**

The Chair provided an update on the following items:-

- Cllr Denis Mullan (Vice Chair) noted that he would be Chairing the meeting in Ms Jean Davidson's absence.
- Condolences were conveyed to Ms Pippa Ross following the bereavement of her husband, Pete.
- There had been a government announcement on Protected Landscapes earlier that month; the Chief Executive had issued a summary to members. Key points had included the formal response to the Landscapes Review, with £10m extra funding awarded to NPAs for next year as a one-off payment. The government were not taking forward the idea of skills for Local Authority members but had committed to skills audits for NPAs; which NNPA had already agreed to.
- The process on SoS appointments for Ms Fiona Gough and Ms Jean Davidson's replacements would commence soon; it was noted that Ms Gough's term of office would finish on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 and Ms Davidson's on 9th June 2024. Extensions had been requested into the second term for both Ms Liz Ellis and Ms Marie Fallon.
- The Member's Away Day held at Walltown had been a valuable day out in the Park.

- There had been ministerial changes within Defra; the new SoS was Steve Barclay MP and the new National Parks Minister was Rebecca Pow MP.
- The Performance and Intelligence Officer would be making his last presentation at the meeting; the Chair thanked him for his work and wished him well for the future.
- The Chair had attended a NPE Meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023. Ms Jayne Butler (who is Newcastle based) had been appointed as the new Executive Director.

The Chief Executive noted that, due to personal prior commitments, unfortunately both Directors were unable to attend the meeting. He then reported as follows:-

### **National**

- NNPA had now received £60K from BMW; these monies would be used to employ two seasonal rangers starting in March 2024.
- The Annual Defra meeting went well, with both challenges and opportunities having been highlighted.

### **Regional/Local**

- RAMP bids had been submitted to the North of Tyne Combined Authority on 4th December 2023 - for Walltown, Hareshaw Linn and Green Pathways to Employment, Healthy People/Healthy Park (focusing on outreach and engagement, volunteers, barriers to inclusion, and research). The total value was £1m, with an alternative extended bid option of up to £2m. An outcome decision was expected in early January 2024.

CLlr John Riddle joined the meeting at 10.45am.

- Landscape Recovery Pilot: HWRN had been successful in securing £650k. We were currently briefing partners and landowners (no offer letter had been received at that stage).
- The Northumberland International Dark Sky Park tenth anniversary had taken place at The Sill on Friday 8th December with 50 people having attended.
- NNPA had received two nominations at this year's Tourism Awards, one of which was for Duncan Wise for his Dark Skies work, the other for accessibility for The Sill.
- Sycamore Gap; partnership working with National Trust and other key partners continued, and an all staff day was held there recently. Public engagement would take place in the new year.
- The Farm Business Support Programme had now started.
- FiPL monies were fully committed for 2023 and also into early 2024; the Chief Executive thanked the FiPL panel for their hard work.
- 10 years of Hadrian's Wall National Trail (HWNT) had been celebrated with some money from National Grid invested in the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI); this was being used to repair trail damage.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Ms Marie Fallon asked for an update on National Lottery Community Fund applications; the Chief Executive noted this had been unsuccessful.
- Mr Chris Mullin asked about the responsibility for signage on HWNT. The Chief Executive said we worked with Historic England and there was still interpretation to be done at different points along the Wall.

- Ms Fiona Gough sought clarity about the Defra monies announced in late November 2023 and asked whether NNPA would be a beneficiary. The Chief Executive had received no further clarity at that point although there was an expectation that NNPA would acquire some of the £10m funding. With regards to the £5m for water enhancement, further details on how to apply and eligibility were awaited.

#### **NPA55-2023      Questions Received from Members of the Public**

No questions were received from members of the public.

#### **NPA56-2023      Declaration of member and officer interests**

There were no declarations of member and officer interests.

#### **NPA57-2023      Minutes of Authority Meeting held on 13 September 2023**

The draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2023 were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Andy Saunders, seconded by Ms Marie Fallon, and it was further:

#### **RESOLVED**

- (a) That the draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

Ms Marie Fallon noted the historic building grant for FiPL work; there were two schemes which were being administered nationally, both of which would take a while to agree and finalise.

#### **NPA58-2023      Report 1 – Half Year Financial Update**

The Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer, provided a summary of her report. The Chair said the Finance and Audit Group had met on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 and were satisfied with the current financial situation.

Members raised the following questions:-

- Ms Pippa Ross queried changes to visitor spending habits. The Head of Business Support noted a lower spend per head with people now buying more practical things, and the Chair added that people were spending more in the cafe rather than the shop. The Chief Executive said there was currently no direct selling link between the exhibition and shop, and this would normally promote a higher spend; although this situation changed with different exhibitions.
- Cllr John Riddle noted a pleasing report. In response to his query, it was noted that a two-year energy contract had been agreed.
- Cllr Riddle queried whether we were promoting Northumberland and selling local produce. The Chief Executive said that approximately 85% of product ranges were sourced from our region and this was NNPA's default position.

The Chair drew attention to the recommendation proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Mr Chris Mullin and, there being no objections or abstentions approved by members who:

## RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the contents of the report.

### **NPA59-2023 Report 2 – Half Year Performance and Strategic Risk Register Update**

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

Members then raised the following questions:-

- The Chair asked about the number of website and social media followers after the Sycamore Gap incident; it was reported that they had increased.
- Ms Marie Fallon thanked the Performance and Intelligence Officer and wished him well in his new role. Following her query, it was **AGREED** that implementation of a traffic light system should be considered to help provide a focus, overview, and check we were on track in achieving performance targets.
- Ms Fallon said we should not amend the climate change definition; suggesting it may be premature to modify this. She added she was not comfortable about altering the residual risk at that time. The Chief Executive agreed to reflect and review this in due course when risk was considered again.
- Ms Fiona Gough noted the risk, referring to failure to progress work programmes due to stakeholder polarisation. She considered this to be a difficult term; the Chief Executive said this meant we could not dictate our stakeholders' priorities and **AGREED** this could potentially be rephrased.
- Ms Gough felt that risk six was concerning and wondered how significant this was. The Chief Executive replied this included variances in staff salaries and Defra funding and, due to economic uncertainties, both represented an elevated threat.
- Ms Gough queried the wider performance report. She asked whether we were we picking up the monitoring of impacts on nature and the historic environment, whilst considering decisions farmers were having to make because of the changing farming support system. She asked about the provision of collective advice, querying whether we could monitor consequences closely. The Chief Executive said that we had farm clusters, we were engaging with farmers and delivering successfully to them. In addition, management information was collected and benchmarked. It was **AGREED** that impact information would be collected and collaboration with other organisations continue.
- Cllr Mark Mather asked about risk three and the 10% fall of residents in NNPA. The Chief Executive replied that we had an ageing population, as well as a loss of existing housing stock to either second or holiday homes. It was noted that the latter could not be restricted in planning terms, however we could control the use of future housing via the primary resident's policy within the Local Plan. With regards to FiPL funding, the Park may be able to make stipulations about how grant aid was used. It was noted that RIP and RAMP work helped to support and maintain local communities. The Chief Executive spoke of proactive measures in collaborating with people to help and support them; he added the planning system was not in place to restrict planning permissions.
- The Chair noted that tourism provided economic benefits to the community. Cllr Mark Mather considered we needed to primarily ensure we had a community in place to be able to support tourism, with a focus on community-led projects and initiatives.
- Cllr Sue Bolam said it was important to have village facilities to help strengthen local communities.

- Cllr Andy Saunders stated that less people participated in farming, and this generated less income. He felt we needed to encourage new businesses via good communications, adding that poor power networks were an issue. The Chief Executive said there would be new opportunities and new skills needed, which would be packaged in a way for people to gain access to them, i.e., via Green Pathways bid to the RAMP programme.
- Ms Pippa Ross suggested we should focus on dependencies rather than polarisation; we needed to look at wording of the risks and make sure that we were articulating these.
- Ms Ross noted item ten should read 'Miles without Stiles' and it was **AGREED** that this be updated. Ms Ross thanked the Performance and Intelligence Officer for his report.

The Chair drew attention to the recommendations proposed by Ms Pippa Ross, seconded by Ms Fiona Gough and, there being no objections or abstentions approved by members who

## RESOLVED TO

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

## NPA60-2023 Report 3 – Half Year Health and Safety and Human Resources update

The HR Officer provided a summary of her report. She noted that 87% of staff had responded to the staff survey, with positive results in key areas; this was giving an indication that the OD Strategy was leading to success. However, we needed to be mindful of balancing what we were trying to achieve with the organisation's capacity.

Members raised the following questions:-

- Cllr Andy Saunders said the practice of blended working meant we could recruit from a larger talent pool. He added that peer/management support was the most powerful factor within an organisation.
- Cllr Eileen Cartie said that remote working meant teams may fail to be built, she also queried whether people would request additional money to work from home.
- Ms Liz Ellis said that the museum sector were using videos to recruit, and this was working well. It was **AGREED** that the EDI Plan would be circulated to members.
- Ms Ellis asked whether other Parks were focusing on EDI and wondered if there was an opportunity for cross-learning. It was noted that the Director of Business Development chaired a national EDI group. In addition, HR Officers across all Parks shared their views through an online forum.
- Ms Ellis noted the challenge of resources and ambition across the public sector over the last few years and was pleased to hear we were mindful of this. She added that risks (as identified) were important to consider.
- Ms Fiona Gough queried whether we were considering doing a volunteer survey.
- Cllr Alan Sharp asked if hybrid working was affecting the business and impacting on ability to deliver. The Chief Executive noted no major disruptions or obvious issues, with technology helping greatly.
- Ms Pippa Ross commended staff who had gained additional qualifications; she asked about sharing this news with members. The Chief Executive reported that a members' intranet would be introduced in March 2024.

The Chief Executive reported on Health and Safety; he noted the Park's zero tolerance with regards to inappropriate/abusive behaviour by members of the public.

Cllr Mark Purvis left the meeting at 11.53am.

The Chief Executive informed the meeting that the Health and Safety Policy had been signed-off.

The Chair noted that compulsory Health and Safety Training would be taking place on Wednesday 18th September 2024, this being a key date for members' diaries.

Members raised the following questions:-

- Ms Pippa Ross noted the Health and Safety Working Group and said it would be good if a member would make themselves available to attend this session. This would help demonstrate how seriously we take it, and this action was **AGREED**.
- Ms Fiona Gough observed the list of incidents, noting they could be traumatic to deal with; she asked if staff were sufficiently trained to deal with them. The Chief Executive said that staff received health and safety training, had access to a 24-hour helpline, and were encouraged to speak to line managers.

There being no other issues raised, recommendation (a) was proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders, seconded by Cllr Mark Mather and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

#### **RESOLVED TO**

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

#### **NPA61-2023 Report 4 – National Park Partnerships Limited: Subscription for 2023/24**

The Chief Executive provided a summary of his report.

Members then raised the following questions:-

- Ms Marie Fallon asked for the latest on Revere; the Chief Executive said he had recently met with them to discuss the nature recovery link to green finance and was awaiting further developments. HWRN was an example of an opportunity where a green finance organisation had provided support.
- Ms Fallon queried travel grants; the Head of Business Support noted monies had previously supported school educational projects. The Chief Executive **AGREED** to speak to the Head of Communications and Development and ascertain what future funding related to.
- Cllr John Riddle fully supported partnership working and said this must continue.
- Cllr Len Glen-Davison asked whether work with NPPL was an ongoing commitment. The Chief Executive said expectations were that it would be, although long-term hopes were for it be self-financing. It was noted that NNPA would seek benefits from this partnership.
- Cllr Val Gibson backed the contribution but asked about the stance of other Parks; the Chief Executive clarified that all NPAs support this.
- Cllr Alan Sharp fully endorsed the NPPL investment.

The recommendations were proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Cllr John Riddle and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

## RESOLVED TO

- (a) Note the operation of National Parks Partnership Ltd (NPPL) and the current benefits to the Authority.
- (b) Approve a financial contribution of £10,000 to NPPL for the financial year from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

## NPA62-2023 Report 5 – Climate Action and Net Zero: 2023 Review and Next Steps

The Head of Conservation and Environment provided a report on Climate Action and Net Zero, considering the 2023 review and the Authority's next steps. He noted there would be a global transition away from fossil fuels, as agreed at the COP28 Summit in Dubai earlier that same day.

Members then raised the following comments:-

- Cllr Andy Saunders suggested larger savings could be made within the Park. He added an improved infrastructure and better electricity supply were required to help achieve targets, although there would be planning implications. People in the Park needed to be encouraged to help themselves.
- Cllr Mark Mather queried whether we expected smaller tenant farmers to go green and asked where the funding was to do this. He asked whether NNPA could be a broker and put in a scheme to financially assist with the capital outlay, i.e., a solar farm, and potentially collaborate with the green team at NCC to help achieve aspirations. The Chief Executive said we needed to look at the asset which NNPA was and consider opportunities for the Park to be a carbon-sink.
- Cllr Andy Saunders said he would appreciate more information around forestry/land management statistics and clarification of how we had got these numbers.
- Ms Marie Fallon thanked the Head of Conservation and Environment for his report. This was a changing landscape, with scope three targets having made this evolving area of work challenging and she considered we must monitor this. For scopes one and two, we must maintain our own house to ensure reputation and credibility remained. She sensed that nature recovery funding would be available in the future.
- Ms Fallon noted that the solar market was volatile and said we must carefully manage the time when we make a review (which should not be too soon). She said we should be working with NCC and continue with our influencing role. The Chief Executive confirmed we were not proposing to remove our 2030 target for achieving net zero as National Park the Authority, but suggested we were honest about our ability to achieve this. He added there was a question as to whether we brought in a specific resource of someone to focus on this area of work.
- Ms Fiona Gough said we needed to retain our credibility by delivering in-house, with reductions rather than off-setting being preferable. She felt we should focus on large areas and asked whether emission calculations were realistic for upland areas. Ms Gough said we should not lose track of adaptations and ensure we build this into our projects. The Head of Conservation and Environment said that modifications were considered, and carbon literacy training took place for staff.
- Further to Ms Gough's request, it was **AGREED** that implications for climate change be included within future Board reports.

Noting the changed wording to (b), recommendations (a) to (d) were proposed by Cllr Andy Saunders, seconded by Ms Fiona Gough; and approved by members (with three abstentions) who:

#### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Note the progress being made to date on the delivery of the Authority's 2020 Climate Change Action Plan.
- (b) Whilst retaining our targets for net zero National Park Authority and net zero National Park (the place), agree a change in the prioritisation of resource, from focusing upon the targets associated with a net zero National Park Authority, towards a net zero National Park (the place) programme, including signing up to the United Nations 'Race to Zero' campaign.
- (c) Agree a revised timeline of working towards being a net zero National Park (the place), from 2040 to 2030 in line with the recommendations of the recent baseline report.
- (d) Note the release of ongoing project funding identified in paragraph 8d to maintain the necessary resource needed to continue this important area of work.

#### **NPA63-2023 Report 6 – Authority Review Meeting 11 October 2023: Historic Environment**

The Chief Executive noted the Cheviot Heritage Project; whilst the Leadership Team accepted this was a priority for NPPA, there were currently insufficient resources to take this forward.

Members then raised the following comments:-

- Cllr Alan Sharp said the Authority Review Meeting had been useful; he would like to see us doing something with the actions. Cllr Sharp highlighted the Park's staff capacity issue which then led to constraints.
- Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell said the historic farm building visit to Sewingshields had been interesting. However, restoration works had only been taken so far and, if there was a change of use then these works would need to be re-done again. Ms Marie Fallon noted the new FiPL funding system was now more flexible in this regard.
- Ms Fiona Gough considered the design of grants should be better able to address the future use of other building aspects and it was **AGREED** that a note about increased flexibility be added, i.e., about future commercial or other use (as per Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell's comment) as a new additional point.

There being no issues raised, recommendations (a) to (c) were proposed by Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, seconded by Ms Liz Ellis and, there being no objections or abstentions, were approved by members who:

#### **RESOLVED TO**

- (a) Note the Review findings/recommendations of the Historic Environment Authority Review meeting held on 11 October 2023.
- (b) Consider the responses of the Leadership Team and actions proposed or currently underway.
- (c) Endorse the actions and timescale as set out in Appendix 1 to this report, subject to the item raised about future flexibility which would be raised as a new learning point.

#### **NPA64-2023 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 NPA65-2023, NPA66-2023 and NPA67-2023 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 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 12.51pm, 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 1.03pm