

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24 JULY 2025 AT 10.00 AM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON SO41 9ZG

Present:

Members

David Bence (Chair)

Victoria Mander (Deputy Chair)

John Adams

Gordon Bailey (left at 12.40pm)

Richard Clewer

Zoe Clewer

Mary Davies

Barry Dunning

David Harrison (left at 1.05pm)

Mel Kendal (left at 12.30pm)

Keith Mans

Caroline Rackham

Joe Reilly

Ann Sevier

Brice Stratford

Michael Thierry

Derek Tipp

Steve Trow (left at 1.10pm)

Malcolm Wade

Officers

Alison Barnes

Chief Executive

David Illsley

Interim Head of Planning & Place

Nigel Stone

Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)

Gareth Hale

Solicitor & Monitoring Officer

David Stone

Corporate Services Manager

Vicki Gibbon

Member Services Administrator

Also in attendance: Sherri Johnston (Copythorne Parish Council)

Before the meeting commenced, the Chair presented gifts to Steve Avery, outgoing Director of Strategy and Planning, and Gavin Parker, outgoing Secretary of State Member, in recognition of their dedicated service to the Authority

161 Monitoring Officer Appointment

161.1 Nigel Stone introduced Gareth Hale as the new Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and explained that this report was to formally appoint Mr Hale in his new position.

Resolved, that

Gareth Hale be appointed as Monitoring Officer of the New Forest National Park Authority with immediate effect.

Voting: Unanimous

162. Apologies for Absence

162.1 An Apology for absence was received from George Meyrick.

163. Declarations of Interest

163.1 All members affiliated with New Forest District Council and Hampshire County Council declared an interest in Minute Item 169: Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

164. Chair's Announcements

164.1 The Chair announced that this would be his final meeting, as his term of office concludes in September. He informed members that Deputy Chair Victoria Mander would act as interim Chair until a new Chair was appointed at the Annual Authority Meeting in October 2025.

165. Minutes

165.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2025 were approved as a true record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2025 be approved as a true record.

Voting: Non-voting against

166. Public Question Time

166.1 Brian Tarnoff, New Forest Association made a presentment to the Authority on NFDC Public Space Protection Orders.

Sarah Nield, Chair of New Forest Association made a presentment to the Authority on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

Copies of both presentations can be obtained via Member Services.

167. Chief Executive's Report (AM 715/25)

167.1 The Chief Executive presented her report, covering the period since the last Authority meeting held on 27 March 2025. The report was structured in alignment with the National Park Authority's statutory purposes and duty and delivered within the framework of the Re:New Forest themes outlined in the Business Plan. Ms Barnes provided a detailed PowerPoint presentation, offering a comprehensive overview of the Authority's activities over the past quarter, organised under each of the Authority's core purposes

167.2 Under the "Protect" theme, Ms Barnes highlighted the Species Survival Fund (SSF), noting a £1.3 million investment aimed at restoring habitats across 250 hectares in the New Forest, with 180 hectares already successfully restored. She also referenced the recent Defra visit, during which concerns were raised regarding funding for commoners, future opportunities under the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme, and the ongoing Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

167.3 Under the "Enjoy" theme, the Chief Executive drew members' attention to the Awakening Festival, which was the largest to date, featuring 130 events, attracting 4,000 attendees, and achieving an online reach of 1.4 million. She also highlighted the success of the "You Can" scheme, which had a strong presence at numerous local festivals, and commended the Education Team for engaging 1,075 pupils through school visits, residential programmes, curriculum-based sessions, and ranger-led classroom activities.

167.4 Under the "Prosper" theme, the New Forest Tour was highlighted, with its launch scheduled for 5 July and operations running through to 14 September. Additionally,

the New Forest Marque has produced a new local guide and will be represented at several events throughout the summer.

167.5 Under the "Excellence" theme, Ms Barnes highlighted the recent Partnership Plan Leaders Panel, where discussions focused on landscape-scale management, nature-based grazing, recreation management, the future of commoning, and associated financial challenges and opportunities. She also referenced recent Defra visits, partner meetings, and engagements with local Members of Parliament. Finally, the Chief Executive reminded members that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the National Park, which will be celebrated at the New Forest Show, the CLA Awards, and through staff discovery days.

Members noted the report.

(A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available on the website.)

168 Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 2 June 2025

168.1 Mary Davies, Chair of the above Committee, drew members' attention to salient points within the reports discussed by the Committee at its meeting on 3 June 2025 which included the external audit planning report (2024/25) and the internal audit progress report for 2024/25, the year-end progress report on the 2024/25 work programme, the financial outturn and treasury management report for 2024/25, the annual health and safety report for 2024/25 and reports from officers on the protected landscapes targets and outcomes framework and planning for the future.

168.2 Members noted the above report.

169 Adoption of Copythorne Parish Design Statement (AM 716/25)

169.1 David Illsley provided a brief overview of the document and informed members that Parish Design Statements continue to be supported by the Authority. He noted that while the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 includes enabling provisions to remove the role of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), these provisions have not yet been enacted. As such, SPDs remain valid and can still serve as material planning considerations within the current planning framework. Mr Illsley then invited Sherri Johnstone of Copythorne Parish Council to address members in support of the document.

169.2 Ms Johnston expressed her gratitude to the Authority and the Copythorne Steering Group for their support in the development of the document. She went on to explain the motivation behind its creation and requested members' support for its adoption.

169.2 Members conveyed their thanks and hard work to the Parish and approved the recommendations as detailed below.

Resolved, that the Authority

- (i) formally adopt the Copythorne Parish Design Statement (Annex 1 to the report) and bring it into immediate effect from 24 July 2025 as material consideration in planning decision making; and
- (ii) delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to make any final, minor amendments to the formatting of the SPD prior to publication.

Voting: Unanimous

170. Update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (AM 717/25)

170.1 David Illsley informed members that the report provided an update on the current status of the separate processes concerning (i) devolution in Hampshire; and (ii) Local Government Reorganisation.

170.2 Beginning with devolution in Hampshire, Mr Illsley reminded members that on 17 February 2025, the Government published proposals to establish a Mayoral Combined Authority covering Hampshire, Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, and Southampton. The consultation period closed on 13 April 2025, and the Authority's response was agreed at the March Authority meeting. Since the consultation's closure, the New Forest and South Downs National Park Authorities have been working collaboratively to ensure both are actively engaged in the devolution process with the Government, providing consistent feedback to ensure that protected landscapes are appropriately considered. The key principles which had been identified to frame the New Forest National Park Authority's future engagement in the Hampshire Devolution proposals were set out in the main body of the report, which can be found on the website.

170.3 Mr Illsley then turned to the topic of Local Government Reorganisation. He explained that the Government intended to replace the current two-tier system of county and district/borough councils operating across much of Hampshire with larger unitary authorities. He noted that national Government is not leading the current public engagement and consultation processes; instead, this responsibility lies with local authorities within the county. As a result, two groups of local authorities had formed, each exploring various alternative models for reorganisation. Mr Illsley outlined the different options under consideration and emphasised that, while the National Park Authority may be less directly affected by these changes, they will nonetheless have a significant impact on the Authority's work.

Members were asked to endorse the recommendations as detailed below.

170.4 The majority of members expressed support for keeping the New Forest unified, rather than dividing it into separate entities. They emphasised the need to recognise and preserve the area's special qualities and its international significance.

170.5 A proposal was put forward to vote on a preferred option in respect of Local Government Reorganisation, however this vote was not carried (7:11); members then agreed to endorse the recommendations as set out below.

Resolved: that the Authority,

- (i) endorse the key principles set out in paragraph 2.3 of the main report to form the basis of the New Forest National Park Authority's engagement on the proposed Hampshire Mayoral Combined Authority;
- (ii) endorse the key principles set out in paragraph 3.8 of the main report to form the basis of the New Forest National Park Authority's engagement on the proposals for Local

Government Reorganisation in Hampshire. The Authority would support the option that delivers the closest alignment with their priorities; and

(iii) agree that the National Park Authority would formally respond to the relevant authorities setting out their position and findings against the various options for Local Government Reorganisation currently subject to consultation

Voting: A vote was taken on each individual resolution with non-voting against and 1 abstention respectively

171. Capital Investment Strategy (AM 718/25)

171.1 In introducing the report, Mr Stone advised that the Defra grant fund award for 2025-2026 for National Park Authorities had for the first time, included a core capital fund – the Protected Landscapes Capital Investment Fund and the Authority's grant for the 2025/26 financial year was £1,392,977.00. Defra has indicated that there may be further capital investment grants in future years. He said that the report sets out the proposed Capital Investment Strategy that will be used to guide future capital funding commitments received from Defra.

171.2 Mr Stone advised that the above capital grant was required by Defra to be spent within the current financial year, and no confirmation had yet been received from Defra that capital grants would be made in future years. Expenditure from the fund was guided by two criteria and a Defra definition of capital spend which was set out in Section 2 of the report.

171.3 Mr Stone said that the Authority currently had in place reserves to allow funding of capital and/or major projects, with particular regard to invest-to-save schemes. The fund currently had approximately £500,000 set aside for such purposes and members were requested to consider any proposals for the use of this fund as the need arises; a previous example of where the fund had been used was in the 2018 support by the NPA in the RSPB purchase of Franchises Lodge. He said that the introduction of a significantly larger Capital Investment Fund to be spent within a set time period meant that the NPA should have a clear strategy to guide future investment from the Fund. In this regard, he referred to the proposed Capital Investment Strategy set out in Annex 1 to the report which set out the approach to developing and delivering an asset portfolio and the decision-making process that will provide guidance as capital projects arose. He drew members' attention to the vision as set out on page 5 of the Strategy and the levels of financial approval as set out under decision making within the Strategy document. He emphasised that the Strategy would need to be flexible to accommodate changes in future capital funding and projects identified.

171.4 Considerable discussion then took place on the Strategy with members acknowledging the work of officers and the Task and Finish Group in developing the document. Some members expressed concern that there was insufficient detail in the Strategy for informed decision making. Officers advised that the Strategy should be considered a live, flexible document and it would be possible to make adjustments to it in response

to changing circumstances and future capital funding opportunities. Members then voted on the recommendations contained in the report.

Resolved, that the Authority approve

1. the approach to capital expenditure set out in the Capital Investment Strategy
2. the decision-making approach set out on page 10, and
3. the role of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee in measuring progress of the Asset Strategy as set out on page 11.

Voting: 10-2, 1 abstention

172. Date of next meeting

172.1 Thursday 16 October 2025 at 10.00am – Council Chamber, Lymington Town Hall, Lymington.

PART II ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ON THE GROUNDS THAT EXEMPTED INFORMATION MAY BE DISCLOSED

Resolved that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, namely the need to avoid disclosing sensitive information relating to the Authority's financial and business affairs.

Voting: Unanimous

173 Capital Investment Appraisal 2025/26 (AM 719/25)

173.1 This item was considered in Part 2 of the meeting and therefore was minuted as such.

Part 1 of the meeting closed at 1:13pm.

Signed: Date: (Chair)