

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 29 JANUARY 2026 AT 10.00 AM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, APPLETREE COURT, BEAULIEU ROAD, LYNDBURST

#### Present:

##### *Members*

Victoria Mander (Chair)	
John Adams	Joe Reilly
Gordon Bailey ( <i>left at 12pm</i> )	Barry Rickman
Richard Clewer ( <i>left at 10.55am</i> )	Ann Sevier
Zoe Clewer ( <i>left at 12pm</i> )	Derek Tipp
Mary Davies	Michael Thierry
David Harrison	Malcolm Wade
Keith Mans (Deputy Chair)	James Wyler-Owen
Ella Mason	
George Meyrick ( <i>arrived 11.35am</i> )	

##### *Officers*

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (Chief Finance Officer)
Gareth Hale	Solicitor & Monitoring Officer
David Illsley	Interim Head of Planning & Place
Paul Walton	Head of Environment & Rural Economy
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Vicki Gibbon	Member Services Administrator

In attendance: Simon Mathers & Katie Lean – Ernst & Young Auditors

#### **197. Apologies for Absence**

197.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mel Kendal, Adarsh Parekh, Caroline Rackham, Brice Stratford and Steve Trow.

#### **198. Declarations of Interest**

198.1 There were no declarations of absence on this occasion.

#### **199. Chair's Announcements**

199.1 None

#### **200. Minutes**

200.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025 were approved as a true record.

**Resolved**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025 be approved as a true record.

*Voting: Non-voting against*

**201 Public Question Time**

201.1 Presentments were made by Brian Tarnoff (New Forest Association) on the future Partnership Plan and Peter Hebbard on flooding in Brockenhurst. A copy of both presentations are available upon request from Member Services.

**202 Financial Report and External Audit Reports 2024/25 (AM 729/26)**

202.1 Nigel Stone presented the Financial Report and External Audit reports for 2024/25 as set out in Annex 1 to the report and advised that no significant issues had arisen since the matter was considered at the meeting of the Authority on 16 October 2025. The issues identified since then and agreed with the Auditors were more of a presentational / categorisation nature and confirmed there had been no changes to the outturn (bottom line) figure for the 2024/25 accounts and it was anticipated that these would be formally signed off within the next few days. He advised that Annex 1 of the report set out the current status of the audit and the recommendation was for members to agree to authorise the Chief Finance Officer, Chief Executive and Chair of the Authority to approve any further minor amendments to the documents which included the Letter of Representation as set out in Annex 2 of the report.

202.2 Simon Mathers from Ernst and Young LLP advised that the Auditors would be issuing a Qualified opinion on 2024/25 financial arrangements, this was arising from the reset arrangements and disclaimer which had been issued in 2022/23. He reminded members that the above situation had been pervasive across the whole of the country in local government and did not just apply to the Authority. The situation had now improved and, subject to the quality of the accounts produced in 2025/26 and these being materially correct, it was hoped that the Auditors would be in a position to give an Unqualified audit opinion. He extended his thanks to Nigel Stone and his team for their assistance with the audit.

202.3 Katie Lean then drew members' attention to the areas for improvement which had been set out in the updated Annex 2 and Annex 3 and submitted with the updated documents at the current meeting.

202.4 In terms of value for money conclusion as set out in the report, Mr Mathers advised members that no significant risks or weaknesses had been identified in the financial report and a positive conclusion would be issued on the 2024/25 audit.

202.5 Following brief discussion, members agreed to support the recommendations in the report.

**Resolved, that**

1. that the Financial Report 2024/25, MRP Policy and Letter of Representation as set out in the submitted report be approved, subject to any further minor changes required, for which delegation is given for these to be mutually agreed by the Chief Finance Officer, Chief Executive and Chair of the Authority

2 the two audit reports be accepted.

*Voting: Unanimous*

## 203 Chief Executive's Report (AM 730/26)

203.1 The Chief Executive presented her report, covering the period since the last Authority meeting held on 16 October 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.

203.2 Under the *Protect* theme, the Chief Executive highlighted several key areas of progress. She reported that the Species Survival Fund (SSF) had delivered improvements to over 250 hectares across more than 30 sites, exceeding the original targets.

She also noted that the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme had been extended for a further three years. Members were updated on the recent draft Local Plan public consultation, which had generated over 600 responses, with the next phase scheduled for the summer 2026.

The Chief Executive also referred to the ongoing Dibden "Solent Gateway 2" proposals.

203.3 Under the *Enjoy* theme, Ms Barnes reported on recent activity and performance. She highlighted the annual volunteering fair, which had attracted over 750 visitors, and the Walking Festival held in October and November 2025, which saw more than 350 attendees and a high number of fully booked events.

Ms Barnes expressed disappointment at the significant rise in animal accidents over the winter period, despite the launch of the New Forest Drive Safe campaign.

She was pleased to inform members that the Education and Youth Team had been named finalists in the Education / Learning Team of the Year category at the School Travel Awards. She noted that the Authority's travel grant continued to enable both rural and urban schools to access a range of learning venues across the New Forest.

It was also noted that Forestry England would be introducing car parking charges across its 129 sites from April 2026.

203.4 Under the *Prosper* theme, members were updated on the recent Transport Summit, which was attended by more than 100 participants and received positive feedback from all involved. The Greenprint Partnership was also highlighted, with its continued growth and its role in providing recommendations to improve awareness of, and access to, green careers across Hampshire and the Solent.

203.5 Under the *Excellence* theme, Ms Barnes provided updates on several key areas. She referred to ongoing discussions regarding devolution and local government reorganisation, and highlighted the Authority's progress in strengthening cyber security, noting that the New Forest had become the first National Park to adopt the Government-sponsored national vulnerability alerting system to support more proactive threat detection. Ms Barnes also reported that an expression of interest had now been accepted for the development of a large-scale "Landscape Connections" bid and a preparation for a full application was underway.

203.6 Members noted that a Members' Day on the Solent Gateway proposals would be held on Tuesday 10 February. A request was made for a Members' briefing focusing on animal accidents. It was further commented that, with significant change taking place in and around the New Forest, there may be an opportunity to involve younger generations in shaping and developing the National Park over the next 50 years. Members were also advised that, in relation to car parking charges, Forestry England would shortly be distributing a leaflet to local households outlining the upcoming charges and the reasons for their introduction.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Chair would write to Forestry England regarding car park charges in the New Forest.

Members noted the report. A copy of the report is available on the website.

#### **204 Oral Report from Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 3 November 2025**

204.1 The Chair of the above Committee (Mary Davies) reported on the items discussed at the meeting on 3 November 2025 including reports from the Internal Auditors, the half-yearly Progress Report on the 2025/26 Work Programme and the half-yearly Budgetary Control Report for 2025/26, the Corporate Sustainability Plan and the Pension Discretions Policy. Speaking on the budgetary control report, she mentioned that officers were continuing to seek clarify with regard to the Authority's future funding settlement from Defra.

Members noted the report.

#### **205 Biodiversity Duty Reporting (AM 731/26)**

205.1 David Illsley introduced his report by reminding members that, since January 2023, all public authorities have been required to consider how they can conserve and enhance biodiversity. He explained that the first step in meeting this 'biodiversity duty' was to identify the areas of the NPA's work that contribute to biodiversity conservation and enhancement. This requirement was addressed in report PC 442/23, which was considered and approved at the Planning Committee meeting in December 2023.

Having identified the main areas through which the New Forest National Park Authority contributes to biodiversity by the statutory deadline of 1 January 2024, the next stage is to report on the Authority's biodiversity actions. Government guidance requires all such reports to be published within 12 weeks of the end of the reporting period, meaning the deadline for publication is the end of March 2026.

205.2 Mr Illsley explained that this report was to ask members to endorse the New Forest National Park Biodiversity Report as set out in Annex 1 of the main report.

205.3 Following discussion, members expressed a desire for additional detail to be incorporated into the report, which Officers noted and agreed to include. Members duly endorsed the report as set out below.

**Resolved that:**

the Authority endorse the New Forest National Park Biodiversity Duty Report as set out in Annex 1 of the report (AM 731/26) as a summary of the work undertaken by the Authority to comply with the legal Biodiversity Duty.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**206 Future Partnership Plan (AM 732/26)**

- 206.1 Paul Walton, Head of Environment & Rural Economy presented the report and advised that the current Partnership Plan was due to end in 2027 – work was accordingly beginning on reviewing the Plan and the revised Plan would run from 2027 to 2032. The purpose of the report was to update members, particularly new members, on the framework and timetable of the review. By way of background, he advised that all National Park Authorities were required to have a Plan for their area to help guide the collective work of all those with responsibilities or an interest in the National Park and reminded members that the Plan was for the New Forest National Park as a whole and not solely for the Authority or any particular single organisation.
- 206.2 The review would accordingly involve other partners in the New Forest such as Forestry England all of whom are represented on the Leaders' Panel taking forward the review. He added that, during the course of the review, consideration would be given to expanding representation on the Panel to include other relevant partners. New guidance had now been published jointly by Defra and Natural England requiring the Plan to align with key aspects such as the monitoring of the Plans' targets and indicators with the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF), which established a shared set of targets and indicators for all Protected Landscapes, linked to the Environmental Improvement Plan (updated in 2025). He advised that it was anticipated that the revised Plan would be published by July 2027.
- 206.3 Members briefly discussed the review and noted that there would be changes in local government structures which might affect the composition of the Leaders' Panel carrying out the review. Mr Walton advised that local government changes would be closely monitored during the review process.

**Resolved that** the Authority note the report and agree the review process for updating the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan 2022-2027

*Voting: Unanimous*

**207 Any Other Business**

- 207.1 The Chief Executive was pleased to announce the completed purchase of three small properties on the Foxlease Park estate, two of which would be rented out, and investigations were being conducted as to whether the third building would be suitable for a staff and volunteer drop-in base to support the conservation work of the Authority.

**208. Date of next meeting**

- 208.1 Thursday 26 March 2026 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**

**None**

The meeting closed at 12:25 pm.

Signed: ..... Date: ..... (Chair)