NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUTHORITY MEETING

Northumberland National Park Offices, Hexham NE46 3PQ

WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2018 1000 - 1230

Present
Cllr Johnny Wilson (SoS Parish) Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)
Ms Fiona Gough (SoS) Mr Peter Murray (SoS)
Cllr Anthony Murray MBE (SoS Parish) Cllr Glen Sanderson (Chairman) (NCC)
Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish) Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)
Cllr Chris France (SoS Parish) Cllr Julie Foster (NCC)
Cllr Val Gibson (SoS Parish) Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC) till 1150
Mrs Pippa Ross (SoS) Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)
Cllr John Riddle OBE (NCC)

In attendance
Officers: Tony Gates (Chief Executive [National Park Officer]); Rosie Thomas (Director of Business Development / Monitoring Officer); Hazel Fitzsimmons (Head of Business Support); Claire Mason (Interim Sill Manager); Clive Coyne (Head of Forward Planning); Robert Mayhew (Head of Conservation)
Others: Jayne Phillips (Independent Person)

NPA49-2018 Apologies for absence

Apologies were noted from Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell, Mrs Jean Davidson, Mr Mike Bell and Mr Pete Trumper (Head of Access and Estates).

NPA50-2018 Chairman’s Introduction

The Chairman advised there would be a report submitted under ‘Urgent Business’ relating to proposed changes to the staffing at The Sill and all members received a copy of the report. It was also noted agenda item NPA64-2018 should be NPA63-2018.

The Chairman highlighted the following changes to the establishment since the last meeting: Leavers: Caroline Mann, Athena Taylor and Amy Stockdale (Sill Visitor Welcome Assistants); Trudy Graham (Sill Activities Support Officer), Claire Bromley (Planning Policy Officer). New starts: Steve Davis (Assistant Trail Maintenance Ranger), Charles Bolam (Farming and Rural Enterprise Officer), Emma Taylor (Farming and Rural Enterprise Officer), Mark Harrison (Planning Policy Officer), Heather Stimpson (Receptionist), Linda Vipond (Administration Officer)

The Chairman spoke about the official opening of The Sill by Prince Charles on 12 September and thanked staff for such a wonderful event. The Chairman updated members on the Glover Review, the Designated Landscapes Review workshop held on 21 September and the visit from members of the Glover Review committee on 4 October.

The Chief Executive said members had been e-mailed a summary of the workshop findings and advised members he would be producing a fuller report on the workshop in due course, which member’s would receive a copy of.

NPA51-2018 Question Time; there were no questions from members of the public.
NPA52-2018 Declaration of Interests: there were no declarations of interest.
NPA53-2018  Minutes of Authority Annual Meeting held on 11 July 2018

There being no issues arising, the draft Minutes of the Authority Annual meeting held on Wednesday 11 July 2018 were noted, proposed as a true record by Cllr Sue Bolam, seconded by Cllr Alan Sharp and approved by members who

| RESOLVED that the draft Minutes of the meeting of Northumberland National Park Authority Annual Meeting held on Wednesday 11 July 2018, as circulated, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. |

NPA54-2018  Item 1: Infrastructure Improvements at Walltown and Cawfields

In the absence of the Head of Access and Estates the Chief Executive spoke to the report, illustrated with a short presentation.

The Chief Executive explained about the two phases proposed for the improvements at the Authority-owned areas of Cawfield and Walltown and what these would entail.

Phase II: the Chief Executive reminded members that Phase II was a separate activity-style building at Walltown and, as there was no planning consent for this as yet, it would be a matter for the Authority’s Development Management Committee in the future. The Chief Executive summarised the criteria for Phase II funding from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), explained funding implications and as grants would be made on a first-come basis speed was of the essence as bids had to be submitted by the end of December 2018.

The Chief Executive said although there was no anticipated impact on reserves, members had to be aware the Authority would be required to invest some money initially (see paragraph 3a). He referred to paragraph 3 of the report and assured member a prudent approach to both the finances and business plan for the development would be taken in conjunction with other income generation targets.

The Chief Executive reminded members the report on this development had been fully discussed by the Estates Task & Finish Group who had wholly endorsed the proposals and drew attention to recommendations (a) to (c).

Questions and Comments

A member, though supportive of the proposals at Walltown, said they would not want the Authority to lose sight of the proposed developments at Cawfields if the RDPE grant application was not fulfilled for Walltown and asked for reassurance that how this development would be taken forward if the grant application was unsuccessful.

Members felt it was important both sites were better advertised especially at The Sill, with improved signage on the A6318. They sought assurance the proposal would be set in context, as a whole package and with the surrounding area brought up to standard, and that the proposal was not just the development of the buildings.

A member was also keen that the Authority was seen to be investing in the north of the Park as well as the south of the Park and hoped this area was not overlooked.

A member asked for clarification in the Business Plan re cost of sales (paragraph 7). The Head of Business Support said calculations had started at a prudent level and it was expected that the ‘grab and go’ market would achieve a higher profit margin, therefore 55% should be achievable.
A member was keen local businesses had the opportunity to tender for the proposed work at Walltown and Cawfields. The Chief Executive reminded members there were strict procurement guidelines and rules to be adhered to for all companies who tendered for work with the Authority and local companies were welcome to submit tenders using the Authority's Procurement process.

There being no other issues, the Chairman drew attention to recommendations (a) to (c) proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Cllr Eileen Cartie and approved by members who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOLVED to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. approve the plans to improve Walltown and Cawfields as detailed in the report, subject to a successful funding bid to RDPE and the securing of the match funding element, as endorsed by the Estates Task and Finish group on the 29 August 2018;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. note the outline Business Plan as at Appendix 1 and approve the use of £6,900 of unallocated reserves to enable the operation to break even in year 3. Subject to a successful funding bid; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. endorse the use of in year budget to invest £18,600 (at risk) to develop the Phase 2 bid with an estimated £400,000 funding available, as endorsed by the Estates Task and Finish group on the 29 August 2018.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NPA55-2018 Item 2: Review of Car Parking Charges 2018

In the absence of the Head of Access and Estates, the Chief Executive spoke to the report and took the members through the history of car parking charges. He reminded members they had agreed to review car park charges after 12 months, pointed out the main changes to parking charges at paragraph 6 (b), reminded members this matter had been reviewed by Finance & Audit Group at their meeting on 29 August 2018 and drew attention to the recommendation.

Questions and Comments

A member, referring to paragraph 4 (h) urged caution with increasing the charge to £2 minimum at The Sill and asked if this minimum charge for two hours would encourage people to stay longer at The Sill, and use the café and shop or put people off going to The Sill.

A member referred to paragraph 6 (b) and asked for clarification of the £10 all day transferable ticket. The Chief Executive explained how this would work and the flexibility the £10 ticket would allow visitors as it enabled them to visit all sites for one parking charge.

A member, referring to paragraph 4 (f) re the Annual Pass and said that other similar passes were more expensive so queries whether an increase from £30 to £35 was too small an increase, suggested a £10 or £15 increase every few years and proposed the Annual Pass be increased from £30 to £40 rather than £30 to £35. Whilst the suggestion for the increase from £30 to £40 was supported in principle, a few members remained concerned the parking needs of local people also had to be considered, especially those who lived in the vicinity of The Sill.

Members also asked that car parking information signage was made clearer and more coherent.

A member proposed amending the recommendation “…and as set out in paragraph 6 (b) with the Annual Pass to cost £40 and not £30 as detailed in the report [also see paragraph 4(f)]”

There being no other issues, raised, the Chairman drew attention to the amended recommendation to raise the Annual Pass from £30 to £40, proposed by Mr Peter Murray and seconded by Cllr Johnny Wilson. Members voted on the proposed amendment, with two members voting against it. The amended recommendation was approved by members who
RESOLVED to approve the amendments to the car parking charges as agreed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Finance and Audit Group on 29 August 2018 and as set out in paragraph 6 (b), with the Annual Pass to cost £40 and not £30 as detailed in the report [also see paragraph 4 (f)]

NPA56-2018 Item 3: Authority Review Meetings – Findings and Actions proposed 25 April 2018 (Communications) and 13 June (Visitor Experience) 2018

The Chief Executive went through his report, drew attention to Appendix 1 ‘Leadership Team recommendations and proposed Actions from meetings 25 April and 13 June’ and Appendix 2 ‘Breamish Valley Action Plan Monitoring Q2’ and drew attention to recommendations (a) to (d).

Ms Fiona Gough, Authority Review Chairman, advised members the wider recommendations had not been captured in the report as these had not been written up yet, but they would be set out in a future report.

Questions and Comments

a) Communications

i. Parishes: A member felt that a weak link in the Authority’s Communications Strategy remained the liaison with some of the Parish Council representatives who were a conduit between residents and the Authority. The Chairman explained he and the Chief Executive had attended meetings of the Parish Councils in the National Park during the past 18 months, with some very positive meetings, and how an Authority ‘advocacy role’ was emerging with some local residents.

The Chairman suggested he and the Chief Executive could re-visit some of the less engaged, as well as larger, parishes from Spring 2019 as well as consideration given to a ‘Resident’s Communication’ to kick-start the flow of communications with residents, ideally before Christmas 2018.

ii. Breamish Valley: Members noted Appendix 2. Members were keen the Breamish Valley, including Ingram Café, and other sites in the north of the Park were not overlooked with the distraction of other projects. The Director of Business Development explained progress being made with Ingram Café, levels of support being offered and that the Café was being encouraged to keep its website updated.

Members asked about car parking at Ingram and was there a timescale to address this. The Chief Executive advise member he had asked the Head of Access and Estates to undertake an internal ‘Breamish Valley’ scoping exercise, which would be the first step towards a ‘masterplan’ and reiterated anything done in the Breamish Valley would also involve a lot of work with the local communities before any more specific proposals such as car parking were considered.

Members felt there were some short term actions which could be done immediately such as making sure what was on the website told a coherent story. The Chief Executive referred to the update on the immediate improvements being made at Ingram which were included with the papers for this Authority meeting.

The Chairman said members wanted to be kept engaged with, and informed of, the proposals for both the Breamish Valley and Ingram, asked for an update to come to members in six months’ time (20 March 2019 meeting) with the possibility of a member visit to the area in spring 2019.
iii. **Advertising and promotion:** members felt the Authority should advertise more widely, especially The Sill, and the Director of Business Development explained that the advertising programme was already quite extensive e.g. advertising in the Cumbria press, wide distribution of press releases and social media but agreed to consider wider advertising such as in the Borders. Members were interested to hear about the promotion of walks using ViewRanger and the success of the Digital Landscapes initiative held at The Sill and noted the Authority's award for ViewRanger uploads.

The Chairman summarised the lengthy discussions, noting

a) the suggestion that he and the Chief Executive re-visit some of the less engaged parishes from Spring 2019 as well as consideration given to a ‘Resident’s Communication’, ideally before Christmas 2018 and

b) referring to recommendation (d), said ‘... the Breamish Valley and Ingram proposals, a report on future developments should be submitted to members in six months’ time followed by a member site-visit’.

There being no other issues, the Chairman drew attention to recommendations (a) to (c) and the amendment to recommendation (d) proposed by Mrs Pippa Ross, seconded by Cllr Alan Sharp and approved by members who

---

RESOLVED to

a. note the findings of the Review meetings held on 25 April and 13 June 2018;
b. note and consider the response from Leadership Team in respect of the recommendations from these meetings;
c. endorse the actions planned or currently underway as set out in Appendix 1 to Item 3; and
d. note the progress in implementing the action plan for the Breamish Valley as set out in Appendix 2 to Item 3 noting that members wanted input to the Breamish Valley and Ingram proposals, a report on future developments should be submitted to members in six months’ time followed by a member site-visit.

---

NPA57-2018  Item 4: Quarter 1 Strategic Risk and Performance Update 2018-2019

The Head of Forward Planning introduced his report, noting the areas of success such as The Sill Education programme and said that now the new Director of Park Management has been appointed, there would be positive progress with some actions not addressed to far. He pointed out the six key risks (paragraph 6 of the report) and Appendix 1 ‘Strategic Risk Register 2018-2019 Update on Q1 actions’

Referring to the six key risks, the Head of Forward Planning said that capacity and resources remained a key risk to the Authority, as well as the impact of recruitment issues being resolved. He added that one risk had been realised - the fire at the Otterburn Ranges and both the MoD and Authority were open to learning lessons from this blow to the area.

There being no other issues, the Chairman drew attention to recommendations (1) and (2) proposed by Cllr Sue Bolam, seconded by Cllr Andy Saunders and approved by members who

---

RESOLVED to

1) note the progress on delivery of the Operational Plan, which at the Q1 point indicates: 84% of actions remain on target; 15% are currently behind target; and 1% are off target; and
2) note the progress towards mitigating the risks identified in the 2018-2021 Strategic Risk Register, which at the Q1 point indicates: 12% of actions have been completed; 80% are in progress; and 8% of actions have yet to have begun.
NPA58-2018  Item 5: Quarterly Sill Update

The Interim Sill Manager introduced the report and was pleased to highlight to members the high number of visitors to The Sill since opening in July 2017 (over 170,000 in the first full year); the number of YHA stays exceeding target the joint offers being worked on with the YHA e.g. YHA stays combined with Sill meeting room use; the increase in visitor spend from 87p per head to £1.20 with the 45% profit margin close to being realised; and the new offers at The Sill Café which would hopefully reverse some of the negative feedback the Café had been receiving as these had been affecting the overall positive reviews of The Sill.

Questions and Comments

A member asked for clarification on visitor numbers. The Chief Executive explained that the Leadership Team received a weekly ‘dashboard’ of visitor numbers and activity figures. Visitor figures were triangulated with car parking figures, café sales and YHA stays and were the best estimate as there are not visitor counters on all access points to The Sill.

A member asked about trends in visitors. The Director of Business Development said that August had been less busy than anticipated, though the target had still been met rather than exceeded, with the summer activity days was not achieving the expected spike in take-up, though the winter months (especially November and February) tended to be better than expected from visitor numbers. School activity days were proving increasingly popular with some repeat visits from schools beginning to appear. There was also a growing secondary school and university market emerging with new offers being developed to suit this specific market.

With regard to volunteering at The Sill, members noted the wide range of ability, knowledge and age range of volunteers at the Digital Landscapes exhibition, with the age range bringing down the volunteer average age by 10 years. There was also an increase in enquiries about corporate volunteering and both these types of volunteering should be captured going forward.

The Director of Business Development said, however, that the income target for activity days was not being met but work was progressing to improve this across all areas. As a result a revised budget was being discussed with the Heritage Lottery Fund in late October 2018 with a view to providing information to The Sill Advisory Board on 9 November.

A member asked about Sill hires. The Director of Business Development said these had been less successful than expected though room use was increasing with some repeat business; the Hive Hub had been disappointing with regard to take-up. A marketing campaign is being developed for the Hive Hub and she was working with others to build up both Hive and meeting room take-up.

In response to queries about the visitor reviews, the Director of Business Development said all reviews were ‘reviewed’; negative as well as positive ones were taken on board and the aim was to achieve more positive reviews.

The Chairman intimated that the new Sill Advisory Board would meet for the first time on 9 November and members not on this committee were invited to attend as observers. From the meeting several topics had been earmarked for discussion at The Sill Advisory Board including:

- update on visitor numbers including trends;
- update on activity day numbers;
- reporting back from the HLF meeting in October;
- Sill ‘Hive and Hires’ update and way forward;
- Café and catering offer and future of this to ensure offer is right one for The Sill; and
- Updated topics from The Sill for Authority Review on 17 October.
There being no other issues, the Chairman drew attention to recommendations (a) to (d) proposed by Cllr Sue Bolam, seconded by Cllr Alan Sharp and approved by members who

RESOLVED to
a) note the progress being made in all aspects of the project;
b) note the success of this summer’s Digital Landscapes Exhibition;
c) note that income generation remains below target however, continued improvement is being made across all aspects of the project; and

d) note the improvement in customer feedback.

NPA59-2018  Item 6: First Quarter Financial Performance and Medium Term Budget Update

The Head of Business Support introduced the report and drew attention to the recommendation and highlighted a few key areas:

- Table 1 – overall net surplus is £200,000 more than planned with the main variance being the salary budget;
- Paragraphs 4 (d) and 4 (e) – progress was being reached with regard to cost-efficiency targets with the Year 1 target achievable though it remained a challenge in future years, with an annual increase in place;
- Paragraphs (g) to (n) – The Sill Business Plan – drew attention to the areas of surplus (operational costs and car parking) and deficits (such as the Hive rental)
- Revitalising Redesdale – members should note the cost to the National Park would be £50,000 over two years;
- Section 6 – Annual Audit letter – this will be published on the website after this meeting and deadlines had been achieved;

Questions and Comments

A member stressed the importance of fundraising and asked for an update on recent successes. The Director of Business Development advised £50,000 had been received for improved signage with a number of live bids in place waiting for results. The Head of Communications and Fundraising post had had to be re-advertised after the job offer had been turned down which was a further blow to fundraising progress.

With regard to the Hubs, the Chief Executive said commercial rents had gone down generally meaning the Authority was no longer competitive; there was general uncertainty about committing to taking office space due to the current economic climate, and that this was being addressed.

Members referred to paragraph 2 (f) the National Park Partnership and asked the Chairman to write to Steve Curl to seek an update on the National Park Partnership and clarification on subscriptions as the National Park Partnership appeared to have moved to a subscription model which was not what was agreed by some national parks, including Northumberland (see exempt report to the Authority March 2018).

There being no other issues, the Chairman drew attention to recommendation (a) and an additional recommendation (b):

(b) to request that the Chairman write to Steve Curl at National Park Partnerships to seek clarification on subscriptions, to note that further subscriptions would be linked to performance and to receive an update on National Park Partnership.

The recommendations (a) and (b) were proposed by Cllr Sue Bolam, seconded by Cllr Andy Saunders and approved by members who
RESOLVED to
a) note the contents of the report; and
b) to request that the Chairman write to Steve Curl at National Park Partnerships to seek clarification on subscriptions, to note that further subscriptions would be linked to performance and to receive an update on National Park Partnership.'

NPA60-2018 Delegated Decisions: none

NPA61-2018 Urgent Business

The Chairman said the following report would be taken as an item of urgent business.

Item 7: Proposed changes to The Sill staffing structure

The Chairman reminded members he had agreed to take an urgent item about The Sill staffing structure so that the resultant proposed changes to the Authority's establishment could be considered by members present, who had all received a copy of the report.

The Chief Executive advised members that the recommendation was for members to approve recruitment of two new roles of Head of Sill Operations (four days a week) and Head of Programmes and Exhibitions (three days a week).

The Director of Business Development explained the purpose of the report which was to replace the old Sill Manager post with two separate posts (which were not job share) – a Head of Sill Operations and a Head of Programmes and Exhibitions. The Director of Business Development said these posts had been benchmarked against other similar cultural roles, stressed that the roles were across the whole of the Authority’s work, not just The Sill and was confident that the right calibre of person would be attracted to the positions at the anticipated band offered.

Questions and Comments

Members asked if the three days allocated to Head of Programmes and Exhibitions was sufficient and were concerned there may be a risk here if this post gravitated to more days (time creep) or required a job evaluation resulting in a higher grade, and this could be an additional financial cost to the Authority. The Director of Business Development said she had considered the implications of a Band 7 re-evaluation but not an increase in days so had noted this.

Members suggested the two posts could constitute a governance issue and the roles should be evaluated after a year to see how they were developing and if the job specifications were fit for purpose. Members also asked if there was any overlap with existing posts e.g. visitor experience or marketing. The Director of Business Development noted these comments.

The Chief Executive said with regard to 'time creep' the two new posts would be supported by staff such as the front-of-house team who were in seven days a week so the issue of The Sill running efficiently seven days a week had been considered and hopefully addressed by this new structure.

Members spoke about fundraising which they noted had taken a significant dip and asked if the new roles meant that attention could now be diverted to this important area as a priority. The Director of Business Development said she hoped the two new roles would help her focus more on key issues like fundraising (with support from the Head of Business Support and the new Head of Communications and Fundraising due to be appointed shortly) and should also allow her to commit more time to her new role of Director.

There being no other issues, the Chairman drew attention to the recommendation, noting the
comments made by members above, proposed by Cllr Val Gibson, seconded by Mr Peter Murray and approved by members who

RESOLVED to approve the recruitment of the two new roles of Head of Sill Operations (four days a week) and Head of Programmes and Exhibitions (three days a week)

NPA62-2018 Members’ Question Time

- members noted information on the 360 degree appraisal questionnaires would be sent out shortly and were urged to act upon this information in a timely manner.

- a member asked about maintenance of The Sill roof plants and felt there was a need to encourage more native and seasonal plants. The Chief Executive explained the upsurge of clover during the summer was being addressed. The roof planting was an experiment as well as a learning exercise and additional ‘spot’ planting of Whin Sill grassland plants was scheduled in the coming weeks.

- a member asked about plans for the Coquetdale Centre. The Chief Executive explained the Estates Task & Finish Group was considering options, with the Authority agreeing the Centre would remain empty over the summer. Members asked for an update at a future meeting

Part One of the meeting ended at 1223 and was followed by Part Two

PART TWO: EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Part Two started at 1225.

The Chairman 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 reason for the exclusion of press and public for this part of the meeting was clarified as: The report NNPA63-2018 Item 1 (P) contained exempt information as per Part 1, Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 [as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006] relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information).

Members were reminded that they required to be satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing information. Cllr Sue Bolam proposed the resolution, seconded by Ms Fiona Gough and approved by members who

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from Part Two of the meeting.

Members of the public, some officers, Cllr Val Gibson and the Independent Person withdrew.

NPA63-2018 Item P (1): Exempt Minutes Authority Annual Meeting 11 July 2018

The draft Exempt Minutes of the Authority Annual Meeting were proposed by Cllr Sue Bolam as a true record, seconded by Cllr Johnny Wilson and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting, including Part Two concluded at 1230

Signed: …………………………………………………………………………   Date: ……………………