NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF FULL AUTHORITY MEETING

The Jubilee Hall, Rothbury, Northumberland

WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH 2019 1000 - 1315

Present
Cllr Glen Sanderson (Chairman) (NCC)  Mrs Jean Davidson (Deputy Chairman) (SoS National)
Ms Fiona Gough (SoS National)  Mr Peter Murray (SoS National)
Cllr John Riddle OBE (NCC)  Cllr Andy Saunders (SoS Parish)
Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)  Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)
Cllr Chris France (SoS Parish)  Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National)
Cllr Johnny Wilson (SoS Parish)  Cllr Eileen Cartie (NCC) (from 1015)
Mrs Pippa Ross (SoS National)  Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell (SoS Parish)
Mr Mike Bell (SoS National)

In attendance
Officers: Tony Gates (Chief Executive [National Park Officer]); Pauline Wall (Director of Park Management); Rosie Thomas (Director of Business Development and Monitoring Officer); Hazel Fitzsimmons (Head of Business Support, Chief Financial Officer and Section 151 Officer); Claire Mason (Head of Sill Operations); Clive Coyne (Head of Forward Planning); Sarah Burn (Head of Exhibitions and Activities); Pete Trumper (Head of Access and Estates); Robert Mayhew (Head of Conservation); Tracey Craft (Finance Manager); Mary Wallace (HR Officer).
Others: Jayne Phillips (Independent Person); Dr Nicola Bell (member of the public)

NPA01-2019  Apologies for absence

Apologies were noted from Cllr Anthony Murray MBE, Cllr Val Gibson and Cllr Julie Foster.

NPA02-2019  Chairman’s Introduction

The Chairman noted the following changes to the establishment since the last meeting: New starts: Caroline O’Doherty (Head of Business Development); Sarah Burn (Head of Activities and Exhibitions); Jay Smith (Planning Officer). Leavers: Rebecca Adams (Planning Officer); Nathan Haley (Assistant Trail Maintenance Ranger).

The Chairman advised members that Item 4 ‘The Sill Update’ was for members’ information and would not be taken at this meeting but would be discussed at the Sill Advisory Board meeting later in the afternoon.

The Chairman drew attention to recent awards received by the Authority including a Selwyn Goldsmith award for The Sill, an award for the ‘Digital Landscapes’ project and an award for the Authority’s work on mental health in the workplace.

‘Revitalising Redesdale’ presentation

The Chairman thanked Karen Collins and Maria Hardy for the presentation to members on the ‘Revitalising Redesdale’ project at the start of the meeting and reminded members this project would also be the topic of the next Authority Review meeting on 17 April 2019.
A member asked about the volunteering aspect of this initiative particularly regarding time spent managing volunteers against time spent by volunteers completing tasks. Members were advised that whilst a lot of time was spent with volunteers, a balance did need to be struck between voluntary work and other work, though it was dependent upon the type of project in question. Members asked for an update on ‘Revitalising Redesdale’ in twelve months’ time.

Other matters

The Chairman advised members that he and the Chief Executive had concluded their current round of meetings with parish councils and had visited them all except Ingram Parish Council.

The Chairman reported on a number of current Defra matters:
• the new Historic Building Restoration Grant scheme worth £2 million was being piloted in five national parks offering funding for land managers to restore their historic farm buildings so they can be used again for farming purposes. Good progress was being made by the Authority with currently 24 live projects (potential £1 million from these) with funding from Defra for up to 80% of the projects;
• updated on the ‘Peatscapes’ initiative, funded by Defra, advising members the Authority had submitted a bid to be part of this initiative; and
• ELMS (Environmental Land Management Scheme) – the Authority will be undertaking tests and trials for future ELMS schemes (public money for public goods) and the Authority had been successful with 49 projects taken forwards so far.

A member asked about the historic farm buildings project and how the estimated £1 million was calculated. The Head of Conservation explained that funding was based on cost of refurbishment of the buildings based on information from architects and builder’s tendering for the work, and stressed was not for change of building use.

NPA03-2019 Question Time: There were no questions from members of the public.

NPA04-2019 Declaration of Interests: There were no formally notified declarations of interest.

NPA05-2019 Minutes of Authority Meeting held on 12 December 2018

There being no other issues raised, the draft Minutes of the 12 December 2018 Authority meeting, as circulated and with the amendment noted, were proposed as a true record by Cllr A Sharp, seconded by Cllr A Saunders and approved by members who

RESOLVED that the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Northumberland National Park Authority Meeting held on Wednesday 12 December 2018, as circulated, be approved as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

NPA06-2019 Item 1: Medium Term Budget Plan

The Head of Business Support went through her report and drew attention to recommendations (a) to (e). It was noted at para 5.22 that the bid for Phase 2 of the Walltown development was in progress with the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

The Head of Business Support highlighted a few key areas including:
• operating staff and related costs (Table 2) and referred to pension costs (para 5.6) stating there was currently no need for any additional pension provision at this stage;
• business rates (para 5.9) and the unexpected bill for retrospective business rates for car parks due to a Ratings Valuation Office discrepancy with £20,000 added to the budget to cover this;
• efficiency targets (Table 4) stressing the responsibility across the Authority to meet these; and ongoing income generation (Table 5);
• for non-Sill related projects, nothing was forecast with a bottom line impact, noting Phase 2 of the Walltown project;
• The Sill – 2019/20 was the final year of project funding and an independent National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) audit will be undertaken in due course;
• The Sill business plan (para 5.27 and Table 8) had been discussed by Leadership Team and Finance & Audit Group. Members should note stretching targets with both new and untested income. The Head of Business Development assured members that Leadership Team received regular updates on The Sill as appropriate (weekly, monthly or quarterly);
• Table 10 (including earmarked reserves) noting contingency provision.

The Head of Business Support said it was a challenging budget, costs and income were not static and the Authority had to continue to strive to be fit for the future.

Questions and Comments

A member suggested it would be useful to have an indication of ‘actuals’ in the medium term budget reporting process such as updates at Finance & Audit group meetings. The member was concerned that other Authority work may not be possible and further savings and cost-cutting would be required in order to fund The Sill as they felt the forecasting was too optimistic. The Head of Business Support stressed to members there should be no budgetary surprises and members would be kept up to date especially with Sill costs. The member requested an additional recommendation to require quarterly monitoring of the budget by the Finance & Audit Group.

The Chief Executive agreed the cost of The Sill was a real risk to the Authority but a trajectory had been set to raise more income especially philanthropic monies and whilst there was a need to be clear about the cost of The Sill, this should not dominate the Authority’s ambition and the Authority had to be alive to both the risks and opportunities such an innovative project brings.

A member commented that the Authority was moving into a different phase now – for example with the NLHF funds for The Sill reaching an end and the ambitious Walltown project taking shape, income generation and fundraising would become more and more important, so did the Authority have the time and resources to manage this without impacting on the Authority’s core work. The Chief Executive said that the Director of Business Development and the Head of Business Development posts had been assigned to cover these areas.

The Director of Business Development said the Authority was experiencing significant cultural changes so it needed to work in a new and inventive way; income generation targets were in place to deliver the Authority’s core objectives and it was up to the Leadership Team to ensure time and resources were in place to allow this to happen.

A member raised the issue of the £100,000 planning reserve ceiling (set aside for any potential impact of wind farms in the National Park) and asked if it was time to review this. The Chief Executive explained that during the examination period for the draft Local Plan (2017 – 2037) it was prudent to leave the planning reserve in place and said it was proposed to reduce this amount during the Local Plan period to £75,000 then increase it by £10,000 per annum until the original level was reached.

The member therefore asked that the option to reduce the planning reserve going forward be kept under review in setting next year’s budget.

The Chairman said he was proud of the Authority members supporting ambitious programmes and building a base upon which the Authority could go forward and flourish.

There being no other issues raised, the Chairman drew attention to recommendations and proposed an additional recommendation (f) ‘…that quarterly budget updates be submitted to the
Finance & Audit Group’. The recommendations (a) to (f) were proposed by Cllr S Bolam, seconded by Mr M Bell and approved by members who

RESOLVED to

a) approve the Budget Plan for the three years 2019-2020 to 2021-2022 in Table 9;

b) approve the Reserves Policy in Paragraph 7.3;

c) approve the Budget earmarked reserves detailed in Section 7;

d) note the key risks to the Budget Plan detailed in Section 8;

e) approve the Operational Boundary and Authorised Borrowing limits set out in Section 9; and

f) request that quarterly budget updates be submitted to the Finance & Audit Group.

NPA07-2019  Item 2: Authority Review Meeting Report 13 February 2019

The Chief Executive explained the topic for this Authority Review meeting had been Governance which had been attended by nine members and drew attention to the both recommendations (a) to (c) in his report and the Leadership Team recommendations in Appendix 1.

With regard to recommendations in Appendix 1, the Chief Executive drew attention to point 2 and said the two members’ training sessions would take place by May 2019, not February [amendment to recommendation (c)].

Questions and Comments

The Chair of Authority Review thanked everyone – officers and members – who had participated in the Governance review and spoke about factors that could be looked at to improve ways of working, culture and values and reducing impact on staff.

The Chief Executive drew attention to Appendix 1, point 4 and said the schedule of meetings would be reviewed to avoid double report writing and foster better discipline, especially at Full Authority meetings, with members for example, refraining from getting into operational matters during discussions or debating issues which were designated as information items.

A member suggested that feedback on the Authority’s Governance was needed from a wider audience including youngsters and could such a survey be undertaken at The Sill, for example.

A member was concerned that all points from the surveys and questionnaires completed by members and officers were taken on board as some important and relevant points had not been included in the report of the meeting.

There being no other issues raised, the Chairman drew attention to recommendations (a) and (b), noted the amendment to recommendation (c) ‘…. Set out in Appendix 1 to Item 3 noting the amendment to point 2’, proposed by Cllr S Bolam, seconded by Mrs J Davidson and approved by members who

RESOLVED to

a. note the findings of the Review of Governance meeting held on 13 February 2019;

b. note and consider the response from Leadership Team in respect of the recommendations from this meeting; and

C. endorse the actions planned or currently underway as set out in Appendix 1 to Item 3 noting the amendment to point 2.
Item 3: Third Quarter Performance including quarterly Operational Plan, Strategic Risk Register and Management Plan Action Plan updates

The Head of Forward Planning went through this report, which was provided for information and drew attention to recommendations (1) to (3). It was pointed out that the footer on the report should be 2019 not 2018. The Head of Forward Planning highlighted a few areas:

- the Operational Plan - Quarter 3 update: strong performance especially with Border Uplands Demonstrator Initiative (BUDI) project, Pennine Way, and The Sill temporary exhibitions; and
- three actions were off target (para 5c): there was no simple cause for this apart from a high level of officer ambition for two of them (Sill Activity Plan and Heritage at Risk volunteers) and the third was out with the Authority’s control (undergrounding of overhead lines).

Questions and Comments

A member, referring to the Operational Plan, asked about the large number of objectives (152) and targets (122 met). The Chief Executive explained that a lot of the Authority’s work was measured from small to large projects so there had to be a balance between listing everything or just the more strategic objectives. The Director of Park Management advised members that following talks with managers, a series of staff workshops to help progress the development of a Strategic Delivery Plan which would inform future Operational Plans were being planned for early summer and this was likely to lead to a refinement in the number of objectives.

With regard to the Management Plan process, the Head of Forward Planning said every effort was being made to highlight the positives of the Management Plan and engage partners and wider audiences. It was noted a possible cause of lack of engagement with partners could be their own lack of resources. The Head of Exhibitions and Activities said spoke about utilising the temporary exhibition space at The Sill and how this could be used to facilitate public feedback and interaction.

There being no other issues raised, the Chairman drew attention to recommendations (1) to (3), proposed by Cllr S Bolam, seconded by Mr M Bell and approved by members who

REISED
1) note the progress on delivery of the Operational Plan;
2) note the collaborative work achieved by the National Park Management Plan Partnership in delivering the 2018-2019 Annual Action Plan and how this relates to the 2016-2021 Management Plan; and
3) note the progress towards mitigating the risks identified in the 2018-2021 Strategic Risk Register.

Item 4: The Sill Quarterly Update

The Chairman reminded members that this report was deferred for discussion at The Sill Advisory Board meeting, to be held following the Authority Meeting and would not therefore be discussed by the full member complement.

Item 5: Third Quarter Financial Performance and Budget update

The Finance Manager went through her report, which was provided for information, and drew attention to the recommendation.
The Finance Manager highlighted the unexpected rates assessment which had resulted in a charge of £38,000 levied for 2017 - 2019 (see Item 1 para 5.9) and as a result, an operating expenditure deficit of £24,000 was forecast.

The Finance Manager referred to income generating areas and was pleased to advise members that since the report had been prepared, the two vacant pods had been let from 1 April 2019 and the Harthope Room let from 1 May 2019. The rental income from the Rural Growth Hub would therefore be higher than reported and only one office remained to be let at Eastburn.

The Finance Manager referred to Section 4 of the report (The Sill Business Plan) which detailed the £35,100 budget deficit and explained how this was made up. The Finance Manager added that budget data for this year had been closely analysed and fed into the work on assumptions for The Sill Business Plan budget as discussed in Item 1 (table 8).

There being no other issues raised the Chairman drew attention to the recommendation proposed by Mrs P Ross, seconded by Ms F Gough and approved by members who

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

NPA11-2019  Delegated Decisions: none
NPA12-2019  Urgent Business: none
NPA13-2019  Members’ Questions / Comments

Comment: A member asked for a full staff chart to be circulated by e-mail.

Question: A member asked about progress with the Coquetdale Centre and for a further update at the July meeting.

Answer: The Head of Access and Estates advised members there was some positive movement with letting the space including interest from a new party.

Comment: A member spoke about Dieter Helm’s book ‘Natural Capital’ and read out some paragraphs. Given the significance of issues pertinent to the National Park such as upland farming, peat management and wildlife it was agreed a further discussion on this matter should take place with the possibility of ‘Natural Capital’ being a topic for a forthcoming member policy conference.

This part of the meeting ended at 1203.

Part One was followed by Part Two
PART TWO: EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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 reports NPA14-2019, NPA15-2019, NPA16-2019 and NPA17-2019 contained exempt information as per Part 1, Paragraph 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 [as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006] 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 required to be satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing information.

Cllr S Bolam proposed the resolution, seconded by Ms F Gough and approved by members who

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

Members of the press and public and the Independent Person left the meeting.

**NPA14-2019** Item 1 (P): Authority Exempt Minutes 12 December 2018

**NPA15-2019** Item 2 (P): Estates: Greenlee Lough

**NPA16-2019** Item 3 (P): National Park Partnership Ltd Future Funding

**NPA17-2019** Item 4 (P): Estates: Falstone Old School tea Room

The Exempt Minutes for this section are confidential and recorded separately.

The meeting, including Part Two concluded at 1315.