

**NEW FOREST ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (NFALC)****Minutes of the General Meeting of the New Forest Association of Local Councils held on-line via Zoom, 2 February 2023 at 6.00pm**

<b><u>Parish/Town Council</u></b>	<b><u>Name</u></b>
Brockenhurst	John Korbey – Vice Chairman
Copythorne	Graham Chillcott
Fawley	Paul Saunders
Hordle	Maggie Hill
Lyndhurst	George Bisson – Chairman Jeannie Smith
Minstead	Richard Taylor Helen Bennett
New Milton	Graham Flexman-Coordinator Joy Bean Joanna Hayward
Ringwood	John Hayward
New Forest District Council	Kate Ryan, Chief Executive Cllr David Russell, Portfolio Holder for People & Places Rebecca Drummond, Deputy Returning Officer Nikki Swift, Community Safety Manager
Hampshire Association of Local Councils	Dawn Hamblet, Chief Executive
New Forest National Park Authority	Steve Avery, Executive Director
<b>Apologies:</b>	
Bramshaw	Sue Bennison
Fawley	Stephanie Bennett
Fordingbridge	Rachel Edwards

## 1. Chairman's Announcements

Chairman welcomed 18 attendees from 10 councils including representatives from NFDC.

NFALC needs to consider succession planning as far as the position of Chairman is concerned and *inter alia* HALC Board Director as Cllr George Bisson will be retiring in May albeit John Korbey expressed a willingness to continue as Vice-Chairman of NFALC.

## 2. Minutes

Chairman referred to Appendix 1, being Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022.

The Co-ordinator pointed out two items needing correction, firstly under Minute 1 there were in fact 14 attendees from 13 councils (rather than the other way around) and under apologies Cllr Sue Bennison represents Bramshaw PC rather than Ashurst & Colbury PC.

Subject to the above amendments, the minutes were approved by those present and agreed as a true record.

Minutes would be signed by the Chairman at the next face-to-face meeting on 20th April.

## 3. Matters Arising - None

## 4. New Forest District Council

The Chairman referred to Appendix 2, being the **New Forest Shop Doctor Programme**.

Cllr David Russell, NFDC Portfolio Holder for People & Places referred to NFDC backed New Forest Shop Doctor Programme that has been running for a couple of years now, with 82 participating stores involved this year. It was well appreciated at Totton last year.

Independent retail and hospitality businesses in Hythe, Lyndhurst, New Milton and Barton, as well as Fordingbridge, Milford on Sea and Brockenhurst registered for the 2023 Shop Doctor Programme. The programme helps businesses to identify individual areas of strength and weakness, through a series of Shop Doctor (Mystery Shopper) visits resulting in a higher quality standard of retail and hospitality provision in town and village centres. This in turn will boost confidence and provide a source of publicity.

Participating businesses receive a confidential report from the Shop Doctor, a certificate of participation and the opportunity to attend an event where they and stakeholders will receive collective feedback on the customer experience in their local shopping areas.

Regarding **cemeteries**, that come under Cllr Russell's remit, Cabinet yesterday agreed the following recommendations due to increasing pressures for more burial grounds:

1. In order to meet predicted future interment needs, officers would carry out further work to progress the expansion of interment provision at Calshot cemetery. Cabinet agreed a new budget of £60,000 to facilitate this work.
2. In order to meet predicted future interment needs, officers will continue in discussions with the landowners of the adjacent and adjoining land identified at Milford Road Cemetery, with a subsequent project budget to be confirmed at a later date.
3. To progress a review of 8 closed churchyards and 2 others nearing closure, to ensure associated transferred liabilities and risks are in full compliance with legislation.
4. To progress options for cremated remains in walls (columbaria) identifying appropriate locations in cemeteries and paying particular attention to Calshot, and Milford Road.

John Hayward said Ringwood, in charge of their own cemetery will be introducing what's known as Columbaria (wall with niches for funeral urns to be stored) in 6-12 months' time, and these are a feature abroad in Italy, the US and Hong Kong, members heard.

**Community Grant awards** were confirmed by Cllr Russell totalling £129,600 in revenue and £92,000 in capital grants that were also approved by Cabinet for inclusion in next year budget. Cllr Russell said within that amount there are 3 Service Level Agreements with HCC for transportation projects all funded from the overall budget for Community Grants.

**Wheels to work** – This is a moped loan service which aims to help people between 16 and 25 with no access to suitable transport get to work, apprenticeships, training or job interviews. Current NFDC grant funding is £7,050. A sum of £7,800 was agreed next year.

**Call and Go** – This is a bookable community transport service for anyone whose transport needs are not met by public bus services to go, for example, shopping, to visit a library or to see family and friends. Drivers will assist with carrying shopping; wheelchair accessible minibuses collect users from their home at pre-arranged time. The cost will vary according to the distance travelled. Current NFDC funding is £27,335. Agreed £28,556 for next year.

**Group Hire** – This scheme provides affordable wheelchair accessible minibuses to hire for voluntary or charitable organisations for a period of 3 hours to 1 week. The cost of hire depends on the distance travelled and duration of hire period. Current NFDC grant funding is £13,032. A sum of £13,671 was agreed by Cabinet for next year.

Current funding of 3 community transport schemes is £47,419. Cabinet approved £50,027.

Chairman then asked Kate Ryan, Chief Executive to give an update on district matters. Kate said Rebecca Drummond had been appointed Deputy Returning Officer and will provide an update on the forthcoming elections including Photo ID.

Kate referred to the recent **Residents Survey** considered by a Scrutiny Panel and then Cabinet yesterday. Key findings are as follows:

**Reputation** – NFDC scored significantly higher than the LGA average, with 93% of respondents satisfied with the area as a place to live, 78% with the way NFDC runs things and 74% trusted NFDC.

**Service satisfaction** - The top-rated services were registering to vote (96%), community recycling banks (90%), garden waste collection (88%), health and leisure centres (87%) and waste and recycling services (83%).

**Internet use** - Over 9 in 10 residents (93%) cite they personally use the internet at home or outside of work, which is in line with the Ofcom national indicator (also 93%).

**Community safety** - Nearly all residents (96%) report feeling very or fairly safe in their local area. Around three-quarters (73%) of residents' report feeling very or fairly safe after dark. Nearly a quarter (24%) of residents reported that their quality of life is affected a great deal / a fair amount by fear of crime.

**Climate change** - Three quarters (75%) of residents' report feeling very or somewhat worried about the impact of climate change. Residents were also asked what steps they have taken in the last 12 months to benefit the environment or address climate change. Most (91%) reported using less energy at home.

**Recycling** - Just over four-fifths (81%) of residents report it is very easy / easy to recycle. Two thirds (66%) of residents feel that NFDC could do more to encourage households to recycle more.

**Community** - NFDC scored significantly higher than the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) benchmark indicators for community question as follows: My local area is a place where people get on well together (NFDC 89%, DCMS 83%).

**Household finances** - Nearly two-thirds (62%) of residents report their financial situation in the last 12 months getting a little or a lot worse. Although 59% report their financial position as very or relatively comfortable, 34% report they are just about managing.

**Climate Change & Action Plan 2023** was also approved at Cabinet yesterday, Kate said.

Roxanne King, NFDC **Climate Change Manager**, will be focusing on a variety of projects under the three main areas of carbon reduction, climate adaption, and nature recovery, looking at these areas in particular to deliver the most impact and best value for money, making sure that climate action and sustainability is considered in everything NFDC do, and how we do it. Roxanne will be sending out an invitation to Town and Parish Councils shortly, inviting them to a Climate Change Conference taking place on 1 March at the Lyndhurst Community Centre from 4.30 to 6.00pm.

Also recently announced was the budget for **capital spend** across the district. Funding will cover projects and initiatives from 2023 to 2026, and include new council housing, coastal protection schemes, council housing maintenance, a new operational depot facility, updated vehicles, and commercial and residential property. As well as the £139 million CapEx, £92,000 has been set aside for **community grants**, awarded to local groups and organisations who are providing essential community services.

Kate referred to recent and forthcoming **staff changes**, with a new strategic leadership team to meet the ambitions of the council that is becoming more externally focused, Solent Free Port being mentioned, with an increasing legal framework to contend with as far as Council Housing regulatory framework is concerned, like that applied to Housing Associations, with tenant engagement and inspection regimes not seen before.

NFDC will be adopting new ways of delivering services with transformation under 3 **Strategic Directors**. The senior management team will now include Grainne O'Rourke as strategic director of housing, communities and governance; Alan Bethune as strategic director of corporate resources and transformation; and James Carpenter as strategic director for place, operations and sustainability from March. Also, an Assistant Director for planning and regeneration to be appointed to act as Head of Planning.

The Chairman thanked Kate Ryan for attending, and for her very informative presentation.

## 5. Safer New Forest

The Safer New Forest Partnership consists of agencies including NFDC, Hants & IOW Constabulary, Hants & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service, West Hants Clinical Commissioning Group and the Probation Service working together towards reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, to make the New Forest a safer place to live, work and visit.

Nikki Swift, Community Safety Manager from NFDC, advised that the 2022-23 Safer New Forest Partnerships priorities below are now coming to an end.

- **Drug and alcohol related crime**- uses a multi-agency forum, with meetings every 6 weeks. This year, it included registering and marking over 200 bikes to reduce thefts.
- **Domestic Abuse** – Overseen by a forum that Nikki chairs, highlighting any gaps in services noting some over 55s tend not to complain. Working with HCC Adult Services
- **Prevention of Exploitation of Vulnerable People** - Includes work by the Fire Service The Modern Slavery Partnership for Hampshire holds a quarterly steering group.

The Safer New Forest Partnership is required to undertake annual community consultation regarding crime and disorder. The Community Safety Team completed their annual community engagement events across the New Forest last year, engaging with local residents regarding crime and anti-social behaviour.

Following the success of the community events, at market towns and other places, including skateparks, they asked for feedback from Town & Parish Councils seeking their views and thoughts on their local areas. That will help inform the Safety Partnership on their annual strategic assessment for 2023-24.

## 6. Elections 2023

The Chairman welcomed Rebecca Drummond, NFDC Deputy Returning Officer / Service Manager - Business Improvement and Elections who referred to new boundaries, 6 new polling stations (affecting 16,000) plus Photo ID, Purdah period and key dates as follows.

From May 2023, voters will be required to show a form of photographic identification at polling stations before they are able to cast their vote. This will affect all voters across the New Forest who vote in person or by proxy at the polling station and will be brought in for next scheduled elections on **Thursday 4 May 2023**.

### Types of photographic identification

A full list of accepted forms of ID will be included on your poll card. This will arrive shortly before the scheduled elections in May and will be in an envelope addressed to you. You will likely already have one of the following:

- a UK issued Passport
- a photographic driver's licence (including provisional)
- a European Economic Area (EEA) photographic ID Card
- a UK Biometric Residence Permit
- an identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (PASS card)
- a Blue Badge
- a concessionary travel pass - for example Hampshire County Council Bus Pass

You must bring the original document. Scanned images or copies will not be accepted. Out of date identification will be accepted if the photo is still a current likeness.

### What to do if you do not have any photo ID

The deadline to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VOC) for use at May elections is **5pm on Tuesday 25 April**. Please apply as soon as possible in case we need to check any of your details. There are three options:

- Government Portal** - If you do not have any of the accepted types of photo identification and you want to vote at the polling station, you will need to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) on the Government Portal by uploading photo and applying on-line. You must be registered to vote to use this service. This will be an A4 photographic identification document specifically designed to allow you to cast your vote.
- Walk in to Information Offices** - Forms can be collected or handed in to one of our information offices. If you need help with this process please call 023 8028 5445 or visit one of our information offices.
- Paper Application**- Temporary certificates are available by writing to Appletree Court.

### Voting by post or by proxy

You will not need ID to vote by post, you will be issued with a postal ballot as usual. If you choose to nominate a proxy to vote on your behalf, they will need to have their own ID to be issued with a ballot paper.

### Purdah period

The pre-election sensitivity period (previously referred to as Purdah period) will commence on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March when we publish the Notice of Election – the latest we can publish the Notice is the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023 but we have decided to go a week earlier to allow for nomination papers to be managed over a longer period of time. This also means that the pre-election sensitivity period is a week earlier and lasts until after Election Day on 4 May.

### **Election timetable**

The publication of the Notice of Election triggers the election timetable, as below:

Publication of Notice of Election Monday 20 March 2023

Receipt of Nominations 4:00 pm Tuesday 4 April 2023

Withdrawal of Candidate 4:00 pm Tuesday 4 April 2023

Appointment of Election Agents 4:00 pm Tuesday 4 April 2023

Publication of Notice of Election Agents 4:00 pm Tuesday 4 April 2023

Publication of Statements of Persons Nominated 4:00 pm Wednesday 5 April 2023

Last Date for Registration Monday 17 April 2023

Last Date for Receipt of Postal Vote Applications 5:00 pm Tuesday 18 April 2023

Publication of Notice of Poll Tuesday 25 April 2023

Last Date for Receipt of Proxy Vote Applications 5:00 pm Tuesday 25 April 2023

Appointment of Poll and Count Agents Wednesday 26 April 2023

First Day to Issue Replacement Lost Postal Ballot Papers Thursday 27 April 2023

Last Day to Issue Replacement Spoilt or Lost Postal Ballot Papers 5:00 pm Thursday 4 May 2023

Last Day for Receipt of Emergency Proxy Vote Applications 5:00 pm Thursday 4 May 2023

Day of Poll 7:00 am to 10:00 pm Thursday 4 May 2023

Return of Election Expenses Thursday 8 June 2023 Notices

### **Nomination papers for Town and Parish elections**

Whilst it is the responsibility of individual candidates to ensure that they are properly nominated and that their nomination forms are completed correctly, it is often the case that the parish clerk is asked to assist with this process.

The window to submit papers opens on Monday 20 March 2023 and the deadline for our receipt of nomination papers is 4pm Tuesday 4 April 2023.

### **Information for Candidates and Agents**

A briefing session for all prospective candidates and agents will be held on Monday 1 March at 6:30pm which all parish clerks are welcome to attend. This session will be hosted online via Microsoft Teams.

### **Count arrangements**

Planning has begun and the rolling count will take place at Applemore Health & Leisure Centre on Friday 5th May 2023. There will not be an overnight count. In order to assist with timings, we plan to share an indicative timetable for when results are likely to be declared. This will be sent to you via email in the coming months.

## 7. New Forest National Park

The Chairman referred to Appendix 4 and welcomed Steve Avery, Executive Director, New Forest National Park Authority.

Steve mentioned there was a full Authority meeting last week, on 26 January 2023 and referred to the Chief Executive's Report on-line. The NPA is helping to promote two draft **Public Space Protection Orders** (PSPOs) proposed by NFDC with partners focused on lighting of fires and using BBQs principally on Crown Lands and the feeding and petting of commoners' animals in the National Park. New Forest Rangers to be able to impose fines.

**Partnership campaigns** to help protect the National Park included an infographic showing the impact of the joint campaigns across the year. Highlights included: • 63 retailers taking disposable BBQs off sale (up from 50 last year) • 85,000 engagements on social media (up from 55,000 in 2021) • fly-tips reduced by 50% compared to last year • 7,000 hours of ranger patrols • 950 New Forest Ambassadors (up 30% on last year) • 122km of forest roads litter picked, collecting over 100 bags of waste.

There were 732 responses to a **visits survey** helping the NPA understand behaviour and impacts on the National Park of visits by both local people and those from outside the National Park. The survey was mainly distributed online, backed up by some ranger survey sessions. Questions included asking what activities people were doing, where they had come from, and awareness of the **New Forest Code**. This will help guide our communications and interactions with visitors.

The 2023 visitor publications including 250,000 copies of the Pocket Guide and the joint Essential Guide with Forestry England are currently being finalised. The film and print materials provide basic visitor information and encourages people to help care for the National Park. More than 700 people took part in 96 guided events across three weeks in the Walking and Cycling Festival, celebrating its 10th year.

NPA set out their concerns on the **Investment Zone** proposals as discussed at the October Authority meeting in a letter to the Secretary of State and it was subsequently decided by the Chancellor in the Autumn Statement not to take them forward. **Solent Freeport** was finally launched in December and we are maintaining contact with its Board to ensure an ongoing focus on the green pledges contained within the bid and to secure benefits for the Forest and its communities.

The move to using new planning ICT software and **Citizen Portal** has proved frustrating, Steve was grateful the Co-Ordinator had circulated Using the Citizen Portal guide. But planning applications remain at a high level, with 1,000 applications anticipated this year. Following a presentation by Citizens Advice Bureau at an all-staff meeting, rangers have been supporting the local food banks and warm hubs by helping and also providing New Forest themed activities for families who attend and may not engage in other NPA events.

The 10th **Walking and Cycling Festival** was a success running for three weeks with over 700 people attending 93 guided walks or cycle rides. All funds raised from NPA walks will go towards replacing a stile with a new kissing gate. We look forward to planning the 2023 festival with the theme of inclusivity. The path clearance volunteers have finished cutting for this year. We ran 15 events across the National Park spending 129 volunteer days on improving rights of way. Volunteers have completed the 2022 ease-of-use path survey. During the survey 75% of paths encountered were judged to be open and easy to use.

NPA began promoting the **National Park Volunteer Fair**, which was held last Sunday 29 January with a refreshed look, different promotional materials using a new venue of Brockenhurst Village Hall. It attracted more than 920 budding volunteers, the largest number in the event's 13-year history. Good news also in regard to slightly **fewer animal accidents**, down to 41 in 2022 from 44 in 2021. The free-roaming animals are known as the "architects of the Forest" as its their grazing that helps the Forest and its wildlife.

## 8. Hampshire Association of Local Councils

The Chairman welcomed Dawn Hamblet, Chief Executive of the Hampshire Association of Local Councils to the meeting. Dawn provided some background information about HALC and the services they are able to provide to Towns & Parishes in Hampshire, there being 260 such local councils. This includes training for both councillors and employees.

Dawn was happy to talk though proposed changes to HALC Articles of Association that are due to be considered at their forthcoming EGM at the end of February, being a hybrid meeting. Dawn said everyone has seen the information a couple of times already (hopefully) but explained why HALC is doing it and what the key changes are. Dawn shared frustration around the membership types, because she thought the original proposals felt much fairer, but having taken legal advice, HALC decided to revert back to original wording as proposed new wording clashed with wording in NALCs constitution.

Whilst this doesn't directly affect HALC, given its a separate organisation to NALC, it might have caused difficulties for councils that wish to carry on being members of both NALC and HALC. Having talked all that through at their AGM originally, Dawn was happy to explain matters again. HALC will however continue with existing **development partner** status for those Local Councils that don't wish to take NALC services.

Dawn explained how HALC operates, with a Board of Directors, gleaned from 7 District Associations, being set up as a limited company 13 years ago, noting it is "owned" by the local councils that it serves. Meetings need a quorum of 20% of members at present reducing to 10% subject to our support at the **hybrid EGM at Sparsholt on 23 February**.

## 9. Cycling Events

Richard Taylor provided the following list of New Forest Cycle Events Scheduled for 2023. Contact: Richard Taylor – NFALC cycling representative (richardtaylorpc@gmail.com)

This is a list of the Sportive events so far scheduled for 2023 in the New Forest as notified to the NDFC Safety Advisory Group. They can be found on the SAG events register – [Event Register \(newforest.gov.uk\)](http://newforest.gov.uk)

Details of all these events have been circulated to Parish and Town Council Clerks in time for comment for the SAG consultation period. All the organisers have committed to follow the New Forest Cycle Event Organisers Charter – [New Forest Cycle Event Organiser's Charter - New Forest National Park Authority \(newforestnpa.gov.uk\)](http://newforestnpa.gov.uk)

- 1) New Forest Tour. 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Starting from Gang Warily. Up to 1032 participants per day. Event confirmed.
- 2) New Forest Rattler. 27<sup>th</sup> May 2023. Starting from Moyles Court. Up to 400 participants. Event confirmed.
- 3) New Forest Sportive. 10<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Starting from Gang Warily. Up to 750 participants.
- 4) New Forest Tour. 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023. Starting from Gang Warily. Up to 1032 participants per day. Event confirmed.

## 10. AOB – The Chairman said we are looking for nominees for HALC Director / NFALC Chair.

**Next Meeting – At NFDC Council Chamber, Lyndhurst, Thursday 20 April 2023 from 6.00pm.**

There being no further business to discuss, the Chairman closed the Meeting just after 7.45 pm.

Chairman

Date