

NEW FOREST ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (NFALC)

Minutes of the Ordinary General Meeting of NFALC held at NFDC Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Thursday 23 July 2026 at 6.00pm

Parish/Town Council

Name

Ashurst & Colbury	Ken Kershaw
Beaulieu	Sami Blastock – Commoning Rep
Bramshaw	Sue Bennison (on-line)
Brockenhurst	John Korbey plus Gale Pettifer (on-line)
Copythorne	Sylvia Wiggins & Sherri Johnstone, plus Graham Chilcott (on-line)
Boldre	Jo Humphreys & Alison Bolton
Exbury	Emma Page
Fawley	Paul Saunders
Hordle	Maggie Hill (on-line)
Lyndhurst	Brice Stratford – Chairman
Minstead	Helen Bennett
Netley Marsh	Adrian Johnstone
New Milton	Graham Flexman – NFALC Coordinator
Ringwood	Janet Georgiou (on-line)
Wellow	Mike Richardson
NFNPA	David Illsley, Head of Planning & Place
NFDC	Sophie Sajic, NFDC Strategic Director, Housing & Communities
	Daniel Reynafarje – NFDC ICT Officer
David Orme	NFALC Cycling Rep

Apologies:

Landford	Mary Davies – NFALC Vice-Chair
Ringwood	Gareth DeBoos
Rockbourne	Mark Baulch
Lymington	Tom Brindley

1. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman welcomed 23 attendees to this hybrid meeting with 6 on-line participants from various local councils in & around the New Forest, together with David Illsley from NFNPA and Sophie Sajic from NFDC, plus David Orme the NFALC Cycling Rep.

2. Minutes

The Chairman referred to Appendix 2, Minutes of the AGM held on Thursday 4 June 2026. It was noted that Tim Cook from Netley Marsh attended representing New Forest Together. The AGM minutes were agreed as a correct record by those present and were duly signed.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

4. New Forest Cultural Council

The Chairman said the Cultural Council had not met in a while, but there's been good positive updates. **The New Forest Flag** is officially launching at the New Forest Show next week. It was given the stamp of approval from the UK flag registry a couple of months ago, and we got the formal letter confirming it a couple of weeks ago, which means that it now has a legal status as a flag.

If it's not legally recognised, by the UK Flag Registry, then technically it's not a flag, it's just a banner or an advertising slogan. And that changes the rules by which it can be flown on government buildings and council buildings and so on. So, we officially have a New Forest Flag as today's Daily Echo news article (**Annex A**). The history of it is in the article, so won't repeat it here, but it's a lovely win for us. We are ceremonially raising it on Tuesday at the New Forest Show, and it'll stay flying for the next three days. As you all know, it's a monarch stag with Rufus stirrup and cob's arrow above it in green and gold, like the Verderer's traditional uniforms, or the gorse of the New Forest.

In terms of arts and crafts NFALC Chairman is now also Chairman of New Forest Marque

[Post Meeting Note: New Forest Marque - Awarded to produce that has been grown, reared, caught, brewed, produced or processed within the New Forest. Look for the New Forest Marque logo and enjoy helping to support your local community@ The Sign of True Local Produce.]

The Chairman provided the following update on the **Arts and Crafts** front. Specifically, Stockton Workshop, based in Fordingbridge, is a relatively new organisation who are setting up and looking to promote heritage crafts within the New Forest. They are also purchasing and restoring heritage properties.

Perhaps most prominent of which is Rose Cottage in Frogham End, the very striking and significant cob cottage where Juliette de Bairacli Levy lived and worked, and which in the 1980s was restored by Irene Sober, who wrote a small book about it. Despite that, it fell into disrepair and was recently restored beautifully and thus won a building design award from the National Park Authority.

[Post Meeting Note: Rose Cottage (also known as Rose Cottage beside the Well House) is a small 19th-century grade II listed hovel made of painted brick and cob, with a thatched roof, located at Frogham End (Abbotswell) in the New Forest. It was famously inhabited for three years in the mid-1950s by the pioneering herbalist and author [Juliette de Bairacli Levy](#), inspiring her classic memoir [Wanderers in the New Forest](#).]

The Chairman referred to their Open Day on Tuesday and will be speaking with them after the New Forest Show about the potential of working with them and the New Forest Marque. They're an associate member of the New Forest Marque alongside various other groups like the Countryside Education Trust and the Minster Trust, both of whom have explored heritage craft within what they do, to establish some kind of a New Forest heritage craft concept.

The Chairman asked if anyone's been to Farnham recently, as they are a world craft town, which gets them lots of attention and unlocks funding opportunities for them and also means that it's very beautiful place these days. The general quality across the board is really high because they act as a focal point for artisans and craft people, both to teach and to train and to learn. It's something which is a fairly straightforward program to get on. There's no reason why we couldn't be the world's first world craft forest.

*[**Post Meeting Note:** Farnham in Surrey is England's first designated [World Craft Town](#), having received the prestigious title from the World Crafts Council in June 2020. The historic market town boasts a rich, centuries-long heritage of making and supports a thriving community of local artisans, independent galleries, and creative institutions.]*

The Chairman will update on how talks like that go but essentially, we already have Buckler's Hard Shipyard Trust, who recently held a heritage craft week that I was lucky enough to attend. We already have people engaged in this type of work in the New Forest. They are all already New Forest Marque members and there's no reason they could not be tied together and work with NFALC and the Cultural Council to just take it that step further, and for it to become a feather in the cap of the New Forest. So that concludes Cultural Council update.

5. LGR Judicial Review

The Chairman referred to Appendix 2 being a latest update from New Forest Together.

In March, the Government announced councils currently operating across Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth will be reduced from 14 to 4 from April 2028 with each of the new 'unitary' councils delivering all council services provided by the County Council, 11 district and borough councils, and the two unitary authorities of Southampton and Portsmouth. Following that decision, the County Council requested further clarification from the Government on its decision-making and financial justification of its decision.

HCC assert that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has failed to sufficiently explain why and how the Secretary of State (Steve Reed) reached his final decision, including justification of the financial case. In July 2026, this lack of explanation triggered the start of formal proceedings by the County Council. Steve Reed was subsequently replaced by Angela Rayner who previously held the post.

A disagreement emerged (**Annex B**) over the £500,000 legal challenge against plans to redraw the map of local government across Hampshire. Senior councillors traded opposing views over the county's ongoing local government reorganisation (LGR), which will replace existing councils with new unitary authorities. Eastleigh Borough Council Liberal Democrat Leader Cllr Keith House criticised the Hampshire County Council decision to pursue a £500k judicial review against the Government's proposals.

The Chairman said he will invite a speaker from HCC to the next NFALC meeting.

6. New Forest District Council

Sophie Sajik, Strategic Director for Housing & Communities is the new NFDC rep for NFALC and updated members as follows:

LGR - It just might be worth everyone being aware that there were a significant number of decisions across the wider country that were made at the end of last week around local government re-organisation. There are only a few areas that are now outstanding for decision in October. Obviously, we've had a change in leadership of the Labour Party.

In terms of New Forest District Council, local government re-organisation, we are effectively ensuring that we have the right voice. So, there's a lot of work around shaping the legal frameworks of these new authorities, helping influence future ward boundaries and local representation, preparing for the shadow authority elections next May, working with our partner councils on transition arrangements and also some key themes about the future of these new unitary authorities of which neighbourhood and communities is one, which as the chair said is being led by Andy Ferrier of Test Valley.

And then there are local representatives, they're called future unitary representatives that have been appointed underneath Andy Ferrier. I hold Southwest Hampshire as a future unitary representative for neighbourhoods and communities. And Andy and I have actually met this afternoon to start to have conversations about that, being ground level up as opposed to top level down and how you look at community governance and community engagement, voluntary community sectors within our own area. That's a really important area where we can influence and have a voice. Obviously, the District Council still remains opposed to splitting the forest, but we are preparing for that, come April 2028. At this point in time, it looks like we are going to receive a structural change order in the autumn. And that would be something that would be really important to bring back here as well when that comes into play.

It's sort of a minor update on last time, because I know the last meeting was last month, so not a significant amount of change in terms of New Forest District Council, a lot of mobilisation in terms of the key work streams that Officers will need to work on collaboratively as part of the boroughs, districts and unitaries that are currently in place alongside Hampshire County.

Local Plan - Coming on to planning, a brief update on the local plan. There is a report going to Cabinet on 5 August around the local plan. We have been doing quite a lot of work in terms of the local plan and there is still considerable uncertainty arising from the government's transition to the new planning system. So effectively existing local plans must be submitted to the Secretary of State by 31st of December, and that does create quite a time pressure. And that's if we're to proceed under the current arrangements. A number of Hampshire authorities, including Winchester and East Hampshire, have paused work on their current plans and opted to prepare plans under a new system, and we're currently considering our approach around that. So, the Cabinet will consider a report on that.

CIL - It's also worth within the planning sphere noting that the community infrastructure levy funding round is now open. Grants up to £100,000 are available for infrastructure-related projects. The deadline for that is the 7th August and the funding is intended for projects that increase infrastructure capacity or support areas experiencing growth. If anyone does want any advice on whether or not a project may be in scope, they're encouraged to reach out to the community infrastructure levy and planning team, and we can get the contacts for that circulated if you don't have them already.

And then the final update or two updates, being the **strategic asset management plan and the community asset transfers**. In July, the Cabinet approved the next steps in the community asset transfer work. Clerks who submitted expressions of interest will have received either one or two letters.

The first one confirming the assets that we are still considering and a letter confirming those that we're not. So obviously some towns and parishes would have only received one in saying yes, some may have received two. For the assets that we are still considering, the next stages of due diligence are taking place to include internal consultation, arrangement of external legal advice and support, and that's fully underway.

If you have received those letters, do expect some further communication and some increase in communication over the coming weeks to include, we'll be doing things like site visits, especially where there's any potential ambiguity on the land or building parcels that exist within. And please be patient. We know that it's been a long process, but we are 'prioritising' this alongside the wider strategic asset management plan at the moment. The upshot to that is expect some communication in the next few weeks. And then my final update...

New Forest Pony and Track Ride, which is taking place on the 8th & 9th of August (**Annex C**). Brian Byrne is leading on that for us as our Community Safety Manager. I know there might also be questions about equine flu at the moment as well. There have been a number of conversations with the organisers around that. They are fully aware and there are mitigations that are being put in place around that as well. A briefing has been arranged for those affected, and NFDC were thanked for their previous one-day training course.

Sophie thanked members and will ensure the community safety team get the feedback on that.

7. National Scheme of Delegation

The Chairman referred to Appendix 3, and the NFALC Co-ordinator explained the background.

The Government has published its response to the recent consultation on **planning committee reform**, that is expected to come into force from October 2026.

The proposals relate to changes around planning committee size and the use of a national scheme of delegation. While these changes apply to local planning authorities rather than parish and town councils directly, they may be of interest to local councils that regularly comment on planning applications.

Parish and town councils may wish to keep an eye on how future changes affect local democratic oversight, planning committee decision-making and the way applications are considered.

There are also changes being introduced through the new local plan-making system, with some local planning authorities now moving into the new process. This may be relevant for councils with an interest in local plans, neighbourhood plans or future development in their area.

The NFALC Coordinator recently received a response from Mark Wyatt of NFDC, as follows:

"Regarding the national scheme of delegation, I will be working on the impacts of the changes to the delegation arrangements over the summer to ensure that the Council can implement any nationally prescribed changes to the way applications are determined. Part of this work will be to contact Parish and Town Councils so that you are aware of the implications for your comments.

In summary, this will have an impact on your response. We will continue to consult with you that doesn't change, however, there will be no mechanism for a Parish or Town Council to automatically, by making a comment, refer an application to the Planning Committee. Local Members will also not be able to call matters before the committee. The comments we receive from Town and Parish Councils will, on the basis that they raise material considerations, be taken into account in our decision making, but the ability to refer items to (the NFDC) planning committee will be removed."

David Illsley explained the position regarding planning applications within the NFNPA area:

"The Government's consultation on this was the subject of a report considered by the National Park Authority's Planning Committee in April 2026. Section 2 of the report is most relevant, with the draft Regulations confirming that national park authorities (including the New Forest) will **not** be covered by the National Scheme of Delegation. This is a position national park authorities pushed for, and our own consultation response was as follows:

'The New Forest National Park Authority supports the position in the draft Regulations and accompanying guidance that the National Scheme of Delegation does not apply to national park authorities due to the structure of their committees and the types of applications they deal with. The proposed thresholds under which proposals would automatically be delegated to planning officers would mean that national planning authority planning committees would consider very few applications. Even small-scale development can have a cumulative impact on the character of national parks, and we welcome the fact that national park authorities are not due to be covered by the national scheme of delegation.'

Consequently, for planning applications submitted within the area of New Milton (for example), that falls within the National Park, New Milton Town Council will be consulted and the existing system for consultation responses will remain (ie. the Town Council can "call applications" within the National Park to the Authority's Planning Committee)."

8. New Forest National Park

David Illsley was happy to provide quite a brief National Park Authority update, partly because as alluded to at the beginning, both Brice and he had spent a long time in this room earlier today attending a full NFNPA meeting this morning, and it was a very hot National Park Authority meeting.

"What I would say is that full National Park Authority meetings, are equivalent of a full council meeting, so that's our 22 members meet roughly four or five times a year. Those meetings, I'm not just saying this, are actually quite interesting. The first agenda item on any authority meeting is normally the Chief Executive's update. That's quite a good distillation of what's happened in the three or four months since the last full authority meeting. The chief executive's report does distil down the sort of the breadth of the National Park Authority's work into quite a readable document.

One or two headlines from the authority meeting this morning. We talked a little about the work of our rangers. Obviously, we have a limited range of resources. I think it's around about three or four full-time equivalents. They do work very closely with the Ranger teams at, particularly Forestry England, but also the other stakeholders that do have rangers in the New Forest, such as Hampshire County Council and the RSPB.

We talked a little bit about the work on the rangers, particularly during drought period at the moment. A lot of work has been done on fire prevention, obviously we've had a fire on the edge of Ashurst recently. And we talked a little bit about the work of the Ranger team, and things like issues around disposable barbecues. Also, the Ranger team felt that the **PSPOs** (Public Spaces Protection Orders) about the lighting of fires had assisted and had given the first a degree of protection that perhaps wasn't there before.

The **A326 application**, you'll be aware of. It's in with ourselves and Hampshire County Council. We are the two determining authorities for our respective elements of that proposal. So just over half of that scheme is in the National Park, and about 48% of it is outside the National Park, where Hampshire are the determining planning authority as well as being the applicant. That planning application affects a number of communities and parishes here today. Anybody with an interest can look at both the National Park Authority and Hampshire County Council planning portal.

We'll have copies of all the responses that have been received on that. As mentioned before, there are 8,000 pages of information submitted with that planning application. I think it's probably the biggest planning application we've dealt with. We are working our way through that; we know it provokes quite strong feelings on both sides of the debate but anybody with an interest, those responses are available online.

Brice has mentioned the **New Forest Show**. I know that's a really important event for many New Forest stakeholders. Certainly, from a National Park Authority perspective, it allows us to reach out and contact people that maybe we don't always reach out and contact during the rest of the year. There's a slightly different profile of people at the New Forest Show than there might be at, say, a parish council meeting. They're both important, but I think the New Forest Show gives us a chance to make contacts and have conversations with people that won't always attend a town /parish council meeting.

The last thing from me, last but not least, is just a brief update on the **National Park Local Plan**. Sophie's outlined the work the District Council are doing for the local plan for the districts outside the National Park for the kind of hole in the donut in the middle. We're preparing a separate National Park local plan. Long debates on that this morning.

I'm not looking for sympathy, but local plans are difficult. They have to make difficult decisions. They have to try and balance a whole range of competing interests and they generally manage to hack off somebody whenever you prepare one. But in terms of the National Parks local plan, that was supported to proceed to the next stage by our members this morning. I emphasise it is only to proceed to the next stage. It's not an adoption of a local plan. Just for the town and parish councils here this evening, some of the headlines from that will be a consultation commencing on the 17th of August, provisionally running to the end of September.

Excuse time, as Sophie outlined, we have to submit our local plan by December. If we don't, we have to start a new style local plan. That's probably a 30-month period and we will have 30 months when the National Park is not covered by an up-to-date local plan. That December deadline is pretty much fixed. With the best will in the world, our planning policy team of less than three full-time equivalents is going to need probably a couple of months after the consultation finishes to get everything in order to submit to the government in December.

Working back from that, we have to have concluded our consultation by the end of September, the beginning of October. It's really just a bit of a heads up that that will be coming your way. We've already sent an e-mail out last week to everybody telling them the provisional timetable; there will be another notification coming out and we will be holding a series of drop-in sessions with at least one in each quadrant. By definition, at least four drop-in sessions. The NPA gave a commitment to hold one in Copythorne.

We're just having a bit of a think about the format of those having staffed all 26 hours of the last one we did, trying to work out how constructive it is to stand in front of a display board for six hours and have the same conversation over again and sort of generally frustrate people with our answers. We're trying to think of how we do that to be a bit more of a managed engagement and actually ensure that we're having a slightly more two-way and informative conversation. But we will definitely be doing them.

We will be submitting our plan by December against that timetable. And probably the last thing I'll just say on the local plan is any comments you make during the window that will open next month, they will go in full to the government appointed inspector."

David Orme, NFALC Cycling Rep highlighted the A326 acts as a boundary between two LCWIPs that is a real barrier for people getting from Waterside to the forest by active travel means. David Illsley said it was a very valid point. Some probably people in the room probably know an LCWIP is a Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan. There's Waterside LCWIP and there's a New Forest LCWIP. And as you rightly highlight, both are relevant for this (application).

NPA are currently reviewing the feedback received on that application. "We're still getting consultation comments in. We have had quite a lot of comments around the kind of permeability of that route, if that's the right term. It's quite a hard brief the county has given themselves to increase the resilience and capability of a road, while also improving the opportunities for people to get across it, and try to prevent the severance of the road. Some might say they're contradictory objectives.

People have referred to the two LCWIPs and the aim of trying to enable waterside communities to have access to the New Forest that's on their doorstep, but they are currently severed from it. It's definitely something we have heard in feedback, and I know a lot of Waterside parishes have responded already to that (LCWIP) consultation. I've certainly seen Marchwood, Totton and Eling, Hythe and Dibden and I've seen more. We do have a case officer for that planning application who's Natalie Walter, who's our principal planner in our team." David's happy to be a conduit to pass that on to Natalie.

9. **HALC LGR Summit**

The Chairman referred to the HALC LGR Summit held on 11 June where quite a good number of people from the Forest were in attendance. He was particularly impressed with Keynote Speaker Andy Ferrier, Chief Executive of Test Valley Borough Council, and his presentation ***Neighbourhood Governance in Practice, Capturing Community Voice in the new Unitaries***

This prompted the following questions:

- a) ***What do you think are the main challenges for Parish and Town Councils as a result of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)?***
- b) ***LGR and The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 – What are the key drivers, national and local context?***
- c) ***What are your initial thoughts about the messages you would like the new unitary councils to hear about neighbourhood governance?***

Andy referred to **10 Enabling Conditions** & **5 Practical Steps** from a TVBC report (**Annex D**):

Neighbourhood Governance in Practice - Lessons from Test Valley for Democratic Renewal

The Chairman will invite Andy Ferrier to come and speak at the next available NFALC meeting as he could help promote good Neighbourhood and Community Governance in the New Forest.

10. **Next Meetings**

Tuesday 22 September 2026 from 6.00pm at NFDC Appletree Court Lyndhurst SO43 7PA

Wednesday 18 November 2026 at 6.00pm at NFDC Appletree Court Lyndhurst SO43 7PA

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending, and contributing, then closed the meeting at 7.00pm.

Signed by the Chairman.....

Date.....