

National Parks England Board Meeting

Draft Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 11th December 2025

In-person and online meeting



In Attendance		
<p>Directors Ken Smith (KS) Derek Twine (DT) Jim Bailey (JB) Will Dracup (WD) Jim Jackson (JJ) Vanessa Rowlands (Chair) (VR) Harry Blathwayt (HB) Victoria Mander (VM)</p> <p>Officers Alison Baxter (Public Affairs Manager) (ABx)</p>	<p>NPOs/ Chief Executives Phil Mulligan (PM) David Butterworth (DB) Tom Hind (THi) Kevin Bishop (KB) Gavin Capstick (GC) Sion McGeever (SM)</p> <p>Tony Gates (TG)</p>	<p>NPA Peak District NPA Yorkshire Dales NPA North York Moors NPA Dartmoor NP Lake District NPA South Downs NPA Broads Authority New Forest NPA Northumberland NPA</p>

Item	
1	<p>Apologies & Intros</p> <p>Apologies were received from Denis Mullan, Andrea Davis, Sarah Bryan, Tiffany Hunt (substituted by Jim Jackson, V-C of LDNPA), Alison Barnes</p> <p>Vanessa welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Jim Jackson from LDNPA who was substituting for TH.</p>
2	<p>Minutes</p> <p>2.1 Approve minutes from the meeting held on 20 October 2025 and 03 December 2025.</p> <p>Decision: Minutes of 20 October 2025 and 03 December 2025 were approved</p>
3	<p>Matters arising</p> <p>THi: No matters arising were notified.</p>



4	<p>Urgent Business notified to the Company Secretary</p> <p>THi - no urgent business was raised.</p>
5	<p>Chair's Report</p> <p>VR reflected on the previous 6 months and expressed her thanks to THi for his work as NPE Company Secretary, to SM for picking up the PLP strand of work, and to the NPE staff for its communications work and assisting in raising the profile.</p> <p>A recent meeting with VR, THi and members of the secretariat discussed future campaigns, the positive work around our brand and building on the work of bringing together the officer group leads to improve transparency. The team will prepare a plan to be present to Board at the next in person meeting. Directors expressed the need to align the NPE brand with the NPUK work.</p> <p>VR advised that the first sift has been completed for the Executive Director recruitment with shortlisting to take place next week, and interviews in early Jan 26.</p> <p>THi advised that a recent report was released by the Nuclear Regulatory Authority which included a recommendation to repeal or constrain the Protected Landscapes Duty. NPE and other organisations have sought clarity from government and Minister Creagh had indicated that government has no plans to repeal, however, some organisations may need additional support in their interpretation of the Duty. SM advised of a positive outcome regarding the Lower Thames Crossing as a long-term agreement has been reached with the Highways Agency and Kent Downs NL on supporting nature, which could be positive for other projects.</p> <p>VR reported that she attended the PL APPG, where the duty was raised. The APPG Chair, Barry Gardiner, has a slot on the final day of the parliamentary session to speak on this.</p>
6	<p>Finance Update</p> <p>THi thanked NYMNPA Director of Finance Pete Williams for his input into monitoring in-year performance against the 25/26 budget and presented the position to the end of quarter 2. He explained that it has taken time to review the corporate context and a reforecast has now taken place.</p> <p>There is a forecast surplus of £164k, largely due to the impact of the Generation Green communications funding coming across from the previous</p>



	<p>year, the salary savings on the Executive Director post being vacant and additional income from a secondment.</p> <p>Part of the NPE budget (the PLP funding) is restricted so is held for specific project activity. but there are some risks of underspends in the following workstreams:</p> <p>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - a sum of £50k for additional activity for the 'barriers to access' programme training</p> <p>Nature Recovery - 15k of the Test and Trial funding is unallocated at present. If unspent the funds will be returned to Defra, however staff are confident that it will be spent by year end.</p> <p>Board was asked to carry forward any year-end surplus to give the incoming ED sufficient funds but may also allow us to retain staff into 26/27. NPE is mindful of the funding position of all our NPAs.</p> <p>WD asked for an explanation of how NPE holds the PLP fund. THi advised that the partner organisations (NPE, National Trails UK and National Landscapes) are allocated a share of the budget and hold it for agreed partnership activities such as Nature Recovery, Climate and EDI. NPE also holds a sum which covers the independent Chair's funding. NPE has a grant funding agreement with Natural England as the PLP cannot hold money in its own right due to not being an incorporated organisation.</p> <p>NPE must uphold its obligations according to the grant agreement and will keep track of the spend via budget monitoring. SM is overseeing the governance in the absence of an ED.</p> <p>DT expressed his support for carrying forward any surplus as it could increase the opportunity for innovation potential to the incoming ED. VM commented on the optics of unspent funds and asked for clarification of whether unspent restricted funds could be carried forward? THi advised that this was not possible but that the risk was minimal as any underspend on PLP activities did not relate to staffing.</p> <p>Action: Circulate the PLP grant agreement</p> <p>Decision: Directors approved the recommendation to carry forward any core surplus to the 26/27 financial year.</p>
7	<p>Campaign for National Park's Youth Voice Declaration</p> <p>AB presented the paper on CNP's intention to launch the declaration at the forthcoming Parliamentary reception.</p> <p>VR explained that the Minister for Nature, Mary Creagh, fully supports youth engagement and will attend to sign the declaration.  </p>

	<p>Directors discussed the wording of the declaration and VR advised it could not be altered now as has been approved by Defra. Directors expressed support for NPE to be co-signatories and asked that NPE representatives at the event should highlight the excellent work NPAs have done in this area for many years and continue to do. WD advised he is speaking at the event so will include this in his comments.</p> <p>Decision: Directors noted the paper and supported the declaration</p>
8	<p>Paul Hamblin Award</p> <p>AB presented the paper requesting Directors to consider the question of running the Paul Hamblin award process again in 2026.</p> <p>Directors discussed that the focus of the award should be to celebrate the work of NPA officers, in particular those ‘unsung heroes’ who have a great impact but don’t always receive recognition. CEOs were also supportive of continuing the award, with a frequency of every 2 years.</p> <p>VR suggested the award could be presented at the bi-annual NPUK Conference, taking into account sensitivities that the award is England based.</p> <p>Decision: Directors agreed run the award process in 2026.</p>
9	<p>AOB</p> <p>GC outlined the current position on the visitor levy consultation that had be launched by MHCLG.</p> <p>The Sustainable Tourism Officer group had initiated work on the pros and cons of visitor levies taking account of experiences elsewhere in the UK and globally. However, the focus of this work, supported by Davina Stanford had evolved to support work on the consultation response.</p> <p>Directors expressed views the introduction of levies, noting the sensitivities of engaging with local businesses and how potential revenue raised would be distributed.</p> <p>GC noted the consultation is driven by Treasury and MHCLG and doesn’t specifically recognise National Park geographies.</p> <p>Decision – Directors agreed to the proposed approach to responding to the visitor levy consultation.</p>
<p>Summary of Actions from this meeting</p>	
1	<p>Circulate the PLP grant agreement</p>



Next Board meeting: 11 March 2026 in person