

NEW FOREST ASSEMBLY OF LOCAL COUNCILLORS
& ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (NFALC)

**Minutes of the Ordinary General Meeting of NFALC held at NFDC
Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday 26 January 2026 at 6.00pm**

<u>Parish/Town Council</u>	<u>Name</u>
Ashurst & Colbury	Caroline Hubbard (on-line)
Bramshaw	Sue Bennison (on-line)
Bransgore	Jacque Lay (on-line)
Brockenhurst	John Korbey Gale Pettifer (on-line)
Copythorne	Graham Chillcott & Sylvia Wiggins
Exbury & Lepe	Emma Page (on-line)
Fawley	Paul Saunders
Fordingbridge	David Millar (on-line)
Hordle	Maggie Hill (on-line)
Landford	Mary Davies – Vice Chair
Lymington & Pennington	Tom Brindley (on-line)
Ringwood	Gareth De Boos
Minstead	Helen Bennett
Netley Marsh	Adrian Johnstone
New Milton	Graham Flexman – Coordinator Joanna Hayward (on-line)
Sopley	Maria Adaway (on-line)
Sway	Katie Walding (on-line)
Totton & Eling	Alison McGowan (on-line) Neville Penman (on-line)
Wellow	Mike Richardson (on-line)
NFNPA	David Illsley, Head of Planning & Place David Harrison
NFDC	Richard Knott - (Link Officer) NFDC Chief Operations Officer and Deputy Chief Executive
	Daniel Reynafarje – NFDC Democratic and Support Services - ICT Officer
	Geoff Blunden – NFDC Portfolio Holder Environment & Sustainability (on-line)
	Joe Reilly, Ashurst, Bramshaw Copythorne & Netley Marsh

Apologies:

Lyndhurst
NFALC Commoning Rep
NFALC Cycling Rep

Brice Stratford – NFALC Chairman
Sami Blastock
David Orme

1. Chairman's Announcements

The Vice Chair welcomed 28 attendees to this hybrid meeting with 14 on-line from local councils in and around the New Forest district, explaining Brice Stratford had tendered his apologies as he was not feeling well. Taking the Chair, Mary Davies welcomed David Illsley, NFNPA Interim Head of Planning & Place, and Richard Knott, NFDC Deputy Chief Executive.

2. Minutes

The Chair referred to the Minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 18 November 2025 and went through them page by page. The Minutes of the meeting were agreed as a correct record and will be signed at the next meeting, noting Mary Davies was not present.

3. Matters Arising

The Chair referred to Appendix 1 being the New Forest Approved LCWIP: Joint Response Document from NFALC prepared by David Orme, our Cycling Rep, noting Version 1 dated 08.01.26 had been submitted to HCC. Members noted that Version 2 is planned to be issued by David Orme during February, incorporating any further comments from local councils.

Re Minute 5 (Flooding & Ditching Matters) there was discussion about NFNPA reply received.

4. Transport Summit

The Chair referred to Appendix 2 being a press article regarding the recent Transport Summit that set out a vision for more sustainable travel around the New Forest.

The inaugural New Forest National Park Transport Summit, held on Thursday, 20 November at Brockenhurst Village Hall, brought together around 100 attendees to explore how people move around the National Park in ways that protect and enhance its working landscape. The summit was organised by the New Forest National Park Authority attracting representatives from parish councils, community groups, businesses, and transport organisations.

Mary Davies confirmed this inaugural Transport Summit was well received and well attended.

Post Meeting Note: David Orme had an opportunity to meet with Ben Mitchell, HCC Transport Planner at the Transport Summit. Ben presented on the LCWIP and told David he was very amenable to getting feedback from NFALC on the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan

5. New Forest Cultural Council

Regarding Agenda Item 5 - New Forest Cultural Council, it was suggested this item be deferred to the next meeting, but Mary asked Brice for a little more information, as follows:

Intangible Cultural Heritage - There's a government call out going on currently for submissions for the new National Register, and these can only be submitted by practitioners who are working with the Commoners Defence Association (CDA) to support them in getting COMMONING registered.

Dialect Language Survey - The initial desk-based work is now almost finished, and the first stage report should be ready by spring. We're now engaging with someone from the English project at Winchester University to finalise the fieldwork recordings, which will be happening in spring / summer this year; we've got a good list of participants but are always keen on more.

6. New Forest National Park

David Illsley provided insight on 4 items being referred to at the forthcoming Authority meeting

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) - Government grant scheme will be extended for a further three years to March 2029 and NPA are waiting to hear how much has been allocated to the New Forest. In the five years to this March, over £1m in grants will have been issued by NFNPA to farmers and commoners to improve their land for climate and nature.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) - The NPA continued to input into discussions on Devolution and LGR, including participating in an NFDC hosted visit of the MHCLG team leading this area of work in Whitehall and submitting the NFNPA response to Government on options for LGR. The NPA response to the latest Government consultation was submitted on 9 January 2026 and confirmed the position that of the options identified, Option 1 represents the best fit for the National Park Authority's priorities for nature, climate, people and place in the New Forest.

This option would keep the New Forest as a whole, combined with the predominantly rural authorities of Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire. Around one third of this area is designated as national park and this new unitary authority would be well placed to work with the 2 national park authorities to deliver the Government's agenda for national parks.

David explained some of the background. "The National Park Authority is perhaps one step back from local government re-organisation in that the NPA statutory functions are not altered by LGR. But the composition of our membership would be. So, we currently have 10 of our 22 Members appointed by Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and Test Valley Borough. The proportions they appoint, and who appoints them, would change through local government re-organisation, as well as potentially the partners that we work with may appear in a slightly different form and slightly rebadged."

Our own National Park Authority response was submitted by the deadline of the 11th January and we were supportive of option one. There was a logic to that configuration of local authorities, certainly with the kind of national parks anchoring either end of it. With a number of characteristics in common, we felt there was a "logic". While recognising it's the government's choice what they do, elsewhere in their decision making, that hasn't always followed the majority feedback they've received."

Waterside and Solent Gateway 2 Significant proposals are coming forward on the waterside for a proposed hydrogen plant at the former Fawley Power Station, and a 'Solent Gateway 2' automotive terminal, with access road, nature area and country park. The team has been providing feedback from a landscape, nature, heritage and wider planning perspective. A presentation of the Fawley Waterside proposals was attended by the landscape officer.

A joint site visit has been undertaken by the landscape officer to the proposed Solent Gateway 2 site to assess the landscape setting and character of the site and surrounding areas, including the impact on the A326. Cross-discipline discussions with specialist colleagues have also taken place regarding the proposals. A landscape response to the Environmental Impact Assessment scoping request for the site has been made.

Again, David explained what's going on at the waterside area of New Forest District. "So, with our national planning hats on, obviously we're quite heavily involved in the Solent Gateway 2 proposal, so me as NPA rep and representatives of New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council and Southampton are meeting with ABP tomorrow as part of their stakeholder advisory group that they've set up as those proposals continue to evolve."

And obviously down that same strip, you've then also got the proposals for the power station site, where there's been a public exhibition earlier this year and parts of that site / footprint, wouldn't be comprehensive redevelopments. And then the A326 planning application I have mentioned in the past is going to be submitted shortly.

First of all, we were told it would be Jan/Feb, and it would be Hampshire County Council but elements of that scheme fall within the national park typically to the west side of the current site and anything east Hampshire County Council will determine as the Planning Authority."

New Forest National Park Local Plan was subject to public consultation between 5 November and 19 December 2025. During this period, NPA held five public drop-in sessions in communities across the National Park, as well as an online event. The sessions were well attended, with over 1,000 people engaging with the planning team on the draft proposals and the timetable for the next steps in the Plan-making process. The consultation closed on 19 December 2025; the Policy team is in the process of reviewing detailed responses received.

The Government has set planning authorities a deadline of December 2026 for the submission of their draft local plans for independent examination under the current planning system. This is a challenging time-table and the next formal milestone will be the consideration of the Regulation 19 'Submission draft' Local Plan which is currently timetabled for the July 2026 full Authority meeting.

The Local Plan sets out the planning framework for the National Park, including the scale and location of new development and the need to conserve the area's local distinctiveness. It guides decisions on planning applications submitted within the National Park and must be reviewed by December 2026 to meet Government requirements.

An up-to-date Local Plan is crucial in the context of changing planning policy and increased focus on meeting housing needs and boosting economic growth. Over 1,000 people attended online and in-person drop-in events spread across the National Park in the latest round of consultation in December. More than 600 responses were received. There will be a further consultation period in the summer to meet the December 2026 deadline for submission for independent examination by a government inspector.

David explained "The National Park Authority's Local Plan review was subject to a 6 1/2 week consultation closing just before Christmas. We were perhaps slightly worried that the dark winter months may stop people turning out and engaging but I think those fears were unfounded, as we had a very good turnout.

The next stage in the Local Plan review will be a revised draft document that we will be publishing in late summer. Assuming it is supported by our members for the purposes of consultation, the consultation will then follow shortly after. I'm sure there will be criticism of a consultation in August. Our hands are tied a little bit because we have to submit the plan by the end of December and if we wait much beyond that, we will really struggle to meet that deadline. What I would say is any town and parish council is a statutory consultee here on that draft plan."

7. New Forest District Council

Richard Knott, Chief Operations Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, referred to the following:

NFDC Local Plan Following Kate Ryan's recent Town & Parish clerks meeting, Graham Flexman today circulated Dean Brunton's slides about the NFDC Local Plan Review, as **attached**. Richard provided a further update and referred to Drop-in events as listed below.

NFDC have also offered an online briefing to all parishes within the NFDC plan area to give an overview of what the plan will contain (in addition to the drop-in sessions). Parishes are able to book this via MS bookings or contacting Dean.Brunton@NFDC.gov.uk

For those parishes where NFDC cannot arrange a convenient time for a briefing, they will be looking to record one that can then be circulated electronically.

Consultation events

<u>Town/Parish</u>	<u>Date & Time</u>
Calmore	10th February 2026 1-6pm
New Milton	11th February 1-7pm
Fawley	12th February 1-7pm
Fordingbridge	13th February 1-7pm
Lymington	25th February 1-7pm
Marchwood	26th February 1-7pm
Ringwood	27th February 1-7pm
West Totton	28th February 1-5pm
Hythe	6th March 1-7pm
Hordle	9th March 1-7pm

Richard Knott asked that towns and parishes please attend these events.

“Our planning team will be at all of those events and are happy to take your queries/questions and they can also have a look at some of the key documents as well during those events. And this is all against the backdrop of national consultation that will change some of the planning frameworks as they go forward, which is why we are trying to submit our plan before December 2026, before the end of this year, so we'll be examined under current framework. If we slip any further, obviously we will then be into potentially new framework determination. So, we are very determined to keep to these existing time frames, but you can obviously feedback to national consultation and that consultation is open until the 20th of March.”

Richard then took questions about development plan policies, explaining broad areas where development may occur, and clarified NFDC will exist until vesting day in April 2028, stressing it is important that this area had a Local Plan.

Waste Service Collection - Richard provided a detailed update on Phase 2 covering 15,000 properties, noting Phase 3 (final and largest phase) starts in May covering 35,000 properties. The point was made by Cllr Blunden that NFDC collect the waste and HCC dispose of it, part of an arrangement HCC has with the companies that run anaerobic digesters.

Phases 1 and 2 of the new waste and recycling service are already delivering real benefits, helping NFDC create a cleaner, more sustainable collection system. Thanks to residents' efforts 80 tonnes of food waste every week is now diverted from incineration to recycling (1,900 tonnes to date). Early results show overall recycling rates improving, the introduction of wheelie bins is contributing to cleaner streets and providing better working conditions for the waste and recycling crews. From designing new routes and testing software, to upgrading depots and training crews, NFDC continue to improve the service ahead for the next major stage. Phase 3 will be the biggest phase yet, involving the delivery of 35,000 new bins.

Phase 3 will cover East & North-East of the New Forest, including Hythe, Fawley, Lyndhurst, Marchwood, Totton and surrounding areas. If properties have been assessed as unsuitable for wheelie bins (and will use communal bins instead) a communal wheelie bin for food waste will be installed in their shared bin store area before the May start date. If properties have been assessed as unsuitable for wheelie bins (and will use sacks instead) the council will deliver their recycling sacks for the next 12 months before the May start date.

Local Government Reorganization - Richard provided a short update on LGR, answering questions about 2026 HCC elections (going ahead this May), appointment of Shadow Council for 2027-28 (with election of Cllrs in May 2027), plus NFDC elections (in May 2027, appointing Cllrs for just a year). Richard explained the rationale, making the point it is not NFDC decision to hold elections. Tom Brindley from Lymington said it seems a bit unnecessary holding the District Council elections for one year. Richard pointed out it's not his decision (it's the Govt).

8. HALC – Local Government Review

Reference Appendix 3, HALC have published their own position paper on LGR, setting out the principles that should inform any future changes to local government structures in Hampshire and the important role that Local Councils should play in this. As a statutory consultee, this was submitted as HALC's official response to Government consultation on LGR.

HALC have commissioned Southampton University to do some research on providing a local voice within the new LGR arrangements. This will be discussed more fully at the forthcoming County Forum at the end of January. HALC will also be holding an LGR Summit on 11th June. The HALC County Forum will be held later this week on Thursday 29 January 2026 to support member councils in relation to LGR. This will also be supported through County Forum workstreams, such as Town & Larger Parish Group, the first meeting of which was held last Wednesday 21 January in Chandlers Ford with 12 larger local councils attending.

NALC's new Chairman, Councillor Iain Hamilton, has set out a clear focus on stronger voices, governance and partnerships for 2026 in his New Year ***Open Letter*** (see copy **attached**) reaffirming NALC's commitment to ensuring parish and town councils are more influential and better heard at national and local levels, championing their vital role in communities.

It also highlights the importance of high standards of governance, transparency and support for Councillors and Clerks, alongside a renewed emphasis on collaboration, strengthening relationships across the sector and with key partners to ensure parish and town councils are well-represented, well-run and well-connected for the future.

NALC called on the government to ensure parish and town councils and **county associations** are fully engaged from the very outset of **LGR**. NALC has been clear that reform cannot succeed unless the voices of the parish and town council sector are heard early, consistently and meaningfully.

NALC remains committed to being a strong national voice for parish and town councils, championing their role as the community tier of local government. They argued that parish and town councils should be given appropriate support to ensure re-organisation delivers sound benefits in both the short and long-term for communities, and **county associations must be adequately resourced and equipped to contribute effectively**.

To achieve this, NALC has urged the government to put in place practical mechanisms for partnership and collaboration. **These include county association representation on the Joint Implementation Teams (JIT's)** that are establishing new unitary authorities, the development of strong local charters, dedicated parish council liaison officers, regular engagement through focus groups, tailored training support, and **formal representation for county associations within new unitary authorities**.

NALC highlighted that proposed **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NAC's)** will only meet the government's stated ambitions if clear and robust arrangements underpin them. It must include agreed minimum meeting frequencies, clearly defined governance responsibilities and transparent Cllr allocation methods, strong decision-making frameworks, clear arrangements for chair and vice-chair elections, effective communication, consultation and training.

9. Next Meeting - Weds 25th March 2026 6.00pm NFDC Appletree Court, Lyndhurst SO43 7PA

10. Future Meetings - All agreed NFDC Council Chamber Appletree Court, Lyndhurst SO43 7PA

Wed 25 Mar Thu 28 May Thu 23 Jul (AGM) Tue 22 Sep Wed 18 Nov

Vice Chair Mary Davies thanked everyone for attending and closed the Meeting at 7.20 pm.

Chairman

Date