



## **Minutes of NUCLNP Board Meeting held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023 9.30am to 12pm via Teams**

### **Board Members Present:**

David Hill (Environment Bank) (Chair)  
Amanda Anderson (Moorland Association)  
Jim Cokill (Durham Wildlife Trust)  
David Gray (GSC Grays)  
Sarah Kettlewell (Nidderdale AONB)  
Neil Kilgour (Abbeystead Estate)  
Elliot Lorimer (Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership)  
Robert Mayhew (Northumberland NPA)  
Gary Smith (Yorkshire Dales NPA)  
Christine Venus (Natural England)  
Chris Woodley-Stewart (North Pennines AONB)

### **In Attendance**

Jayne Longlands (Northumberland NPA)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Received from; Richard Betton (Northern Hill Farming Panel), Robert Carr (Environment Agency), Iain Mann (Nidderdale AONB), Clare Steward (Environment Agency), Laurie Norris (NFU), \*Crispin Thorn (Forestry Commission), Pauline Wall (Northumberland NPA), Jim Wardill (RSPB).

*\*NB: When submitting his apologies, Crispin Thorn had provided a written report, as shown at Appendix 1.*

### **2. Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership – 10 Years on and Its Future Remit in a Changing Landscape (papers enclosed)**

#### **(a) NUCLNP Terms of Reference**

The Chair provided an introductory background, outlining the reason for holding this meeting; questions around the size of the group and the focus of the paper were to be considered. It was noted that modifications to the previous NUCLNP [Vision and Objectives](#) may be required.

The Chair opened the paper to the floor for debate and Board members made the following comments:-

- Robert Mayhew pointed out that a great deal had changed in the environmental field, both at a national and regional level over the past ten years since the NUCLNP was established; other partnerships with a specific focus had been set up (e.g. The Great North Bog initiative, various peat and woodland partnerships), superseding some of the NUCLNP's early focus. Given the findings of the 2019 [State of Nature report](#) he questioned whether we were actually making a difference but agreed that this was the right time to note what had been achieved and review the remit of the NUCLNP and its future.
- David Gray considered that communication was important, and views of the landowners needed to be heard; he felt it was important to talk to the protected landscapes and other key stakeholders to gain their input and understand what was happening. David considered it was essential for people to attend the meetings.
- The Chair suggested that, if people missed two meetings in a row, then they should potentially fall off the group. He added that people should be expressing views from their organisations' perspective rather than a personal one. He said that the future sustainability of those business models which did not currently add value should be examined. The Chair also suggested that upland farming may need to be done differently if it was to be economically viable.
- David Gray considered that the NFU should be attending future meetings, as they were an important key stakeholder on the NUCLNP board.
- Elliot Lorimer noted that the NUCLNP may be able to deliver on items which smaller organisations (such as the Forestry of Bowland AONB) were not able to, due to their limited resources.
- Chris Woodley-Stewart said the internal benefit of NUCLNP and how we learnt was very important; we also needed to understand what the organisation looked like to the public.
- The Chair suggested we focus on natural capital, green financing for nature, regenerative agriculture transition, and be more vocal on these subjects.
- Christine Venus said we could do more together as a partnership than we could do alone. She queried whether we needed to be more public facing and asked what this would look like. Christine said that high nature value farming had potentially achieved this but there was room for improvement within other sectors.
- The Chair queried whether we should hone-in and give more specific time to certain projects.
- Gary Smith said that, following and in-line with [government guidelines](#), we should be a group of people who want to improve their local environment. Nature and ecosystems were the areas we were considering and we should focus on the areas of work that we were good at. He added that the NUCLNP should be all about getting things done on the ground.
- Neil Kilgour noted that people were interested in the North Pennines and felt that the group added value. He said it was interesting to hear other points of view but queried whether the group had the resources, time and energy to take big projects forward. However, the NUCLNP had carried out some good projects, such as the curlew one, and he felt the group did have a role to play.
- Jim Cokill suggested that the RSPB did not see NUCLNP as a projects delivery model, but more as a forum for broader discussions and finding out what people thought.
- Neil Kilgour sat on the Great North Bog Forum and noted the lack of engagement with other organisations. Chris Woodley-Stewart / Elliot Lorimer clarified that this forum was in fact part of

the Lancashire Peat Partnership rather than the Great North Bog Board or Operations Group per se.

- The Chair said that, in future, natural capital would flow through the private landowner's sector.
- The Chair summarised that we could modify our objectives which would take the pressure off having to deliver them all; with a focus on helping private landowners do things more quickly and on a larger scale.
- Amanda Anderson felt that the NUCLNP's role was to 'close the gap' (the gap currently being vast), with government organisations to help communicate with and deliver to land managers.
- Robert Mayhew agreed that communication between relevant environmental organisations and newly formed environmental partnerships needed to be effective and perhaps the NUCLNP had a role to play here? Aware that on the back of the 2021 Environment Act, Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) were around the corner and Government guidance was awaited, he asked whether an analysis of key upland habitats and species was required in order to identify the future focus/remit for the NUCLNP.
- The Chair suggested we encourage more external people on the ground to attend meetings and tell us about what they were doing well.
- Robert Mayhew noted the NLHF Curlew Project which had been previously developed and was currently 'on the shelf'. He queried whether we should now be thinking about returning to this as the RSPB Curlew Life project had only a couple of years left to run?
- Christine Venus queried whether we should get involved in projects (such as those linked to peat and trees) and said we needed to consider how we actively plugged the gap (rather than just talking about it).
- Gary Smith did not think that NUCLNP was a delivery body for projects but rather a body that could make things happen (through partners coming together).
- Amanda Anderson noted that the land management sector felt like things were done to them rather than with them. She said that farm clusters were growing into business cooperatives (with one having been launched in the Peak District, involving 63 land managers and covering many hectares; they were looking to apply for funds to make their own projects which were in-line with government targets). Landowners needed help and to be able to understand; what is out there, what can they go for, and be offered help to go for grants and projects. Amanda asked how we could enable this to happen, i.e., for land managers to be the delivery body for themselves by themselves and set up business cooperatives. She noted the gap was currently huge and said this anomaly needed to stop.
- Jim Cokill said that groups continued to apply for repeat additional lottery funding and NGOs were able to help people complete application forms; he felt this would be a good role for the NUCLNP to assist with. Jim added that engagement was important.
- David Hill noted the difficulty in engaging with farmers and felt we should focus on getting the message out there to help the people on the ground.
- Chris Woodley-Stewart talked about the FiPL challenges, and said we needed a mechanism to allow farmers to deliver for nature and be rewarded financially for this.
- Sarah Kettlewell said that Nidderdale AONB were proud of how they communicated with landowners and were starting to do some work on reviewing this (asking landowners for their

perception on what was delivered). She added it was important to understand barriers to communication and address any areas of concern. She felt the decision making processes on farms needed to be understood.

- Gary Smith noted that one of the Northern Hill Farming Panel's purposes was to champion the value of upland farming in the LNP to national and regional policy makers. It was also intended to create a network of farmers who could champion and raise awareness of high nature value farming opportunities amongst other farmers. Gary was keen to try and reinvigorate this with a different structure in place, and a stronger emphasis on high nature value farming (rather than upland farming per se) – focusing on those farmers that were enthusiastic and keen to make a positive difference. It was **AGREED** that we would review the constituency of the Northern Hill Farming Panel – creating local HNVP groups in each Protected Landscape - to make sure that it impacted positively on the ground. Further discussions will need to take place.
- Robert Mayhew noted that Northumberland NPA issue a farming newsletter and felt this could be enhanced to include some of the key points raised at the meeting in Northumberland. With just 220 farms in NNP this was achievable, but he appreciated the challenges in scaling this up across the wider NUCLNP.
- David Gray said we were looking to get farmers to work collaboratively, and funding was available for this. He noted that anything that anyone could do to help them get involved and engaged would be much appreciated.
- The Chair said there were private lifestyle buyers looking to tap into capital income resources; however, David Gray noted there was still a lot of interest in the purchase of land for agricultural purposes.

Following full and comprehensive discussions, the Chair then summarised on the points raised in the circulated papers as follows:-

**3a. *Is the NUCLNP Vision and are our objectives still relevant? If not, what should they be? How should they be linked to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and findings of the 2018 Landscapes Review?***

**AGREED** that a review should take place.

**3b. *Given the findings of the 2019 State of Nature Report – are we making a difference?***

As previously discussed.

**3c. *What are the areas of duplication with other organisations, and should the LNP step back from certain areas of work in order to manage its workflow if Partners are engaged in other ways?***

It had been **AGREED** that we needed to reduce duplication and an obvious start would be to step back from Woodland Creation and Peatland Restoration initiatives as these are considered covered by newly established activity specific partnerships.

**3di. *Should we hone down our projects list? If so, what projects should we continue to take forward?***

**i. *A successor to Curlew LIFE?***

**ii. *The future of the High Nature Value farming group?***

**iii. *Information sharing/collaborative working between the Woodland Partnership Groups?***

**iv. *Natural Capital Assessments and shared data acquisition and management? (Glover P.2).***

3di **AGREED** (Robert Mayhew said that the RSPB are likely to continue to champion this area of work and queried whether we could delegate this to the Curlew Sub-group). David Gray was keen that we did not duplicate activity with others such as the [Curlew Recovery Partnership](#). The Chair to speak to Jim Wardell RSPB Representative. Christine Venus supported the Curlew Project and was enthusiastic to revitalise this and involve others, whilst not being competitive with other people.

3dii Gary Smith said we needed to refresh what the NUCLNP already had; He was keen to try and reinvigorate the Northern Hill Farming Panel's with a different structure in place, and a stronger emphasis on high nature value farming (HNV) rather than upland farming per se. **AGREED**.

3diii Robert Mayhew said that the NUCLNP needed to be clear as to how and if newly established woodland partnership groups were communicating with each other ([The Northern Forest](#), [White Rose Forest](#), [Great Northumberland Forest](#) etc.). David Gray queried whether this was part of the Forestry Commission's remit and wondered whether this was being dealt with elsewhere? This area of work was also dependent on funding so the entire NUCLNP area may not be covered by a current Woodland Partnership.

3div We needed to continue with this in some shape or form. Christine Venus was working on a project for Borderlands to see how they may use natural capital at a strategic level. Christine said we needed to consider what this meant and think about how to plug the gap. Elliot Lorimer added we needed to think about how we used natural capital. Robert Mayhew reminded the group that the [eftec Natural Capital Account](#) for the NUCLNP had struggled to identify a financial value for biodiversity and thus whilst this work was hugely important, it still had its flaws. Gary Smith said we should focus on natural capital and monitor changes in the natural environment, lobbying for investment - particularly with relation to green finance (such as greenhouse gas sequestration).

**3e. What are the implications of Defra's current proposed Protected Landscapes 3 year flat cash budget settlement and will this have an impact upon delivering the LNP Objectives?**

The current budgetary pressures and the implications for Protected Landscape teams when prioritising workflow, including that of the NUCLNP were noted.

**3f. Similar to the Great North Bog Coalition, should the NUCLNP seek private sector funding to help deliver objectives? Explore public/private blended models? Individual project funding bids or landscape scale bids across the entire LNP?**

David Gray said it should not be NUCLNP's role to deliver finance for private projects. Gary Smith noted that key stakeholders were represented on the NUCLNP, and many were already delivering on or adding value to numerous environmental projects, therefore there was a lot of added value already in place and this forum brought them all together as one group.

**3g. What should we prioritise the LNP's budget on? (Robert to update the Board on the current financial position).**

**Agreed** that the budget should be directed on delivering the agreed priority projects, once identified.

**3h. What should the LNP priorities be? Focus on short-term gains or longer term strategic planning?**

As previously discussed.

**3i. Given the increase in pressures on Board members time, should organisational stand-ins be permitted? If so what are the implications?**

It was **AGREED** that we should not have stand-ins for Board members on the group.

**3j. *Should we review the membership if people are struggling to find time to attend meetings?***

David Gray said we needed to plan meetings in advance, being 12 months ahead and get the meetings into the diaries. The frequency of meetings was also important. The Chair would think about membership as this was important. If members had any issues they should come back to the Chair. It was **AGREED** that a short paper be brought to the Board.

**3k. *Should we change the chairmanship? Nominate a second deputy chair?***

The Chair offered to step aside there were others keen to pick up the baton. No one rushed forward but members did thank David Hill for his continuous time, support and commitment to the NUCLNP. If members wanted the Chairmanship to change, they members should take this up with Robert Mayhew.

**3l. *Do we need better marketing of what we do? – a dedicated resource?***

Amanda Anderson noted that marketing was about defining your audience, which are the landowners. Chris Woodley-Stewart suggested there was no need to have a comms plan, we just needed to know that we were engaging on an appropriate level. Sarah Kettlewell queried how other people found out about the NUCLNP and the benefits it provided, and it was **AGREED** that we would look at this.

**3m. *Should we ‘re-brand’ if we wish to continue – Suggested new name e.g. ‘Northern Upland Nature’ or ‘Northern Upland Nature Partnership’?***

It was **AGREED** that the group name be changed to; Northern Uplands Nature Partnership (NUNP), with a new logo and artwork being required.

**3n. *How frequently should we meet and by what means, Face to Face or MS Teams, a mix of the two?***

There would be three meetings per year; one in person and two via Teams. In future, there would be no Annual Forum.

**(b) NUCLNP Financial Update**

This report was **NOTED**.

**3. Minutes of the last NUCLNP meeting held on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

The Minutes of the last NUCLNP meeting held on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022 were approved and seconded as a true and correct record.

**4. Any Other Business**

None.

**5. Date of Next Meeting**

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions; it had been a valuable meeting and all points raised were gratefully received.

The date of the next meeting was to be confirmed; it was noted that meetings invitations would follow via Doodle Poll in the near future and members were encouraged to respond. The agreed timetable for future meetings would be:-

- March (via Teams)
- July (in person)
- October (via Teams)

There being no further business, the meeting was drawn to a close at 11.30am.

Signed: .....

Date: : .....

## Appendix 1

### Crispin Thorn's Comments: submitted by email on the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023

1. **What has changed** – I do think the landscape for nature has changed since the inception of the LNP's. We now have a climate emergency which is requiring us to act more positively to address the challenges facing society. We also have a nature crisis which also adds further pressure as we recognise that the UK is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries, with on average about half its biodiversity left - far below the global average of 75%. I would hope we would all agree the nature recovery is still a key priority and from my perspective a key challenge is embedding this in our land management systems and making it attractive enough for land managers to engage.
2. **Overlapping** – I think we should consider whether the geography is still valid, from my perspective the protected landscapes of the uplands are still a key resource and there is a logic and considering action at this level. The counter argument is whether initiatives such as 'Nature North' have developed this thinking further and over a larger area?
3. **Resources** – Things have moved on with the Environment Act and the development of strategic planning for nature (LNRS's) and also different support mechanisms (BNG, Nature for Climate etc, FiPL).
4. **Original Remit** – I do think it's worth reflecting on the original remit and identify the difference we have made. I think we have done some great work, particularly in the early days in developing the Forum, helping move key priorities forward such as HNVP. Other areas have been less successful such as the Great Upland Forest, but these have been overtaken by projects driven outside the LNP but are still contributing to the wider objectives.

I've had a look at the wider questions in the discussion section and would highlight the key issue is deciding whether the partnership in its current form adds value and is making a difference. This discussion should directly connect into the wider thinking on nature recovery and from my perspective a key question is whether there is need / logic to looking at nature recovery at a Northern Uplands level and helping to link together the plans across the different responsible bodies. The other view is to recognise that each of the protected areas have their own management plans / directions so there is already an outline framework. Should the connections be clearer and do they add up to greater than the sum of their parts.

The other key issue relates to land manager / farmer / owner engagement. There has been a significant amount of change in support / opportunities available for land managers and whether the partnership has a role in helping clarify, bring people together, learn from others from an upland perspective.

I will try to join some of the discussion, but it may not be possible, but I would be happy to continue to support a refreshed partnership if we collectively feel it will make a difference. There is however a capacity issue and we have seen a significant growth in woodland creation partnerships and also nature recovery partnerships and this combined with a focus on delivery on the ground has an impact both my (and the wider teams) ability to commit.