

Confirmed Minutes

Title of meeting:	NRW Board Meeting – Public Meeting
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Location:	Centre for Alternative Technology, Machynlleth, and Microsoft Teams
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Date of meeting:	23 rd May 2024
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Board Members present:	Sir David Henshaw, Chair Clare Pillman, Chief Executive Prof Steve Ormerod, Deputy Chair Geraint Davies Prof Calvin Jones Lesley Jones Prof Rhys Jones Mark McKenna Kath Palmer Helen Pittaway Dr Rosie Plummer
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Executive Team Members present:	Ceri Davies, Executive Director of Evidence, Policy and Permitting Prys Davies, Executive Director of Corporate Strategy and Development Sarah Jennings, Executive Director of Communications, Customer and Commercial Gareth O’Shea, Executive Director of Operations Rachael Cunningham, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services (Teams) Victoria Rose-Piper, Head of Business Support Services and Adfywio/Head of Business Transformation, deputising for Rachael Cunningham, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services
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Attendees present:	Phil Williams, Head of Governance and Board Secretary (All items) Rob Bell, Head of Finance, Item 6 (Teams) Dominic Driver, Head of Land Stewardship, Item 7 Dawn Thompson, Estate Recreation Planning Team, Item 7
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NRW Observers present: Bhuvaneswari Marrisudi, Board Apprentice
Gavin Bown, Head of Operations Mid Wales
Meinir Wigley, Integrated Communications Team Leader
Elsie Grace, Head of Sustainable Commercial
Development

Public Observers present: Polly Ernest
Elizabeth Mullan
Rhys Llywelyn
Jim Ralph
Delyth Lloyd
Matt Ward
Sian Roberts
Kim Waters, Welsh Rivers Union
Additional members of the public

Apologies: Dr Pete Fox

Secretariat: Natalie Williams, Deputy Board Secretary and Board
Secretariat Team Leader
Jocelyn Benger, Board Secretariat Team

Declarations of Interest:

- Dr Rosie Plummer - Member Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority - wide-ranging interactions with NRW including National Park landscape designation and protections including SAC rivers, Marine zones, diverse grant recipient and collaborator; Plantlife Trustee; Director of Plantlife Biodiversity Enhancements Ltd
- Prof Steve Ormerod – Chair of the Science Advisory Group and Board Member to the new Environmental Markets Board; Chair of the Fish-Eating Birds Advisory Group; Vice-President of the RSPB
- Geraint Davies – Mentor with Farming Connect; Associate of Pwllpeiran Upland Research Centre
- Prof Rhys Jones – part of a funded research project with Coventry University that will be examining the development and early implementation of the Sustainable Farming Scheme
- Prof Calvin Jones – Cardiff Business School hired by Welsh Government to look at financing models for potential tidal lagoons in Wales
- Mark McKenna – Down to Earth expression of interest in the Caernws scheme

Item 1. Open Meeting

1. The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed everyone, and explained the conduct of the meeting. Declarations of interest and apologies were noted as above.
2. The Chair read a statement on Withy hedge Landfill in Pembrokeshire, acknowledging local public concerns on the issues at the site. This is attached to these minutes at Annex A.
3. The Chair read a statement on Visitor Centres, acknowledging the level of public interest in the current situation. This addressed some of the correspondence received on the Visitor Centres and the items raised within the correspondence. This is attached to these minutes at Annex B.

Item 2. Review Minutes and Action Log

Item 2A. Review Minutes from the 21st March Meeting

4. The minutes from the public Board meeting on 21st March were reviewed and agreed.

Item 2B. Review Action Log

5. The Action Log was reviewed and noted.

Item 3. Update from the Chair

6. The Chair updated the Board on a busy few weeks, noting the number of current ongoing issues.
7. A meeting had taken place with the new Minister for Climate Change and Rural Affairs on the Teifi catchment work.

Item 4. Report from the Chief Executive

8. The Chief Executive gave an update on items in addition to the written Report.
9. The announcement of a general election on 4th July was noted. NRW would be working closely with colleagues in Welsh Government (WG) going into the pre-election period particularly on the announcement on the Upper Wye Project and NRW Senedd event. NRW would receive advice to arms-length bodies on conduct during the pre-election period and this would be circulated to staff.
10. NRW teams had been working hard to support communities and emergency services during the recent period of very heavy rain.

11. The fire and pollution incident at the Synthite factory in Mold was raised. The Executive Director of Operations gave an update on the incident. The media coverage was noted. It was explained that this was a COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazards) site which was jointly regulated by NRW and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Dead fish had been found in the River Alyn and concerns were raised over the presence of formaldehyde, therefore a Strategic Gold Command incident response group was set up and appropriate actions taken. Monitoring of the River Dee had taken place, and very low-level traces of formaldehyde were detected. NRW had worked with the water company to ensure safe drinking water. NRW would be chairing the recovery group which would include lessons learned.
12. Board members noted the ongoing updates that were received and expressed their appreciation for being kept informed on live incidents.
13. The Minister for Climate Change and Rural Affairs had made statements on his priorities and on the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). The announcement on the SFS described the preparatory phase for the SFS which would be undertaken in 2025, with the proposed transition period starting in 2026. The one-year delay in the start of the SFS would enable WG to undertake key commitments including: an evidence-based review to achieve carbon sequestration within the SFS; a data confirmation exercise with farmers on habitat and tree cover; to identify and develop further collaborative actions with a view to introducing these as soon as possible; setting up a Ministerial roundtable with key stakeholders to resolve issues of concern. NRW would have an involvement in many of these elements.
14. Prof Steve Ormerod and the Chief Executive attended a meeting of the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) in Edinburgh. Prof Steve Ormerod, as a member of JNCC, updated the Board on the meeting, which brought the parties together to consider and share knowledge and intelligence on the common issues faced across the environment. The substantive issue for discussion concerned the 30by30 commitment to have 30% of global land and sea effectively protected and managed for biodiversity by 2030. Intelligence was shared from across all countries with very helpful and productive discussions.
15. The Executive Director of Evidence, Policy and Permitting (EPP) updated the Board on her attendance at the European Environmental Protection Agencies meeting in Bratislava. This had provided an excellent opportunity to work with other countries, with an agenda that was very pertinent to NRW's discussions around a just transition on climate change. Financial matters were also discussed around how nature conservation and protection was funded, sharing good practice and how this work could be taken forward.
16. NRW would be represented at the European Nature Conservation Bodies meeting in Rome, leading presentations on transformative change for nature.
17. Board members noted the content of the Report and queried the opportunities for mainstreaming of lessons learned, in particular on decarbonisation developments,

considering the HyNet example and other technical developments relating to renewables. The Chief Executive confirmed that there was good discipline in place for taking lessons learned forward, including around the types of technical teams that would be needed with the anticipated increase in renewables.

Item 5. Update Reports of Committees and Forums

18. Kath Palmer, Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) gave an update on work since the meeting held on 7th March. A deep dive on the Annual Accounts was scheduled for 24th May and the next full meeting would take place on 4th June.
19. Prof Steve Ormerod, Chair of the Evidence Advisory Committee (EAC) gave an update on the meeting held on 14th May in Cardiff. Matters discussed included: progress on the Interim State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) 2025; the All Wales mapping work on landscapes across Wales; an update on evidence gathering processes on the potential new National Park; the Teifi demonstrator project and how the data and information would be accessible by members of the public; an update on the recommendations from the WG Biodiversity Deep Dive. Prof Rhys Jones, as a member of EAC, commented on the importance of thinking through the connections from SoNaRR into other activities, to emphasise the importance of the need for change by linking into areas such as the impact on people's wellbeing of climate change and biodiversity decline.
20. Helen Pittaway, Chair of the Finance Committee (FC) updated the Board on the meeting held on 25th April. The paper was taken as read. The year-end financial performance and priorities for 2024/25 were considered. Detailed discussion took place on the items for financial approval around renewables, compensatory planting, and priorities for the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE). An update was received from the Programme Management Office (PMO). The Annual Business Plan metrics were also discussed. The next meeting was scheduled for 13th June to review the Annual Accounts.
21. Geraint Davies, deputising for the Chair of the Flood Risk Management Committee (FRMC), updated the Board on the meeting held on 18th April. The paper was taken as read. The useful site visit to the Stephenson Street Flood Risk Management Scheme in Newport was highlighted. The Local Partnerships Report was considered and oversight by FC for the resulting project was approved. FRMC formally closed the Flood Recovery and Review Implementation Programme (FRRIP). Updates were received on Flood Risk Management (FRM) and the FRM Capital Programme. The team were praised for their efforts in working to ensure delivery during a difficult year with significant pressures.
22. Prof Calvin Jones, Chair of the Land Estate Committee (LEC), updated the Board on work since the meeting on 13th February. The Waterfall Country safety project continued to progress well in conjunction with the Visitor Safety Group. It was noted

that there were still some issues on contractors and safety which were being managed through the Forestry Industry Safety Accord (FISA). The timber income was very close to forecast. This year's budget would enable the management of key risks, although it was recognised that this was not yet in a virtuous circle of investment in the WGWE. Discussions were ongoing with WG on a multi-year funding agreement. An update was provided on re-stocking, and it was confirmed that there was no risk of any further write-offs. The next meeting was scheduled for 18th July.

23. Mark McKenna, Chair of the People and Customer Committee (PCC) updated the Board on work since the meeting held on 1st March. The next meeting would take place on 6th June and would include the mix of strategic and approval items, plus an update on NRW2030 and the implications of the Business Plan.
24. Dr Rosie Plummer, Chair of the Protected Areas Committee (PrAC) updated the Board on work since the meeting held on 22nd February. A site visit was planned for 11th June, and the next formal meeting was scheduled for 28th June. There were a number of sites notified for protection which could need determination in public. The work on the proposed new National Park continued. PrAC would also be scrutinising the outcomes from the Board strategic discussion on the Corporate Plan Wellbeing Objective 1: Nature is recovering.
25. Prof Rhys Jones, Chair of the Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF), updated the Board. The paper was taken as read. Meetings of the sub-group on Agricultural Pollution had also taken place with discussions ongoing around the four-year review of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations (Agri Regs). Concerns were raised about the need for more clarity on the terms of the review and the process. A presentation on NRW's Nutrient Review was provided to the Sub-Group, which included an update on the interactive mapping portal which would be introduced. A report was received on visits by officers in relation to the Agri Regs, and interesting patterns on compliance were noted. Dr Rosie Plummer, as an observer to the meeting, commented on the useful nature of the discussions and commended it to the rest of the Board.
26. Prof Steve Ormerod, Chair of the Wales Fisheries Forum (WFF) and Wales Water Management Forum (WWMF) updated the Board. The papers were taken as read. The work of the WFF was highlighted. The ongoing debate on the declining serious state of salmon and sewin and the outcomes of the work by the Fish-Eating Birds (FEB) Advisory Group were raised. The initial work on the Usk on salmon smolt appeared to show a greater risk of mortality with low water flow and drought conditions, showing a link between climate change, water quality, and the management of the landscape. The FEB Advisory Group would be reconvening in July. The Net Limitation Order on the Dee was highlighted. It was noted that the net fishery was unlikely to open again, and it was expected to move to formal closure on salmon conservation grounds. An item was received on the Sea Trout Symposium and the WFF were updated on NRW river restoration projects.

27. Geraint Davies, Chair of the National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW), updated the Board. The paper was taken as read. NAFW had met on 5th March and a group was created to feed into the SFS to ensure that members voices could be heard. An update was received on the Recreation Strategy.

Item 6. Finance Performance Report

Presenter: Rob Bell, Head of Finance

28. The Head of Finance introduced the item and provided an overview of the paper, noting the Report showed the position at the end of March. This had been scrutinised by the Executive Team (ET) and the summary had been reviewed by FC. The draft net position was noted in the Report as an underspend of £0.4m. More detailed work had taken place since the publication of the Report and the position was now an underspend of £0.2m. FC would be updated on the details at the meeting in June. The areas of underspend and other variances were described and were detailed in the Report. The underspend had been forecast and a discussion had taken place with FC in March on where this could be used, which included reassessed charge schemes and the use of more Grant in Aid towards externally funded schemes, which would enable some European funding to be deferred into future years, thereby helping with inflation pressures. The Head of Finance noted that it had been a difficult financial year with a number of unforeseen issues, such as pay increases and Flood Capital Programme challenges. The positive performance of programmes such as the Nature and Climate Emergency (NaCE) Programme was highlighted and the support from WG on the Flood Capital Programme was recognised.

29. The Board thanked the team, recognising the amount of work that had taken place.

30. Board members queried whether there were any lessons learned to be taken forward into the new financial year. The Head of Finance confirmed that the two main issues around pay and timber income were likely to be mitigated for the next financial year.

31. The controls on recruitment were noted, and Board members queried the level of savings achieved by this. The Head of Finance explained that the recruitment controls did not make the level of savings that were expected but it did help with the budget situation overall. Controls had been strengthened in January and it was recognised that the situation would have been worse without them in place.

32. The Board approved the changes to the latest forecast, from £272.8m to £283.8m and noted the financial performance to the end of March 2024.

APPROVED: The change to the latest forecast from £272.8m to £283.8m

Item 7. Recreation Strategy

Presenters: Dominic Driver, Head of Land Stewardship; Dawn Thompson, Estate Recreation Planning Team

33. The Executive Director of EPP introduced the item. The background to the development of the Recreation Strategy was described; two years ago, NRW were dealing with recreational activity decisions, and the Board were clear at the time that a Recreation Strategy was needed with focus on the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR). LEC had since provided oversight of the development of the Strategy.
34. Dawn Thompson, Estate Planning Recreation Team, provided the Board with an overview of the work on the Recreation Strategy. Engagement had taken place with staff and stakeholders, and there had been a real drive to help to shape a new future for outdoor recreation on the land in NRW's care. Valuable input had been provided by LEC, NAFW and Local Access Forums, which had helped to deliver a consensus Strategy around the expectations of stakeholders and to set the future direction for decision-making by NRW staff through the vision for NRW to 2050. It also allowed for short-term areas of focus through to 2030 to align with the Corporate Plan by defining how NRW could enable access to nature with a focus on delivering a sustainable future, and improving internal integration, processes and decision-making, and external collaboration. A shift would be seen from NRW putting its own resources into creating recreation opportunities and towards managing activity and supporting others to deliver on the land to connect people with nature, while ensuring that the activity was supportive of the SMNR aims and NRW's Wellbeing Objectives.
35. Prof Calvin Jones, Chair of LEC, thanked the team for their work to develop the Strategy. LEC had overseen the development and were content with the outcome, noting that the Strategy delivered a useful framework for decision-making, while being clear about inclusivity, and protecting and enhancing SMNR.
36. The Head of Land Stewardship explained the next steps for implementing the Strategy through service plans on the land in NRW's care. Changes would be made where necessary to allocate resources differently, recognising that overall there needed to be a reduction in resources. Social justice would be considered around where the most value could be added, such as sites with the potential to reach those who would benefit the most. There would be decisions for the Board on strategic issues.
37. The Board welcomed the Recreation Strategy, and appreciated the balance of inclusivity, responsibility, and protection of the environment. The opportunities for using technology for interpretation and information were highlighted. Geraint Davies, as Chair of NAFW, highlighted the good work that had taken place with stakeholders. Board members praised the level of consultation that had been undertaken. It was recognised that the Strategy provided a useful framework to help with future decision-making.
38. The fit with the Board's strategic discussions around aims on partnering and working more with others was welcomed. It was queried whether partners were being actively sought. Dawn Thompson confirmed that this would be the next step, taking forward stakeholder analysis at a national and local level, including social prescribing and the involvement of Public Service Boards.

39. Board members queried how considerations around areas such as reputation, health and safety, and financing would feed into the framework when considering contentious decisions. The Head of Land Stewardship explained the ‘centre out, Place and back again’ model, which involved Place colleagues looking at what the Strategy would mean for their area with significant decisions brought to the Board for approval.
40. It was queried how the elements around social justice would link into the Business Plan and the metrics. The Head of Land Stewardship confirmed that the Business Plan would include a commitment on outcomes to be achieved, which would therefore be visible to the Board. Board members asked whether there was a baseline of those who accessed NRW’s land and how the areas relating to social justice and urban nature would be defined. It was explained that a zoning framework was proposed to map the land in NRW’s care for the areas for development with communities, and nature zones with high conservation value for protection.
41. The inclusion of the health benefits of outdoor recreation was welcomed. The approach to volunteering was considered and it was confirmed that this was likely to be part of a partnership element.
42. It was noted that the current version of the Strategy was aimed internally, and it was confirmed that an external document would also be produced which would provide opportunities for further engagement. Board members emphasised that the Strategy would need to move into delivery. It was confirmed that the Land Stewardship Business Group would lead on delivery with LEC oversight. Resource constraints were recognised but it would be important to capture the enthusiasm and take opportunities forward.
43. The Chair thanked the team and Forestry England who had supported Dawn Thompson’s secondment to NRW.
44. The Board approved the Recreation Strategy.

APPROVED: The Recreation Strategy

Item 8. AOB

45. No matters were raised under AOB.

Meeting Closed

Public Q&A

46. The Chair noted the questions received in advance on Withyhedge Landfill Site and Visitor Centres. Statements had been made at the start of meeting on these issues. No further questions on other matters had been received in advance.

Public Meeting Closed

Index of Annexes

Annex A – Withyhedge Statement

Annex B – Statement on Visitor Centres