

## **EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Notes of a meeting of the Exmoor Consultative Forum held on Wednesday 19 June 2002 at 6.30 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

#### **PRESENT**

Mr E Nightingale	Forum Chairman	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr A Collins		Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr J Dallyn		Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr M Gammon		Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr R Morrison-Smith		Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr S Pugsley		Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr F Rawle		Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr RWebber		Exmoor National Park Authority
Mrs L Crossman		Member with Special Knowledge
Mr J Milton		Member with Special Knowledge
Mr K Ross		Member with Special Knowledge
Mrs R Thomas		Member with Special Knowledge
Mr H Thomas		Member with Special Knowledge
Mr J Holtom		Badgeworthy Land Company
Mr P Addicott		Beagles
Mrs S Ray		Endangered Exmoor
Ms M Waller		ESA Project Officer
Major General E Beckett		Exmoor Trust
Ms J Carless		Living Exmoor
Mr P Delbridge		NFU (Devon)
Miss J Stanley		Ramblers Association (Devon)
Mrs J Nicholson		West Somerset Archaeological Society
Mrs J Dermitage		West Somerset Archaeological Society
Mr G Way		Youth Hostels Association

#### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Mrs A Amory	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr J Edwards	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr M Knight	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr M Robins	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mrs M Russell	Exmoor National Park Authority
Miss E Stacey	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr B Dru	Member with Special Knowledge

Lady Gass	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr J Roberts	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr M Scott	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr D Wade	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr T Yandle	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr B Richardson	Caravan Club
Mr J Talbot	Community Council of Devon
Mr J Lawrence-Mills	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Mr G Bateman	Area Manager Devon, Environment Agency
Mr M Hawkins	Exmoor Society
Mr T Davey	Exmoor Society
Mr H Crawford	Exmoor Tourist Association
Mr C Marrow	Forest Enterprise
Ms L Jones	Forestry Commission
Mr C Roberts	Forest and Timber Association
Mr R Morris	National Trust
Mr M Ward	Nettlecombe Court Field Centre
Mr P Morris	NFU
Rev. R Ray	Diocese of Bath & Wells
Mr C P Dowden	Countryside Agency
Mr C Thomas-Everard	NFU (Somerset)
Mr R Butcher	Exmoor Natural History Society

1. **NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

- i. The Notes of the last meeting of the Consultative Forum held on 9 November 2001 were agreed as a correct record of that meeting.
- ii. There were no matters arising.

2. **MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1 The Chairman told members that Mr Alastair Finlinson had resigned as a member with special knowledge from the Forum. The Chairman remarked that Mr Finlinson had given many years of service, both as a member of the Authority and on the Consultative Forum.
- 2.2 Members noted that a review of the membership had taken place, and that 9 organisations and 2 members with special knowledge that had found difficulty in attending meetings had now left the Forum. A list of the current membership was given to members.

### 3. ITEMS RAISED BY MEMBERS

#### 3.1 Access to Open Countryside Legislation

3.2 Mr Paul Hawkins, the Authority's Recreation Management Officer updated members on the progress of implementing the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. He said that part one of the Act set out a public right of access on foot to mountain, moor and heath, down and registered common. Under this, 19000ha of moorland and common on Exmoor would be potential access land. There is already formal access to 47% and defacto access to a further 10% of the potential area and more limited access to the remaining 43%.

3.3 The implementation of the Act for Exmoor had been timetabled by the Countryside Agency as :-

- August 2002 - Countryside Agency to commence mapping the open access areas
- October 2002 - Local Access Forum established.
- March 2003 - Draft Map of Open Access published by the Countryside Agency.
- March Meeting 2003 - Public consultation period on draft map.
- September 2003 - Provisional Open Access areas published; landowners and others with a legal interest able to appeal to Countryside Agency at this stage.
- May 2004 - Countryside Agency publishing the conclusive map, which will be valid for 10 years.

3.4 Part 2 of the CROW Act deals with developing and improving the Public Rights of Way network. Authorities will be required to prepare improvement plans covering the network of rights of way.

3.5 DEFRA now expected to publish in July 2002 regulations regarding the Local Access Forum. The Exmoor National Park Authority will set up its Local Access Forum when the regulations are known. The role of the Forum will be to provide and advise about the development of strategies that cater for a wide range of people, improvements to the path network and the implementation of new access to open country. Membership of the Forum, which will not exceed 20, will be sought from a wide range of interests by newspaper advertisements etc.

3.6 Mr P Hawkins said that timetables had slipped in a few areas which were ahead of Exmoor in the schedule.

3.7 Mrs Thomas asked why an outside company had been asked to carry out the mapping. Dr Stone replied that the decision had been made by the Countryside Agency, and much has been learnt from the initial work already carried out.

3.8 Mr Milton was concerned that the definition of what is available for public access

- needs to be made clearer. Much of Exmoor already enjoys de facto access. The National Park Officer said that there are possible complications in that landowners have the right to stop public access for any reason for up to 28 days each year. The Exmoor National Park Authority was aiming to recruit 3 additional staff to assist with additional work associated with the introduction of this Act.
- 3.9 Mr Collins asked what was intended by the role of developing rights of way that the Access Forum would have. The National Park Officer said he anticipated this would be the creation of small links between existing paths.
- 3.10 Mr Thomas was concerned that small and isolated areas of access land less than 5 ha. in area were of limited access benefit and felt strict criteria were needed to prevent anomalies.
- 3.11 In reply to a question from Mr Ross, Mr P Hawkins said that the Act gave a right to roam on foot on designated land. Although landowners could close access land for up to 28 days a year, which could be as one day every fortnight for instance, the public rights of way crossing these areas remained open. However, land could not be closed, for example, on public holidays. The landowner would have to give the Countryside Agency details of when land would be closed. He hoped that National Park Authority staff would carry out liaison to prevent the need for some restrictions.
- 3.12 Mr Ross referred to northern grass moors and was interested how the public would know that access land was closed. Mr P Hawkins said that the Countryside Agency was proposing to set up a control notification point that would operate a web site map for the whole country. On the ground, the onus will be on the landowner. Mr P Hawkins acknowledged that dealing with open moorland with many entry points still needed to be solved.
- 3.13 Mr Collins asked about the amount of notice that would be required to close a path. Mr P Hawkins said that while 5 days would be needed for a 28 day closure, a 2 hour notification is proposed for emergency restrictions.
- 3.14 Mrs Thomas suggested the proposals were a recipe for disaster and felt that the Countryside Agency should delegate its role to the National Parks in these areas. The National Park Officer said that the legislation entitled landowners to give notification over the phone at any time. Consequently, it was easier to have a single national number that was manned around the clock.
- 3.15 In reply to Mr Way, the National Park Officer said that Exmoor's Visitor Centres were preparing to have current information on access land closures and suggested that the Youth Hostel Association also might need to consider internet access to give its members the necessary current information on paths.

- 3.16 Mr Gammon asked how the additional cost of administering this Act would be managed. Dr Stone replied that so far DEFRA had met the additional costs incurred by National Park Authorities through the National Park Grant.
- 3.17 Miss Stanley was interested to find out how the public would know that land is 'open access'. The National Park Officer said open access land would be indicated on Ordnance Survey maps. People would also need to check at Visitor Centres or on the Internet, or take a chance on not finding a closure sign.
- 3.18 Mr Milton was concerned about closing open access land lying alongside a road which would have unlimited access points. The Head Ranger said that notices on the cattle grids or Anstey Common had proved effective during the Foot and Mouth crisis.
- 3.19 Major General Beckett was concerned that the 'Right to roam' could lead to birds etc. being disturbed. Dr Stone said that limitations on the public rights already existed for Rights of Way and the CROW Act did prohibit disruption of any legal activities on land.
- 3.20 Mr P Hawkins was thanked by the Chairman for the update.

#### **4. HUNTING**

- 4.1 The Exmoor Society asked for an update on the National Park's response to the DEFRA consultation on hunting. The National Park Officer said that the consultation has been launched by the Rt. Hon Alun Michael, Minister for Rural Affairs. The Exmoor National Park Authority would be responding to the consultation, and a special meeting of the Authority would be held to agree the response.
- 4.2 Mr Pugsley added that the Minister had visited Exmoor twice, and he believed he understood the issues. However, the Minister would be invited to visit again to discuss the affects on Exmoor of a hunting ban.

#### **5. RURAL HOUSING ENABLER PROJECT**

- 5.1 The Chairman introduced Mrs Trudy Robinson, the newly appointed Rural Housing Enabler, whose work is to promote affordable housing on Exmoor and the rural areas of North Devon and West Somerset.
- 5.2 Mrs Robinson said that the aims of the project were to increase the provision of affordable housing for local needs where it was needed in the rural communities.
- 5.3 Organisations across the project area had got together to promote and facilitate the development of affordable rural housing, with funding from North Devon and West Somerset District Councils, the Countryside Agency, Magna, Hastoe, North

Devon Homes and Falcon Rural Housing as well as the Exmoor National Park Authority.

- 5.4 The role of the Rural Housing Enabler will be to provide advice to local communities on the process of securing affordable housing, assessing local housing needs by assisting local communities and parish councils with surveys, helping to identify potential buildings or sites, exploring development options with housing associations and local authorities, and generally increasing awareness of rural housing issues.
- 5.5 Mrs Robinson said the project has started on 1 April and she had already contacted 7 parishes within the National Park and would be pleased to receive invitations to talk to others. The home ownership initiatives would include low cost, shared ownership and self build, helping young first time buyers and the re-use of existing buildings.
- 5.6 Mr Webber said that it was important that communities respond to this initiative to ensure the housing existed to keep a balanced community.
- 5.7 Mrs Crossman said she would be very interested to see how the theory was put into practice. She said that West Somerset District Council has a commitment to provide 300 affordable housing units, but that the process could be so drawn out that she worried that the funding might run out before the projects were achieved.
- 5.8 In reply to a question from Mr Collins, Mrs Robinson said that the project covered both rental and ownership schemes, but that new build will combine economy with individual design as far as possible.
- 5.9 Mr Addicott suggested the area needed an affordable stock of homes to rent. Even shared equity could make new homes unaffordable. Ms Robinson felt that the local needs restrictions would restrict their value on the open housing market.
- 5.10 Major General Beckett said that rent restructuring where the value of housing will be reflected in the rents charged, and which could go on increasing over 10 years, could be a problem. He said that National Park Authorities should consider joining together to try to influence the government. Mrs Robinson said that she understood that Housing Associations were limited to increases that equalled inflation, plus 0.5% Affordability will be a key factor in any new schemes.
- 5.11 Mrs Crossman said that front end costs were a major factor in rural areas. Mr Ellerby said that ANPA had written to the housing minister to ask that the rates of grant to housing associations be increased in National Park areas.
- 5.12 Mr Pugsley said that this project involved close working with local communities and so any proposed schemes should have local support.

5.13 Mrs Thomas said that it was important to identify the needs of key workers. Any surveys needed to include the business activities that villages need.

5.14 Mrs Robinson was thanked for her talk.

## 6. **THE MALCOLM MACEWEN TRUST**

6.1 Mr Temperly said he wanted to inform the Consultative Forum about the MacEwen Trust to increase awareness of it and through this encourage local people to apply. It is a registered charity set up in 1999 to commemorate the late Malcolm MacEwen's contribution to the conservation of Exmoor. The Trust encourages research on the conservation of Exmoor and in particular provides bursaries to encourage outstanding undergraduate or post graduate students to undertake research projects on Exmoor. Examples of research supported by the Trust include:-

- The potential for moorland restoration on Exmoor (Liz Rowan)
- The regeneration of lichens and bryophytes following moorland fires (James Cook)
- The effectiveness of moorland management agreements on Exmoor (Alessandra Jones)
- Sustainable tourism on Exmoor (Sally Webber)
- Later pre-historic metal working on Exmoor (Chris Carey)
- The medieval landscape of Exmoor (Martin Gillard)

6.2 Mr Temperley said that the Trust Fund has been established by contributions from CNP, CPRE, Exmoor Society, Ramblers Association and the Open Spaces Society, as well as the Exmoor National Park Authority and ANPA, and also by individual donors. He added that the Trust Fund would be pleased to receive further donations to assist in pursuing its objectives.

## 7. **AN ECONOMIC STATEMENT FOR EXMOOR**

7.1 The Head of Planning & Community told the members that a statement on the potential for the future development of the economy of the National Park in ways that were compatible with and help achieve National Park purposes had been prepared. It would be published soon in printed form as well as on the Website.

7.2 He said that the Foot and Mouth crisis last year had hit a fragile local economy. While Foot and Mouth had taken £16m from the local economy, most of this had come from sectors other than agriculture and tourism. Even the local laundry had been affected. This clearly demonstrated the close linkages and the high spending power of people coming to a quality landscape.

- 7.3 The National Park Authority is not responsible for the economic development of the area. However, the Economic statement is already being used to assist West Somerset District Council in preparing a community strategy.
- 7.4 Mr France said that the Economic Statement would complement the Big Map. All activities have an economic spin off. He hoped that this work would help to make the most of economic development that was based on a quality landscape.
- 7.5 Mr Ross thanked the National Park Officer for the work that had gone into the preparation of the Statement which he said would be invaluable to the District Council as well as for those involved with rural regeneration.
- 7.6 Mrs Thomas asked if any attempt had been made to identify the labour requirement to maintain the landscape. Dr Stone said this was an economic statement, but as a further stage, it would be developed.

## 8. **'The Big Map'**

- 8.1 Sarah Bryan outlined the concept of the 'Big Map', a range of practical projects to conserve and enhance the environment of the National Park. Members then broke into workshop groups to consider further the project proposals outlined on the Map. Among the points identified in the reports from the workshop groups:-
- Money needed to encourage environmental schemes such as moorland recreation, hedgerow management
  - Regenerated woodland should be identified
  - Links to be shown to the South West Forest
  - Need to ensure skilled labour is available for ongoing conservation management
  - Means needed to respond to Listed Building emergencies
  - The Mineral Line must be a priority for action
  - Churches and Church yards are an unappreciated asset.
  - Exmoor Time Line Project – ice age to present day
  - Watermills are a potential feature
  - A project to demonstrate the link between social development and the topography of Exmoor.

## 9. **ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2001/02 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2002/03**

- 9.1 The National Park Officer summarised for members the main achievements in the previous financial year. These included:-
- 9.2 Natural Environment: Purchase of 34 ha of woodland at Tarr Steps, reintroducing grazing at North Hill, commencing heathland restoration at Hadborough, involvement with new native woodland at Glenthorne and progress on the MIRE project.

- 9.3 Cultural Heritage: Renovation commenced at Simonsbath Sawmill, thanks to a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, archaeological surveys completed at Culbone Woods and Cosgate Hall, consolidation work to the Winding House, Burgundy Chapel and Fortescue Cairn and assistance financially to achieve the publication of 'Field Archaeology of Exmoor'.
- 9.4 Recreation Management: Foot and Mouth helplines and disinfectant points operated, Rights of Way reopened, promoted days out by bus, Snowdrop Valley park and ride scheme, again worked well, work done on village gateways and 96% of Rights of Way classified as easy to use.
- 9.5 Promoting Understanding: Wind Turbine at Pinkery installed, IT links to visitor centres provided, Exmoor Visitor and 2 editions of Park Life published and work done on the Exmoor Resource project. Exmoor's Visitor Centres achieved an effectiveness rating of 93% the highest in England.
- 9.6 Development Control: 295 planning applications received, of which 60% were dealt with within 8 weeks, new delegation scheme introduced, Best Value Review Action Plan implemented, 104 enforcement matters reported and 461 local searches processed.
- 9.7 Forward Planning: New National Park Management Plan published, Deposit version of the draft Local Plan prepared, House Price survey completed and Housing Enabler appointed.
- 9.8 Corporate Matters: New Standards Committee formed, Investors in People award achieved and all energy consumption monitored.
- 9.9 The National Park Officer identified Priority Work for 2002/03 as:-
- Completing the Local Plan Review
  - Completing the restoration of Simonsbath Sawmill
  - Re-establishing the coastpath at Porlock Bay
  - Enhancing the area and replacing the toilets at Tarr Steps
  - CROW Act implementation and Access Forum and mapping exercise
  - Publish the first State of the Park report
  - The Sustainable Tourism initiative with the Countryside Agency
  - Implementing Electronic Government
  - Best Value Performance Plan and Review
  - Job Evaluation of all posts.

## 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Ms Judy Carless reminded members that the EU Committee Inquiry into the Foot and Mouth Crisis was holding an open meeting at Knowstone on Friday 21 June.

She thanked the National Park Officer and Authority for the Forum and the opportunities it offered to consult with local people.

11. **NEXT MEETING**

- 11.1 The next meeting for the Consultative Forum would take place at 10.30 a.m. on Friday 8 November 2002.