

## EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of the meeting of the Consultative Forum held on Friday 7 November 2003 at 10.30am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

#### PRESENT

John Dyke, Forum Chairman	Exmoor National Park Authority
Arabella Amory	Exmoor National Park Authority
Alan Collins	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mike Knight	Exmoor National Park Authority
Steven Pugsley	Exmoor National Park Authority
Fred Rawle	Exmoor National Park Authority
Baroness Mallilieu	Member with Special Knowledge
Rachel Thomas	Member with Special Knowledge
Bernard Dru	Member with Special Knowledge
John Milton	Member with Special Knowledge
Edward Nightingale	Member with Special Knowledge
Malcolm Prowse	Member with Special Knowledge
Jeremy Roberts	Member with Special Knowledge
Michael Scott	Member with Special Knowledge
Humphrey Temperley	Member with Special Knowledge
Tom Yandle	Member with Special Knowledge
Jeremy Holtom	Badgworthy Land Company
John Lawrence-Mills	CPRE – West Somerset
Richard Andrews	Defra RDS
Robin Ray	Diocese of Bath and Wells
Sylvia Ray	Endangered Exmoor
Michael Hankin	Exmoor Natural History Society
Tim Davey	Exmoor Society
Michael Clinch	Exmoor Trust
Mark Ward	Field Studies Council
Chris Roberts	Forestry & Timber Association
Chris Hewitt	National Trust
R Ferrar	North Devon Conservation Society
Joyce Stanley	Ramblers' Association – Devon
Julia Moysey	South West Lakes Trust
Joan Nicholson	West Somerset Archaeological Society
Geoff Way	YHA (England & Wales) South Region

Apologies for absence were received from: Julia Clark, Ann Clitheroe, John Edwards, Mike Gammon, Christine Lawrence, Roger Martin, Ron Morrison-Smith, Jim Pile, John Travis, Jeremy Yabsley ( Exmoor National Park Authority), Louise Crossman, Lady Gass, Marilyn Russell, Keith Ross , Donald Wade (Members with Special Knowledge), Fleming Ulf-Hansen, (English Nature), Michael Ryle (Exmoor Society) David Westbrook, (Somerset Wildlife Trust) and the Environment Agency.

## 9. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

### (1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2003 were signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment requested by the Exmoor Society:-

Note 3 (1) - Statement on the Economy of Exmoor

In the third line of the first paragraph, the words "was proposing to meet" be replaced with "proposed that there should be meetings."

### (2) **Matters Arising**

#### (i) **Minute 3 (3) - House Price Surveys on Exmoor**

Chris France, the Authority's Head of Planning & Community, informed members that the recent Exmoor House Price Survey showed that houses with postcodes outside the National Park had lower rises than those within the Park.

#### (ii) **Minute 7 - Implementing Electronic Government**

The Exmoor Trust had organised a very successful meeting at Raleigh's Cross concerning Broadband. A group has been formed in Dulverton to pursue access to Broadband, and the National Park Authority was participating in it.

#### (iii) **Minute 3 - Future Development Proposals at Wimbleball Lake**

Mr Hankin asked if South West Water had been successful in identifying the £1million funding that was needed to enable the project to proceed. The National Park Officer replied that South West Lakes Trust intended to apply for Rural Renaissance Funding from the Regional Development Agency, a fund aimed at developing economic prosperity in rural areas and for Objective 2 funding from the Government Office for the South West.

Michael Scott said that South West Lakes Trust had held a successful meeting locally and had accepted local concerns that any development should be on the western side around Hill Farm, the dam and Bessom Bridge and that there should not be a cycle-way on the eastern side as it would not be appropriate in woodland. Mr Hankin was pleased with this as it would not affect bird life as much.

#### (iv) **Minute 5 - Sustainable Development Fund**

The National Park Officer said that an independent panel had now been established to make recommendations about applications for funding. The National Park Authority was represented by two members on the Panel. The National Park Officer was pleased with the uptake and the exciting range of projects that were being submitted and hoped that DEFRA would continue to provide funding for a third year.

#### (v) **Minute 6 - Access Maps for Exmoor National Park**

Martin Evans, the Authority's Head of Recreation and Tourism, reported that Provisional Maps are likely to be published by the Countryside Agency in February. The publication of these maps would provide the opportunity for landowners to appeal regarding land identified for open access.

(vi) **Minute 7 - Ordnance Survey Explorer Map for Exmoor**

Martin Evans, the Authority's Head of Recreation and Tourism, said that Ordnance Survey had made a range of suggestions for identifying National Park boundaries on these maps, but none were as prominent as those currently in use. Ordnance Survey had wanted a change to make it easier to identify access land. National Park Authorities would continue to lobby because it is useful for people visiting the area to know where the boundaries were.

10. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions

11. **ITEMS RAISED BY FORUM MEMBERS**

11.1 **DRAFT POLICY PLANNING STATEMENT (PPS)7**

Michael Scott said that this policy statement gave a clear indication to Planning Authorities that they needed to have regard to the requirements for farmers to diversify. As he was a farmer with some diversification he wanted to know how the Park Authority intended to respond to the draft policy statement. The response could be crucial for Exmoor in view of the impending review of the Common Agricultural Policy which was expected to lead to up to one-third of farmed-land being taken out of use, with payments made on an area basis with no obligation to farm the land. Additionally, the proposed Hunting Bill would have an impact. Mr Scott felt the draft policy planning statement gave the Park Authority an opportunity to reconsider the stringent policies in the draft Local Plan, and the new Plan should reflect this new policy guidance, even if it meant delaying publication of the Plan.

Ruth McArthur, the Authority's Principal Planning Officer, replied that the Draft Policy Planning Statement would be considered by the National Park Authority on 18 November 2003. The draft Local Plan was positive about diversification proposals and already reflected much of the guidance in the Statement. Chris France, the Authority's Head of Planning & Community, commented that new Policy Planning Statements were more concise than previous ones, using more positive language. Richard Andrews added that claimants would have to accept environmental restrictions with cross – compliance to be taken into account to receive agricultural support payments.

11.2 **ECONOMY OF EXMOOR**

The Exmoor Society asked for the Forum to receive an update on progress following publication of the Statement on the Economy of Exmoor in June 2002 and consideration to be given to proposals by the Society for an umbrella organisation to stimulate and co-ordinate initiatives to meet the aims in the Statement.

Nigel Stone said that a list of the actions that had happened had been given to all members present before the meeting and further copies were available. The question of forming an umbrella organisation would be considered by the Authority at its next meeting. However, the National Park Authority was not a lead agency on the economy of Exmoor. While Nigel Stone acknowledged that a great deal had been achieved with partners including the district and county councils, he said that limited staff resources had not allowed the Authority to be as pro-active as he would have liked to be in some aspects of the Statement.

Roger Webber said that the Exmoor Trust had been very helpful in giving the Broadband issue prominence. Access to Broadband was needed to attract businesses to Exmoor.

Mr Hankin asked about the Tick Control Project which had been partly funded by the Sustainable Development Fund. Nigel Stone replied that it was a pilot project in the Dunkery area carried out jointly with the National Trust and graziers. High levels of ticks had led to complaints from visitors and led to some graziers showing reluctance to let stock graze on the moor.

Malcolm Prowse said the RDA had given the green light to the proposal to move South Molton market, and now it was necessary to consider the Blackmoor Gate site, which was critical for the economy of Lynton and Lynmouth.

Joan Nicholson commented on the Dunster Action Plan, saying that the Dunster Tythe Barn was deteriorating as water was now getting into the fabric of the building and asked that pressure be put on the Crown Estate to avoid any more delay. Nigel Stone said that the Authority's Historic Buildings Officer was involved in progressing the issue.

### 11.3 TRAFFIC CALMING IN VILLAGES ETC

The Exmoor Society asked to be updated on the Authority's success with the two Highway Authorities on achieving a more co-ordinated application of measures to reduce the speed of traffic in the villages and on the rural roads of Exmoor. The clutter of signing and road markings were also a serious concern.

Martin Evans, the Authority's Head of Recreation & Tourism, told members that Somerset County Council had set up a Commission to consider speed management issues. The National Park Authority had commented in detail to the Commission, and the Commission's conclusions were awaited. Two members of the Authority, Alan Collins and John Dyke had places on the Commission.

Mike Knight said that he had spoken to Devon County Council to initiate a meeting with the Park Authority and Somerset County Council to develop a joint approach to traffic management signing.

Martin Evans said that the Highway Authorities had been invited to sign up to an accord on signing two years ago, and a further meeting was scheduled for the following week. He added that it was crucial to retain Exmoor's distinctiveness.

Humphrey Temperley said that, as a former Chairman of Somerset County Council and also its Environment Committee, he felt that the national requirements were interpreted too rigorously. Devon had a less obtrusive approach which he hoped Somerset could follow. John Dyke said it was increasingly apparent that '*a one size fits all*' approach is not an acceptable solution, and that flexibility was needed, especially in areas with protected landscapes. He also suggested that it was not visitors who tended to drive too fast.

Rachel Thomas agreed that villages on Exmoor could be treated differently to Exmoor in general.

Roger Webber drew attention to work undertaken by Somerset County Council, with support from the National Park Authority, to use traffic signing to route lorries away from the National Park, but said some drivers simply ignored the signs.

Nigel Stone pointed out to members that appropriately designed gateways on village approaches were an opportunity to remind people that they were in the National Park.

#### 11.4 **LITTER**

Michael Clinch said that the Exmoor Trust would welcome a statement from the National Park Authority on its approach to best managing and reducing the problem of litter as he felt it had increased in recent years. Nigel Stone said that the Authority co-operated with the Highway Authorities who were responsible for dealing with litter on roads. Alison Kent said the Authority regularly arranged litter sweeps with the help of a team of volunteers. Also, visitors were encouraged to take litter home with them.

Tim Davey said that the Exmoor Society had had a programme of distributing a card to all retailers selling sweets and canned drinks asking people to take their rubbish home with them. This had led to an improvement at the time, but the scheme had been discontinued.

#### 12. **HUNTING STUDY**

Nigel Stone informed members of the findings of the Study into the Impact of a Ban on Stag-hunting in the Greater Exmoor and Quantocks area. It had been jointly commissioned by West Somerset District Council and other authorities as a result of the Bill introduced into Parliament in December 2002 for the licensing of hunts, and which would have banned stag-hunting. The Greater Exmoor and Quantock area was covered by three separate packs of stag-hounds. The study had been published on West Somerset District Council's web-site.

The study was considered to be particularly accurate because it sought out those engaged in the activities, ie the three hunts, Hunt followers, Hunt "tourists" and those businesses most affected.

The Hunts had a turnover of £350,000 and 17 full-time equivalent jobs.

Hunt followers spent £2.4m on hunt related goods and services, supported 94 full-time equivalent jobs and kept 533 horses.

Hunt "tourists" bought about £2.9m into the local economy, which underpinned 227 full-time equivalent jobs.

There were 159 businesses which benefited from expenditure of £2.6m by hunt followers. 44% of these businesses felt jobs would be affected by a hunting ban with 82 full-time equivalent jobs likely to be at risk. The businesses likely to be affected included garages, vets, livery yards farriers and restaurants. 16% estimated they would not survive a hunting ban, while only 5% expected no adverse effect.

Overall, the Study estimated that a turnover of £9.5m and 584 jobs could be linked directly and indirectly to stag hunting.

Nigel Stone said that preparations would be needed to manage the transition if hunting legislation was passed, and the next steps proposed were the creation of a working group of economic development agencies and businesses most affected and the development of a contingency plan.

Baroness Mallilieu thanked Nigel Stone for outlining the study. She said that at Westminster it was a matter of waiting to see what the Government decided to do. She thought it unlikely that a bill to ban hunting would be in the Queen's speech, but that would not prevent it being re-introduced, in which case any ban could come into force shortly before the next general

election. The study was important as a joint committee of both Houses of Parliament looked at proposed legislation to ensure it complied with the Human Rights Act, and she outlined possible problems with the compensation implications of the amended legislation. She suggested it needed to be drawn to the attention of the All-Party Committee on National Parks.

Nigel Stone confirmed that a copy of the Study had been sent to the Government before it was published. Steven Pugsley added that the National Park Officer had also spoken to Rt Hon Alun Michael subsequently. The report confirmed the earlier Burns Report and provided the firm evidence to back it up.

Humphrey Temperley said it would be useful to put the study into context by showing the total GDP and employment levels for the study area.

Roger Webber said that the study would be challenged, but it was important to remember that it would directly affect up to 10% of jobs in some Exmoor communities. He had confidence in the findings and had been impressed by the depth of questioning by the survey team.

Fred Rawle emphasised how useful the Hunts were in collecting fallen stock; it was important they were not left by the road-side.

Jeremy Roberts asked if hunt tourism was a growth industry or in decline. Nigel Stone said that the study was a snapshot of the current situation.

### 13. **MOORLAND INITIATIVE**

Graham Wills, the Authority's Head of Conservation & Land Management, said that as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the designation of Exmoor as a National Park was approaching, it was an appropriate time to consider whether the condition of the moorland was what it should be. Issues to be considered included the problems of keeping stock on the moor, ticks and scrub encroachment. English Nature had estimated that 40% of moorland in Sites of Special Scientific Interest were in favourable condition.

It was suggested that a commission of eminent people be set up to initiate a wide ranging debate and produce a report in October 2004 outlining mechanisms for improving management of the moorland's condition. Rachel Thomas said the Exmoor Society was excited by this suggestion as it was an opportunity to bring together various complex issues. She advocated a full consultation exercise to look at the state of the moorland and felt that recreation issues should be included in the commission's remit.

Humphrey Temperley said the MacEwen Trust had access to funds for moorland research. Also, the CAP and ESA reviews may lead to levels of stock on the higher moor being reduced, and wondered if the DEFRA RDS representative could comment on any work that had been undertaken on this aspect, particularly with regard to stock in the early season. Richard Andrews said that there were various categories of moorland and the ESA target was favourable or unfavourable but improving. There was not even a consensus on what represented good condition. He said that agri-environment schemes were being reviewed and the new ESA included environmental stewardship. New ESA agreements would include a base level of stock.

Jeremy Holtom emphasised that there was a huge body of expertise on moorland management locally, and members agreed the need for a field based study involving moorland managers as opposed to a desk-top approach.

R Ferrar said that it was not a high moorland issue exclusively; bracken encroachment in the Valley of Rocks was a problem.

14. **RIGHTS OF WAY**

Members took part in a quiz on rights of way law and facts and figures, devised by Paul Hawkins (Recreation Management Officer), which was designed to highlight various issues relating to public rights of way.

15. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

R Ferrar expressed concern at the condition of some bridleways that were deep with mud. He also asked whether the Authority had ever taken legal action against landowners in respect of footpath problems. Officers replied that, at times of having prolonged rain, it was inevitable that some bridleways would get muddy, but the Authority had a maintenance team that dealt with such problems. It was usually possible to resolve footpath issues before legal action went too far.

16 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Consultative Forum would be held at **6.30pm on Wednesday 16 June 2004.**

Chairman