

# ITEM 4

## EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Exmoor Local Access Forum held on Wednesday, 20 April 2005 at 6 pm in the Classroom, Wimbleball Lake, nr Brompton Regis.

### PRESENT

Jeremy Holtom (Chairman)  
Michael Pulvermacher (Vice-Chairman)

Chris Binnie  
Bill Butcher  
Simon Colley  
Stephen Crossman  
Jeff Cox

Kait Ellis  
Jason Hooper  
Joan Long  
Duncan Waller

### National Park Authority staff in attendance

Martin Palmer, Secretary to the Local Access Forum  
Martin Evans, Head of Recreation and Tourism  
Paul Hawkins, Recreation Manager  
James Maben, Access Officer  
John Whitcutt, Solicitor and Monitoring Officer  
Alison Kent, Senior Ranger

**Apologies for Absence:** John Edwards, John Dyke, Maria Floyd, Bill Geen, Rob Manicom, Robin Milton and Tim Ryan.

### 10. **Thanks**

The Forum conveyed thanks to Julia Moysey, Head of Development for the South West Lakes Trust, for an interesting and informative walk around Wimbleball Lake, where members had been informed about existing recreational and leisure facilities at the Lake and those proposed for the future.

### 11. **Welcome**

Kait Ellis was welcomed to her first meeting as a member of the Forum, having replaced Tim Norton.

### 12. **Declarations of Interest**

Jason Hooper and Duncan Waller declared personal interests as off road users concerning a report from Paul Hawkins on the Management of Recreational Motorised Activities in Other National Parks (Minute 15 below).

Chris Binnie declared a personal interest as Chairman of the West Somerset Bridleways' Association concerning a letter from one of the Association's members regarding the Battleton Brake RUPP (Road used as Public Path) (Minute 15 below).

Stephen Crossman indicated that he would have a personal interest were there to be any discussion on Timberscombe Common. In the event, the item was raised under Other Business of Urgency (Minute 21 below).

See also Minute 14 below.

13. **Minutes**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 9 February 2005 were signed as a correct record.

(2) **Matter Arising**

**Minute 8 – Exmoor Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) Chapter**

The Secretary mentioned that the National Park Authority would be asked to approve amendments to the Chapter text at its meeting on 26 April 2005, following comments made by the Forum and others during the recent public consultation.

A comment at the last meeting had been the potential for specific sites to be developed for off road vehicular activities, which would also be a means of diversification for farmers. However, Joan Long drew members' attention to a recent news item which suggested that farmers and landowners could lose out financially if they allowed motor sports to take place on their land. The Chairman said that the item related to the new single farm payments scheme and guidance issued by Defra suggesting that payments could be withdrawn if such activities took place. He added that it could also affect a number of long established events on Exmoor. Various bodies were pursuing the matter with Defra and its response to representations was awaited.

14. **Diversion Orders**

Alison Kent updated the forum on diversions:-

- Chidgley Farm, Old Cleeve – a public inquiry into the proposed footpath diversion was to be held at the Ralegh's Cross Inn on 17 May 2005, as a result of the single objection lodged.
- Higher Blackland, Withypool – the single objection was being dealt with through written representations, rather than an inquiry.
- West Mill, Luckwell Bridge, Cutcombe – diversion of bridleway – Somerset County Council was trying to see if there was a way around the single objection lodged.
- Middle Eastcott – footpath diversion – currently subject to an informal consultation which would run until the end of April 2005. Michael Pulvermacher declared that he had a personal interest in this application.
- Two Moors Way, Glen Lyn, Lynmouth – the Ramblers' Association (North Devon) had responded and the informal consultation would run until 10 May 2005.

Chris Binnie mentioned that planning permission for the bridleway link from Oaktrow Wood to Pitt Bridge had been granted and the works would commence within the next few months. He also congratulated the National Park Authority's officers involved in expediting the project.

15. **The Management of Recreational Motorised Activities in Other National Parks**

The Forum considered a report from Paul Hawkins on the problems of motorised vehicles in other National Parks and how they were dealt with, which also referred to recent results of vehicle monitoring on Exmoor. It was apparent that recreational vehicle driving affected National Parks differently; for some it was a contentious issue, while in others it was less of a problem and the National Park Authorities had adopted different solutions to tackle problems. The Lake District National Park Authority, in particular, had developed a comprehensive management system to provide control and vehicle restraint, which was described in the report.

It was explained that selected RUPPs on Exmoor were being monitored over a 12 month period using four counters, which would provide information on the types of vehicles using them and their environmental effects. Those selected were chosen because of issues or concerns raised by bodies and individuals. It would be the end of 2005 before the full data was available. Early monitoring suggested that there was fairly heavy use of Long Lane, Cutcombe and Slade Lane at the weekends. However, Paul Hawkins suggested that the Forum should delay reaching any conclusions or making any recommendations on how problems should be resolved until all the data had been thoroughly analysed.

It was mentioned that monitoring had commenced in February and, so far, it had not borne out public perception that, in some cases, hundreds of vehicles were involved, but later months may show different results. In terms of damage, wheel rutting was a particular problem, but its effects were not the same in different locations and this was reflected in RUPP management. Further data would be brought to the Forum at forthcoming meetings.

In response to comment from Toni Jones (a member of the public), the officers explained that:-

- Counters were expensive and monitoring by volunteers was intensive and so it was not possible to monitor all of the RUPPs over the year.
- Whilst there were particular problems in some villages affecting residents, the problems caused to the environment in the moorland areas were equally important. The monitoring aimed to provide a snapshot of different RUPPs across the moor.

A copy letter from Ms P Millard concerning her experiences of conflict with 4x4 off road vehicles and motor scrambling bikes when riding her horse on the Battleton Brake RUPP, DU 6/19 which ran west from Howetown to the A396, was noted. The Secretary was asked to reply to Ms Millard to let her know that the letter had been considered by the Forum and that it was looking into how the problems associated with the motorised use of RUPPs may be reduced. The response would also mention that data from monitoring was being collected by the National Park Authority, including Battleton Brake.

16. **Annual Report 2004/05**

The Forum was asked to agree the content of its Annual Report for 2004/05, which would be presented to the National Park Authority at its Annual Meeting on 7 June 2005. A draft was attached to the meeting agenda. The Secretary explained that it would be updated to take

account of items considered at this meeting, including the position on RUPPs and monitoring (Minute 15 above).

There were questions from a couple of members on whether the discussions and decisions of the Forum over the last two years had resulted in meaningful achievements and whether the Forum was truly independent of the National Park Authority. In response, the Secretary referred to the following achievements:-

- The Forum's extensive involvement in the mapping process for open access land. It had commented on the Draft Access Map to the Countryside Agency and this had resulted in changes. Its statement had also been considered by the National Park Authority which had assisted the Authority in its own response. In addition, at the Draft Access Map stage and Provisional Map stage, the Forum through the National Park Authority's officers had been instrumental in ensuring that everyone entitled to respond to the Countryside Agency's consultations were made aware of the process and had the opportunity to make comments. Furthermore, the Forum had also conveyed comments on the process and how it was received.
- The Forum's responses to a number of consultation documents issued by the government.
- The Forum's key roles in influencing the direction of the National Park's Rights of Way Improvement Chapter and the associated investigation of the motorised use of RUPPs (Roads used as Public Paths) within the Somerset part of the National Park and the conflicts that arise, together with its involvement in helping to find solutions to minimise the problems occurring on these rights of way.
- The Forum's advice on the public information and interpretation strategy for new access land.
- The Forum's influence in the pursuance of two bridleway improvements; one of which was proceeding to implementation.

On the second point, it was suggested that there was inevitably a symbiotic relationship between the Forum and the National Park Authority, but that the Forum was independent in the way it approached its work, the conclusions it reached and the views it expressed.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the content of the draft report, subject to the inclusion of additional items from this meeting and to take account of any comments arising from further consultation with members.

## 17. **Annual Work Programme**

Whilst the Forum had a work programme in its first year for the consultation stages involved in the mapping of access land, it had not really had one since, with items for consideration being determined for one or two meetings ahead. Government guidance was that each Forum should have an annual work programme. It would also have the effect of giving Forum members more control, and therefore independence, in deciding meeting agendas.

The following items were suggested by the Forum for a work programme for 2005/06:-

- The provision of advice to landowners and users concerning open access land.

- Long-term Closure Orders, i.e. for more than 6 months (the first of which would be brought to the Forum's next meeting), and how these were to be advertised and identified on the ground.
- A possible role for the Forum in asking Ordnance Survey to make a clear colour coded differentiation on its maps between open access registered commons and commons not included.
- Advice to the National Park Authority over signage issues, gates/stiles etc for open access land.
- Advising the National Park Authority on the implementation of measures aimed at minimising the effects of motorised vehicles on RUPPs.
- The setting of priorities for year one of the implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) Chapter.
- The mapping of permissive footpaths and bridleways and inclusion on the National Park Authority's website (subject to agreements having been drawn up with landowners).
- Sports and other recreational activities.

These items would be set out in an outline work programme for the Forum to consider at its next meeting, when there would be the opportunity for members to include further items.

#### 18. **Somerset County Council – Rights of Way Improvement Plan Update**

An update from Peter Hoble, Rights of Way Project Officer for Somerset County Council, on the progress of the Plan had been circulated with the agenda. In response to comment from Joan Long, Sally Vickery, Secretary to the Somerset Local Access Forum, who was present at the meeting, undertook to enquire why there had been no targeted consultation for walkers.

**RESOLVED:** to note the content of the update.

#### 19. **Exmoor Local Access Forum Logo**

It was explained that most other Local Access Forum's had logos to identify them and it was suggested that the Exmoor Local Access Forum could also have one. It would be an 'in house' design through the National Park Authority's Media Support Officer and could include on it walkers, horse riders etc.

**RESOLVED:** to agree the principle of a logo for the Local Access Forum, but that it should be kept fairly simple.

(NB. Potential logos would be brought to the next meeting).

#### 20. **Date of the Next Meeting(s) and Agenda Items**

**RESOLVED:** (1) to confirm that the next meeting will be held on **Wednesday, 29 June 2005 at 6 pm at a suitable meeting room location** (the main items for the meeting being a long term closure application on open access land, further data from the monitoring of motorised vehicles on RUPPs and the outline work programme), and this will be preceded at 4 pm by a visit to the RUPP at Putham Lane, Cutcombe (Wheddon Cross) to see the

improvements undertaken, with the opportunity to discuss the matter further in the meeting; and

(2) that the subsequent meeting be held on either the first or second Wednesday in September 2005.

21. **Other Business of Urgency**

The Chairman authorised the following items being considered as matters of urgent business.

- Joan Long asked for an update on footpath diversions at Croscombe Barton, Martinhoe and Hewitts Hotel, Lynton. She said that in both cases the definitive paths were unusable, and no progress appeared to have been made in securing legal diversions. There was an alternative path at Croscombe Barton but it was steep and unsuitable for people with disabilities, and had also not been diverted formally. She asked for a map to be brought to the next meeting. On the Hewitts Hotel footpath, she said that a diversion had been proposed for many years, but nothing had happened.

John Whitcutt said that the existing footpath leading from Hewitts Hotel, Lynton to the beach was a short path in difficult terrain and seriously affected the Hotel. A more commodious and more scenic route had been identified, but the Hotel owner was reluctant to make an application for the diversion and had not responded to letters from the National Park Authority. Given that the definitive route was closed by obstructions, the hotel owner had been advised that the existing route would have to re-open, but again there had been no response from him. Joan Long asked for a plan at the Forum's next meeting.

- Chris Binnie asked for an update on Timberscombe Common. In response, Alison Kent said that a meeting had been held with the landowner and representatives of the National Park Authority and Somerset County Council. Four new gates had been installed on the definitive lines of bridleways across the Common, but there was the need for further discussions with the landowner and more action was needed.
- Members supported a request from Stephen Crossman for Forum members' contact details – email and telephone – to be circulated to each of them, so that they would be able to contact one another between meetings.

(The meeting closed at 7.15 pm)

Chairman