

ITEM 8

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of the meeting of the Consultative Forum held on Friday 5 November 2004 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
John Bray	Exmoor National Park Authority
Alan Collins	Exmoor National Park Authority
John Edwards	Exmoor National Park Authority
Fred Rawle	Exmoor National Park Authority
Edward Nightingale	Member with Special Knowledge
Jeremy Roberts	Member with Special Knowledge
Humphrey Temperley	Member with Special Knowledge
Rachel Thomas	Member with Special Knowledge
Hugh Thomas	Member with Special Knowledge
Jeremy Holtom	Badgworthy Land Company Ltd
Richard Peek	CLA (Devon)
Michael Hankin	Exmoor Natural History Society
Tim Davey	Exmoor Society
Michael Clinch	Exmoor Trust
Chris Hewitt	National Trust
Roger Ferrar	North Devon Conservation Society
Joyce Stanley	Ramblers' Association (Devon)
Richard Andrews	RDS Defra ESA
Julia Moysey	South West Lakes Trust
Joan Nicholson	West Somerset Archaeological Society
Geoff Way	Youth Hostels Association (South Region)

Apologies were received from Julia Clark, Anne Clitheroe, Evelyn Stacey, John Dallyn, Mike Gammon, Roger Martin, Adrian Moore, Ron Morrison-Smith, John Travis, Roger Webber, Brian Windsor (Exmoor National Park Authority), Louise Crossman, Lady Gass, Baroness Mallalieu, Bernard Dru, John Milton, Keith Ross, (Members with Special Knowledge), John Addicott (Beagles), John Lawrence-Mills (CPRE), Fleming Ulf-Hansen (English Nature), Michael Ryle (Exmoor Society), Anthony Brunt (Exmoor Tourist Association), Chris Roberts (Forestry and Timber Association), Peter Delbridge (NFU), the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission.

23. Minutes of the last meeting

(1) Confirmation

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 16 June 2004 were signed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Humphrey Temperley to the list of those attending the meeting.

(2) Matters arising

(i) Policy Planning Statement (PPS) 7

Humphrey Temperley asked if a briefing note by Louise Crossman had been circulated to the Consultative Forum. Chris France replied that he had had a discussion with her, but it was agreed that as PPS7 included matters which had implications for policies included in the new Local Plan, these issues would best be dealt with in the forthcoming Local Development Framework.

(ii) Sustainable Development Fund

The National Park Officer informed members that it was likely that funding from DEFRA for the Sustainable Development Fund would continue for another 3 years.

24. Chairman's Update

At the invitation of John Dyke, Arabella Amory informed the Forum that the Exmoor National Park Authority had received an Access Award from the British Horse Society for being the National Park Authority most active in opening up equestrian routes. The Authority was presented with a framed certificate, citation and silver salver at a ceremony in London on 4 November 2004. Mrs Amory gave particular thanks to Alison Kent, Senior Ranger with the Authority and Stephanie Wheeler, regional director of the British Horse Society.

Rachel Thomas said that the award recognised that Exmoor offered much to horse-riders, as identified in the Hobhouse Report, and one of the reasons that the National Park was originally established.

Nigel Stone said that he would give details of how the Authority was working to help support equestrian activity to the next meeting of the Forum.

25. Items Raised by Forum Members

- (1) **Wimbleball Lake proposals** – an update requested by the Exmoor Trust. Julia Moysey, Head of Development for the South West Lakes Trust said she was pleased to have this opportunity to inform the Forum about activities at Wimbleball in 2004 and the plans for 2005.

She expressed thanks to the Authority's Sustainable Development Fund for its contribution towards some work on paths. She said during 2004:-

- A new access and slipway had been provided for disabled anglers
- Screening plans for deciduous trees and shrubs had been prepared in accordance with a planning condition.

- A meeting had been held with the Highway Authority regarding the approach roads to Wimbleball.
- Traffic counters had been installed on the main and anglers' entrance.

Julia Moysey said that 2000 people had attended an open day, with 650 people on the water, which had been very successful. She was also proposing to arrange a user group meeting to get feedback in readiness for the following year. The next planning application would be for a rowing store and this proposal was to be discussed with local people. The aim would be for an emphasis on quality. Sport England would also be involved and it was hoped to attract Objective 2 funding. She hoped that the development work would also benefit local businesses.

John Edwards said that Brompton Regis Parish Council was concerned about the lay-bys, which acted as passing places, as they needed improvement. Julia Moysey said that the South West Lakes Trust had met the Highway Authority together with the Parish Council representative and 2 lay-bys had been identified for improvement subject to negotiation with the land-owner and funding. Mr Edwards also asked if the public toilets at Bessom Bridge could be upgraded and returned to use. Julia Moysey replied that such toilets were expensive to operate and maintain. The toilets at Bessom Bridge had low usage compared to the other toilets on the Wimbleball site. It was also difficult to get capital investment funds and she was not optimistic that they would be re-opened.

Michael Hankin commented that the toilets were missed by members of the Natural History Society who frequently met at that part of the lake. Julia Moysey replied that the toilets there were usually shut during the winter to prevent frost damage, but in 2004 they had been shut since the early summer because of damage. She would relay these concerns to the Trust.

Jeremy Roberts said that the tea-room toilets were also shut during the previous winter and this did little to encourage visitors to the area. Julia Moysey replied that she hoped that South West Lakes Trust would be able to display details of the toilets that were open by the Rangers' office.

Michael Clinch referred to proposals that cyclists would be able to use some paths. Julia Moysey said that cycling would be restricted to bridleways only, and there were no plans for cyclists to use other paths. Kissing gates had been installed to restrict cyclists and horseriders where necessary. It was intended to keep signage to a minimum, but a newsletter could be used to re-inforce certain messages.

Nigel Stone said that the initial idea for a cycle route around Wimbleball had been dropped.

Rachel Thomas offered congratulations to South West Lakes Trust for their achievements at Wimbleball but said that the Exmoor Society had been concerned about the lack of a Landscape Character Assessment with their last planning application, as it was felt this would help their relationship with the local communities. Julia Moysey said that the Trust was presently updating their integrated management plan.

Humphrey Temperley asked if there was a published master plan, approved by the National Park Authority, that all were signed up to. Julia Moysey replied that the Trust had a strategic Plan, which she had presented to the Consultative Forum 18 months previously. It set out long term plans for the site, and the next planning application needed to be seen in that context.

Nigel Stone said that the Trust's long term plans had been debated locally and current proposals were based on these consultations.

Julia Moysey emphasised that a "straight-jacket" would not be helpful. The Trust circulated a newsletter to a wide audience to help people understand what the Trust was trying to do.

John Dyke thanked Julia Moysey for attending the meeting.

(2) **Calvert Trust Proposals at Wistlandpound**

Jeremy Holtom said that in the light of the previous discussions about Wimbleball, he felt it would be useful to update members of the Forum on developments at Wistlandpound.

He said that the Calvert Trust had operated at Wistlandpound, close to the National Park boundary, since 1996. Its premises were originally a model farm, built in 1839, and formed part of the Fortescue Estate. It provided challenging holidays for disabled people and their families and friends, and the Trust had identified the potential to improve facilities and subsequently visitor numbers. Market research had also demonstrated that improvements were necessary to develop the Centre into an all year round facility to provide new challenges with better social and activity space with flexible accommodation that can also encompass the local community.

Jeremy Holtom showed plans of the new project, a partnership with Forest Enterprise together with South West Lakes Trust, which included:-

- A linhay conversion to provide a Discovery Centre, art room and tea shop, and also parking and reservoir access
- An all-abilities ropes challenge course
- Provision of a children's play park
- Improvements to the activity hall including a climbing wall and cushion flooring for indoor games
- A south facing extension for communal activity and recreation including a dining layout for 100 people, a conference / concert layout for up to 140 people.
- Better pool changing facilities linked to a gym and sensory room
- A new accommodation block including bedrooms, training room, staff room and storage.

Humphrey Temperley said he had long been a supporter of the project, but was concerned that the woodland surrounding the buildings was rather dark. Jeremy Holtom advised him that this had been improved by lightening the canopy.

Edward Nightingale said that the hope had been originally that the Calvert Trust would be able to restore the leat and waterwheel which had been a feature of the original farm and he wondered this would be completed. Mr Holtom said that although this was part of the history of the farm, these were not costs that the Calvert Trust could justify incurring, as the current proposals would need the available money.

Rachel Thomas said that the Wistlandpound area was important as it straddled the National Park boundary, and she thought the Authority's Blackmoor Gate site could be used to unlock further potential such as an Interpretation Centre. It would help to balance the Authority's facilities in the east of the National Park.

Chris France explained that there were several interesting developments in the western part of the National Park, such as the Lynton to Barnstaple railway which was already in contact with the Calvert Trust.

Joyce Stanley mentioned that there had been an earlier attempt to open a footpath from Blackmoor Gate to Wistlandpound along the route of the railway line, but that this had been opposed by the Calvert Trust as it would not have been suitable for use by people with disabilities. Jeremy Holtom confirmed that the Calvert Trust would be able to support such a proposal if it provided access for all.

Michael Hankin suggested that, with the natural history and geology elements of the new Discovery Centre, there might be scope for liaison with the Exmoor Natural History Society's Malmsmead Centre.

Nigel Stone said that a report was being considered at the next meeting of ENPA about Blackmoor Gate and he would be happy to explore further closer working arrangements with the Calvert Trust.

John Dyke thanked Jeremy Holtom for the update.

(3) **Objective 2 Funding**

The Exmoor Trust had asked for an update on the National Park Authority's success in attracting Objective 2 funding.

Chris France explained that what was European Union "Objective 5b" funding had been replaced by "Objective 2" funding and was made available in recognition of structural problems in an economy. Funding was totally driven by economic aims and success is measured by the number of new jobs created. Therefore Exmoor National Park Authority had to engage in partnerships, usually with District Councils, to gain Objective 2 funding. He said that projects that had been successful in attracting Objective 2 funding included:-

Exmoor Food Links	£150,000
Exmoor Festivals	£120,000
Foot and Mouth recovery	£120,000
South West Wood Fuels	£ 80,000
TOTAL	£470,000

As this Objective 2 funding has to be matched from other sources, these projects had brought in nearly £1 million to the Exmoor area's economy.

There were further projects from West Somerset in the pipeline:-

- Minehead, Williton, Watchet, Wheddon Cross and Brushford Highways Depot – managed workspace units
- Broadband provision
- Wimbleball developments with South West Lakes Trust

In addition there were the “Cycle Exmoor” and the “Coleridge Way” projects where Exmoor National Park Authority were taking the lead, Visit Exmoor, a major tourism initiative, and a bid to be made based upon proposals in a report from the Dunster Working Group. It was hoped that the Lynmouth Pavilion redevelopment would also secure Objective 2 funding. Use of Rural Renaissance funds were also being explored as this could be matched to Objective 2 money.

Joan Nicholson asked about progress with the Dunster Tythe Barn project. Nigel Stone said this scheme may not meet the funding criteria on economic grounds but he was hopeful that a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund would succeed.

Arabella Amory said that although it was generally not easy to obtain European funding, some National Park areas had obtained money from the “LIFE” fund for wildlife and nature conservation.

Chris France said that Objective 2 funding would be available for a further 2 years, but because match funding was required, the RDA's involvement was crucial to any success.

Humphrey Temperley said that the game market was important, especially as any money generated tended to remain in the Exmoor economy. Nigel Stone said that local authorities had committed some funding for a study of the economic importance of game shooting, and the industry would also be meeting a share of the costs.

26. **The Moorland Seminar**

Graham Wills reminded members of the Forum that the Golden Jubilee Moorland Review was intended to mark the 50th anniversary of the designation of Exmoor as a National Park by initiating a thorough and objective review of the state of Exmoor's moorlands and then preparing a comprehensive and compelling plan of action for their future conservation.

Phase one of the review included bringing together existing information on the moorland landscape, moorland farming, Management Agreements, the Historic environment, Birds and invertebrates and the recreational use of moorland together with commissioning further research and surveys. This was combined with engaging as many people and organisations in the process as possible so that the eventual outputs could be widely supported and “owned”.

Phase 2 comprised a seminar held in Lynton on 19 October which featured presentations by Rachel Thomas (Chairman of the Exmoor Society), Robert Deane (Land use Consultants) Prof Mark Blacksell (Moorland Study Steering group), Dr Matt Lobley (Centre for Rural research) and Humphrey Temperley (Chairman of the Malcolm MacEwen Trust) and an afternoon workshop session.

As part of Phase I, the Exmoor Society had commissioned a report on the state of Exmoor moorlands which had identified 15 action points:-

(for immediate implementation)

- A re-invigorated moorland forum.
- Pro-active engagement by moorland farmers.
- Foster appreciation of the overall value of the moorlands.
- A better understanding of Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets for the SSSIs.
- Establish objectives and needs for each of the moorland units.
- Assess the condition of the moorland resource.
- Monitor public access to the moorlands.
- A moorland management infrastructure grant.
(for medium term implementation)
- Foster appreciation of the overall value of moorlands
- Monitor changes in vegetation cover.
- Evaluate the evolving condition of the moorland landscape.
- Co-ordinate best practice in moorland management and restoration.
- The employment of “moor keepers.”
- Flexible and targeted agri-environment funding to expand the moorlands.
- A new Moorland Challenge Fund.
(for longer term implantation)
- Future support to moorland farms.

The National Park Authority had commissioned a report on the state of moorland farming. This had concluded that:-

- Moorland farms and their operators make a distinctive contribution to Exmoor
- While a numerical minority, they manage a large area of land.
- Long family connections to Exmoor and higher levels of community activity
- More likely to be affected by CAP reform but much higher anticipated succession rate.
- Future would see reductions in livestock numbers, some withdrawal from commons and significant turnover of moorland farmers themselves.
- The majority of moorland would remain in the families that have managed Exmoor’s moorlands for generations.

The Malcolm MacEwen Trust had commissioned a study of moorland management agreements which concluded that:-

- Early participants helped to establish the approach to reconciling farming and conservation
- Management Agreements contributed to a cultural shift
- Management Agreements provided the foundations for the next steps
- They influenced national and international policy

- They represented the start of a process towards rewarding environmentally enhancing land management

Phase 3 Of the Golden Jubilee Moorland Review would be the development of an Action Plan during the period November to March 2005.

Rachel Thomas said the State of the Moorland report presented the big picture and considered the significance of moorland to society as well as the condition of the moorland.

Humphrey Temperley viewed the Moorland Review as a positive initiative, but said that he advocated a series of plans for each moorland unit rather than an overall action plan. He added that he felt the ESA scheme had been too blunt an instrument to manage moorland properly, while English Nature had ambition it lacked the necessary resources. He hoped that Environmental Stewardship would be able to establish the right programme and that the National Park Authority could be involved in the preparation of management plans.

Nigel Stone explained that it was the intention to work up action plans for each moorland block and that Environmental Stewardship was a replacement agri-environment scheme that would be phased in from 2006 and should be more flexible in its application. However, it might be some time before all moorland was eligible for entry into the new scheme as the scheme was being phased in as existing ESA agreements were reviewed or came to an end.

John Edwards said that the Report was very helpful, but that a map overlay to accompany the maps illustrating the report would be useful to identify the particular moorland areas where the information was available.

Rachel Thomas added that the NFU had indicated a positive reaction to the action plan proposals, but were keen to look at the south-western moorland as a whole.

Jeremy Holtom said that it was critical that the new Single Farm Payment properly reflected the needs of areas of moorland and common.

John Dyke said it was important that DEFRA should establish the basis of payments in respect of commons, ie based on commons rights or usage.

John Dyke thanked the Exmoor Society and Graham Wills for their work in producing a very useful review.

27. **Exmoor National Park Local Plan/Affordable Housing.**

Chris France reminded members that the Local Plan Review process had taken a proactive approach to local needs housing. The Planning Inspector at the Public Inquiry had accepted most of the changes contained in the plan, and the final public consultation period ended on 15 November. It was intended that the National Park Authority be recommended to adopt the plan at its meeting on 7 December.

The Authority was working closely with the Rural Housing Enabler project, and he was aware of many people who will be applying for local needs housing opportunities.

Roger Ferrar asked if the new plan set village development boundaries. Chris France replied that they had been retained for a few larger settlements, but generally they were not considered successful.

Chris Hewitt asked if there was an adequate resource capacity to deal with the parish appraisals used to assess housing need. Chris France replied that the National Park Authority shared one Housing Enabler post with the two district councils.

In reply to a question from Michael Hankin, Chris France explained that housing provided to meet local needs would reflect the property market but be limited to the extent that prospective purchasers would have to meet the housing needs criteria. He also said that size conditions would exist for new housing agreed in response to local needs.

28. Consultation on the Future Provision of Toilets within the National Park

Charles Burrows told members that the Authority was about to issue a consultation document about the role of Exmoor National Park Authority in the provision of toilet facilities within the National Park.

He explained that the Authority had no statutory duty to provide toilets, and neither had the district councils, and it was facing pressure on two fronts. It had to bear increasing cleaning and maintenance costs together with additional obligations towards meeting costs associated with implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act and increasing expectations of the standards of provision. Given this, the Authority could not sustain the present number of toilets which it operated. He emphasised that the status quo was not an option for the Authority, but that it was a matter of cost containment, not cost reduction.

Charles Burrows said that the consultation document would outline proposals to upgrade toilets at key visitor locations, and enter into partnership arrangements at some other sites. He hoped the outcome would result in the Authority operating a reduced number of toilets, but to a higher standard.

Rachel Thomas said that provision of toilets used to be a responsibility of the Countryside Commission

29. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Consultative Forum would be held at 6.30pm on Wednesday 15 June 2005.

30. Any other business of urgency

There was no other business.

Chairman