

22 July 2003

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday 22 July 2003 at 10.30 am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr M A Collins (Chairman)
Mr R Morrison-Smith (Vice-Chairman)

Mrs J Clark (substituting for Dr J F Travis)	Mr M H Knight
Mr W J Dyke	Mr M J Pile
Mr J C Edwards	Mr M E Taylor
Mrs AM Foxhuntley	Mr R J Webber

Also present: - Mr S J Pugsley (Chairman of the Authority) and Mrs A Amory (Deputy Chairman of the Authority)

Apologies for absence were received from Miss E I Stacey and Dr J F Travis.

3. **WELCOME**

Mrs Clark was welcomed to the meeting.

4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared.

5. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 29 April and 1 July 2003 were signed as correct.

(2) **Matter Arising on the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2003**

(i) **Minute 45 – Funding Bid for 2004/05**

The National Park Officer reported that, with the Authority's Chairman and the Chief Finance Officer, he had made a presentation on the Authority's funding bid for 2004/05 to senior DEFRA and Countryside Agency officers. The bid involved an increase of £414,000 over the current year (13 %), a £315,000 bid for capital and an additional bid of £500,000 for accommodation. The National Park Officer felt that the discussions with DEFRA and the Countryside Agency had enabled them to gain a greater understanding of the issues affecting Exmoor National Park and the funding priorities. However, 2004/05 was likely to be a difficult funding year for DEFRA, which may well be reflected in the National Park Authorities settlements.

There had been debate at the presentation on the Authority's accommodation requirements. Even if the bid was not successful, there was the prospect that the Authority would, in the future, be able

to borrow money. This had not previously been possible because, although the Authority had borrowing powers, its borrowing limit set by the government had always been £0. It was anticipated that the new Local Government Finance Bill would permit the setting of a higher borrowing limit without affecting DEFRA's overall expenditure, subject to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) approval. For the accommodation scheme the Authority had in mind, the loan would be over a number of years and the debt would have to be serviced. It was envisaged that the new accommodation would be ancillary to the existing Exmoor House building, with the objectives of providing new meeting room accommodation, easing the existing pressures on space and addressing health and safety requirements. However, much detailed work was still needed before any commitment of this sort could be made by the Authority.

The National Park Officer also reported that there had been progress on the development of a revised formula for allocating funds to the National Park Authorities. A study had been undertaken by consultants for ODPM and one of the recommendations was that each Authority should be allocated a baseline figure of £1m. 80% of the remainder of available grant would be distributed to the Authorities in accordance with an agreed formula and the remaining 20% would be allocated on a discretionary basis.

(ii) **Minute 47 – Planning Delivery Grant 2003/04**

In response to a question about training to be provided for Parish Councils/Meetings, the National Park Officer explained that a series of workshops were being organised over the financial year; the first of which would be held during October/November 2003. The workshops would be held across the National Park and involve West Somerset and North Devon District Councils to ensure Parish Councils/Meetings divided by the National Park boundaries were covered. An external facilitator was in the process of organising the workshops.

It was hoped to encourage a high participation rate and to invite Councils to submit issues they would like to see discussed. A comment was made about the need to also engage Parish Clerks in the process as they performed an important role in informing their members.

It was also noted that North Devon District Council ran member induction courses which were open to Parish Council attendance.

6. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

7. **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES**

The Committee was introduced to three members of the Independent Remuneration Panel, which was currently reviewing the Authority's Scheme of Members Allowances, namely Miss Barbara Bryan (Chairman), Major General Edwin Beckett and Mr Alan Hill. The fourth member Mr Tom Coyne was unable to attend the meeting.

(1) **Future Arrangements for Members' Allowances**

Miss Bryan explained that the Panel had so far met on three occasions to examine the Scheme of Members' Allowances and how it could operate in the future. It was working towards the production of a report and new scheme which would be presented to the Authority's meeting on 2 September 2003. Of particular interest to the Panel was the amount of time members spent on Authority work and how this should be reflected in the new scheme, particularly in view of the statutory requirement for attendance allowances to cease. The three Panel members would be available to see Authority members on an individual confidential basis throughout the morning of this meeting and into the early afternoon, until 2 pm.

The Chief Finance Officer indicated his preference for the new scheme to operate from 1 October 2003, which would allow more flexibility in the budget through phasing the scheme in over a two year period. He also said that the review was taking note of the allowance schemes of the four constituent Councils within the National Park and the proposals of other National Park Authorities (although each of the other National Park Authorities was approaching the need to alter their allowances differently). He added that an essential element of all of the new schemes would be to remunerate members for the time they put in. However, the scheme for Exmoor had to be realistic and affordable.

Major General Beckett said that the Panel was looking for a transparent formula to remunerate members for the 'typical' work put in, for which an adequate level of information from members was necessary. Special Responsibility Allowances would be added to the base level of allowance. The Panel also intended that the allowances should be capable of being updated for inflation, have a degree of consistency with remuneration to Authority staff and local income levels and have mechanisms in place for regular review. Another item the Panel wished to see implemented was a Job Description for members which would provide a clear point of reference of what was expected of them and that, in the future, could be related to the level of allowances. A Job Description would also be of value in enabling the Authority and the authorities or Secretary of State appointing members to evaluate whether members were properly fulfilling their duties and responsibilities and also assist in determining the best candidates for appointment.

Members spoke in support of the concept of a Job Description. There was also comment that the breadth of knowledge that members brought from their other authorities or general experience should be reflected in the Job Description, as should preparation time for attending meetings etc.

(2) **Summary of Allowances paid to Members during 2002/03**

RESOLVED: to note the Summary of Allowances paid to members during 2002/03, which was attached to the meeting agenda.

8. **ANNUAL ACCOUNTS – OUTTURN FOR 2002/03**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer on the Annual Accounts Outturn for 2002/03 and the position on reserves at 31 March 2003.

Members were advised that there were three items of expenditure affecting the budget for 2003/04. They were: -

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- The Authority at its meeting on 1 July 2003 had approved a contribution towards the installation of three new cattle grids on the A39 at Countisbury. It was proposed that the costs would be split between the Authority, the Highway Authority and the National Trust, with each paying 1/3. For the Authority this cost would be £18,000.
- The Land and Property Advisory Panel had suggested to the National Park Officer that the Authority should join with English Nature to fund a pilot heather restoration project on Authority tenanted land at Warren Farm by way of a Management Agreement. The cost to the Authority would be £10,000 for this year and the same sum for each of the following four years (these future years would need to be covered as separate one off items each year). Costs arising from staff time would be minimal.
- There was an opportunity to underground telephone cables from Tarr Steps car park to Tarr Steps Farm at a cost of up to £10,000 to the Authority.

The National Park Officer mentioned that it had been necessary to carry forward spending from the Sustainable Development Fund as a result of a significant amount of the money allocated not yet having been drawn down by applicants. This resulted from the level of progress they had made on their projects, which was often subject to variables, such as the weather, over which they had little control. While DEFRA required the money given to the Authority to be spent within the year for which it was allocated, it would be possible for the Authority to show that it had been allocated even if it had not all been drawn down.

In response to comment, the Chief Finance Officer indicated that IEG money had been earmarked for that project only. The Authority would need to produce a progress report in October/November 2003 in order to secure further funding for next year. There would be a meeting of the national Member IEG Group in September 2003 and this would be followed by a meeting of the Authority's own group.

RESOLVED: (1) to note the financial performance for 2002/03 and approve the adequacy of reserves at 31 March 2003;

(2) that the additional funding of £38,000 required for Cattle Grids on the A39 at Countisbury, the heather restoration management agreement at Warren Farm and undergrounding of telephone cables at Tarr Steps be met from the General Reserve, a Sustainability Reserve and underspendings that are likely to arise in 2003/04; and

(3) to thank the Chief Finance Officer and his Finance Team for a good set of accounts and their general management of the Authority's finances.

9. **PINKERY RENEWABLE ENERGY SCHEME**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Education and Interpretation which updated members on the Pinkery Renewable Energy Scheme. The Authority's Environmental Education Support Officer (Mr M Laughton), who had been instrumental in the Centre achieving Eco Centre status, was present to answer members' questions.

The National Park Officer said that the costs and outputs from the various elements of the scheme would be able to be assessed once the project had been operational for a longer period of time. It would then be possible to properly evaluate payback.

In response to comment about the need for oil fired heating at the Centre, members were advised that the gas room heaters had been replaced by a 'wet' circulating

heating system using oil, which also used surplus power from the wind turbine and photo voltaic roof. Oil was a cheaper option than gas but not ideal in terms of the need to further reduce CO2 emissions. It was, however, hoped to ultimately replace the oil with some form of wood fuel heating or geothermal system.

The possibility of water power in a future scheme was mentioned. In response, the Environmental Education Support Officer said that thought had been given to hydro power. However, there would be practical difficulties due to the significant distance to take water from Pinkery Pond and difficulties in obtaining an abstraction licence as the land was SSSI. Also, any engineering works could pose a threat to the SSSI, particularly to fish and aquatic invertebrates.

The Head of Education and Interpretation said that there would be the opportunity to develop other renewable energy technologies in the County Gate Development Project. Also, a seminar was proposed for September 2003 which would raise awareness of the issues surrounding renewable energy technologies and particularly focus on the Pinkery scheme.

RESOLVED: to note the content of the report and to thank the Head of the Pinkery Centre (Mr A Bailey) and the Environmental Education Support Officer (Mr M Laughton) for their work on the project and the achievement of securing Eco Centre status.

10. **AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Chief Finance Officer's report informed members on the Internal Audit Activity and the External Audit of the 2002/03 Accounts and the 2003/04 Business Plan (Best Value Performance Plan).

Members were advised that the Audit Commission had just confirmed RSM Robson Rhodes as the Authority's auditors until 2006.

In response to comment, the Chief Finance Officer explained that the planned internal audit days for 2002/03 had not been achieved because of staff changes. The backlog would be undertaken before the external auditors commenced their work in October 2003, but the main areas of creditors and payroll had been completed. He also explained that the 'medium risk' identified by the external auditors for IEG was the political risk of failing to achieve the government's requirements.

RESOLVED: to note: -

(1) The internal audit activity carried out in 2002/03 and the programme proposed for 2003/04; and

(2) The arrangements for the audit of the 2002/03 Accounts and the Best Value Performance Plan for 2003/04.

11. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

The report of the Chief Finance Officer updated the Committee on Treasury Management matters and invited consideration of Treasury Management Practices.

RESOLVED: (1) to note that the Treasury Management arrangements for 2002/03 continue until 31 March 2004;

(2) to adopt the Treasury Management Practices set out in the Appendix attached to the report (appended to the signed copy of these Minutes); and

- (3) to note the Treasury Management Outturn for 2002/03.

12. **THE EQUALITY STANDARD**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Business Management which briefed members on the Equality Standard and the action that was necessary for the Authority.

In response to comment about why the Authority was aiming at Level 1 only, the Head of Business Management explained that, whilst elements of the other levels were already being achieved, it would be necessary to achieve all elements to move to the higher levels. In Level 2, for example, while the Authority was a part of the formal consultation process, it did not have a statutory role and would need to develop elaborate inspection and monitoring systems if it were to go further in this area. It was questionable as to what degree a small non-departmental public body should go to achieve higher levels. Nevertheless, it was recognised that elements of the other Levels could be used as performance indicators and recorded.

The National Park Officer said that the Social Inclusion Group could also look further into how elements of Levels in the Equality Standard may be achieved.

RESOLVED: to note the steps being taken to achieve Level 1 of the Equality Standard and to see what other possibilities there are in the future.

13. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

The Head of Business Management's report updated members on personnel matters.

In addition to the details on personnel changes in the report, it was noted that Ms L Roots, Tourism Officer had left the Authority's employment and Mr G McVittie, Woodland Officer would be leaving in September 2003 to take up a new post with the National Urban Forestry Unit.

The Head of Business Management said that good progress was being made on the Job Evaluation review of all the Authority's staff posts and Somerset County Council panels were currently meeting to consider the job descriptions submitted. The implementation date for the new grading and pay structure remained 1 July 2003 and the target was for changes to be reflected in the November 2003 salary payments.

The Job Evaluation Panel would be meeting during August and September to examine the general issues surrounding Job Evaluation, the pay scales of Somerset County Council and other National Park Authorities, the results of the Job Evaluation exercise and the new pay/grading scales for the Authority. In view of it not now being possible to bring the new pay and grading scales to the Committee until 4 November 2003, it was proposed that the National Park Officer be given delegated authority to determine them, in consultation with the Panel.

RESOLVED: (1) to note the changes to personnel that have occurred and to congratulate Ms R McArthur on her promotion to the post of Principal Planning Officer (Policy and Community);

(2) to approve the payment of professional fees for those posts where there is a requirement from 1 January 2003;

(3) to approve the leave entitlement for all staff up to Scale point 21 being increased to 25 days per annum with effect from 1 April 2003;

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(4) to approve 2 January 2004 as an additional one-off leave day for staff;

(5) to make no response to the Briefing Sheet on the new investment strategy of the Somerset County Council Pension Fund; and

(6) to delegate authority to the National Park Officer to determine the Authority's new pay and grading scales following the current Job Evaluation exercise, in consultation with the Job Evaluation Panel, and that the results be reported to the Committee's meeting on 4 November 2003.

(The meeting closed at 12.15 pm)

Chairman

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