

11 June 2003

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Consultative Forum held on Wednesday 11 June 2003 at 6.30pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr S J Pugsley, Acting Forum Chairman	Chairman, Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr M A Collins	Exmoor National Park Authority (provisional)
Mr J Dyke	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr J C Edwards	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mrs C Lawrence	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr F J Rawle	Exmoor National Park Authority
Dr J F Travis	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr R J Webber	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mr J W J Milton	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr J Roberts	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr K Ross	Member with Special Knowledge
Mr J Holtom	Badgworthy Land Company
Mr P J Addicott	Beagles
Mr R Peek	CLA - Devon
Mr J Lawrence-Mills	CPRE – West Somerset
Mr R Andrews	Defra ESA Project Officer
Mr M Hankin	Exmoor Natural History Society
Mr T Davey	Exmoor Society
Mr M Ryle	Exmoor Society
Mr M J Clinch	Exmoor Trust
Dr R Ferrar	North Devon Conservation Society
Miss J Stanley	Ramblers' Association - Devon
Mrs J Nicholson	West Somerset Archaeological Society

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs A Amory (Deputy Chairman, Exmoor National Park Authority) Miss E Stacey, Mr J Dallyn, Mr R J A Martin, Mr R Morrison-Smith (Exmoor National Park Authority) Mrs L Crossman, Lady Gass, Baroness Mallalieu, Mrs R Thomas, Mr B Dru, Mr H Temperley, Mr H Thomas and Mr D Wade (Members with Special Knowledge), Mr B Richardson (Caravan Club), Rev R Ray (Diocese of Bath & Wells), Mrs S Ray (Endangered Exmoor) Mr F Ulf-Hansen (English Nature), Mr G Bateman & Mr T Owen (Environment Agency), Mr M Hawkins (Exmoor Society), Maj.Gen E Beckett (Exmoor Trust) Dr M Ward (Field Studies Council) Mr D Gosling, Mr C Marrow & Mr N Slater (Forestry Commission), Mr C Roberts (Forestry & Timber Association), Lady Carolyn Gosling (MFHA), Mr N Hester (National Trust) and Mr G Way (Youth Hostels Association)

Mr Pugsley explained that he had been asked to Chair the meeting as Mr Nightingale, who had been Chairman of the Forum, had not stood for re-election at the recent elections and consequently was no longer a member of the Authority. Also, the Deputy Chairman of the Forum, who would otherwise have chaired the meeting, was unable to be present.

1. **Notes of the Last Meeting**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Notes of the meeting of the Forum held on 8 November 2002 were agreed as a correct record.

(2) **Matters Arising**

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

Mr Ryle commented that the Statement on the Economy of Exmoor had been a very useful report and asked what had resulted from its publication. He said that the Exmoor Society was proposing to meet with the farming and tourism industries to discuss a series of initiatives.

The National Park Officer said that funding initiatives were being pursued with the local district councils. Additionally, in response to an invitation from the Rural Development Agency, a South West National Parks Rural Renaissance bid was in hand and the Economic Statement was a core part of this work. He added that he was hoping to report soon to the National Park Authority on these developments.

(ii) **Note 3 (3) - House Price Surveys on Exmoor**

Mr Davey asked if the Authority had been able to obtain actual house price data from the Land Registry. Mr France replied that a survey with the usual methodology was due to be carried out, with an accompanying "health warning". However, additional confirmatory information would be sought. This was also being followed up with the Land Registry, but was unlikely to be a straightforward matter, and there were additional cost implications.

(iii) **Note 7 - Implementing Electronic Government**

Mr Clinch informed the meeting of a very successful meeting of potential users and equipment suppliers the Exmoor Society had organised regarding extending Broadband provision to Exmoor and a record was being compiled of how people could contribute to achieving this.

Mr Webber said that the West Somerset District Council representatives had attended a County-wide meeting regarding access to Broadband, and considered all interested parties needed to work together.

Mr Pugsley added that Devon had been able to access funding for Broadband in areas such as North Molton, and felt that recognition of the needs of areas such as West Somerset in particular was required.

Mr Ross said he had attended meetings with DEFRA and the Dept. of Trade and Industry, but BT were not keen to extend Broadband to small rural communities, and he felt that RDA assistance was needed to achieve it.

2. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions

3. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS AT WIMBLEBALL LAKE

The Chairman introduced Julia Moysey, the Head of Development for South West Lakes Trust, who was attending the meeting to update members following the outline proposals that were presented at its previous meeting.

Ms Moysey re-iterated that Wimbleball was seen as a key site by many, including West Somerset District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority, and South West Lakes Trust wanted to develop it as a centre for excellence for water sports and related training. It was planned to attract more people to Wimbleball without detracting from the area. The project had been revised following consultations with local parishes and others and because local funding is not easy to obtain.

As Sports Lottery funding preferred to support projects centred around people and renovation themes and was not keen on new build, the intention now was to achieve the aims by the following proposals:-

- Renovating existing buildings to provide showers and toilets
- Providing 2 flats at Higher Cowlings for instructors; people could be put off employment locally by the high cost of housing
- The tea rooms would not be enlarged, but existing seating areas would be screened to extend its operating season
- Hill Farm barns - potentially there would be some alterations to this part of the site.
- Some of the paths around the Reservoir were Public Rights of Way, and some were permissive. The Trust was looking at improving access for the disabled because of increasing demand as well as new cycle routes, including off road activities which could link into a wider network.

It was expected that users would use the site for 2 or 3 days, and stay near to the site, thus benefiting other local businesses.

The overall cost was estimated at £1million. There was a 6 month time-span for funding to be identified as the Sports Lottery was not accepting any bids until December 2003. It was also hoped to obtain Objective 2 European funding.

Ms Moysey emphasised that 500 people had attended the recent open day and there was no traffic congestion, and anyway, the main effect of these plans would be to extend the length of the operating season, rather than increase peak demand.

Mr Hankin said the Bessom Bridge area was a favourite for bird watchers and asked if the toilets could remain open in the winter months.

Some members acknowledged the advantages of developing cycle routes, but foresaw problems with walkers and horses if they were going to share routes.

Mr Milton was concerned because he said that the National Park Authority had been assured when Wimbleball was first created that this further development would never be sought, and he asked how it was now justified. Ms Moysey said that there was now demand for better footpaths, more cycle routes, better access to the water and higher quality facilities. She added that as Exmoor was a place known for outdoor recreation, it had to keep up with the public's higher expectations. It would also bring some benefits to the economy of the area.

4. **TRAFFIC SPEED MANAGEMENT ON EXMOOR**

Mr Evans explained that the Highway Authorities of Somerset and Devon were at different stages in introducing traffic calming across their areas.

Exmoor National Park Authority's involvement started in 1999 when the Highway Authority provided road markings in Dulverton together with yellow backed signs. Work was also carried out in Simonsbath and other areas, which did not have a speed limit at the time, by increasing the size of signs and yellow and red markings on the road. More recently some villages have been selected for speed limits which brought a lot of extra signs – both 30mph repeater signs and more signage where 40 mph buffer zones were required. There could also be 20mph signs near schools in settlements. While all these signs added to the visual clutter it had to be noted that speed limits themselves were in response to local wishes.

The National Park Authority's preference was to try to slow traffic without using signs, in the way the narrow bridge in the centre of Challacombe slowed traffic, and so had tried to recreate this "gateway" effect elsewhere such as Wheddon Cross. This experiment had brought to light various difficulties as the Somerset Highway Authority had to adhere to certain national highway standards, such as no newly created obstructions on the edge of roads, which caused the gateway effect to be set back, and thus reduced its effectiveness. White lines had to be used to give the perception of narrowness and rumble strips. In contrast, the Devon Highway Authority had constructed chicanes and similar calming measures on some roads to successfully slow down traffic.

The Exmoor National Park Authority was not consulted on the latest Somerset scheme to calm traffic in Roadwater whereas in Porlock consultations had been carried out with the Parish Council.

Mr Evans suggested that the Authority should set out some clear principles for traffic calming measures on Exmoor, including:-

- There is a presumption against yellow backed signs
- There should be more emphasis on enforcement methods, as it was thought that it was less likely that visitors were the offenders
- There should be more use of speed visor signs
- Innovative solutions should continue to be sought
- The Authority should lobby for changes to highway regulations in sensitive environmental areas.

Mr Evans said that he would be very interested in the Consultative Forum's views on the impact of the current schemes.

Mrs Lawrence said that she felt moves were afoot within Somerset County Council for greater consultation with the Park Authority before future traffic calming schemes were implemented. Mr Edwards confirmed that a scheme at Exford was in abeyance, pending further discussions.

Members agreed that a flexible approach was needed and that communication involving all parties was vital before any schemes were implemented.

There was a feeling that the traffic calming measures in the main were needed for local drivers who knew the roads rather than tourists and Mr Lawrence Mills suggested a neighbourhood watch type approach. Mr Pugsley said that speed cameras were available for use in certain parish schemes.

Mr Hankin asked if “sleeping policemen” were acceptable. Mr Evans replied that they could not be used on major roads or outside 30 mph limits; also the roads had to have street lighting. Mr Ross added that there was a long waiting list already for “sleeping policemen”.

Dr Ferrar said that he accepted that many villages needed speed restrictions, but he felt that sometimes the length of the restriction was excessive.

Dr Travers said that in Lynbridge people were more concerned about the speed of the traffic than the number of signs.

Mr Ryle said that small villages not on main roads should not be overlooked. Mr Webber added that in some cases perceptions of speeding traffic were not supported when monitoring was carried out.

5. **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND**

Mr Philip Cookson was introduced as the Authority’s Sustainable Development Officer.

Mr Cookson reminded members that DEFRA had provided funding for sustainable development projects that were compatible with the Park’s statutory purposes, with the proviso that the community should decide how the funds should be spent. So far grants totalling £185,000 for 19 projects had been offered, an average of £10,000 per successful scheme and the Sustainable Development Fund was on target. It was understood that DEFRA funding would continue until at least 2005, but it was essential to show that it was being spent effectively.

There was an interim advisory panel advising on the distribution of grants at present, but the Authority was seeking volunteers for an independent panel which would operate from September. Further information was available on the Authority’s web-site.

Examples of projects that would be considered for funding were:-

- Moorland bird survey
- Wood fuel projects for heating village halls etc
- Assisting a primary school project on global sustainability issues

6. **ACCESS MAPS FOR EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK**

Members were reminded that they had received previous presentations on the implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. The draft maps showing the proposed public access areas were published by the Countryside Agency in May, and the consultation period extended to 13 August. Copies were available in local libraries and visitor centres. This was the opportunity for the public to comment to the Agency on the areas shown for access, including proposed boundaries etc.

Mr Evans emphasised that the access areas on the maps had not been produced by ground surveys.

The Exmoor Local Access Forum would find it useful to be informed of local comments as this would help them to formulate their own response.

The publication of revised draft maps following the public consultation period would be the opportunity for landowners to raise objections to any of the proposals.

Mr Holtom, as Chairman of the Exmoor Local Access Forum, said that a press release had been issued advising the public of the ability to comment on the proposals. A seminar would take place on 23 June for members of the Park Authority.

Mr Webber added that this was also the chance for the public to make suggestions through their comments to the Countryside Agency for additional areas to be included as access land.

7. **ORDNANCE SURVEY EXPLORER MAP FOR EXMOOR**

Mr Evans told members that the Ordnance Survey 2½ inches to the mile Explorer Map was very useful to local people and visitors. The Ordnance Survey had announced its intention to revise the maps, one intention being to remove “clutter”. Part of this would be to remove National Park boundaries from these maps. However, he felt there were many reasons to justify the retention of this boundary marking. The Association of National Park Authorities had made representations to the Government and, as a consequence, a meeting of National Park Authorities and the Ordnance Survey had been arranged.

Mr Ross considered there would be merit in reviewing the way the National Park boundary was marked, as the current style was too wide, and a thinner or translucent line would be preferable.

8. **EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2002/03 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2003/04**

Dr Stone summarised some of the achievements in the past year:-

- Progressed with the Local Plan Review – the Inquiry was scheduled for November 2003
- Completed the restoration of Simonsbath Sawmill
- Completed work on the South West Coast Path at Porlock Bay
- Completed footpath improvements and minor enhancements at Tarr Steps and commenced work on the design of the replacement toilets.
- The CRoW Local Access Forum has been appointed and draft access maps were received in May 2003
- The first “State of the Park” report had been published on the Website
- A sustainable tourism initiative was launched in partnership with the Countryside Agency
- Committee Reports and Agendas were now published on the website
- Various “Best Value” reviews had been completed
- Haddon Hill heathland restoration project commenced
- Successfully carried out the agreed moorland burning programme.
- Improved the appearance of County Gate toilets and prepared for major works to Blackmoor Gate & Tarr Steps toilets.

Dr Stone emphasised how many of the projects carried out linked into the community and economic life of the National Park.

Mr Davey asked if the Sawmill would open regularly for visitors to have a look. Dr Stone explained that primarily it was an operational building, but would be open at times which would be specified in the Exmoor Visitor or by prior appointment for groups that wanted an escorted tour.

Dr Stone outlined the priorities for 2003/04:-

- The official opening of Simonsbath Sawmill
- CRoW Open Country map consultations (led by the Countryside Agency)

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- Tarr Steps Woods and Hawkcombe Woods to be designated as National Nature Reserves
- Blackmoor Gate – refurbishment of toilets and interpretation boards
- Promotion of Sustainable Development Fund projects
- Local Plan Inquiry
- Launch of the National Park's 50th anniversary celebrations and events
- Tarr Steps – new toilets to be completed

[Please note that the next meeting will be held at 10.30am on Friday 7 November 2003]

(The meeting ended at 8.40 pm)

Chairman