

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY****2 SEPTEMBER 2003****SUPPORT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES WITHIN EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK****Report of the National Park Officer****Purpose of Report:**

To appraise members of current initiatives aimed at promotion, marketing, quality improvement and sustainable tourism within the local tourism sector and seek views on future contribution of the National Park Authority.

**Legal Implications including Human Rights Act 1998:**

S.62 Environment Act 1995

**Financial Implications:**

The Authority will need to consider how far it wishes to combine its resources with partner organisations to achieve enhanced tourism promotion, marketing, quality improvement and sustainable tourism within the National Park and surrounding area.

**National Park Purposes:**

Effective working with the tourism sector makes an important contribution towards promoting opportunities to understand and enjoy the National Park's special qualities.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Members are asked to CONSIDER the principle of Authority participation in a potential new tourism development initiative for the Greater Exmoor area.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Over many years, the Authority has developed an increasingly effective working relationship with the tourism sector within the National Park area. The priorities for the Authority have traditionally focused on the management of visitor pressures, provision of information to visitors about the National Park and the development of more sustainable approaches to tourism. More recently, while retaining these priorities, the Authority has increasingly focused on the quality of visitor experience and Exmoor as a tourism destination and this has resulted in the identification of Exmoor as a national pilot for the Countryside Agency's strategy for enhancing the quality of the rural tourism product. An outline of progress with the QUEST initiative is provided in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 Initiatives aimed at active promotion and marketing of the National Park are largely the responsibility of the tourism sector itself and the economic development agencies - principally County and District Councils. The National Park Authority has supported many of these promotional initiatives through provision of information and small grants, but has not taken a lead role in encouraging greater visitor numbers to the National Park. Indeed, given the level of resources available to the Authority and the considerable demands placed upon it, the Authority has not been in the position to make any more substantial contribution to promotional work.

- 1.3 Indeed the issue of insufficient resources is one that has held back tourism promotion within Exmoor. The tourism sector, although a large and vitally important part of the National Park economy, is primarily based around small businesses that are not able to contribute large sums to more general promotion and the local authorities have not been able to commit substantial funds for this purpose. Despite this position, effective work has been undertaken by the North Devon Marketing Bureau and the Exmoor Tourism Forum in brochure production and other promotional work such as media advertising, web site development, events etc.
- 1.4 The Exmoor Tourism Forum is currently coordinated by West Somerset District Council and includes representatives from the tourism sector across the National Park. The Authority has been an active member of the Forum and is represented by Mr Morrison-Smith and Martin Evans, Head of Recreation and Tourism section. Much of the output of the Forum has relied on the considerable efforts of a few volunteers and this group is now actively considering options to attract additional external resources and establish a small professional team to take on much of the promotional activity.
- 1.5 These discussions are at a very early stage and any initiative is considerably more likely to be successful if this Authority is able to make a significant input. The most practical option is to consider secondment of a member of staff from the Recreation and Tourism team to the new organisation. This will enable close and integrated working with the new organisation and provide the basis for matching funding from external sources. Clearly, this has important implications for the Authority and members views are sought on the principle of this approach prior to any detailed discussions.

**Nigel Stone**  
**National Park Officer**  
**21 August 2003**

## QUEST PROGRESS UPDATE

### TOURISM STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

QUEST is a five year national demonstration pilot project for sustainable tourism, funded by the Countryside Agency and hosted by Exmoor National Park Authority. QUEST stands for Quality Underpins Exmoor's Sustainable Tourism, and focuses on a range of issues relating to the enhancement of Exmoor as a quality visitor destination. The aim of the project is to demonstrate that, by encouraging quality in the delivery of the visitor experience on Exmoor, benefits can be secured for the economy, environment and community. QUEST embraces the Greater Exmoor area, which includes all of the Exmoor National Park and an approximate 10 mile radius from its perimeter, enabling it to work with businesses and organisations outside of the national park boundaries, which identify themselves with Exmoor as a visitor destination.

Initially the project has been focusing on achieving greater co-ordination in the management of tourism on Exmoor and enhancing quality for visitors to Exmoor. To facilitate this aim QUEST has been developing a strategic action plan, which sets out a vision for tourism, sets objectives, is a practical action plan, and provides a framework for co-coordinating the actions of the main organisations whose activities influence tourism.

The action plan is being developed through consultation with local authority partners, the tourism industry and local communities. The first stage of the consultation process has been completed, comprising a series of 12 meetings taking place across the Greater Exmoor area (Porlock, Combe Martin, Lynton, Minehead, Dulverton, Dunster), and a postal / email questionnaire made available on request. Information and views gathered through this process have been used to develop the action plan.

Key issues identified during the initial consultation period, which have particular relevance to Exmoor National Park include:

- ◇ Leadership and co-ordination : need for an umbrella body and first stop / one stop shop
- ◇ Marketing: need for co-ordination, partnerships, research, resources and proactive marketing
- ◇ Infrastructure improvements:
  - Traffic and transport : transport provision, managing traffic, car parking, signage, roads
  - Access: Rights of Way; improving physical access for people with disabilities
  - Facilities: improving range and quality of facilities and ensuring year round access
- ◇ Quality of Delivery
  - Gaining greater knowledge and understanding of visitor requirements – visitor surveys
  - Making Exmoor visitor friendly: year round tourism / access for people with disabilities
  - Enhancing and ‘packaging’ the tourism product
  - Quality assurance for products and delivery
- ◇ Business Support: ICT / broadband; training and mentoring; advice and ‘signposting’
- ◇ Protecting the environment and local communities
  - Interpretation and information
  - Green tourism and recycling services
  - Maximising use of local produce
  - Visitor management: visitor pressures / user conflicts / sustainable tourism

A draft action plan will be available for a further consultation period from mid September to mid October, which will include an open meeting for the tourism industry and local people. The finalised strategic action plan will be presented to the Exmoor National Park Authority at their meeting on 18 November.

For more information contact: Anne Clayton, QUEST Project Manager (01398) 322284.