

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

6 SEPTEMBER 2005

'A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR EXMOOR' - REVIEW OF THE EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Report of the National Park Officer

Purpose of Report:

To advise members on the proposed process for undertaking a comprehensive review of the Exmoor National Park Management Plan including the engagement of key partner organisations and other stakeholders, integration with other community planning processes, and wide public consultation.

Legal Implications including Human Rights Act 1998:

Environment Act 1995 places a statutory duty on a National Park Authority to produce a National Park Management Plan and undertake a review at least every five years.

Financial Implications:

The review is a priority for the Authority and budget provision has been made.

National Park Purposes:

The National Park Management Plan is central to the effective achievement of National Park purposes in the short, medium and longer term.

RECOMMENDATION:

Members are recommended to:

1. APPROVE the process set out in this report,
2. NOTE the six members appointed to the NPMP Review Steering Group at the Authority's meeting on 7 June 2005 (see 2.2)
3. CONSIDER the creation of an 'Exmoor National Park Strategic Partnership' as recommended in the Performance Assessment Report (see 3.5)
4. SUPPORT, in principle, the appointment of New Economics Foundation to engage local partners and businesses etc, in considering how to develop a sustainable economy on Exmoor that contributes to and is compatible with National Park status (section 5)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Authority last led a review of the National Park Management Plan in 1998/2000 leading to the publication of the 2001-2006 Plan during 2001. The existing Plan document provides a comprehensive assessment of the key aspects of the National Park central to the achievement of National Park purposes and to the social and economic well-being of the National Park communities.
- 1.2 A progress review held during 2003 indicated that a great deal is being achieved to meet the objectives set out in the 2001-06 Plan. However, the progress review was made difficult by the large number of objectives and policies set out in the Plan, and highlighted that the plan was not being used effectively to determine the direction and priorities for

the Authority or key partners. Whilst there is much that is still relevant in the current Plan, it is clear that the forthcoming Plan needs to be a more focused document that has wide commitment and support, particularly from key partner organisations.

- 1.3 Since 2000, the overall planning context for the National Park Management Plan has also become more complex. Local authorities now have a statutory duty to bring together Local Strategic Partnerships and produce Community Plans for their area. The Exmoor National Park area is covered by two Local Community Plans (West Somerset and North Devon) and two County-level Strategic Plans (Devon and Somerset). The Authority is a partner on all four respective Strategic Partnerships and is well placed to ensure effective integration with the National Park Management Plan and to enable more effective joint consultation with local residents in the National Park so that their views can feed effectively into the most appropriate Plan.

2. **COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY GUIDANCE AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT REPORT**

- 2.1.1 The review of the Exmoor NPMP also needs to take into account the revised guidance on National Park Management Plans prepared by the Countryside Agency this year, and the recent Performance Assessment Report following the assessment team visit in July. The latter makes some specific comments that are relevant to the review of the Exmoor NPMP:

- The next Management Plan should contain more focused vision and be strong on ambition
- Efforts should be made to ensure that key partners are active participants in the next Management Plan, rather than passive consultees
- The Management Plan needs to have a 15 to 20 year perspective, although it is rolled forward every five years
- Partners would welcome an approach [to NPMP review] which starts with more of a “blank sheet” enabling them to participate from the outset and help to shape the plan
- The Management Plan should articulate all key stakeholders ambitions for the Park and their respective intentions in terms of action
- Where necessary the NPA should work to reconcile competing ambitions in order to preserve the special qualities and communicate clearly when they are doing this
- The Performance Assessment Report also cautions the Authority to manage consultations in a way that does not raise expectations that cannot be met.

- 2.2 The process outlined below takes account of the guidance and comments received and is based on preliminary discussions of a NPMP Review Steering Group. At this early stage there is scope to revise the programme for the review and the Steering Group will benefit from the inclusion of the six members appointed to it at the Authority’s meeting on 7 June, helping to support the review process over the next 12 to 18 months. (The members appointed being Arabella Amory, Alan Collins, John Edwards, John Dyke, Diana Kershaw and Mike Taylor).

3. **OUTLINE REVIEW PROCESS**

- 3.1 A draft outline of the review process is set out in appendix 1. There are six key stages:
1. **Preparation** - collate draft issues report based on State of the Park statistics, NPAPA self-assessment and Forum for the Future Sustainability Appraisal
 2. **Hold discussions with partners and stakeholders on key issues and options.** Refine issues and options report and hold staff and member workshops to establish draft priorities for the Authority
 3. **Hold 6 local public consultation events** on key issues and options for Exmoor

National Park over the next five to twenty years.

4. **Publish proposals and priorities report** and consult

5. **Publish draft NPMP** and final consultation

6. **Adopt new NPMP**

3.2 The initial scoping discussion has proposed that the review should take place over an eighteen month period with adoption of the new National Park Management Plan at the Authority meeting in February 2007. Commencement of the review has been delayed by the need to give priority to the NPAPA team visit and the Authority will need to commence its improvement planning processes alongside commencement of the NPMP review.

3.3 In addition, the Authority has to carry out the preparation of the Local Development Framework in line with the new planning legislation. A draft timetable for LDF preparation has been considered by members and submitted to Government Office South West. Public consultation is a key element of the LDF process and it is proposed that the LDF Core Strategy and NPMP consultations should be undertaken at the same events in March/April 2006. This represents a delay in the draft timetable for the LDF but ought to enable a more effective engagement of the local community and be acceptable to GOSW.

3.4 Discussions are also being held with Local Strategic Partnerships in West Somerset and North Devon to establish whether consultation effort can be combined for those communities in the National Park. Exmoor Coast & Countryside Partnership (ECCP), the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for West Somerset, is preparing for a review of the Strategic Plan for the district, including much of Exmoor. This Plan has a strong focus on social and economic issues and ought to be complementary to the NPMP and Exmoor LDF. If the timescales are appropriate it is proposed, therefore, to plan the public consultation so that the process addresses issues relevant to ECCP rather than ECCP holding a separate series of consultation events. Similar proposals will be explored with the LSP in North Devon (North Devon Community Alliance).

3.5 This is an opportune time for the Authority to give consideration to a recommendation in the recent Performance Assessment Report that “*the NPA should consider creating an Exmoor National Park Strategic Partnership comprising : regional and local statutory bodies, community and business representatives, landowners, voluntary sector and others*”. The recommendation goes on to state that “*the Exmoor Strategic Partnership could steer the development of the new Management Plan. This would enable the NPA to provide the kind of involvement for partners which they say they want, i.e. not consultation after the event but involvement from the outset.*”

4. **MANAGEMENT PLAN TITLE AND FORMAT**

4.1 A clear vision of the final format for the 2007-12 Exmoor NPMP needs to be established at an early stage to ensure a successful outcome to the planning process. Key considerations include those raised in the Countryside Agency guidance and Performance Assessment Report outlined in section 2 above. Setting a clear brief for the process and outcomes is a task for the first meeting of the full NPMP Review Steering Group, however, some suggestions currently being considered including:

- Revision of the existing 2001/06 NPMP to provide an up to date and robust analysis of key issues and context for the 2007-12 Plan together with a clear statement of policies to underpin the Management Plan objectives and enable consistent responses to events and challenges that occur during the plan period

- Production of a final plan that sets out the overall vision, priorities and goals for the National Park in the next 15 to 20 years and a series of 3 to 5 year action plans for the Authority and each of the key partners and stakeholders that have an essential contribution to make in the achievement of the Plan objectives
- Clear links to other plans and strategies that affect the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Exmoor communities and are being led by local and regional statutory partners and local strategic partnerships
- The NPMP to be entitled '*A Sustainable Future for Exmoor*' to encapsulate the importance of a long-term vision for the National Park and of integrating local social and economic development with the achievement of National Park purposes.

5. CONSULTANCY SUPPORT

5.1 The review process set out in outline above is an ambitious one that seeks to achieve the optimum level of engagement of partners and the wider public and achieve a series of challenging outcomes. Inevitably, however, there are many additional demands on the Authority and it is not possible to dedicate a staff team full time to this work. The Authority recognised this issue when setting its budget for 2005/6 and has set aside funds for the engagement of consultants or other support as required.

5.2 Whilst, at this stage, there are no firm proposals to engage consultants, the need for additional support and expertise will emerge during the detailed planning phase that will be undertaken by the NPMP Review Steering Group. The phase of the programme that will require most intensive input will be preparation for and undertaking of the public consultation events in March/April 2006 and additional capacity will be required at this time.

6. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

6.1 Whilst the core role of the Authority will remain that of achieving National Park purposes, a key consideration in the preparation of the new Management Plan will be the way in which social and economic issues are addressed. The Authority has consistently stated its belief that the conservation and enhancement of the environment of the National Park and provision of opportunities for understanding and enjoyment, is inextricably linked to the well-being the people who own and manage land and property in the National Park and who earn their livelihoods in the area.

6.2 This belief led, in 2002, to the publication by the Authority of a draft 'Statement on the Economy of Exmoor National Park' in response to serious concerns about the overall economic impact of the foot and mouth disease crisis. The intention of this Statement was to indicate to key partners, potential funders and local businesses ways in which the Exmoor economy can develop while building upon and contributing to the National Park's special landscape and environment.

6.3 The three years since this statement was published have seen substantial achievement in a number of aspects highlighted in the Statement including local foodlinks schemes, renewable energy projects, woodland certification and a range of initiatives supported through the Sustainable Development Fund. However, concern about the fragility of the Exmoor economy remains and a number of key partners have felt disappointment that the Economy Statement has not been taken forward more effectively.

6.4 The barrier to successful implementation has been lack of engagement of partners and businesses in considering and taking forward the ideas set out in the Statement, largely because of lack of capacity within the Authority and concern that the responsibility for

leading on these issues rests with other agencies. However, an opportunity to take forward the ideas set out in the Statement emerged at a recent workshop held by the Association of National Park Authorities attended by several members of this Authority.

- 6.5 An inspiring presentation at the workshop by Stewart Wallis, Executive Director of New Economics Foundation (NEF) highlighted an exciting and innovative approach to understanding how economies work in rural areas and ways in which local economies can be developed based on an area's local distinctiveness and special qualities. Preliminary discussions with NEF indicate that they would be interested in working with the Authority and local partners to apply their approach in Exmoor. The South West Regional Development Agency has indicated its interest in supporting such an initiative and a scoping meeting with NEF, RDA and local authority partners has been scheduled for early September. If the scoping meeting proves successful, it is proposed that NEF be engaged to undertake a programme of events to apply their approach in Exmoor as a contribution towards the initial phase of NPMP development.

Nigel Stone
National Park Officer
10 August 2005

Background papers on which this report, or an important part of it are based, constitute the list of background papers required by Section 100 D (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to be open to members of the public comprise:-

National Park Management Plans – Guidance. Countryside Agency. April 2005

Exmoor NPA Performance Assessment Report. SOLACE. August 2005

Statement on the Economy of Exmoor National Park. ENPA. Consultation draft July 2002