

# ITEM 7

## EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### DISTRICT and PARISH FORUM

Minutes of the meeting of the District and Parish Forum held on Monday 27 June 2005 at 7.00pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

#### PRESENT

Arabella Amory	Chairman of the Forum and Deputy Chairman of Exmoor National Park Authority
Mike Gammon	Exmoor National Park Authority and West Somerset District Council
Steven Pugsley	Exmoor National Park Authority and West Somerset District Council
Jim Pile	Exmoor National Park Authority and Kentisbury Parish Council
Fred Rawle	Exmoor National Park Authority and Exton Parish Council
Susan Gibb	Dulverton Town Council
Bob Churchill	Luccombe Parish Council
Marilyn Crothers	Nettlecombe Parish Council
Herbert Geen	North Molton Parish Council
Dave Britnell	Porlock Parish Council
George Wale	Porlock Parish Council
Tim Davey	Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council

Apologies for absence were received from John Dallyn, Andrea Davis, John Dyke, John Edwards, Ian Galloway, Roger Martin, Joe Tucker and Brian Windsor (Exmoor National Park Authority), John Travis (Exmoor National Park Authority, North Devon District Council and Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council), Brian Simmons (Brayford Parish Council) Bernard Smith (Brompton Regis Parish Council), Dunster Parish Council, D Sherring (Exton Parish Council), Suzette Hibbert (Lynton & Lynmouth Town Council), Old Cleeve Parish Council, and Mr Webber (Wootton Courtenay Parish Council).

#### 1. Minutes of the last meeting

##### (1) Confirmation

The Minutes of the Forum's meeting held on 26 November 2004 were signed as correct, subject to the insertion of a comma in the list of apologies after the phrase (Old Cleeve Parish Council).

##### (2) Matters arising

###### (i) Minute 12 - Devon Association for Renewable Energy

Marilyn Crothers said that Miscanthus (Elephant Grass) was a common biomass product but warned that it was an unpleasant crop to live with because high winds can blow the sharp leaves onto neighbouring land while the stalks are as hard as bamboo. Furthermore there were concerns that its extensive root systems had the potential to damage archaeological remains.

###### (ii) Dave Britnell asked if private households were also eligible to apply under the grant schemes for the installation of heating schemes using

alternative fuels. The National Park Officer said that funding opportunities were not restricted to businesses.

## 2. **Items raised by Town / Parish Councils and Meetings**

No matters were raised by members of the Forum.

## 3. **The Adopted Local Plan, Local Development Framework and the Design Guide**

John Clements (Principal Planning Officer – Policy and Community) outlined the background to the revision of the Local Plan and its subsequent adoption in March 2005. He said that printed copies would be available soon. The key focus of the Plan was its housing policies, particularly those relating to local needs affordable housing and planning applications under these measures were being approved.

It was the last time that development planning for Exmoor would be determined through Structure and Local Plans as the government through its Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 had set out a new planning agenda focused on sustainability (social, environmental, economic, resources), spatial planning (integrate, inform, take account of, and help deliver other agencies' strategies and programmes) and widespread ownership (involving community and stakeholder involvement). The changes also proposed streamlining the process through flexibility (responsive), a strengthening of community and stakeholder involvement, 'front loading' (with key decisions being taken early on), sustainability appraisal, programme management and soundness (content, process and evidence base).

At the local level, future development planning would take place through a Local Development Framework, which set out a number of processes to be followed and involved the production of Development Plan Documents, Supplementary Planning Documents and other documents (mostly to do with process). Key features of the new system included wide opportunity for stakeholder/community involvement and monitoring. The Local Plan was now a part of the Local Development Framework, and with the 'saved' Structure Plan, formed the statutory Development Plan until the new Regional Spatial Strategy was produced which would replace the Structure Plan. The processes would take three years to complete. He emphasised that during the transitional period the policies in the new Local Plan remained valid and automatically became part of the Local Development Framework for at least 3 years, but as and when they were replaced they would supersede the relevant policies of the Local Plan. The National Park Officer said that Parishes not completely within the National Park could be affected by a local development scheme for the area inside the National Park boundary and one from the District Council in respect of the remaining area.

John Clements said the existing Design Guide was produced 10 years previously but was not used as much as had been hoped. It was intended that the new one would be used more. Consultants were being employed to assist in its production and a well-attended seminar was held in Dunster in April 2005 to examine the areas that the new guide needed to address. This would be followed by a series of 4 informal community workshops and drop-in sessions across the National Park which would be extensively publicised. Arabella Amory urged all parishes to encourage people to attend a workshop.

## 4. **Funding**

Philip Cookson, the Authority's Sustainable Development Officer said that the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) for 2004/05 amounted to £200,000 and was funded by Defra for projects which furthered National Park purposes. An independent group of 12 people who lived and worked across Exmoor formed a panel to assess the applications made for funding from the fund. The fund was not fully spent in 2004/05 and the unspent money would be carried forward to the current financial year and added to the sum already provided for the

new year. He said that every pound provided by the Sustainable Development Fund towards projects brought in a further four pounds from other sources.

He gave 3 examples of projects supported by the fund:-

- EXperience MOOR 2004 project which gave over 170 10 – 16 year olds from 25 villages and towns the opportunity of hands-on outdoor recreation as well as developing life skills.
- Landsense whose work involved management of moorland in an environmentally sensitive with preferential rates for land within the national park area.
- Brendon Folk Festival which was a local event focussing on Exmoor's music, myths, legends and including children's workshops.

In reply to Mr Wale, Philip Cookson confirmed that businesses and individuals as well as community groups were able to apply for grants under the SDF scheme.

Susan Gibbs asked if the Fund would assist with the provision of solar panels. Mr Cookson said that the fund had restricted itself to consideration of schemes such as those involving micro hydro-generators in fast flowing streams.

Philip Cookson also drew members' attention to the Southwest Network's Development Fund which offered grants ranging from £200 to £1,500 to support and develop high quality community and regeneration networks.

## 5. National Park Authority Performance Assessment

Nigel Stone informed the Forum that the National Park Authority was undertaking an in-depth assessment of its performance in the run up to a national programme of performance assessment affecting all National Park Authorities. The purpose of the programme was to help Authorities become more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement so that they could develop improvement plans to focus on those areas. The Authority had to produce a self assessment based on 9 common "key lines of enquiry" about the effectiveness of the organisation and how it worked. A peer review team from other National Parks and public sector organisations scrutinised the self assessment and prepares a report which was the starting point for improvement planning. A report would also be submitted to Defra covering the performance of all the National Parks in England

An important aspect of the Authority's self assessment was its relationship and joint working arrangements with partner organisations. To help inform this process the forum members were formed into 2 groups for a workshop session and asked to list the main areas where the Authority's performance was good and those where there was scope for improvement.

Group A

Areas where the Authority was good:-

- Rights of Way and footpath work
- Moorland and flora preservation
- Outreach programmes for young people.

The group was divided about the Authority's performance on swaling.

Areas where the Authority could make improvements:-

- Pace of provision of affordable housing
- Not enough encouragement for local people to become moorland farmers
- There were still some places on Exmoor without mains electricity.

#### Group B

Areas where the Authority was good:-

- Consultation with communities
- Its inclusive approach to residents and visitors
- Footpath provision

Areas where the Authority could make improvements:-

- Could give more feedback on planning application decisions, or at least some acknowledgement that comments from parish councils had been received.
- Insufficient consultation where planning applications were refused
- Needed to be tougher regarding off-road use by 4X4 drivers

Nigel Stone thanked all members for their contributions to the workshop session and said the points made would be taken on board and fed into the preparation of the self-assessment. He added that all parishes had been sent a questionnaire, but so far only 6 replies had been received. He also informed members that preparations had been made for the peer review team to meet members of the District and Parish Forum at Winsford Village Hall at 7.00pm on Wednesday 20 July 2005, and he hoped members would be able to attend.

#### 6. **The Future of the Exmoor District and Parish Forum**

Arabella Amory said that this subject was raised as the District and Parish Forum tended to consider the same issues as the Authority's Consultative Forum but was often not well attended. The Consultative Forum had members with conservation and recreation interests in Exmoor, as well as a range of members with special knowledge of the National Park due to their long and close association with it. She invited members' views on a proposal to merge the two consultative groups. At its meeting on 15 June 2005 the Consultative Forum had considered the proposal and expressed unanimous support for a merger.

Bob Churchill asked if there was any evidence that daytime or evening meetings were better attended. Arabella Amory replied that meetings of both groups alternated between mornings and evenings to maximise attendance opportunities.

It was emphasised that a consultative group worked best if there is a two way process, but it was pointed out that members had had no matters to include on the agenda for the meeting.

Tim Davey thought that because from 1997 parishes had been represented on the Authority by parish members those 5 members provided a better channel of communication between parishes and members.

Fred Rawle said that there should be a review of the merged consultative arrangements after 12 months.

Members agreed that the District and Parish Consultative Group and Consultative Group should merge, the new group being known as the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum.

7. **The Authority's Achievements in 2004/05 and Plans for 2005/06.**

The National Park Officer gave a presentation on the Authority's achievements in 2004/05 under the headings of:-

- Looking after Exmoor's environment
- Helping people enjoy and learn about Exmoor
- Helping to support Exmoor's communities and economy
- Improving our performance

In conclusion Nigel Stone looked ahead to the main strands of activity for the Authority in 2005/06.

Herbert Geen said that he was concerned about the fungus called Sudden Oak Death which could affect rhododendron as well as oak. There had been a serious outbreak in Cornwall and he suggested that it would have significant impact if it reached Exmoor.

8. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting, which would be the first meeting of the merged Forum (if agreed by the Authority) would be at 10.30am on Friday, 4 November 2005

(The meeting closed at 9.00pm)

Chairman