

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**8 JUNE 2004****MEMBERS' REPORTS**

Purpose of Report: To receive updates and reports on meetings and events attended by Members as representatives of the National Park Authority.

1. **Council for National Parks Meeting - 21 April 04 -
Report from Arabella Amory**

1.1 Among those welcomed to their first meeting were Mark Robins representing RSPB and Michael Ryle from the Exmoor Society.

1.2 Items of Interest:

- The Government's decision to refuse proposals for a new container port at Dibden Bay in the New Forest was welcomed.
- Following legal advice CNP is seeking judicial review of the Pembrokeshire Coast NPA's decision to grant outline planning permission for the Bluestone leisure development. The grounds were that the interests of National Park Authority Members had given rise to a perception of bias in the decision making process and that the decision had been taken without proper consideration of the Local Plan and National Park Purposes.
- DEFRA lawyers have confirmed that Regional Planning Bodies (in the SW this is the Regional Assembly) are relevant authorities for the purposes of the Section 62 duty (to have regard for the statutory purposes of NPs).
- Mark Robins queried the absence of agricultural action and projects in the work plan. CNP have always had a problem in these areas as they do not have capacity to take on every cause and feel that others e.g. NPAs and ANPA are tackling these issues adequately. However, it is hoped in the future to feed into agricultural groups set up by ANPA and others in order to voice National Park concerns as appropriate.
- A review is underway looking into how the CNP Council works, relationship with Members of Council, how Members report back to their Authorities, Societies, Associations, Trusts, Clubs etc and how much should be charged, with the aim of fees bringing in at least 10% of total core funding. Every NPA in England and Wales sends a co-opted Member to Council but they do not pay a fee of any sort.
- The Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael addressed his first Council Meeting and afterwards answered a few questions from the floor. Mark Robins asked for clarification of NPA Members being involved in Regional Assemblies and also being Members of SEEPs. The Minister promised to look into this and a follow up letter from CNP was promised. Anyone wishing to see the full minutes please contact me.

2. **South West Regional Assembly - Regional Spatial Strategy Steering Group Meeting – 20 April 04 – Report from Arabella Amory**
- 2.1 Main item on the agenda was the response of the Regional Assembly to the Barker Report (Housing Supply) recommendations.
- 2.2 Points raised included: The recommendations should highlight the link between the economy and housing provision taking into account low wages in the South West. Planning and housing departments should work more closely. Clearer definitions of ‘key workers’ needed. South West Region broadly achieving the required housing targets set in RPG10. However, shortage of appropriate housing was the important issue, to meet the needs of the young and elderly. The Regional Housing Body is commissioning a housing Market assessment project to consider the housing needs of the Region. It was identified that there is a need to engage with employers to determine the housing needs facing the Region. A need to ensure an integrated transport system is planned with housing growth and the investment required for delivery. There was no regional context to the Barker Review and the Regional Assembly should report on the issues facing the South West. A clearer definition of affordable housing is required from Government and it is vital to ensure that such housing remains affordable in the long term.
3. **Special Meeting of the South West Regional Assembly – 30 April 04 – Report from Arabella Amory**
- 3.1 This was held in order for Members of the Assembly to vote on the outcome of the Highway’s Agency’s assessment of options for the second strategic route to the South West. This report was commissioned by the Secretary of State who accepted a second strategic route was needed but not that this second strategic route should be connected to the M5 by both the A358 and the A303. The Highway Agency report outlined the pros and cons of both routes in question. It did not draw conclusions or make recommendations on which of the two should be supported. Members were sharply divided, with most representatives from Devon and Cornwall strongly in favour of dualling the A303 despite the fact that the proposed stretch of road runs through an AONB resulting in deliverability being in doubt, whittling away of ‘environmental capital’ etc. The point was also made that widening of the A358 did not actually create another strategic route. Those in favour of dualling the A358 made the points that the rural economy of West Somerset and North Devon were consistently disadvantaged in the Region, the North-South route was of importance to the Region as a whole and road building through a protected area was not acceptable. Business representatives voiced concerns about travel needing to be reliable, perception of bad transport routes can deter new business etc. It was acknowledged we would do environmental harm whichever route we chose and a plea was made for good design and style. Many, many points were made for and against both routes. In all some 37 speakers, including three local MPs, presented arguments and statements.
- 3.2 The voting was on ballot papers and the results were: Option A - supporting the dualling and trunking of the A358 between Ilminster and the M5 and supporting safety improvements along the A303 between Ilminster and Honiton 41 in favour. Option B - supporting the dualling of the A303 from Ilminster to Honiton and reassessing the North-South route as part of the review of the Regional Transport Strategy as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy 42 in favour. **So Option B won by 1 vote.**

If anyone would like any further information on the above reports, please contact Arabella Amory, Deputy Chairman of Exmoor National Park Authority.