

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**11 JUNE 2002****COUNTY GATE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: ENHANCING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE****Report of the Head of Education and Interpretation****Purpose of Report:**

To advise Members on the progress of this project

Legal Implications:

Planning permission required before commencement of building works.

Human Rights Act 1998 Implication

To ensure that any new building and interpretative facility is accessible to all.

Financial Implications:

Budget allocated for Phase I.

There will be need to be allocation for the implementation of Phase II which will be based primarily on external funding

National Park Purposes:

Promoting Understanding

Management Plans Policies P8/9, P12/4, P13/15, P14/1, P14/6, P16/1, P16/2, P16/5, P21/3,

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members NOTE the content of this Report

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Authority's Visitor Centre at County Gate occupies a significant location on the A39 at the Devon/Somerset border.
- 1.2 The Centre currently receives in the region of 27,000 visits during the season. There is the potential to develop and enhance the site to provide improved facilities for the public.
- 1.3 The long-term aim is to remove the existing toilet block and develop a modern, purpose-built facility integrated with the existing Visitor Centre.

2. **ENHANCEMENT PROJECT**

- 2.1 A two-phase project is in place. For Phase I, 20 architects' practices were invited to express interest, primarily from the South West. A shortlist of 5 was selected to work up their initial concepts in a limited competition. The winner of the competition will develop detailed design, costings and secure planning permission for the project.
- 2.2 Phase II will require external funding (e.g. Objective 2) to enable the construction of the new facility. If funding is secured, the successful practice will project manage the construction phase.
- 2.3 The new build will compliment the existing Visitor Centre, use sustainable building principles and respect the current setting and surrounding environment. The building will incorporate new accessible toilets and a visitor interpretation facility.
- 2.4 The resulting building will serve as an example of contemporary design, sustainable building and planning in a sensitive remote rural location. The project links in with the wider 'sustainable development' projects and messages being developed at the Simonsbath Sawmill and the Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Education.
- 2.5 The Project Team consists of the Head of Education and Interpretation, Historic Buildings Officer, Principal Planning Officer (Development Control), Visitor Centre Head (County Gate) and Facilities Manager. The team will get independent, external guidance from Mark Pearson, Director, the Architecture Centre, Bristol.

3. **TIME TABLE**

- 3.1 The deadline for presentation of the initial concepts from the 5 practices is 31 May 2002.
- 3.2 There will be an opportunity for Members to view the concepts and make comments at the Workshop Session on the morning of 18 June 2002. The Land and Property Advisory Panel will be invited to offer guidance on 24 June 2002. A final decision will be made on 25 June 2002 to select the successful architect.
- 3.3 Subject to a successful planning process and funding bids, the ideal target date for opening the new facility will be 2004 to coincide with the Authority's 50th anniversary year.

Tim Braund
Head of Education and Interpretation
22/05/02

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:-

Building and Competition Brief (2002) held with Head of Education and Interpretation