

ITEM 4.1

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES of a meeting of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday, 5 September 2006 at 2 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr S J Pugsley (Chairman)
Mr W J Dyke (Deputy Chairman)
Mrs A Amory (Second Deputy Chairman)

Mr F J Bray
Mrs A M Clitheroe
Mr M A Collins
Mr J Dallyn
Miss A Davis
Mr J C Edwards
Mrs A M Foxhuntley
Mr I Galloway
Mrs CM Lawrence

Mr R J A Martin
Mrs E I Marsden
Mr R Morrison-Smith
Mr M J Pile
Mr F Rawle
Dr J F Travis
Mr R J Webber
Mr B O Windsor

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J Clark, Mr M Gammon, Mr D E Gladding, Ms D Kershaw, Mr M Taylor and Mr F G H Tucker.

30. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared.

31. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- **Natural England and Countryside Agency Board Members' Visit and Seminar on National Park Responsibilities, Balmer Lawn Hotel, Brockenhurst, 29 & 30 August 2006**

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman had attended parts of this event which provided a briefing for National Park Authorities on the responsibilities of Natural England in relation to National Parks. It also provided the opportunity for those attending to meet members of the Natural England Board. There was not, however, a great deal of information on the new Board's policies as they were still being formulated.

It was hoped that the Natural England Board member with responsibilities for Exmoor would visit the area soon.

- **Southern National Parks Conference at Exford on 13/14 September 2006**

The first day would focus on National Park Centres, involving a tour to the Authority's Dunster Centre and the Porlock Visitor Centre; with the second day examining current issues affecting National Park Authorities and a presentation by the New Economics Foundation on rural economies. The list of members attending from Exmoor was the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Second Deputy Chairman, Mrs Clitheroe, Mr Collins, Miss Davis, Mr Edwards, Mr Pile, Dr Travis and Mr Webber. (NB. Mr Pile subsequently withdrew).

- **Opening of European Le TREC, Dunster and re-opening of the refurbished Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross on 15 September 2006**

The Chairman would be attending both of these occasions.

- **Barry Gardner, the new Minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs**

The Chairman and the National Park Officer/Chief Executive, together with representatives of the other English National Park Authorities, would be meeting the Minister on *18 September 2006 to discuss National Park funding issues. The Chairman explained that the Authority would be looking for at least inflation income as promised by the previous Minister. (*subsequently altered to 10 October 2006)

- **Wood 2006**

The Chairman would be opening Wood 2006 at Dunster Castle on 25 September 2006 at 10 am. Members could attend.

- **Rural Development Plan for England Conference at Somerset College of Arts and Technology, Taunton on 19 September 2006**

Mr Martin undertook to attend this Conference on behalf of the Authority.

- **Aspects of Exmoor – Paintings and Drawings by Brian Chugg 1926-2003**

There would be a private view of the paintings and drawings at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon at The Square, Barnstaple on Saturday 9 September 2006 from 6.30 – 8 pm, including the presentation of prizes for the Exmoor Society's Brian Chugg Art Award. Members could attend the event and there would also be further opportunities as the exhibition would be open to public attendance until 28 October 2006.

- **Walk at Tarr Steps**

Members were reminded of the members' informative walk taking place that evening at 4.30 am from Tarr Steps (meeting at the car park).

32. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Authority's meeting held on 18 July 2006 were signed as correct.

(2) **Matters Arising**

- **Minute 16 – Single Payments Scheme (SPS)/Review of Hill Farm Allowance (HFA)**

Lord Rooker, Minister for Sustainable Farming and Food, had responded to Mr Dyke's letter regarding delays in the making of SPS and HFA payments and the need for interest payments on the latter. He indicated that over 95% of the available funds under the 2005 SPS had now been disbursed and, as at 4 August 2006, 64% of the total HFA claims had been paid. However, he did admit that the SPS payments had been made four months later than originally forecast and that this, coupled with the later than normal payment of HFA, had resulted in hardship and concern in the farming community. Nevertheless, there was still no intention at this stage to pay interest in respect of HFA, given that the legal deadlines associated with SPS did not apply in this case.

Mr Dyke said that 2,000 HFA payments were still to be made.

- **Minute 24 – Development of Policy on Promoted Walking Routes on Exmoor**

In response to comment, it was pointed out that the Visit Exmoor Forum was supportive of Minehead being a base for walking on Exmoor.

33. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

See Minute 34(2) for public statements from Mrs R Thomas, Exmoor Society and Mr D Waller, Barle Valley Safaris (also a member of the Exmoor Local Access Forum).

34. **EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

(1) The Authority received the Minutes of the meeting of the Local Access Forum held on 31 May 2006 and backed its position to support voluntary access agreements as the best means of permitting canoeing on waterways (Minute 7.2) and **RESOLVED** to actively promote voluntary access agreements through informing the public of the existing agreements on rivers within the National Park and seek to act as an intermediary between canoeist groups and riparian owners, when and where applicable, to try to secure further access agreements.

(2) The Authority received the Minutes of the meeting of the Local Access Forum held on 9 August 2006. There was lengthy debate on Minute 22(1) concerning the closure of RUPPs (Roads Used as Public Paths) and their reclassification as Restricted Byways, and the effects this was having on the three safari operators to still have routes where they could take visitors. The first part of the recommendation to the Authority was that, in view of the difficulties the safari operators were having in seeking consents from landowners to use routes, it should do whatever it could to encourage Somerset County

Council to speed up the process for completing the Definitive Map Modification Orders on Restricted Byways within the National Park, where appropriate, so that permissions could be obtained for bona fide safari operators to have routes they could use. The second part of the recommendation was for the Authority to recognise the economic benefits that both safaris and organised rallies brought to the National Park.

Public Question Time

Mr Waller, Barle Valley Safaris and a member of the Local Access Forum, said that the off road tours took many people to the remoter parts of the National Park which they would otherwise not have access to. As appeals to landowners for permissions to use routes across their land had not in most cases been responded to, he urged the Authority to seek a rapid resolution of applications for Restricted Byways to be upgraded to BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic) so that they had some routes to use again.

Mrs Thomas, Exmoor Society, said that vehicular use of the former RUPPs had led to considerable problems both in terms of conflicts between users and environmental effects and, while there were few concerns about the safari operators, there was unease that speeding up the processing of the Definitive Map Orders on Restricted Byways would quickly bring back the wider pressures of all vehicles being allowed to use them again. Whilst the Society sympathised with the plight of the safari operators, it was felt that their negotiating with individual landowners was the best means of resolving the issue.

The Exmoor Society also had concern that recent meetings of the Local Access Forum had relatively low attendance levels which called into question whether balanced decisions were being made between the various interests making up the Forum.

The Authority's Consideration

The Authority also sympathised with the difficulties the safari vehicle operators were having in securing routes they could use. Some members pointed out that the processing of applications and examining the evidence of routes previously used by motorised vehicles was something Somerset County Council had do anyway and speeding it up would be likely to benefit the safaris. However, the majority did not wish to see routes opened up to permit their use by other motorised vehicles which was seen as being contrary to the National Parks' first purpose "to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage", in terms of damaging the tranquillity of the National Park and access to quiet recreation, and the County Council's six years plus backlog of applications was seen as beneficial in this respect. It was, nevertheless, felt that the Authority could help the safari operators by providing them with letters of support for their activity.

The second part of the Local Access Forum's recommendation referred to organised rallies and this also gave rise to some concern. However, the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer explained that rallies too would need to go to landowners on a case by case basis to seek permissions.

Members were advised that it was not possible to erect barriers to prevent access to Restricted Byways. However, in 2007 the Authority would be issued with powers to implement Traffic Regulation Orders on these routes, including those which eventually became BOATs, which would enable them to be better managed, particularly in sensitive

locations. Also, on those routes which remained Restricted Byways, incursions by motorised vehicles could be tackled through the enforcement powers the police had under the Road Traffic Act 1988.

RESOLVED: that letters of support be sent to the three safari operators which they can use when contacting landowners for permission to use routes.

- (3) The Authority received the Local Access Forum's Annual Report for 2005/06 and **RESOLVED** to agree that it be published as a 'stand alone' document.

35. **MEMBER KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**

The report of the Head of Business Management set out a programme of training events for members in 2006/07 to enable the enhancement of their knowledge and understanding.

RESOLVED: (1) to agree the following training programme covering the period to the next Annual Meeting (which includes some events already undertaken):-

4 July 2006 – Good Governance Workshop facilitated by the Audit Commission.

1 August 2006 – Rural Communities – Presentation from the New Economics Foundation.

19 September 2006 – Local Development Framework – invitation to all members to attend.

3 October 2006 – National Park Management Plan Workshop.

14 November 2006 – Member Engagement Workshop.

17 November 2006 – Development Control and Landscape Tour.

9 January 2007 – Priorities Workshop.

3 April 2007 – see (2) below; and

(2) that the following topics be considered either at the training event on 3 April 2007 or at future Authority meetings – Managing SSSIs (Authority meeting on 14 November 2006), Hedgerow Trees, Conservation Areas and Settlements (including the Design Guide and Historic Settlements).

36. **IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

The report of the National Park Officer/Chief Executive advised members on progress in implementing the Improvement Plan 2006-08.

RESOLVED: to note the progress in implementing the Improvement Plan 2006-08, subject to the deletion of the Proposals and Priorities Report from item 1, National Park Management Plan Review.

37. **REVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

The National Park Officer/Chief Executive's report sought members' approval to commence a review of Authority partnership working in the Improvement Plan.

Members welcomed increased partnership working and there was comment that existing work in this area was already impressive. The National Park Officer/Chief Executive explained that future partnership working would need to be scored against a criteria relevant to the Authority's priorities and objectives and the review would investigate existing partnerships and potential new ones.

RESOLVED: (1) to note the current engagement by the Authority in partnership working;

(2) to approve the approach to the review set out in the report; and

(3) to appoint Mrs Amory, Mr Collins and Mrs Marsden to join a 'task and finish' partnership review group to report to the Resources Committee in November 2006.

38. **CORPORATE EQUALITY PLAN**

The Authority considered the report of the Head of Business Management which updated members on the requirement to produce a corporate equality plan and made recommendations on how this could be achieved.

Reference was made to rural isolation, with people living in remote rural areas having less access to facilities and opportunities compared to those living in urban areas, and recreation was particularly highlighted. It was suggested, however, that the latter was more applicable to the item in Minute 39 below, but it was recognised that rural isolation was a factor regarding equality, although it needed to be considered in proportion to other items identified in the report as affecting equality.

RESOLVED: to agree that:-

- (1) the Management Team takes responsibility for the development of the Corporate Equality plan, for monitoring progress on the implementation of the Action Plan and for evaluating and reviewing the Corporate Plan;
- (2) the Lead Role be undertaken by the Head of Business Management supported by the Personnel Officer as the Equalities Champion; and
- (3) a Steering Group be established to produce a consultation document, review responses and produce a draft plan; the Group to comprise the Head of Business Management, the Personnel Officer, representatives from each Section and Miss Davis and Mr Galloway from the Authority with a role to contribute and challenge.

39. **DEFRA CONSULTATION ON 'OUTDOORS FOR ALL' – DRAFT DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN**

The report of the Head of Recreation and Tourism asked the Authority note the content of the draft Diversity Action Plan and to consider its response to the consultation outlined.

There was discussion about what recreational activities people wished to engage in outdoors within the National Park. This included suggestions that the local emphasis placed on equine tourism may be too strong and that nationally too much attention was being focused on ethnic groups and targeting of resources to those groups, which may be hindering diversity. However, there was also comment that there was room for many different activities to be undertaken within the National Park by a wide range of people and by different ages and ability levels. Nonetheless, there was recognition of the need to improve the baseline data of what the public required, particularly for those people with disabilities, which it was suggested could be achieved through national research data. It was also mentioned that the tourism industry had a significant role to play in drawing people to the National Park and in providing recreational provision.

RESOLVED: (1) to approve the response to the consultation outlined in report, subject to the response under Question 16 including reference to the need for national research data on what those people with disabilities and other people require; and

(2) to incorporate any other suggestions from members into the response.

40. **TRAINING USE BY MILITARY PERSONNEL OF THE EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY ESTATE**

The Authority considered the report of the Head of Recreation and Tourism which informed members of a request for the use of areas of the Exmoor National Park Authority Estate for limited low key military training and sought approval for entering into a trail agreement for this use for two years.

In response to members' comments, the officers said that the military would be asked to maintain their distance from sensitive locations, e.g. where ground nesting birds were present. In instances where problems arose for tenants, wildlife, the public etc the Ranger Service would act quickly to diffuse situations.

While the officers were not currently seeking remuneration for the military's use of the Authority's land, it was suggested that the issue needed to be explored as some other National Parks had financial levies in place.

RESOLVED: to approve the agreement between the Exmoor National Park Authority and the Ministry of Defence for two years, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, for the use of military services personnel of land owned by the National Park Authority.

41. **STRATEGY FOR THE HORSE INDUSTRY IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

The report of the Head of Recreation and Tourism informed members of the Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales and its relevance to the work of the National Park Authority, particularly in promoting recreation and tourism as a means of diversifying the farming economy and encouraging economic development.

There was discussion about the potential for conflicts between horse riding and pedestrians, with specific reference to the erosion effects of horses on wetter areas and the implications for walkers. It was felt there was the need for more information on this aspect and a concern was expressed about changes occurring to traditional farmsteads which were becoming 'horse centres'. Nevertheless, it was also recognised that the equestrian industry had many positive attributes, particularly in relation to the tourism economy.

The Head of Recreation and Tourism referred to a submission from the West Somerset Bridleways' Association which was largely supportive of the existing strategy within the National Park, but highlighted the need for additional improvements to the bridleway network. He confirmed that there were anomalies and deficiencies which had been identified through the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) process and a number of actions were proposed to improve the network through creating new links and routes, as indicated in paragraph 2.15 of the report.

RESOLVED: to note the report and how it will affect the work of the National Park Authority and to welcome the Strategy for the Horse Industry, subject to the need to ensure that conflicts between equine and pedestrian access recognised and resolved.

42. **UNDERGROUNDING OF OVERHEAD CABLES**

The Head of Conservation and Land Management's report updated the Authority on the progress in developing proposals for the undergrounding of overhead electricity cables within Exmoor National Park.

Members expressed concern that, while electricity companies in other parts of the country were working with authorities to progress the undergrounding of overhead cables, Western Power Distribution in the South West of England did not see it as a priority, even in the protected landscape areas. It was felt that more pressure needed to be exerted upon them, particularly regarding those sites within the National Park where overhead cables had significant landscape impact.

The National Park Officer/Chief Executive explained that Western Power Distribution was constrained by OFGEN regulations through additional funding not being available and the company not being able to pass the costs on. In addition, there was the factor that with the South West being a less populated area, the company had fewer customers and a smaller network.

There was also discussion about there still being properties within the remoter parts of the National Park which were not connected to mains electricity, and comment that they would need financial support for undergrounding. In response, the National Park Officer/Chief Executive said that he was working with the Sustainable Development Manager to investigate other ways of meeting those electricity needs through renewables.

On the undergrounding of cables within the National Park, it was pointed out by the Chairman that it was not the Authority's responsibility to provide funding with partners to resolve the issue.

RESOLVED: (1) to note the content of the report;

(2) to support the proposal to identify and record visually damaging wires;
and

(3) to support the proposal to further encourage Western Power Distribution to reconsider its position to contribute financially to the undergrounding of power lines in the South West Protected Landscapes.

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43. **MEMBERS' REPORTS**

There were none.

(The meeting closed at 3.51 pm)

Chairman