

ITEM 4.2

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES of a special meeting of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday, 24 October 2006 at 10.30 am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

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

Mr F J Bray
Mrs J Clark
Mr M A Collins
Mr J Dallyn
Miss A Davis
Mr J C Edwards

Mr I Galloway
Mr M J Pile
Mr F Rawle
Mr M Taylor
Mr R J Webber
Mr B O Windsor

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs A M Clitheroe, Mr W J Dyke, Mrs A M Foxhuntley, Mr M Gammon, Mr D E Gladding, Ms D Kershaw, Mrs C M Lawrence, Mrs E I Marsden, Mr R J A Martin, Mr R Morrison-Smith, Dr J F Travis and Mr F G H Tucker.

44. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared.

45. **CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS**

RESOLVED: to pass a resolution pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for Minute 46 below on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business arising and that the following information will be considered which is exempt information as presented in Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended):-

3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

46. **PROPOSED ACQUISITION AT BLACKPITS, SIMONSBATH**

The Authority considered the report of the Head of Conservation and Land Management (that at the time of the meeting was confidential) which asked members to consider the acquisition by the Authority of land and buildings at Blackpits, Simonsbath. It was in an isolated but prominent location, surrounded by open moorland owned by the Authority.

On the day before the Authority's meeting, members had the opportunity to visit the site and see for themselves why the site was considered, given its prominent position and impact, to be an important purchase for the Authority.

The National Park Officer/Chief Executive said that purchase of the property would be beneficial in conserving and enhancing "the distinctive characteristics, qualities and condition of Exmoor's landscapes" and ensure that Exmoor's moorlands "remain open, remote and relatively wild in character"; despite there being a 1950's bungalow in the middle of the site. He added that the benefits of acquisition were:-

- To achieve National Park purposes by:
 - Conserving and enhancing the character of area
 - Reducing impact on the wider landscape
- Ensure future use took place without adverse impact
- Keep the bungalow affordable for local use - e.g. agricultural dwelling / business (acquisition would ensure that it was available for local needs and use, as appropriate)

Members were advised that the vendor was prepared to accept a price within a valuation made by the District Valuer and to secure the property it was necessary for a decision to be made at this meeting. There would need to be additional funding spent on the property to bring it up to a standard suitable for occupation. However, this was likely to make it unaffordable for people in local housing need.

If the Authority agreed to acquire the property, the options were:-

- Restore former landscape character (this option was not included in the report to members)
- Leasehold sale of bungalow and the garden area:
 - new agricultural tie
 - covenant to influence external appearance
 - 'buy back' covenant to the Authority at market value
- Pass the bungalow on to Registered Social Landlord (RSL)
- Refurbish the bungalow and rent
- Demolish the bungalow and rebuild, possibly on another site. Planning policies would permit this and it could ensure the affordable provision equivalent in a less visible location (possibly within the Simonsbath settlement if acceptable arrangements, including financial, could be achieved).

If the bungalow remained on site, there would need to be a new entrance and right of access.

- Options for the retained land:

- lease to bungalow purchaser including possible new outbuildings
- lease to other party
- manage or remove plantation
- allow grassed areas to merge back into the moor
- modify or remove barn; the existing barn was not considered to be very suitable for potential uses and a different location was likely to be more suitable. A new building set back into the site, providing a lower profile and meeting landscape requirements, was likely to be preferable.

It was estimated that a sum of £100,000 would be required to cover the imposition of restrictive covenants and carry out other works on site and the Chief Finance Officer advised that this could be met through the additional National Park Grant awarded for 2006/07 and anticipated underspendings in the current year. However, he indicated that there would be concern if a revenue cost was required, as the Authority was facing a standstill budget over the next few years. Members were informed that external funding for improving the building, e.g. the Heritage Lottery Fund, was unlikely, but there may be opportunities for management of the surrounding land.

The National Park Officer/Chief Executive explained that, while transfer of the property to an RSL was an option, it was not being recommended. The officers' preference was for acquisition followed by selling on. This would provide the Authority with the necessary powers to control the external appearance of the site and buildings to prevent adverse impact, but would not prevent its condition being improved.

It was noted that the size of the site was between 2.5- 3 acres and not 1.5 acres as originally suggested. The National Park Officer/Chief Executive also mentioned that the House Buyers pack had shown there were no major defects in the bungalow.

There were differences of opinion amongst members as to whether the site should be left very much intact as it was (albeit with suitable improvements) or whether it should be cleared completely and allowed to meld back into the moorland landscape. The former view was that the site was part of the landscape of the area and had its own historical importance. It was also suggested that the conifer plantation formed apart of that and should be retained, as it offered protection, particularly against the east wind, and also that the property offered sanctuary in a desolate part of the moor.

The feeling of most members was that, if the Authority agreed to acquire the property, all the potential opportunities for future use needed to be explored by the Asset Management Review Group before it was sold on.

Members were advised that Mr Martin, who was not able to be present at the meeting, had indicated his preference for acquisition.

RESOLVED: (1) to acquire Blackpits in accordance with the valuation of the District Valuer and authorise the Head of Business Management to complete the negotiations and legal processes; and

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(2) to ask the Asset Management Review Group to consider the options for the whole site and make recommendations to the Authority to protect and enhance the character of the site and its landscape setting.

(The decision of the Authority was clearly carried)

(The meeting closed at 11.25 pm)

Chairman