

ITEM 10

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

15 NOVEMBER 2005

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. ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE – 12 SEPTEMBER 2005 – REPORT FROM ALAN COLLINS

1.1 Planning Policy System

1.1.2 A presentation on the new planning policy system was given by John Baker of Baker Associates . Exmoor National Park looked ahead of the game as John Clements has been explaining this to us for several months.

1.2 Public Rights of Way

1.2.1 A presentation about maintenance, development and enforcement was given. There were a lot of statistics. Somerset County Council has received about 140 applications to upgrade RUPPs (Road Used as Public Paths) to BOATS (Byways Open to all Traffic).

1.2.2 Information and maps are soon to be available on the Somerset County Council website.

1.2.3 Volunteer work groups were being set up to keep paths clear.

1.2.4 Rights of Way in Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and West Somerset District Council are managed directly by Somerset County Council. The Mendips, South Somerset District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority retain their agency agreements. They are paid by the metre.

1.3 County Farms

1.3.1 The Chief Land Agent explained the policy review of the retained County Farm estate. The purpose of the retained estates at Donyatt (2271 acres) and Quantock (1065 acres) were considered as was the future of 5 farms which become vacant on 31 March 2006.

1.3.2 The sub-committee expressed the view that the existing sales policy should not be changed.

2. **ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE – 17 OCTOBER 2005 –
TAUNTON - REPORT FROM ALAN COLLINS**

2.1 **Department of Transport Report on Transport Service**

2.1.1 The Government Office for the South West (GOSW) had assessed the performance of the Somerset transport service as 'weak'.

2.1.2 The main findings of the review were considered in order to understand the factors contributing to the Council's deteriorating performance in transport over 2003/4. Ways of improving performance across the whole transport service were discussed.

2.2 **Protocol agreement with the Regional Assembly**

2.2.1 The Regional Assembly (RA) as the Regional Planning Body (RPB) became a statutory consultee on Local Development Documents in the spring of this year and for the development control system on 24 August 2005.

2.2.2 In August 2005 the RA asked all County Councils in the south west whether county officers could assist the RPB from 1 September in carrying out these statutory functions in accordance with provisions within the Regulations and Guidance.

2.2.3 The level of funding offered by the RA is £5K.

2.2.4 If Somerset County Council does not sign the protocol another County Council will make comments on major planning applications and policy matters of strategic importance relating to Somerset. The view was that Somerset County Council should sign.

2.3 **Gypsy and Traveller Services**

2.3.1 New legislation introduced in late 2004 has given an opportunity for closer co-operation between County and District Authorities relating to the provision of accommodation. The view was taken that Somerset County Council should continue to provide existing facilities and offer technical support to the District Council with their efforts to provide accommodation plus assistance in identifying plots of land in County Council ownership that could be used to provide small family sites.

If anyone would like any further information please contact Alan Collins, Member of the Exmoor National Park Authority.

3. **REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT NETWORK (REN) MEETING – 13 OCTOBER
2005 – REPORT FROM ANN CLITHEROE**

3.1 The group is undergoing some evolutionary changes which were discussed at this meeting but the main business was largely a review of Regional Strategy documents. The following paragraphs cover the main points and I will be pleased to discuss them if more detail is required.

1. The Regional Environment Strategy which was launched in July 2004, (see notes 07.07.04 for details), is now due for its annual progress report and was originally on the agenda for this day. Its publication was unfortunately delayed but was available by the next week – in time for consideration by another group which I attend, so in the interests of timely reporting I shall include details here (though I have no copy of my own as yet). A number of improvements and projects in the SW environment benefiting biodiversity,

heritage, landscape and marine habitats were reported which can be said to have been influenced by the strategy, though some others would undoubtedly have occurred in any case. Greater emphasis on the joint working of regional bodies has definitely been noted such as joint funding for key posts, eg. a Co-ordinator for the SW Climate Change Impacts Partnership and to deliver the improved access to open countryside. The Environment Strategy has informed the development of other Regional Strategies considered below. REN remains in a key 'champion' role.

2. The RDA's Regional Economic Strategy for the period to 2012 is now in its consultation phase, with a timetable leading to its deposit with DTI by February 2006 and publication in April, accompanied by an implementation plan. There will be meetings around the region at which this and the SWRA's Spatial Strategy (see below) will be considered together. The three 'drivers' (innovation, skills and environment) are still thought to be key to the economic performance of the region but the way they work is to be much more clearly spelt out. It is proposed to recommend a specific statement of intent :-

"The South West of England will demonstrate that economic growth can be secured within environmental limits to bring prosperity to the Region". The SW is the only region in which it's RDA has declared such an aspiration and it may not survive into the final document but it reflects the strength of influence of those who have worked so long for the due recognition of the importance of the environment in our region for its own sake, not just as a factor to be exploited.

3. Planning Policy throughout the region will be guided by the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy, covering such matters as transport, waste, mineral extraction, economic development, housing, employment, health, climate change, culture and environment. After further consultation around the region, this document will be submitted to government in March 2006, for consideration by a specially appointed panel and will also be accompanied by an implementation plan and sustainability report. There will be yet more rounds of consultation following this, leading to publication in early 2008.
4. Underlying the various strategies developed in the region are the principles encapsulated in the region's Sustainable Development Framework, which is now about three years old and is being re-evaluated by Sustainability South West for the SWRA. This will ensure that it is still 'fit for purpose', addressing changes in policy and aims for the region. It will be made more 'user friendly', contain more indicators and targets and an action plan will be developed to ensure that it remains a widely consulted reference point. It will continue to form the foundation of audits of other strategies.
5. The Environment Agency in the South West is also consulting on the EA document 'Creating a Better Place', which will continue developing its corporate aims and priorities, following on from 'Making it Happen'. It will be more closely tied in to its business plan and reflect regional needs more emphatically. This is the EA region which is usually ahead of others in its thinking and mode of partnership working and in some of its aims will need support from bodies ('stakeholders') across the region to back it up in its need to impress EA HQ with the urgency of some issues which are of importance here i.e. flooding, waste. It is expected to be ready for implementation in Spring 2006.

If anyone would like any further information please contact Ann Clitherow, Member of the Exmoor National Park Authority.