

(7 September 2004)

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday
7 September 2004 at 2 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

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

Mr F J Bray
Mrs J Clark
Mrs A M Clitheroe
Mr M A Collins
Mr J Dallyn
Mr W J Dyke
Mr M H Knight
Mrs A M Foxhuntley

Mrs C M Lawrence
Mr R Morrison-Smith
Mr M J Pile
Mr F Rawle
Mr M E Taylor
Dr J F Travis
Mr B O Windsor
Mr J Yabsley

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Gammon, Mr D E Gladding, Mr A Moore,
Mr R J A Martin, Miss E I Stacey and Mr R J Webber.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared.

31. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Tony Hams, Chairman of the Peak District National Park Authority:** At the recent AGM of the Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA) Mr Hams had been appointed as the new Chairman. It was noted that ANPA still comprised the English and Welsh National Park Authorities, with those from Scotland having associate status. The Scottish National Parks also had their own loose federation.

The English Chairs Committee would appoint a Chairman at the ANPA Conference being held towards the end of September 2004.

- **David Mansell, Secretary of the Exmoor Pony Society:** Mr Mansell was retiring as the Pony Society's Secretary after many years of service and he and his wife were moving to Northumberland. They had done much to support the Exmoor Pony breed and given advice and practical assistance to the Authority in the management of its own herds. Members asked for their thanks to be recorded in the Minutes and for a letter to be sent to Mr and Mrs Mansell to also express thanks and to wish them well for the future.
- **South West Regional Assembly:** During September and October 2004, the Assembly was holding a series of briefing days throughout the region, which non-Assembly members could attend. Of most relevance to Exmoor were those being held in Exeter on 17 September (which Mr Yabsley would be attending) and 21 September in Taunton.
- **William Stansell/SBPT Awards:** The Authority had gained a highly commended award under this awards scheme for the restoration of Simonsbath Sawmill and a formal ceremony would be taking place in Wells on 30 September

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2004. Authority member Mr Martin would be approached to see whether he was willing to represent members and receive the certificate.

32. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Authority's meeting held on 20 July 2004 were signed as correct.

(2) **Matters Arising**

(i) **Minute 19(2)(i) – Advisory and Policy Groups concerned with Farming and Moorland**

The remit and composition of these groups would be circulated to members to see whether there was any desire for adjustments to be made.

(ii) **Minute 23 – Proposed Modifications to the Exmoor National Park Local Plan: First Alteration**

In response to comment, the Chairman suggested that it would be difficult to remove occupiers from affordable housing if at a later date they had improved their financial circumstances to the extent that they were able to afford open market housing.

33. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

34. **MEMBERSHIP**

(1) **Mark Robins, Secretary of State Authority Member**

Mr Robins had tendered his resignation from the Authority to the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality. He had done so with regret after finding himself in a difficult situation as a result of proposed new legislation (a Statutory Instrument under the Planning and Compensation Act 2004) governing the membership of Regional Planning Bodies; i.e. the Regional Assembly in the South West. Whilst there had been different interpretations on the wording of the draft Statutory Instrument, it seemed likely that if Mr Robins was to continue his membership of the Regional Assembly's Social, Economic and Environmental Partners Group representing the RSPB he could not also be a member of the National Park Authority. Given the regional role of the Regional Assembly, Mr Robins had concluded that there was more opportunity for him there to influence regional and national policy.

The Minister had, however, asked to see the draft Statutory Instrument to check the interpretation, and so there was a very slim chance that the resignation might not be accepted. In the meantime, Defra had advertised the vacancy.

Members asked for a letter to be sent from the Chairman to Mr Robins to thank him for his support and valuable contribution to the work of the Authority, if it became clear that that his resignation would be upheld.

(2) **Membership of National Park Authorities**

The Authority considered whether to make comments to Defra's consultation on reducing the number of members on the Authority (copies of a letter setting out the proposals from the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality had been circulated with the agenda – attached to the signed copy of these Minutes).

Whilst there were some comments about the effect of the proposals on the equitable balance of the Authority's membership across the two Counties and the relative proportional increase of Secretary of State members, it was ultimately **RESOLVED** to raise no objections to the current proposals relating to Exmoor.

35. **ANPA CONFERENCE 2004 – 'RISING TO THE CHALLENGE' – 22-24 SEPTEMBER**

Members not attending the Conference who wished to join any of the Exmoor tours on 23 September were asked to contact the Member Services Officer, subsequent to this meeting.

36. **RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The Authority received the Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 20 July 2004.

In respect of Minute 4(2), IEG, the Authority was informed that the National Parks Portal could now be seen on the Internet (although it had not been officially launched yet). It included links to UK, European and international National Parks, general information about the UK National Parks and a good source of map based information, but its overall content was not yet complete. There would be a demonstration for members at a later date. In the meantime, any comments from members viewing it would be welcomed www.nationalparks.gov.uk (with comments to the National Park Officer or the Head of Business Management). The National Park Officer expressed thanks to the Authority's ICT Team for their pioneering work on the project, particularly Mr Babbage, ICT/IEG Systems Developer and Mr Sully, GIS Officer.

The Head of Business Management explained that, linked to the new National Parks Portal, the Authority's own website was being re-designed, with the aim of it being re-launched in February 2005, just before the start of the 2005 Spring/Summer Season.

A meeting of the IEG Working Group was set for 11 am on Monday, 27 September 2004.

37. **EXMOOR CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

The Authority received the Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Consultative Forum held on 16 June 2004.

38. **NATIONAL PARK GRANT**

The National Park Officer gave a presentation and provided feedback to members on the Authority's bid to Defra for additional National Park Grant (NPG) for 2005/06 to 2008/09. There had recently been a meeting with representatives of Defra and the

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Countryside Agency which set out the financial basis upon which the Authority operated and the requirements for additional funding. Financial modelling on how various levels of NPG would affect the Authority had been prepared by the Chief Finance Officer and it was felt the Defra and Countryside Agency officials had gained a greater understanding of the Authority's needs. The ultimate decision on the level of NPG the Authority would receive lay with Defra and the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality.

The National Park Officer explained that this year's settlement had been a challenge for the Authority and future years may be even more so. This year, while NPG had been calculated differently and split in different ways, in cash terms it was a reduction on 2003/04, but the effects had been cushioned by an extra £200,000 allocated by Defra last year, of which £150,000 had been preserved to ease the financial situation. There had also been a reduction of £100,000 for access but the Sustainable Development Fund had been maintained at the same level with favourable indications that it would continue.

The revised formula adopted by Defra provided a core base line for each NPA of £1m, which was a positive development for smaller National Parks like Exmoor. However, Defra's financial model to assess 'core' expenditure was based on 18 factors, with land area, population and visitor numbers being predominant factors, which presented difficulties for the Authority as for Exmoor these aspects scored relatively low. Defra only provided an inflation adjustment for the core expenditure. The funding that the Authority received through NPG and other income all went into an overall budget with 'core' funding including all fixed costs such as staff, accommodation and members costs, and a relatively small discretionary spend remaining for such things as grants and partnerships. Inevitably reductions in NPG had a disproportionate impact on the latter. The discretionary budget had already been reduced this year, despite a transfer of extra money from reserves.

It was indicated to the Defra and Countryside Agency representatives that additional costs were expected in 2005/06 and four alternative funding scenarios for that year were presented to them. Only if the Authority received an increase in funding of 11.2% would it be able to bring its discretionary budget back to the 2003/04 level (£500,000); anything less than this would result in a cut in that budget. It was thought that the % increase in funding was likely to be between 2.5 and 6.3, which on the lower figure would mean a cut of £200,000 in the discretionary budget or on the higher figure a cut of £100,000.

The bid meeting had drawn attention to the success of the discretionary budget and SDF in leveraging external funds for projects in the National Park, thereby creating additional funding value. The Authority's five priority programme areas – Moorlands and Biodiversity; Open Access and Rights of Way; Visitor Experience and Reaching New Audiences; Supporting Local Communities; and Improving Services and Effectiveness – and details of the projects and initiatives the Authority wished to pursue had also been presented.

Following the Defra/Countryside Agency meeting, the Management Team had worked through the priority programme areas for the forthcoming year and linked them to funding scenarios. Potential budgets linked to thematic priorities would be presented to members in advance of next year's settlement.

The National Park Officer and the Chief Finance Officer were thanked for putting the presentation to Defra/Countryside Agency together.

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39. **MEMBERS' REPORTS**

Reports from Mrs Clitheroe on a conference and workshop on the government's consultation on a new sustainable strategy for the UK and the launch of the 'Our Environment: Our Future' Regional Strategy for the South West environment were noted.

Reference was also made to a seminar on 2 September 2004 at the Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Education on Pinkery Pond and the associated canal. There were a number of theories concerning use, for example, they may have supplied water to an incline on a rail road intended to bring lime to Exmoor to "sweeten" the acid soil as part of planned improvement of moorland for agriculture. It was hoped there would be a written report on the day in due course.

(The meeting closed at 3.23 pm)

Chairman

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