

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**16 November 2004****LYNMOUTH PAVILION: PROPOSED TEMPORARY RELOCATION OF NATIONAL PARK CENTRE TO BLACKMOOR GATE****Report of the Head of Education and Interpretation****Purpose of Report:**

To advise Members of the need to find temporary alternative accommodation for the Visitor Centre currently located at Lynmouth Pavilion and to seek Member's views on initial relocation options.

Legal Implications including Human Rights Act 1998:

Section 65 Environment Act

Planning permission is likely to be required for any temporary premises.

Financial Implications:

Revenue costs accounted for in core budget allocation

Additional costs for groundwork/services preparation if the relocation is approved.

National Park Purposes:

Promoting Understanding and Enjoyment

Policies P12/4, P14/1, P14/6, P16/1, P16/2, P16/5, P21/3.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. To NOTE the current condition of the Lynmouth Pavilion and the need to relocate National Park Centre activities to a new location by 19 March 2005.
2. To APPROVE the temporary relocation of the National Park Centre service to Blackmoor Gate for a trial period 2005/06 and 2006/07 including approval to seek planning permission for the temporary relocation; and
3. To SUPPORT the proposal to undertake a park-wide review of National Park Centre provision in 2006/07 incorporating experience gained at Blackmoor Gate.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will be aware that there have been ongoing discussions about the future use of the Pavilion at Lynmouth. The Authority operates one of its five National Park Centres at this location the others being located at Combe Martin, County Gate, Dunster and Dulverton.
- 1.2 A variety of options have been considered for the development of the building over the last fifteen years, none of which have reached fruition.

- 1.3 The building itself is now becoming 'unfit' for purpose and poses significant operational challenges for staff and use by the public. For these reasons, the current building is regarded as unsuitable for operation in 2005 and alternative premises will be required until such time as a suitable new facility is available.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Pavilion is owned by the North Devon District Council. The National Park Authority rents part of the ground floor and operates the space as a National Park Centre.
- 2.2 An 'interim' refurbishment of the Centre was undertaken in 2001 with an aspiration that major developments would be agreed and implemented within three to five years in partnership with the NDDC, Lynton Town Council and the Lyn Community Development Trust.
- 2.3 The building is in a poor condition and continues to deteriorate. The 2003 season was blighted by serious flooding resulting in closure of the Centre for one Bank Holiday and frequent interruptions to service provision during the remainder of that season.
- 2.4 The recent gales and rain have again led to flooding despite remedial works having been carried out.

3. **OPPORTUNITY**

- 3.1 Even if the future use of the Pavilion was agreed today, to secure funding and carry out the subsequent building developments is likely to take between eighteen months and two years. During this period, the National Park Centre and associated services would need to be relocated.
- 3.2 No suitable alternative sites have been identified within Lynmouth to date. Commercial premises have been considered but are far beyond the budget available.
- 3.3 Given the timescale and the ongoing deterioration of the building, it is suggested that the Authority relocates its Centre services to Blackmoor Gate from March 2005 for a trial period of up to two seasons (2005/06 and 2006/07).
- 3.4 This relocation would enable the Authority to assess the potential for a 'gateway' National Park Centre at this location. It has long been identified that this is a critical entrance to the National Park (from the North Devon Link Road, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe) and has the potential for the development of a destination information, interpretation and education facility.
- 3.5 First hand data (eg. of visitor numbers, information requests) that could be accurately and consistently collected during this time would prove invaluable and inform any longer term, strategic thoughts for the site.
- 3.6 There is an option to return to Lynmouth when a suitable facility is available. This is, however, a good time to review the overall strategy of the provision of National Park Centres in the light of the experience gained at Blackmoor Gate to be undertaken in 2006/07
- 3.7 The current National Park Centre network has evolved 'piecemeal'. There is no specific documentation revealing the location of the Centres. A 'retro' fit strategy reveals National Park Centres based in settlements. These serve users once they are here and reflects historic thinking in terms of visitor management.

- 3.8 A more strategic approach to visitor and information management is to advise and inform people before they enter the heart of the National Park. This could form the basis of a network of 'gateway' and/or 'destination' Centres. These would be supported by the network of Local Information Points (at present 11) and the Information Centres at Lynton and Porlock, providing local area information.
- 3.9 From Blackmoor Gate, information on the western side of the National Park would be available to direct and encourage exploration in Lynton and Lynmouth, Combe Martin, Parracombe and Challacombe and the associated areas between these key settlements. This wider 'signposting' role would continue to support the activities and services of the local community and increase the opportunity to promote understanding and enjoyment of the National Park. The site is accessible by a regular bus service.

4. **TIMESCALES**

- 4.1 It is proposed that a robust Portakabin style unit be deployed and kitted out with the majority of the existing displays that are currently in the Centre at Lynmouth. The shelving for saleable items and free literature is free standing; the panels produced for the interim refurbishment were specified to enable re-use.
- 4.2 The proposed programmed move is shown below:

Activity	Complete By
Committee report explaining relocation proposals	16 November 2004
Application for planning permission	December 2004
Investigation of consents, electricity, telephone and other service installations	December 2004 to 28 January 2005
Final 'relocation action plan' produced	31 January 2005
Planning application considered by ENPA Planning Committee	1 February 2005
Implement 'relocation action plan'*	2 February 2005
Delivery of Portakabin*	14 February 2005
Fit out Portakabin*	12 March 2005
Open temporary National Park Centre*	19 March 2005

* Dependent on the outcome of the planning application.

- 4.3 It is desirable to have the temporary facility up and running by 19 March 2005 in readiness for the main season.

5. **STAFF CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 National Park Centre managers and information advisors have been continually involved in this process. As front line teams, their input and experience has helped inform the thinking and decision making process.

6. **PLANNING**

- 6.1 Planning consent will be required.
- 6.2 It is intended to submit a planning application by the end of November/early December 2004 following the decision of this meeting.
- 6.3 Temporary planning permission will be sought for a two year pilot facility.

- 6.4 Initial advice has been sought from planning colleagues and it is intended that any structure will:
- Not be located within the envelope of the car park itself (ie. there will be no impact on capacity)
 - Be located appropriately alongside existing structures (toilet block, shelter) to minimise impacts on the landscape.
- 6.5 A more detailed assessment and consultation will be undertaken to support any planning application.

7. **FUTURE PLANS**

- 7.1 Currently, the Authority has a commitment to maintain a presence at Lynmouth working in partnership to develop a new facility at the Pavilion. Resources have been earmarked for this outcome.
- 7.2 However, given the uncertainty of the future of the site and the ongoing discussions relating to its future, short term alternatives need to be secured.

8. **CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 It is rare for the Authority to have the opportunity to ‘test’ a location for its suitability for visitor and information management. This formative evaluation will enable informed debate to take place in the future.
- 8.2 The current situation with the Lynmouth Pavilion offers the opportunity to trial a new location without committing significant additional resources to assess future potential.
- 8.3 The relocation would also stimulate a wider debate about the strategic provision and network of National Park Centres designed to give the best possible experience and service for the local and visiting population.

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16 November 2004