

## EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

19 NOVEMBER 2002

### 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. **South West Regional Assembly Planning and Transport Advisory Group Meeting - 26<sup>th</sup> September 2002 - Report from Arabella Amory**
  - 1.1 A key issue was the Assembly's response to the Planning Green Paper. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) should provide a strategy for the region which relates to a broad spectrum of public policy and provision, including for example, health, education, culture, not just land use planning and transport.
  - 1.2 The RSS should include sub-regional sections where appropriate
  - 1.3 County and Unitary authorities will have a key role in assisting the Regional Planning Body (RPB) to deliver the sub-regional agenda via 'agency' agreements and will distribute housing allocations to Districts. Work was being undertaken by officers to try to identify a pattern of sub regional work which would best suit the needs of the region. The establishment of agency arrangements between the RPB and the county councils, unitaries and National Parks was also being considered. It is vital that the NPAs are involved in the sub-regional chapter/strategy within the RSS at this early stage in its development.
  - 1.4 The RPB would have a prominent role in advising local authorities on ensuring that their plans conform with RPG (and RSS) and would be expected to comment on regionally significant planning applications. If this advisory group was to gain respect and have influence on decisions made by the full Assembly it was important that all members of the Assembly (not just members on P&T Group) were properly trained to deal with issues of conformity and the exercise of these new responsibilities.
  - 1.5 The Assembly also discussed the future development of air transport in the South West in the light of the Department of Transport paper that was recently published for consultation (deadline end Nov). The responses will be taken into account in publishing an Airports White Paper next year. There was disappointment that the Government has gone back to its old predict and provide formula whereas it should be on plan/monitor/manage principles. It was agreed that the demand for air travel from within the region should, wherever possible, be met within the region, as this would be a more sustainable approach and the question of access to airports by public transport was considered crucial. I requested that a rigorous environmental assessment be carried out before any airport expansion took place especially as there are 3 National Parks that could be affected (Dartmoor and the New Forest are the most likely to be affected by increased traffic and also noise – also bearing in mind that air travel is the greatest of all the pollutants).

## 2. **Europarc Conference – Snowdonia National Park – 2-6 October 2002 – Report from Arabella Amory.**

### 2.1 **Theme and Objectives of Conference**

- To adopt a pan-European declaration on the protected landscapes of Europe in readiness for the World Parks Congress, Durban September 2003
- To highlight the successes and difficulties of promoting sustainable development in protected landscapes
- To reinforce the role that the protected landscapes of Europe have to promote innovation in the sustainable management of important landscape areas and to share good practice, experience etc.
- To illustrate principles of sustainable development through reference to first hand examples from the Snowdonia National Park

Most of this was achieved, although the ‘Snowdonia Declaration’ has not been seen in its final version yet. Both Rhodri Morgan (Wales First Minister) and Sue Essex (Environment Minister) attended the Conference on Thursday evening informally and on Friday Morning for the official opening.

2.2 The tour I went on was ‘Habitats and Farming’ and set out to show management agreements made between the farmers/landowners and NPA to create experimental areas of managed wilderness. This allowed, in some areas, a limited amount of grazing by sheep and cattle and in some areas a complete ban on stock grazing with a view to monitoring what happens to the vegetation and wildlife. All these experiments are carefully monitored and could be used as examples of best practice. We visited a glacial lake in a mountain nature reserve with a large plot which had been cordoned off against stock for 40 years and an area adjacent which had had the same treatment for 15 years. This showed how completely the landscape would change over time with enormous benefit to biodiversity. Obviously this is not always a popular move and agreements have to be signed up with neighbouring farmers in order to achieve the desired result. This particular nature reserve was an important site for education purposes. That day at least 3 school groups were there on site visits.

2.3 We also visited a working farm owned by the National Trust. This farm was being managed to achieve Objective 1 Favourable Condition Status. It had environment, education and access central to its farming strategy. It aims to achieve these main objectives through organic farming, an agri-environmental agreement, woodland expansion and regeneration scheme. In order to restore the land to a higher level of nature conservation the sheep numbers have been cut in half and cattle have been re-introduced to stem the growth in the bracken cover. The conversion to organic blends in well with the environmentally sensitive farming and provides a marketing stance. (For example, the health of the stock raised for market has improved). Rhododendron clearance is underway and local employment has increased with skills needed not just on the farming side but also restoring historic features in the area and providing education and interpretation opportunities. The biodiversity is being continuously monitored by environmentalists e.g. vegetation, birds, invertebrates, mammals etc. This enterprise is an example of a test case/pilot scheme for the future of farming and land management.

2.4 We had a variety of speakers including Rhodri Morgan and Sue Essex, Prof Adrian Phillips and Nicholas Hanley, Head of the Directorate-General for the Environment, European Commission.

The message coming from most of the speakers was:

- Sustainable development is everyone's business – big changes will provide challenges both environmental (e.g. climate change) and demographic (social, political and economic). We need to be ready for the new pressures that are coming.
- Sustainable development strategies – make new partners, even with old enemies – sell ourselves better, making the case for protected areas and the benefits that Protected Landscapes can bring to society at all levels. People need protected areas. (e.g. in USA after September 11<sup>th</sup> more people visited the National Parks)
- A sustainable development agenda means amongst other things: working with local communities, making Protected Landscapes models of sustainable agriculture, of sustainable resource use and of tourism. Also advocating sustainable development in education programmes.
- We should also consider setting up partnership with protected areas in developing countries and participating in the work of EUROPARC and IUCN
- 'The challenge is really about winning hearts and minds – beginning with our own...'  
Adrian Phillips

2.5 During a conversation at dinner Nicholas Hanley expressed surprise that more applications for European Funding from the UK National Parks were not arriving on his desk. He likened it to a man praying for a win on the Lottery and God saying to him 'You'll never win if you don't play the game'. He stressed that the way in which the application was presented made the difference between it actually making it to his desk or being binned in the outer office.

2.6 The Policy Focus Group (The Europarc lobbying group chaired by Martin Doughty and administered by Martin Fitton) has not made much progress since last year. They are still working on a Position Statement on Agenda 2000 and the future development of EU funding policies for rural areas. I hope this will be finalised soon. Meetings with movers and shakers in the Commission seem to be hard to achieve. There is a feeling that Europarc needs an office in Brussels but their financial situation is so bad at present that this idea is on the back burner. Landscape issues get lost in Brussels between DG Agriculture and DG Environment. (When I mentioned this to Nicholas Hanley he predictably stressed that was not the case).

### 3. **SW Regional Assembly Meeting – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2002 – Report from Arabella Amory**

3.1 I attended the Social and Economic Partners (SEP) Group meeting before the full Assembly meeting. Discussion centred on problems with the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). Their apparent lack of accountability to the Regional Assembly and their inability to hand over funds and criteria in a clear concise way. This was also echoed at the Assembly where there was concern over the fact that the RDA are slimming down their advisory groups and not re-appointing a number of the RA members. There was a feeling that the RDA was no longer representative of regional interests and there was a lack of diversity on these groups.

3.2 Affordable Housing is high on everyone's agenda - discussed at SEP meeting and at full Assembly. It was considered that as the Regional Planning Body the RA can require Local Authorities to deliver affordable housing. However, it appears nobody yet has a clear idea how to deliver this and whether this can be done through the planning system. Questions were being asked like: 'How do you decide what is affordable?' and 'How do you ensure properties remain affordable in perpetuity?' There was not time to go into details then and there. I suggested to Chief Executive that the ENPA writes a short paper on what it is we are trying to achieve and how we hope to deliver, to send to all Assembly members. Of course, the situation is slightly different but so long as this is highlighted some of the points could be helpful to people's understanding of a tried and tested system (Peak District).

- 3.3 On 22 October there was a Parliamentary Select Committee on affordable housing in the South East. At the very last moment, and under pressure, the South West were invited to give evidence. The SW appears to have been overlooked in recent Government announcements. There was no mention of SW housing pressures in the Comprehensive Spending Review or Deputy Prime Minister's speech in July and the SW is not part of the £200million Challenge Fund, despite the fact the SW shares many of the same housing issues as the SE. We now await a response from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and a further submission will be made by the SW.
- 3.4 Members was asked to change the RA Constitution to allow the SEPs voting rights on decisions involving planning matters which at present they are not entitled to. According to GOSW and ODPM there is no statutory reason why this could not be put into place and indeed they would welcome the move. There were not enough members in the chamber to make a decision but a vote to test the proposal showed the Conservatives block voting against. A representative from the Association of Local Councils asked for the Constitution to be reviewed again to see why their Association could not vote on constitutional matters and I asked for them to review the same for National Parks. This is all in the light of the Government's Paper 'Your Region – Your Choice' stating that bodies which only involve local authorities will not be recognised for the purposes of the new Regional Spatial Strategies. They have to prove they are an inclusive body.
- 3.5 The progress report on 'A Sustainable Future for the South West – Moving in the Right Direction' showed the Region moving disturbingly in the wrong direction as far as Transport, Biodiversity, Landscape and Tourism were concerned – important issues from the rural point of view.

*If anyone would like further information on the above three reports, please contact Arabella Amory, Member of the Exmoor National Park Authority. In addition, Mark Robins Authority Member, and Martin Evans and Tim Braund, Authority Officers also attended the Europarc Conference (paragraph 2).*