

1 March 2005

ITEM 7

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Resources Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday, 1 March 2005 at 2 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr M A Collins (Chairman)
Mr R Morrison-Smith (Vice-Chairman)

Mr W J Dyke	Mr M J Pile
Mr J C Edwards	Miss E I Stacey
Mrs A M Foxhuntley	Dr J F Travis
Mr M H Knight	Mr R J Webber

Also present: Mrs A Amory (Deputy Chairman of the Authority) and Mr B O Windsor.

An apology for absence was received from Mr M E Taylor.

25. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared at this point in the meeting, but see a declaration from Dr Travis in Minute 28 below.

26. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 16 November 2004 were signed as correct.

(2) There were no matters arising.

27. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

28. **BUDGET FOR 2005/06**

Dr Travis declared a personal interest in respect of Appendix 3, concerning the satellite information provision in Lynton/Lynmouth, which may utilise the Town Hall. The interest was as a member of Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council.

The Committee considered the joint report of the National Park Officer and the Chief Finance Officer which set out the details of the National Park Grant settlement for

1 March 2005

2005/06 and asked members to agree the Authority's budget for 2005/06 within the approved level of expenditure determined by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the funding increase in this year's settlement was attributable to inflation and extra funding for access. Given that there was unlikely to be any change in the formula for determining the level of grant in the near future, additional funding for the Authority should not be expected over the next few years. No increases in the cash level of core grant in future years would mean a funding reduction in real terms and, if this occurred, the Authority would have to find the necessary resources within a standstill budget for the effects of inflation (i.e. increased costs, pay increases etc.)

The National Park Officer said that the crucial element of the funding formula for the Authority was visitor numbers (the other was land area, but Exmoor being a smaller National Park militated against a high score on this aspect). In recent times, Exmoor's score on visitor numbers had also not compared well with other National Parks. Whilst a national telephone survey was to be undertaken this year by the Countryside Agency, it would take account only of staying visitors from England. Many of those visiting Exmoor were day visitors and significant numbers of visitors tended to stay at resorts just outside the National Park.

There was currently no accurate picture of the numbers of people visiting Exmoor. Nevertheless, it was hoped that, in conjunction with the tourism industry, the Authority would be able to obtain improved information. The STEAM economic impact model adopted by other National Park Authorities was proposed to identify visitor numbers which would be used to challenge the national figures. It would also be significantly less costly than the type of extensive visitor survey carried out in 1994 which had involved counting vehicles.

An additional difficulty for the Authority was that Devon and Somerset County Councils collected the visitor numbers in their surveys differently, and this too needed to be addressed.

The National Park Officer also mentioned that annual grant settlements made it difficult for the Authority to plan ahead effectively. Defra had suggested a change to three year funding settlements, but it had not materialised. They were also reluctant to indicate a baseline funding figure below which they would not go.

Other significant issues which would need to be considered in the future were the ending of IEG (Implementing Electronic Government) money in 2006/07 and how the Authority would fund the maintenance of the equipment and the additional member of staff and also the future funding of the planning service once Planning Delivery Grant ceased.

In response to other comments, the officers explained that:-

- Some Authority projects were likely to seek funding through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), but they would be subject to the independent Panel process, in the same way as other applications.

1 March 2005

- Sums identified in Appendix 3 of the report beyond 2005/06 were aspirational and dependent upon sufficient funding being allocated through the National Park Grant settlement. As there was no guarantee as to its availability it would not be included in the Business Plan.
- In Appendix 3 – Looking after Exmoor’s environment (page 1) –
 - no allocation had been made for the Authority’s contribution to projects on Exmoor supported through Somerset County Council’s Landscape Grant Scheme but it was hoped that money from reserves could be used. It was also hoped that the Authority would be able to negotiate a similar arrangement with Devon County Council in the Devon part of the National Park;
 - £10,000 over three years had been offered for the Warren Management Agreement, but it was hoped there could be some saving on that figure. The Agreement had been signed and the tenant had been undertaking some work.

The officers also explained that funding was allocated for Driver Farm in the reserves and that, as agreed at the Committee’s previous meeting, £90,000 was being held in reserves for the Lynmouth Pavilion project. In addition, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Authority could proceed on projects identified as being funded from reserves in 2005/06 and still have an adequate level of funding in reserve.

- no figures had been identified for the Valley of Rocks management plan for the aspirational years beyond 2005/06 as it was not currently clear what actions requiring funding were proposed. Funding allocated to date had been for specifics;
- In Appendix 3 – Looking after Exmoor’s environment (page 2) –
 - the figures of £40,000 (2006/07) and £50,000 (2007/08) referred to for the West Somerset Mineral Railway needed to be adjusted to show that it was £40/50,000 over the two years and not £90,000. A bid was to be made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project in the region of £600/700,000 and it was possible that they could fund 75% of the costs.
 - it was hoped to maintain a focus on the village enhancement programme, but it would depend on funding availability. The future of these schemes would feature in the review of the National Park Management Plan.
- In Appendix 3 – Helping people enjoy and learn about Exmoor –
 - Page 1 – funding for improvements at the Valley of Rocks toilets was ring fenced. However, the toilet review proposed minimal toilet provision at sites for the future, within the funding that was available.
 - Pages 1 & 2 – the funding of the Brendon bus, North Hill bus and Wednesdays are for walking buses in the 2004/05 financial year had been ‘seed money’ to see whether there was a demand for the services, rather than a subsidy. The cost per

1 March 2005

passenger had been high, but the services had been experimental and passenger take up inevitably took time. Using taxis for the services would have been considerably more expensive. With more publicity in 2005/06 better value should be achieved. The bus operators were keen to continue the services and were looking to expand.

- Page 2 – the portacabin for the temporary National Park Centre at Blackmoor Gate was being rented and the installation costs were contained within the 2004/05 budget. The installation had cost £10,000, with a further £2,5000 for the provision of a ramp. The annual rental was on a par with the rental for Lynmouth Pavilion.
- Page 2 – the £500 allocated for information provision at Lynton/Lynmouth, following the National Park Centre's temporary re-location to Blackmoor Gate, would be sufficient for material costs, which was printed 'in house' and would be updated regularly. A venue was still to be agreed, but the preference was for the Lynmouth Memorial Hall downstairs. There was member questioning of the timeframe of beyond two years for resources for the facility, given that an assurance had been given that the Centre would be at Blackmoor Gate for two years.
- Page 2 – the core costs for the Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Education had increased as a result of a slight reduction in forecast income, additional maintenance costs and the impact of the Job Evaluation scheme. Nevertheless, demand for the Centre and a willingness to pay for its usage remained high. It was mostly used at capacity.
- Appendix 3 – Helping support community & economy – some of the projects identified could be supported from reserves (Appendix 6).
- In Appendix 3 – Improving our performance –
 - Page 1 – the National Park Management Plan Review and Performance Assessment were financial commitments for 2005/06, but would not necessarily be ongoing in subsequent years.
 - Page 1 – apart from staff time, no other expenditure was anticipated to implement the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act.
- In Appendix 4 – 2005/6 Draft Work Programme –
 - Members felt that the overall picture would be clearer if the references to funding from reserves etc had been costed. This would be carried out for the Business Plan for 2005/06.
- In Appendix 6 – Statement on Reserves –
 - Members asked that in future years amounts to be transferred to reserves at the year end be included to show the anticipated reserves at 31 March.

1 March 2005

- RESOLVED:** (1) to **recommend** the Authority to approve the core and discretionary budgets for 2005/06 as summarised in Appendix 5 to the report (attached);
- (2) to approve the work programme for 2005/06 as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report which would form the basis of the Business Plan;
- (3) to approve note the position on reserves as detailed in Appendix 6 to the report;
- (4) to approve the following financial strategy for 2005/06:-
- a. The Management Team to continue to review and appraise the filling of all vacancies that occur;
 - b. Underspendings that arise during the year to be carried forward to ease the financial pressure in 2006/07 and beyond;
 - c. All requests for additional funding to be resisted unless they can be covered by genuine savings; and
- (5) to note that a report on Implementing Electronic Government (IEG 4), Planning Delivery Grant and the Sustainable Development Fund will be presented to the Committee's next meeting on 26 April 2005.

29. **NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITIES PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

The report of the Head of Business Management appraised members of the proposal of the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality to introduce Performance Assessment for National Park Authorities.

RESOLVED: (1) to agree the implementation of Performance Assessment as outlined in the letter from the Minister dated 1 February 2005, attached to the signed copy of these Minutes;

(2) to nominate Mrs Amory to participate in the peer review teams.

30. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

RESOLVED: to note the personnel changes within the Authority since the Committee's last meeting, as set out on the agenda.

(The meeting closed at 3.44 pm)

Chairman