

8 January 2002

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday 8 January 2002 at 2.00 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

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

Mr J C Edwards
Mrs A M Foxhuntley
Mr D E Gladding
Mr M H Knight

Mr M J Pile
Mr S J Pugsley
Mr M E Taylor

Observer: Mrs A Amory.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Prowse and Miss E I Stacey.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared.

21. MINUTES

(1) Confirmation

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 November 2001 were signed as correct.

(2) Matters Arising

(i) Minute 16(1) - Membership of the Exmoor Consultative Forum

It was noted that, of those bodies and individuals asked if they wished to continue their membership of the Forum because of recent low attendance, 8 had so far responded, with 2 withdrawing from the Forum. The bodies and individuals concerned had been given a deadline of the beginning of February 2002 in which to respond.

(ii) Minute 19 – Personnel Update

In response to a question, the National Park Officer reported that the Countryside Agency through the Coast Path Grant made a contribution towards the Coastal Ranger post and funded other partnership work on the coast path.

22. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

23. AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2000/01 – ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

Mr Barrie Morris for the Authority's External Auditors, RSM Robson Rhodes gave a presentation on the content of the Annual Audit Letter, including its recommendations, for the year ended on 31 March 2001. The Letter and a covering report from the Chief Finance Officer had been circulated with the agenda.

In Section Five, Performance Management, the auditors had advised that the Best Value Reviews should be more strategic and, stemming from that, the National Park Officer and the Chief Finance Officer informed members that future reviews would be more related to National Park purposes and undertaken over a 3 year period. The two reviews already completed and Promoting Understanding, currently under review, had resulted in a considerable drain on time and resources, and the intention was that future reviews would be more focussed so that better value could be obtained from the process.

RESOLVED: (1) to receive the Annual Audit Letter and to note -

(i) the achievements in 2000/01;

(ii) the responses to the key issues raised; and

(2) to congratulate the Chief Finance Officer and the Finance Team on coping with the Authority's finances over a very difficult year.

24. **BUDGET FOR 2002/03 AND THE ISSUE OF THE LEVY**

The Committee was advised that, although DEFRA had announced there would be a 12.7% increase in funding for National Parks overall in 2002/03, the allocations for individual NPAs were not yet known. It would, therefore, be necessary for the Authority's budget for 2002/03 and the issue of the levy to be taken to the Authority meeting on 5 February 2002 (the deadline for setting the levy was 15 February).

25. **BEST VALUE UPDATE**

The report of the Head of Business Management informed the Committee of a recent government White Paper, which had implications for some aspects of the Authority's Best Value work. In particular, members were concerned about additional burdens being placed upon the Authority through the timetable for preparing the Best Value Performance Plan and the summary being altered. The full Plan would be required to be published by 30 June but the summary by 31 March, and the White Paper talked about the summary being distributed with Council Tax information and it seemed that it was already too late to do this locally. The officers would pursue the potential difficulties posed through appropriate channels.

There was also member concern about proposals to classify authorities as 'high performing', 'striving' or 'coasting'. Authorities could be placed in the 'coasting' category simply because they did not have the resources to provide the same level of service as larger authorities with more resources. The 'coasting' category could pose significant problems for authorities, not least in terms of public perception.

RESOLVED: to note the proposals in the White Paper.

26. **EXMOOR RESOURCE PROJECT UPDATE**

The Committee considered the report of the Team Leader (Education and Interpretation), which updated members on the progress of the Exmoor Resource project now that a draft Business Plan had been produced.

In response to comments made about the funding implications for the Authority and likely external funding, the National Park Officer explained that the initial report was a preliminary look at the proposals and financial considerations. A further report would be brought to the Committee providing more detail once the outcome of external funding bids was known. The Authority would take the lead on the project

and, beyond the three year start up which would require external funding support, there would be an ongoing commitment for the Authority of £10,000 per annum.

It was also explained to members that documents would be temporarily acquired to be digitised for inclusion into the computerised Exmoor Resource, and the originals would then be returned to their owners or keepers.

RESOLVED: to note:

- (1) the content of the report;
- (2) that external funding will be sought during 2002/03 to implement the actions laid out in the Business Plan; and
- (3) that it is likely further funding from the Authority for the Exmoor Resource will be necessary from 2003/04 onwards provided the results of the external funding bids are successful.

27. **VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY**

The Head of Park Management's report updated the Committee on the possibility of the Victoria County History team working on Exmoor.

RESOLVED: to confirm the Authority's continued support in principle for the Victoria County History Project and to note that a bid for a contribution of £7,500 during each of the next two financial years towards the Pilot project will be included in the budget planning process.

28. **QUALITY PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS – A CONSULTATION PAPER**

The report of the Head of Business Management invited the Committee to consider the questions raised in a consultation paper issued by DEFRA on ways of modernising the work of parish and town councils.

RESOLVED: to respond to DEFRA to indicate that the Authority does not wish to comment on the detailed questions, but would wish to be included in any proposed parish and town councils' charters on Exmoor and discussions on their formulation, and also in the discussions on any proposals for delegating functions.

29. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Business Management which updated members on current personnel matters.

The National Park Officer withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the annual uplift in his salary and arrangements for his inclusion in the Staff Review and Development scheme. The Solicitor and Monitoring Officer had not attended the meeting, so there was no need for withdrawal when his contract was considered.

In response to comment about the Head Ranger post, the National Park Officer said that future options and how they would co-ordinate with the rest of the Authority were still being considered, but a final decision would be taken soon.

RESOLVED: (1) to note the update;

(2) to agree that the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer be issued with a permanent contract; and

8 January 2002

(3) to agree that the annual uplift for the National Park Officer be in line with that awarded for all other staff and that the National Park Officer be included in the Staff Review and Development scheme, with his two interviews per year being undertaken by Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Authority and the Chairman of the Resources Committee (NB. It would be possible for other members to comment to these individuals prior to the interviews, should they wish to do so).

30. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF URGENCY**

The National Park Officer was authorised by the Chairman to provide an update on Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) as an item of urgency, in view of the importance of the project. He reported that all of the National Park Authorities had been awarded £400,000 over two years to enable the Government's targets for IEG to be achieved, and the Committee congratulated him on submitting an IEG statement which was successful in attracting this level of funding.

(The meeting closed at 3.46 pm)

Chairman

ENPRESOURCESMINS8January2002.doc