

5 November 2002

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday 5 November 2002 at 2.00 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr M A Collins (Chairman)

Mr J C Edwards
Mr W J Dyke
Mrs A M Foxhantley
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 R Morrison-Smith, Mr M Prowse and Miss E I Stacey.

15. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared.

16. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 July 2002 were signed as correct.

(2) **Matters Arising**

(i) **Minute 9 – Sustainable Development Fund for National Parks**

The National Park Officer explained that the interim Grant Advisory Panel had met on two occasions, providing advice on how the Fund should operate. An explanatory leaflet and application form had been produced and the Fund was being launched formally through the latest edition of Park Life. Applications and expressions of interest were already being made, even before the formal launch. Also, discussions were taking place with local councils and Dartmoor National Park Authority over co-ordination and securing additional funding for the grant scheme. A single Fund covering both Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks was, however, thought to be impractical, given the distance between the two, but both Parks were aiming for a similar approach in the workings of their Funds, for example, through compatible criteria for applications and regular sharing of experience.

It was noted that the appointment of the Sustainable Development Officer had been deferred until the position on future funding was clearer. Assurances had been given that funding would continue in 2003/4, but the situation beyond that was less certain. The National Park Officer said that the Authority was not required to spend all of the funding allocated for this year by the end of March 2003, but

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DEFRA would be looking for a significant amount of it to be committed through grant by that date.

In response to comment, the National Park Officer said that for renewable energy schemes to be successful under the Fund they needed to make a contribution towards National Park purposes.

(ii) **Minute 11 – Simonsbath Sawmill Project**

The Head of Conservation and Land Management reported that building, weirs/leats and engine works at the Sawmill had all been completed. Also, works on the turbine were virtually complete, apart from the installation of the new draft tube, as were those on the line shaft and belts. These works had been completed to timetable and largely in accordance with the original budget, but additional expenditure had been necessary on the roof slates and to update the budget to current prices. A revised bid had been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund to cover these extra costs, and a decision was expected on 5 December 2002.

There were still some more minor works remaining: -

- A decision was awaited from the Field Services Team on a new sawbench, which would then need to be installed/adapted.
- A fish screen needed to be installed.
- In partnership with the Environment Agency, the commissioning/calibrating of flow monitoring devices.
- Racksaw refurbishment.
- Health and safety works.
- Exterior tidying, fencing and tree works.

Discussions were proposed with the highway authority to explore the possibility of car parking spaces being permitted in Lime Combe layby, opposite where a footpath led to the Barle Weir.

It was hoped that a trial abstraction of water would take place during November/December.

The Head of Conservation and Land Management said that the intention was to have an official launch for the working sawmill in June 2003. There was discussion about whether this may need to be changed if a government proposal to put back the local elections to June to coincide with European elections was implemented.

(NB. Subsequent to the meeting, it was learned that the European elections were taking place in 2004 and not 2003).

Mr Edwards mentioned that the North Devon and West Somerset Flood Relief Fund set up following the Lynmouth Flood in 1952 had awarded £1,000 to the Sawmill as it had been damaged by the flood.

It was likely that the joint Dartmoor/Exmoor members' working day on 10 December 2002 would be cancelled, which may mean a review of holding a meeting of the Sawmill Steering Group at the Sawmill

early that morning to tie in with the day. Members of the Steering Group were also due to visit the Sawmill on 17 January 2003 to see it in operation.

17. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

18. **REVISED BUDGET FOR 2002/03**

The Chief Finance Officer's report, and appendices, set out the budgetary review that had been undertaken and the financial strategy to be followed for the remainder of the financial year. An amendment was made to the 'General' line in Appendix 1 to alter the figure under 'Other' from "£-12,200" to "£-1,200".

An explanation was provided for the allocation of £3,000 for fencing materials to renew fences on Authority land (paragraph 2.4 (iii) of the report).

The Chief Finance Officer explained that: -

- Funding allocated for central accommodation was to maximise its use following additional staff appointments and re-organisation. Also, the Authority's licence from Somerset County Council to use premises at Brushford for storage purposes would be ending in 2003 and the store would need to re-locate to the former Bottle Store owned by the Authority in Dulverton Town Centre.
- £5,000 had been allocated for Driver Farm repairs in the current financial year, but there was also a further £10,500 from reserves (Appendix 2). The views of the Land and Property Advisory Panel would be sought on funding priorities at the farm which would need to be included as a future building works project.

The Head of Conservation and Land Management said that further funding of £11,000 allocated from reserves (Appendix 2) for North Hill would enable scrub control to be undertaken.

RESOLVED: (1) to approve the revised budget for 2002/03;

(2) to release £24,800 towards signs etc at Visitor Centres (£1,600), Woodcombe Brake tree works (£3,500), Fencing materials (£3,000), Telephone Link to Town Centre Accommodation (£9,700) and the completion of the migration to Microsoft Office (£7,000); and

(3) to note that the National Park Officer and the Chief Finance Officer will make such adjustments as are necessary to keep within the approved budget with the objective of marshalling resources to assist in the funding of the building works projects.

19. **IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the National Park Officer on progress made in Implementing Electronic Government (IEG), together with the accompanying IEG Statement already submitted to the government to meet an end of October 2002 deadline.

There was discussion about the need for computer links on Exmoor to be speeded up through the provision of BT Broadband, or some other system such as ADSL, to assist local businesses using IT. To obtain BT Broadband a customer base of 200 on each exchange needed to be achieved, which would be difficult in the more remote

areas. It was noted that both Devon and Somerset County Councils were piloting programmes to extend Broadband to rural areas (including Exmoor), and liaising with one another on their projects. The National Park Officer said that representations would continue to be made to government and others for improved computer links on Exmoor.

Reference was also made to the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) being jointly developed by the National Park Authorities to improve relationships with customers across the range of access channels and, in parallel to this, the National Parks Portal project, which were key components of the Authority's IEG Statement.

RESOLVED: (1) to make the following amendments to member involvement in the IEG process – Mrs Amory to be appointed member 'E' Champion (in place of Mr Pugsley) and Mr Dyke to be appointed to the member/officer steering group (in place of Mr Gladding);

(2) to endorse the Implementing Electronic Government Statement 2002 which was submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by 31 October 2002, and note that a member/officer steering group will be held in December 2002, once the result of this submission is known, to review progress and plans for the implementation of electronic government; and

(3) to thank Mr Dunscombe, the Best Value Officer for his work on preparing the IEG Statement.

20. **POLITICALLY RESTRICTED POSTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Business Management which sought members agreement to update the list of politically restricted posts within the Authority.

RESOLVED: (1) to approve the list of posts set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report as the list of politically restricted posts required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; and

(2) to delegate responsibility for signing a "Certificate of Opinion" to the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer as outlined in paragraph 2.3 of the report.

21. **REVIEW OF TOILET PROVISION**

The Head of Business Management's report set out details on toilet provision throughout the National Park and asked the Committee to consider establishing a member/officer working group to undertake a review.

Discussion centred on the toilet facilities at Blackmoor Gate. Vandalism had been an issue and the toilets had been closed for a period this summer, with temporary facilities being provided at the end of the season. There was, however, a demonstrable need for toilets at the site which was a 'gateway' into the National Park and it was intended to upgrade the facility and provide new interpretation about the moor. Architects were currently preparing plans to provide modern functioning toilets in a series of cubicles (which may not utilise the whole building) – disabled/baby changing and unisex in the remainder – and vandalism should be reduced.

In response to comment, members were informed that toilets in settlements were the responsibility of the District Councils. It was also noted that both District Councils

were re-evaluating their level of provision and it was likely to be reduced. The Head of Business Management said that the Authority would not have the capacity to acquire any of these.

RESOLVED: to establish a small member/officer working group to review toilet provision as outlined in paragraph 2.3 of the report, and to appoint Mr Knight and Mr Webber to it.

22. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Business Management which updated members on personnel matters. The departure date of two seasonal car park attendants was amended from "01.06.02" to "08.09.02".

RESOLVED: to note the update.

23. **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES**

In light of the recent DEFRA Review of English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority having not addressed the issue of Members' Allowances and ANPA not coming forward with a National Parks scheme, the Committee was asked to consider an independent panel being appointed to review the Authority's Members' Allowances scheme.

RESOLVED: (1) to authorise the National Park Officer to appoint an independent panel, following local advertisement, to review the existing Members' Allowances scheme within a criteria determined by him, and make recommendations on any changes considered necessary; and

(2) that the Authority be asked to agree any changes to the scheme at its annual meeting on 10 June 2003, with implementation from April 2004.

(The meeting closed at 3.32 pm)

Chairman