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ITEM 5

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Resources Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday, 26 April 2005 at 10.30 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 E Taylor
Mr J C Edwards	Dr J F Travis
Mr M H Knight	Mr R J Webber
Miss E I Stacey	

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

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs A M Foxhuntley and Mr M J Pile.

31. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Dr Travis declared personal and prejudicial interests in respect of the report on Planning Delivery Grant Allocation for Performance in 2004/05 (Minute 34 below) as there was reference to designing and implementing improvements to the Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council owned car park in the Valley of Rocks. He was a member of the Town Council and indicated his intention to withdraw from the meeting if this aspect of the report was discussed.

32. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 1 March 2005 were signed as correct, subject to the following amendments:-

Minute 28 – Budget for 2005/06:-

Page 3, second bullet point: The first line of the second paragraph was amended to read (alteration in italics): “£10,000 over *every year for three years* had been offered for the Warren Management Agreement.....”

Page 4, first right facing arrow (second paragraph): In line three the figure for the ramp for the National Park Centre at Blackmoor Gate was altered from “£2,5000” to “£2,500”.

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Page 5, part (3) of the resolution: the word “approve” was deleted.

(2) **Matters Arising**

• **Minute 28 – Budget for 2005/06**

In respect of the Defra funding settlement on page 2 (paragraph 6) of the Minutes, the National Park Officer explained that, at a recent meeting with Defra officials and other colleagues, it had emerged Defra considered they had given a three year funding commitment to the National Park Authorities (NPAs). They indicated that the total cash figure for each Authority, excluding provision for the Sustainable Development Fund and Access funding, would not drop below its current level over the three year period, which gave the Authority an indicator for planning its budgets over the period (previous interpretation of the Minister for Rural Affairs and Environmental Quality’s settlement letter was that the base level could drop). Confirmation of this position was to be sought from Defra. Nevertheless, there was no guarantee on an inflationary uplift and it remained to be determined how the access funding pot for the Authorities would be split in the future.

There was a question mark over future funding for access and Defra was seeking views from the NPAs on how it should be allocated in future years. The National Park Officer said that the Authority would not benefit if it was added to the overall pot of funding and included in the formula. Efforts would be made to persuade the other NPAs to support an approach through the Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA) to add it to the baseline and maintain its value in real terms.

There was discussion on whether changes to the formula were likely. It was noted that the Council for National Parks was offering its assistance to ANPA to try to get it changed. The Head of Business Management said that there was the possibility the formula may no longer be seen by Defra as being sustainable if it could not be delivered under the 2006 Spending Review. This would then be likely to result in a review of the formula itself, and something else might emerge. The recent meeting with Defra had confirmed that a review of the formula had been included on an options paper.

The National Park Officer said that NPAs most disadvantaged by the formula, the Peak District and Exmoor, would benefit from an additional top up of grant beyond the formula, but this would require more growth in the overall grant. Even if no more money was available, there could still be benefits for the worse off NPAs if the existing money was re-distributed, but just putting more money in with no change in the formula would not provide much additional help for Exmoor. A meeting of the National Park Authority Officers Group on 4 May 2005 would be discussing the problems with the issue of access funding and the formula and making a recommendation to Defra. There was member suggestion that there needed to be a triple approach involving protecting the baseline, seeking changes to the formula and obtaining additional funding for the overall pot.

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- **Minute 29 – National Park Authorities Performance Assessment**

Whilst the Committee had nominated Mrs Amory to participate in the peer review teams, separately Mr Taylor had also been nominated as someone was needed at short notice to participate in the pilot review in the Lake District NPA. It was, therefore, proposed that Mrs Amory should now act as a substitute, being available to call on, if necessary.

33. **IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT (IEG) AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND (SDF)**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Business Management which informed members of the budgetary implications of Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) and the overall position of the Sustainable Development Fund.

There would be a presentation to the Committee's meeting on 19 July 2005 on the National Parks Portal and the Authority's Document Management System (DMS).

In response to comments, the officers said that:-

- The IEG 4 submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) identified all of the targets for IEG funding and how they were to be delivered.
- There would be ongoing revenue costs for the Authority of £30 – 40,000 per year to support DMS, the National Parks Portal and other IEG projects, and also from 31 March 2006 IEG funding for the posts of IEG Programme Manager and ICT/IEG Technician would end. A decision would be needed then on whether the ICT/IEG Technician post could continue to be accommodated or the level of ICT support would have to reduce. The issue of ongoing funding for maintenance and renewals as a result of IEG had been raised with Defra, but so far no commitment had been made. Were there to be no additional funding for this, members would need to decide whether funding should be diverted from other areas to enable the new systems to continue.
- The investment of ODPM in the Authority's ICT processes was enabling increased efficiency in the activities of staff and the services provided.
- The Authority's investment in Broadband was for Authority purposes only, and not the community. It was to be used for external users to access the Authority's network (the Kilo Stream link to Somerset County Council was to be retained for using the County Council's finance system, the email system and network access to the internet), for upgrading the National Parks Portal and the Authority's website. Whilst the Authority was inputting into the discussions on and encouraging the development of Broadband within the wider West Somerset community, it was not directly delivering. The District and County Councils and the Regional Development Agency were working in partnership to provide funding to enable remote locations in West Somerset to link in to Broadband.
- The officers would need to come back to the Committee on how Authority members would access the Authority's network.

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- There was regular contact with applicants who had been successful in securing funding from the Sustainable Development Fund to ensure they were still on track with the delivery of their projects. Where they could not proceed or needed to amend their applications, in the first instance funding was withdrawn and in the second it was revised.

RESOLVED: to note the position regarding IEG and to note that an annual report on the Sustainable Development Fund will be presented to a future meeting of the Authority.

34. **PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT ALLOCATION FOR PERFORMANCE IN 2004/05**

The report of the Head of Planning and Community informed the Committee of the level of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) awarded to the Authority for its planning performance during 2004/05 and sought approval for its distribution to continue to improve the planning service during 2005/06.

John Travis, having declared personal and prejudicial interests in relation to proposals for improving the Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council owned car park in the Valley of Rocks (Minute 31 above), withdrew from the meeting during reference to this aspect of the report.

The Planning and Community Team was congratulated on meeting its delivery targets, thereby securing a third year of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG). Comment was also made about the high quality of development being achieved and the need to regularly review what has been approved, so that lessons could be learned for the future. In addition, it was pointed out that the completion of the new Design Guide would add to the encouragement of good quality design. The launch of preparation on the Design Guide was to take place through a seminar being held at Dunster Castle on Friday, 29 April 2005.

The Head of Planning and Community said that, if the further award of PDG for 'plan making' progress referred to in the report was not received, it may still be possible to find some funding for the improvement/enhancement schemes at Winsford and the Valley of Rocks car park.

RESOLVED: to agree the proposed allocation of the Planning Delivery Grant award as set out in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 of the report.

35. **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2005/06**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Business Management on the Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06, which the Authority was required to publish by 30 June 2005.

RESOLVED: to note the arrangements outlined in the report and to authorise the National Park Officer to prepare and publish the Best Value Performance plan 2005/06 by 30 June 2005 as well as an appropriate summary of it in the Spring edition of Park Life.

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36. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

The report of the Head of Business Management updated the Committee on personnel changes, email policy and Local Government pensions.

An amendment was made on the last page of the email policy (paragraph 6.4) to substitute “*which*” for “*whom*” in the first line.

Under personnel changes, it was noted that Mrs Jo Cox had been offered the post of Rural Housing Enabler to succeed Mrs Trudy Robinson. She had already been undertaking the role of Rural Housing Enabler elsewhere in Somerset and so had the necessary experience. The project had funding for one further year, but it was hoped it may be extended for another year after that, depending on funding availability. As previously, it was a joint post with North Devon and West Somerset District Councils, local housing associations and the Countryside Agency, and it would be based with the National Park Authority at Exmoor House.

In response to comment from members (including the Authority’s representative on the Steering Group, Mr Webber), the Head of Planning and Community said that the Steering Group could examine the role of the Enabler, communication between the authorities and of the Enabler’s role, and review the surveys undertaken and progress made on the delivery of local needs housing. He added that funding through additional Council Tax levies being raised on second homes may be able to assist delivery. The National Park Officer also mentioned that there was onus on the two District Councils, as housing authorities, to come forward with housing schemes.

Regarding changes to the Local Government Pensions Scheme, the Head of Business Management said that the Authority’s budget for 2005/06 took account of the increase in the employers contribution. However, the additional costs involved for this and future years had been raised with Defra and the Local Government Association would also be making a case for assistance on the extra costs for employers to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Government proposals for altering the retirement age and changing the basis on which the levels of pensions were set were currently in a state of flux and there was also a review taking place into the long term stability and viability of the Pension Fund. One option to make any new scheme more affordable was to increase employees contributions. At present, there was no intention to remove the final salary scheme and replace it with a career average.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) to note the changes to personnel;
 - (2) to approve the email policy; and
 - (3) to note the position regarding changes to the Local Government Pensions Scheme.

(The meeting closed at 11.46 pm)

Chairman