

20 July 2004

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday 20 July 2004 at 2.30 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 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

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

4. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Committee's meetings held on 27 April and 8 June 2004 were signed as correct.

(2) **Matter Arising**

**Minute 31 (27/4/04) – 2004/05 Financial Matters – IEG**

The National Park Officer reported that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had allocated a further £400,000 to the Authority over the next two years to enable the completion of the programme of IEG implementation by December 2005. A number of mandatory 'priority outcomes' had to be met to ensure that the funding was received.

The National Park Officer said that the Authority was ensuring the services and systems it provided were available electronically, particularly on the internet and the forthcoming National Parks Portal. IEG also covered the Authority's response over the telephone and how it dealt with inquiries. A Customer Relations Management system, and associated Document Management System, would be important developments in this respect.

In response to comment, the National Park Officer acknowledged the need for compatible links with other authorities, particularly West Somerset and North Devon District Councils, and for all members to be accessible via email.

There would be a meeting of the IEG Working Group soon, with members also being involved in various elements of the IEG process.

5. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

6. **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME**

The sums of allowances paid to members during 2003/04 were considered.

In response to comment, it was suggested that comparing the costs of Secretary of State members against local authority members would have no real meaning, as some local authority members also travelled long distances. It would, however, be possible to provide explanatory notes in future to indicate why some total allowances paid were higher because of distance travelled and the number of meetings attended, and that the latter reflected the responsibilities of those members.

**RESOLVED:** to note the sums paid to members during 2003/04 and to include explanatory notes in the future, as described above.

7. **THE BUDGET OUTTURN AND POSITION ON RESERVES AS AT 31 MARCH 2004**

The Chief Finance Officer's report set out the outturn for 2003/04 and the position on reserves at 31 March 2004.

It was noted that members attending the recent Open Day at Exmoor House had been impressed by the use of technology in the delivery of services. The Chairman suggested that it would be useful for all members to be shown these facilities at some time in the future.

**RESOLVED:** (1) to note the financial performance for 2003/04 and approve the adequacy of reserves at 31 March 2004; and

(2) to agree that the transfer of £38,000 to support the 2004/05 budget be reviewed in November 2004.

8. **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2003/04**

The Chief Finance Officer's report presented the Statement of Accounts for 2003/04 which the Committee was asked to adopt. It was noted that the levy figures for West Somerset District Council and Devon County Council for 2002/03 on page 17 of the Statement should be the other way round.

**RESOLVED:** to adopt the Statement of Accounts for 2003/04.

9. **AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer on Internal Audit activity and the External Audit for 2004/05.

**RESOLVED:** to note:-

(1) the Internal Audit activity carried out in 2003/04 and the proposed programme for 2004/05; and

(2) the arrangements for the 2004/05 External Audit.

10. **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The report of the Chief Finance Officer detailed the Treasury Management Performance in 2003/04.

**RESOLVED:** to note the Treasury Management outturn for 2003/04.

11. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

The Head of Business Management's report updated members on personnel matters.

An update on the structure of the Field Services Team was requested for the Committee's next meeting.

**RESOLVED:** (1) to note the changes to personnel that have occurred; and

(2) to accept the Funding Strategy Statement proposed for the Somerset County Council Pension Fund.

12. **OTHER BUSINESS OF URGENCY**

The Chairman authorised the following two items being raised; the need for urgency being self-explanatory.

(1) The Chief Finance Officer and his finance team were thanked for their careful management of the Authority's funds in 2003/04.

(2) The National Park Officer undertook to update a future meeting of either the Authority or the Committee on the Authority's bid for funding from Defra.

13. **CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS**

**RESOLVED:** to pass a resolution pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business arising and that the following information will be considered which is exempt information as presented in Schedule 12A of the Act: -

7 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the authority)

14. **ANNUAL ESTATE REVIEW**

The confidential report of the Head of Conservation and Land Management introduced the Annual Estate Review 2004, attached to the report, which provided an overview of land owned by the Authority and its management.

There was comment about whether the Authority needed to own all of its current estate when other agri-environment schemes came into play following the ending of the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme. In response, the Head of Conservation and Land Management said that the Authority owned 6/7% of the land area within the National Park; most of which had been acquired either in 1970s as the

20 July 2004

only mechanism available to stop land improvement for agricultural purposes or to extend access. As things stood, ESA funding was payable for Authority owned farm land and this was reflected in the rental paid by the tenants, but there were areas of open land for which no payments were available (in particular, where there had been difficulties in attracting graziers) and the Authority's woodland had little financial return. The need for the Authority to review regularly the desirability of retaining areas of its estate was recognised by officers. Controls and incentives through agri-environment schemes, SSSIs and new powers under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act in respect of open access to some extent lessened the need for ownership. Nevertheless, much of the Authority's land would attract little sale value. The farmed estate was generally in difficult farming locations and there were various constraints on the sale of the more major land areas which either prevented sale or meant a very low sale value.

In response to a question about the valuation of Authority properties, the Chief Finance Officer said that the estate was revalued every five years. The latest details would be available on 31 March 2005. It was also pointed out that, as yet, there was no external pressure on the Authority to divest any of its estate.

Regarding Simonsbath Sawmill, the officers said that it would not be possible to admit the public without prior appointment until works to separate the operational areas were complete so that there was no risk of the public being exposed to hazards. There was also a manpower issue to be resolved. The National Park Officer suggested that a future review of visitor services would need to include an allocation of staff time to show people round. In the meantime, more publicity was suggested for when the Sawmill was open and when guided walks went there.

There was also a question about public access to the West Somerset Mineral Railway Incline. The Head of Conservation and Land Management said that the Exmoor Society was taking the lead on a project to conserve and enhance the former railway and had obtained Heritage Lottery Fund money to produce a management plan, with the potential for substantial grant. A consultant's report for maximising the Incline's conservation, tourism and interpretation potential would be available soon.

The Head of Conservation and Land Management said that there had been a good response to consultation on the North Hill Management Plan and a walk or members' tour to look at the issues was proposed.

Regarding woodlands, grazing was proposed on the former Hadborough Plantation and, in the longer term, it was intended to remove the internal fence so that it could be grazed with the rest of Haddon Hill. Hawkcombe Woods were to be declared as a National Nature reserve in October/November 2004.

**RESOLVED:** (1) to receive the confidential Annual Estate Review 2004 and to note its contents; and

(2) to thank the Land Agent for her excellent work on the Annual Review.

(The meeting closed at 4.10 pm)

Chairman