

27 April 2004

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday 27 April 2004 at 10.30 am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

**PRESENT**

Mr M A Collins (Chairman)

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

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

An apology for absence was received from Mr R Morrison-Smith (Vice-Chairman)

**28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared when this item was taken, but Miss Stacey was unable to be present at the beginning of the meeting and so declared an interest later in the proceedings – see Minute 33 below.

**29. MINUTES**

**(1) Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 2 March 2003 were signed as correct, subject to the following amendments to Minute 26, Detailed Budget 2004/05: -

- Page 2, Brendon Valley Bus – the second sentence was changed to read: "In response, the National Park Officer explained that the Authority could provide bus services to assist the understanding and enjoyment of the National Park for both visitors and local people."
- Page 3, in the second part of the resolution the figure for the position on reserves altered to read "£188,000".

(2) There were no matters arising.

**30. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

**31. 2004/05 FINANCIAL MATTERS**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer on the action taken under delegation regarding the discretionary budget for 2004/05, progress on Implementing Electronic Government (IEG), the National Park Grant Bidding Process and the Planning Delivery Grant for 2004/05.

- **Budget 2004/05**

In response to member comment regarding elements from the Discretionary Budget used to fund the Brendon Valley Bus and European Funding Advisory Posts/Objective 2 technical support, the officers explained that: -

- The £1,500 reduction for toilets, car parks and other improvements was for extra improvement work and the reduction would have only a marginal effect. There was still approximately £15,000 in the Discretionary Budget for those works. The Authority was also negotiating with the National Trust to take on responsibility for toilets at Allerford, Horner, Bossington and Hunter's Inn. In addition, there was the need for a meeting of the Toilets Working Group in the near future to produce an action plan for the Committee covering toilet facilities for which the Authority was currently responsible.
- The reduction of £4,000 from extending Visitor Centre hours would have a minimal effect. There had already been a recent expansion of hours for Lynmouth and Dunster; they had been open at weekends until Christmas and from the February half-term onwards.
- The £1,000 reduction from the Moorland Initiative was from the Conference and its report/action plan, which the Head of Conservation and Land Management was confident would be found through sponsorship.

- **IEG**

It was noted that the key elements requiring funding in paragraph 3.1 of the report did not include member commitments, which would be added once the funding allocation for the Authority for 2004/05, and hopefully 2005/06, was known (£400,000 over the next two years was expected). At that stage, a meeting of the IEG Steering Group would be convened to examine what the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) was expecting National Park Authorities (NPAs) to deliver. The NPAs had put forward two new areas – 'Modernising Rural Delivery' and 'Sustainable Rural Tourism'. It was considered that the NPAs were well placed to take the lead on these issues.

Reference was made to the need to increase member communication electronically. There were significant advantages in communicating through email and other electronic mechanisms, not least through the reduction of paper and postage. The Authority would need to address ICT provision for Secretary of State and Parish members of the Authority, given that all County and District Council members would be equipped by their appointing authorities. There would need to be compatibility between the systems used by the Councils and the Authority and a training programme for members. Broadband would also need to be a part of the process. Members expressed concern about the efficiency of printing large agendas and papers locally and it was felt that central printing and posting would be the most efficient and cost effective approach.

In response to comment about the possibility of a single GIS mapping system being available for all NPAs, the National Park Officer explained that the Authority was working with the NPAs Web Portal Group to develop a portal for all NPA websites, which would include compatible map based information.

- **National Park Grant Bidding Process**

An appendix to the report set out DEFRA and Countryside Agency National Parks Bidding Guidelines for 2005/06, identifying a range of aims and objectives

for NPAs. Cultural Heritage was a significant omission from the guidelines, which the National Park Officer thought was due to DEFRA having no responsibility for it.

There was member comment about: -

- The need for three year funding programmes from DEFRA. The National Park Officer acknowledged that in theory it should provide more certainty in making spending commitments and securing delivery, but it could also result in a more pessimistic approach by DEFRA overall, leading to lower settlements for three year planning
- The need for a longer time frame for Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to tie in with the Management Plan and the local planning/Local Development Frameworks. The National Park Officer reported that the minimum cost for the Audit Commission to undertake CPA for each NPA would be £30,000 and neither ODPM nor DEFRA were willing to fund it. Therefore, a reduced more practical approach was being explored, involving the current process for self assessment by the NPAs and the Audit Commission supporting a peer review costing £5k to £7k for each Authority. Whatever the outcome, DEFRA would want to proceed with a review of some type later in the year. The Committee would be informed of the implications as matters progressed.
- The difficulties of securing funding from the RDA and sub-regional partners and also the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Whilst the Authority had benefited from the latter in the past, its priority was now directed towards disadvantaged people, including inner city areas.

- **Planning Delivery Grant**

In response to member comment, the officers explained that the review of the Design Guide Review was a priority and examination was being made into the way it was to be tackled, cost and timescale. Members emphasised the need to get a revised Design Guide produced and published as quickly as possible, which would also assist the Authority's relationships with the community.

**RESOLVED:** (1) to note how the additional requirement approved by the Committee will be covered within the Discretionary Budget, as set out in paragraph 1.2 of the report;

(2) to note the position on IEG funding;

(3) to note the revised National Park Bidding Process for 2005/06; and

(4) to approve the proposed allocation of the Planning Delivery grant for 2004/05.

32. **EXMOOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND**

The report of the Head of Planning and Community informed the Committee of the progress of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the proposed future management and delivery of the Fund on Exmoor.

At the recent Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA) Workshop in Buxton, the Minister for Rural Affairs had explained his desire to see the focus of SDFs leaning more towards supporting projects for younger people, particularly to provide

contact between National Parks and communities in inner cities. The Sustainable Development Officer said that Exmoor's SDF had supported a wide variety of projects across the area involving young people, with 1700 youngsters being directly supported. However, he also acknowledged the need for the Authority to be more proactive along the lines proposed by the Minister.

In response to member comment, it was explained that: -

- In the future, where the Authority was involved in projects, other partners would take the lead.
- An effective monitoring and assessment process was in place through the Sustainable Development Officer and grant conditions to ensure that project delivery requirements were met.

**RESOLVED:** (1) to note the projects offered grant aid (Appendix 1 to the report) and the impacts of those projects; and

(2) to note the work of the Independent Grant Advisory Panel and its new quarterly meeting cycle.

### 33. **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2004/05**

The Committee considered a draft of the Best Value Performance Plan for 2004/05, (which the Authority was required to publish by 30 June 2004), together with a covering report from the Head of Business Management.

Miss Stacey declared a personal interest, as Director of South West Lakes Trust, in respect of Objective 16/1, regarding the Authority working with South West Lakes Trust, Calvert Trust and Forest Enterprise at Wistlandpound to develop an 'all ability' facility. She did not consider the matter to be prejudicial and so did not withdraw from the meeting, but indicated that, were there to be any discussion on the matter, she would not participate.

In response to members' comments, the following points were made: -

- **Conservation of Natural Environment**
  - 6.1 ha of Hadborough Plantation (page 4) had been cleared in 2003/04 and a further 2 were planned (the land was to be reverted to moorland). Gorse growth was to be cut back. There would be an inspection of the site soon with representatives of English Nature.
  - A new National Parks 'state aids' scheme (page 4) had been approved by the European Union. This scheme provided the legal basis for advice and support to be given to agricultural enterprises and the Authority's existing payment schemes would be tailored to it.
  - Efforts were being made to progress implementation of the Porlock Bay and Marsh Management Plan (page 4).
  - A draft Management Plan for Driver Farm (page 4) would be taken to the Food, Farming and Land Management Panel in June 2004.
  - 75% of all known sites with Knotweed would be treated over the next year (page 5); the remaining 25% would be treated by other bodies, e.g. the Environment Agency. Repeated application was necessary to destroy it and the Authority held a database on sites etc.

- The Authority was keen to do more to tackle the Rhododendron problem (page 5), but it would require additional resources from elsewhere.
  - The restocking of 2 ha of woodland at Simonsbath (page 5) was Balewater Woods, where Oak, Ash and Hazel were to be planted through the Woodland Grant Scheme.
  - Larcombe Wood (page 5) was not an Authority project, and so the reference required re-wording. The £1,638 generated for the Authority was to cover costs and was not profit.
  - The achievements on renewable energy would be included in the final version of the BVPP and linked to the work of the Sustainable Development fund in this area (page 6)
  - Two County hedge groups ran competitions to encourage improved hedge management and restoration (page 7)
  - Various partners would be asked to help fund the economic study into game shooting, including a contribution from the industry (page 7)
  - The Authority was contributing £2,000 to the 4 Landscape Grant Scheme projects (page 7)
  - The Exmoor woodland certification scheme (Exmoor WoodCert) (page 8) was aiming to bring together woodlands where the wood was from sustainable sources, where local wood products could be purchased etc. It included the Authority's woodlands and many privately run.
- **Conservation of Cultural Heritage**
    - A number of new measures were being targeted in the Plan.
    - Surveys were being undertaken to identify buildings and ancient monuments 'at risk' (page 14). The former could result in more buildings being listed and both surveys would enable the Authority to focus its activity where it was needed. There was, however, a concern that English Heritage was putting reduced resources into the scheduling of ancient monuments and the listing of buildings processes. A significant number of ancient monuments on Exmoor were not scheduled and the Authority may need to consider introducing its own scheduling scheme, where the main cost would be staff time.
    - There was more work to do on identifying meaningful monitoring indicators for the Authority's performance in this area and which went beyond the one year.
  - **Recreation Management**
    - Regarding the removal of litter bins (page 15), there was a need to encourage the public to remove dog mess, which was a particular problem at some sites.
    - It was hoped that a pilot scheme to let vending concessions at two car parks would proceed this year (page 15). The vendors would be responsible for litter removal.
    - Regarding the quality of public footpaths and the increased equestrian use of bridleways, the Ranger Service undertook surveys of the conditions of rights

of way across the National Park and problems identified were added to the work programme.

- Where there were problems of identified unauthorised vehicular activity, the Ranger Service worked with landowners to resolve them.
- The QUEST (Quality Underpins Exmoor's Sustainable Tourism) project management group was keen to appoint a successor project manager.

- **Promoting Understanding**

- As part of the Authority's 50th anniversary celebrations, a mass picnic was being considered for Dunkery on Saturday, 3 July 2004, which would also tie in with marking National Parks Week from 1 to 9 July 2004. Discussions on the idea were proposed with the National Trust and English Nature. Details would be sent out to members when firm plans had been made.

- **Development Control**

- The number of enforcement matters reported in 2002/03 was three times that expected – Anticipated 100, Achieved 309 (page 28) – this had resulted from increased issues coming to light as a result of a more proactive approach by staff. The officers were working on the provision of figures for unauthorised developments enforced.

- **Forward Planning**

- Local people were being engaged in the local housing needs process through the Rural Housing Enabler post and the new Local Development Framework would permit their involvement at the more strategic level. Additional funding for the Rural Housing Enabler post would be needed from the main parties following the likely withdrawal of funding from the Countryside Agency in years four and five.

Mr Knight referred to the opportunity available for using funding from the additional Council Tax being levied on second homes by the District Councils for local housing needs. He said that there was a need for the Authority to act quickly as the money was unlikely to be available for such purposes beyond a couple of years. Officers confirmed that these sources were being sought and that confirmation of funding from the Exmoor Coast and Countryside Partnership was confirmed to help in years four and five of the Rural Housing Enabler project.

**RESOLVED:** (1) to agree the draft Best Value Performance Plan on which the final Performance plan and business Plan will be based, subject to the following changes: -

- the wording on page 5 of the Plan being adjusted to show that Larcombe Wood is not a project;
- the addition of targets and achievements for Dunster under Conservation of Cultural Heritage, Recreation Management (additional to traffic management and parking already included) and Forward Planning;
- under Promoting Understanding on page 20, paragraph 4.3 re. updating interpretation at Blackmoor Gate, refer to 'Parish and Town Councils' rather than identifying only two of them;

- under Corporate and Democratic Core, add details of Member Training;

(2) to agree the issue of a Public Summary by the National Park Officer; and

(3) to thank the Best Value Officer on his preparation of the Best Value Performance Plan.

#### 34. **AGRICULTURAL ESTATE RENTS AND RE-LETTING PROCEDURE**

The Head of Conservation and Land Management's report set out proposed guidance on the negotiation of rents on land owned by the Authority and a related amendment to Standing Orders.

The Committee accepted that it would be inappropriate for members to be involved in the details of rent levels and acknowledged that, while the starting point for rentals was a commercial one, the intention would not be to jeopardise businesses.

It was noted that, in future, the Annual Estate Report would be wider in scope and focus, particularly addressing the achievement of National Park purposes. Each property was to be identified and there would be an opportunity for members to visit in the context of the annual review.

**RESOLVED:** (1) to approve the policy statement on the setting of rents on land owned by the Authority as set out in section 3 of the report;

(2) to **recommend** to the Authority that the Scheme of Delegation be amended so that the National Park Officer's delegated authority limit for the annual rental of property be increased from £5,000 to £20,000; and

(3) to note that information on rents and recent rent changes will be included in the Annual Estate Report to the Resources Committee (scheduled for July in 2004).

#### 35. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

The report of the Head of Business Management updated the Committee on personnel changes and the Local Government Pension Scheme.

It was noted that options were being explored for cover during the period when the Principal Planning Officer – Policy and Community was absent on maternity leave.

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

(2) to agree that the Somerset County Council Solicitor should continue to act as the "Specified Person" for the pension scheme and that existing employees be given the option under the scheme to aggregate previous service at 'such longer period as the employer allows'.

(The meeting closed at 12.55 pm)

Chairman