

March 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 March 2002 at 2.00 pm in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr M A Collins (Chairman)

Mrs A M Foxhantley
Mr D E Gladding
Mr M H Knight
Mr M J Pile

Miss E I Stacey
Mr M E Taylor
Mr R J Webber
(deputising for Mr S J Pugsley)

By Invitation (primarily for Minute 34, Simonsbath Sawmill): Mr F J Bray, Mrs A Amory and Mr F Rawle.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J C Edwards, Mr R Morrison-Smith, Mr M Prowse and Mr S J Pugsley.

31. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared.

32. **MINUTES**

(1) **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 January 2002 were signed as correct.

(2) **Matter Arising**

Minute 21(2) - Membership of the Exmoor Consultative Forum

It was noted that only a limited number of bodies and individuals had withdrawn from membership of the Consultative Forum. The full details would be set out in a report for the Committee's next meeting.

33. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

34. **SIMONSBATH SAWMILL PROJECT**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Park Management on recent progress with the Project, and members were invited to agree to proceed with the restoration work and to adopt a revised budget.

There was lengthy discussion about whether the budgeted costs for the restoration work would be sufficient. The officers advised that the figures presented to members could not be absolute, since there were still some imponderables, particularly in relation to the condition of the roof. The total budget for the project had risen by £19590 from the agreed figure of £478259 to £497849. However, there was the facility for an application to the Heritage Lottery for additional funding and other funding possibilities (described in the report). The Head of Park Management advised that it was possible there may need to be some cutting back on spending; for

example, the open space in the south wing, may receive only minimum repairs in the interim, sufficient to make it waterproof etc. A number of options were being considered for this space, for example, a community use, for the provision of interpretation facilities or as an operational base for the Rangers. Any letting arrangements, however, would need to take account of the grant conditions, so as not jeopardise any grant.

The Head of Park Management also advised that there may be a need to re-evaluate how the Sawmill would relate to other businesses within the local Simonsbath community, in view of a number of property changes in the village.

In response to comment about using the opportunity to create something significant for the moor, the Head of Park Management explained that an Objective 2 bid for renewable energy was a possibility, linking to a possible wood fuel project and the wind turbine etc at Pinkery.

It was noted that the Environment Agency had been fully involved in the fish pass proposals from the outset, to avoid any difficulties of the fish pass not working effectively in the future.

The Historic Buildings Officer reported that the old turbine had been removed and been found to be in good condition, which was likely to mean that it could be re-used subject to slight modification.

The Head of Park Management confirmed that the project was currently on target to meet its completion date of October this year, with water operation commencing in January 2003. In fact, contractors for the building works had gone on site three months early.

Members were advised that 4 days had been set aside for visits while the contractual work was being undertaken. It was proposed that the Members Steering Group should visit the site on two of these days during the spring/summer and the full Authority membership on another day. There would also be the opportunity for individual members to visit, subject to prior arrangement.

RESOLVED: (1) to note progress with the Project and, in particular, that consent had been granted by the Environment Agency for the River Barle fish pass;

(2) to agree the revised budget as outlined in the report;

(3) to authorise the National Park Officer to sign contracts in respect of the building renovation work and machinery and equipment restoration; and

(4) to authorise the National Park Officer to submit applications to appropriate bodies for financial support for the Project.

35. **DETAILED BUDGET FOR 2002/3**

The Committee considered the joint report of the National Park Officer and Chief Finance Officer on proposals for the detailed budget for 2002/3, within the overall budget already approved by the Authority on 5 February 2002.

In response to comments on the details, the officers made the following points: -

- A figure of £19,000 for membership of the Association of National Park Authorities (a £3,000 increase) was necessary as a result of the organisation's re-

March 2002

structuring to provide a higher profile and to be more effective. There would be a service review later this year to ensure its aims were being met.

- This Authority and other NPAs had made submissions to the National Parks Review on the need for a more realistic level of members allowances.

(NB. At 2.40 pm the meeting adjourned for 5 minutes, as the result of a fire drill)

- Funding had been allocated across the budget to meet the conservation objectives of the Management Plan, but it was not possible in some services areas to show this element, for example, IT. Nevertheless, there would be more detailed information on this aspect in the Business Plan (Best Value Performance Plan).

The National Park Officer confirmed that, although the Authority had received an increase in its budget for 2002/03, there were aspirations which could not be financially supported. However, officers were looking at other ways of achieving some aims, in partnership with other bodies. A recent example of the type of partnership arrangement proposed was the securing of commitments for heathland restoration and broadleaved tree planting at Wootton Ridge, which had been achieved without Authority funding.

It was still intended to create a Project Development Manager post, which may be in partnership with other local authorities to make funding bids to benefit the area as a whole. There had been difficulties for the Authority in securing funds from Objective 2 as funding had to be linked to economic objectives. However, the external funding officers based at West Somerset District Council (who are partly funded by the Authority) were putting together an integrated action plan, which it was hoped would be received more favourably by GOSW and result in "ring fencing" of some Objective 2 funds for the North Devon and Exmoor sub-region.

- A paper would be prepared to document the major areas of moorland on Exmoor, responsibilities, issues etc, in consultation with the Moorland Panel, which would enable progress to be made on the management of those areas.
- A long term improvement plan was proposed for Driver Farm. A report on detailed proposals would be taken to a future meeting of the Authority, and it was also proposed to arrange a site visit for members.
- Repairs had been completed on the winding house beside the Mineral Line Incline, and drainage works were being undertaken on the Incline itself. A full update would be taken to the Authority's meeting on 23 April 2002.
- £35,000 would be available for toilet refurbishment to a high standard, which was now considered to be a more practical option than re-build. The Authority would also be working with the two District Councils on the level of toilet provision required.

RESOLVED: (1) to **request** the Authority to **APPROVE** the core and discretionary detailed budgets proposed for 2002/03 within the agreed net budget of £2,934,765 as set out in the Appendix to these Minutes;

(2) to note the position on reserves and the review that the Chief Finance Officer will carry out as part of the closure of the 2001/02 Accounts;

(3) to agree the allocation of the Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Budget for 2002/03; and

(4) to note the Sustainable Development Fund that that it is hoped will be made available by DEFRA.

36. **BEST VALUE REVIEW: PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING**

The Committee gave preliminary consideration to the draft report for the Best Value Service Review for 'Promoting Understanding', together with a covering report from the Team Leader (Education and Interpretation).

RESOLVED: to note the completion of the draft report on the review and that a detailed consideration be given at the Committee's on 23 April 2002, but prior to that meeting the document be adjusted to incorporate the following: -

- The four 'Cs' (i.e. Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete) being spelt out more clearly, together with an indication of continuous service improvement.

(NB. Mr Gladding would provide a paper from South Somerset District Council on its approach to Best Value Reviews, learning from the experience of the first ones it produced).

- The report being drafted in a less technical style, with an Executive Summary at the beginning, rather than the document commencing with a series of tables.

37. **BEST VALUE – 2002/03 BUSINESS PLAN**

The report of the Best Value Officer set out the critical dates for the publication of the Business Plan 2002/03 (Best Value Performance Plan).

RESOLVED: to note the key dates in the publication of the Business Plan.

38. **BEST VALUE – DTLR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Best Value Officer's report provided the comparative data for the 2000/01 Performance Indicators.

A Best Value training session had been arranged for all members of the Authority on Friday 15 March 2002 at 2.30 pm, which would enable a fuller understanding of the review process and be attended by the Best Value Inspector.

(NB. Subsequent to the Committee's meeting, the training session was re-arranged for Friday 19 April 2002 at 2.00 pm).

RESOLVED: to note Exmoor's position in regard to the comparative data.

39. **PERSONNEL UPDATE**

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

In response to comment on the Homeworking Policy, the Head of Business Management explained that measures were in place to prevent Authority owned IT hardware and software being used for private purposes at home, and that any increased availability of office space within Exmoor House would depend upon the take up of the scheme.

The National Park Officer referred to recent proposed appointments not mentioned in the report – Land Agent; Project Development Manager; Rights of Way Officer, Ranger Assistant and Conservation Assistant under measures in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act; IEG Project Assistant; Assistant to input Historic Environment

March 2002

data (from IEG money); plus three externally funded posts – Rural Housing Enabler, Integrated Quality Management Project Officer and Sustainable Development Officer (financed through the Sustainable Development Fund).

RESOLVED: (1) to note the update;

(2) to delegate authority to the National Park Officer, in consultation with the Head of Business Management and one or two members if he so chooses, to appoint a new Head Ranger at second tier level; and

(3) to note the actuarial valuation of the Somerset Pension Fund and congratulate Somerset County Council on its performance and management of the Fund.

(The meeting closed at 4.14 pm)

Chairman

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