

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 23 APRIL 2002

2002/03 – CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Report of the Head of Planning and Community

Purpose of the Report:

To inform Members of the Authority's annual financial commitment towards its social and economic duty and to consider its detailed allocation to specific areas

Legal Implications:

Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995

Financial Implications:

None over and above the existing budget allocation for this financial year

National Park Purposes:

The duty should be actively implemented in pursuing the purposes of conservation and public understanding/enjoyment. National Park Management Plan objectives 19/1; 19/2; 19/3; 19/4.

RECOMMENDATION

To: NOTE the existing detailed apportionment of the budget and to CONSIDER whether a re-allocation should be made in the light of additional funding requests.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As part of its duty to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities in the National Park, the NPA has for many years been an active partner in rural development and regeneration initiatives. Many of these have been ongoing such as the long running Rural Development Programmes, whilst others have been specific Projects which have involved considerable staff and financial input and commitment of the Authority such as the Greater Exmoor LEADER Project which came to an end this year.
- 1.2 The National Park Authority's remit in relation to social and economic development is set out in the Environment Act 1995 which states that in pursuing National Park purposes a National Park Authority shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park, but without incurring significant expenditure in doing so. More details are provided in Circular 12/96 and although this reinforces the need for the Parks to take a positive view of the well-being of their local communities, it does not enable the National Park Authorities to make additional financial resources available and gives them no new powers.

- 1.3 The term “significant expenditure” is not defined in either the Act or the Circular and has not been further explained in any subsequent government advice. What is clear is that National Park Authorities have no economic development powers – the National Parks themselves are part of the social, economic and environmental structure of a wider area and NPAs must therefore work with other local authorities and agencies whose remit is to promote the social and economic development of rural areas.
- 1.4 There has been an increasing emphasis on social and economic matters in National Parks and rural areas generally over recent years as a result of the ongoing problems in the tourism and agricultural industries and the increasing problems of rural housing affordability. There are more funding opportunities and initiatives and NPAs are now more than ever involved in partnerships with their local authorities with the advent of ‘community planning’. There is a need therefore to consider and perhaps reassess our existing funding commitment to this area of work, particularly in the light of an ever increasing demand for partnership funding.

2. EXISTING BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

- 2.1 The amount set aside under the heading ‘Support to the Local Community’ for the current financial year amounts to £14000 which is in addition to the £15000 the Authority also contributes to the European Funding Adviser post, shared with West Somerset District Council. The attached appendix shows how this sum is allocated, with a brief description of the specific initiative and its impact on the National Park.

3. ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUESTS

- 3.1 Four further funding requests have been received arising from the Authority’s involvement in partnerships with North Devon and West Somerset District Councils. To facilitate access to European Objective 2 funds, the NPA is part of a sub-regional regeneration company which will take on a similar role to the Greater Exmoor LEADER Company. Initially an ‘integrated action plan’ will be produced covering the North Devon and Exmoor Area which will be used as a strategy to submit individual projects for funding. This approach has already received the approval of the Government Office for the South West. Of course, there are running costs to be met and the NPA and West Somerset District Council who joined the partnership late have now been asked for contributions towards these costs. The amount requested from both authorities is £10,000 each year over a three year period.
- 3.2 The Authority is also a key partner in the Exmoor Coast and Countryside Partnership which is the District Councils’ Local Strategic Partnership which will produce the Community Strategy for West Somerset. We have been asked what level of resources (both staff and financial) can be put into the running costs of this partnership.
- 3.3 A third request is to part fund a West Somerset Access and Economic Development Study which has been commissioned by the District and County Councils. This will provide valuable data on the economy of the area and can be extended to also cover the Devon part of Exmoor to obtain a picture of the economic situation across the National Park. A sum of £2500 has been requested from the NPA towards the total cost of £12,500.
- 3.4 Finally, £1200 is required to fund a student placement under the STEP scheme which will produce valuable information on the links between conservation projects and resultant economic benefits.

4. CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS

- 4.1 There are clear benefits to be gained through partnership working and if the NPA is involved in partnerships, it should reasonably be expected to contribute to some of the costs incurred. The existing allocation of funding to this area of work can again, reasonably be regarded as 'not significant expenditure' in the context of the Authority's total budget. The benefits to National Park purposes can objectively be measured in terms of funding obtained from these sources for 'pure' National Park projects, though what is less easily defined is the benefit to National Park purposes gained by funding purely social and economic projects. Helping the local community in this way does of course assist in raising both the profile and perception of the Authority by the National Park community (as was demonstrated dramatically last year during the Foot and Mouth crisis). It should also be noted that the very small amounts of individual funding allocated to specific schemes is match funding and when aggregated it can produce real benefit.
- 4.2 It is therefore difficult to recommend that any of the existing allocations be re-directed to the additional requests, although reductions could be made to the Devon Small Grants Scheme and the Somerset Community and Business Chests which would free-up £1,500.
- 4.3 Of the four requests it is considered that the information obtained from the economic and access survey would be of particular interest and value and indeed a specific amount was originally bid for in the annual budget to fund such research and studies to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the economic and social make-up of Exmoor, which can be included in the State of the Park Report. Additional funding of £1400 has just been received back from the LEADER project which is unspent ENPA core funding towards the project. This could be made available for socio-economic projects linked to National Park purposes. It is suggested that the Authority's contribution to the Exmoor Coast and Country Partnership is limited to staff representation and the offer to provide one of the venues for the meetings. A nominal contribution to the Regeneration Company may be considered appropriate from the savings identified already, although this may raise concerns in relation to our statutory purpose.

Chris France
Head of Planning & Community
16 April 2002

APPENDIX

Name of Fund/Initiative/ Body	Amount of ENPA Allocation	Description	Achievements towards objectives in the Exmoor National Park Management Plan
West Somerset RDA Fieldworker	£4,500	<p>The ENPA has been a long standing and important partner in the Rural Development Programme for Somerset. Through this programme Government funding is made available for social and economic regeneration in 30 priority areas across England - the Rural Development Areas. An important component in the delivery of the RDP is the presence of a fieldworker working with communities to help local people to identify their own needs and develop appropriate solutions. Key tasks are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicise the benefits of RDA status • Assist the implementation and preparation of RDP projects • Managing the RDP Community Chest Fund 	<p>The ENPA contribution to the core costs of this post represents the Authority's main financial input to the RDP Process. Specific community projects which have benefited the Park community have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New safe play area for Timberscombe • New play equipment and safety surfaces for Porlock • The Lovelace Centre, (library, IT and visitor centre) Porlock • Exmoor Producers Association • Winsford Community Computer Centre • Somerset Rural Youth Project <p>Specific NPA projects which have benefited from RDP funding include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NP Village Information Agencies • Dulverton Visitor Centre Improvements • Brendon Hills/West Somerset Mineral Line Project • Off road cycle routes on Exmoor • Simonsbath sawmill restoration • Local public transport information, Exmoor • Dulverton town centre enhancement project • Study into the economic impacts of Foot & Mouth Disease on Exmoor <p>The RDP is due to be replaced by a new Regional Development Agency initiative this year called Rural Renaissance. It is considered that there will be the need for an 'on the ground' presence to help deliver this new initiative and consequently all existing partners have been asked to retain their contributions to the fieldworker post, until the full details of Rural Renaissance have been agreed. The RDA Fieldworker will also be involved in other initiatives such as the Countryside Agency's 'Vital Villages' and it is considered that the ENPA contribution be retained, at least for the budget year.</p>
Somerset RDP Community Chest Grant Aid	£1,000	Managed by the RDA Fieldworker, this is a delegated small grants scheme for local community	<p>Projects in the National Park which have received Community Chest Grants include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-sports courts - Porlock

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		initiatives within the RDA. It is similar to the Authority's Community Support Grant Scheme which was in existence until recently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vandal-proof parish notice board, Withycombe • Wimbleball Sailing Club - new canoes and equipment for young people with special needs • Cutcombe Moorland Hall - replacement windows • Exford Play School – sand pit • Winsford Hand Bell Ringers • Carhampton Community Orchard
Somerset RDP Business Chest Grant Aid	£500	Similar to the above scheme, this represents the RDP delegated fund for small grants for business development.	Without doubt many small businesses on Exmoor have benefited from this scheme. Beneficiaries include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lewis Tea Rooms, Dulverton • Doverhay Forge Studios, Porlock • Exford Post Office • The Foresters, Dunster • Brushford Taxi Ltd
Community Council for Somerset	£1,000	Community Councils are registered charities and exist to promote the welfare of rural communities, encouraging community self-help, local initiatives and voluntary effort. The NPA contributes annually to the core running costs of the organisation. This has been formalised this financial year through the production of a service level agreement with key partners	The NPA now has a greater input to the work programme of the Community Council and there are several areas of work which will involve the Authority and benefit its purposes such as : village appraisals, working with communities and the housing enabler to identify needs and sites for local housing, village design statements.
Community Council of Devon	£1,000	As above, for the Devon part of the National Park.	The two Community Councils value the support of the Authority and are key members of the Consultative Forum. Their involvement with parish councils, housing needs and overlaps the work of the NPA and it is considered that support funding should continue
Devon RDP Small Grants Fund	£1,000	This fund is the delegated small grants scheme for Devon and is available for smaller social and economic projects which are not included in the Devon Rural Development Programme. All partners ie Devon local authorities, Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks contribute annually to a funding pot.	Many businesses and community projects have benefited over the years through the Devon RDP and the delegated fund including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lynton Community Cinema • Lynton Market Hall (IT centre and library) • Farm Buildings Design Guide • Blackmoor Gate Visitor Interpretation Plan (grant offered) • Lyn and Exmoor Museum – renovation and interpretation display • Parracombe Village Hall –

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			<p>landscaping for new car park</p> <p>The NPA has itself benefited from the small grants fund for improvements to the County Gate Visitor Centre and for a comprehensive traffic analysis for Lynton and Lynmouth.</p> <p>The RDA have offered funding for the continuation of this scheme for this financial year only, in the light of Rural Renaissance</p>
Tarka Millennium Project	£3,000	A scheme backed by the Millennium Commission with £750,000 of lottery funding and supported by 13 various organisations including the NPA. It provides grants to individuals who wish to carry out "not-for-profit" projects which benefit both themselves and the local community.	There are three themes to the awards – conservation and restoration, social and cultural and ideas for the future, which are well related to National Park purposes.
Somerset Food Links Project	£2,000	Originally set up in 1997, this project has now expanded to cover the whole of Somerset, including Exmoor. This partnership project aims to promote the supply and availability of locally grown and processed food products for local people. The NPA and WSDC have now joined as partners for the next three years	The project will produce outputs which have direct links to National Park purposes, through the development of local branding, and maximising the links between a high quality landscape, farm products and public enjoyment