



**EXMOOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INDEPENDENT GRANT ADVISORY PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Sustainable Development Fund Independent Grant Advisory Panel held on Thursday 1 December 2005 at 5.30 pm in the Lecture Room, Dunster National Park Centre.

**PRESENT**

**Members:**

Bob Jeffries (Chairman)  
Carol Carey  
Alan Collins (NPA member)  
Mike Goff  
Jill Jones  
Mij Lambert  
Richard McLaughlin  
Barney Simmons  
Colin Slow  
Pat Williams

**Exmoor National Park Authority Officers:**

Phil Cookson, Sustainable Development Officer  
Martin Palmer, Member Services Officer

**Apologies for Absence:** Ann Foxhuntley (NPA member) and Nigel Hester.

**1. Minutes of the last meeting**

**(1) Confirmation**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2005 were signed as correct.

**(2) Matter Arising – Minute 1 - West Somerset Youth Action Group**

Phil Cookson would be taking the Action Group on a tour of some of the SDF projects on Tuesday, 20 December 2005. Other matters in respect of the formation of the Youth Group were progressing.

**2. Update on Finances**

- £96,844 was available in the Fund at the commencement of the meeting.
- Defra had committed £200,000 to the Fund for each of the next two years.

- An additional £270, 000 had been committed to the Fund by the RDA and was available from now until March 2008. This money could be spent how the Panel wished to see it, provided it met targets specified by the RDA in relation to jobs created, employment support and Skills for Life certificates.

### 3. Project Updates

The Panel noted a Project Updates paper circulated by Phil Cookson. The following was also mentioned:-

- **04/52 KleenKutt Forestry** – In discussions with the company, it had emerged that a business in the region had come forward to purchase FSC timber, which meant the company's 68% of unsold timber could be reduced considerably. This also meant that an interest-free loan of £10,000 for sales and marketing was no longer necessary. However, the company did have the need for a loan for capital kit in the first two years. The Panel was content for the request to be determined by the National Park Officer as he considered appropriate.
- **04/21 Exmoor Farm Plastic Recycling Scheme** - A further collection of black farm plastic was to be made in January 2006 – at Blackmoor Gate on 10<sup>th</sup> and Cutcombe Market on 12<sup>th</sup>. Somerset FWAG would also be making another application to the Fund to support a May 2006 collection.

### 4. Consideration of Applications

The following applications were considered:-

#### (1) **05/38 Wimbleball Fisheries Assistant**

Julia Moysey, Head of Development, and Chris Hall, Head of Fisheries, for the South West Lakes Trust outlined their proposal for two new job share Fishery Assistants posts to be created at Wimbleball Lake to enable an improved service to be provided for anglers.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- Anglers' requirements
- The numbers of anglers using the lake and number of angling days. The level of increase anticipated
- Permit cost and the ability of the posts to become self financing
- The increase in stocking levels
- The number of visitors to break even
- The level of advertising for the fishing facilities and where?
- The methods used to attract young people to fishing at the Lake and the potential for an expansion of 'taster' fishing sessions
- Current and future arrangements for instruction
- Links with other Lakes that have fishing facilities

The feeling of most Panel members was that the project was not ambitious enough, particularly in the scale of increase proposed for angler numbers and drawing young people in. In addition, there was insufficient research on how the numbers of anglers might be increased and insufficient information provided on whom the existing anglers were, leading to the perception that the proposed expansion would largely

cater for them. The project was not seen as becoming self-sufficient for a considerable time. It was also felt there was scope in exploring other funding avenues, such as lottery funding through Sport England and support from the Environment Agency, and that fishing guides living in the area could provide the new service required for anglers without the level of expense anticipated for the Fishery Assistants posts, particularly with regard to evening cover.

The Panel's view was that money would be better spent on marketing to encourage greater use of the facilities, rather than training, and that the project should seek to link with other similar facilities with the intention of preparing a Business Plan and exploring other funding opportunities. It was, therefore, felt that the application in its present form be declined, but up to £1,500 should be made available to the applicant for working up a Business and Marketing Plan, with a marketing strategy being brought back to the Panel to take the project forward. In particular, the following 3 elements needed to be included in the strategy:-

- Including other fishery enterprises in the marketing.
- Developing web links with other fishing lakes in the South West.
- Looking at an upward sliding scale of fees as the project developed.

## (2) **04-44 Exmoor Horn Sheep Breeders**

Alan Collins declared personal and prejudicial interests as he kept Exmoor Horn Sheep and was a member of the Exmoor Horn Sheep Breeders' Society, the applicant. He, therefore, withdrew from the meeting while the application was considered.

Richard McLaughlin declared a personal interest in that he had a connection with the Society, but it was not sufficient to warrant declaring a prejudicial interest and leaving the meeting.

David Bawden and Peter Delbridge, Exmoor Horn Sheep Breeders' Society, outlined their project to maintain and hopefully increase the number of Exmoor Horn Sheep in their native habitat of Exmoor.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- The decline in the number of Exmoor Horn Sheep on Exmoor and other breeds
- The potential for traditional farmers to keep the breed as well as 'hobby' farmers and economic viability, the use of half breeds and suitability of breeds on different land types
- Stock management and husbandry
- Characteristics and qualities of the breed, including cost of keeping, shelter requirements and foraging ability
- Whether the breed's use was for maintaining the land and landscape or for a saleable commodity in the market place (including demand for the meat, the potential for selling direct to the end user, branding and the premium that could be attained)
- The effects on the landscape if land was no longer grazed by sheep and the implications of the loss of native breeds
- The percentage of farms currently holding Exmoor Horn Sheep and previous figures

Whilst some members saw merit in branding Exmoor Horn Sheep for the quality market, it was pointed out that they produced over fat lamb which many consumers were not interested in. It was, therefore, felt there was probably more mileage in retaining the breed for its survival, gene pool and agri-environment uses. It was also recognised that the project was long-term and would take time to achieve its results. Ultimately, the Panel expressed its support for the recommendation and conditions in the Appraisal and Summary Sheet, but with the addition of a monitoring and evaluation scheme to assess the project's success (which would include such things as the increase in number of Exmoor Horn Sheep and number of shows held), and Phil Cookson was asked to discuss its development with the applicants. Once prepared, the document would be referred to Jill Jones for comment.

(3) **05-15 – South West and Exmoor WoodFairs**

Graeme McVittie, Woodland Officer for the National Park Authority, outlined a joint project with partner organisations throughout the region to facilitate three 2-day woodfairs over the period from December 2005 to July 2008. In the Exmoor context, there was to be a satellite woodfair at Dunster Castle in September 2006, combined with the Wood 2006 woodcarving symposium, and a South West woodfair in Taunton in July 2007, providing an opportunity for Exmoor businesses to be showcased to a wide audience.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- The cost of holding the events vis-à-vis the projected levels of attendance. Whether the attendance figures were realistic and the potential for the woodfairs to ultimately become self-financing
- Exhibitor revenue and level of subsidy
- The use and cost of consultants, which had not been factored in
- The contributors to the events and other people attracted
- The potential for regional events, such as the independent event held at Westonbbirt Arboretum
- Why the Woodland Trust was not involved?

The Panel questioned the financial figures presented as it appeared that the £16,000 requested from the Fund over the three years may not be required for the project to be viable. The project had also applied for funding from the Forestry Commission (£15,000) which had been approved and £75,000 from South West Woodland Renaissance and a further £95,923 from partner organisations. To secure the Woodland Renaissance funding, it was necessary for the project to demonstrate a commitment of funding from SDF for three years. Therefore, the Panel recognised that it was essential for the commitment to be made, albeit that the allocation of the sum requested be subject to checking that the visitor admission income would be realistic and regular updates being provided on pricing and visitor numbers. The decision also needed to be subject to the conditions in the Appraisal and Summary Sheet.

(4) **05-37 Water Quality Improvement**

Mark Clayton, Aardvark EM Ltd, outlined his company's project to provide mobile reedbed systems to improve ground and surface water quality. The project was in two phases – the first consisting of consultations and the second being the deployment of mobile reedbeds to key sites. Funding from SDF was being sought

for additional staff time for phase one and for deployment and monitoring costs in phase two.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- The types of pollution and sites covered
- The working of the reedbeds, use all year round, volume of liquid dealt with, cost and the nature of their mobility – case studies
- The use of reedbeds on Exmoor, the quality of its rivers and addressing the catchments rather than just specific pollution sources, and the level of pollution incidents in the area. Also, the Environment Agency's assessment of the level of pollution risk in Exmoor's rivers
- The use of traditional reedbeds as opposed to mobile ones
- The potential for mobile reedbeds to replace septic tanks and also cover other discharges on a permanent basis
- The cost of hiring mobile reedbeds
- The potential for using several mobile reedbeds together insitu
- The exclusive use of the 4 mobile reedbeds proposed within the National Park and the one person appointed being used only within the area
- The ability of the project to proceed if SDF grant was not forthcoming
- The level of take up to sustain the business and expanding the project beyond Exmoor
- The nature of the project in terms of a commercial venture and a research project. Also, the availability of research data for other organisations and interested parties and demonstrations of the technology

Phil Cookson explained that, whilst the recommendation in the Appraisal and Summary Sheet required sufficient scale of need to be demonstrated before the mobile reedbeds were constructed, information supplied to the applicant by the Environment Agency (which was tabled) indicated that an important part of the year for improving river water quality (taking account of the new Water Framework Directive) would be lost if this course was followed. He, therefore, suggested that this requirement be dropped on the basis that there were likely to be sites to deploy to; although this would mean a greater risk for the grant allocated.

The view of the Panel was that 39% of the funding requested for the whole project be allocated, but if insufficient identification of sites had been made by month 4 of the project (when a progress report would be required from the applicant), then the Fund should withdraw its grant at that stage. The approval to also be subject to the other conditions set out in the Appraisal and Summary Sheet.

(5) **04-46 – Exmoor Arts Project (formerly Creative Cultural Communities)**

Jan Ross and Tracey Roberts outlined their revised project to provide four communities on Exmoor with the support, access to artists, arts expertise and financial support to run their own arts projects.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- Training the arts workers
- Parish Councils' response to the proposed project

- Benefits to National Park purposes, particularly promoting understanding of its special qualities, and Exmoor as a whole and how this would be interpreted through various arts
- The need to fund this project when many communities already had an active arts focus which they funded themselves and already enables them to bring their communities together
- How the project would assist Exmoor cohesion
- Whether the project would be better focussed on providing evening classes

The feeling of most Panel members was that the project would do little to promote National Park purposes or assist the learning process about the area. It was also felt that there was no additional benefit to the communities in taking better care of their environments or that it would make any other difference to their everyday lives. It also needed to be proven that communities wanted the project as only one had shown interest to date. Therefore, the Panel's view was that the application be declined.

**(6) 04-49 Active Exmoor 06-08**

Mij Lambert declared personal and prejudicial interests as Vice-Chairman of Active Exmoor and withdrew from the meeting while the application was considered.

Jan Ross and Mike Bishop briefly outlined the purpose of the project which was to increase quality sports and activities on Exmoor to increase the number of visitors to the area and to provide opportunities for local people of new employment in this field of work.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- What already existed for sports and sporting activities and how this would be extended to more people (including visitors) and a wider area of Exmoor, particularly encompassing the whole of Greater Exmoor
- The results of the current Exmoor community sport oriented 'Active Exmoor' project
- The intention to cover all sports and the roll out and timeframe for new courses/activities
- Why the targets in the Business Plan were not included in the submitted job description
- The need for the project to take care in not promoting activities which could damage Exmoor's special qualities or result in excessive use
- The need not to ignore the needs of local people when seeking to attract more visitors

The Panel supported the project subject to the conditions set out on the Appraisal and Summary Sheet.

**(7) 05-29 Visit Exmoor**

Martin Evans and Julie Lovett gave a presentation on proposals to continue the QUEST (Quality Underpins Exmoor's Sustainable Tourism) Project Manager post, following the ending of funding from the Countryside Agency, so that its work on supporting the Visit Exmoor partnership and pursuance of the further development of quality tourism in Greater Exmoor could carry on for another 2 years. The post was currently with the National Park Authority but it was envisaged that its work

would be integrated into the Visit Exmoor partnership and be self-financing by the end of the period.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- The extent to which businesses had signed up to the Green Tourism Business (not a QUEST activity) and Quality Assurance Schemes
- The perception of businesses to green tourism and the numbers involved in the awareness seminars
- The response of businesses to the Strategic Action Plan and the number of businesses signing up to Visit Exmoor
- The need for tourism businesses to be quality assured and the loss of marketing and promotion through Visit Exmoor or any other publicly funded tourism marketing organisations if businesses failed to join the Quality Assurance Scheme
- How the Quality Assurance Scheme worked and the current lack of 'green' standards within it
- Why the project could not be funded by other means and whether the post would be unable to continue without SDF support
- Ownership of the project by the National Park Authority and Visit Exmoor and their proximity to it, and the perception that the Sustainable Development Fund was being asked to provide funding for the project because the two bodies had no funds of their own to continue to support the post. Also, was there any limit to the funding that might be required?
- How other areas were delivering quality tourism

The Panel acknowledged comment from Phil Cookson that it was permissible under the rules governing SDF for the National Park Authority to seek to use money from the Fund for its own projects and other National Park Authorities had done so. Nevertheless, the Panel was concerned that the outcomes and outputs from the project were somewhat nebulous, with reference being made to:-

- The limited success of the project in signing up businesses to green and quality tourism and the lack of information on how this might be better addressed, together with an apparent hostility from some businesses to being involved;
- The limited outcomes in terms of sustainability, with the only identifiable one being the Green Tourism Business Scheme;
- The top heavy nature of the managerial structure within the project (with 5 people in managerial positions) and why there was also the need for the Project Officer post in addition to these;
- The lack of a business plan and any indication that Visit Exmoor as a business could seek a bank loan to fund the post now and in the future; and
- The limitations being placed on businesses who did not sign up to the nationally imposed Quality Assurance Scheme in terms of their future marketing and promotion and the perception of the Panel that successful businesses would be far better off relying on their own reputations rather than being accredited. There was also the impression that it was largely failing businesses who were signing up.

The Panel was asked whether it would be able to support the project if it was reworked to identify key outcomes and outputs, including a higher number of businesses buying into green and quality tourism. The Panel's view, however, was that the application be declined as it was not thought the project would be able to

deliver any more information or outputs, there was strong opposition from Panel members to the nationally imposed Quality Assurance Scheme and the project was too focused on accommodation.

(8) **05-32 Green Heritage Ambassadors**

Dave Gurnett, Education Officer for the National Park Authority, explained that this was a 12 month pilot outreach project, involving three organisations, aimed at engaging disaffected young people to act as 'heritage ambassadors' for their local community. It would initially involve youngsters from the Hamp Estate in Bridgwater, but was later intended to include those from similar areas on the periphery of the National Park, and seek to encourage them to gain an interest in a protected landscape and be inspired to participate in local environmental projects in their own urban area, working with environmental education teams from protected landscapes. Funding was sought for a part time Project Co-ordinator and training the local ambassadors.

The Panel's questions covered:-

- The extent to which Exmoor would be used – residential and day visits
- Activity already undertaken/planned with youngsters from the Hamp Estate
- Staff operating the project
- The level of support and help from the local community, including Somerset County Council's Children and Young People's Directorate (previously Social Services and Education – now combined)
- Other urban areas intended to be added to the project and potential involvement of the Quantock Hills and North Devon AONBs SDFs and the potential levels of funding they may be able to contribute
- Whether the project was too ambitious in its aims
- The benefits for the Hamp Estate community as a whole

The Panel fully supported the project which was seen as being very worthwhile and would hopefully provide tangible benefits for the Hamp Estate community. In addition to the Conditions set out in the Appraisal and Summary Sheet, the Panel wished to see a full report back on the success of project by December 2006, particularly recording what the young people had said to their community.

5. **Update on Finances/Next Meeting**

£146,525 was the total spend from this meeting.

5 further projects were well advanced and it may be necessary to bring forward the Panel's next meeting from Thursday, 23 February 2006 to Thursday, 2 February 2006 (**NB. Subsequent to the meeting the date was confirmed as 2 February**).

From the next meeting, an Updates paper would include a full summary of the financial position and how RDA targets were being met.

(The meeting closed at 9.22pm)

Chairman