

## ITEM 2.1

### EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY EXMOOR CONSULTATIVE AND PARISH FORUM

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Exmoor Consultative Forum held on Friday, 4 November 2005 at 10.30 am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

#### PRESENT

Alan Collins	Exmoor National Park Authority & Withypool and Hawkrigde Parish Council, Acting Chairman of the Forum
Jeremy Holtom	Badgworthy Land Company
John Addicott	Beagles
Brian Symons	Brayford Parish Council
John Lawrence-Mills	Campaign to Protect Rural England
Susan Gibb	Dulverton Town Council
John Bray	Exmoor National Park Authority & Winsford Parish Council
John Edwards	Exmoor National Park Authority
Mike Gammon	Exmoor National Park Authority
Christine Lawrence	Exmoor National Park Authority
Ron Morrison-Smith	Exmoor National Park Authority
Jim Pile	Exmoor National Park Authority & Kentisbury Parish Council
Steven Pugsley	Exmoor National Park Authority & West Somerset District Council
Fred Rawle	Exmoor National Park Authority
John Travis	Exmoor National Park Authority, North Devon District Council & Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council
Brian Windsor	Exmoor National Park Authority & Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council
Michael Hankin	Exmoor Society & Exmoor Natural History Society
Toni Jones	Exmoor Society
Rachel Thomas	Exmoor Society & Member with Special Knowledge
Edwin Beckett	Exmoor Trust
Michael Clinch	Exmoor Trust
Suzette Hibbert	Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council
Timothy Parker	Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council
Herbert Geen	North Molton Parish Council
John Milton	Member with Special Knowledge
Jeremy Roberts	Member with Special Knowledge
Michael Scott	Member with Special Knowledge and Brompton Regis Parish Council
Hugh Thomas	Member with Special Knowledge

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Stan Taylor  
David Britnell  
George Wale  
Joan Long  
Richard Andrews  
Margeret Westcott  
Joan Nicholson  
Tim Davey  
Geoffrey Way

Minehead Town Council  
Porlock Parish Council  
Porlock Parish Council  
Ramblers' Association (Devon)  
Rural Development Service – Defra  
Selworthy Parish Council  
West Somerset Archaeological Society  
Withypool and Hawkridge Parish Council  
Youth Hostels' Association (Southern  
Region)

### **National Park Authority staff in attendance**

Nigel Stone, National Park Officer  
Chris France, Head of Planning and Community  
Graham Wills, Head of Conservation and Land Management  
Tim Braund, Head of Education and Interpretation  
David Lloyd, Team Leader – Moorlands and Wildlife  
John Clements, Principal Planning Officer (Policy & Community)  
Graeme McVittie, Woodland Officer  
Martin Palmer, Member Services Officer

**Apologies for absence were received from:** Peter Jones (Challacombe Parish Meeting), Louise Thornhill (Countryside Agency), David Gladwin and Patrick Watson (Country Land and Business Association), Arabella Amory (Exmoor National Park Authority), John Dallyn (Exmoor National Park Authority & Martinhoe Parish Meeting), Andrea Davis (Exmoor National Park Authority, Kentisbury Parish Council & North Devon District Council), John Dyke (Exmoor National Park Authority), Ian Galloway (Exmoor National Park Authority), Joe Tucker (Exmoor National Park Authority & North Devon District Council), Roger Webber (Exmoor National Park Authority, West Somerset District Council & Cutcombe Parish Council), Michael Paton and Nick Salter (Forestry Commission), Chris Roberts (Forestry and Timber Association), Louise Crossman, Bernard Dru, Edward Nightingale, Keith Ross and Humphrey Temperley (Members with Special Knowledge) and Roger Ferrar (North Devon Conservation Society).

## **1. NEW FORUM AND WELCOME**

Alan Collins, Acting Chairman (in the absence of the Chairman [John Dyke] and Vice-Chairman [Arabella Amory]), welcomed members to the first meeting of the newly merged Forum (from the Consultative Forum and District and Parish Forum) and expressed the hope that the new body would work well together.

## **2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS**

### **(1) Confirmation**

The Minutes of the former Exmoor Consultative Forum (15 June 2005) and the District and Parish Forum (27 June 2005) were signed as correct records, subject in the latter to the reference to “Susan Gibbs” in the fourth paragraph of page 3 being amended to “Susan Gibb”.

(2) **Matters Arising**

• **Exmoor Consultative Forum**

➤ **Minute 2 – Local Development Framework, The Local Plan and The Design Guide**

In response to comment, Chris France said that he had no new information regarding the exercise of planning powers over inshore waters.

➤ **Minute 3 – National Park Authority Performance Review**

Investigation would be made into why the National Park Authority's community newspaper 'Park Life' was not being received in Minehead and Lynton (there had been an earlier problem across the National Park when the Post Office had failed to deliver them). It was suggested that Town/Parish Councils and Meetings may be able assist by distributing them through local shops etc.

➤ **Minute 5 – The Authority's Achievements in 2004/05 and Looking Forward to 2005/06**

**Development Control**

In response to comment, Chris France explained that the eight week period for the determination of planning applications began on the day applications were received.

**Helping to support Exmoor's communities and economy**

In response to comment, Nigel Stone said that work had commenced on an economic model to provide information on the 'State of Tourism' and a date for the report's publication was expected to be known by February/March 2006.

- There were no matters arising on the Minutes of the District and Parish Forum.

3. **ITEMS RAISED BY FORUM MEMBERS**

(1) The Exmoor Society had asked for feedback on:-

- **The current time-frame of the Design Guide** – A note from John Clements had been circulated with the agenda papers on the anticipated completion date and he added that, following a meeting of the Steering Group that afternoon, it was hoped a definite date for consultations would be agreed. The Forum would be kept informed of progress.

In response to comment, John Clements explained that work undertaken by consultants earlier in the year had informed the second stage, which was to

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produce the Design Guide, and new consultants to be appointed would complete this task. The work of the initial consultants, and later the new consultants, would be available for those who wished to see it. The issue of slippage in the timetable for the Design Guide and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy was also raised. John Clements responded that this had occurred because of resource considerations and the need for the Core Strategy to be closely aligned with the review of the National Park Management Plan.

Rachel Thomas said that the Exmoor Society had expressed concerns to the National Park Authority over the consultations for the Management Plan and the Core Strategy being undertaken together, as it was felt the public may be confused over the different policies and what was trying to be achieved. In response, Nigel Stone said that the Management Plan was the over arching document and, by taking the two documents together, it was hoped to avoid confusion as the single consultation process would permit issues to be raised more effectively as one.

The concerns expressed were noted.

- **Progress on the public participation into the Core Strategy** – A note from John Clements had been circulated with the agenda papers (see also above).
- **Any feedback on the shooting study being carried out by Cambridge University** – David Lloyd reported that the study was following its timetable, with work on individual shoots having been completed and questionnaires being sent out to the providers to shoots. The Greater Exmoor Shooting Association (GESA) was also sending out questionnaires to shoot participants.

A draft of the first part of the study was expected in December 2005, with the final report in mid to late February 2006. It was likely that the study would identify many of the same issues that had arisen in the Hunting Study.

The results of the Exmoor study were not to be made publicly available until the national study on the same issues was released.

(2) Porlock Parish Council had asked for the following to be discussed:-

- **Tree Preservation Orders in connection with the ancient Old Orchard, Redway** – A note from Graeme McVittie setting out the reasons for the TPO had been circulated with the agenda papers.

David Britnell said that the Parish Council welcomed the blanket TPO to protect the orchard trees and hoped that it would be confirmed in due course. However, concern had been expressed by the residents of Redway about its extension to non-orchard species. These other trees had grown up over the last 10 to 15 years and were causing additional shading in the valley and combe. David Britnell asked for this to be taken into account when the final TPOs were agreed.

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In response, Graeme McVittie explained that the draft Orders had been made by drawing lines on a map and initially included all trees within the protected areas but, when the final Orders were confirmed, the non-orchard trees identified as having little merit would be removed.

- **Sudden Oakdeath (Phytophthora ramorum)** – David Britnell said he understood that an outbreak of Sudden Oakdeath had been reported at Williton. He added that it had devastated coastal oak woodlands in California and had been brought to the UK on imported plants. While the information he had cast doubt over the susceptibility of English oak, it suggested that other trees species and species of rhododendron and other shrubs could be affected. He expressed particular concern over the future of sweet chestnut trees in Culbone Woods, holm oaks on Porlock Hill and trees generally in the combes and woodlands around Porlock, which if affected by the disease could lead to significant deforestation, increased erosion and flooding.

In response, Graeme McVittie said that the name of the disease was somewhat misleading as it did not affect all oaks and could be found in other tree and shrub species. He added that the disease had been brought into this country on infected plant material but the Forestry Commission was keeping a close watch for outbreaks of the disease and had carried out an extensive survey in the previous year. Any identified outbreaks of the disease had been dealt with quickly and effectively. So far, the disease in this country seemed to be restricted to shrub species and there had been a few outbreaks in Cornwall.

Copies of a Defra leaflet explaining what the disease was, identifying it and what species it affected were available at the meeting, which would be useful for Town/Parish Councils and Meetings and could be copied; although the disease was presently very limited in its extent and people should not be too worried. Graeme McVittie was not aware of any outbreak of the disease at Williton and there was no reference to it on the Forestry Commission's website.

- **The apparent anomaly of the Authority requiring the windows of extensions on two properties in Porlock to be timber framed when the original dwellings were either uPVC or metal** – A report from Chris France setting out guidelines on the National Park Authority's approach to the use of uPVC window frames had been circulated with the agenda papers. He added that where planning control existed it was the Authority's policy to reduce the use of uPVC windows in properties as they were contrary to National Park purposes.

David Britnell said that one of the planning applications had involved Crittall (metal) windows for the proposed extension which also existed in the dwelling and he could not see the logic of requiring timber framed windows, as metal windows were often considered to be acceptable. He was advised to raise the matter with the planning case officer, Helen Brosnan.

Stan Taylor said that recycled rubbish was a new material being used for

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windows which was not uPVC, but looked similar. He suggested that the Authority would need to produce guidelines on its use, if it was not considered to be suitable within the National Park.

- **The condition of bridleways in the Porlock area:** George Wale had originally intended to raise the Parish Council's concern about the lack of maintenance on the tarmac section of Hawkcombe Bridleway by Somerset County Council, as the Highway Authority. It had, however, been repaired the previous day.

Regarding rights of way in the Porlock area generally, George Wale said that the National Park Authority had undertaken excellent work in keeping them up to standard. However, visitors were often confused about where they were and where they were going and he thought that identification signs and an A5 flyer of the routes would assist this situation. In response, Nigel Stone explained that there were colour identification signs in operation, following a national colour code, which denoted the different types of right of way and finger posts identified destinations. Another issue was permitted paths. It was hoped to include them on the Authority's website, but it relied on landowners' consent and such paths did not exist in some areas.

(3) Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council had asked for the following to be discussed:-

- **Proposed signing to 'Exmoor' on the new downstream bridge in Barnstaple:** The Town Council supported this new signing in Barnstaple which should benefit Lynton and Lynmouth and Exmoor as a whole. It should also assist the Aller Cross Visitor Centre. However, Herbert Geen expressed concern that extra traffic was likely to be generated on the Aller Cross roundabout and it would use the road to Brayford, which he suggested required improvement but would not be easy to achieve. John Travis commented that the new sign was originally proposed to take traffic from the west over the new bridge towards Lynton and Lynmouth which would have meant going through Braunton to Lynton Cross (below the south side of Combe Martin), which he suggested would have been a very tortuous route to use. There was also further comment in support of the identified route as being preferable to alternatives.
- **The return of Exmoor National Park to Lynmouth Pavilion area:** Suzette Hibbert said that there was to be a meeting later in November on the future of the Pavilion, but there was no clear information at this time. She said that North Devon District Council was looking to make a bid for funding for a new building, but there were problems to surmount and no timetable could be given as yet. Ideally, the Town Council and community wanted to see a National Park Centre on the ground floor to benefit Lynton and Lynmouth, with another use above. John Travis added that the return of the Centre to Lynton and Lynmouth was important for the visitor experience and the community, with the twin villages being the main settlement on the Devon side of the National Park. He also mentioned that the previous Centre had the largest number of visitors of all the Centres on Exmoor.

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Another aspect was raised by Rachel Thomas, who said that Lynton and Lynmouth had a significant cultural heritage (e.g. its conservation movement and poets) which could be developed through a new National Park Centre in the community. Calls were also being made for World Heritage Status for Exmoor as a cultural landscape and the new Centre would benefit from this too.

Jeremy Roberts said that a new Centre in the community could give more focus to interpreting the coastline and Bristol Channel, which was an important asset for Exmoor.

In response to the comments, Nigel Stone said that a new building, rather than refurbishing the existing Pavilion, could offer greater opportunities for the National Park message to be interpreted.

- **The effect of the new licensing laws (particularly the restriction of 12 special event notices per premises) on Village and Parish Halls and Community Centres throughout Exmoor:** Timothy Parker explained that unless the Town Council obtained a Premises Licence with Alcohol Permissions, which included the requirement for a Designated Premises Supervisor who would have to be a Personal Licence Holder, it would be unable to hold more than 12 events per year where alcohol was permitted. Special events in the Town Hall often required licensed bars and were important for the viability of the building. The option of appointing a volunteer as a Personal Licence Holder was likely to be difficult as the requirements for such a post would be onerous (including holding responsibility for the events and needing to be present) and the alternative of employing someone was unlikely to justify the expense in relation to the number of events likely to be held. It may also make events prohibitively expensive, with costs needing to be recouped from event organisers. It was suggested that many village halls were likely to be similarly affected.

Nigel Stone explained that both North Devon and West Somerset District Councils were concerned about the impact of the new licensing regulations on rural communities and were looking at the options to see if they could assist.

Stan Taylor suggested that an option might be for Parish Councils to hold a Premises Licence with Alcohol Permissions for village halls in their parishes, but they would need to have a named person to be the Personal Licence Holder and some expressed doubt over whether Parish Councils would be willing to take up the task.

Suzette Hibbert said that approaches had been made to the local MP and other MPs, but they were not hopeful of getting the legislation changed.

It was suggested that Parish Councils, with their District Councils, were probably best placed to demonstrate the effects of the legislation on rural areas, which could be taken up with agencies such as the Sparsity Partnership for Authorities Delivering Rural Services (SPARSE) (of which Steven Pugsley, through West Somerset District Council, was Chairman), the Local

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Government Association and the Countryside Agency.

A letter from Mark Curgenvin, Licensing Manager with North Devon District Council, setting out the effect of the new licensing laws on village halls, is \*attached to these Minutes.

#### 4. **NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

Nigel Stone thanked those on the Forum who had contributed to the Performance Assessment process. He said that the report produced by the Assessment Team had confirmed the Authority's own thoughts that it was strong on delivery, partnership working and had a positive attitude, with a robust commitment from staff and members. However, the report had also highlighted areas which needed to be worked on, in particular:-

- The need for the Authority to have a clear, concise and shared vision, which partners could understand.
- A clearer set of priorities for the Authority, within resources. The feeling of the Assessment Team was that a lack of clear priorities had raised expectations on occasions which were not necessarily met.
- Managing performance and allocating resources.

The next phase was to be a 'Round Table' meeting with representatives of various bodies to commence improvement planning. An Improvement Plan was to be drawn up by the Authority, which was to be an ongoing plan for improvement, and would be made available in the New Year.

The Assessment Team's report would be available on the Authority's website soon, but Nigel Stone urged caution in that certain conclusions and judgements were in dispute. It was hoped to resolve these to secure a more balanced document ultimately.

Rachel Thomas said that the Exmoor Society felt the whole process was too heavy, with the Authority's own self-assessment treated as if it had come from a County or District Council and there had been no clear focus on the statutory purposes of a National Park. She also expressed concern that the process had taken needed resources away from other activities. In response, Nigel Stone said that the process had been less than County and District Councils had to go through and had been useful. He, nevertheless, acknowledged that it needed to be appropriate to the Authority's role and what should be expected of it.

Nigel Stone said that the National Park Management Plan Review would set out responsibility for issues and taking actions forward. The Authority would need to ensure implementation and that bodies were accountable to the community.

#### 5. **WORKSHOP ON THE NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW**

A timetable was circulated for the review of the National Park Management Plan and preparation of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. As there was significant overlap between the two documents (with the Management Plan being the overarching document) they were to be taken forward together, with a single consultation

process.

The Authority was currently embarking on preliminary work on the review of the Management Plan and issues would be taken forward covering the next 5, 10 to 15 years. In the early stages, the Authority wished to obtain views from the public on what the key issues and options were considered to be and this Forum workshop was a part of that process. There would be public consultations on them in April/May 2006.

The workshop consisted of two exercises to guide the Authority's thinking processes and the Forum split into five separate groups.

The first exercise focused upon the special qualities of the National Park and the groups were asked for their opinions on what the special qualities should be. Comments were made on a list of suggested qualities and then returned to Tim Braund for analysis.

On the reverse of the sheet of suggested special qualities was a draft set of issues to provide context to the special qualities (to provide a 'Vision for the National Park'). For the public consultations, an issues and options paper would be presented and they would be asked about what things were considered to be important and what needed to be done about them and how.

In the second exercise, each group was asked to identify a list of key issues and prioritise them to provide a top three, and also to identify the lead agencies/corporate bodies which should be responsible for the top 3. Tim Braund would analyse the full responses following the meeting, but the top 3s and lead agencies (where mentioned) were as follows:-

#### Group 1

1. Landscape Mosaic of Farmland and Moorland (**Natural England, NPA and English Heritage**) – openness to sky and sea.
2. Working and Living Environment.
3. Industrial (particularly the archaeological goldmine) and Cultural Heritage.

#### Group 2

1. Any change needs to be balanced with the requirements of the local community, particularly in terms of housing and schools (**NPA Planning**).
2. Provide education for the public so that they will visit the National Park and care for and respect the countryside.
3. We need to preserve all that is special about the National Park (within the budget that is available), in particular the built environment.

#### Group 3

1. Affordable needs local housing to encourage a strong working population and ensure its survival (in particular, affordable housing for key workers) (**NPA and**

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**District Councils).**

2. Encouraging new businesses (particularly in tourism) to benefit the economy, but they need to 'fit in', and developing rural skills and apprenticeships (**County and District Councils and Regional Bodies**).
3. Moorland and woodland management (**NPA, National Trust, Woodland Trust and other agencies**).

Group 4

1. Grazed landscape, maintaining traditional rural skills (particularly livestock skills) (**Defra, Natural England and NPA**).
2. Proper protection and enhancement of the landscape, wildlife and historic environment – a better evidence base for the historic environment and landscape environment (**NPA and English Heritage**).
3. Sustainable communities with opportunities for work (**Health Authorities, Countryside Agency, NPA, County and District Councils**).

(NB. These were not in any particular order)

Group 5

1. Maintaining livelihoods whilst keeping the National Park's character (**Government bodies and NPA**).
2. Community based renewable energy schemes - water, solar and small wind (**The Government's renewable energy funding and Clear Sky grant, NPA Planning**).
3. Awareness of traffic and the issues surrounding it and awareness of public transport, park and ride and 'honeypots' (**Highway Authorities, District Councils and Tourism interests**).

6. **FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Forum agreed to keep the present arrangements of the June meetings being held in the evenings and the November meetings in the mornings. The next meeting was to be held on **Wednesday, 14 June 2006 at 6.30 pm.**

7. **OTHER BUSINESS OF URGENCY**

The Chairman authorised Edwin Beckett raising an item of urgency concerning a funding opportunity and Christine Lawrence an item about highway salting and winter maintenance.

Edwin Beckett explained that in June 2005 the Big Lottery Fund had altered most of its funding provision. A new fund titled 'Living Landmarks' could offer an exciting opportunity for Exmoor. The fund required a large bid of at least £10m and so a

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corporate bid for Greater Exmoor would be necessary, with 75% of the funding required being available. The remaining 25% would need to be found locally. The deadline for applications was 6 June 2006 and the Exmoor Trust had undertaken a preliminary feasibility study to identify potential spending areas, which had come to over £10m. There was no guarantee of success, but Edwin Beckett felt that it was worthwhile given the benefits funding would bring. Possible projects could include re-building village halls, replacing the lock gates at Porlock Weir, the expansion proposals of the Calvert Trust, traffic management, the provision of viewing sites etc. In order to achieve the aims of a bid, it would also be necessary to demonstrate local support and enthusiasm for the project and the ability to raise the outstanding 25% of funding required. He also tabled details of the Exmoor Trust's address, telephone number etc for organisations or individuals on the Forum who wished to know more and potentially be involved.

Christine Lawrence said that Somerset County Council had reduced its spending on salting and winter maintenance on the County's highways by £300,000, which could potentially be very serious. The situation needed to be monitored.

(The meeting closed at 12.50 pm)

Chairman