

H Exmoor's economy and communities



Photograph - © E. R. J. Davey

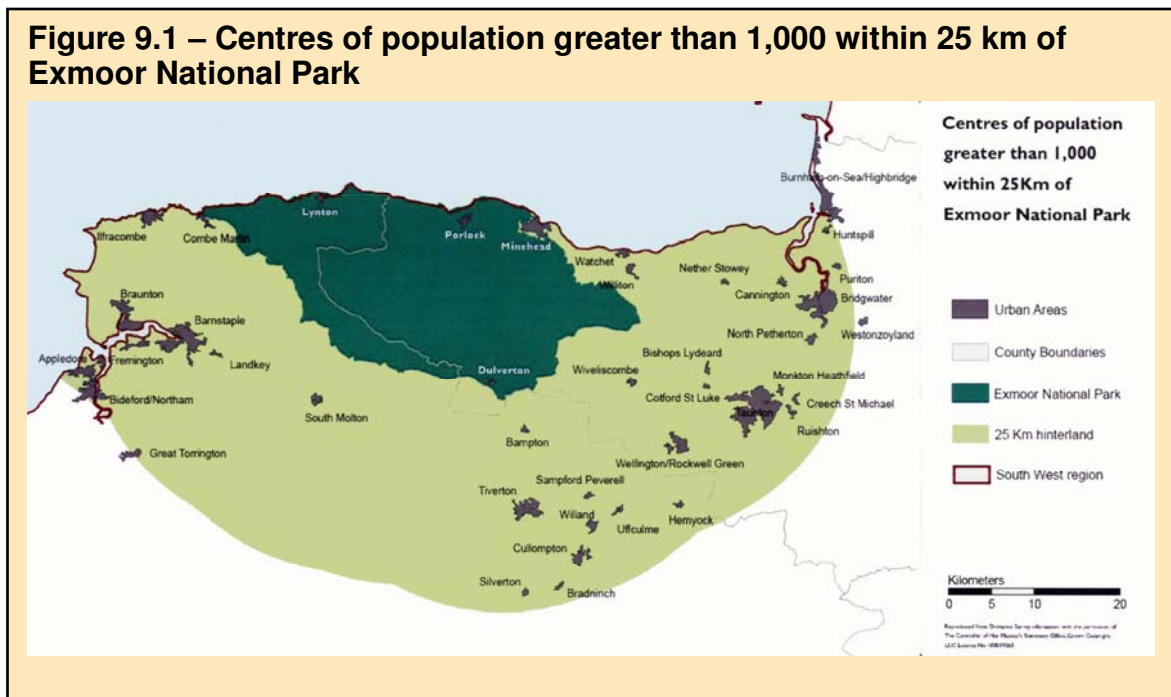
“By 2020 Exmoor’s communities retain a continuity of connection with the land; people have access to affordable services and facilities, and there is a strong, diverse and sustainable economy that benefits from and contributes to the care and appreciation of Exmoor National Park”

H. Exmoor's economy and communities

- 9.1 Around 10,900 people live in Exmoor National Park in around 4,900 occupied households. The proportion of the National Park population aged over 65 is relatively high and increasing while the proportion aged under 15 is relatively low and decreasing.
- 9.2 Unemployment on Exmoor is low and below the national average. Average local household incomes are also low as much of the available employment is seasonal with low wages. In response, many households derive their income from a variety of sources during the year and a high proportion of economically active people on Exmoor are self-employed. There is a high dependency on 'traditional' employment with 14% jobs in agriculture and 29% in accommodation, catering and retail industries related to tourism.
- 9.3 There are six first schools, two primary schools and a middle school in the National Park compared with many more schools in the past. Access to further and higher education is poor due to travel distances and lack of suitable public transport so that many young people have to leave Exmoor to seek higher education and develop their careers.
- 9.4 Access to bus services, pubs, village shops and banks is better than the national average for all parishes, whilst access to post offices, schools and villages halls is worse and access to petrol stations is declining following recent closures. Access to medical services is average.

The national and regional significance of Exmoor's economy and communities

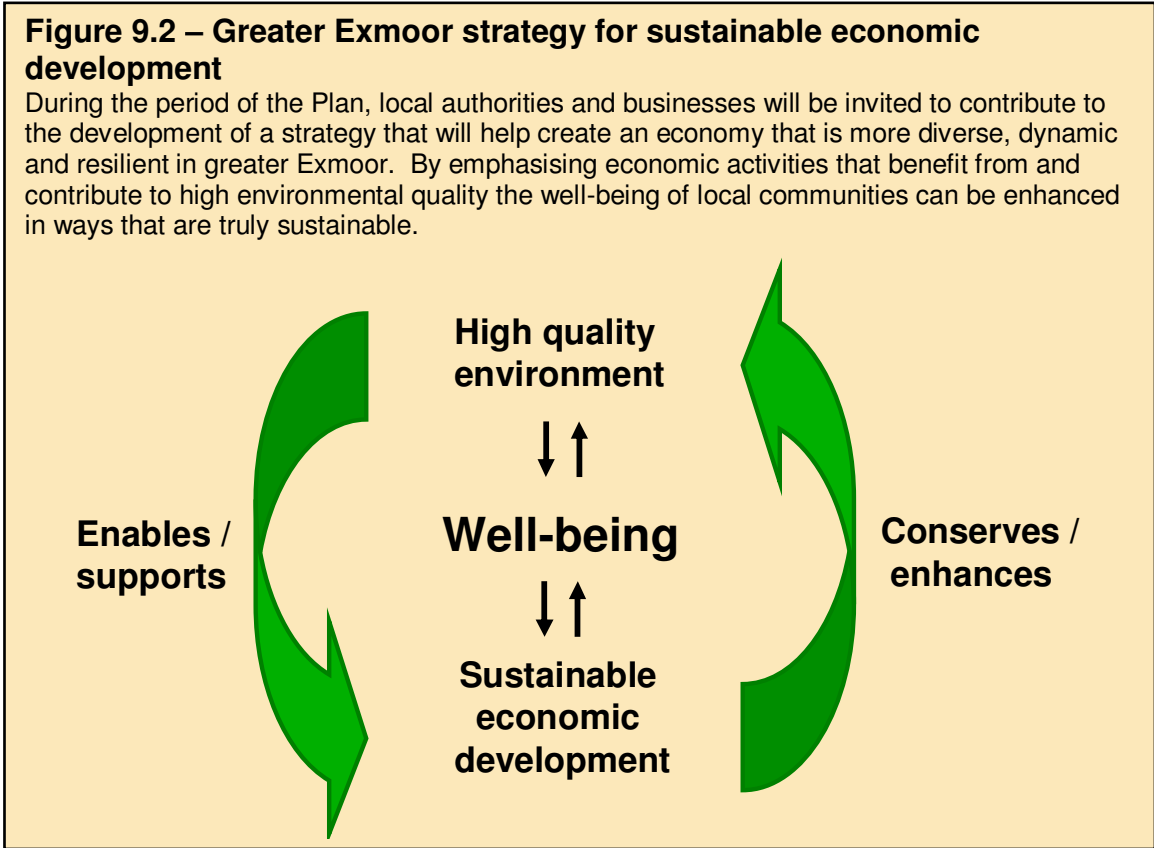
- 9.5 Figure 9.1 shows the centres of population greater than 1,000 within 25 km of Exmoor National Park. The presence of the National Park benefits communities well beyond the National Park boundary including some that experience high levels of deprivation such as Ilfracombe and Barnstaple in North Devon and Bridgwater in Somerset. Principal benefits include access to a high quality landscape, opportunities for active recreation, and commensurate benefits to health and wellbeing. Similarly, communities receive economic benefits from proximity to the National Park as exemplified by the tourism economy figures for the greater Exmoor area provided in figure 8.1.



Trends and issues affecting Exmoor’s economy and communities

Exmoor’s economy

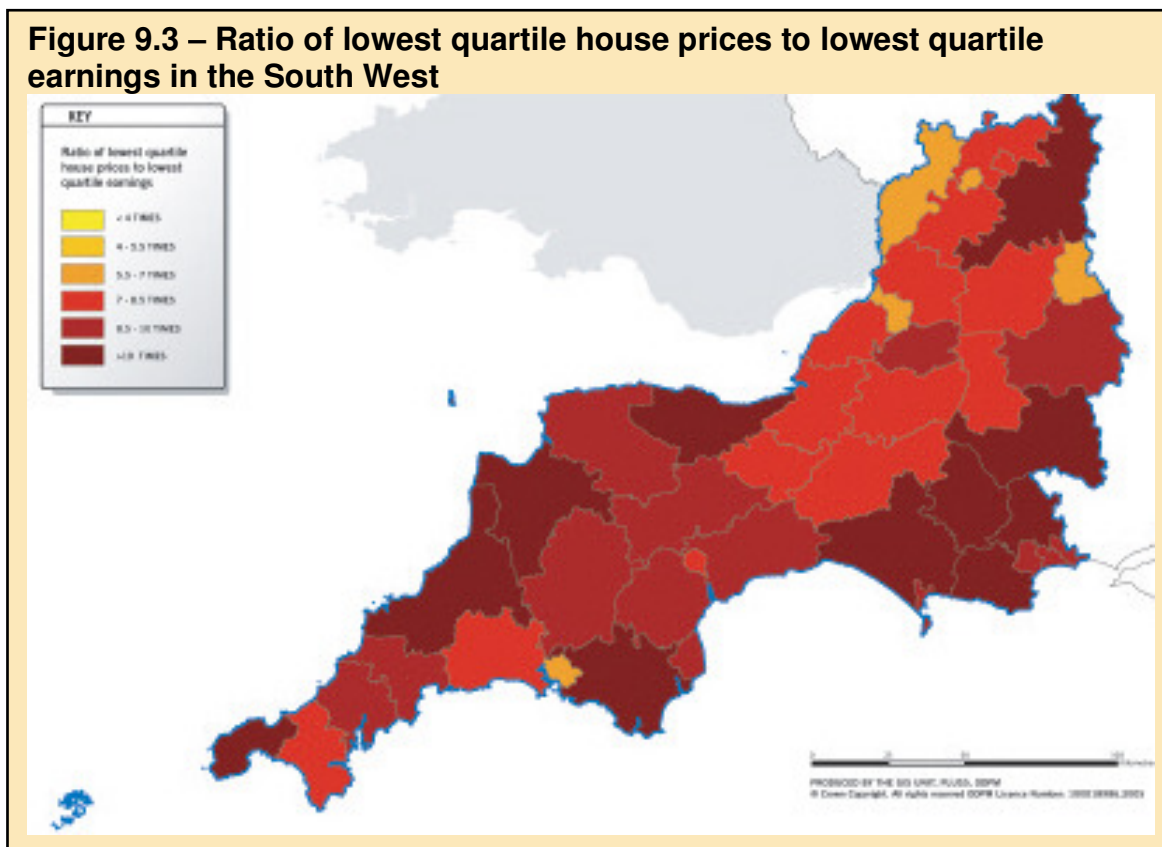
- 9.6 The structure of Exmoor’s economy is dominated by tourism and the land-based industries of farming and, more recently, commercial game bird shooting. These industries have undergone significant structural changes over many decades and successive policy documents have recognised the need to broaden the economic base of the National Park and surrounding areas.
- 9.7 Across Exmoor unemployment rates are low compared with the national rate (2.8% Exmoor National Park, Somerset 2.4%, SW 2.6%, England and Wales 3.4% at the 2001 census) but average weekly earnings are also low. For example, full-time male weekly earnings averaged £316.50 in North Devon in 2005 – only 73% of the UK average of £433.10. Low incomes exacerbate problems in securing affordable housing locally and provide little encouragement for the long-term future of young people seeking careers locally. More positively, there has been an increase in uptake of jobs on Exmoor by young people from Eastern Europe, especially Poland, particularly in tourism businesses and the services sector.
- 9.8 The Exmoor economy is characterised by a high proportion of small, ‘micro businesses’, with less than five employees and a high proportion of self-employed (24.5% in the National Park compared with a national figure of 8.1% in the UK at the 2001 census). The lack of better paid job opportunities locally means that self employment and the development of new business ventures probably provide the best hope for people seeking to increase their incomes. However, there are significant barriers for those wishing to develop their knowledge and skills or attend training as Exmoor is remote from centres of higher or further education. Lack of access to modern telecommunications, such as access to broadband, can also be a barrier although this is being effectively addressed across the National Park.
- 9.9 Despite these drawbacks, new businesses are being developed in the National Park based on local opportunities, e.g. renewable energy, local food and produce, high quality visitor accommodation, restaurants, outdoor recreation and high technology etc. In 2006, the National Park Authority commissioned a study by The New Economics Foundation in 2006 with funding from the SW Regional Development Agency (RDA), Devon and Somerset County Councils and North Devon District and West Somerset Councils and its own resources. The study ^[30] identified a wide range of ideas and actions for developing the Exmoor economy in ways that benefit from the status of the area as a National Park.



Affordable housing

- 9.10 Exmoor has seen substantial increases in house prices in recent years driven, in large part, by demand from people moving into the area or purchasing second homes. Currently, there are around 560 second or holiday homes - approximately 10% of total household spaces - and the parishes with the highest proportion of dwellings that are second homes are Martinhoe and Trentishoe with 26%. The upward trend in open market house prices within the National Park shows no sign of ending and these trends exacerbate the problems of availability and affordability of housing to meet local need.
- 9.11 Moreover, past experience shows that simply building more houses is not likely to meet local need for more affordable accommodation as 93% of open market houses built in the National Park in the ten years to 2005 were bought by people from outside the National Park. The geography of most Exmoor settlements means that suitable sites for new housing are limited and even modest numbers of new houses would significantly alter their character. In addition, consultation indicates high levels of opposition to substantial housing growth (see appendix). Longer term, there are concerns about the vulnerability of some existing housing to increased flood risk and rising sea levels that are predicted to result from climate change.
- 9.12 The growing gap on Exmoor between average household income and average house prices is a significant problem that has the potential to threaten the vitality of communities and viability of local services. In the 2006 house price survey the differential between average incomes and average house prices is among the highest in the country at 14 times local household income. Even selecting the lower quartile of houses for sale, the average price in the National Park was 6.7 times average local household income^[31] and average household incomes do not reflect the incomes of people in need of housing which are often significantly lower than the average. This means that local residents looking for housing often have to look outside of Exmoor for cheaper accommodation or even leave the area altogether.

Figure 9.3 – Ratio of lowest quartile house prices to lowest quartile earnings in the South West



- 9.13 The provision of housing to meet local needs for more-affordable housing is therefore a priority and the housing policies in the Exmoor Local Plan mean that almost all new housing in the National Park will be aimed at meeting local needs for more-affordable housing, whether this be 'social housing' provided by housing associations or privately (or community) owned homes. Planning agreements on such housing that limit the occupation, together with upper limits on the size of these properties, serve to keep the price or rent below open market levels.

- 9.14 As well as setting the planning context, the National Park Authority is working with West Somerset Council, North Devon District Council and locally based housing associations to support a 'Rural Housing Project'. The project compiles reliable information on local housing need by involving Parish Councils in collecting the information for parish level housing needs surveys and seeks to ensure that all avenues are pursued to deliver housing to help meet the identified community need for affordable housing.
- 9.15 In the period since adoption of the new Local Plan policies in 2005 to the end of 2006, the National Park Authority had approved the development of 24 new homes to help meet local needs for more-affordable housing. It is anticipated that there will be a continuing need for around 12 to 15 more-affordable dwellings each year during the life of the Management Plan. The scale and type of communities' needs will continue to be surveyed and reviewed to ensure these can, as far as possible, be met.

Traffic

- 9.16 Devon and Somerset County Councils lead on traffic and transport matters in their respective areas of the National Park and set out relevant strategies in the Local Transport Plans^[32]. Exmoor has only two principal routes, the A39 and A396, although the important A399 passes along part of the western boundary of the National Park. Levels of traffic on Exmoor's roads are considerably less than in other National Parks and current traffic levels can be mostly tolerated, even in summer. However, some of Exmoor's roads are not suitable for the levels of traffic now being experienced and there are areas where problems of congestion occur, particularly popular locations and towns and villages such as Lynton/ Lynmouth, Dunster, Dulverton and Porlock.
- 9.17 Heavy goods vehicle movements on roads within the National Park are generally at lower levels in relation to total traffic flows than on roads in Devon and Somerset as a whole. A scheme to reroute long vehicles away from the restriction in Dunster has proven successful but large vehicles can still cause problems on narrow roads and in villages across the National Park.
- 9.18 The effects of traffic on the environment of the National Park are seen in the congestion of streets and over-demand for parking space in some towns and villages at peak periods. This can result in a reduction in the quality of life and the experience of the National Park for residents and visitors, damage to the physical fabric of buildings and, in some cases, restrictions on the passage of buses and emergency vehicles. On the other hand, congestion tends to limit vehicle speeds through the settlements, which can make them more amenable to pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Conditions for pedestrians are, however, unsatisfactory in some settlements.
- 9.19 Outside settlements there are frequent concerns that high traffic speeds on narrow roads and lanes put other users such as walkers, horse riders and cyclists at risk. In some cases, wide verges that might otherwise be used by riders have been made totally unusable due to regular and deep drainage channels to take water away from the road.

Public transport

- 9.20 Wherever possible, people are encouraged to travel by more sustainable means than the private car - by bus, train, cycle and on foot - for appropriate journeys. It must be accepted, however, that achieving a substantial shift from the car to other modes is a difficult task within Exmoor. For many local people, the car is the only practicable means of transport and holiday travel is much more difficult to accomplish by public transport. While it is possible to get to the National Park by train and bus all year round the number of people who travel to Exmoor by rail or bus is very low.
- 9.21 However, the newly completed rail link to Minehead from Taunton on the West Somerset Railway provides a better connection to the national rail network and an opportunity to increase public transport usage by visitors to the area. The Exeter to Barnstaple line also provides opportunities, in combination with bus services, for access via the western part of the National Park. Within Exmoor itself, travel by bus is the only practical alternative to the car but there is a need to improve the number and frequency of services and encourage greater use by the public.
- 9.22 There are few opportunities to encourage cycling as an alternative mode of transport for journeys such as work, social and shopping trips, as Exmoor is not ideal cycling country and many employed people have to travel to larger centres outside the National Park. However, there may be opportunities for encouraging interchange between cycles and buses by providing secure cycle facilities at key points on bus routes, and to facilitate local journeys such as those within settlements. Making opportunities available for recreational cycling can help to take visitors' cars off the road network for at least part of the time.

- 9.23 Retaining services and facilities within settlements can help reduce the need for travel, but most services will be located in larger villages and towns and people will need to travel to reach them. Exmoor has a high car ownership per household, reflecting the remoteness from services and facilities in towns, the relatively affluent population and the lack of all-year round and evening bus services. Nonetheless, there are households without a car or where one or more members do not have access to a car and for whom this creates difficulties, for example students travelling to colleges or people in, or seeking, part-time jobs.
- 9.24 There are few communities on Exmoor with an all-year round bus service adequate for all needs and in many cases it may never be financially possible to provide a daily service. For such communities other ways must be found of meeting their travel needs. For most, some form of community transport is possible, for example car sharing or a community bus scheme. It takes commitment on the part of the community and advice and assistance from the local authorities if these alternatives are to be organised effectively.

Healthy lifestyles

- 9.25 A well-balanced diet without added sugar or salt and low in fat, together with regular participation in physical activity is recognised as a determinant of health and well-being, helping to reduce risk of cardiovascular and many other diseases; maintaining a healthy body weight, and improving mental health. Living in or close to a National Park can provide easy access to healthy, locally-produced food and easy access to many opportunities for walking, riding and cycling.
- 9.26 Currently, a Community Sports Network is being set up in all Districts of Somerset including West Somerset led by the Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership. The Active Exmoor project is linked in to this initiative with the aim of increasing participation in sport and active recreation both for children and adults.
- 9.27 The Primary Care Trusts in Somerset and Devon have targets to reduce mortality from cardiovascular disease and are keen to see an increase in the number of people participating in active recreation. For example, the Somerset Local Area Agreement has targets for increasing Physical Activity amongst Somerset residents as measured by two indicators:
- Increase in the proportion of adults (aged 16-74 years) who do a minimum of 3 x 30 minutes of moderate or strenuous activity per week
 - Decrease in the proportion of adults (aged 16 - 74 years) who do less than one session (30 minutes) of moderate or strenuous physical activity per week

Other community services and local needs

- 9.28 In addition to affordable housing, employment opportunities and transport, the residents of Exmoor's towns and villages also require access to a range of services and facilities. Though Exmoor residents as a whole make much use of facilities in the surrounding towns, these are unlikely to be convenient, if accessible at all, to those without cars.
- 9.29 The population is likely to continue ageing as many people who move to Exmoor are of retirement age, while younger people move away and there are fewer families with school age children. One consequence of the loss of younger people from Exmoor's communities and an ageing population is an increase in the need for the local delivery of services. Without local provision, the elderly and the sick often have to move to surrounding towns for transport, domiciliary care and access to services. Those who remain can become excluded from many activities.
- 9.30 The problems are well documented, reflecting considerable concern over the rate of closure of shops, post offices and schools, the low level of public transport and the poor quality of many community sports and social facilities. However, the new planning policies to ensure new housing is to meet a local need are intended to help slow these trends as young people and families with connections to the area will have a greater chance of finding affordable housing on Exmoor as the stock of affordable housing builds up over time.
- 9.31 Rural businesses serving small communities, such as shops, post offices and petrol stations, are vulnerable to economic conditions and changing circumstances and some element of funding support will continue to be needed in many cases. For example, in recent years North Devon and West Somerset councils have supported reductions in business rates targeted at village shops. Schemes such as the development of Local Information Points by the National Park Authority can also help to increase the viability of the more remote village shops by providing a small financial incentive and encouraging greater use of local shops by visitors. This is one example of the sharing of facilities which can help make businesses and services viable where individually they could not survive.

- 9.32 Despite the problems, Exmoor benefits from many community-minded people and there are success stories, for example, new funding initiatives, particularly European Union and Lottery funding, have created new opportunities for communities to improve social and sporting facilities. New halls have been built in Monksilver, Luxborough and Wootton Courtenay, and other halls have been substantially improved as at the Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross.
- 9.33 The future of the remaining Exmoor schools now looks more assured. In Somerset a review was prompted in 2006 when projections indicated that the number of pupils could fall below 30 by 2010 for three of the six first schools in the National Park. The review has led to closer working between schools and the formation of two federations, one involving Timberscombe and Cutcombe first schools and the other between Exford, Dulverton First and Dulverton Middle schools. Devon County Council has a presumption against closure of small schools unless it believes they are educationally unsuitable and closer working is helping to sustain the primary schools in Lynton and Parracombe.
- 9.34 Living in or near to a National Park like Exmoor with a high quality rights of way network and extensive tracts of open country, enables easier access to the benefits that derive from more healthy lifestyles associated with recreational activities such as walking, horse riding and mountain biking. There are plans to extend these benefits to communities within easy reach of the National Park through links with the Devon and Somerset Primary Care Trusts.
- 9.35 Local residents have a wide range of concerns and needs in addition to the specific issues identified above that are particularly relevant to the status of the area as a National Park. For example, health and social services and community safety are key concerns in Exmoor's communities as elsewhere but have not been explored in this Management Plan. These concerns provide the focus for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) that bring together local authorities, health authorities, police and other services and agencies, to deliver services in a more integrated way. More locally, parish partnerships, such as the Lyn & Exmoor Vision covering Lynton & Lynmouth and surrounding parishes, can play a key role in helping to set out and meet the needs of their communities^[33].
- 9.36 Exmoor falls within the areas covered by the West Somerset Strategic Partnership and North Devon Community Alliance. The partnerships have been active in consulting local people and developing community strategies^[34] for their areas and the Exmoor National Park Management Plan should be seen as a focused plan for the National Park alongside and complementary to these strategies. A further level of integration is provided by the Devon and Somerset Local Area Agreements (LAAs)^[6] that set out the commitments of local authority partners to working together to deliver more effective local services.

External Funding Opportunities

- 9.37 Several Exmoor projects received European funding under the South West European Objective 2 programme that finished in 2006. A new Objective 2 programme starts in 2007 and it is hoped that eligibility will continue for Exmoor communities. The South West Regional Development Agency funds a range of rural development initiatives including the Somerset and North Devon Rural Renaissance programmes which have benefited projects and business on Exmoor. From 2007, there will be a new Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE) delivered through the RDA. Northern Devon and West Somerset are priority areas for support to the rural economy and there is potential to use existing mechanisms such as the North Devon & Exmoor Regeneration Company, to deliver a LEADER-style' RDPE programme in the area.
- 9.38 On a smaller scale, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has provided an innovative funding programme to National Park areas through the National Park Sustainable Development Fund (Exmoor NPSDF). Since 2003, the Department has provided £200,000 a year for local innovative projects that combine environmental, community and economic outcomes and the South West Regional Development Agency has added a further £300,000 over three years to 2008.
- 9.39 Whilst there are likely to be opportunities for external funding there is concern that Exmoor lacks the capacity to attract funding of the scale that is needed for some of the more ambitious projects that the area needs. A recent initiative by the Exmoor Trust is bringing together local authorities and other groups to agree ways to develop a locally based project to lead in developing funding bids of the quality that is needed if they are to be successful.

Figure 9.4 – Exmoor National Park Sustainable Development Fund achievements 2002-2006

Active Exmoor, beekeeping, birdwatching, butterflies, cameras (to watch bats), dormice, education projects, Exmoor Horn Sheep, Exmoor ponies, Food Links, firewood, a gallery, hydro electricity.... mobile reedbeds, multimedia... Wimbleball Lake, wood heating boilers ... the Exmoor Sustainable Development Fund has helped them all. From April 2002 to March 2006:

- 79 projects were offered grant aid from 215 expressions of interest
- Sustainable Development Fund projects:
 - engaged more than 5300 young people
 - reached over 1217 businesses,
 - involved 154 community and voluntary groups in 90 new partnerships
- The project attracted 94 press articles, 16 radio interviews and 2 TV features
- £840,000 of grants drew in £2.5m of other funding and over £323,000 of in-kind support
- 16 projects involved linking people from hinterland towns with Exmoor activities and groups, one project had a global perspective
- 53 projects provide models of local sustainable development which could be replicated elsewhere
- 53 are continuing after the grant aid has been spent
- 61 projects involve a significant impact on attitudes and understanding on the part of project participants

Desired outcome for Exmoor's economy and communities:

“By 2020 Exmoor's communities retain a continuity of connection with the land; people have access to affordable services and facilities, and there is a strong, diverse and sustainable economy that benefits from and contributes to the care and appreciation of Exmoor National Park”

Objectives and targets for Exmoor's economy and communities:

[Key targets identified for inclusion in the Core Plan are shown in boxes]

Objective H1

To ensure housing needs are adequately met to sustain local communities and the landscape and facilities of the National Park

Targets:

H 1.1 At least 60 new affordable dwellings will be completed where there is demonstrable need in the National Park over the five years to the end of 2012, and this provision will be available to help meet need in perpetuity. Lead organisation: North Devon & West Somerset Rural Housing Project

H 1.2 New affordable housing will be available for occupation within 3 years of securing suitable sites (conversions as well as new build) over the period of the plan. Lead organisations: Exmoor National Park Authority with North Devon District & West Somerset Councils (Local Housing Authorities)

Objective H2

To support the provision and retention of community facilities and services that are reasonably accessible and affordable to Exmoor's residents

Targets:

- H 2.1 Targets set out in the North Devon and West Somerset community strategies will be achieved where they relate to communities in the National Park. Lead organisations: North Devon District Council, West Somerset Council.
- H 2.2 The needs of Exmoor's communities will continue to be addressed in Local Area Agreements and other local and regional strategies and plans over the period of the plan. Lead organisations: Local Authorities – Devon CC, Somerset CC, West Somerset Council, North Devon District Council, Exmoor National Park Authority
- H 2.3 The potential for a new year round bus route linking Dulverton to Lynton and Lynmouth via Winsford, Exford and Simonsbath will be established by the end of 2009. Lead organisations: Exmoor National Park Authority with Somerset County Council
- H 2.4 The majority of local residents in the National Park will know how they can access information regarding the management of the National Park over the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- H 2.5 The majority of local residents in the National Park will be aware of mechanisms to enable them to comment upon and influence decisions regarding planning applications and the provision of other local government services over the period of the plan. Lead organisations: Local Authorities – Devon County Council , Somerset County Council , West Somerset Council, North Devon District Council, Exmoor National Park Authority

H 2.6 Improved cardiac health and more healthy lifestyles will be encouraged amongst people living in Somerset and North Devon by providing opportunities for supported active recreation and quiet enjoyment within the National Park over the period of the plan. Lead organisations: Exmoor National Park Authority with Somerset and Devon Primary Care Trusts

H 2.7 Awareness of the risk of being bitten by a tick in the National Park and the possibility that this could lead to infection with Lyme disease will be increased over the period of the plan, together with awareness of the action to take to reduce risk and obtain medical treatment when appropriate. Lead organisations: Exmoor National Park Authority with Somerset and Devon Primary Care Trusts

Objective H3

To develop the greater Exmoor economy in ways that will increase the range and scope of employment and training opportunities for local people, particularly those that benefit people with relatively low household incomes and that relate to or further conservation and enhancement of Exmoor's special qualities

Targets:

H 3.1 A Greater Exmoor Sustainable Economy Strategy will be implemented over the period of the plan based on the study undertaken by the New Economics Foundation in 2006. Lead organisations: Devon County Council , Somerset County Council , West Somerset Council, North Devon District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority

H 3.2 An up to date 'broadband' and communications infrastructure using modern technologies will be available by the end of 2010 to ensure potential access to businesses and households across the National Park particularly where there is not good access via the telephone network. Lead organisation: Somerset County Council (with West Somerset Council and North Devon District Council)

H 3.3 Financial support from the South West Regional Development Agency and other sources will be secured over the period of the plan to assist in the development of a sustainable economy within the National Park and surrounding areas. Lead organisations: Devon County Council , Somerset County Council , West Somerset Council, North Devon District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority

H 3.4 Support from Defra and the South West RDA for the Exmoor National Park Sustainable Development Fund will be maintained over the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

H 3.5 At least 100 Exmoor based businesses will be meeting 50% or more of their heating and energy needs from wood fuel and/or other non-fossil fuel sources by the end of 2012. Lead organisation: Greater Exmoor Network for Renewable Energy with support from the Somerset County Council Sustainable Development Team in Somerset

Other training and skills development targets in the National Park Management Plan include:

- C3.9 - building conservation work and renovation
- D2.2 - sustainable building techniques
- D3.4 - installation and maintenance of renewable energy systems
- E2.4 - farming and land management
- F2.4 - vocational training at schools and colleges
- G5.3 - recreation management and adventure tourism