

**Response of Exmoor National Park Authority to the ‘SURVEY
OF RESIDENTS’ ATTITUDES IN THE EXMOOR NATIONAL
PARK’ circulated by Mr Liddell-Grainger MP**

APRIL 2009

This document presents some short responses to the questions posed by Mr Liddell-Grainger MP in a survey that he circulated to residents in the West Somerset part of Exmoor National Park in April 2009. For further information on the work and achievements of Exmoor National Park Authority please visit our website or contact us directly:

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The original questions from the survey use this text style. Authority responses are in this style and in blue.

Questions 1 to 3 relate to the residence of the responder and have been omitted.

4. Do you feel your views are being represented by West Somerset Council?

Yes? _____ **No?** _____ **Don't know?** _____

or by Exmoor National Park Authority?

Yes? _____ **No?** _____ **Don't know?** _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response

Exmoor National Park Authority and West Somerset Council are different organisations with different remits. Both organisations can provide many examples where they have effectively represented the interests of Exmoor communities within their spheres of influence. Indeed, the presence of both organisations means that Exmoor's needs are being championed by both organisations with complementary effect. For example, the National Park Authority has a direct link to parts of central government that are important for people engaged in hill farming on Exmoor such as Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Natural England.

The English National Park Authorities Association is made up of all 10 National Parks in England and provides a combined voice on behalf of National Park areas. This opportunity is not available to communities outside the National Park and this has been used, for example, to influence legislation and attract funding to National Park areas including the National Park Sustainable Development Funds. Similarly, West Somerset Council has wider influence to the benefit of the area through its partnerships with other councils and the Local Government Association.

Exmoor National Park includes a part of North Devon as well as West Somerset including Exmoor's largest settlement in Lynton & Lynmouth. Clearly, West Somerset Council has no specific remit to represent the interests of communities in that part of the National Park in North Devon. This means that the National Park

Authority is better positioned to represent those interests that apply across the whole National Park, for example, in encouraging the Devon and Somerset agencies responsible for tourism promotion to both feature Exmoor in their promotions, and promoting the interests of farming in the National Park which neither district council has done or is well placed to do [see also response to question 14].

West Somerset Council is responsible for all local government services across the West Somerset part of the National Park with the exception of the planning service. Thus, building control; waste collections; environmental health; economic development etc. are functions of the district council not the National Park Authority. The primary responsibility for social and affordable housing provision in the West Somerset area of the National Park is also the responsibility of the district council.

6. Do you believe that all Government appointees to the National Park Authority should be local people?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

Government appointments to National Park Authorities are made by the Secretary of State for Defra and these appointments have been part of the make up of National Park Authorities since their inception.

The 6 Secretary of State appointees are a minority of the Authority's 22 members. The remainder of the members are appointed by the local district and county councils and 4 are elected to the National Park Authority by parish councils in the National Park area.

When there are vacancies for Secretary of State appointees on National Park Authorities, Defra places national, regional and local advertisements and undertakes the shortlisting, interviewing and eventual selection of applicants. This process follows 'Nolan Rules' that are established by Government to ensure open-ness and fairness in the appointments process.

There is no reason that Secretary of State appointees to the Authority cannot be residents of the National Park. Ultimately, the principle role of the Secretary of State appointees is to be independent of local councils in recognition of that the funding for National Parks is allocated from the taxes of the whole nation

7. Do you believe they should be paid for their services?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

All members of local government and government bodies receive some allowances for undertaking their public duties. The same, very modest allowance, is provided to all Authority members including Secretary of State appointees.

The payment rates are determined locally and the process used in Exmoor National Park Authority includes an assessment of an independent remuneration panel that does not include any National Park Authority members or staff. The amount of the allowance is reduced by a third compared to the assessed value of the time spent by members to reflect the expectation of a voluntary element in public office. The most

recent report of the panel for Exmoor National Park Authority was considered on 3 February 2009 and is available on the Authority website via this link:

<http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/ar-enpa-03-02-09-item12.pdf>

Thus, there is nothing unusual about the process used in Exmoor for setting members allowances which is the same as that used by West Somerset Council and other local councils.

8. Do you believe the National Park planning system is fair?

Yes? _____ **No?** _____ **Don't know?** _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

The National Park Authority operates its planning processes in exactly the same way as all other planning authorities in England. All requests for advice and all planning applications are considered in line with planning law and with publicly available planning policies.

The National Park Authority website contains a great deal of up to date information on the planning process, planning policies and all planning applications that the Authority has received. Link:

http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/index/living_in/planning.htm

The Planning Committee sets planning policy and makes the decisions on applications. An objective approach is applied to all applicants and all objectors without any discrimination on grounds of length of residency in the National Park or other matters that are not proper considerations when deciding planning applications.

The Authority aims to process applications as quickly as possible and decisions are made by planning staff in many cases. More complex cases where, for example, the parish or town council has a view that is different from planning officers, are decided at Planning Committee meetings. Unsuccessful applicants have the right of appeal to the Planning Inspectorate and no charge is made to consider the appeal.

The Authority is conscious that planning matters can lead to a great deal of distress and even antagonism on occasion and Exmoor National Park is no different from any other part of the country in that respect. The Authority does as much as it can to guide and advise on its planning policies and to look at ways in which potential developments can be designed to fit in with planning policies. For example, pre-application advice is provided at no charge even though it is the policy in some councils to charge for this advice.

As a result, more than 9 out of 10 planning applications to Exmoor National Park Authority are approved.

Planning policy can only be changed after local public consultation and consultation will begin in 2009 on a review of planning policies in Exmoor National Park.

The National Park Authority frequently receives thanks by applicants for the fairness of presentation at Committee and by members of the Standards Board who monitor Planning Committee meetings.

9. Do you feel the National Park Authority should be providing a better range of housing within the park, including affordable housing for young, local families?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

The National Park Authority does not provide housing, the responsibility for housing provision rests with West Somerset and North Devon Councils in their respective areas of the National Park.

However, the National Park Authority does have a key role as planning authority in determining the mix of new housing provision. These planning policies are aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing for people with a local connection and in housing need.

Inevitably it takes time to build a house as land needs to be acquired, plans drawn up, planning permission granted and funding raised. The first new affordable home under the new planning policies was completed in 2006 and in the 2.5 years since then 32 new local needs affordable houses have either been completed and occupied or are under construction. Plans for 15 more affordable houses are proceeding through the planning process and 46 more are under discussion.

The aim over time is to establish a range of housing across the National Park to help meet local needs and to ensure that these homes remain affordable and for local people in housing need into the future.

10. Do you believe the National Park Authority should be concentrating its financial resources more on community-based projects which benefit local people, rather than on conservation, environmental projects and interpretation schemes?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response;

Conservation, environmental projects and interpretation schemes are the core roles of a National Park Authority

The National Park Authority receives around 80% of its annual expenditure direct from central government for these purposes. The remaining 20% is secured from grants and outside sources such as Lottery funding for specific projects and activities. The Authority does not receive any portion of local Council Tax so all the funding it receives is additional to that secured by local councils and other local organisations.

Furthermore, the '**conservation, environmental projects and interpretation schemes**' make a very significant contribution to the local economy.

A good example of this is the recent lobbying work of the Authority which helped secure an additional £1.6 million over two years from Natural England for conservation work under the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme. This funding is drawn down by local farmers and the majority of it used for hedgerow management and fencing undertaken by local contractors – that is local jobs directly funded to help achieve National Park purposes.

Other examples include securing over £1.2 million for woodland management in the National Park in the past two years; and £400,000 to local contractors from lottery grants attracted by the West Somerset Mineral Line project.

11. Do you think the National Park Authority listens to your views and opinions?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

The Authority is always open to comments and we receive letters, phone calls and e-mails from local people and the general public every working day. Authority members and staff regularly attend parish meetings and community groups and are always willing to attend meetings whenever we are invited.

The Authority provides a range of opportunities for local residents and others to provide their input to the development of Authority policy. The most important of these are the development of the National Park Management Plan and the Local Development Plan.

All Authority and Planning meetings are open to the public and press and members of the public are given the opportunity to express their views to Members

This year, the Authority will be working with parish councils and arranging other opportunities to enable local people to have their say in reviewing the planning policies for the National Park.

The Authority listened in the consideration of the future of the bungalow at Blackpitts near Simonsbath resulting in the reversal of an earlier decision to provide a replacement new dwelling in Simonsbath itself. In 2004, the Authority consulted on ideas for an extended visitor centre at County Gate and decided not to proceed because of objections from the Exmoor Society and local people. We listen and act.

12. Do you agree that the quality of life within the National Park has declined over the last 10 years?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Stayed the same? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

Many factors affect 'quality of life' in the National Park and elsewhere and the vast majority of these factors are well outside the influence of local authorities or other local organisations.

The conservation and environmental projects and education and advisory services that the Authority provides all make a positive contribution to the quality of life for residents and visitors. Furthermore, the attraction of substantial funding for these projects makes an important contribution to the local economy

13. Do you think more needs to be done to encourage tourists to come and visit Exmoor?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

Yes.

The National Park Authority has always actively supported the initiatives of local councils and tourism businesses to promote Exmoor and the wider area.

In a national survey undertaken by National Opinion Polls in 2007 only 4 out of 11 other English and Welsh National Parks received higher awareness scores than Exmoor - the Lake District, Peak District, Snowdonia and Dartmoor.

Tourism is estimated to be worth over £200 million a year to the greater Exmoor economy which compares well with other National Park areas.

Compared to other National Park areas Exmoor has a relatively high proportion of staying visitors but fewer day visitors. Staying visitors make a substantially higher economic contribution than day visitors and, while overall visitor days is lower than most other National Parks in England, the economic contribution per visitor to Exmoor is high.

A big factor in determining how many visits an area gets is distance from large urban areas and lack of competing similar attractions. Exmoor is distant from large cities and from the motorway network and the South West is generally a highly attractive environment. Given this position National Park status and the relatively high awareness of Exmoor help to make a substantial positive contribution to the Exmoor tourism economy.

14. Do you consider farming to be an industry which is vital to the long-term prosperity of Exmoor?

Yes? _____ No? _____ Don't know? _____

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Exmoor National Park Authority working has consistently championed the best long-term interests of farming in the National Park. We want to see a profitable future for traditional livestock farming in the National Park and have played an active role at regional and national level to attract additional public funding for Exmoor farming. The Chief Executive of the National Park Authority is the chairman of the South West Uplands Task Force which is lobbying regional organisations and government for:

- Increased payments for the upland farmers through the Single Payment Scheme
- Environmental Stewardship schemes that are adaptable to local conditions and reward farmers for the full range public benefits they provide, and
- An effective strategy to eradicate bovine TB

In the first year, £2.6 million of additional agricultural funding has been pledged to Exmoor by regional organisations as a result of lobbying work by the Authority.

In addition, the Authority has held many Ministerial visits and meetings where the Authority has lobbied for Exmoor farming. The most recent of these was a visit by Jane Kennedy MP, Minister for Farming and the Environment, jointly hosted with the National Farmers Union and local farming representatives in April of this year.

Any other comments:

Exmoor National Park Authority response:

The National Park Authority has a challenging role in championing the needs of Exmoor's communities, economy and environment. Over the last ten years it has made significant achievements to the benefit of Exmoor including the attraction of many £ millions to support the development of the local economy as well as to achieve environmental purposes.

Ultimately, the best interests of Exmoor will be served by all individuals, organisations and authorities working together. We believe that negative stories in local and regional newspapers about the work of the National Park Authority and other efforts to undermine the reputation of the Authority will be highly damaging to the long-term interests of Exmoor.

The Authority is ready and willing to work with local people to identify the problems and work up solutions so that we can work together in the best interests of Exmoor's communities and economy.