

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

3 December 2019

ANNUAL ESTATE REVIEW 2018/19

Report of the Land and Property Manager

Purpose of the report: To present the Annual Estate Review 2018/19 to the Authority Committee.

RECOMMENDATION: The Authority Committee is recommended to NOTE the Annual Estate Review 2018/19.

Authority Priority:

- Broaden our income base to ensure sustainable delivery of National Park purposes.
- Manage Authority owned land in ways that will enhance the special qualities of Exmoor

Legal Implications: The legal impact of the recommendation(s) of this report has been assessed as follows: None

Equality Implications: The equality impact of the recommendation(s) of this report has been assessed as follows:

- No disadvantage will be incurred as a result of belonging to a protected group as defined within the Equality Act 2010
- The recommendations have no implications under the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998

Financial and Risk Implications: The financial and risk implications of the recommendation(s) of this report have been assessed as follows:

- Financial: None
- Risk: None

Climate Change Response: In response to the Authority's Climate Declaration, officers are preparing an action plan, which will include proposals for reducing emissions from Estate operations and opportunities for carbon storage and sequestration.

Exmoor National Park Authority

Annual Estate Review 2018/19

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to give an overview of the management of the Authority's estate for the period April 2018 to November 2019. It does not mention every individual property, only those where there are, or have been, significant issues or changes. Financial reporting is confined to the year April 2018 to March 2019.

2. INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

2.1 Capital Receipts

There were no capital receipts from property assets within the period.

2.2 Revenue expenditure and income 2018/19:

Cost Centre	Expenditure £	Income £	Net Position £
Land & Property (Includes project costs and salaries)	(391,156)	267,570	(123,586)
Visitor Facilities (Car parks and public toilets)	(90,926)	58,969	(31,957)
Woodland	(165,268)	62,184	(103,084)
	(647,350)	388,723	(258,627)

2017/18

Cost Centre	Expenditure £	Income £	Net Position £
Land & Property (Includes project costs and salaries)	(358,370)	262,714	(95,656)
Visitor Facilities (Car parks and public toilets)	(84,470)	60,990	(23,480)
Woodland	(172,806)	111,739	(61,067)
	(615,646)	435,443	(180,203)

2016/17

Cost Centre	Expenditure £	Income £	Net Position £
Land & Property	(287,376)	249,991	(37,385)
Visitor Facilities	(97,767)	54,528	(43,239)
Woodland	(203,091)	98,714	(104,377)
	(588,234)	403,233	(185,001)

Clearly the net position is down on the previous year by £78,500. Almost £50,000 of this relates to a drop in woodland grant income as two grant schemes came to an end. The Authority's woodlands are now in a Countryside Stewardship scheme. Other negative differences include a slight (weather related) fall in car park income (2017/18 was unusually high). The figures given include project spend which, by its nature, is spiky and so shouldn't be regarded as a matter for concern.

3. LET ESTATE

Moorland

- 3.1 A large proportion of the Authority's 4,300ha (10,700 acres) moorland estate was bought with funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and is held in trust for the Nation.

This means that it may only be disposed of by conveyance to an organisation with similar objectives to the National Park Authority such as the National Trust, or other suitably approved body, for *no consideration*. The majority of the agricultural rents mentioned above are derived from this land.

Brexit continues to create uncertainty in the agricultural land market and this inevitably feeds through to farm rents. At a national scale landlords and tenants have been exercising caution and, in the hills, with both cattle and sheep prices continuing to fall, it will come as no surprise to Members that the Authority hasn't undertaken any moorland rent reviews this year.

3.2 **Land at Warren (705 ha, bare moorland)**

Our tenants at Warren had been occupying the land on a tenancy from year to year since the expiry of their fixed term in 2011. However, with a change in the structure of the farm business (brought about by taking one of their sons into the partnership), they requested a new Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) with a long fixed term. It was suggested that the Authority include (the then vacant) Blackpits in the tenancy, so as to provide separate accommodation for the son. Members will recall that in May they approved a 20 year FBT for the Warren land and a five year rolling tenancy of Blackpits bungalow and land. This arrangement is working well.

3.3 **Burcombe (66 ha, bare moorland)**

Burcombe was a focus of Frederick Knight's attempt to mine iron from the Forest. Consequently, there are disused shafts and adits throughout this area of access land. All of the discoverable remains were surveyed in 1995 by the Exmoor Mines Research Group. The survey report also listed several of the workings as unfound but gave their approximate positions from historical evidence. A firm of mining consultants from Cornwall has been commissioned to undertake a resurvey, which is underway at time of writing.

3.4 **Driver Farm (319 ha, equipped holding)**

Last year's report highlighted the deteriorating condition of the 1970s portal frame building at Driver.

During the summer three local agricultural building contractors were invited to quote for carrying out the necessary repairs and for adding a modest overhang to the southern elevation, which will create an additional feeding area for housed livestock. A contractor has been booked for the spring, when the shed has been cleared out.

Building surveyors have been instructed to carry out a condition survey of the farmhouse as part of quantifying works for which both landlord and tenant are responsible. We await their report.

3.5 **Swaling**

A week of suitable weather at the end of February this year allowed the Rangers to catch up a little with the swaling backlog, see inset table below.

Site	Total Burnt 2011	Total Burnt 2012	Total Burnt 2013	Total Burnt 2014	Total Burnt 2015	Total Burnt 2016	Total Burnt 2017	Total Burnt 2018	Total Burnt 2019	Av Rotation since 2011
North Hill	19.6 ha	16.7 ha	11.6 ha	5.7 ha	12.2 ha	0 ha	0 ha	7 ha	16.2 ha	8 yrs
Cosgate	3.3 ha	0 ha	0 ha	7.5 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha	13 yrs
East Anstey	9.6 ha	11.6 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha	5.6 ha	16 yrs
Haddon Hill	20.2 ha	28.1 ha	18.7 ha	0 ha	6 ha	14.5 ha	0 ha	0 ha	20.6 ha	10 yrs
Mill Hill	23.6 ha	23.2 ha	0 ha	30.1 ha	0 ha	25.3 ha	0 ha	0 ha	28.2 ha	16 yrs

Questions have arisen over the future of swaling as a management tool since the declaration of a climate emergency. This is a debate which looks set to run for a while, drawing in various other issues, such as the burgeoning tick population and the potential for very large wildfires if the moorland fuel load is allowed to accumulate.

4. IN-HAND ESTATE

Moorland

4.1 North Hill (249 ha moorland and woodland)

- In January the Authority defeated a claim for adverse possession of a parcel of land at North Hill. A former owner of an adjoining property had extended the driveway into the Authority's land and erected a building on it.

Acting on our solicitor's advice, once the Land Registry had confirmed the failure of the application, the applicants were offered the choice of removing the building and the tarmac surface or buying the land parcel at an arm's length valuation.

They have elected to buy it and negotiations over the precise area to be conveyed continue.

- There have been a number of meetings with the National Trust over the course of the year in connection with a joint management plan. Things are still at a formative stage, but greater progress is expected over the next 12 months.

4.2 The Chains (385 ha, bare moorland)

The Chains is in a Higher Level Stewardship agreement which comes to an end in June 2020. Natural England has indicated that it might offer a one year extension and we are waiting for more details. If this opportunity fails to materialise then it should be possible to put the Chains into the higher tier of Countryside Stewardship.

Woodland

- 4.3 The Authority owns and/or manages about 571 ha (1,410 acres) of woodland. The work summarised below was largely completed last winter.

Burridge Wood

Management of dense holly and beech seedling understorey to release oak, hazel and rowan continues. Pupils from Dulverton school have been involved in tagging and measuring oak saplings supported through the Plantlife Project.

Hawkridge Wood

Plantlife has also supported a detailed survey of important lichen features in Hawkridge Wood. This is in advance of targeted thinning to improve conditions for lichens. RemoWe have also removed beech seedlings and carried out a light thinning of oak to further release oak regeneration.

Tarr Steps

At Tarr Steps we have carried out a targeted thinning of the canopy to improve conditions for regeneration and stand stability. The meadow has also been cut. Dismantling of lichen encrusted ash tree which was at risk of collapse was filmed by BBC Countryfile and the lichens translocated by a Plantlife team.

Ashcombe and Simonsbath

Removal of rhododendron and cherry laurel has been ongoing. The planting programme has included scots pine, willows, alder and swamp cypress. A number of ash trees have felled due to ash dieback (ADB).

North Hill

Selective thinning at Moor Wood following Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) principles has released quality timber, sold at a premium to local timber framer.

Woodcombe Community Woodland continued their programme of work in Woodcombe Wood.

Hawkcombe

It's been another busy year at Hawkcombe with a further 0.3 ha coppice plot felled to assist recovery of heath fritillary. Veteran oaks were released through halo thinning (Plantlife), rare filmy fern habitat improved by removing shading beech trees (Plantlife). An area of pollards was re-pollarded following detailed baseline surveying by a Plantlife team. Beech seedlings have been removed and we have undertaken further work to remove sections of the redundant silt trap dam.

Culbone/Yarner

Viewpoints, vistas and carriage drives associated with historic Ashley Combe gardens have been revealed and opened up. Culbone-wide invasive species control continued.

Hadborough Plantation

This plantation has been marked up ready for thinning.

Throughout

Tree safety inspections have been completed and work to hazard trees is underway. Estate-wide assessment of ash completed to develop a plan to respond to threat from ADB. Details in next year's summary.

4.4 Exmoor Ponies

The Authority has the following ponies on its land:

- 16 mares and 3 foals (2 colts and 1 filly) on Haddon Hill
- 15 mares and one gelding on North Hill
- 5 geldings and 1 mare on East Anstey Common (during the summer)
- 3 mares at Long Holcombe

As mentioned in last year's report, a stallion had been running with our herd at Haddon Hill to produce a small number of foals to replenish the Haddon bloodline. The stallion was removed in early 2019. This year we have had 3 foals: 1 filly and 2 colts. The filly will remain on Haddon and the colts will be removed and rehomed eventually as conservation grazers.

5. OPERATIONAL PROPERTIES

5.1 Warehouse (Dulverton)

Cyclical external repairs and redecoration were completed during the summer.

In the early autumn a combination of heavy rain and a blocked drain the adjoining (Guildhall) car park led to a flood in the warehouse. The Facilities officers had, just the day before, prepared a delivery of stock to the Centres and this was sitting inside the door. Fortunately, the losses through water damage amounted to only a few hundred pounds. The event has led to a review of drainage at the Warehouse.

6 PUBLIC FACILITIES

6.1 Public Conveniences

All of the Authority's public toilets are well used and require constant monitoring/upkeep. Our current cleaning contractor plays a vital role in this; he visits each on a daily basis and is happy to carry out simple repairs in addition to his

cleaning duties. Any serious defects are called in to the team on the day they are discovered.

The Facilities Officers carry out their own monthly inspections and base their maintenance programme around these.

In April the Porlock Weir public toilets were refurbished at a cost of £9,500. All fittings are in contrasting colours in line with best practice for the visually impaired (also recommended by bodies like the Alzheimer's Society).

6.2 Car Parks

6.2.1 The Authority owns 13 car parks, which vary in size and formality:

- Ashcombe (Simonsbath)
- Blackmoor Gate
- County Gate
- Cussacombe Gate
- Exford
- Haddon Hill
- Marsh Bridge
- North Hill (Moor Wood)
- North Hill (Burgundy Combe)
- Quarme Hill Layby
- Robbers Bridge
- Tarr Steps
- Valley of Rocks

We currently charge for parking at Tarr Steps and the Valley of Rocks. Voluntary donations are encouraged at both Ashcombe and Haddon Hill. As can be seen from the table at 2.2, income from these car parks is quite significant. Of the £59,000 taken last year, donations accounted for £1,650.

As part of the Authority's response to the uncertain financial situation, Officers are looking at all opportunities to increase income from the estate.

A comprehensive review of the potential to charge in some other car parks is planned for next year and a paper containing options on this subject will be presented to Members in due course.

Upgrading the Tarr Steps car park machine to accept card payments has resulted in a 15% increase in takings (on this time last year). There is scope to do the same at the Valley of Rocks and this is planned as part of a re-landscaping project.

6.2.2 Charging points for electric vehicles (EVs) were discussed at some length following an invitation from Forum 21 to participate in a community focussed scheme. There is support for these amongst Officers, but it is felt that installation in any of the Authority's car parks should be undertaken as part of a strategic network in West Somerset and North Devon. It is also felt that a partnership arrangement with one of the commercial providers would be the most straightforward option for the Authority. There is scope to explore this subject alongside the review of parking charges mentioned above.

7. OTHER PROPERTIES & PROJECTS

7.1 Weir Cleeve, Dulverton

Rock slope remedial works to all areas have been completed. It will now be necessary for the contractors to revisit each phase, 12 months from completion, to ensure that netting etc is adequate and that there has been no deterioration of the rock face. As a result, some additional work has been identified behind the joinery workshop in Northmoor Road. This is due to be done in late November.

7.2 County Gate

Last year's report explained that discussions with the National Trust had been very positive. This remains the case and a Governance paper has been submitted by the NT's local team. An update is awaited at time of writing.

7.3 Simonsbath Sawmill

Local woodland management firm Three Atop took the Sawmill on a 12 month peppercorn licence at around the time of the royal visit to Simonsbath. They are using it as an operational base, milling timber and running pay-for-entry tours etc. We will review the situation in summer 2020. Options include a further licence period (at a fee) or, perhaps, a lease. The latter would seek to transfer some repairing obligations to Three Atop.

The Sawmill Volunteers have taken something of a back seat, though they will continue to look after the leat and other components of the water power system. Some of the volunteers will also be joining those working in the Ashcombe gardens, a group which we expect will develop into the Simonsbath Volunteers.

7.4 Historic Environment

Standing Stone Condition Survey

The report is completed and available on the website. Three of the prehistoric stone settings owned by ENPA are considered 'At Risk' and are on the Historic England 'Heritage at Risk Register' and ENPA have secured grant funding from Historic England to undertake conservation work.

Larkbarrow

Exmoor Mires Partnership withdrew from working on this site. ENPA now developing own proposals. An archaeological measured Survey by Hazel Riley has been undertaken of part of a contour leat on Swap Hill, part of John Knights early water carriage irrigation system of 1819-2020, to inform the rewetting proposals.

White Rock Cottage

Members will have been following this through other reports over the last few months, but building works at White Rock Cottage and the former Simonsbath School will be completed in early December 2019. Discussions are now underway between ENPA officers and Trustees of the newly formed Simonsbath & Exmoor Heritage Trust to scope out the potential transfer of the buildings during 2020. A meeting was held on 6th November 2019 to progress this and a small working group has been formed to develop a process and timescale.

Scrub and Bracken Control on Scheduled Monuments and Significant Archaeological Sites

Work undertaken at the Iron Age sites at Timberscombe, Oldbury and Berry Castle at Hawkcombe (the latter two are Scheduled Monuments 'at Risk').

North Hill

'North Hill on the Radar' event in September with convoy of c15 military vehicles (volunteers) from Minehead and the Radar Station open with displays on the history of the site and WWII ration refreshments. Some of the bases of military buildings were cleared of scrub. Walks were undertaken by volunteer walks leaders.

Listed Building Survey

County Gate Cottage (GII) is assessed as 'at Risk' in the listed building survey the Authority has undertaken across the NP.

The Incline (West Somerset Mineral Line)

Members may recall that last year a structural engineer was asked to examine the massive masonry retaining wall at the Incline. He concluded that it is sound but, amongst other things, recommended regular monitoring. A scheme was put into place and this monitoring continues at intervals of 6 months. Results to date suggest small but progressive movements of the wall outwards and downwards. Monitoring will remain at the same frequency until this is better understood. In the meantime, and as another consequence of the engineer's report, a camera survey of the culvert which runs through the wall is being commissioned. This will help identify any areas where water is able to seep into the fill behind the wall, thereby adding to the pressure upon it.

Some small scale consolidation work of a fireplace in the Winding House is planned for next spring.

7.5 **Pinkery Centre**

- Water supply – last year’s report mentioned that the dry summer in 2018 had resulted in a period of low flow from the spring. Water from the borehole on site contains high levels of manganese and so is not potable, however it was hoped that it could be used for flushing toilets etc. It has emerged that this is not practical and so plans are being made to increase the storage of water from the spring.
- The 2018 report also mentioned a planning application to replace failed PV slates with PV panels. This project was completed in May and has been very successful, with a significant reduction in use of the diesel generator.
- The comprehensive package of repair/redecoration work completed in 2017 included the replacement of a number of windows. Quite a few of these have since developed leaks and the contractor has been asked to rectify/replace.

7.6 **Land at Cutcombe Market**

Terms for the sale of the Authority’s two land parcels at the entrance to Cutcombe Market have now been agreed and solicitors are preparing the sale contract.

7.7 **Asset Review**

Members will recall signing off the revised acquisitions and disposals policy in May this year. Since then work to assess each property against the agreed criteria for retention/disposal has continued. This is not a quick process, but the end product will form the essence of the Review: an examination of each property and a draft list of potential disposals for other Officers and Members to consider.

A separate piece of work led by Rob Wilson-North is exploring the potential of our assets and aims to identify longer term visions/objectives in a systematic way. This ‘land visioning exercise’ is closely related to the asset review and fits within the context of recommendations in the Glover Review and the Authority’s Climate Emergency declaration.

A number of strands will be pursued to:

- 1) Address the challenges of climate change
- 2) Advance the Lawton agenda for nature (re-asserted by Glover in 2019)
- 3) Increase income potential
- 4) Clearly define and enhance or at least reinforce the special qualities wherever possible in order to deliver NP purposes
- 5) Address other challenges around resilience (eg plant health, flooding, farming systems in the future)

- 6) Explore better and closer working with partners and neighbours to maximise the impact of our approach.
- 7) Create opportunities for public engagement, understanding and enjoyment, health and wellbeing.

A workshop with ENPA staff will be carried out in December 2019. Follow-up sessions will take place with other stakeholders thereafter and with ENPA Members.

Matt Harley
Land & Property Manager
November 2019