

8 November 2011

## ITEM 4

### EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

**MINUTES** of the Meeting of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday, 8 November 2011 at 10.30am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

#### PRESENT

Mr W J Dyke (Chairman)

Miss A V Davis (Deputy Chairman)

Mr J Bray

Mrs A M Clitheroe

Mr R C Edgell

Mr J Freeman

Mr J Gurney

Dr S Head

Mr N Holliday

Ms D Kershaw

Mrs C Lawrence

Mrs B Maitland-Walker

Mr R Milton

Mrs F Nicholson

Mr S J Pugsley

Mr I Rigby

Mr T Taylor

Mr R J Webber

Dr J Wibberley

Mr A L Wright

Mr J Yabsley

**27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were no declarations of interest.

**28. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:** The Chairman reported recent attendance at meetings of the All Party Parliamentary Group on National Parks; the English National Park Authorities' Association; the Environment Agency; and Natural England.

#### 29. MINUTES

- i. **Confirmation:** The Minutes of the Authority's meeting held on 4 October 2011 were agreed and signed as a correct record.
- ii. **Matters arising:** There were no matters arising.

**30. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME:** See Minute 31 for a public question from Mrs Rachel Thomas, Exmoor Society.

#### 31. NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN / PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2012/2017

The meeting received the report of the Chief Executive.

##### Public Question Time

Mrs Rachel Thomas, Exmoor Society, congratulated the Authority on the draft Partnership Plan as being a simplified document that concentrated on National Park purposes; moved away from setting detailed targets; and provided a better link with the Local Development Framework. However, the Society was disappointed that the landscape section had not been strengthened and was surprised that reference to enhancement had been removed from the strap line, particularly having regard to the Authority's statutory purposes. Mrs Thomas also congratulated the Authority on Exmoor's recent designation as a Dark Sky Reserve.

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### **The Authority's Consideration**

Members welcomed the draft Partnership Plan 2012-2017 as a document that continued to build on the achievements of the current Management Plan and set out a concise, easily understood and logical sequence of priorities for the delivery of National Park purposes, divided into three programmes:

- A thriving, living landscape
- Connecting people and place
- Towards a sustainable future

It was recognised that in producing a succinct and accessible document, it was not possible to achieve a high level of detail; the Plan therefore identified key challenges and priorities for action, supported by a comprehensive evidence base contained in the revised State of the Park report.

In commenting on the draft Plan, Members suggested the following: greater acknowledgement of the industrial history of the area; reference to climate change mitigation where relevant to each priority; awareness of the potential impact of forestry on the landscape; emphasis on the importance of broadband infrastructure to rural businesses; and reference to the potential for external influences to impact upon the wider National Park setting.

It was recognised that resources would be constrained during the coming 5 year period and in addition to being a realistic framework for the Authority's work programme, the Plan should act as a mechanism for working with constituent local authorities and local communities, and for achieving support and commitment from key partner organisations. It was agreed that the Local Development Framework must contribute to delivery of the Plan and it was vital to establish a vision and a set of core objectives common to both documents.

In response to a request for clarity of the Authority's role towards achieving a sustainable future for Exmoor's communities, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Authority's primary functions were the conservation and enhancement of Exmoor's natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and the promotion of understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities. It was therefore not the role of the Authority to provide services that fell within the remit of the County and District Councils. However in working to fulfill its statutory role, and in the development of planning policies for the National Park, the Authority was keen to explore and understand how it could help to support the needs and aspirations of people living and working on Exmoor. He further advised that as part of the National Parks' family, the Authority would continue to represent rural communities at a national level.

The meeting was informed that the consultation period would end on 31 January 2012, during which time the Authority would continue to work with key partners to develop detailed action plans; and to devise a simple, effective mechanism for monitoring progress of the Plan.

**RESOLVED:** To authorise the Chief Executive to:

- (a) Make final changes to the draft and publish the plan for public consultation.

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- (b) Enter into further discussions with partners and other organisations in order to achieve commitment to the objectives and actions set out in the Plan.
- (c) Prepare a final plan based on responses received in consultation with the National Park Management Plan Implementation Board.

### **32. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN/LDF VISION AND OBJECTIVES, GENERAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIC OPTIONS**

The Authority received the report of the Head of Support to the Community.

#### **The Authority's Consideration**

Members considered a consultation document on the strategic elements of the Local Plan including options on spatial areas of policy and housing, prepared following the outcome of the Your Future Exmoor community consultation events. It was confirmed that in order to ensure consistency and cohesiveness, consultation would take place alongside that for the draft Partnership Plan for Exmoor.

The debate included the following comments:

#### General Policy 1: Achieving National Park Purposes and Sustainable Development

- To allow greater flexibility, development proposals should be required to demonstrate a lack of conflict with, rather than positive support for, the vision and objectives of the Partnership Plan and Local Plan.
- The use of local, traditional, sustainable building materials should be qualified as being a requirement where appropriate.
- Policy should encourage support for a diversity of employment opportunities additional to those in the land-based and tourism sectors.

#### General Policy 2: Major Development

- Reference should be made to the basis on which the Authority was invited to comment on proposals for development outside the National Park boundary and to the potential impact of such development on the National Park setting.

#### Securing Planning Benefits

- The meeting noted the government's consultation on proposals for the introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy to allow Planning Authorities to secure a levy from development towards community infrastructure and whether this should be extended to allow its use as funding towards affordable housing. It was recognised that as the levy would be charged on development over 100sqm, there would be limited potential for its application in the Exmoor context. However, the Authority was seeking views on whether the Local Plan should include an enabling policy so that future consideration could be given to introduction of CIL on development in the National Park. The importance of any levy charged being applied to benefit the community in which development was located was acknowledged.

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- It was agreed that the contribution to funding for affordable homes and to other, smaller, community benefits of commuted sums payable under planning obligation agreements would continue to be important.

Housing in Exmoor National Park: strategic options setting out different approaches to where development should go and delivery of affordable housing

Members agreed that as now, the priority must remain the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs. The meeting commended the work of the Rural Housing Enabler and stressed the importance of securing future funding to enable the project to continue.

However, it was noted that following significant reduction in the level of government housing grant, alternative means of financing the delivery of affordable homes would be considered, for example permitting open market housing to cross subsidise affordable housing provision.

Members acknowledged that due to topography and landscape considerations the number of potential development sites on Exmoor was limited and were mindful that any permission for open market housing to cross subsidise affordable housing could utilise a significant element of this restricted resource. There was also concern that the financial mechanisms for the delivery of affordable housing were likely to change over time and should therefore be separated from planning policy.

The consultation sought views on an option that would permit, if required to help fund affordable housing, the development of a new housing tier of 'local housing'; being only for local people who had lived in the National Park for 10 years or more but who may not qualify as being in affordable need. Members welcomed this initiative which had potential to meet the requirements of the wider local community by providing housing to which, for example, a local person in a family-sized home could downsize. However, it was recognised that due to its lower market value, local housing could not cross subsidise affordable housing to the same degree as open market development.

In relation to where development should take place, it was questioned whether the expansion of smaller settlements was appropriate in view of limited access to services and facilities; however, it was noted that some smaller communities may have suffered a period of decline and may wish to be revitalised by new development.

In approving the draft document as the basis for public consultation, it was agreed that the policies would require further refinement in the light of responses received. It was confirmed that the consultation documents would be available on the Authority's website and circulated to local services and to Parish Councils.

**RESOLVED:** To authorise the Chief Executive to make final changes to the draft and publish the plan for public consultation.

### **33. AUTHORITY MEETING DATES 2012 AND 2013**

**RESOLVED:** To agree the Authority's meeting dates for 2012 and 2013.

### **34. RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE**

The Authority received and noted the draft minutes of the Resources and Performance Committee on 20 September 2011.

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### **35. MEMBERS' REPORTS**

- Mr R J Webber reported on attendance at the Southern Parks Conference at the New Forest National Park Authority and on attendance at a meeting of the Moorland Board and Natural England which included an opportunity to see examples of moorland management on Dartmoor.
- Dr J Wibberley reported on attendance at an event to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dartmoor's designation as a National Park.
- It was agreed that the recent Members' Education Services Workshop at the Pinkery Outdoor Education Centre had been valuable.
- As the Authority's appointed representative on the West Somerset Strategic Partnership, Mr J Freeman reported that following withdrawal of funding the Partnership had now been wound up.

### **36. ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF URGENCY**

Mrs Rachel Thomas, Exmoor Society, advised that the Society had recently hosted a conference for all National Park Societies and thanked the National Park Authority for its assistance, including the contribution made by the Chief Executive and other members of staff as speakers at the event, and through funding from the Sustainable Development Fund. Mrs Thomas reported that the conference had been extremely successful, a particular highlight being a talk from school children about their experience of the Exmoor curriculum.

The meeting closed at 1.05pm

(Chairman)