

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday, 15 February 2011 at 10.30am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

**PRESENT**

	Mr W J Dyke (Chairman)
	Miss A V Davis (Deputy Chairman)
Mrs A M Clitheroe	Mr R Milton
Mr M A Collins	Mrs F Nicholson
Mr J Freeman	Mr M J Pile
Dr S Head	Mr S J Pugsley
Mrs S Hibbert	Mr F Rawle
Mr N Holliday	Mr I Rigby
Ms D Kershaw	Mr R J Webber
Mrs C Lawrence	Dr J Wibberley
Mrs B Maitland-Walker	

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R C Edgell and Mr J Yabsley.

**42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In relation to Item 6 – Review of the Governance Arrangements for National Park Authorities – Authority Submission to Defra:

- Mr R J Webber declared a personal interest as Chairman of the Exmoor Association of Parish Councils.
- All Members declared having been lobbied.

In relation to Item 10 – Exmoor Coast Interpretation Centre: Lynmouth Pavilion Project:

- Miss A V Davis declared a personal interest as Devon County Councillor for the Combe Martin Rural Ward.
- Mrs S Hibbert declared a personal interest as a Member of Lynton & Lynmouth Town Council.

**43. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- The Chairman and Members joined in congratulating former Authority Member, Mr John Edwards, on the award of an OBE for services to the community of Somerset in the 2011 New Year's Honours List; an award that Members agreed was thoroughly deserved in recognition of Mr Edwards' dedicated and enthusiastic membership for many years of both Somerset County Council and Exmoor National Park Authority.

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- The West Somerset Railway project had received a Highly Commended award in the building conservation category of the RICS 2010 South West regional awards. The judges considered this to have been a detailed research project from Exmoor National Park Authority, the Forestry Commission and English Heritage which secured the future of a building on the at risk register and two scheduled monuments, and resulted in an impressive educational and leisure resource.
- A visit to Exmoor by Richard Benyon, Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries, had unfortunately been subject to a last-minute postponement. The Minister was intending to travel to all National Parks and it was hoped that his trip to Exmoor would be rearranged in the near future.

#### **44. MINUTES**

i. **Confirmation**

The Minutes of the Authority's meeting held on 9 November 2010 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

ii. **Matters arising.**

Minute 34 – Amendments to Standing Orders and the Recording of Meetings: It was noted that Officers were undertaking some preliminary work to enable the Member group established to conduct a full review of Standing Orders to consider an initial draft document.

#### **45. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

See Minutes 46 and 47 below for public questions from Mrs M Groves, Exmoor Uprising and Mrs R Thomas, Exmoor Society, and Minute 54 below for a public question from Mr J Dallyn, Martinhoe Parish Meeting.

#### **46. REVIEW OF THE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITIES – AUTHORITY SUBMISSION TO DEFRA**

The Authority received the report of the Chief Executive

##### **Public Question Time**

- (1) Mrs M Groves, Exmoor Uprising, said that the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum was a first rate meeting which should be held a minimum of 5 times each year. She said that until authorised by Defra, the proposals set out in the Authority's response to the consultation on governance arrangements should not be implemented, and asked that Members insist on a large proportion of those appointed to the Authority being directly elected. Mrs Groves supported the proposal that the Authority hold an annual open meeting at which members of the public could raise any matter relating to the work of the Authority.
- (2) Mrs Rachel Thomas, Exmoor Society, said the Society believed an opportunity had been missed to reduce the overall size of the membership,

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which would reduce costs and improve accountability. The Society welcomed the proposed increase in Parish Members but was concerned that this would be balanced by a reduction in the number of 'National' members, who brought specialist knowledge and independent judgment to the Authority's core role of achieving National Park purposes. The Society also believed that as determination of the majority of planning applications was delegated to Planning Officers, the size of the Planning Committee and the frequency of its meetings should be reduced.

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

The Chief Executive advised that the proposed Authority submission to Defra reflected the views of Members developed at a Member workshop, having taken account of consultation responses.

It was agreed there was no 'magic number' which represented the optimum size of the membership; and that of greater importance was the achievement of economy, effectiveness and efficiency in the Authority's operations, together with a culture of constructive engagement with local communities. The current size was considered to work well, with the membership being representative of local people and bringing to the Authority a wide range of interests and perspectives. However there was support for altering the composition by increasing the number of Parish Members from 4 to 5 to provide additional assurance of representation of local interests. This would be balanced by a corresponding reduction in the number of 'National' Members appointed by the Secretary of State, whom it was agreed should serve a maximum of two 4-year terms with a third term appropriate only in exceptional circumstances.

In relation to the size of the Planning Committee, it was acknowledged that the majority of planning applications were quite properly delegated to Planning Officers. However, it was recognised that applications which came before the Committee often did so because a detailed examination against policy was required. It was therefore through the Planning Committee that Members gained a thorough understanding of the effect of Local Plan policies and were able to consider how planning policy might evolve.

The increased community engagement achieved by the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum was commended and Members were concerned to increase participation of the younger Exmoor community through attendance at the Forum, as well as through engagement with the Authority's education officers and liaison with voluntary youth organisations in Devon and Somerset. The proposed Annual Open Meeting was welcomed as an additional mechanism of community engagement.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) To approve the submission to Defra setting out the proposed changes in Authority governance arrangements arising from the review and taking account of consultation responses.
  - (2) To authorise the Chief Executive to commence arrangements for implementation of the governance changes with immediate effect excluding those changes that require prior approval by the Secretary of State. Prior approval will be required for the proposed changes in the composition of the Authority membership.

**47. RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT SPENDING REVIEW AND THE NATIONAL PARK GRANT FUNDING SETTLEMENT**

The Authority received the report of the Chief Executive.

**Public Question Time**

- (1) Mrs M Groves, Exmoor Uprising, said the Authority could significantly reduce the number of IT and Corporate Services staff and that all specialist posts could be replaced with a broad range of conservationists. Mrs Groves believed National Park Centres should continue to be supported and that the work of the Field Services Team was essential to the future of the moor. With the availability of video conferencing facilities, Mrs Groves questioned the need for Member attendance at the ANPA Workshop.
- (2) Mrs Rachel Thomas, Exmoor Society, said the Society considered the report to be a thoughtful response to the public spending review and evidence of good financial management. The Society hoped that conservation and land management services would not be reduced, and believed the Authority should enable and stimulate the private and voluntary organisations that contributed to National Park purposes. In supporting the three primary audiences, the Society felt it would be important to monitor the impact of this customer facing focus on the long-term interests of the National Park.

**The Authority's Consideration**

Members commended the report, which in response to the reduction in National Park Grant Settlement set out a proposed shift of focus from project and partnership programme delivery to the provision of outward facing services to the key communities of the National Park:

- those who own and care for its natural resources and cultural heritage and provide public access;
- those who live, work and run enterprises in the National Park; and
- those who wish to visit, enjoy and learn about Exmoor.

Members agreed that while a limited capacity to undertake projects would remain, the Authority's emphasis should be on increasing partnership work and on supporting and enabling the communities and organisations that contributed to the wellbeing of the National Park; and that at a time of reduced resources this represented a sound approach to the future delivery of National Park purposes. The importance of the Local Development Framework, and the challenge of achieving a vision for Exmoor which supported the local community and economy through encouraging appropriate business enterprise and delivering affordable housing, was recognised.

With regard to the future management of discretionary funding, it was agreed that a Sub-Committee of the Resources and Performance Committee would be the appropriate mechanism for administering the proposed 'single pot' fund, which would combine the Sustainable Development Fund with a proportion of the Authority's discretionary funding. It was suggested that this include some area-related funding,

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enabling local communities to influence how an allocation of discretionary funding might be spent in their locality in furtherance of National Park purposes.

It was noted that the proposed organisational changes would include a reduction in the current staff complement and Members extended their thanks to staff for their continued commitment to the work of the Authority during a difficult and uncertain time.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) To support the organisational changes and timetable being proposed in response to the announcement by Defra of reducing National Park Grant levels for the period to 2014-15.
  - (2) To approve the proposed approach to the management of National Park project budgets from 2011-12 onwards including incorporation of the Sustainable Development Fund programme.

#### **48. SCHEME OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES**

The Authority received the report of the Head of Corporate Services

**RESOLVED:** (1) To adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2011/12 based on the current scheme for 2010/11 subject to:

- (i) Rounding of the Basic Allowance to £2,500 per annum;
- (ii) Adoption of the following Special Responsibility Allowance multipliers:

Chairman of the Authority (multiplier of 2);  
Deputy Chairman of the Authority (multiplier of 1.5);  
Chairman of Planning Committee (multiplier of 1.5);  
Deputy Chairman of Planning Committee (multiplier of 1);  
Chairman of Resources & Performance Committee (multiplier of 1);  
Deputy Chairman of Resources & Performance Committee (multiplier of .5);  
Chairman of Consultative and Parish Forum (multiplier of .5);  
Chairman of Standards Committee (multiplier of .25).

#### **49. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2011-12**

The Authority received the report of the Chief Finance Officer.

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

It was noted that Somerset County Council was reviewing the arrangements under which it offered treasury management services to the Authority, and that dependent on the outcome of that review, it may be necessary to bring a revised strategy to Members during 2011/12.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) To note the report.
  - (2) To approve the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2011-12 and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2011-12 as set out in the report.
  - (3) To note the Prudential Indicators for 2011-12 to 2013-14 as set out in paragraph 6.6 of the report.

**50. EXMOOR COAST INTERPRETATION CENTRE: LYNMOUTH PAVILION PROJECT**

The Authority received the report of the Head of Information and Access Services.

**The Authority's Consideration**

The meeting was advised that the project was currently on time and on budget, and the Project Board had overseen the appointments of Architects, Quantity Surveyor and Structural Engineer, and Construction Design Management Co-ordinator. The scheme was now entering a period of significant activity and Members were asked to approve the next steps of the project, and the future role and terms of reference of the Project Board. It was proposed and agreed that as the project was entering a dynamic phase, the review period of the terms of reference be reduced from every 6 months to every 4 months.

It was noted that engagement with the local community would be a key component of project delivery, including forthcoming discussion events in Lynton and Lynmouth and followed by subsequent consultation on the internal design and interpretation element of the new National Park Centre.

In congratulating Officers on the progress achieved, one Member expressed the hope that a new Centre of the Moor National Park Centre would remain an aspiration of the Authority.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) To note the progress made to date with regard to this project.
  - (2) To agree to seek renovation and refurbishment of the existing building as a preferred option based on professional advice received.
  - (3) To approve Terms of Reference for the Project Board subject to review every 4 months.
  - (4) To delegate decision making and 'sign off' to the Head of Information and Access Services in consultation with the Project Board for project development and the appointment of key contractors for the construction phase, fit out and through to completion as per the Project Plan.
  - (5) To receive updates on the Project at key milestones programmed in the Project Plan or by exception as directed by the Project Board.

**51. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Authority received and noted the Annual Report of the Standards Committee.

Independent Member and Chairman of the Standards Committee, Catherine Hodgson, confirmed that the forthcoming Localism legislation would implement abolition of the existing Standards regime by early 2012; however she believed there would continue to be a role for a similar independent monitoring system. The Chief Executive advised that Members recognised the value of independent monitoring

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and the Authority's response to the consultation on governance arrangements therefore included a proposal that the potential for a new 'Independent Monitoring Committee' be considered.

**52. EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

The Authority received the Exmoor Local Access Forum Annual Report 2010.

**RESOLVED:** To note the Forum's Annual Report 2010 and as appointing authority to agree its submission to Natural England.

**53. RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE**

The Authority received and noted the draft minutes of the 9 November 2010 meeting of the Resources and Performance Committee.

The Committee Chairman reported that in relation to the item of urgency concerning a request from the Environment Agency to install hydrological monitoring equipment on National Park Authority land to the south of Simonsbath, a site visit had taken place and the proposed installation had been approved subject to the construction of adequate fencing to prevent livestock accessing the site.

In relation to the revaluation of assets, it was questioned whether the Authority's statement of accounts should note the effect on values of the encumbrances to which the major part of the Authority's landholding was subject.

**54. ANPA WORKSHOP ON THE VALUE OF NATIONAL PARKS**

**Public Question Time**

Mr John Dallyn, Martinhoe Parish Meeting, said that in the light of a reduced National Park Grant settlement, there was no justification for sending four Members to the annual ANPA Workshop.

**The Authority's Consideration**

It acknowledged that this was a difficult time to propose expenditure on attendance at the annual Association of National Park Authorities' (ANPA) Workshop. However, Members recognised the value of such events in bringing fresh ideas to the Authority, and agreed that the opportunity to exchange good practice and experience was of particular importance at a time of reduced resources. It was also felt that the workshop theme, 'The Value of National Parks', was particularly pertinent at a time of public spending constraint, and National Park Authorities now needed to take a positive approach to evaluating and evidencing the economic benefit of National Parks to their local communities and to the nation. It was agreed that Mrs A Clitheroe, Dr S Head, Mr N Holliday and Mrs F Nicholson would attend the workshop.

It was noted that in response to reduced public funding for National Park Authorities, the annual ANPA Conference would not take place this year and future annual conferences would be scaled down.

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**55. MEMBERS' REPORTS**

The Authority received a report from Dr S Head on attendance at the Europarc Atlantic Isles Conference: Protect and Prosper – Optimising the economic benefits of designated landscapes.

**56. ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF URGENCY**

There was none.

The meeting closed at 12.30pm

(Chairman)