

# DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Friday 3 December 2021

Present: A Cooper, W Dracup, G Gribble, P Harper, G Hill, S Morgan, D Moyse, J Nutley, N Oakley, C Pannell, M Renders, P Sanders, P Smerdon, P Vogel, P Woods

Officers: K Bishop, Chief Executive (NPO)

Apologies: J McInnes, L Samuel, D Thomas,

The Chair welcomed Mrs Shewan, Independent Person

## **3362 Declarations of Interest**

None

## **3363 Minutes of the Authority meeting held on Friday 1 October 2021**

The minutes of the Authority meeting held on Friday 1 October 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

## **3364 Chair's Report**

The Chair reported the following:

- She recently joined the Chief Executive and Director of Conservation and Communities in meeting Lord Benyon, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at Defra, responsible for National Parks. The meeting went well; Lord Benyon was extremely interested in the information and updates provided during the discussions.
- Attended the official re-opening of the Dartmoor Line at Okehampton Railway Station and enjoyed a train ride to Bow and back.
- Attended a meeting with Devon Leaders and CEOs. She reported that DNPA always receives warm support from Devon County Council and other Local Authorities.
- Attended the Chairs' Forum for National Parks in the UK.
- Attended the National Parks England meeting.

The Chair reminded Members that today was the Director of Conservation and Communities last attendance at an Authority meeting. On behalf of Members the Chair asked that the minutes recorded very warm thanks and good wishes for everything that she has done for Dartmoor over many years.

In response to a Member query, the Chief Executive confirmed that Lord Benyon was appraised of the financial pressures that the Authority is currently experiencing. Lord Benyon was very positive but also clear regarding those financial pressures. He advised that National Parks would receive a three year settlement but that years two and three might not be fixed. The Chief Executive asked if a minimum level could be

set for years 2 and 3 (below which the grant would not fall) but Lord Benyon did not commit to this.

The Deputy Chair reported:

- He had attended the National Parks Partnership Board meeting; the Management Plan was signed off.
- FiPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) is going well with several impressive applications having been received.
- He, along with Mrs Oakley, attended the Hill Farm Project group meeting. He reported that a family, closely related to the HFP had sadly lost a member of the family due to suicide. The group had agreed to join the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute and would be encouraging the wider farming network to make use of the Institute with regard to mental health and support for all.

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) welcomed two new members of staff: Will Jones, Projects Officer Forward Planning & Economy, and Claire Eden, Business Support Officer.

**3365 Items requiring urgent attention**

None.

**3366 Public Participation**

None.

**3367 Dartmoor Local Plan 2018-2036**

Members received the report of the Head of Forward Planning and Economy (NPA/21/031) which, he advised, was one of the most significant reports brought before them for several years. Section 3 of the report sets out the review process, from the winter of 2016 when the first informal consultations took place, to November 2021 when the Inspector's final report was received.

Members joined officers of the journey and a lot of people had been listened to along the way. The aim was to learn a lot about Dartmoor. He was pleased to report that more evidence had been gathered than ever before and it now sat behind the plan.

The Dartmoor Local Plan 2018-2036 has a new three tier settlement hierarchy, with settlement boundaries in the Rural Settlements. This will help to prevent sprawl. The Plan also sets out allocated sites for housing development in the Local Centres, a new 'local occupancy custom and self-build' policy and a revised definition of a 'local person' to support those working in the National Park. The definition will also assist with the need to cover retirement. Requirements for electric vehicle charging points, ahead of the government provisions are set out, as well as higher standards for energy efficiency in new buildings. Every new home will be required to meet higher levels of accessibility and adaptability in order to accommodate those with mobility issues. Limitations to the size of extensions have been set in order to prevent the loss of smaller more affordable homes. Also included is a requirement for development to deliver biodiversity net gain, ahead of the government provisions, and opportunities for new homes on farms through conversion of traditional buildings.

A debt of thanks is owed to many, most importantly to the communities and residents of Dartmoor. He also recorded his thanks to Mr A Gandy, Senior Policy Officer for his hard work and support, Consultants, the Programme Officer and of course Members who have involved themselves in the process from the beginning.

The Head of Forward Planning and Economy took Members through the process since his last presentation to them. He advised them that if they adopted the local plan today, it will immediately replace all current planning policies, it will be the basis for making planning decisions in the National Park.

Members thanked The Head of Forward Planning and Economy and his team for their hard work over the last five years. They also appreciated the Quick Guide which had been put together and distributed.

In response to Member comments / queries, he responded as follows:

- DNA is not required to have a five year land supply. The housing land supply is derived by offices of the Authority. However, the Authority does have its own five year land supply, an annual updated is provided by officers in the annual monitoring report. He added that the Authority is in a strong position.
- Officers scrutinise viability of proposed developments and have the authority to do this within the Local Plan. Any applicant attempting to rid themselves of a requirement for affordable housing will come under very close scrutiny. Officers can refuse this type of application; the new Local Plan places officers in a stronger position.
- Full consideration had been given to the 30% increase to be allowed with regard to extensions. Officers are also required to consider design, technical standards etc.
- Age demographic – The Authority wants to offer properties that fit the needs of residents, to future proof its housing stock for everyone. The Local Plan will provide policies to enable people to downsize as well as upsize.

Mr Sanders proposed the recommendations, which was seconded by Mr Vogel. Mr Sanders reminded Members that this would be their Local Plan, their policies going forward.

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) Noted and accepted the Inspector's Report on the examination of the Dartmoor Local Plan and schedule of Main Modifications, dated 1 November 2021;
- (ii) Agreed that the Local Plan is amended in accordance with the Main Modifications in Annex 1 to the Inspector's Report and in accordance with Additional Modifications and Policies Map Modifications proposed and published during the examination;
- (iii) Adopted the Local Plan 2018-2036 as amended with immediate effect.

### **3368 Appointment of the Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer)**

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) (NPA/21/032)

The Authority is required by law to appoint three statutory officers: the National Park Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer). The role of the Section 151 Officer falls under the remit of the Head of Business Support. Angela Stirland is a Chartered Public Finance Accountant and is therefore qualified to fulfil the role.

Mr Sanders proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Mrs Pannell.

**RESOLVED:** Members approved the appointment of Angela Stirland, Head of Business Support as the new Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer)

### **3369 Arrangements for the Appointment of External Auditors**

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/21/033).

Under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Authority is required to appoint its own external auditors. When the issue was last considered in December 2016 the Authority formally accepted the invitation of the Public Sector Audit Appointment (P SAA Ltd) to opt into the national scheme for auditor appointments. This resulted in Grant Thornton being appointed as external auditors from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2023.

The PSAA has invited the Authority to opt in to its procurement arrangements the the next phase of auditor appointments. If agreed by Members the Authority would need to confirm this by 11 March 2022.

In response to a Member query the Head of Business Support advised that the procurement of auditors would be determined against set parameters, qualifications etc.

Mrs Morgan proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Mr Gribble.

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) Approved the Dartmoor National Park Authority opting into the national audit appointment arrangements of Public Sector Audit Appointment (PSAA Ltd) for appointment of the Authority's external auditors for period 1 April 2023 until 2028; and
- (ii) Authorised The Head of Head of Business Support to sign and issue the "notice of acceptance" to the PSAA Ltd on behalf of the Authority

### **3370 Future Direction and Priorities**

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) (NPA/21/034).

Members were advised that the report outlined the Authority's priorities for 2022/23, the financial challenges that it faces and some key actions derived from discussions in October 2021.

The Dartmoor Partnership Plan 2021-2026 sets out a vision for the future of the National Park. The seven themes that identify what the Authority wants to achieve and how are reflected within the five priority areas of the Business Plan.

The Authority has been successful in drawing in a grant income which exceeds £16.5million. However, this success hides the fact that our core funding has been reducing over several years. The last time that the Authority saw a real terms increase in core funding was in the 2008/09 financial year; 13 years of cuts has presented a huge challenge. However, DNPA is financially viable and a going concern.

The Chair commented on the implications of the flat cash settlements; there could well be a big effect on core services. Seeing the figures in black and white may well have stunned everyone. The project funding that is available to take forward into the next financial year is only possible due to a sound core of staff and their time. No organisation can or should rely on project funding when this is undermined by a continued reduction in core funding in real terms.

A Member expressed concern that it was initially acknowledged following the Glover Report that AONBs and NPs would need significant funds to implement government requirements. They felt that having previously believed that we would see an improvement, it was now more doubtful that this would be forthcoming.

Another commented that Dartmoor could not fight this on its own; unity was needed between the 10 NPAs in England.

The Chief Executive advised that in the Landscapes Review 2019, it was recommended National Parks should receive at least inflation proofed settlements, since then it has been further real terms cuts to core funding.

National Parks England (NPE) is the voice for the 10 National Parks. Some of the Parks are able to generate a lot of money from their assets. Dartmoor NPA does not benefit from this. The Chief Executive advised that he and the Head of Business Support had met with Defra officials and had raised the issues surrounding the flat cash grant. He added that he had raised the question of capital funding; so far an acknowledgement of his email is all that has been received.

Mr Cooper proposed the recommendations which was seconded by Mr Gribble. Members recorded their thanks to the Chief Executive for his hard work.

**RESOLVED:** Members

- i. Agreed the priorities outlined in paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10 as the basis for developing the Business Plan and revenue budget for 2022/23 and the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan;

- ii. Authorised a strategic review of the Authority's premises to identify any potential for financial savings and efficiencies over the medium-term;
- iii. Endorsed a project to consider the business case for establishing a 'Dartmoor Foundation' – a charitable structure and potential linked trading company that could be a vehicle for external fundraising and partnership working; and,
- iv. Authorise Officers to instruct Devon County Council (as the highway authority) to pursue a Traffic Regulation Notice to provide a consistent approach to car park charges and enforcement across all the car parks operated by the Authority.

### **3371 End of Season Report 2021**

Members received the report of the Director of Conservation and Communities (NPA/21/035).

Members were advised that, drawing on experiences and issues during 2020, a collaborative management plan was drawn up for 2021, the themes of the plan were:

- o Communicating key messages
- o Providing a warm welcome
- o Managing traffic flows and parking
- o Limiting damaging activity

2021 was quieter than 2020 with a reduction in negative issues for staff to deal with. The messages put out this year by the Authority has helped. This has been a joint effort between partners, staff and the public.

A Member commented that they hoped to be able to replicate next year those lessons that have been learned and helped to deliver positive outcomes. Wearing the DNPA uniform was vital.

Mr Cooper, on behalf of Members, thanked the Director of Conservation and Communities and her team for taking on the difficulties faced while working in a Covid environment. The dedication and effort seen has been outstanding. Another Member advised that the Director had chaired an inter-agency group, of diverse interests, very successfully with good results.

In response to a Member query, the Director advised that he was aware of two pop-up campsites.

The Chief Executive formally acknowledged the work of the Engagement Volunteers and the Voluntary Wardens and Members asked that their thanks be recorded.

Mr Cooper proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Mr Harper.

**RESOLVED:** Members noted the content of the report.

**3372 Tree Preservation Orders, Section 211 Notifications (Works to Trees in Conservation Areas) and Hedgerow Removal Notices Determined Under Delegated Powers**

Members received the report of the Trees and Landscape Officer (NPA/21/036).

**RESOLVED:** Members NOTED the content of the report.

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