

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Friday 7 January 2022

Present: A Cooper, W Dracup, P Harper, G Hill, S Morgan, D Moyse,
J Nutley, N Oakley, P Sanders, P Smerdon, P Vogel, P Woods,
D Thomas J McInnes

Officers: K Bishop, Chief Executive (NPO)

Apologies: G Gribble, L Samuel, C Pannell, M Renders

The Chair welcomed new members of staff, Richard Drysdale, Director of Conservation and Communities and Su Layfield, Business Support Officer

3373 Declarations of Interest

S Morgan, J Nutley and P Vogel declared an interest in Item 7 and will leave the room for this discussion.

3374 Minutes of the Authority meeting held on Friday 3 December 2021

Save for an amendment on page 2 as detailed below, the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 3 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

'He had attended the National Parks Partnership Board Meeting; the Management Plan was signed off.'

Should instead read:

'He had attended the National Parks Partnership Board Meeting.'

3375 Chair's Report

Nothing to report.

3376 Items requiring urgent attention

None.

3377 Public Participation

None.

S Morgan, J Nutley and P Vogel left the Meeting.

3378 Consultation Response: Teignbridge Local Plan

Members received the report of the Head of Forward Planning and Economy (NPA/22/001).

The Head of Forward Planning and Economy advised Members that the Teignbridge Local Plan could be divided into three main areas:

- **Renewable Energy Strategy**

- Solar Energy - The proposed solar area is extensive and does not appear to have factored in the position of the National Park, although there is an additional SPD (similar to sensitivity study). Excerpts from the report: “strongly supported in principle within areas identified as having suitable solar resource” and that “development will be permitted where, on balance, the contribution towards renewable energy provision and climate change mitigation outweighs significant harm, which cannot be mitigated”. The Authority therefore objects to this policy as currently worded. Officers would offer to work with the District Council to identify alternative appropriate wording, potentially in conjunction with a review of the areas suitable for PV development (reviewing or refining the criteria used to identify these areas in order to better take into account the setting of the National Park).
- Wind Turbines – the areas for wind turbines are fewer and more focussed. Areas include NW of View Farm and SW of Staddon Farm – both of which officers object to, as well as W of Tedburn, Ducks Brook, and W of Downhouse Farm – objection is currently on hold subject to the receipt of further information.

- **Provision for Gypsies and Travellers**

A site has been identified at Higher Mead Farm, Ashburton. The site is around 5ha. No indication has been given of the number of units. Identification of this site would mirror the Authority’s concerns regarding residential site to east of the A38 which was objected to in the Part 2 Consultation. Concerns are that development would not form part of the town. It would be isolated from the town which would lead to unsustainable travel patterns inconsistent with the objectives of the plan.

- **Small residential development sites**

No objection would be raised with regards to an identified site, Strode Road, Buckfastleigh for the construction of 10-14 homes.

Response to the plan is due towards the end of January 2022. Members are asked to agree the principles of the response, which will be finalised in consultation with the Chief Executive (National Park Officer).

In response to a Member request regarding the acknowledgement of the cumulative impact of solar sites as well as wind turbines in certain areas, it was confirmed that this was included in the Landscape Sensitivity Impact Study. It was also acknowledged that there could be a potential wildlife threat which could endanger habitat regulations. Neither of these are currently included in the policy - to be proposed for inclusion.

In response to a Member asking for a more precise indication of where the solar panels would be sited in Buckfastleigh, the Head of Forward Planning and Economy advised that the location of these were to be to the east of the dual carriageway; the area is largely farmland, field-based solar farms would be constructed.

A Member noted that the wind turbines shown were all located in mid-Devon/Exeter and asked whether there were any planned further South. This was confirmed. However, as these would not have a direct impact on Dartmoor impact DNPA, they were not included in the Authority's response. It was agreed that the Net Zero policy needs to be factored into consideration of this policy by Members. It was noted that the landscape siting issue has been factored in in the NPPF and Members could, therefore, support the plan. Some of the sites are very close to the National Park boundary whereas others would have no impact on the National Park. A sequential approach would need to be taken going forward. The Authority needs to make it clear that it is not wholly anti the plans, rather, would support opportunities which have the least impact on the National Park. The Member suggested that, due to the climate emergency declaration, it could be necessary for the Authority to be more flexible in its stance towards wind turbines and their visibility from Dartmoor.

A Member asked that Teignbridge be required to consider the cumulative effect of the massive housing initiative currently underway and the effect of this on the National Park. The Head of Forward Planning and Economy reported that he was looking at setting up a working group to discuss issues at officer level (to be expanded to include Members in time).

A Member agreed that although the proposed gypsy and traveller site would not be near a settlement, the fact that the site is close to the A38 would fulfil the requirements of the potential inhabitants and was, therefore, disappointed that officers felt it necessary to object to the site. It was felt that this rare opportunity to find a site should be taken advantage of.

Members were advised that the site would be a permanent site rather than a site for transient inhabitants. In addition, it is the responsibility of the District Council to find a suitable alternative site and that the Authority should be consistent in its objections.

A Member suggested consideration be given to park and ride or park and cycle onto schemes for access to the moor, potentially in tandem with Teignbridge and South Hams District Councils. Members were advised that the Authority has a green transport strategy. This has been slightly side-lined by the Byelaws Review.

It was suggested that authority be delegated to the Head of Forward Planning and Economy, in consultation with the Chief Executive, (National Park Officer). It was also suggested that the Chair also be included in the consultation.

Mr McInnes proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Mr Cooper.

RESOLVED: Members agree the principles of the response to the Teignbridge Local Plan consultation and delegated authority to the Head of Forward Planning and Economy in consultation with the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) and the Chair of the Authority, to submit a formal response.

S Morgan, J Nutley and P Vogel re-joined the Meeting.

3379 Moor Otters Arts Trail Evaluation

Members received the report of the Head of Communications and Fundraising (NPA/22/002). Members were given a brief evaluation of the Moor Otters Arts Trail which took place in 2020/21.

The aims for the project were:

- Provide an arts-based free, visitor attraction
- Engage with new audiences particularly hard to reach groups
- Increase footfall to local businesses
- Engage with local schools
- Generate income to support conservation and access projects in the National Park, through sponsorship, donations and auction sales

Risks were evaluated and mitigations were put in place as part of the project plan but, unfortunately, the global pandemic was not foreseen.

Celebrated local artist Alan Cotton selected the final artists for the project and there were many submissions from community groups working with a range of young people / adults from hard-to-reach groups. This increased the range of people that the Authority worked with and will, hopefully, continue to work with.

As was done for the previous project, an external project manager was commissioned to develop the project. Having learned lessons from the previous project officers set some clear targets and areas of responsibility for him to deliver against. The project manager was able to secure some excellent in-kind support again for the project, ensuring costs were kept down.

A main sponsor for the project was secured, together with some smaller sponsors for individual otters. This was secured by officers.

Aware that the idea of "completion" of the trail was popular but led to lots of travelling around, four mini trails for people to do were developed, giving them something to 'complete' without the need to travel large distances. There was a competition for the most sustainable otter spotter to encourage people to leave the car at home and there was a mini trail in Plymouth as part of the Mayflower 400 celebrations, to engage with new audiences.

When lockdown was announced it was agreed, with the support of artists and host businesses, to postpone the trail and look at options for when the project could proceed. Businesses were offered a refund of their hosting fee due to them all having to close during lockdown.

At this point the project was added to the Authority's risk register as a financial risk due to a large amount of budget having been committed and no idea when the project would be able to proceed, or if the Authority would realise any income at the end of the project.

When the trail was re-launched in May 2021, the focus was on supporting the economic recovery. The project offered a free activity and focus for visitors and audiences with the aim of helping them discover new places to visit and return to.

The schools project was a key part of engaging with local communities. Despite the pandemic, officers were still able to work with nine local schools in 2021 and they found the project to be valuable, particularly for socialising pupils and improving mental health following lockdowns. We were delighted with the results of their outputs – the schools exhibition was very well received.

To ensure that the project maximised opportunities for engaging with all audiences a number of different channels were developed to do this, from face-to-face at visitor centres and the outreach vehicle, through to social media channels and a dedicated Facebook group. Again, learning from previous experience about how committed people were once they became otter spotters we wanted to ensure we created a sense of community.

This worked particularly well through the dedicated Facebook group. Tips were shared, people interacted with other otter spotters, particularly good for social isolation following the last lockdown and businesses were able to engage with their audiences.

It was also interesting to see through the Facebook comments that people had a much greater sense of the need to support the local businesses they were visiting as part of the economic recovery.

A live auction was held for the golden otters, with the remaining otters being auctioned on-line. The live auction was also broadcast live.

Unfortunately, the Authority not make as much money as the first project but, given the global economic downturn as a result of the pandemic and the fact that people did not have as much money at their disposal, officers were still very pleased with what was achieved as a net profit.

When the trail finished, two surveys were undertaken, one with host businesses and one with the Facebook group of 'otter spotters'.

The business survey results were fairly positive, given the situation they were in. Most saw an uplift in footfall although found it difficult to determine if that led to an increase in turnover. The survey from the public was very positive with 73% of them saying in a follow up question they had returned to Dartmoor since doing the trail.

Going forward, if a similar project were to be done again,

- suggest bringing the project management in-house which would give greater control and, even with the potential additional cost of staff time, still save on costs;
- The levels of digital engagement experienced leads to the need to consider developing an app to support the trail, simplifying both trail information and enabling bidding on the sculptures;

- It was suggested to have fewer sculptures and have all of them auctioned live with real time online bids at the same time.

In summary a calculated risk was taken when launching the trail as lockdown restrictions were easing; re-focussing to support the recovery and people re-connecting with the outdoors and each other worked really well and as it developed, it could be seen by the levels of engagement that this had paid off.

Members congratulated staff involved in this initiative. It was agreed that the in-house Communications team will improve the management of the plan each time it is rolled out. It was also acknowledged how the project had to change due to the Pandemic and the hard work in order to maintain engagement with local businesses. Members were concerned that momentum with the Facebook group be continued order to develop footfall to the website and share the key messages. Following a Member query, it was confirmed that the Authority still has contact details. It was also pointed out that this started as a fundraising initiative but morphed into more of a public engagement project. However, luckily, it was cost neutral overall.

A Member advised that as a volunteer at Ashburton, he saw many more tourists taking a comfort break between Cornwall and the M5 this last summer. There were several who had seen the advertising at the Mayflower event and decided to seek out the Otter Spotter project, therefore staying in the area longer as a result. Buckfastleigh was also of the same opinion.

A Member stated that it should be stipulated whether the initiative was a fund raiser or a public benefit. This last initiative was undoubtedly the latter.

A Member suggested that managing the project in-house may not be the best use of staff time, particularly in view of such a small team. This may have implications for a charitable trust.

It was acknowledged that there are many issues to weigh up before another project like this is launched. However, it was confirmed that officers have been very diligent in collecting data on public engagement which will enable the Authority to attract sponsorship and recognise opportunities. It is understood that the scope of the project changed dramatically; however, this was largely due to the pandemic. The team would be happy to work with members in order to ensure that staff are being used to their optimum possibility.

The Chair asked when officers might be looking to implement a new project. The Chief Executive suggested that a business plan should be ready to be submitted in March 2022.

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

RESOLVED : Members NOTED the content of the project summary, evaluation report and lessons learned from the project.

3380 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/22/003)

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

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