

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Friday 2 October 2015

Present: K Ball, P Harper, S Hill, J Hockridge, M Jeffery, D Lloyd, N Oakley,
P Sanders, J Kidner, J McInnes, D Moyse, M Retallick

Apologies: S Barker, G Gribble, J Christophers, P Hitchins, I Mortimer, C Pannell,
K Bishop, Chief Executive (National Park Officer)

3117 Minutes of the Authority Meetings

Save for the amendment detailed below, the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

Minute 3104 – Declarations of interest – to be amended to read:

'Mrs Pannell declared a personal interest in the tabled item – Ashburton Masterplan – due to her being a voluntary working member of the South Devon Railway Association

3118 Declarations of Interest

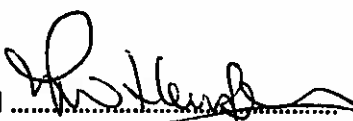
There were no declarations of interest.

3119 Chairman's Report

The Chairman thanked those Members who assisted with the Outreach Vehicle over the summer. Their presence was very much appreciated by staff. Members reported that they had enjoyed taking part and catching up with staff. They also added that they had been particularly impressed with the professional and positive attitude of the Junior Rangers who had attended the events; they had all been keen to talk to the public and related very well with individuals of their own age group.

He reported that he had visited Canada and the United States of America over the summer. He had met Sally Jewell, the Chair of National Parks America and had had valuable discussions regarding the proposed National Park Partnerships. He had also attended the Environment Agency's National Laboratories at Starcross to deliver a presentation on the Dartmoor Mires Project. Staff at the laboratories now wish to follow up this meeting with a visit to Flat Tor Pan.

The Chairman then invited Members to report any news. They advised the committee of the following:

Signed 

Date 4/12/15

- Mr Retallick attended a useful meeting with Parish Councils and other groups regarding the rollout of broadband across Dartmoor. Airband, the company which has the contract for Dartmoor and Exmoor, is using wireless technology, relaying signals to telephone repeaters across the moor. A protocol has been agreed with the Planning Service to deliver a sensible and sensitive rollout by the end of 2016.
- Miss Moyse and Mr Hill had visited Hampshire for a day's workshop and reported that they had been quite shocked to see the amount of development taking place; this included extensions to Alms houses and camping pod constructions. Also interesting to note was the fact that there are over four thousand camping spots within the National Park.
- Mr Lloyd reported that he had attended the Campaign for National Parks (CNP) working party meeting in the Peak District on Thursday 1 October 2015. The main item on the agenda was upland farming.

Members discussed the fact that not only CNP was discussing the upland farming issue. Indeed, Natural England has a working group to address this too. Members agreed that it would be helpful if key issues from these working groups could be shared in order that a consistent message is sent to Central Government.

3120 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

Planning Policy Group – The Head of Planning reported that he had received requests from six Members to join this group. The Chairman asked whether any other Members wished to volunteer. Members were advised that the group was likely to meet around four times and that every attempt would be made to dovetail the meetings with others.

Mrs Oakley volunteered to join the group.

RESOLVED: That the following Members should be appointed to the Planning Policy Group: Dr Mortimer, Mr Kidner, Mr Sanders, Mr Harper, Mr McInnes, Miss Moyse and Mrs Oakley.


It was noted that this group was purely advisory and has no decision-making powers.

3121 Public Participation

None.

3122 National Park Partnerships

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (NPA/15/032).

Signed 

Date 4/12/15

The Director of Conservation and Communities, on behalf of the Chief Executive reminded Members that in December 2014 they had agreed that the Authority should become a member of a proposed new company – National Park Enterprises Limited.

The report before Members today is due to a technical issue following independent tax advice about the new company structure in that, should the new organisation be established as a limited liability partnership (LLP), Corporation Tax on any profits made would not have to be paid.

Mr Sanders proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Mr Ball.

RESOLVED: Members authorised the Chief Executive (National Park Officer), in consultation with the Chairmen, to secure the execution of the necessary formalities and documents to enable Dartmoor National Park Authority to become a member of National Park Partnerships.

3123 Annual Review 2014/15, Priorities for 2016/17 & Financial Outlook

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) (NPA/15/033).

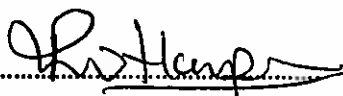
On behalf of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer), the Director of Conservation and Communities reported that the Authority has delivered significant achievements against its key themes of Sustain, Enjoy and Prosper. Some of these included:

- Securing non-government funding for the Hill Farm Project;
- Completion of the Dartmoor Mires Project;
- Securing £1.9m of Heritage Lottery funding for the Moor than Meets the Eye Landscape Partnership Scheme;
- Refurbishment of the National Park Visitor Centre at Princetown;
- Partnership work with Devon County Council with the Granite and Gears project, delivering a range of improvements for cyclists;
- 700 planning applications processed in 2014/15 with 90% of those granted.

Defra, as an unprotected Government Department, has been asked to model two scenarios for the term of this government (2019/20): 25% and 40% savings in real terms ie, taking inflation into account. Rory Stewart MP, the new Minister for National Parks, would like to see a bigger focus on sponsorship and philanthropic donations. It was noted that detailed financial planning was very difficult given the current uncertainty. Further cuts to National Park Grant will, in all probability, mean further reductions in staffing and the need to withdraw some services. There was a high probability that the Authority would need to use reserves to balance the budget in 2016/17.

With regard to priorities, there are six identified in the Business Plan for 2015/16. They are considered relevant and would support the Management Plan vision and form the basis for the business plan and budget for 2016/17.

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Date ... 4/12/15

In discussion, Members noted that each National Park is different and the ability to generate income from assets varies widely across the National Parks. They agreed that this needed to be communicated to Defra. They also emphasised the need for a long-term settlement in order to plan with some certainty and avoid a scenario of an annual announcement of cuts which would not be efficient. It was noted that the attendance of the Minister at the conference dinner may provide an opportunity to communicate the good work that the National Park is doing and there was a suggestion that a short briefing note be prepared.

RESOLVED: Members:

- (i) Noted the Annual Review for 2014/15;
- (ii) Noted the current financial uncertainty;
- (iii) Agreed the vision for the Authority and the priorities for the 2016/17 Business Plan.

Members requested that they be kept informed and appraised of plans with regard to the possible use of Reserves.

3124 Appointment of Specialist Consultant Contractor to deal with Linhay Quarry Planning Application, for Extension of the Quarry and Associated Works

Members received the report of the Head of Planning (NPA/15/034) and the tabled report (NPA/15/034A).

- Members were reminded that the Authority is expecting a major planning application for the extension of Linhay Quarry, from Glendinning Ltd. From the pre-application discussion that have taken place so far, it has become clear that due to the complexity of the application, external support will be required. An invitation to tender for the provision of expert minerals planning advice and casework assistance was undertaken. Each company was provided with a very detailed environmental impact scoping document as well as other supporting documents setting out the scope of the works and evaluation criteria. Four tenders were received.

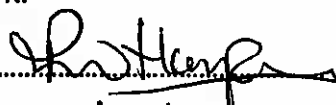
Additional support is needed due to the complexity and size of the forthcoming application. Issues to be considered will include visual, character and panoramic impact assessments, ecology, hydrology, major development test and economic development/contribution to local economic wellbeing.

The criteria applied in reaching a decision were:

- Comprehensive and detailed knowledge re: minerals planning issues;
- Experience in providing advice and services re: minerals planning applications;
- Ability to communicate effectively;
- Resilience;
- Value for money
- Successful completion of comparable work within the last 12 months.

These criteria were set before the tender process and published as part of the invitation to tender, alongside the proposed scoring framework.

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Date

4/12/15

The Head of Planning advised that, following the scoring of each tender, company D scored highest and was the recommended contractor. He added that without external assistance, the application would impact heavily on the Planning Department's daily workload and its ability to deal with other planning applications. As well as carrying out the tasks required to prepare a report for committee, the contractors would also be expected to draft reasons for refusal, or conditions and a proposed S106 agreement, dependent upon the recommendation. The contractors will also assist with the pre-application submission work, particularly in relation to Environmental Impact Assessment matters.

In response to Member queries, the Head of Planning advised that with regard to tenders C and D, their overall track record was good; tender D's knowledge and experience is considered exemplary. It was agreed to clarify the position regarding any additional expenses.

Members were concerned that the planning application fee would not cover the cost of processing the application. It was explained that planning fees are set nationally and the Authority has no discretion in this matter. One Member suggested that the contract should be capped at £50,000 so that there was no 'excess' cost to the Authority/public purse. It was explained that the statutory fee may not be a realistic measure of the actual cost of dealing with the application properly.

Members emphasised the importance of actively managing the contract to ensure value for money and asked that the contract have clear review and exit points.


It was noted that Members would have preferred to have seen the proposed criteria in advance of the tender process. The Head of Planning confirmed that the Authority had initially sought support from Devon County Council, Cornwall County Council and the Peak District National Park Authority but, unfortunately, all had advised that they were unable to provide dedicated support at this time

RESOLVED: Members approved the appointment of the firm identified in the report as Tender D to act as specialist external contractor and deal with the application for the extension of minerals working at Linhay Quarry, Ashburton.

3125 Tree Preservations 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/15/031).

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report

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