

# DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Friday 1 March 2019

**Present:** K Ball; S Barker; W Cann; A Cooper; G Gribble, P Harper; S Hill; P W Hitchins; J McInnes; D Moyse; N Oakley; C Pannell; R Parkinson, M Retallick; P Sanders; P Woods

**Apologies:** J Christophers, M Jeffery; D Webber

## **3420 Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on 11 January 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2019 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

## **3421 Declarations of Interest**

Mr Harper declared a personal interest in (NPA/19/012) National Parks Partnership Limited, due to being a former director of the National Parks Partnership Limited.

## **3422 Chairman's Report**

The Chairman reported that he and the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) had recently attended a meeting of the English National Parks and a reception to launch the "English National Parks Collection". The Collection is a series of visitor experiences which are being promoted to UK and overseas tourists.

The Chairman asked that the Minutes record the Authority's gratitude to Ashburton Motor Works Ltd who have provided, free of charge, a new vehicle for the use of the Community and Land Management Ranger.

The Chairman reported that he had attended a Steering Group meeting for the National Park Management Plan and that there had been a good discussion, amongst the wide variety of organisations present, about the future vision for the National Park.

## **3423 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

Members were asked to approve the appointment of Mr Parkinson to the Dartmoor Local Access Forum, as one of two National Park Authority representatives. He would replace Mr Webber who would formally act as a substitute should one of the Authority's two representatives not be able to attend.

**RESOLVED:** Mr Parkinson was to be appointed an Authority representative on the Dartmoor Local Access Forum with Miss Moyse; Mr Webber to act as substitute

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Date .....

10.5.19

**3424 2019/20 Draft Business Plan**

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (NPO) (NPA/19/005). He stated that the Business Plan is a strategic document which guides the Authority with the purposes and key actions agreed by the Members. He informed Members that a number of the projects outlined in the Business Plan run over financial years and therefore links to the Medium Term Financial Plan as well as this coming year's budget.

In September 2018 Members agreed six priorities that link to Your Dartmoor (The National Park Management Plan). The key actions identified in the Business Plan will help to deliver the six priorities. A clearer focus has been requested by Members on: management and enhancement of access; future direction of agriculture policy; the role of the Authority in supporting economic development; engaging with people and communities; and external funding and promotion of the work of the Authority.

He stated that a key objective for 2019/20 and beyond is to influence the proposed Environmental Land Management System that will replace agri-environment and basic payment schemes post Brexit. Projects like Dartmoor Farming Futures, Common Cause, Natural Flood Management and the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund will provide the evidence and experience to feed into Defra.

Economic development has been supported via the Connecting Dartmoor and Exmoor superfast broadband project. Looking forward, we need to be feeding into the Local Industrial Strategy and extended our work under the Vital Villages, Terrific Towns programme and through the Hill Farm Project.

In terms of engaging with people, our intention is to further develop the Ranger Ralph and Junior Ranger initiatives by adding a Youth Ranger programme. We also have a programme of activity through 2019 to support the Government's Year of Green Action.

Members suggested that the Pathways project should have involvement from landowners and Parish Councils. They also wanted the Authority to learn from the positive community engagement undertaken through the Moor than meets the eye Landscape Partnership that has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In response to a question from a Member, the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) explained that the Business Plan did not seek to list all of the Authority's partnerships but that he would amend the Business Plan to ensure that it clearly communicated the importance of partnership working with organisations like our constituent districts and borough.

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

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**RESOLVED:** Members reviewed the draft Business Plan for 2019/20 and delegated authority to the Chief Executive (National Park Officer), in consultation with the Chairman, to agree the final version.

**3425 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 to 2021/22**

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/19/006) which consisted of a balanced budget for 2019/20 and an outline budget for the following two years – which, when combined, makes the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The current year's financial performance and forecast outturn position is very strong. The highlights of the increased income are filming charges, mobile vending, car parking charges, treasury income and planning application fees. Salary savings are forecast to be circa £70k. Carry forward requests totalling £90k have been received (to date) from Head of Service in respect of projects that will not be complete at year-end. A balance of £29k remains unallocated in the Project Fund. It is likely that some of planned extra in-year costs can be absorbed rather than using reserves. The 2018/19 outturn performance will demonstrate substantial income generation, robust cost control, prudent financial management and the ability to use in-year surpluses to cover other planned costs.

The Head of Business Support informed Members that 2019/20 is the last year of a 4 year National Park Grant settlement received under the previous Comprehensive Spending Review and Defra has not given any indication of the level of National Park Grant beyond that. The MTFP has been built assuming a similar annual increase in National park Grant of 1.72% per annum and t which is therefore a major risk. A 2% per annum pay award has also been projected throughout the MTFP and other future pressures include; an aging vehicle fleet; car park resurfacing and IT upgrades and licences. Members were informed that future years financial plans are subject to change for a number of reasons; and these will be reflected accordingly as we move through the MTFP period. The 2020/21 financial year is looking particularly challenging at this time due to assumed pay awards, a below inflation increase (assumed) in National Park Grant, and other pressures already outlined. The Authority is now well practiced in being flexible and agile so that opportunities are embraced and threats mitigated against as they arise.

The Head of Business Support presented the current Reserve Balances describing how reserves support the MTFP; the current position indicates that reserve balances will reduce by £950k over the life of the MTFP. The unallocated general reserve fund of £450k has been unchanged since 2015 and is the minimum amount that the Authority has determined it should retain. It is recommended that this should be increased by £50k via a transfer from the unallocated balance in the Match Funding Reserve.

Members were informed that the Authority there is a new requirement to create a Capital Strategy. The Authority rarely has a Capital Programme or

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the need for significant investment in physical assets in the same way as local authorities. Capital spend for the Authority is usually for small scale items such as vehicles or IT equipment. The Authority does not invest for commercial purposes and is debt free. Capital expenditure is met from revenue income, grants, reserves or capital receipts.

The Head of Business Support informed Members that although the MTFP is built on sensible assumptions, the Authority does need to be prepared for less favourable scenarios e.g. that NPG may not be increased and the fact we are experiencing a period of significant economic uncertainty. However the Authority does still hold a sufficient level of reserves to mitigate against some of this, and maintains a robust, honest and critical view on future risks, The Authority continues to hope that the commitment made by Government in the 25 year environment plan, will translate into a continued commitment to adequately fund National Parks going forward.

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) Approved the 2019/20 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan for the years 2020/21 and 2021/22 as shown in Appendices 1 – 3
- (ii) Approved the contributions to, from and within the General Fund reserves balances as set out in section 4 of the report
- (iii) Approved the Capital Investment Strategy as set out in Section 5 of the report.

#### **3426 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2019/20**

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA19/007). The Head of Business Support informed Members that the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management is unchanged this year.

For this Authority this is a fairly simple and straightforward document as:

- We are debt free and have no plans to borrow;
- We have modest working capital balances that are invested in bank treasury deposits;
- We rarely have a capital programme of any substance; and
- We do not have any other type of investment activity that falls outside of the Treasury management policy, i.e. commercial investments in property, companies or other financial assets.

**RESOLVED:** Members approved the 2019/20 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy.

#### **3427 New Member Role Description**

The Head of Organisational Development & Monitoring Officer advised that the Role Description for Members had been reviewed and updated. The review had not led to significant changes to what is expected of Members'

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behaviour and responsibilities. A new appendix has been introduced supporting the "Team Dartmoor" ethos of the Authority.

Members agreed that the Role Description is clear and concise. A Member suggested that the last point in the Role Description should read "Parish **Link** Members (rather than Parish Members) will be expected to take a lead in communicating with the constituent Parishes.....". After a lengthy discussion Members agreed to leave out the word "Link" and approve the Role Description as set out in the report.

Mr Harper proposed the recommendation, which was duly seconded.

**RESOLVED:** Members approved the updated Role Description for Members of Dartmoor National Park Authority.

**3428 Proposed New Visitor Centre at Postbridge**

The Head of Communications and Fundraising advised Members that at the Tourism Excellence Awards 2018-19 the Authority had achieved Gold in the 'Visitor Service of the Year' category.

Members received the report of the Head of Communications and Fundraising (NPA/19/009).

Members were reminded that in May 2018 they had agreed to progress with the project to develop design proposals and bid for funding from the RDPE for a new visitor centre at Postbridge. Over time it became clear that a replacement Visitor Centre was not possible so focus shifted to designing a single storey extension to increase the floorspace from 136sqm to 258sqm. These proposals were approved at the Development Management Committee meeting held this morning (planning application no. 0019/19).

Stage 3, the writing of the bid, has progressed well and it is hoped that the application will be sent off at the end of next week. The bid will be for 100% funding which the RDPE has confirmed is acceptable for the Authority to bid for. We are on track with regard to the timeline; the aim is to have made a start by October 2019 with completion May/June 2020.

Members were advised that if the bid is successful the tender process for the works will follow. Should tenders be higher than the bid awarded, the project will fail as the Authority is not permitted to match fund with National Park Grant of any other public funds. The Quantity Surveyor employed by the Authority has allowed for inflation within the costings.

With regard to the flow chart (Appendix 1) the Head of Communications and Fundraising assured Members that there is a detailed weekly project plan in place; the tender process will include the construction schedule required.

In response to Member queries, it was confirmed that the toilets would not close during construction; only small part of the car park would be allocated to

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the contractor; the coach park at the bottom end of the car park should not be affected by the works. Under the terms and conditions of the bid, no funds can be allocated to works to the existing Visitor Centre.

Mr Cann left the meeting.

The Head of Business Support advised Members that, with regard to contractors, Devon County Council has a list of contractors who will have been through a robust set of tests in order to get themselves onto the approved list.

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

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) noted the progress of the project to date; and
- (ii) approved the submission of a bid to the Rural Development Programme England (RDPE) for the funding for the extended improved centre

### **3429 Fundraising Update**

Members received the report of the Marketing and Fundraising Officer (NPA/19/0100).

The Head of Communications and Fundraising advised Members that the Marketing and Fundraising Officer has been in post not for just over a year. Many areas for fundraising have been explored; a brief presentation was made to Members regarding progress to date, a summary of which is provided within the report.

Mrs Pannell left the meeting.

The proposed actions for 2019/20 were presented to Members for their comment and approval.

In response to the presentation, some comments made by Members are noted as follows:

- Donate for Dartmoor – the target of £30k should be increased; we should aim higher;
- Organised events (by DNPA) – need to be more explicit; need to demonstrate to contributors what they will 'get out of the event';
- Arts Trail 2020 – Moor Otters 2 – care to be taken re: capacity within the team to undertake this project; lessons learned from Moor Otters 1;
- Local businesses like to subscribe eg, 2016/17 Hill Farm Project – interest from Mole Valley, John Deer Group, Woollcombe Beer Watts; Lloyds Agricultural Department but need to see that their contribution is recognised and appreciated;

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With regard to a query raised regarding contributions from Mole Valley the Chief Executive advised the Member that this would be followed up.

He added that the most effective sponsorship deal so far has been with Ashburton Motor Works; a ranger vehicle has been provided for the last three years, with another for the next 12 months.

Sponsors who decline the offer of publicity are advised how their contribution has been spent in writing.

A Member commented that the Authority's hosting of the National Parks Conference in October 2015 had generated some strong relationships with local businesses. Behind every individual donation there could be a story to use to promote the National Park eg, family holidays; it's not the amount that matters, it's the connection between the donor and the National Park.

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) noted the progress to date; and
- (ii) agreed the proposed actions for 2019/20

**3430 Performance Indicators**

Following the cancellation of the Audit and Governance Committee meeting on 1 February 2019 due to snow, the Chair of the Committee briefly updated Members:

Staff sickness absence – a new policy has been agreed and will be implemented from today (1 March 2019). Training is being provided to all managers by ACAS;

Member attendance – it was pleasing to note that attendance rose in Quarter 3 to 78%, but remains below target;

Planning – due to reduced capacity, minor applications completed within 8 weeks has fallen to 50% in Quarter 3; other applications – targets continue to be exceeded.

Pre-application advice provision has re-commenced.

**RESOLVED:** Members noted the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee's verbal update.

**3431 Tree Preservation Orders and Section 211 Notifications (Works to Trees in Conservation Areas) Determined Under Delegated Powers**

Members received the report of the Trees and Landscape Officer (NPA/19/011)

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

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*It was duly proposed by Mr Harper, seconded by Mr Gribble and agreed that, in accordance with s.100A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended, report NPA/19/012 should be taken in the absence of the Press and Public, on the ground that exempt information within the meaning of Part 1 Paragraph 3 to Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act (as amended) will be discussed, namely:-*

*Information in respect of commercial sensitivity.*

**RESOLVED:** Members resolved to move into Part II private session.

**3432 National Parks Partnership Limited**

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) (NPA/19/012).

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) agreed a further contribution to the operating costs of National Parks Partnerships Limited for 2019/20, in the sum of £10,000; and
- (ii) delegated authority to make the final decision to the Chief Executive (National Park Officer), in consultation with the Chairman and other Members of the Authority via email.

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