

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Friday 5 September 2014

Present: Mr G Gribble, Mr P Harper (Chairman), Mr P Hitchins, Mr J Hockridge, Mr M Jeffery, Mr J Kidner, Mr D Lloyd, Dr I Mortimer, Miss D Moyse, Mr J Nutley, Mr M Retallick (Deputy Chairman), Mr P Sanders, Mr J Shears, Mr P Vogel, Mr D Webber

Apologies: Mr K Ball, Mr J McInnes, Mrs N Oakley

Non Attendance: Mr S Barker

3092 Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 1 August 2014

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2014 were signed as a correct record.

3093 Declarations of Interest

None

3094 Chairman's Report

The Chairman informed Members that the Heritage Lottery Fund had provided authorisation to commence expenditure on the Moor than Meets the Eye Landscape Partnership.

The Chairman reported that he had visited the Dartmoor Mires Project restoration at Flat Tor Pan. He stated it was a very interesting visit and the project involves much detailed work. Members were encouraged to show their support for the Project and visit the site.

The Chairman had met with Mel Stride MP, who was very supportive of the Hill Farm Project and the need for Rural Development Plan funding. Mel Stride MP had agreed to write to the Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport regarding improved coverage of mobile communications within National Parks. He also highly commended the Chagford Masterplan and the Passivhaus affordable housing scheme in Christow.

The Chairman would be attending a meeting with Devon County Council, South Hams and West Devon Councils, in September, to discuss economic development issues.

The Chairman advised Members that Mr Retallick would be representing the Authority during his trip to Canada in September.

The Chairman reminded Members about the Whitehorse Hill: A Prehistoric Dartmoor Discovery exhibition opening on 12 September at Plymouth City Museum, the Whitehorse Hill 'final secrets revealed' to be shown on BBC One South West on Monday 8 September and the Wilderness Walks with Ray Mears to be shown on ITV on Tuesday 9 September.

Signed 

Date 3/10/14

The Chief Executive reported that the Deputy Chairman was going to contribute to the BBC Countryfile programme on 21 September.

3095 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

None

3096 Public Participation

None

3097 Annual Statement of Accounts 2013/2014

Members received the report of the Head of Resources (NPA/14/036)

The Head of Resources reported that the unaudited Statement of Accounts had been presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 15 August for review and scrutiny. Whilst there were no significant changes to the format or content of the Statement of Accounts to report this year, the Authority has applied one change of accounting policy which relates to the presentation and disclosure of post-employment benefits.

Members were informed that whilst aspirations and ambitions remain, the practical capacity to deliver has dropped significantly due to reduced levels of expenditure and staffing levels, reflecting the available budget. However, with healthy reserve balances, the Authority is well positioned for the future.

The financial statements record that, as a result of careful management of resources, a reasonable level of reserves has been maintained, leaving the Authority in a sound financial position to cope with future challenges.

Members were informed that the Statement of Accounts had now been audited by Grant Thornton, who had not identified any adjustments affecting the Authority's reported financial position, apart from a few minor disclosure changes. The Heritage Asset is currently included on the Balance Sheets at a value of £487k and was last valued in 2011. The asset value is based upon the insurance value, currently estimated at £600k. Whilst Grant Thornton accept that this is an estimate only, they have made the recommendation that management undertake a review of all assets which are not valued in year, to ensure that those assets recorded are not materially incorrect, in accordance with international accounting standards. Whilst they noted that the contingent liability relating to the possible repayment of the special Defra pass through grant for farmers up to 2006/07 has been removed from the 2013/14 accounts, they have accepted that the possibility of repayment continues to be remote and have recommended that 'Those Charged with Governance' review the need for a contingent liability disclosure on an annual basis.

Members were advised that the audit was nearing completion and the Audit Report will be published by 30 September 2014.

A Member expressed concern regarding adequate resources in the pension fund and as to whether the situation might arise in the future whereby heritage assets such as Higher Uppacott would have to be sold to fund a pension deficit.

Signed 

Date 3/10/14'

The Head of Resources reported that a pension fund valuation had taken place last year. Contributions are unchanged and the Authority has been advised by an Actuary, and Section 151 Officer, that we are moving in the right direction. There are currently no plans to sell Higher Uppacott and external Heritage Lottery funding through the 'Moor than Meets the Eye' Project will be used to improve the fabric of Higher Uppacott, to increase visitor numbers and a longer term ambition is to develop a trust to support its future.

Members thanked the Head of Resources for her excellent work and report.

Mr Sanders proposed the recommendation as set out in the report, which was seconded by Mr Nutley.

RESOLVED:

Members:

- (i) Approved the 2013/14 Statement of Accounts;
- (ii) Authorised the Chairman of the Authority to sign and date the Statement of Responsibilities on behalf of the Authority; and
- (iii) Approved the signing of the Letter of Representation.

3098 Annual Governance Report

Members received the report of Geraldine Daly, Director of Assurance, Grant Thornton (NPA/14/035).

Geraldine Daly reported that whilst the audit is substantially complete, they are finalising work, as set out in page 5 of their report, in the following areas: obtaining and reviewing assurances from the audit of the Devon Pension Fund 2013/14; from the auditor for Devon County Council for the systems that are operated at Devon Council which the Authority reply upon; the ISA240 letters from the Authority; the final management letter of representation; updating their post balance sheet events review, to the date of signing the opinion; whole of Government accounts; and completion of their closing procedures.

Members were informed that further details of the key issues arising from the audit findings are set out in Section 2 of the report, but no adjustments affecting the Authority's reported financial position had been identified. Key messages arising from the audit were: a small number of minor disclosure changes made to the accounts; those charged with Governance have been asked to review the position in relation to the historic payment from special grant income to farmers and any need in future to disclose a contingent liability; and have recommended that management review the value of all assets which have not undergone a formal valuation in year to ensure that those not valued are not materially incorrect.

It was confirmed that the final fees charged for the audit will be £11,807, as approved at the start of the year.

A Member expressed concern that Grant Thornton had not provided the report by the required deadline. It was explained that this had occurred due to a sudden sickness absence within the company.

Signed

Date 3/10/14

The Chief Executive thanked Geraldine Daly for stepping in and for her thorough work.

Mr Retallick left the meeting.

3099 Sponsorship Policy

Members received the report of the Promotion and Development Officer (NPA/14/037).

The Chief Executive reported that the purpose of the policy is to ensure the Authority adopts a consistent and professional approach towards sponsorship; the Authority's position and reputation are adequately protected in sponsorship agreements; protect Members and officers from allegations of inappropriate dealings or relationships with sponsors; and to obtain and provide best value in sponsorship arrangements.

Members were informed that currently the Authority has local sponsorship arrangements with Sprayway and John Lewis Partnership. These include free of charge uniforms for the rangers, waterproof clothing for voluntary wardens and a large tent used at events. The John Lewis Partnership provided free retail advice as part of the Visitor Centre review and a large flat screen television for the Princetown Visitor Centre.

He further reported that National Park Authorities have worked through the Association of National Park Authorities and have entered into an agreement with Airwick. The agreement includes a financial agreement whereby a percentage of sales from their new 'Breathing Spaces' air fresheners is paid to ANPA and divided equally amongst the fifteen National Park Authorities in the UK. The Chairs of the UK NPAs are exploring in more detail the commercial sponsorship agenda, including the setting up of a private company limited by guarantee as a trading body to represent the NPAs. Dartmoor has taken the lead on work to trademark 'Britain's Breathing Spaces', having already trademarked the Dartmoor brand. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services was thanked for his project management on this work.

Members were advised that the Chairs of the National Park Authorities had agreed that each National Park Authority would contribute £10,000 during 2014/15 to help fund the wider work to attract commercial sponsorship. A report on further details would be brought to Authority, subject to decisions being required, to take this forward.

A Member queried the £10,000 contribution by each National Park Authority and asked for clarification that any monies generated through commercial sponsorship would be divided equally amongst all National Park Authorities.

The Chief Executive confirmed that all fifteen National Park Authorities will benefit equally and this had been agreed by the Chairs of the National Park Authorities when they met in June 2014.

Dr Mortimer recommended the deletion of the 'Introduction' to the Sponsorship Policy as he felt that it would date the policy very quickly.

Mr Hitchins thanked the Chief Executive for all the hard work, welcomed the policy and supported the recommendation as he considered sponsorship to be very important to the National Park.

Signed 

Date ... 3/10/14

Mr Sanders proposed the recommendation, subject to the deletion of the 'Introduction' to the policy, which was seconded by Mr Gribble.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the deletion of the 'Introduction', Members adopted the Sponsorship Policy.

3100 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Local Action Funding Greater Dartmoor Local Enterprise Action Fund (GD LEAF) 2015-2020 Core Costs Contribution and Representation on the Local Action Group (LAG)

Members received the report of the Communities Officer (NPA/14/038).

The Director of Planning reported that although the requested £6,900 annual contribution over six years is a significant investment for the Authority, during times of a reducing budget, it will facilitate the successful delivery of a grant programme in excess of £2 million, enabling projects to an estimated value in excess of £5 million to deliver key economic 'Your Dartmoor' plan objectives. The potential benefit is great and he encouraged Members to support the programme.

Dr Mortimer welcomed the £1 of Local Authority contribution generating £23 of activity delivered through the programme and proposed to proceed as set out in the recommendation.

Members fully supported and were delighted with the project.

The Chairman confirmed that he would seek assurances that administration costs will not increase.

A Member asked in which area the posts of the two project officers, who will assist potential applicants develop fundable projects, will operate from. The Chief Executive reported that previously they had operated from Okehampton. Members agreed that the Chief Executive would seek clarification of where the posts will be located and possibly of one of the posts linked to the Hill Farm Project.

RESOLVED:

Members:

- (i) Agreed to provide an annual contribution of £6,900 for 6 years, 2015–2020 (inclusive) to assist with the core costs of running the GD LEAF programme, subject to:
 - (a) funding being secured from RDPE and LA Partners (WDBC, TDC and SHDC);
 - (b) the Local Development Strategy promoting appropriate opportunities for Dartmoor communities and businesses;
 - (c) Authority representation on the GD LEAF 2015-2020 management team; and
 - (d) delegation of final decision on funding to the National Park Officer (CEO) in consultation with the Chairman.

Signed 

Date ... 3/10/14

3101 Charging for Pre-Application Planning Advice

Members received the report of the Director of Planning (NPA/14/039)

The Director of Planning reported that following presentation of a report to the Audit and Governance Committee on 15 August 2014 he is now seeking authorisation to issue a consultation document in relation to a scheme of charging for pre-application advice, in the same way as many other planning authorities within the County.

He reported on the breakdown of pre-applications received in 2013/14, the potential income and risks, exemptions, timescale and how the scheme will operate. Whilst, householder pre-application enquiries are the highest number received, it was considered that charging for this type of enquiry would be a backward step. The proposal is not to charge householders for pre-application advice but to ensure that officers limit any time spent on these enquiries to two hours maximum without a site visit.

It was considered that planning agents have come to expect that charges will be levied for pre-application advice on commercial or residential type developments. Currently, there is no charge for pre-application advice on Listed Building Consent and it was considered that an introduction of one could result in an increase in poor quality applications received. However, if a site visit was considered essential a charge should be made. Any specific advice regarding trees on potential development sites can be incorporated as part of the charges levied for residential/commercial development and advice will not be offered in future for pruning works for non TPO trees.

A full set of advice notes would be produced regarding other major developments. The potential Member involvement would be taken forward separately and a further proposal would be presented to a future Planning and Sustainable Development Working Panel.

Members were advised that views would also be sought from members of the farming community, who would be included in the consultation exercise.

The Director of Planning reported that he would report back to Authority, probably in December, for a final decision on charging and the level of any charges.

Members agreed with the proposed consultation and were pleased that it was moving forward.


Dr Mortimer proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Mr Hitchins.

RESOLVED:

Members agreed to public consultation on the draft charging schedule for pre-application advice.

Signed

Date


3/10/14

3102 Local Plan – Annual Monitoring Report

Members received the report of the Senior Forward Planner (NPA/14/040)

The Senior Forward Planner reported that the two key roles of the report were to set out the implementation of the Local Development Scheme and to assess the effectiveness of policies in the 'local plan'. He advised Members that a copy of the Authority's Annual Monitoring Report could be accessed on the Authority's website.

He reported to Members a brief overview of the work achieved to include the work in 2013/14 on the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document which was adopted in April 2014; the significant amount of officer resources which have gone into plan delivery, especially the Masterplans and development briefs at Ashburton, Chagford, South Brent and Yelverton; and the timetable set by the Local Development Scheme, adopted in May, for local plan work.

He highlighted to Members that the level of affordable housing completions had risen in 2013/14 with 32% of new houses completed being affordable, the five year average on completions has been 40% and the number of permissions for affordable housing at 35%. Although the overall numbers on completions are lower than has been seen, it is expected to see numbers increasing through permissions and completions over the coming three years as the Development Management and Delivery Development Plan Document takes effect. The new allocations has put the Authority in a comfortable position regarding a five year land supply on the basis of indicative need.

Members were informed of the impact of Certificates of Lawfulness for new dwellings and the proactive monitoring which is now taking place on occupancy conditions, which may see, in the short term, an increase as identified dwellings occupied contrary to occupancy conditions. In the longer term, the Authority does need to consider whether we are striking the right balance between policy constraint and monitoring. Together with holiday accommodation this is an area which will continue to be closely monitored.

Members were advised of some areas of monitoring and evidence that were currently being or need to be looked at during the next 12 months, including engagement with Strategic Housing Market Needs Assessment on both Exeter and Plymouth areas; the need to consider the evidence base as options are assessed for addressing minerals policies; design quality and landscape monitoring; and economy which together with housing is likely to be a key focus of strategic policy review.

A Member expressed concern regarding the future of Buckfastleigh, stating that it would require a co-ordinated approach from all agencies to resolve current issues.

Members thanked the Senior Forward Planner for his considerable hard work on the Ashburton and Chagford Masterplans.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report.

Signed

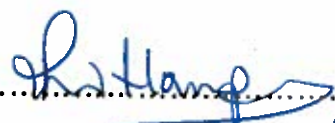
Date

3103 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/14/041)

RESOLVED:

Members noted the content of the report.

Signed 
Date ... 3/10/14
The signature is a cursive-style name, possibly "L. H. H. H.", written in blue ink. The date "3/10/14" is also written in blue ink.