

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting held at the Dales Countryside Museum, Hawes on Tuesday, 31st January 2006.

Present:

C Lis in the Chair.

RA Bird, J Blackie, Mrs A Brooks, WH Brown, G Dalton, W Fenten, Mrs N Grace, C Hammond, TRN Harrison-Topham, D Ireton, HA Kirkbride, KJ Lancaster, Mrs S Marshall, Mrs D Millward, A Osborne, Mrs Y Peacock, JJ Pearlman, Dr KM Petyt, Mrs FG Ramsbottom, S Shaw-Wright and Ms N Stedman.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

1/06 MINUTES**RESOLVED –**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29th November 2005, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman, as a correct record.

2/06 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No notifications of public questions or of the intention to make a statement had been received.

3/06 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**RESOLVED –**

That pursuant to Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of Item Nos 16(a) and 16(b) on the agenda on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs 1,7,8 & 9 and 12 & 13 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

4/06 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from SHK Butcher, OJ Kendall and SR Macaré.

5/06 DECLARATIONS OF THE EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

The following members made declarations of interest:

Mrs Y Peacock – a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Item 12 as a member of Richmondshire District Council.

KJ Lancaster – a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 13 as Director of Finance of Hudson House, and a member of Sedbergh History Society.

WH Brown - a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 13 as a Director of Hudson House.

A Osborne – a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Item 11 as an employee of DEFRA.

Dr KM Petyt – a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Item 13 as a member of Sedbergh History Society.

Mrs FG Ramsbottom - a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Item 12 as a member of Richmondshire District Council.

6/06 DECLARATIONS OF LOBBYING

None.

7/06 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Chairman.

In response to a member's question, he stated that his 'catch-up' meeting with representatives of the Yorkshire Dales Society had covered a number of issues, including, the Authority's Peer Review, the Audit Letter, the 25th Anniversary of the Society and the Ken Willson award.

RESOLVED –

That the report and further comments be noted.

8/06 REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Chief Executive.

In response to members' questions, he stated that:

- he was awaiting a report on the hearing of the Affordable Housing Commission, and would be reporting further to Members in due course
- minutes of the Defra Implementers' Group could be circulated, for information, through the Members' Information Bulletin (MIB)
- he would invite Dr Peter Annison to give a presentation to the Authority on progress on the Wensleydale Housing Scheme and invite representation from the Darlington Building Society

- with regard to progress with the Skipton Building Society initiative regarding affordable housing in Craven, work was on-going on defining a 'key worker' and he would either update members through the MIB or bring a report to the Authority.

Members were informed that, since the preparation of the report, notification had been received that Stephen Butcher would replace John Sayer as one of Craven District Council's representatives on the Authority.

Members welcomed the proposal to have an 'Open Evening' at Yoredale in Bainbridge and saw it as an ideal opportunity to extend links with the local community. The Chairman commented on the remarkable work of staff in arranging and undertaking the move from Yorebridge House to Yoredale.

RESOLVED –

That, subject to member and officer comments being taken into account:

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) SHK Butcher be appointed to serve on the Planning and Audit and Review Committees and a report be brought to the next meeting of the Authority to consider appointing to fill vacancies on various internal groups and the Access Forum that were occupied by John Sayer;
- (c) the Chairman, J Blackie, Mrs A Brooks, Mrs Y Peacock, Dr KM Petyt and Mrs FG Ramsbottom (with the new Secretary of State appointee to be invited to be 'substitute') and two officers, represent the Authority at the ANPA Workshop to be held in Cheltenham on 26th to 28th April 2006, attendance to be an approved duty.

9/06 NPA PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT – IMPROVEMENT PLAN

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Chief Executive.

A member, whilst generally supporting the recommendations contained in the report, proposed that, as the Planning Performance Working Group had been established with a specific remit which did not include this particular element of work, the membership of the Group should be expanded to provide a more balanced representation of the views of the Authority. He also commented that if a 'reduced' Planning Committee was to 'work', the membership would need to be seen to be representative of all members of the Authority, with the option for all members to be able to serve on the Committee at some stage, possibly through some process of member rotation.

Members discussed the report and recommendations in detail, raising a number of issues, including:

- if there was to be a reduction in the size of the Planning Committee, some thought should be given to the greater role that members might play elsewhere within the Authority
- there should be an equitable allocation of places on the various committees of the Authority

- a local press report had highlighted concern over the possible reduction of local representation
- there was no proven link between a reduced committee size and an improved service
- the Audit Commission, who had been one of the main advocates for a reduced Planning Committee, showed inconsistency by not recommending a similar reduction in the size of the North York Moors National Park Authority's Planning Committee
- concern that there would be a lack of ownership of the Committee by local people if there were fewer local representatives
- the report and Improvement Plan dealt with far more than just planning and those other aspects should not be overlooked
- suggesting that the Audit and Review Committee should take on a 'scrutiny' role
- could the Group also look at broader governance issues.

The Chief Executive reminded members that a Corporate Governance Working Group had already been established and would be reporting separately. He emphasised that a number of external organisations had been critical of the Authority's planning service, namely the Audit Commission, Peer Review Team, Management Letter and there had been a local press editorial that referred critically to the public's perception and operation of the Planning Committee. He pointed out that, as far as he was aware, only four Authorities, including the Yorkshire Dales, operated with a Planning Committee consisting of the full membership of the Authority.

RESOLVED –

That:

- (a) the package of recommendations and actions set out in the Improvement Plan appended to the report of the Chief Executive be approved;
- (b) Members confirm their belief that there are advantages to the suggestion made by the Peer Review Team to reduce the size of the Planning Committee;
- (c) the membership and remit of the Planning Performance Working Group be extended to take forward recommendations 11-13 of the Improvement Plan and report back to the Authority with recommendations on what the most appropriate arrangements would be for operating a smaller Planning Committee, the membership of the Group being extended by the addition of Messrs Blackie, Lis and Pearlman;
- (d) a report setting out proposals for the way in which Members will be involved in the implementation of the other recommendations and actions be brought to the March meeting of the Authority for consideration and adoption.

10/06 ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Chief Executive.

Members were reminded that the report had been considered at some length by the Audit and Review Committee, although discussion had focussed primarily on the recommendation in respect of the reduction in the size of the Planning Committee.

In considering the report, several issues were raised by members, including:

- requesting figures on the costs of operating the Planning Committee to assist the Working Group's debate on the options for operating a smaller Committee
- welcoming the comment from the auditors on 'Financial aspects of corporate governance' that their 'work had not identified any weaknesses to which we wish to draw the attention of members.' This was highlighted as being an excellent result for members and officers.
- expressing regret at the responses given by the auditor at the Audit and Review Committee meeting and seeking those responses in writing
- what is the role, definition and scope of audit within local government?

RESOLVED –

That, subject to member comments being taken into account:

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) the Chief Executive to write to the Audit Commission requesting that they respond in writing to members' concerns raised, in particular, at the Audit and Review Committee meeting during consideration of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, in particular, insofar as the Letter recommends a reduction in the size of the Authority's Planning Committee; and
- (c) officers arrange for –
 - costings of the operation of the Planning Committee to be available for the Working Group as part of its consideration of options for operating a smaller Planning Committee; and
 - a briefing paper on 'Audit in the Public Sector' to be produced for circulation through the MIB.

11/06 BUDGET: 2006/07

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Senior Finance Officer.

RESOLVED –

That the budget for 2006/07, as recommended by the Finance and Resources Committee at its meeting on 14th November 2005, be approved.

12/06 RICHMONDSHIRE 2021 – DRAFT COMMUNITY STRATEGY

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Policy and Liaison Officer.

Members, whilst generally supporting the draft Strategy, raised several issues, including:

- suggesting a need for the greater dispersion of job creating investment throughout the area;

- expressing concern at the possible impact of the expansion of Catterick Garrison on other parts of the area, in particular the National Park. It was feared that an expanded Garrison would be dependent on drawing labour from elsewhere and that this could starve businesses and services in areas of the Park, in particular Wensleydale, of their local labour force;
- the inclusion of national statistics would allow comparison of and a benchmark for the data provided by the document;
- mention should be made of 'The Northern Way' which will have an impact on the district and its communities; and
- some explanation of the statements on 'deprived wards' would be of assistance.

RESOLVED –

That:

- (a) Richmondshire Local Strategic Partnership be thanked for the opportunity to comment on the draft reviewed strategy 'Richmondshire 2021'; and
- (b) the comments contained in the report of the Policy and Liaison Officer and those raised by members be submitted to the Partnership.

13/06 ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL PARK CENTRES, PARTNERSHIP CENTRES AND PARK INFORMATION POINTS

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Sustainable Tourism Manager.

Members, in noting the report, expressed some reservations at the operation of Hudson House. Whilst accepting that the project at Reeth was a 'pilot', they were concerned that, purely on financial grounds, continued support beyond the period of the pilot would be difficult to justify. They were reminded of the visitor perception that the facility was not easily recognisable as a National Park Centre. Although members were aware that the pilot was due to run to March 2008, it was suggested that discussions should be held with the other partners in the project sooner rather than later.

In response to a member's question, the Sustainable Tourism Manager confirmed that comparative costs per visitor could be provided for members.

RESOLVED –

That, subject to member and officer comments being taken into account, the report be noted.

14/06 FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Secretariat Officer.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

15/06 PLANNING COMMITTEE

CONSIDERED –

The minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee held on 8th November and 13th December 2005.

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee held on 8th November and 13th December 2005 be received.

16/06 ACCESS COMMITTEE

CONSIDERED –

The draft minutes of the meeting of the Access Committee held on 3rd November 2005.

RESOLVED –

That the draft minutes of the meeting of the Access Committee held on 3rd November 2005 be received.

17/06 FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CONSIDERED –

The draft minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Review Committee held on 14th November 2005.

RESOLVED –

That the draft minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Resources Committee held on 14th November 2005 be received.

18/06 AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

CONSIDERED –

The draft minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Review Committee held on 16th December 2005.

RESOLVED –

That the draft minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Review Committee held on 16th December 2005 be received.

The remainder of business was considered in private

19/06 FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CONSIDERED –

The private minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Resources Committee held on 14th November 2005.

RESOLVED –

That the private minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Resources Committee held on 14th November 2005 be received.

20/06 PLANNING COMMITTEE

CONSIDERED –

The private minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 13th December 2005.

RESOLVED –

That the private minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 13th December 2005 be received.