

MINUTES OF THE EXMOOR TOURIST ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 2nd MARCH 2009 AT DUNSTER TITHE BARN

PRESENT: 54 attendees signed in – approx total in room nearer 100

1. WELCOME BY PRESIDENT, MR WILLIAM THEED

Mr Theed welcomed members to the meeting and talked of the economic downturn - how we can make Exmoor a success story.

2. ADDRESSES BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Ian Liddell-Grainger MP gave apologies for his peers Nick and Jeremy. Talked of Support for Devon and Somerset and how the latest Exmoor Coast and Country was ‘fantastic’. This year would be a defining year. Foot and Mouth was tough but this economic ripple effect from London was having a similar effect on West Somerset. He talked about how the Free Press was getting smaller and how a lot of locals were being laid off. All 3 MP’s believe that the answer is to get more visitors down to West Somerset. He called for a team effort – in isolation we will fail. Due to the weakness of the pound, the unpredictable weather, failing low cost flights all meant that people were waiting until the last minute to book holidays. He praised the www.exmoor.com website and its links and also gave his thanks to Naomi for her dedication as secretary, a position she is stepping down from.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

13 were received.

4. ACCEPTANCE OF 2008 AGM MINUTES

The Chairman confirmed that the minutes had been circulated and proposed they be accepted. A vote was taken and passed. They were therefore duly signed as a true record.

5. CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He paid tribute to the committee and thanked them for their hard work over the past year. He went on to talk about we were within the worst recession in living memory and we realise the impact this was having on members. The ETA represents over 200 businesses and we were working to promote tourism as public funding is tight. ENPA and WSC realise the value of tourism to the local economy and an aura of cooperation was developing following negotiations between officers and ETA members.

Exmoor Coast and Country guide was published on time and the directors were considering the affect of the current economic environment on the guide – there needs to be a debate on the merits of hard copy or web based advertising. Also the high cost of traditional distribution is under discussion. HE called for all members present to take copies away with them.

The chairman went on to mention the Exmoor Food Festival and how successful it was in 2008 and we are working towards an even better one in 2009.

The website was congratulated for being the predominant website in search engine rankings and went on to say how thrilled we were to have internationally known Pat Edgar of PR Matters now working for us. A call was made to all members to help with journalist visits. He expressed his thanks to ENPA and WSC with their support in this area. The chairman said that all of the progress made by the ETA was due to a strong committee and gave thanks to all of them – and they were sad to be losing Naomi and wishes her well in the future. He welcomed the new secretary, Rachel, and thanked all members in attendance.

6. a) TREASURER’S REPORT

Naomi Griffith reported income is slightly down on last year as the number of members has dropped slightly and expenditure has also increased slightly due to administrative expenses. There is a slight

deficit of £3760. A member then queried the level of reserves and Naomi informed us that they stood at £20K.

b) ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by William Theed and seconded by Roger Barbee. **All in favour.**

7. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR

Frances Clark accountants in Taunton (formerly Whites) were proposed as auditor by William Theed and seconded by Antony Brunt. **All in favour.**

8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Officers were proposed and seconded as per attached sheet. **All present agreed.**

9. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

William Theed then proposed Antony Brunt as Chairman and seconded en bloc. **All present agreed.**

10. REPORT FROM MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Naomi Griffith reported that membership was slightly down this year to 180 members. Losses as usual are the result of selling of businesses and retirement.

11. INTERNET REPORT

Nigel Smythe reported a successful year with the website www.exmoor.com which built on the previous years successes. Numbers of visitors to the site has stabilised at over 10,000 unique visitors per month, which equates to over 125,000 unique visitors to the site annually.

Mr Smythe reported that the important click throughs are down by 9% on last year to approximately 33,000. 25% of all visitors then click on to members pages.

Google Adwords campaign and also the constant efforts of Bryan Cath our webmaster, in subtle but vital manipulation of the site has been maintained to best a prominent position within all search engines.

When compared with our competition we are 25% ahead of nearest rival and 50% ahead of rest, Miniguide were downloaded at around 100 copies per month.

He talked about how Exmoor Coast and Country would be a major task for the New Year and how we were in talks with WSDC re: Visit Exmoor and Exmoor.com as to how to pool their resources and remove duplication. He finished by formally thanking the website subcommittee team of Bryan Cath, Andrew Flagg and Antony Brunt.

12. REPORT FROM ENPA

Nigel Stone gave a PowerPoint report on the Exmoor National Park and the future of tourism within the park.

13. REPORT ON FERRY PROJECT

Chris Marrow gave a PowerPoint report on the Bristol Channel Ferry project.

14. REPORT ON MINEHEAD EYE PROJECT

Naomi Griffith gave a report on the project she is leaving ETA to work full time on – Minehead Eye. It is a Youth Project for the wider community. It is an exciting and innovative dedicated extreme sports centre offering a skate park. BMX and flexible spaces for other activities. IT will be able to host theatre productions and work as a community space. The project will empower and engage the young people of West Somerset and Exmoor with opportunities in sport, art, media and music. The project has been 8 years in the offing and was awarded 3.2M capital funding from lottery funding ‘my space’. WSDC have also put forward 250K.

The centre will offer support and guidance in a non-institutional surrounding with skills and training projects. It is an environmentally sustainable project with wind turbine, cork insulation etc. if affordable for the project. They are due to start onsite in April and are on schedule to open for spring 2010.

It is envisaged that the project will help tourism by bringing a base for 'bad weather' activities and a skatepark is a big pull for families. There is a growth in the market for extreme sports and a gap in the market on Exmoor. The tourist trade will actually subsidise the activities for the local youth.

15. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Q. A.Caldwell (Weatherall Farm): Taking Nigel Stone's presentation. The use of marketing research was good and there is a clear message in the research. We need to use the research to underpin new businesses. The ETA needs to build on some of the actions: The ferry sounds fantastic. Coast and Country – why has ENPA a policy of not carrying it?

A. N.Stone: The ENPA always has C&C available and people are referred on. **A.Brunt:** ENPA have adopted a very positive attitude. The enquiries we get over email for C&C brochures and they are predominately UK based. But the ENPA enquiries tend to be from overseas – this is an interesting statistic and shows ENPA must be doing something right. **N.Stone:** The Park as a brand is an international one.

Q. M.Rawle: Queried the website links on National Parks website and the small text for 'visit Exmoor'.

A. N.Stone: We are now getting more of an idea of how people are using the website. We are now giving a higher profile to accommodation and education.

Q. P.Webber (Hindon Farm): Can we hear more about the 'partnership'?

A. A.Brunt: There is no formal proposal laid down but it has been suggested that savings could be made by ENPA, WSDC and ETA working more closely together. There is quite a degree of duplication and an exploration is taking place into economies and how we can achieve more. Pioneered by Mike Bishop of Active Exmoor he is hosting a workshop and wants to hear industries ideas. We call on you all to stay and give your views.

Q. P.Webber (Hindon Farm): And what is ETA's point of view on this?

A. A.Brunt: We realise there are economies of scale and improvements from working together. There is no 'formal' partnership legally and we are beginning discussions.

Q. P.Webber (Hindon Farm): So Visit-Exmoor, Coast and Country and ETA – keeping them all?

A. A.Brunt: This will be up for discussion this afternoon.

Q. J. Halliday (Primrose holiday cottages): Can we hear ETA's point of view before this workshop?

A. A.Brunt: Any working together should be led by the industry and not by the local authorities. But we also need a lot of help from the local authority sector/

Q. P.Webber (Hindon Farm): ETA's thoughts on how it should function and be called?

A. A.Brunt: ETA and Active Exmoor are not fully decided on direction and seeking views of industry as a whole. We are keen to hear your views. ETA wants to do the best thing for tourism in the area.

Q. P.Webber (Hindon Farm): We need to move forward by working together?

A. A.Brunt: Takng this general concept of working together – who supports this ideal?

Carried by a show of hands.

A. M. Bishop: Finance is limited. In North Devon they have cash available and are reaping the rewards. We need co-ordination on Exmoor of information for the general public. We need harmony and this afternoon is about developing ideas.

Q. P. Webber (Hindon Farm): Would exmoor.com be the predominate website?

A. M. Bishop: Possibly – but there may be several websites within that.

A. A. Brunt: In fact we are pleased to announce that as from today everyone advertising on Exmoor.com site will qualify for a free ‘silver’ listing on the Visit-Exmoor site. If you have already paid for a visit Exmoor ads then let us know and we will arrange a refund. This is the sort of thing we are talking about. This is a new venture from the ETA and WSDC and shows the positive steps we are taking to make your money go further.

Q. Mrs Cauldwell: Coast and Country distribution – if we know people out of the area and send them out and drop them into local doctors and dentists?

A. A. Brunt: We’ve looked into buying such a database but was too pricey – we have plenty of copies we can give people.

Q. P. Webber (Hindon Farm): Couldn’t other national parks advertise each other? Such as ENPA and Snowdonia?

A. N. Stone: The market is too competitive for that to be tolerated. – but the issue will be raised.

Q. Mrs Cauldwell: We did our own marketing research of TIC in various places and the most helpful was TIC in Peterbrough. All the others will not stock other areas info due to lack of space/

Q. Bob Deville: Coast and Country distribution – cost of postage is a big problem? Lynton can’t afford to post them.

A. A. Brunt: Yes – marketing and distribution costs. We have bulk mailings carried out by carrier direct. We have been talking to Mike Downes re: postage and there may be more help in the future here. Minehead TIC postage is paid by WSDC and enquiries over the web are done by carrier direct. IF we could post through Minehead TIC it would be great and reserve Carrier direct for international.

A. South Molton TIC: We do keep other areas info – but space IS at a premium.

A. Porlock Visitor Centre: We send out from our own funds.

A. A. Brunt: For which we are very grateful.

Q. John Malin (Quay St): What are the plans for a jetty for the Severn Link

A. C. Marrow: Quay St is very important for this. There is no berth at spring tide and at low tide. Low water spring tide is the same time 1-4pm/am so we can schedule safely. The old jetty (1942) would have been fine. It doesn’t need to be anything sophisticated – a lattice design like a Victorian pier – it may also help the lifeboats. If built by the Council there would be different priorities and therefore would cost more. There is a problem with match funding - but could be done with commercial match funding. But Swansea £ would need to be used at this end. This has in principle been accepted by Swansea Council. Or perhaps EDF/ Hinckley Point? Or a developer of Culvercliff could be called on to develop pier.

Q. ?? What about the Severn Barrage?

A. C. Marrow: No problems with that.

Q. ?? Would it run up to Bristol?

A. C. Marrow: That would call more for a hovercraft.

Q. H.Asher (Twitchen Farm) What can be done about rural access? Eg. Challacombe . ENPA no longer offers walks that are not accessible by bus route. How do we get visitors from Minehead and into our villages?

A. N.Stone: Regarding Bus provision – we have been looking at transport provision at the moment eg Dulverton to Lynton. We are carrying out some test runs on tourist routes. We look at the events programme and we need to apply some lateral thinking about minibuses. We could be using the private sector and the sustainable development fund eg: safari businesses and minibus excursions run by private enterprise in other national parks.

A. C,Marrow:We are marketing regional links – not a ferry. We want to be able to link the Severn ferry into something and it therefore fundamental that we link with the private enterprises.

Q. D. Birch (South West lakes) Would bikes be allowed on the ferry?

A. C,Marrow: Yes as long as good DDA (Disability Discrimination authority) compliance – and yes to dogs!

The Question and answer session was then halted for lunch and followed by the Open Forum on Tourism hosted by Mike Bishop.