

PRESS RELEASE:

Heading: **Spring Conference 2017 - 10.00-15.30 Friday 7 April 2017, Dulverton Town Hall**

The Exmoor Society's 13th Spring Conference, in partnership with Exmoor National Park Authority, has the theme 'Exmoor's Natural Capital'.

Defra has an objective to improve the quality of the natural environment and see a net gain in its value over the next 25 years. To achieve this, it has set up a Natural Capital Committee. But what is natural capital? What are the building blocks required for its value to be increased? Can there be an enhanced role for the National Parks, rich in natural assets and recognised by their special designation, funding and administrative arrangements? These are the key questions that will be explored at the Spring Conference.

The English National Parks, mainly in the uplands, were created for their spectacular scenery, wild, wide-open spaces, abundance of wildlife and bio-diversity, rich farming heritage, a rural culture stretching back to pre-historic times and their suitability for outdoor recreation. Today they face many challenges, not least from Brexit and the passing of the Common Agricultural Policy. Various organisations are setting out their preferred replacement schemes. All these different proposals will impact upland farmers whose livelihood, mainly from extensive livestock production and land management, is now at greater risk. Can a new approach such as Natural Capital be successful in bringing together natural assets, including natural beauty and the historic environment, and retain traditional farming practices and a deeply rural culture still found in geographical places such as Exmoor?

The Exmoor Society, in partnership with the Exmoor National Park Authority, is delighted that two leading figures from the Natural Capital Committee will be keynote speakers at the Conference, Professor Dieter Helm (Chairman) and Professor Ian Bateman (Member). A workshop for delegates will be led by Professor Brett Day and colleagues from the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute, Exeter University. Delegates will discuss Exmoor's natural assets, how they have changed, the pressures they face and a future agri-environmental scheme that emphasises public payment for public goods. Other speakers will include Rob Wilson-North, Conservation Manager, ENPA and Dr Helen Blackman, Outreach Archivist, Exmoor Society, with Dr Nigel Stone giving some reflections on his 17 years as Chief Executive of ENPA and thoughts about Exmoor's future.

Places can be booked online at www.exmoorsociety.com or by contacting The Exmoor Society on 01398 323335.

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Note to Editors:

The Exmoor Society exists to promote and organise action for the conservation and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of Exmoor national park. It was established in 1958 and successfully fought proposals to afforest The Chains, the central moorland area of Exmoor. It has continued to campaign against adverse changes and encourage people's understanding of the park's special qualities. It acts as an independent watchdog and champion for Exmoor's status as a national park.