

PRESS RELEASE: Proposals for a Hydroelectric Scheme at Iconic Watersmeet are Rejected

The Exmoor Society is pleased that Exmoor National Park Planning Authority unanimously rejected the proposal by the National Trust to develop a hydroelectric scheme that would have included the Hoar Oak Water, Farley Water and its confluence with the East Lyn River at Watersmeet. The Exmoor Society, a charity whose objectives are to protect and promote Exmoor National park for the benefit of all, undertook a site visit walking from Combe Park House to Watersmeet, considered the various reports provided by the developers, other bodies and individuals in order to understand and carefully assess the impact of the proposed scheme. Speaking at the Authority Meeting, the Chairman of the Society, Rachel Thomas, made the following brief points illustrating why it was objecting to the application:

1. **Hydrology & Stream Abstraction** including a great reduction in waterflow, excessive rock abstraction along a narrow bridleway pipeline, a scar on the steps pipeline at Watersmeet and noise of rock-hammering during construction.
2. **Ecology.** There are no aquatic invertebrate surveys, the flow reductions will have impacts on the wider environmental ecology. Many overall impacts and actions affecting habitat quality or causing habitat loss collectively create a significant permanent impact to the natural environment.
3. **Landscape Character & Visual Amenity.** The National Trust's mission is 'to keep places special for ever, for everyone'. The ENPA and The Exmoor Society share in that but this is a scheme that will do material harm to the character of the place that has long been acknowledged as one of the most exquisite in England. Surveys show that 85% of visitors to Exmoor come for the landscape and what 75% do is take a short walk. Watersmeet is one of the most popular places in the National Park to do this, which is not surprising as Watersmeet is an iconic Exmoor landscape – wild, romantic and, as the NT put it themselves, a 'dramatic river gorge, ancient woodlands, tea garden and shop in stunning surroundings. To retain this, it needs the lightest of touches – discretion in its tracks, buildings, bridges and signs. This proposal unfortunately does the reverse – the human footprint will become bigger and more visible in every respect.

The Society accepts the urgency of dealing with climate change and admires and supports the National Trust's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint - but this must not be at the cost of damaging or even destroying the natural and cultural assets in its ownership - and particularly those in the National Park.

The full submission to the Planning Authority can be found on The Exmoor Society website.

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Press Contact:

Rachel Thomas – 01271 375686 or
Exmoor Society Offices – 01398 323335

Note to Editors:

The Exmoor Society is an independent charity that protects and promotes Exmoor for the benefit of all and is the only membership organisation that is dedicated to the National Park status. Exmoor is a unique, diverse landscape of moorland, coast, woodland and farmland shaped by both nature and people over thousands of years. Established in 1958, The Society acts as a champion and watchdog for its conservation and the enjoyment of its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. It searches for solutions to today's challenges, such as loss of heather moorland, by gathering evidence to influence rural decision-makers both locally and nationally.

The Exmoor Society, 34 High Street, DULVERTON TA22 9DJ. 01398 323335
info@exmoorsociety.com www.exmoorsociety.com

