

The Exmoor Society

The Society's Year in Retrospect 2016-17

The Year in Retrospect highlights the significant contributions and activities the Society has undertaken in order to achieve its charitable objective of promoting the conservation and protection of Exmoor National park for the public benefit.

Highlights of the Year

- Held a very successful Spring Conference on the concept of Natural Capital with keynote speakers being world-class experts;
- Merged the Malcolm MacEwen Trust with, and transferred its funds to, The Exmoor Society;
- Launched a new archive project – Using the Archive to Understand Exmoor's Special Qualities – with six main themes;
- Continued to actively support hill farming, facilitating further research with Exmoor Farm Businesses;
- Initiated further work on the recommendations within the report *Exmoor's Moorlands - Where Next?*;
- Expanded the annual Walks Programme enabling The Exmoor Society to be the largest provider of Exmoor walks;
- Increased the use of the Resource Centre by the general public;
- Achieved funding for a further three years of the Pinnacle Award for young entrepreneurs;
- Involved with others in the development of the Local Plan.

The Society promotes the conservation of Exmoor National Park in a variety of ways: through conferences, issuing statements, influencing policy, undertaking research, responding to consultations, using its website, undertaking outreach, making awards and monitoring planning.

Campaigning

In the last year, the campaigning activities have included:

- Developing the concept of Natural Capital through the 2017 Annual Spring Conference. Two world-class experts – Professors Dieter Helm and Ian Bateman, Chairman and member, respectively, of the Government's Natural Capital Committee – were the keynote speakers. They outlined the work of the Committee and how the natural capital approach can help the Government's ambition to leave the environment in a better condition than present through a 25-year Environment Plan.
- The Society was pleased to see many of the recommendations in its commissioned report *Exmoor's Moorland - Where Next?* were followed-up by the ENPA and the Moorland Board. It remains concerned over the loss of moorland to woodland and the restriction of views and access in places.

- Changes to agri-environment policy as a result of the decision to leave the European Union has led to the Society being involved in discussing future schemes with CNP (Campaign for National Parks) at national level, SWUN (South West Uplands Network) at a regional level as well as locally facilitating a further business analysis of Exmoor farms. It has promoted the relationship between farming practices and landscape quality.
- The Society was involved in the Steering Group set up by ENPA (Exmoor National Park Authority) to oversee the Update of Exmoor's Landscape Character Assessment. It continues to lead the Landscape Advisory Group and its response to the new Management Plan 2017-22.
- The Society has formulated its position in relation to Recreation and Access.

Planning

The Society submitted a written response to the Local Plan, much of which was taken into account before the public enquiry in 2016. In June 2017, the Inspector published his response and the Society is satisfied that it now represents a range of good policies after being widely consulted on. 352 planning applications have been monitored by the Society in 2016, of which more than 40 were for broadband masts enabling coverage across most parts of Exmoor.

Second Archive Project

The Society launched the new Archive Project taking place between 1 July 2016 until 30 September 2018. It has raised sufficient money to employ Dr Helen Blackman to use the archives to understand Exmoor's special qualities. Six themes are set: Archive Hub; Then & Now photographs; Post Paths & Communications; Exmoor Studies, a new series of publications; a special event, Exmoor as an Outback; a book-length study of the contribution The Exmoor Society has made to the Exmoor National Park status for 60 years.

Events & Outreach

The annual Spring Conference, in partnership with the ENPA, aims to provoke discussion on issues of importance that affect the National Park designation. This year's conference was exceptional, being fully booked with people having to be turned away, and including a workshop facilitated by LEEP (Land, Economics, Environment and Policy Institute, Exeter University) leading to delegate involvement. Particular interest was shown over the inclusion of Cultural Capital within the natural capital concept as both are inextricably linked.

The 2017 Walks Programme was the largest offered across Exmoor, including themed walks on aspects of wildlife, flora and fauna, the arts, history and water management in different areas of Exmoor. Requests for talks on the Society's activities continue to be received.

The 2016 AGM was well-supported, with a detailed talk by Rob Wilson-North on the exciting discovery of the Secret Gardens of Simonsbath. Christmas lunch was enjoyed by members with a second visit to Simonsbath House Hotel, of significance to the Society as the place of its inauguration in October 1958. Preparations are taking place for the special 2018 *Exmoor*

Review celebrating its 60-year anniversary. This edition will be in full colour and include many photographs taken over the years.

The Society continues to be represented on many bodies including the ENPA's Consultative & Parish Forum, Moorland Board, Landscape Advisory Group, Historic Environment Advisory Panel, Learning and Engagement Panel as well as other special interest groups such as SW Water's Mires Project and Headwaters of the Exe Project. It liaises with like-minded groups, e.g. CNP, SW Lakes Trust, Dartmoor Preservation Association, CPRE, The National Trust and many other local groups.

The Society offers the following Awards:

- Founders Award, which in 2017 is given to Steven Pugsley in recognition of his readiness over many years to support Society events and contribute knowledgeable and entertaining talks on a wide variety of Exmoor-related subjects.
- Mary & Brian Chugg Conservation Award this year is presented to Dr Nigel Stone in recognition of his conservation work over and above the requirements of his professional position as Chief Executive of ENPA, his deft management of difficult and controversial subjects such as the hunting debate, the Foot and Mouth crisis, etc.
- The Lucy Perry Literary Competition 2017 results are:
Junior Category: 1st Prize Willow McCarthy, West Buckland School
2nd Prize Amelie Preston, West Buckland School
Senior Category: 1st Prize Ollie Heath, West Buckland School
2nd Prize Alfred Reynolds, West Buckland School
Esme Kwiatkowski of West Buckland School was Highly Commended for her prose piece on the 1899 overland launch of the Lynmouth lifeboat from Porlock.

Communications

The Society communicates its activities across different media. It regularly issues press releases which are published in local papers and promotes local events in its shop window. Its website is refreshed regularly with up-to-date details of its activities and Twitter is used to link to current information and raise awareness of local issues. The Resource Centre, including the Archives, Reference Library, themed displays and workspace area with WiFi, is used increasingly by researchers, the public and people making enquiries on specific subjects of interest. The shop now includes pictures, postcards and notelets by local artists as well as Society items and news.

Governance

Finance: Total incoming resources for 2017 amount to £168,790. The income on the General Fund of £43,931 is close to expectations and the balance is mainly project income and bequests placed in various designated funds. Resources expended amount to £82,629. General fund expenditure has been well controlled. This has resulted in a modest surplus on that fund. Most of the other funds expenditure has been on the projects. Overall the net incoming resources for the year amounted to £86,161. The major proportion of this being income to funds which has been due to several generous bequests.

On the balance sheet there has been an overall increase of £120,087 in total funds. This is mainly due to an increase in Restricted and Designated Funds. However, the General Fund also shows a large surplus due to the increase in the value of investments.

The Malcolm MacEwen Trust has merged with the Society and its finances transferred to a dedicated fund with advice on how this is used from former MMT trustees.

The Executive Committee meets six times a year as well as regularly reviewing its policies.