

NOTICES OF MOTION

Report of the County Solicitor

Recommendation: that consideration be given to any recommendations to be made to the County Council in respect of the Notice of Motion set out hereunder having regard to the relevant factual briefing/background papers and any other representations made to the Cabinet.

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The Notice of Motion submitted to the County Council by the Councillor shown below have been referred to the Cabinet in accordance with Standing Order 8(2) - for consideration, reference to another committee or to make a recommendation back to the Council.

A factual 'Briefing Note/Position Statement' prepared by the relevant Chief Officer and / or Head of Service is also included, to facilitate the Cabinet's discussion of each Notice of Motion.

### **(a) Saving Precious National Parks (Councillor Connett)**

Our precious National Parks, including Dartmoor and Exmoor, are loved by millions and used by many thousands of people.

The LOCAL Park Authorities comprise LOCAL representatives who know and serve the community and keep LOCAL oversight of Dartmoor National Park and Exmoor National Park.

Government is understood to be considering setting up a National Landscape Service which would centralise services under one, nationally run, new organisation.

A National Landscapes Service that effectively replaces individual National Park Authorities would not be a positive reform:

- It is contrary to the Government's 'levelling-up' agenda which involves government decentralising power and working more directly with local partners and communities.
- The 2019 Conservative Party Manifesto stated that "the days of Whitehall knows best are over" (p.26) and pledged to give communities of all sizes far more control. This Council questions how a centralist National Landscapes Service would achieve this.
- The move is contrary to international good practice in the management of protected landscapes which emphasises the importance of management being undertaken with and through local people and mainly for and by them.

- Locally run and locally managed National Parks are able to respond in the most appropriate way to their own unique qualities and without the burden and red-tape of national management.

Therefore, this Council urges Government not to proceed with a National Landscape Service or to take any step which will remove local engagement and involvement in our precious national parks and Council instructs the Chief Executive to write urgently to the Prime Minister and local Members of Parliament serving Devon and Somerset setting out our support for our local National Parks.

### **Briefing Note / Position Statement from the Head of Planning, Transportation and Planning**

This precise issue was considered by Cabinet at its meeting of 14 April in response to a question from Cllr Hannaford. In response, it was noted that there is no government proposal to merge all National Park Authorities. However, it was recognised that there has been media coverage of a leaked report which referred to the consideration being given by Defra to the possible role and structure of a new National Landscape Service. The establishment of this sort of service was one of the recommendations made through the Landscapes Review which was led by Julian Glover at the request of the (then) Secretary of State for the Environment, the Final Report of which was published in September 2019. This addressed a very wide range of issues relating to both National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), including specific recommendations relating to their governance. Devon County Council submitted evidence at the time of the Review and met directly with one of its panel members.

The government response to this Landscapes Review is keenly anticipated. Whilst assumed that the creation of a National Landscape Service is likely to be announced, there is no certainty about its role and composition and the corresponding implications for the governance of our National Parks and AONBs. However, in response to a supplementary question at the meeting, it was confirmed by the Cabinet Member that any recommended merger of National Parks would be opposed.

Since that Cabinet meeting, the same issue was raised through a meeting of the Team Devon (Leaders and Chief Executives) grouping in late April. This resulted in letters being sent by the Council Leader, on behalf of Team Devon, to the Secretary of State for the Environment and all Devon MPs outlining this concern. These letters stated:

*“All of Devon’s local authorities were alarmed to read recent media reports referring to the consideration being given by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to the possible role and structure of a new National Landscape Service. We share grave concerns about the potential impact that this might have on the management of Devon’s unique series of nationally protected landscapes. The Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities, together with our five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are instrumental in conserving, enhancing and promoting Devon’s natural environment and the social and economic benefits that they provide. The localised management of each of those*

areas is critical to their success and we would strongly oppose any centralised merger of their functions.

*When the Government responds to the 2019 Landscapes Review, I hope that you can urge it to make a positive contribution to the ability of National Parks and AONBs to continue their important work and retain their autonomy. A National Landscape Service which brought together and strengthened existing national support for landscape conservation and the protection of our natural environment could be of great benefit. Such a Service could provide a strong national voice for all protected landscapes, assist in the future development of policy and guidance (alongside other relevant Defra-funded agencies) and promote collaboration and consistency in the delivery of common functions. Such increased national support, coupled with local autonomy in governance and operation, provides the most effective model to improve upon the fantastic work which is already led and managed in Devon.”*

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This Report has no specific equality, environmental, legal or public health implications that will not be assessed and appropriate safeguards and/or actions taken or included within the detailed policies or practices or requirements in relation to the matters referred to herein.

JAN SHADBOLT

[Electoral Divisions: All]

**Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers**

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| <b><u>Background Paper</u></b> | <b><u>Date</u></b> | <b><u>File Reference</u></b> |
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**NIL**