

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

URGENT BUSINESS ITEMS SUB-COMMITTEE

2 MARCH 2001

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT NATIONAL PARK OFFICER – HEAD OF CONSERVATION

PART A

1. FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE (A.5601/JJL)

Introduction

- 1.1 The first case of Foot and Mouth Disease in the United Kingdom for 20 years was confirmed on Tuesday 20 February 2001. By the evening of Thursday 1 March, 32 cases had been confirmed. None of these are in the Peak District National Park. The nearest cases are in Lancashire and Leicestershire. There are cases now in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- 1.2 As a consequence of the spread of the disease, on Tuesday the Government made the Foot and Mouth Disease (Amendment) Order 2001. Under this Order, in an infected area the local authority can prohibit movement on non-vehicular routes. Outside infected areas, a declaration to prohibit movement has to be agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Closure on non-vehicular rights of way

- 1.3 By Thursday evening, all 7 constituent highway authorities had made the decision to introduce closure of all public rights of way shown on the Definitive Map. These declarations of prohibited areas have now come into effect. The authorities are preparing notices of closure. The notices warn that contravention may lead to a fine of up to £5,000.

- 1.4 Even before the legal closures, the National Park Authority had erected up to 3,000 advisory signs throughout the National Park asking people to stay out of the countryside. Our early action was already conveying a clear message of our concerns and was drawing significant support from local people, organisations and visitors. However, by the middle of the week it was clear from the spread of the disease that formal closure of paths and bridleways should be supported. As the closures came into effect we began replacing the advisory signs with new signs informing people that rights of way are now closed. This action has been taken to ensure that signs are in place before the weekend, whilst we wait for the legal notices to be available. We will also assist in getting those notices put up.

Present impact on National Park Authority work

- 1.5 As this week progressed, officers had to make decisions about the consequences of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease on Authority work. These decisions were taken on consultation with the Chair of the Authority.

- 1.6 The current situation with facilities and properties is as follows:

- Losehill Hall has postponed or cancelled all educational visits and leisure breaks. It remains open for conferences/seminars etc which are confined to Losehill Hall.

- We have closed the trails, cycle hire, car parks and North Lees campsite. Bus services to Fairholmes in the Derwent Valley, other than a service for local residents, have been withdrawn.
- We have closed access areas, having agreed that action with the Ministry.

1.7 The effect on other work of Authority staff is essentially as follows. I have asked that staff carrying out work which may involve visits to farms or other farmland, moorland or woodland only do so provided that they:

- obtain farmer and landowner permission;
- park their vehicles on public roads not covered by the closure declarations;
- Disinfect their footwear and waterproof overtrousers before and after leaving the site.

1.8 At the present time, Services whose staff normally carry out many visits to farms and countryside in co-operation with farmers and landowners as part of their work, are continuing to do so. It should be noted that in some National Parks, particularly where there are confirmed cases in or nearby their area, the Authorities have stopped such work. I prefer that such staff continue working but we are keeping the situation under review. In practice, when asked, the majority of farmers are now asking staff not to visit.

1.9 I have been asked by Development Control Service that its staff should be able to visit sites without prior appointment, in order to "make a representative assessment and maintain public credibility for both planning applications and enforcement work, using the statutory rights of entry". I do not accept that visits can go ahead without first contacting the applicant. It is vital that all National Parks staff are seen to be acting responsibly. Farmers are appreciating the way in which we are conducting business. However, if visits by planning staff are refused in such a way that necessary action is prevented, decisions whether or not to visit would have to be taken on a case by case basis.

1.10 In making decisions about our own work and business activity we have also been in close contact with partner organisations and with similar businesses. The Forestry Commission and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have stopped all routine field visits by their staff. The Ramblers Association, British Mountaineering Council and British Horse Society have supported the closures in the National Park. The National Trust has closed its properties. Field study centres and outdoor centres and hostels are mostly partially closed and some are fully closed. In the other National Parks the situation on closures of rights of way facilities and land is similar to the Peak District.

Financial impact on the National Park Authority's income

1.11 It is necessary to begin to assess the financial consequences for the Authority. A certain amount of information is so far available.:

- For the month of March, it is estimated that the partial closure of Losehill Hall will result in a net income loss of £12,500.

- The net income loss for car parks and cycle hire is weather dependent and therefore harder to calculate. The approximate income for these facilities in previous years was:

	<u>March 1999</u>	<u>March 2000</u>
Car park (pay & display)	£9,300	£11,150
Cycle hire	£13,750	£21,900

- Losehill Hall has also estimated its net income loss if the partial closure continues beyond March as follows:

<u>April 2001</u>	<u>May 2001</u>	<u>June 2001</u>	<u>July 2001</u>
£26,500	£23,500	£33,000	£11,500

- 1.12 Losehill Hall has, in addition, estimated its net income loss if it also suspended its other main business. The net income loss of closure of most business - education visits, leisure breaks, conferences/seminars, training - would be:

<u>March 2001</u>	<u>April 2001</u>	<u>May 2001</u>	<u>June 2001</u>	<u>July 2001</u>
£53,000	£40,500	£27,500	£50,500	£43,000

- 1.13 There will be other effects on income. The loss due to closure of Fairholmes information centre and the loss of income from refreshment concessions – which would operate from car parks now closed – have not yet been estimated. Takings at other information centres may also reduce if people stay away from National Park towns and villages. Over the coming weekend we will be recording and observing levels of visitor activity

Financial impact on National Park businesses

- 1.14 There is already considerable concern about the economic consequences of the foot and mouth outbreak on rural businesses. The more successful we are in controlling activity which might spread the disease the more likely there is to be an impact on businesses. This is predominantly an issue for the Government to consider but is of concern within the Peak District as elsewhere.
- 1.15 Visitor-related businesses and agricultural businesses are particularly at risk. There are many, mostly small scale, accommodation and craft/local product businesses in the Peak District whose income may be severely impacted.
- 1.16 Nearly all farms in the National Park are livestock and/or dairy. Many livestock farms rely on selling young stock to other farmers for fattening or breeding. Income from this source is blocked by the prohibition of livestock movement. The Government is today planning to introduce arrangements which will allow livestock sales direct to abattoirs but that will not help those farmers whose land is suitable for rearing young stock but not for fattening.
- 1.17 The Authority has tenanted farms and farmland and other land let on licence to farmers. Our tenants are likely to be severely impacted if the outbreak continues beyond March. No estimates have yet been made of the possible impact on the income of tenants.

Other staff issues

- 1.18 The serious problem of Foot and Mouth Disease has demonstrated the ability of Authority staff to respond quickly and flexibly to the situation. Staff from a number of Services have worked hard and together to cope with many enquiries from the public and organisations, to provide information and signs throughout the National Park and to reorganise work and activities. In some cases this has inevitably had a considerable impact on their other work. Other staff are having to make different arrangements in order to still do their work.
- 1.19 As the outbreak and consequent closure of facilities and restrictions on work continue, managers will need to consider how to best use staff resources, particularly those staff whose duties are curtailed.

Conclusions

- 1.20 Support is sought for the actions taken so far since the national Foot and Mouth outbreak began.
- 1.21 It is proposed that staff prepare further estimates of the financial implications for the Authority and for Authority tenants. Notes should also be prepared on the continuing implications for staff whose duties are curtailed and for staff who will continue their site visits.
- 1.22 Consideration needs to be given for what additional action if any would have to be taken if a suspected or confirmed case occurs in or close to the National Park. These and other issues have been partly considered but so far most effort has been concentrated on the issues described in this report. The issue of whether or not our actions are perceived to be sufficient and appropriate also needs to be considered.
- 1.23 In addition, it is considered that the National Park Authorities need to consider how to help to ensure that the economic implications of the continuing outbreak on rural areas is given sufficient attention. It is also suggested that they should contribute to a necessary debate to consider what sort of agricultural industry is appropriate for a sustainable and environmental beneficial economy.
- 1.24 Finally, it is intended to issue a further news release today, ahead of the weekend, to make clear that the whole of the National Park farmland, moorland and woodland is covered by closures.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. To confirm the actions taken by the Authority in relation to closures and other matters arising from the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.**
- 2. With respect to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease, it is proposed that staff prepare:-**
 - (i) Advice on what additional action would have to be taken if a suspected or confirmed case occurs in or close to the National Park;**
 - (ii) Detailed estimates of the likely implications on the financial and staff resources of the Authority.**

- 3. That the Authority in conjunction with the Association of National Park Authorities should consider how to help to ensure that the economic implications of the continuing outbreak on rural areas is addressed by Government and that that debate should consider the overall direction for the future of the agricultural industry.**
- 4. That authority be delegated to Assistant National Park Officer - Head of Conservation, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, to take executive action as necessary and to subsequently report action to the next meeting of this Committee.**
- 5. That the Authority commends the work done by staff and expresses its confidence in the ability of Officers to cope with this crisis.**

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