

## . DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 31 May 2012.

#### **Present:**

Professor I Mercer - Chairman	Mr A H Cole	Mr M Reddaway
Mr C Alford	Mr J Cooper	Mr M Retallick
Mrs M Alford	Mr G Hill	Mr R Savery
Mr R Ashford	Mr L Jones	Mr R Steemson
Mr J Aylett – Deputy Chairman	Mr I Mortimore	Mr T Stratton
Mr L Branfield	Mr D Powell	

#### **In attendance**

Mrs L J Heriot	Dr K Bishop DNPA	Col A Clarke
Mrs Sandra Dodd		

#### **1 Chairman's Remarks**

The Chairman said that Working Party, set up to look at the admin, had met on 24 April and had decided to recruit an assistant secretary with the view that that person would eventually take on the role of secretary. It was hoped that a person would be in place by the Annual Meeting and, if things went to plan, Mrs Heriot would reduce her hours in the second half of the year. A recruitment agency had been hired to source likely people.

2. **Apologies** were received from Messrs A Coaker, P Cottington, P French, B Lavis, J Jordan, R Savery, D Webber and Ms R Burge.

#### **3. Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 April were confirmed and signed.

#### **4. Ten Tors**

Colonel Clark gave a presentation to Council regarding a proposal to change the Ten Tors Routes being worked up for the Ten Tors Policy Committee by its Working Group. He went on to say that Ten Tors has been in existence for 50 years and now was considered to be a good time to reassess the Challenge and ensure that it can be sustained into the future. Ten Tors has grown into a national flagship for youth development in the South West and continues to achieve its Charter with links to the Government's strategy for youth, the Big Society agenda and the National Park purposes. For the Army it provides an annual workout for the regional brigade headquarters and its units to train for resilience operations with the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and civilian emergency services. It also provides the opportunity for the military to put something back into the local community and to influence teenagers.

A Critical Risk assessment of Ten Tors has been carried out, which highlights safety, resilience, environment protection and flexibility. Continuing military support has been assured but austerity requires all expenditure to be justified. Road Traffic Collisions with teams is considered a severe risk. Rivers in spate and treacherous bogs are other safety critical risks. The Military are aware of the need to minimise any negative effects on livestock, wildlife, cultural heritage and the fabric of the Moor. Safety of the participants is paramount; a major incident during the Challenge would undermine confidence and threaten the continuance of the Event.

A map of the proposed routes was shown to members and Colonel Clark explained the rationale; eight Safety Control Points near roads would guide participants to major river bridges, check teams through, evacuate fall outs and supervise the 35 miler's camping; small Check Points on selected tors, hills and beacons would spread the routes; and DRG and helicopters would continue to provide the safety cover.

It is the Ten Tors Working Party's intentions, to visit the Commoners' Associations affected, to talk through the details, listen to any concerns and work together. He emphasised the opportunity for commoners to educate the Ten Tors Managers' about the farming role, their viewpoint and working life as he felt there should be closer contacts with farmers. (Mr Arnold Cole, Mrs Mary Alford, and Mrs Sandra Dodd volunteered to join Mr John Cooper to speak at the Ten Tors Team Managers Briefing on Saturday 13 October.)

The Chairman suggested that any Member wishing to speak to Colonel Clark might do so after the meeting as he had larger more detailed maps for members to examine.

## **5. Matters Arising**

### **5.1 Cattle Grids at Chagford**

Mr Jordan was unable to attend the Council meeting but sent in a report of the meeting held in the Globe Inn at Chagford on 18 April. The report was tabled.

### **5.2 Forest Boundary – Public Inquiry**

The public inquiry on 3 May was adjourned and has been rescheduled for 12 July 2012 and will be held at The Watermark, Erme Court, Ivybridge.

## **6. Matters brought forward**

### **6.1 Western Power Distribution – Proposed under grounding of Overhead Cables**

Members were informed of the proposed under grounding of overhead cables on Walkhampton Common and Holne Moor; the local commoners and landowners are aware of the plans and have agreed to it.

### **6.2 Common Boundary - Mary Tavy**

Mary Tavy Commoners have responded to a letter, which was sent out to Local Commoners Associations in March, asking if there were problems with unfenced land abutting commons. The Mary Tavy Commoners have had a long running problem with the boundary of Prescombe Farm, Lydford which is a Devon County Council small holding. The argument for the long-lasting dispute over the boundary is that it is part of an ongoing restoration project, which requires the removal of a number of ash trees with a preservation order. It was agreed that a letter be written to the Devon County Council.

### **6.3 Update on the Eylesbarrow Mine Track**

Mr Aylett read out a report, which was received from Mr Len Jones. The funding and manpower requirements for the project had all but faltered at the end of 2011 due in part to the reduction of staffing levels and cut backs on spending within the NPA. However the outlook for 2012 is better, funding and manpower is now in place for the completion of the repair of the track and commends the efforts of Mr Rob Steemson in securing funds and staffing. The work will not start until the autumn, after the ground nesting season ends. The work to be carried out is as follows:

- cut off large boulders that are embedded into the track and pick up loose stone piles and use both types of stone to infill pools or hollows along the length of the track
- cut or replace water run offs from the mine manager's house to Plym ford
- fill in the large crater just before Wheal Katherine and make good the free flow water in the area
- revetment of the track side near Plym Ford and infill with local material on site
- trustees of the Dartmoor Association are matching the funding within their area of responsibility

Mr Cole said that he had visited the track that day and it was good to see that an effort had been made but felt there could be more coordination between the working parties. Mr Jones replied that he was aware of the problems but he had been constrained by the reduction in manpower but work would resume in August 2012. Mr Cole continued by saying that he had come across six cyclists on the Eylesbarrow track that were riding on the grass and not the track. When he had spoke to them they had pointed out that there were no signs telling riders to stick to the tracks. Mr Cole asked if a request could be made to the NPA to put up some signs. Mr Steemson replied that there were legal signs either end of the bridleway. Mrs Alford commented that there were many more cyclists using the Moor and they were not staying on the bridle paths. Mr Steemson said that he would make sure that information on biking is highlighted at Dartmoor National Park Authority roadshows. The Chairman suggested that the general question of cyclists be taken to the next meeting of the Recreation Working Party.

#### **6.4 Little Yennadon**

A letter had been written to the Devon County Council asking them to repair the fence as it is quite clear that the cattle grid and the fence are integral furthermore that any accidents on the B3212 caused by stock getting through the fence and on to the highway would be their responsibility. The Chairman said that the owner of the common is quite clear that the responsibility for maintenance and stock proofing lies with the Highway Authority. He considered that to resolve the matter it might be necessary to arrange a site meeting with the Devon County Council. It was agreed that a further letter be written to the Devon County Council stating the urgency of the problem.

#### **6.5 Slurry Silage**

Mrs Alford said under the Catchment Sensitive Farming Grant Scheme 2012 there is a "small window" in which grants are available, however the Dartmoor National Park Authority is insisting on full planning permission. Mrs Alford asked if there was any way in which the National Park could help to get the planning through more quickly. Mr Steemson said that he would make enquiries and get back to Mrs Alford.

### **7. Election Results**

The Chairman reported that only one election had been held and that was in the South Quarter, which resulted in Mr Anton Coaker and Mr Philip French being re-elected. Ms Rebecca Burge had stood down and Mr Michael Mudge had been elected to represent those commoners grazing less than ten livestock units in the South Quarter and he would take his place on the Council at the Annual Meeting on 15 August. In the East Quarter, Mr John Jordan and Mr Maurice Retallick were returned to their

seats as were Mr John Cooper and Mr Brian Lavis for the North Quarter and Mr Arnold Cole and Mr George Hill for the West Quarter.

## **8. Stallion Scheme**

This year the Stallion Scheme will be held on 15 October. The Chairman reminded Council that it had decided it would not make payments to pony keepers for two years. Mr Cole expressed his frustration at the pony situation on Wigford and Lynch commons. It was suggested that the Council engage with the National Trust over the range of problems at Wigford. The matter was discussed and the Chairman recommended that there should be a *post mortem* in the winter to consider best practice for the ponies and to reassess the Code of Guidance for Grazing Ponies on the common.

## **9. Update from the National Park Authority**

**9.1** The Chairman said this would be a standard item on the agenda. Mr Steemson updated members on what would be happening in the next couple of months. A press release was issued on 14 May on the "Paws on the Moors" Campaign and highlighted the National Park's promotion of responsible access to Dartmoor with dogs, understanding the issues and educating the public. The event would be held on 8-10 June at the Leg O'Mutton car park on Roborough Down from 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. The Outreach vehicle was scheduled to be at Roborough, New Bridge and other popular areas over the summer weekends so staff can talk to the public. The information boards can be used to publicize different topics as appropriate. The Recreation and Strategy Group are targeting litter and overnight camping. Mr Steemson had advised Members of the agreed events that were taking place on Dartmoor over the next few months. The list of events was available to members if required. As there were several cycling events, Mr Retallick suggested that it would be a good opportunity to publicise the cycle regulations. He reminded Members of the Moorland Management Forum arranged for Wednesday 20 June 2012 at Roborough Common at 10.30 a.m.

The Chairman asked if the Recreation and Strategy Group, sub group, which was made up of commoner members, might be reconvened in order to discuss cyclists and containing them to the bridle ways and the continuing subject of dog questions.

**9.2** Mr Cole brought up the horrific dog attack on a mare and her foal on Roborough Down in May, after a discussion it was reiterated that an annual letter must be sent to veterinary practices and animal charities about the procedure for dealing with injured ponies. Mr Jones asked if Mr Carl Caswell could be invited to a Council meeting in the near future. It was established that discussions were still on going with West Devon Borough Council about the role of dog wardens.

## **9.3 Mires Meeting**

There had been a board meeting of the Mires Project that day and Dr Bishop updated Council. The detailed plans for the sites are still to be drawn up and all of the work is subject to full consultation with local commoners and landowners approval. The draft work programme for the remainder of the project is as follows:

- Winneys Down - works scheduled in September 2012 to complete works on the site started last year.
- Board Down/Flat Tor pan is schedule in 2013
- South Tavy Head and Cranmere pool in 2014

- A further area at Winneys Down will be completed either in 2012 or 2014. If all approvals and arrangements are in place to manage the risk of unexploded ordnance the aim is to try and do the works in autumn 2012.

If all these works are successfully implemented the project should achieve the 110 ha target for the hydrological restored area, which is part of SW Waters Bid to Ofwat. The subject of contractors was discussed and how local contractors might have an opportunity to tender for work. The National Park will make sure that local contractors are aware of the exact specification for the work and that any new contracts are promoted locally. The other matter commoners raised was had they been inadvertently penalised by coming forward to agree works in the current price review period when SW Water had said they were keen on introducing revenue payments from March 2015, if they get Ofwat approval. The National Park had written to SW Water who replied stating that land owners and commoners who had agreed to restoration work on their land in the period of up to March 2015 will be treated on the same basis as those participating in 2015. (A copy of the letter will be sent to all Members.) The National Park is pursuing SW Water for details on the bid for PR 14 and the basis for calculating any revenue payments, the impact on agri-environment and other agricultural support. A map of the Mires Sites 2010-15 will be circulated to Members.

#### **10. Local Commoners Association Meeting**

The Council has received several requests from Local Commoners' Associations to arrange a meeting of chairman and secretaries. It was suggested that a date should be fixed sometime in October; the meeting would be informal and have no agenda.

#### **11. Update on Moor Skills**

Mrs Dodd updated on members on Moor Skills. Over the seven years that Moor Skills has been in existence nineteen apprentices have completed the course. This year an apprentice has already completed the course and has two part time jobs; five other apprentices are nearing completion. Out of the twenty apprentices, nineteen have stayed or are returning as contractor's on Dartmoor. Several had stayed on and completed the second year with Moor Skills either as level 3 in livestock protection or level 2 environment and conservation. This year September 2011 to August 2012 funding has been received from the Dartmoor Commoners' Council, Dartmoor National Park Authority, Duchy of Cornwall, Duchy College, the Prince's Trust, Pipex and some of the home commons. Sponsorship and protective clothing has been received from Mole Valley and Countrywest.

At a recent review meeting it was recognised that there is a struggle for young people farming to meet the requirement of law, e.g. trailer tests. The main hurdle is usually the cost and this also applies to those who have completed Moor Skills and need to update their certificates. Therefore the Directors of Moor Skills have proposed a slight alteration to the normal running of the scheme. This year there will be no active recruitment drive but time, effort and finances will be channelled into "upskilling" those under 26 years who are committed to working on Dartmoor Hill Farms. So as not to arrange unwanted courses and to have commitment from those taking part there would be a requirement to justify why they want to do the course and what benefit it would be to their farm. It is proposed that there would be two meetings throughout the year bringing all the Dartmoor young farmers together to undertake two set courses (yet to be determined).

It has been recognised that many employers and employees do not realise their responsibilities e.g. policies and administration required by law and HSE requirements. Therefore Moor Skills decided to employ a company to work with and create a template, which could be adapted for Dartmoor farms to avoid future Court cases.

A presentation and open meeting will be held on 29 June to present the awards and next year's launch. Moor Skills are seeking funding for next year's training courses, although many are subsidised through Skills for Life, RDPE and other bodies. The Duchy College and the Duchy Cornwall have agreed continued support. Mrs Dodd said she is exploring the option to change Moor Skills from a limited company to charity status, which would enable them to tap into more funding streams. She is also seeking sponsorship from the larger companies, more finance means more support for the apprentices. Mrs Dodd hoped Council saw the changes as progressive and positive and would continue its support.

The Chairman said that Mrs Dodd should be congratulated on her achievements and the refinements to the scheme. He reminded Council that at the present time a grant of £2,500 is made to Moor Skills every two years. He proposed that the amount should be increased to £1,500 per year. Mr Powell seconded the proposal.

**12. Date of next meeting**

The Chairman reminded members that Council had resolved to reinstate the ten minutes public questioning twice a year and suggested that this should begin with the Annual Meeting. Members agreed.

The next meeting of the Council will be the Annual Meeting on Wednesday 15 August 2012 at 7.30 p.m. at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

**Signed:**.....

**Date:**.....