

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 27 March 2013.

Present:

Prof I Mercer - Chairman	Mr J Cooper	Mr D Powell
Mr L Branfield – Deputy Chair	Mr P French	Mr M Retallick
Mrs M Alford -Vice Chair	Mr L Jones	Mr R Savery
Mr J Aylett	Mr J Jordan	Mr R Steemson
Mr A Coaker	Mr M Mudge	

In attendance

Mrs L J Heriot	Ms K McKechnie DLPO
Mrs K F Davis	

1. Chairman's Remarks

Professor Mercer welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Messrs R Ashford, C Alford, A Cole, B Lavis, I Mortimore, T Stratton and D Webber. The Chairman informed the meeting that Mr Arnold Cole was unwell and Council agreed to write to Mr Cole wishing him well.

3. Confirmation of the Minutes

Mr Steemson asked for a correction to be made to item 7 on the report on Moor than Meets the Eye project, page 3, line 9 after National Park should read: "This received a stage one pass and a grant of £100,000 has been made to partners and a total of £2 million is earmarked for the main scheme". There being no further amendments the minutes were duly confirmed and signed.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Snow Fall

There had been a reply in response to the Council's letter to the police which had been circulated to members. Mr Retallick commented on the expectation that farmers would clear car parks for the public. He said the police should be made fully aware of the considerable disruption caused when roads are blocked with traffic and emergency services unable to get through. He considered that this was a serious situation and farmers severely disadvantaged. Members agreed that the police could have access to their telephone numbers should an emergency arise. Mr Steemson said that he would be meeting Inspector Andrew Oliver the following day to discuss this issue. Inspector Oliver is responsible for Okehampton and Tavistock area. The Chairman felt it was important to speak to the police and highways department in parallel; he recommended that Council should talk to a senior official of the Devon County Council about their responsibility in this matter including the car parks. Mr Steemson said he would ask a police representative to attend the next Council meeting but in the meantime would keep the Council informed. The Chairman reiterated that an urgent meeting should be arranged with the police to discuss this issue in greater detail and ascertain what measures are going to be put in place.

4.2 Ponies

It was agreed that this item would be discussed in committee after the rest of the agenda was completed.

5. Matters Brought Forward

5.1 Dog Attacks

Mrs McKechnie give details of the serious problem of dog attacks on sheep at Long Ash, Roborough Down where ten sheep were killed, four needed veterinary attention and others had been bitten. Mrs McKechnie said she had issued press releases, which generated information from the public with the result that the owner and the dogs responsible had been identified. The police have apprehended the owner and are hoping for a prosecution. The owner is considering re-homing the dogs or having them destroyed. Mr Jones reiterated the ferocity of the attacks and loss of income to the farmer. It was agreed it was timely to reconvene the Recreation Strategy Group, which is led, by Andrew Watson, Head of Recreation, Access & Estates specifically to discuss the dog question.

5.2 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC)

The Chairman said that the Areas of Natural Constraints, which is a successor for LFAs and SDAs, has a consultation map for Dartmoor but several areas are not included. The Chairman and the National Park Authority have written in protest about the obvious missing areas of the ANC (the worst being Whitchurch Common).

5.3 Dartmoor Working Party Meeting – 6 June 2013

The Chairman said that Council is entitled to send four representatives to the next Dartmoor Working Party meeting because it follows the Ten Tors event and asked for volunteers. At present the Council's representatives are Mr Cooper and Mr Jones. Mr Alford and Mr Lavis were appointed to attend as the extra Council members.

5.4 Slippage of HLS Payments

Mrs Alford said that the HLS payments on the commons, which are usually due on 1 March, have been changed to 1 April. The EU rules have changed and the payments are in April and December rather than every six months and she would like to know the reason why government, contrary to what associations had signed up to, has altered the date of common HLS payments. Mr Coaker said that it affected all commons signed into HLS agreements and it would be appropriate for Council to address the matter with Defra. Mrs Alford proposed that Council should write to Defra asking for an explanation. Mr Coaker seconded the proposal. It was agreed that the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Vice Chairman should meet and draft a letter together.

5.5 Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

The Chairman said there was to be a meeting of the Biodiversity Action Plan advisory group on 18 April; Mr Arnold Cole is one of the Council's representatives but as he was unwell asked for a volunteer to take his place. Mr Aylett agreed to attend in his stead.

6. Hot Branding

Mrs Alford said that Defra were reviewing the practice of hot branding and required the procedures to be reviewed and alternatives sought. Mrs Sandra Mansell, Secretary of the Native Ponies GB, had been asked by Defra to lead a small working group of interested people to look into the subject. Mrs Mansell had produced a Branding Code of Practice to present to them. The meeting held on 3 March was to discuss the paper with Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor representatives and to incorporate their views. Mrs Alford said she was disappointed that there had been no support from the Heritage Trust or the Pure Breed Society who do use hot branding and had been asked to comment.

7. Little Yennadon Fencing

The Chairman said that in his latest letter Mr Lester Wilmington, Devon County Councils', Head of Highways and Traffic Management had indicated that he would be happy to ask a local officer to meet interested parties at Little Yennadon to review the situation. The Chairman felt it would be useful to take up the offer and to emphasise the dangers of stock escaping onto the main road. It was suggested that the interested commoners (Messrs Colton, Northmore and Wilkins) should attend the meeting at a convenient date fixed by the Devon County Council. Mr Hess, representing the owner of the common, would be invited to attend when more details are known. It was considered important that this issue be resolved in case of future disputes over cattle grids.

Mr Jones asked if he could carry on the research into the matter and this was agreed.

8. Recreational Events

A paper entitled "Management of Large Scale Events", written by Andrew Watson, Dartmoor National Park Authority had been circulated to members. Mr Steemson said that the National Park Authority had adopted a formal approach to the management of large recreation events in 1990s. In 2003 an organised event application and monitoring system with an associated code of conduct was established to assist in avoiding clashes between events and to help organisers plan in a sustainable manner and to ensure they obtained permission from the relevant people. It has now been identified from the feedback from various groups that there needs to be a tightening up of the management of events. The suggestion is that 30 cyclists or horse riders and 50 people on foot are classed as a large-scale event. However, the National Park Authority has no power over what events take place, as this is generally the decision of the landowner. He said the events and guidance are on the Park website and that the key is early planning and timing. Organisers are encouraged to avoid the nesting and lambing seasons, which means there are more events in September and October. There has been an increase in requests for large-scale events which the NPA discourages and steers to other places. A discussion followed. Mrs Alford asked about cycling events and whether they take place on the road or on the commons. Mr Steemson confirmed that all the cycling events should be on roads or on a legal bridleway; the Park has no jurisdiction over events taking place on the road. The initial map and event application is circulated to the landowner, the Dartmoor Commoners Council and the Local Commoners Association and the NPA look at each application to determine the impact on the environment. The organisers' of educational events are not obliged to inform the Park. Mr Branfield expressed his

concerns over the Midnight Madness event and the possibility of participants straying onto his land and whether he would be considered responsible for any accidents. It was agreed that the issue would be on the agenda of the next Recreational Sub Group and discussed in greater depth.

9. Lobbying of MPs – Fine Levels

The Chairman said there had been a request from a commoner to consider lobbying of local MPs to discuss the levels of fines. He said that the lobbying had already begun and asked the Council to throw its weight behind it. The fine levels have not changed since the 1950s. Geoffrey Cox QC MP has written to the Secretaries of State for Defra and Justice requesting them to find an early opportunity to amend the Act by replacing the fixed fines with the “standard scale” which is amendable by order. It was suggested that the other Dartmoor MPs should be copied into the correspondence and that the Exmoor and Bodmin Moor Commoners’ Associations should be made aware of the matter. It was further suggested that the Foundation of Common Land should be involved.

10. Update from the Dartmoor National Park Authority

10.1 Paws on Dartmoor

The Paws on Dartmoor campaign 2013 was launched earlier in March requesting the public to keep their dogs on leads. Signs and leaflets have been erected and distributed across Dartmoor. As a response to the incidents on Roborough Down, as previously reported by Mrs McKechnie, the Park rangers have put on extra patrols in the key areas. Mr Steemson said it was good to hear that the dog owner had been caught and hopefully there will be a prosecution that can be fully publicised.

10.2 Devon County Show

The NPA will be attending the Devon County Show in May.

10.3 Moorwatch

The police are organising a series of Moorwatch days (with partner agencies) that have in the past focused on thefts from vehicles. Mr Steemson is hoping to influence and change the outlook and emphasis of the days in order to address other issues including litter, dogs chasing grazing livestock, vehicle speeds and illegal/obstructive parking. This will be discussed with senior police officers when he meets with them to consider the snow plan objectives and he will update the Council of progress made.

10.4 National Park Management Plan

The pre-consultation version of the plan was sent to Council on 12 March and the deadline to reply is 8 April. The Chairman had not identified any ‘lead role’ for the Council in the plan.

10.5 Ten Tors 2013

The training period is well underway and, since the end of January, a list of teams out on the moor each weekend plus duty officer details have been distributed to all concerned. So far the training and scrutinising checks are going well, hopefully complacency will not set in. The Royal Wessex Yeomanry will be in charge and coordinating the actual event in May and the wash up meeting is scheduled for 6 June 2013. Four Council members are

invited to this meeting, however, it was stressed the importance of providing feedback with regard to any incidents as soon as possible.

10.6 Ten 10 Tors 2014

Mr Steemson reported on the work of the Ten Tors planning group, which is working on proposals for the 2014 event. The revised format would focus on seven safety control points close to roads (to reduce reliance on air support and ensure safer river crossings). The current plan is for twenty-five checkpoints manned by four service people at key tors. The 35-mile route would use the north moor only, whilst the 45 and 55 milers would still go on the south moor. None of the routes would cross the middle of the north moor.

The potential need for an Environmental Impact assessment is being looked at by Natural England and the final details of the 35-mile route fixed campsites will be confirmed. At the Dartmoor Working Party meeting Mr Cooper requested that the Council be kept informed of the potential changes to the 2014 event. Mr Steemson said that Dr Bishop had stressed the importance of keeping **all** partners informed and asked that a copy of the latest route proposals be circulated. He asked that the relevant local commoners associations be consulted and suggested that a presentation be made to the Commoners' Council on the revised proposals.

Ms Victoria Harrild-Jones, the Ten Tors Secretary, will circulate the latest version of potential 2014 safety control points and check points and consider how to brief the Commoners' Council.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be on Wednesday 29 May 2013 at 7.30 p.m. at the Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

Signed:.....

Date:.....