

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 25 January 2017.

Present:

Mr J Waldon - Chairman	Mr P Cleave	Mr G Mortimore
Mrs M Alford – Vice Chairman	Mr N Cole	Mr M Mudge
Mr P Abel	Mr P French	Mr M Reddaway
Mr C Alford	Mr G Hill	Mr M Retallick
Mr J Aylett	Mrs K Little	Mr T Stratton
		Mrs A Willcocks

In attendance:

Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	Mrs A Kohler (DNPA)
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1. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting & raised the following points-

- A record of the meetings & working parties that Council Members attend on behalf of Council was tabled. It also serves as a record of the other organisations that Council Members are affiliated to & acts as a 'declaration of interest' form. All Council Members are asked to ensure that their information is up to date. Please advise Sara of any amendments.
- Council held its Annual Dinner on 18 January 2017 at the Two Bridges Hotel. It was a successful evening, the food was good & those that attended enjoyed themselves.
- The MOD Commoners' Briefing/Lunch will be held this year on Thursday 30 November 2017.

2. Apologies for Absence

These were received from Mr R Ashford, Mr A Coaker, Mr J Cooper, Mr P Cottington, Mr J Jordan, Mr S Lake, Mr R Steemson (Mrs Ally Kohler from DNPA attended instead) & Mr D Webber. It was noted that Mr Len Jones has not attended a Council Meeting since March 2016 & it was agreed to ask Mr Jones to clarify his position.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

Mr Jonathan Aylett referred to the note of the National Common Land Stakeholder Group meeting that accompanied the minutes (Appendix A). He suggested that under note 1, the word 'impeded' should read 'included'. The amendment was made & the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2016 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Basic Payment Scheme on Commons

The RPA held a meeting in Exeter that was chaired by Mr Paul Caldwell, BPS Operations Director & attended by representatives from the NFU & Council. Mr Caldwell stressed the need for better communication & suggested several ideas for dialogue between stakeholders & the RPA in the South West. How this will be set up was not confirmed but the idea was welcomed.

The RPA advised that they had paid 83% of common claims in England. Council thanked the RPA for their efforts however, whether the amounts paid are correct still remains a concern, as the RPA are unable to provide detailed claim statements. Council & other organisations will continue to press the RPA to address this issue & to also ensure the remaining payments for 2016 are paid as soon as possible. The RPA said that there were still some queries outstanding regarding 2015 BPS claims & confirmed their commitment to sort these. They also confirmed that 2016 payments will not be held back due to this.

The RPA acknowledged that there were significant issues with mapping including an obligation to amend maps if they receive information from Ordnance Survey. This may effect the eligible area & prevent them from making a payment. We explained the problems this creates & the RPA will look into whether they can offer a period of consultation every time they make a change or consider an annual cut-off date for making changes. It was noted that there are issues with producing maps on a frequent or individual basis & meeting with the Local Commoners' Associations is a more effective way of working. Council offered to help facilitate this.

The back payment due following the 'Minchinhampton decision' was discussed. Mr Mark Grimshaw's offer, made last year, to pay in the first quarter of 2017 no longer reflects the situation. When pressed, the RPA said the decision to progress the repayments would be made at Directorate level & not by them. We asked the RPA to clarify what is happening. If the payments are not going to be made this quarter, Council will write to local MPs.

The Chairman clarified the following regarding the 'Minchinhampton monies':

- The RPA has said not to buy entitlements on common land. They will ensure that the entitlements match up with the entire area of common land.
- The bulk of the money paid will be a compensation payment for the years 2009 to 2014 (6 years under Single Payment Scheme).
- The 2015 & 2016 Basic Payment Scheme payments have been calculated using a new formula that takes into account the total area of the common. A recalculation adjustment may follow.

5. Matters brought forward

A TB consultation is underway seeking views on proposals to introduce a supplementary licence for farmers to continue badger disease control measures after a licensed cull. A discussion followed on whether Council should respond to the consultation as there is no suggestion that any of the licenced culls will take place on common land. It was agreed that Council's TB Working Party get together to discuss this further. The consultation closes on 10 February 2017.

The Landscape Character Assessment is to be updated as part of the Dartmoor National Park Authority's review of its Local Plan. Mr Russell Ashford attended the Dartmoor Landscape Workshop recently. It was an opportunity to gather perspectives on the landscape condition, review forces for change & gain information on what is valued about the different parts of the Dartmoor landscape. A report will be produced in due course & made available to Council. The Chairman thanked Mr Ashford for representing Council.

The Chairman advised that 188 road traffic accidents involving livestock was reported to Karla in 2016. The Chairman has spoken to BBC Environment Reporter, Adrian Campbell, who is interested in helping Council to raise public awareness of this issue.

The Chairman reminded Council Members to encourage everyone to report road traffic accidents involving livestock to Karla & as well as incidents of sheep worrying.

6. Financial Estimate for 2017/2018

Copies of the estimates were sent to all Council Members with the agenda. Being self-explanatory with no major queries or comments, Council agreed to the estimates provided.

7. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Mrs Ally Kohler reported on the following:-

- Stephen Belli, Head of Planning, is leaving in the middle of February. Sue Bishop, Recreation, Rangers & Estates Support Officer will be retiring at the end of March. The new Head of Conservation & Land Management (Chris Giles), Ecologist (Richard Knott) & Farming & Community Wildlife Advisor (James Rogers) are now in post. As part of their induction there will be a programme of visits to farms & if anyone would like to host the team, please make contact.
- Working in partnership with the Duchy of Cornwall, funding has been secured from The Princes Countryside Fund & the Heritage Lottery Fund (through the Moor than Meets the Eye Scheme) to continue the Hill Farm Project for a further three years. This was helped by an initiative from the Hill Farm Project to introduce a subscription scheme, that a lot of farmers have joined, which offers discounts on training & other events. There will be a continued focus on training, knowledge transfer & study tours; support for Moorskills apprentices & building connections with tourism business. The Moor than Meets the Eye stone walling grant will open again on 1st February. If anyone is interested, please contact the Hill Farm Project office.
- Following the Event Organisers' Workshop held earlier this year, which was attended by a number of commoners, & further 1:1 conversations with a number of farmers, new guidance for event organisers has been drafted. It is hoped that this will be circulated for comment in mid to late February. The DNPA is aware of concerns about the process for event notification & is also looking at this.
- The DNPA is also aware of concerns raised over recreational impact & has started the process of reviewing the information used. The aim is to generate clear, concise messages for key themes e.g. dogs, camping, cycling, litter, ponies, driving on the moor, fires. DNPA have listened to farmer's feedback & used the farmer's recreation diaries (developed through the Hill Farm Project) to help with this & there will be further opportunity to comment on the draft messages.

Mrs Ann Willcocks asked if the DNPA was intending to pass their planning application process to district councils. Mrs Kohler confirmed that this was not the case.

Mrs Willcocks also asked if the DNPA was looking at being a facilitator for 'agri-environment' schemes (post Brexit). Mrs Kohler confirmed that locally delivered agri-environment schemes are being considered by some groups. The Chairman advised that everyone is waiting for Defra's 25 year agricultural plan that may indicate Defra's thinking on the future of agri-environment. He hopes that Council will want to comment on this document. Mrs Willcocks added that as Council is well placed to deliver such schemes, it should be kept up to speed. The Chairman commented that whether Council wishes to be responsible for delivering the schemes remains to be seen. He did feel it is important

that Council responds to the document & reminds the Government of the benefits of hill farming. The Chairman agreed to keep Council Members updated.

Mr Neil Cole raised the issue of land owners not keeping their boundaries/hedges against the common in a good state of repair & asked that Council & DNPA work together to educate them. The Chairman advised that Council has a procedure in place to deal with this & if Mr Cole could provide the names of the land owners, a letter will be sent to remind them of their responsibilities. It was also suggested that Council send a letter to local estate/land agents & parish councils to make them aware that it is the landowner’s responsibility to fence against the common.

8. Council Member’s Job Description

The first draft was circulated with the agenda, for consideration by Council Members. It was decided that a few amendments be made to include making the job description generic for all members of Council & a second draft will be sent out to Council Members for further consideration.

It was agreed that Council’s Standing Orders be circulated to all Council Members & Mrs Kate Little kindly offered to look at Council’s Standing Orders & convert them into plain English.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 22 March 2017 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

The office will be closed from Monday 13 February to Monday 27 February 2017 inclusive as Sara is away on holiday. There will be an appropriate answerphone message directing callers to Quartermen if the enquiry is urgent or to Karla, DLPO. Sara will check emails remotely on a regular basis & she will forward any urgent emails to the following Quartermen, who have kindly volunteered to deal with these accordingly –

- North Quarter – Mr Crispin Alford**
- South Quarter – Mrs Ann Willcocks**
- East Quarter – Mr Gordon Mortimore**
- West Quarter – Mrs Mary Alford**