



seconded by Mr Jonathan Aylett that Mr John Waldon continue as a co-opted member on Council for a period of 4 years from 2 August 2017. There were no other nominations.

## **5.2 Election of Chairman**

With Mrs Mary Alford still in the chair, she asked for nominations for the post of Chairman. Mr Rob Steemson proposed that Mr John Waldon continue for a further year. Mr Philip French seconded the proposal. As there were no other nominations, Mr Waldon was duly elected as Chairman for the year 2017-2018.

## **5.3 Election of Vice-Chairman**

The newly elected Chairman took to the chair & asked for nominations for the post of Vice-Chairman. Mrs Ann Willcocks proposed Mrs Mary Alford & Mr Brian Lavis seconded the proposal. Mr Russell Ashford proposed Mr Maurice Retallick & Mr Anton Coaker seconded this proposal. As two names were put forward, the Chairman called a secret ballot. He requested that Council Members put the name of their preferred candidate on the ballot paper & put it in the ballot box. The result was 12 votes for Mrs Alford & 11 votes for Mr Retallick with no void papers. Mrs Alford was duly elected as Vice-Chairman for the year 2017-2018. She thanked members for their support & said that she is looking forward to working with everyone & doing the best she can.

## **5.4 Confirmation of Honorarium**

Mr Anton Coaker asked if the Chairman & Vice-Chairman felt that the current honorarium was set at a suitable level as the last increase was in 2014. Both parties agreed that it was. Mr Tom Stratton felt the amount should not remain static for too long & that any increase should be at least in line with inflation. Mr Coaker proposed that the honorarium remain at the current level & is reviewed next year. Mr Layland Branfield seconded the proposal. Therefore, the payment for 2017-2018 will continue as £5000 for the Chairman & £500 for the Vice-Chairman. It is to be noted that at the Annual Meeting on 14 August 2013, it was agreed that the payment for Vice-Chairman be £1000. However, Mrs Mary Alford has held the position since then & is happy to receive a reduced payment of £500.

## **6. Matters Arising**

### **6.1 Commercial Dog Walking on Common Land**

At our last meeting, Mr Paul Cottington offered to look into what legislation is available to control commercial dog walking. He has produced some very useful notes which will be discussed at a meeting with DNPA on 25 September, of which further details will follow.

### **6.2 Policy Work Group to review Standing Orders**

Mrs Kate Little has converted Council's Standing Orders into plain English. The Chairman asked for volunteers to form a Policy Work Group with Mrs Little to progress this & report back to Council in due course.

### **6.3 Council's Position Post Brexit**

Following the English National Parks' proposal to be considered as a potential local delivery mechanism for future agri-environment, Council wrote to DNPA requesting that Council should be part of this process. A reply has been received. DNPA have formed a group to consider future farming options for Dartmoor, our Chairman has been invited to sit on this group in his role as Chairman of Council. The first meeting will be held on 14 August & the Chairman will report back to Council shortly afterwards.

The Chairman had an opportunity to meet Maria Southgate (Defra's new Deputy Director for uplands & commons) at the recent NCLSG meeting. He advised her that Council wishes to be involved in any future discussions regarding what replaces the current agri-environment scheme. A note of the NCLSG meeting is attached (Appendix B).

## **7. Matters Brought Forward**

All Council Members are invited to a joint meeting with DNPA, on 25 September at Parke, to discuss a number of issues i.e. recreational events, commercial dog walking. Council Members requested that the meeting be held in the evening & the Chairman agreed to pursue this with DNPA.

All Council Members have received a letter from a commoner concerned about the number of events being held on the commons & in particular, those taking place at night. They have asked for Council's support to introduce some form of enforcement to prevent these events taking place. Following a discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman would ask DNPA to invite the commoner to the above mentioned meeting. The Chairman will respond to the commoner accordingly.

A TB consultation is underway seeking views on proposals to simplify bovine TB testing in the High Risk Area of England & other disease control measures. It was agreed that Council's TB Working Party will get together & respond on behalf of Council. The NFU have offered to participate in the group. The consultation closes on 29 September 2017. A discussion followed on APHA's lack of understanding of the implications of the TB regulations on commons & how the TB Control Plans for Commons work. Concerns were also raised regarding the new procedures for cattle missing from TB tests. The Chairman agreed to contact APHA & Defra to invite them to a meeting, to be held on Dartmoor, to discuss these issues.

Mrs Ann Willcocks raised the issue of lost livestock on the moor & requested that the matter be discussed at the next Council Meeting. The Chairman agreed. He requested that all Quarterman try to establish the status, in their area, regarding loss of livestock in advance of the next meeting.

Mr Tom Stratton reported that the Prince of Wales enjoyed a visit to Dartmoor last month which included a visit to Okehampton Camp to talk about military training & the working management of Dartmoor.

Mr Maurice Retallick reported that there are a large number of strong, unmarked ponies with foals on Haytor Down which do not belong there & no idea where they have come from. The Association is concerned that this will effect their HLS agreement if the matter is not dealt with. They are prepared to deal with the ponies once gathered, but have requested help in gathering them, which they are happy to pay for. No immediate offers were forthcoming so the Chairman asked if anyone would be willing to communicate with Mr Retallick once a date had been set to gather them. Mr Neil Cole & Mr Russell Ashford offered to try & find some people to help & Mrs Karla McKechnie offered to help.

## **8. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority**

Mr Rob Steemson reported on the following:-

DNPA are in the process of trying to confirm the legal position in regard to the actual controls & influence of their byelaws created within the 1985 Act. They are also looking in to other mechanisms for dealing with events & commercial activities & are currently reviewing their Code of Conduct. They plan to share the outcomes of their legal searches at the proposed joint meeting in September & because the importance of any outcomes is relevant to Council, DNPA would like to invite all Council members to attend.

In respect of the issues of night time recreational use, DNPA need to encourage commoners / land owners to evidence these issues by recording whenever possible – activity, date, time, number of participants etc., particularly if they are not already known

via the distributed events list. This needs to be fed in to the recreational section at DNPA at the earliest opportunity.

DNPA have given some funding to the ongoing Community SpeedWatch for leaflets etc. as requested.

BBC Countryfile were on Dartmoor last week & part of the programme is about ponies. The DNPA agreed to have an input in to the article on ponies.

DNPA were involved with Lord Gardiner's ministerial visit last week.

DNPA Rangers are working closely with the Special Constabulary & the Police within their Rural Engagement strategy. A successful operational day took place in June predominately targeting speeding drivers & DNPA are currently looking for their support in dealing with anti-social behaviour at specific `honey pot` sites. DNPA are also in the process of renewing their formal partnership link within the Police Community Safety Accreditation Scheme.

#### **9. Stallion Scheme Autumn 2017**

Council agreed to hold its annual Stallion Inspection on Wednesday 18 October 2017. Mr Gordon Mortimore kindly offered to hold it at Higher Shapley Farm, Chagford. Further details will be sent to pony keepers & Local Commoners Associations at the beginning of September.

#### **10. Sheep Clearance Autumn 2017 – Proposed Dates**

Council agreed the dates for the mandatory sheep clearance. The South moor clear period will be from 11-25 November & the North moor clear period will be from 18 November – 2 December.

#### **11. Local Commoners' Association Meeting**

This will be held on Wednesday 11 October 2017 at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown at 7:30pm. All the Local Associations will be invited & the Chairman requested that Council Members also try & attend.

#### **12. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer**

Mrs Karla McKechnie circulated her road traffic accident statistics to Council Members at the start of the meeting. She read out her report & a copy is attached (Appendix C). Council thanked Karla for all that she does. The Chairman advised that Defra have announced that they plan to hold a national meeting to include the Highways Agency, County Council & the Police, to discuss the issue of road traffic accidents involving animals.

#### **13. Ten Tors Team Managers Training Day – Saturday 14 October 2017**

Council has had a request from the MOD that 4 members of Council (plus a number of reserves) attend the team managers training day. It is an opportunity to influence those who will be planning & conducting training on Dartmoor ready for the Ten Tors event in May 2018. Mr Anton Coaker, Mr Neil Cole, Mr John Cooper, Mrs Karla McKechnie & Mr Gordon Mortimore have offered to attend. Council has also received an offer from the chairman of a local commoners association who would be willing to attend. Further details will be circulated to volunteers nearer the time.

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 27 September 2017 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

**Signed:**.....

**Date:**.....

**Chairman's report to Council - August 2017**

In the twelve months from August 2016, Council has been represented at 32 meetings addressing a wide range of subjects including TB regulations, specific issues on individual commons and the regular liaison meetings with the MOD. However, as was the case in the previous year, the Council's work in the earlier part of the year was dominated by issues related to the delay in the payment of the Basic Payment Scheme claims. The establishment of regular meetings between the Foundation for Common Land, led by Julia Aglionby, and the RPA, helped resolve some issues and, eventually all commoners received some payment. Unfortunately the RPA's computer system is unable to provide a breakdown on the payment, so it remains unclear if everyone has received the correct amount. This, together with poor mapping, and the decision by the RPA not to recognise parts of commons, continue to be the focus of discussion with the Agency.

As Chairman I have attended several meetings, national and local to the south-west, to hear deliberations and much speculation about what agriculture support may look like in the UK after we leave the EU. So far no clear picture has emerged and following the recent change of Defra's Secretary of State, there appears to be further uncertainty. It remains an imperative to continue to press for support for hill farming and commons and that commons remains a priority during these uncertain times. Recently I have been invited to sit on the Dartmoor National Park Authority's group to consider future options for Dartmoor.

Council continues to be represented on the Devon TB Eradication Group, the National Common Land Stakeholders Group, various Dartmoor National Park Authority groups and both the MOD's Working and Steering Groups on Dartmoor. Council was pleased to note that the Commoners' briefing or lunch was reinstated by the MOD and was held on 30<sup>th</sup> November.

Changes to regulations relating to TB and equine identification have caused concern; both changes were made following little or no consultation. This is a worrying trend within Defra and attempts to ensure Defra and its agencies better understand the practical implications of some of these changes is now a priority. The dialogue continues directly with Defra and also through the Foundation for Common Land.

On a sad note, Council's previous Chairman Prof. Ian Mercer died on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2016 aged 83. At his funeral and at an event to celebrate his life, Ian's contribution to commons and Dartmoor were well to the fore, especially his efforts in securing the 1985 Dartmoor Commons Act, our enabling legislation.

In May, those Council Members whose term had come to an end all stood for re-election and were re-elected. Following the decision by one council Member to resign, efforts were made to attract another commoner to represent those with a small number of rights. This attempt failed and a vacancy remains.

The Council's live register was submitted to the RPA on time to help them carry out their duties. Sara is to be congratulated on her efficient management of the register and the complex issues that arise, especially those connected with commoner's concerns over their BPS claims. Sara also enlivened the annual meeting with the Commons' Associations, providing excellent entertainment to balance discussions on some difficult issues.

Note provided by John Waldon, 7 July 2017

**Note of National Common Land Stakeholders Group Meeting held on  
27<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at Natural England offices, Exeter.**

Defra's new Deputy Director, with responsibilities for commons, uplands and National parks, is Marie Southgate. She chaired the meeting.

1. **Animal deaths on roads.** After discussion and presentation of latest data from Dartmoor and New Forest (Dartmoor = 56 dead animals reported this year), Defra offered to set up a national group to look at local initiatives and best practice. The group would hopefully include high level representation from the relevant County Highways, Highways Agency and police. New Forest offered to host first meeting and present updates on their various initiatives.

**Action:** Defra to organise meeting expected in the autumn.

2. **RPA and BPS update.** Most 2015 and 2016 BPS payments made, but issues still with mapping, New Forest and poor information on how individual payments calculated. In 2015, commoners were requested to fill-in forms for compensation and 2700 of these forms were received by the RPA. The RPA had expected to make compensatory payments for SPS years 2009-2014 in May 2017, but the general election led to a delay; now the RPA are working closely with new Secretary of State's private office in order to start payments in the next few weeks. Once compensation has been paid for SPS then entitlements can be issued for BPS and back payments made to for 2015 and 2016. The plan is that this work will be completed before the 2017 BPS payment window opens to avoid the need for iterative top ups.

3. **Commons Councils.** Discussion on role of Councils dominated by concerns that the two new Councils, created by the 2006 Act, are experiencing real problems due to very slow progress of their Rules and Regulations. Defra must speed up process to avoid Councils folding. Bodmin Moor Commons Council: A draft of the regulations were written last year and sent to Defra on the 3rd January 2017. This draft was for Defra's comments before the official consultation. Apart from an acknowledgement, Defra still has not replied. This is causing real issues. No Regulations means no income and worse still, the momentum created by the formation of the Council is slipping away. A similar situation is occurring on Exmoor: The Brendon Commons Council is on its 12 or 13 re-draft of its rules. So far this has cost the council at least £7k, and the process started early in 2014. Because it only includes one common and that common is in HLS, the new Council is able to fund itself from a levy imposed on the HLS agreement holders. However the Council is unable to function.

**Action:** Defra to progress.

4. **Role of Commons Councils.** JW raised whether the new Councils and Dartmoor Commoners' Council could be considered as a potential delivery body for what replaces the current agri-environment scheme. No conclusion, but Defra aware that DaCC and the other two new Councils would wish to be included in future discussions.

5. **Hill Ponies.** JW explained that Defra's completely new equine team headed up by Merewyn Loder held a meeting on Dartmoor on the 11 April 2017. Interested parties from Exmoor and the New Forest joined those from Dartmoor. It was not a good meeting, with little evidence that Defra were listening or wishing to learn. Current system of derogations works well, but new regulations came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 (no consultation) and the new team want changes to reflect the EU regulations. Consultation issued shortly after – purdah and short 6 weeks caused some problems with responding. Requests to discuss the implications ignored. Defra exhibited no understanding of ponies or commons.

**Action:** Defra offered to discuss this with the Equine team.

6. **TB more new regulations:** JW raised issue of new staff from Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA); little understanding of the implications of the TB regulations on commons and how the TB Control Plans for Commons were designed to make the Regulations relevant and deliverable on commons. New APHA procedures for cattle missing from TB tests had been announced. This means that after 1st July 2017, when cattle are tested after bring home from the common, any cattle are found to be missing (theft, lost or straying) the test will be void and the farmer in breach (fines) and treated as under restriction with all the accompanying problems (fines, unable to move cattle). Again no consultation or discussion with practitioners.

**Action:** Defra to investigate.

Lot of criticism of Defra and its departments. Lack of joined up working and understanding of commons. Opportunity for new Deputy Director, Marie Southgate, to address this issue. She acknowledged this.

Claire Horton (commons lead) maternity leave starts in September. Her post to be filled.

Note provided by John Waldon, Chairman of Dartmoor Commoners' Council

29<sup>th</sup> June 2017.



**Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer's Report - August 2017**

**Road Traffic Accidents**

There have been 88 RTAs to date – 12 ponies dead, 2 injured; 65 sheep/lambs dead, 8 injured & 1 cow dead.

With all the publicity & awareness we are doing i.e. speed monitors & speed checks, I am not sure what else can be done. I am currently in touch with the police over two separate incidents where sheep on the moor have been hit by vehicles that have not stopped & registration numbers have been taken by witnesses.

Gregg Manning of SpeedWatch continues with his speed campaign & has agreed to risk assess Dunnabridge Common with a view to checking motorists there. This area has been badly hit recently with RTAs. You may have noticed that the speed monitors have now been moved to Pork Hill & Sharpitor. The information collected from them is proving to be vital in getting the authorities to recognise the problem that exists on Dartmoor with speeding motorists.

**Dog Attacks**

There have been 38 dog related incidents reported to me to date this year.

The Police have been really cooperative over out of control dogs. When we are able to get a positive ID on irresponsible dog owners, the Police are more than willing to visit them & compensation paid.

There was an incident on 28 July on Whitchurch Down when a Beagle X German Shepherd dog chased & savaged a lamb which had to be put down. I obtained full monetary compensation for the farmer for the loss of the lamb, they asked that the Police not be involved on this occasion.

I sense that although there are still many dog walkers on the moor, that maybe they are taking a more responsible approach.

**General**

I receive many calls day & night including calls about lame sheep, lame ponies & other moorland problems. The owner of a dangerous stallion at Clearbrook has been asked to remove it. It has caused problems with riders & walkers at gateways & on the common by its aggressive behaviour & being a real nuisance generally. However, the stallion is still out there & continues to chase both riders & walkers.

A foal on Plaster Down which is being monitored due to a virus (which at first was thought to be the dreaded strangles) has made a 99% recovery.

On average I receive up to 6 calls a week from the RSPCA. Recently I dealt with a pony with a huge wound in its stomach that may have been caused by impact from a vehicle. My thanks to the farmer who helped me remove this unmarked pony.

There have been lots of problems with ponies that have needed monitoring over a period of weeks, but which have all recovered satisfactorily. This monitoring in part is linked to the fact that the public expect you to do 'something' when an animal is lame or injured, however superficially, otherwise it gets spread all over Facebook about neglectful farmers.

Managing the public now that the moor is getting busier can prove quite trying at times. On occasions I am insulted & verbally abused! However, I still love what I do so please keep answering the phone to me!

Report provided by Karla McKechnie.