

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 6 December 2017.

Present:

Mr J Waldon - Chairman	Mr N Cole	Mrs K Little
Mrs M Alford – Vice Chairman	Mr J Cooper	Mr G Mortimore
Mr P Abel	Mr P Cottingham	Mr M Mudge
Mr R Ashford	Mr P French	Mr M Retallick
Mr L Branfield	Mr G Hill	Mr T Stratton
Mr P Cleave	Mr J Jordan	Mr D Webber
Mr A Coaker	Mr B Lavis	Mrs A Willcocks

In attendance:

Mrs S Sloman Dr K Bishop (DNPA)

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He asked everyone to remember Mr Roger Michelmore who died on 1 November & thanked those Council Members who attended the funeral service. Russell Ashford, Anton Coaker & Maurice Retallick spoke about Mr Michelmore's long-standing membership of Council & how he was recognised for his dedication & contribution, not only when helping to create Council, but right up until the time of his resignation in 2010.

2. Apologies for Absence

These were received from Mr C Alford, Mr J Aylett, Mr S Lake, Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO), Mr M Reddaway & Mr R Steemson.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

Tom Stratton referred to the third paragraph under item 7. Joint Meeting with Dartmoor National Park Authority. He suggested that the sentence should refer to '*commercial*' activities on the Commons. The amendment was made & the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2017 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Local Commoners' Association Meeting (11 October)

The feedback from the Associations is that they found the meeting valuable & wish it to continue on an annual basis. As agreed at our last Council meeting, the concerns over the loss of livestock from the commons was discussed. It was agreed that a note will be sent to all commoners with the annual invoices in January, advising them to report missing stock to their Local Associations who will collate the information & pass it to Council. We will then have an idea of the scale of this issue & be able to identify if there any particular areas that are prone to livestock disappearing.

4.2 MOD & Ten Tors Team Managers' Training Day

The Chairman reported that he recently attended the MOD Steering Group meeting & was asked to formally thank those Council Members who took part in the Ten Tors Team Managers' Training Day. The day was considered to be extremely successful by those who attended & according to the feedback that the MOD received, the Commoners' talk was one of the most valuable parts of the training day briefing. The Chairman thanked

John Cooper, Gordon Mortimore & Karla McKechnie for giving up their time & representing Council.

4.3 Impact of Recreation on Farming Update

It was reported at our last meeting, that following the meeting with DNPA, the decision was that there should be a policy statement, endorsed by Council, DNPA & the Dartmoor Commons Owners Association (DCOA), that will address some of the recreation issues. A small group is being formed to draft the statement & Council will be represented by one Member from each quarter. The Chairman thanked Kate Little, Phil Cleave, Layland Branfield & Neil Cole for agreeing to represent Council. The Vice-Chairman, Mary Alford, will also attend & the DNPA will arrange a date in the New Year.

The DNPA will be holding an Event Manager's Training Day in January/February next year & Council will be requesting representatives to attend & explain to the organisers of recreational events why farming matters on Dartmoor & the impact these events have on farming.

Ann Willcocks asked if Council would consider producing a video, to be available on its website & social media sites that states, from a commoners perspective, why farming matters on Dartmoor. The Chairman agreed that Council would look into the costs involved & whether there is any potential funding available. However, Kevin Bishop later advised that there is a commitment in place, through the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project, to commission a film on the farming calendar.

A discussion took place & concerns were raised again about the number of recreational events being held on Dartmoor, the number of participants that each event attracts & that although some Associations do respond to DNPA's recreational events consultations, they do not receive any comments back. Ann Willcocks requested that the DNPA share their information on event erosion monitoring & the heat sensitivity maps with Council. Kevin Bishop advised that the heat sensitivity maps & the erosion maps will be available for the recreational policy statement meeting. He also agreed to check up on the process of notifying Associations of feedback to their comments made & agreed that future consultations will state if the event is charitable or commercial, if this is known. There will be an opportunity to further discuss the concerns raised at the recreational policy statement meeting to be held in the New Year.

5. Matters brought forward

The Chairman reported that at the recent RPA Commons Stakeholder Group meeting, the RPA made a brief indication that they are considering a 'universal scheme' that would be facilitated through local associations. The associations would receive a sum of money based on the eligible area of their common & would be responsible for the distribution of the money accordingly. Concerns were raised as not all commons in England have associations & some commons do not have the ability to manage this money. Some of these areas have said that they will consider forming a Commoners' Council to do this. Dartmoor Commoners' Council may wish to consider taking on the administration of any future scheme, but to do so would have huge implications. As any new scheme would not happen until 2025 (if at all), Council will have to consider its position if such a scheme is announced. The Chairman also reported that the majority of Basic Payment Scheme payments for 2017 are unlikely to be received until January 2018. In some cases, the delay is due to remapping as the RPA have said that they are obliged to update maps whenever new satellite imagery etc. becomes available. Council agreed to review the situation at its next meeting in January before taking any action.

6. DNPA's Approach to Farming Post Brexit – Dr Kevin Bishop

Kevin Bishop thanked the Chairman for his invitation to speak to Council. He reported that the National Parks in England have submitted an outline report to Defra, titled 'Farming in the English National Parks'. The report recognises the importance of farming to the National Park landscapes & the fact that these landscapes have been created & managed by the farming community. It calls on the Government to make sure that there continues to be a resource to sustain the farming systems that manage those landscapes. The report also sets out ideas for a new, 2 level farming & rural management scheme, based on local flexibility & farmer engagement & calls for a localised approach to rural development.

DNPA have formed the Task & Finish Group with representation from landowners & the farming community across Dartmoor. The purpose of this group is to engage the farming community to identify principles for the next set of schemes that would be good for Dartmoor. Kevin Bishop hopes that there is a common agenda & a common purpose between what DNPA is trying to do & what the commoners would like to see.

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for environment, food & rural affairs, visited Dartmoor in the summer to learn about Farming Futures, in particular the level of farmer engagement & focus on outcomes. The Government is committed to a universal environmental land management scheme across England, with local tailoring & possibly making payments to commons associations. The principle of the scheme will be about public money for public benefits. It will also focus on soils & soil condition & Mr Gove has said there will be *'recognition of uplands & the need to ensure the human ecology of rural areas is protected'*.

Mary Alford asked for clarification on what the National Park call public benefits. Kevin Bishop referred to the National Parks in England paper & said that public benefits included landscape, biodiversity & geodiversity, carbon management, water management, woodland management & creation, historic environment, access & education whilst also facilitating the production of high quality food through sustainable farming systems.

Ann Willcocks asked what the National Park's role is in this. Kevin Bishop answered that the key principle is that within any scheme, there is an opportunity to ensure it is fit for a place. So, from a National Park perspective, to make sure the scheme works for Dartmoor, as it would also work for the Lake District etc. He confirmed that DNPA wants to help to facilitate this. He added that although some National Parks have expressed an interest to deliver the scheme, he has no personal interest in being part of a paying agency.

Anton Coaker raised concerns about local delivery & proposed that, once a scheme has been designed, Council lobby that the administration & payment of the scheme be carried out by a national government agency. George Hill supported the proposal.

Layland Branfield raised the issue that approx. 11,000 HLS schemes are due to end in the next 2 years & if there is nothing to bridge the gap between one scheme ending & the next one starting, there might not be any farmers left. The Chairman advised that Natural England had indicated that the Government was considering the option of rolling on existing HLS agreements for a couple years. He offered to try & get some clarity on this. Kevin Bishop said that there has been a 31% drop in agri-environment scheme coverage on Dartmoor in the last 12 months. This was raised with Mel Stride MP, when

he visited Dartmoor with Mr Gove & his parting words to Mr Gove were *'don't forget the upland farmers, they are important for our communities & for the landscape'*.

Mary Alford suggested that Council considers holding a meeting with the MPs that cover Dartmoor to discuss our concerns. The Chairman advised that he had recently attended a meeting where Dr Sarah Wollaston MP for Totnes had also suggested a meeting. He agreed to pursue this.

The Chairman thanked Kevin Bishop for his participation. He added that the Farmer's Forum, which is open to all farmers & being held on December 13th. would be another opportunity for some of matters discussed here to be further debated.

7. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Kevin Bishop reported that the DNPA are working on the campaign around visitor management called 'Love Moor Life'. They are in the process of obtaining farmer input & the campaign will be presented at the forthcoming Farmer's Forum meeting for comment before it goes live.

The Foundation for Common Land & a broad partnership of organisations have successfully secured a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the 'Our Common Cause' project. Work will take place on commons in Dartmoor, Lake District, Shropshire Hills & Yorkshire Dales. The project's aim is to enhance the cultural & ecological heritage of Upland Commons & provide the public with the opportunity to learn about, appreciate & support the continuation of pastoral commoning. A national co-ordinator has been appointed & a local co-ordinator, for Dartmoor, will be appointed early next year.

8. Sheep Clearance – Report from Quartermen

The Quartermen reported that the clearance generally went well in all quarters. Some issues were identified, such as poor fencing of some boundaries & a general lack of good husbandry. The Chairman advised that these issues need to be addressed & reiterated that if any Quartermen experience problems with commoners not clearing sheep or identify issues with boundaries of newtakes, to advise the Office Administrator who will write letters accordingly.

9. Pony Working Group – Draft Proposal to deal with Dangerous Animals on the Commons

A proposal was circulated with the agenda, for consideration by Council Members. Following a lengthy discussion, Council was unable to agree on any decision & the Chairman asked that the Pony Working Group consider the matter further & come back to Council with some firm proposals. The Chairman said that he would look into Council's public liability/indemnity insurance. John Jordan made a proposal that the Quarterman be responsible for removing a dangerous stallion from the common & that one nominated Quarterman from each quarter takes the responsibility for holding the stallion while Council proceeds with its legal regulative process. Neil Cole seconded the proposal. Kate Little suggested that we adopt this proposal in the interim until a definitive decision is made & Council Members agreed to this temporary proposal. The Chairman asked that the Office Administrator is advised of the nominated Quartermen by the next Council meeting in January.

The Pony Working Group received a letter from the Dartmoor Hill Pony Association (DHPA) asking that they work together to protect the pony passport derogation. This was tabled at the meeting. John Jordan confirmed that Council's Pony Working Group will work with the DHPA on this matter.

The Chairman took this opportunity to inform Council that there has still been no response from Defra to Council's letter sent at the beginning of September requesting a note of the meeting held in April & an update on legislation for equine ID. The Chairman recently spoke to Tim Morris, a member of Defra's Welfare Committee, who advised that Tristan Crago was the new Defra lead. The Chairman had contacted Mr Crago & advised Tim Morris that Council will write to the Minister if there is no progress.

10. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

Karla Mckechnie had sent her apologies as she was unable to attend the meeting. A copy of her report was provided to all Council Members & a further copy is attached (Appendix A). The Chairman thanked Karla for all her hard work. He also informed Council that Defra had promised a national meeting to discuss dog attacks & that he had written to them asking why this has not been actioned, but has yet to receive a reply.

11. Date of Next Meeting/Dates for your Diary

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 24 January 2018 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

An Upland Alliance Conference is being held on Wednesday 24 January 2018 at WestPoint, Exeter from 10:00am to 3:00pm

The Chairman reminded Council Members that the Annual Dinner will be held at the Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 31 January 2018 at 7:00pm. The invitation is extended to all Local Commoners' Associations.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer's Report - December 2017

Road Traffic Accidents to date: 160

Ponies: 21 killed and 10 injured

Cattle: 5 killed and 5 injured

Sheep/lambs 105 killed and 14 injured

As you can see from the above statistics, we are still experiencing a large number of road traffic accidents. We will be in talks with the police in the new year to see what further measures can be taken.

There have been recent newspaper publicity and radio interviews covering road accidents. I was mortified to hear one caller admit that *'it's a known fact that everyone comes to Dartmoor to drive fast'*. Let's hope that next year we will see an improvement. Dunnabridge Common has now been risk assessed by the police pending a speed watch session. So, farmers be warned!

Dog Attacks

There was a nasty dog attack recently at South Zeal in a field crossed by a permitted path when two lambs and a ewe were killed and the rest of the flock were chased for two hours before the dog could be captured. These sheep had just been put to the ram and the risk of abortion will probably be high. The sheep were also chased through a fence and into a river. The police and insurance company are involved.

In general, regarding dog attacks on the moor, I have been able to secure compensation for farmers in several instances this year. So please keep your reports of dog attacks coming in to me, not only for the statistics but I may be able to help in other ways too.

Stallion Inspection

The recent stallion inspection at Higher Shapley Farm went well. Thanks to everyone who helped.

My thanks to all the farmers and to everyone who helps me in my work.

Merry Christmas!

Karla