

4.2 Agri-Environment Agreements

The Chairman confirmed that Natural England (NE) has gained approval for HLS agreements ending in 2019 & in subsequent years to be rolled over annually until 2023. There are 4 agreements on Dartmoor that end in 2019. NE has assessed these agreements & is satisfied that there are no outstanding issues & has offered HLS replication (Defra's term for an extension). A significant number of agreements on Dartmoor end in 2020. They will be eligible for an annual rollover for 3 years, after which it is hoped that the proposed new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) will be available.

The Devon, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Team at Natural England (NE) have made some changes which have implications on how they will cover Dartmoor. Dartmoor will be part of NE's Devon Team, led by Eamon Crowe, who has responsibility for all of Devon & specific responsibility for agri-environment through Devon & Cornwall.

4.3 Local Commoners' Association Meeting

The meeting was well attended with 22 out of the 34 Local Associations being represented. Once again, the feedback from the Associations is that they found it useful & welcome the opportunity to meet on an annual basis. There was a general consensus amongst those present that the Dartmoor Commoners' Council should continue to put pressure on the RPA, Natural England & the Minister regarding the late payment of BPS 2018 & the retrospective payments for the 2015-2017. The Vice-Chairman agreed to progress this with Council. Also, attendees were given a copy of the Recreational Events Policy & advised how the policy can be used to address some of the issues that the Associations have with recreational events.

4.4 TB Regulations Meeting with APHA

At Council's meeting in August, it was reported that Council's TB Working Party were hoping to meet with APHA to discuss the impact of some TB Regulations. This has yet to happen. However, a date has now been set to meet in January to discuss TB Regulations along with the annual review of the TB Control Plans on Commons.

5. Matters Brought Forward at the Direction of the Chairman

5.1 Landscapes Review (National Parks & AONBs): Call for Evidence

The Chairman reported that Defra's consultation opened in October. He has drafted a response on behalf of Council, which has been circulated to all Council Members for comment. The consultation closes on 18 December 2018.

5.2 Electronic Identification (EID) of Cattle & Sheep

The Vice-Chairman reported that the London Defra team for EID are visiting Dartmoor on Tuesday 11 December 2018. That evening, there is an open meeting at the Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown, starting at 7:30pm when the Defra EID team will give a short presentation on the impact that the new proposed EID regulations will have on cattle & sheep owners - in particular when grazing commons. The Vice-Chairman added that this an important opportunity for farmers to make valid points to the Defra EID team before the consultation is launched next year.

6. Cost of Delivering Agri-Environment Agreements – Mary Alford & Ann Willcocks

Mary Alford reported that both Janet Dwyer & Chris Short (CCRI Gloucester University) have been contacted. Mary & Ann have started to collate some data on how much it costs to operate & deliver agri-environment schemes & they are currently working on a brief to bring to Council for further consideration in due course, which is likely to be post Brexit.

7. Sheep Clearance – Reports from the Quartermen

The Quartermen reported that the clearance generally went well in all quarters. Some issues were identified early on, but these were addressed quickly. Ann Willcocks mentioned that, in the south, younger members helped out & worked well together & that it was delightful to see the next generation joining in.

8. Council's Pony Working Party - Report

The report was read out & a copy is attached (Appendix A). The Pony Working Group asked that Council approve its recommended members, along with the terms of reference. Council formally agreed the request following a proposal by Kate Little, which was seconded by Philip French.

9. Presentation by Mr Thomas Binns (NFU Uplands Chairman)

Thomas Binns thanked the Chairman for his invitation to speak to Council & spoke a little about his farming life in Lancashire & the journey to his current position within the NFU.

He reiterated the importance of the Defra EID team's visit to Dartmoor & the opportunity to demonstrate a practical understanding of how the new proposed EID regulations for cattle & sheep will operate in terms of their movements when grazing on the commons.

Thomas believes that the role of the NFU during this turbulent time is to try & ensure that the relevant proposals put forward in the Health & Harmony paper & the Agricultural Bill are proven to be reliable & based on what is needed for upland farming. During his term, Thomas is keen to address with Politicians the issues & concerns of upland farmers. He has called for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hill Farming to be recalled in the New Year, which will be chaired by Tim Farron, MP. The purpose of the group is to promote & protect hill farming interests & the communities that depend upon hill farming throughout the UK & to raise issues of concern with government ministers.

He supported the Environment Secretary's recent decision not to grant a licence for the reintroduction of the lynx into the Kielder Forest area in Northumberland. However, he fears that the controversial debate of rewilding will not go away & is keen that the NFU continues to discourage this idea.

Thomas spoke of the proposed new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) & the phrase that is being frequently used 'public money for public goods'. He felt that it will be unclear what this actually means until the Government has agreed on a deal for Brexit, what the trade policy looks like & what the Treasury is prepared to commit.

There then followed a general question & answer session.

The Chairman thanked Thomas Binns for his wide-ranging presentation.

10. Dartmoor Debate on Farming & Forestry 2018 - Report

As part of the Dartmoor National Park Management Plan review process, Council was invited to join in a debate to discuss the future vision for Farming & Forestry on Dartmoor. The Chairman, Vice-Chairman & Anton Coaker attended on behalf of Council. The debate examined the trends in farming & forestry, potential future scenarios for farm businesses in the light of leaving the EU; & examined how Dartmoor's farmers, foresters & commoners can help to deliver the vision for the National Park. The conclusions from this series of discussions will be fed into the review of 'Your Dartmoor' – the five year National Park Management Plan.

11. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Rob Steemson reported on the following:

The Recreational Events Policy is no longer a draft & DNPA will be adopting this policy for events taking place from 1 January 2019. Events that have already been approved for next year through the old system will not be affected. DNPA will be circulating the new information to event organisers over the coming weeks & getting information onto their website.

He thanked those members of Council that attended the Dartmoor Debate on Farming & Forestry. In due course, it is hoped that a draft summary of the information collated will be available.

The Fire Summit meeting was held recently. DNPA & Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service are working on having an all embracing wild fire plan for all commons & access land.

12. Dartmoor Rural Crime Partnership Meeting

Our Chairman has been invited to attend the inaugural meeting on 17 December 2018, which is being hosted by Devon & Cornwall Police, Office of Police & Crime Commissioner & DNPA. Its aim is to create a forum for key stakeholders on Dartmoor to identify rural crime & safety issues affecting the statutory authorities & those communities living, working & visiting DNPA. It is hoped that common priorities will be set & specific partnership action plans will be agreed to address these issues.

13. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

Karla McKechnie had sent her apologies, so her report was read out on her behalf. A copy is attached (Appendix B). The Chairman thanked Karla for her hard work & commented that the latest RTA figures made depressing reading. He hoped that those attending the Rural Crime Partnership meeting will be equally appalled when presented with these statistics.

A general discussion followed on road traffic accidents & speeding vehicles.

14. Date of Next Meeting

The Chairman is unable to attend the January meeting. Ann Willcocks proposed that the meeting date remains & our Vice-Chairman chairs the meeting. Kate Little seconded the proposal.

The next meeting of the Council will therefore be held on Wednesday 30 January 2019 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown

A motion to go into a closed session was proposed by the Chairman.

Signed:.....

Date:.....



DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Report of Pony Working Group

Council's Pony Working Group has undergone an overhaul & the inaugural meeting of the restructured group was held on 7 November 2018.

A Committee, comprising of both members of Council & some non-Council members with expert knowledge has been recommended. Under Council's Standing Orders, non-Council members on the Committee will not be entitled to vote, but can contribute to a debate. Additionally, non-Council members must not exceed one third of the Committee. All Council Members have been given a copy of the Pony Working Group's terms of reference. The Pony Working Group asks that Council approve its recommended members, along with the terms of reference.

Following new Equine ID regulations which came into force on 1 October this year, Mary requested, at the last Council meeting, that talks continue to find a better solution at the annual pony sales. A representative from Council's Pony Working Group will be meeting with key partners in the drift sales to discuss the difficulties experienced this year & consider a way forward. Additionally, they have been asked to meet with representatives from Defra's Traceability Committee to provide information related to semi-wild ponies. They will, of course, report back to the Pony Working Group in due course.

In the wake of the autumn pony drifts, concerns have been raised that there appears to be an increase in the number of families of unmarked ponies & that some areas have not been cleaned up properly following its drift. Local Commoners' Associations will be requested to give this matter their urgent attention & will be reminded that all young colts must be removed from the commons by 15 January.

Council's Pony Working Party is pleased to report that Neil Cole has agreed to be Council's representative at Pony Action Group (PAG) meetings & Phil Abel will be his deputy.

As part of Dartmoor National Park's current Management Plan, Council is the lead organisation for Action 6 of the Your Dartmoor Action Plan: seek to ensure that the importance of ponies for conservation grazing is recognised in future management & funding. Discussions with Natural England & Defra have continued since 2015 & the focus is now on post-Brexit agri-environment schemes. The Agricultural Bill will bring responsibility for all aspects of British agricultural policy back to Westminster for the first time in over 40 years. As the bill makes its way through Parliament, the forthcoming Report Stage (the date of which is yet to be announced) on the Bill in the House of Commons provides an opportunity for any backbench MP to speak up for farming during the debate, as well as table & vote for amendments which could improve the Bill. Although many wider outside bodies & individuals have sent written submissions, there is only one to date that is Dartmoor specific. The Pony Working Group has been asked to support this submission. This will be discussed at the Group's meeting on 16 January 2019 & a report will be given to Council at the January meeting.

Finally, if anyone (Council Member, Commoner, member of the public) has a pony related issue, the Pony Working Party respectfully ask that it is put in writing & sent to the office. Council's request for Consideration Form, which is available on the website, can be used or the issue can be emailed. It will then be properly addressed at the next Pony Working Group meeting.

Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer's Report – December 2018

A quick up-date on the Ten Tors Team Briefing: It was good to see so many representatives for Dartmoor attending the event. Due to the horrendous weather and health and safety restrictions, the talks were cut back to just one for each of us, but with a larger audience of approximately 150! My group was very responsive, asked lots of question and agreed to abide by the fundamental rules applying to those who visit Dartmoor. They even agreed that when they are training and completing the Ten Tors, they would not only take their litter home but any other litter they found on the way.

Road Traffic Collisions

184 up to today. 152 of those were killed.

There have been 28 dead ponies/8 injured, 115 dead sheep/12 injured, 9 dead cows/12 injured.

I believe this year will prove to be the highest recorded RTCs. This speaks for itself.

Dog Attacks

102 up to today.

Again, this is the highest number I have recorded. However, the police have been a lot more actively involved. Lots have been crimed with the police, many dog owners have received dog control orders and I have managed to obtain compensation for the farmer whenever it has been possible. I will be interested to meet PC Martin Beck, our new Rural Crime Officer for Dartmoor. I am sure I will keep him busy . . . !

Sheep Clearance

When out and about I did come across several sheep still out on the commons on both the north and south moor during the clear period. However, after speaking to the farmers the sheep were gathered.

Please ring me with any stock problems and keep your reports of RTCs and dog attacks coming in.

I'm not sure if anyone read the recent article in the Western Morning News, commenting on the report put together by Exeter University and DNPA. It appears that they believe day-visitors to Dartmoor will increase by 1 million over 20 years. They are concerned over the impact of those visitors on footpath erosion and disturbance to wildlife. What about the impact on the grazing livestock? How's that for priorities?! You only need to see the increase in the deaths on the roads and the dog related incidents to realise that farmers are suffering already.

Thank you.

MERRY CHRISTMAS and a happy new year to everyone.

Note provided by Karla McKechnie, Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer.

5 December 2018