

## DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

### Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 31 July 2019.

#### Present:

Mr J Waldon – Chairman	Mr L Branfield	Mr S Lake
Mr P French – Vice Chairman	Mr P Cleave	Mr B Lavis
Mr P Abel	Mr A Coaker	Mrs K Little
Mr C Alford	Mr N Cole	Mr G Mortimore
Mrs M Alford	Mr J Cooper	Mr M Retallick
Mr R Ashford	Mr P Cottington	Mr R Steemson
Mr J Aylett	Mr J Jordan	Mrs A Willcocks

#### In attendance:

Mrs S Sloman

Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)

#### Open Meeting

The biannual opportunity for members of the public to address Council for 10 minutes prior to the start of the meeting was offered by the Chairman. No questions were raised from the public gallery & the time will be given again at the January Meeting.

Mary Alford addressed the Chairman at this point & made serious allegations relating to his conduct. The Chairman took the allegations very seriously, but felt it was inappropriate for them to be raised & debated within this forum.

#### 1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman formally welcomed everyone to Council's Annual Meeting. He explained that, in order to avoid a lengthy meeting, this meeting will address the business that has to be dealt with annually at this time. An additional meeting has been called for Wednesday 4 September 2019 to deal with other Council business. However, the Chairman wanted to bring the following matters to Council Member's attention:-

- The New Forest have advised Council that they have had some serious incidents involving people & cattle, that are now being investigated by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), which could have significant implications. Having spoken to Karla McKechnie (DLPO), Council is now aware of several recent similar incidents on Dartmoor. The New Forest have offered to share the findings of the HSE with Council & a protocol will need to be considered to deal with such issues. In the meantime, please report any incidents to Karla.
- Natural England has commissioned a study, to be undertaken by the University of Gloucestershire, to look at how climate change is impacting on those trying to deliver agri-environment agreements. For further information & to complete the survey go to <https://glos.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/neccopen>

- Ashburton Fire Station is under consideration for closure. The station spokesman is seeking views from Council on what implications its closure will have for fighting fires on Dartmoor. This matter will be discussed further at the next Council Meeting.

## **2. Apologies for Absence**

These were received from Mr G Hill, Mr T Stratton & Mr D Webber. Council Members sent their best wishes for a speedy recovery to both George Hill & Derek Webber following recent stays in hospital.

## **3. Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes of the Meeting held on 22 May 2019 were confirmed & signed.

## **4. Chairman's Report**

The Chairman read out his report & a copy is attached (Appendix A).

## **5. Elections:**

### **5.1 Elections of Chairman**

The Vice-Chairman, Philip French, took the chair. He thanked the Chairman for the time & effort he had put in to working on behalf of Council during the last 12 months. The Vice-Chairman then asked for nominations for the post of Chairman. Maurice Retallick proposed that John Waldon continue for a further year & Anton Coaker seconded the proposal. Mary Alford proposed Ann Willcocks for the position & Phil Abel seconded this proposal. As two names were put forward & both were willing to stand for the position, the Vice-Chairman called a secret ballot. The result was 14 votes for John Waldon & 6 votes for Ann Willcocks with 1 blank ballot paper. John Waldon was duly elected as Chairman for the year 2019-2020. He thanked Council Members for their support & felt it was only fair to give Council 12 months' notice of his intention not to seek re-election next year.

### **5.2 Election of Vice-Chairman**

The Chairman asked for nominations for the post of Vice-Chairman. Ann Willcocks proposed that Philip French continue for a further year. Kate Little seconded the proposal. As there were no other nominations, Philip French was duly elected as Vice-Chairman for the year 2019-2020. The Vice-Chairman thanked Council Members.

Russell Ashford felt that Council had spent a lot of time over the last 12 months, dealing with some internal disagreements. He suggested that now is an appropriate time to draw a line under these matters. Council Members agreed that there are interesting, yet difficult times ahead & Council needs to move forward & engage in a positive & collective manner.

### **5.3 Confirmation of Honorarium**

The Chairman & Vice-Chairman considered the current honorarium payment to be at a suitable level. Therefore, Council Members agreed that the payment for 2019-2020 continue as £5000 for the Chairman & £1000 for the Vice-Chairman. Ann Willcocks suggested that the costings for both positions be monitored over the next 12 months.

#### **5.4 Appointment of Dartmoor National Park Representatives**

Under Section 3 (2) (b) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Rob Steemson & Derek Webber were re-appointed as the 2 members representing the Dartmoor National Park Authority on Council for a period of 4 years from 1 July 2019.

#### **5.5 Appointment of Duchy of Cornwall Representative**

Under Section 3 (2) (c) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Tom Stratton was re-appointed as the member representing the Duchy of Cornwall on Council for a period of 4 years from 1 July 2019.

#### **5.6 Co-option to Council of Mr Paul Cottingham (NFU).**

Under Section 3 (3) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, it was agreed that Paul Cottingham continue as a co-opted member on Council for a period of 4 years from 31 July 2019.

#### **6. Review Council's Working Groups & the Members.**

Council is able to set up small working groups to focus on a particular issue or matter. In certain circumstances, non-council members are invited to join these groups to provide advice & expertise. Council currently has a Policy Working Group, Pony Working Group & a T B Working Group, all of which have recently been reviewed. However, the Chairman felt that the protocol for these working groups needs to be revisited & this will be addressed during the review of Council's working practices, which has previously been proposed to take place this autumn. A list of those people in each working group is attached (Appendix B).

#### **7. Review of who represents Council on other Groups**

Council will maintain a record of any external groups & organisations that Council is represented at, to include when meetings are held & who Council's representative is. This information will be reviewed each year at Council's Annual Meeting. Representatives are required to give a brief report to advise Council Members of the outcome of the meeting they attend. This will only apply if a formal note or minute is not anticipated.

#### **8. Local Commoners Association Meeting**

This will be held on Wednesday 30 October 2019 at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown at 7:30pm. All the Local Commoners Associations (LCAs) will be invited & the Chairman asked that all Council Members attend. An agenda will be agreed over the coming weeks.

#### **9. Stallion Scheme Autumn 2019**

Council agreed to hold its annual Stallion Inspection on Wednesday 23 October. Gordon Mortimore has kindly agreed 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. Other Business Discussed:**

##### **10.1 Structuring within Council**

Kate Little suggested that Council may wish to reflect on how it operates, going forward, so that it is best placed to address the matters it chooses to become involved with in the future. Both the Chairman & Vice-Chairman agreed that Council, as a whole, will need to give this some thought. The matter will be discussed at the next meeting.

**10.2 Condition of the Commons**

Ann Willcocks asked that Council considers initiating a review of the condition of the Commons, following years of stewardship schemes with Natural England, to include vegetation assessments & grazing surveys. Following a discussion, the Chairman agreed that this will be addressed at the next meeting. In the meantime, Council will contact Local Commoners Associations in an agreement to establish if they are under pressure from Natural England to reduce stocking levels. Additionally, Council will attempt to obtain a definition of the term overgrazing from Natural England.

**10.3 Support for Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer**

Neil Cole raised concerns that he is aware of a few occasions where farmers may have taken advantage of Karla’s dedication to her work. Neil reiterated the fantastic job that Karla does in her role as Dartmoor’s Livestock Protection Officer. Council Members agreed that having such a committed welfare officer is invaluable & Council will continue to do all it can to support Karla.

**10.4 Our Common Cause Project**

A number of concerns were raised regarding how this initiative is progressing on Dartmoor. The Chairman gave a very brief account of the project. He explained that at the moment, the proposed Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) on commons will include a vision to identify the range of public benefits that a common can provide & the main stakeholders. The Our Common Cause project was launched to invent a process that would help commons produce this vision easily & efficiently. Following a discussion, it was agreed that Council obtains an update on the project in advance of the next meeting when it will be further discussed.

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Council is an additional Meeting which will be held on Wednesday 4 September 2019 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

**Signed:**.....

**Date:**.....

## **Chairman's Report to Council - August 2019**

During the past twelve months, six Council Meetings were held although I was unable to attend the Meeting in January. I am grateful to Philip French for chairing this meeting. An Extraordinary Meeting was called in January to address an internal Council matter that resulted in a change of vice-chair.

Council continues to be represented on the Devon TB Eradication Group, Defra's National Common Land Stakeholders Group (NCLSG), Rural Payment Agency's Commons Stakeholders Group and both the MOD's Working and Steering Groups on Dartmoor. Additional meetings were held with the RPA (mapping and late payment), APHA (TB Control Plans and the impact of the 10 mile rule), Defra (Electronic Identification and equine identification regulations) and the Dartmoor National Park Authority (Fire plans and road traffic accidents involving livestock, see *following paragraph*).

At a meeting in November involving the Police, Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, Natural England and many other groups the critical role of Fire Plans and the role of commoners in fighting fires were clearly recognised. Coordination and effort were identified as requiring improvement if moorland fires are to be fought efficiently. A subsequent meeting confirmed improvements.

As part of a revitalised Dartmoor Rural Crime Initiative, a Rural Roads Focus Group met in March coordinated by DNPA. The purpose of the meeting was to develop an agreed joint action plan, with clear priorities to tackle three key issues on Dartmoor roads: animal accidents; keeping people safe and response to severe weather. It is hoped that this effort will identify solutions that would lead to a decline in the significant and unacceptable number of animals killed and injured on roads across commons. This may be the correct place to record Council's appreciation of Karla McKechnie's continuing efforts relating to road traffic accidents and dog attacks on livestock. In both cases she provides an invaluable service to farmers with stock on the commons.

Council's internal working groups were reviewed to ensure contributing Members were content to continue to contribute and that the ratio of Council Members and non-Council Members reflected the Council's revised Standing Orders that were agreed by Council in October. Updating the Standing Orders was an important piece of work and all the Council Members who contributed are to be congratulated on their effort.

A protocol to help Council consider the increasing number of farm share agreements was drafted and submitted for legal opinion; the legal view is awaited.

This time last year I described Defra's plans to replace the BPS and agri-environment schemes. A Test & Trial programme had been announced that was intended to help shape the new proposed Environmental Land Management Scheme to replace the support provided by the CAP. Unfortunately there has been little progress, although the Dartmoor proposal for Test & Trials, headed up by the DNPA has been selected by Defra. We await news and have stressed the need for any trial to include common land and for Council to be involved.

Looking ahead; the role of agri-environment agreements providing the incentive and funding to manage the commons looks likely to change. In the past, whether by design or default Council has accepted that the land management of the commons should be the responsibility of the associations and delivered through an agri-environment agreement. Council may well have to review this position and increase its role in securing the correct management of the commons if agri-environment funding is no longer available.

Note provided by John Waldon, 22 July 2019

**Council's Working Groups & Members**

**Policy Working Group:**

John Waldon  
Philip French  
Phil Abel  
Crispin Alford  
Mary Alford  
Russell Ashford  
Layland Branfield  
Neil Cole  
Kate Little  
Maurice Retallick  
Rob Steemson

**Pony Working Group:**

John Jordan – Chairman  
Philip French  
Phil Abel  
Crispin Alford  
Mary Alford  
Neil Cole  
Stuart Lake  
Peter Farnsworth – *non council member* (Pony Sales only)  
Charlotte Faulkner – *non council member*  
Karla McKechnie – *non council member*  
Gordon Mortimore  
John Shears – *non council member*  
Rob Steemson  
Ann Willcocks

**T B Working Group:**

John Waldon  
Colin Abel - *non council member*  
Mary Alford  
Layland Branfield  
Anton Coaker  
Sandra Dodd - *non council member*  
Helen Radmore - *non council member*  
Ann Willcocks