

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 4 December 2019.

Present:

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

In attendance:

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| Mrs S Sloman | Dr K Bishop (DNPA) | Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO) |
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1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Dr Kevin Bishop, Chief Executive for Dartmoor National Park Authority. Dr Bishop later gave a presentation to Council. The Chairman advised that he had a number of items to report on & this would be done under 'Matters brought forward at the direction of the Chairman'.

2. Apologies for Absence

None received.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Meeting held on 2 October 2019 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Matters Brought Forward at the Direction of the Chairman

5.1 Ten Tors Team Managers Training Day

The Chairman thanked John Cooper & Kate Little for representing Council at this event.

5.2 Accounts & Auditor's Report

Council's Accounts & Auditor's Report for the year ending 30 June 2019 have been finalised. Copies are available from the Office.

5.3 National Food Strategy Consultation

The Chairman thanked Philip French for submitting a response on behalf of Council. A summary of the responses will be published on the gov.uk website early next year. *(1976 responses received. Summary of responses due to be published by April 2020).*

5.4 British Farming Awards

Congratulations to Mat Cole, director of Dartmoor Farmers Association for being awarded gold in the 'sheep innovator' category. Also to Ed & Julie Williams who were nominated in the 'beef innovator' award category.

5.5 Local Commoners' Association Meeting

The Chairman reported that the attendance at this year's event was particularly encouraging with 28 out of the 37 Local Associations being represented. The opportunity for the Associations to meet & discuss some of the issues faced was welcomed. The Chairman thanked those members of Council who attended.

5.6 Dartmoor Farms – Documentary Photography Book

Council has been contacted by the creator of this book, featuring 6 family run Dartmoor farms, seeking sponsorship for the book in return for a number of copies which can then be sold. Following a discussion, it was agreed that as Council is a statutory body & not a commercial business, engaging in product sponsorship or promotion is not within Council's remit.

6. Farm Share Agreements & Grazing Agreements

The Chairman reminded Council Members that a small working group was set up last year to produce a guidance note on how Council intends to respond to requests to recognise grazing rights associated with legal agreements. He apologised for the length of time it had taken to bring this back to Council & explained that this was predominantly due to obtaining legal advice. A copy of the draft guidance note had been sent to all Council members for consideration prior to the meeting. Following a discussion & a minor adjustment, the guidance note was approved by Council. Copies are available from the office.

7. Sheep Clearance – Reports from Quartermen

The quartermen reported that the clearance was generally good in all quarters. The Office had received a report of an incident in the East quarter, despite the alleged commoner receiving a letter in advance of the clear period. A quarterman has since spoken with the commoner.

8. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Rob Steemson reported that the Wild Fire Awareness Day held recently was a successful event with 60 commoners attending, as well as 25 fire officers being trained in various roles.

9. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

Karla McKechnie read out her report, a copy of which is attached (Appendix A).

10. Pony Working Group Report & Recommendations

The Chairman of Council's Pony Working Group, John Jordan, reported on the following:

Pony Drifts

This year's drifts went reasonably well with no reports of any real issues. The Chairman thanked Neil Cole for organising the recent Forest gather, which was considered to be successful, with many commoners (including non-pony keepers) helping out.

Pony Sale

The Chairman congratulated Charlotte Faulkner & her team of helpers for the work they did to ensure that this year's pony sale went ahead. It was reported that the sale went very well. Charlotte is already working with Defra's new head of equine regarding next year's sale. The Chairman proposed that Council contribute to the costs incurred by Charlotte in her efforts to address the issues of Equine ID Regulations. This was agreed & the Chairman will decide a reasonable amount with Charlotte.

11. Presentation by Dr Kevin Bishop (Chief Executive, DNPA)

Kevin Bishop thanked Council for providing an opportunity for him to speak at the meeting. He reported on the findings of the Glover Review of National Parks & AONB, spoke about the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) & Defra's Test & Trials & updated Council Members on the DNPA Management Plan

Glover Review

This included recommendations to encourage National Park Authorities to do more to enhance nature, welcome people & improve the vitality of communities. The Review also suggested proposals to alter National Park purposes; amend the governance of National Park Authorities; create a National Landscape Service & establish a National Landscapes Housing Association. It is anticipated that Defra will take at least 12 months to review the report & respond.

ELMS & Test & Trials

As part of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, legislation to deliver a new land management system was introduced to Parliament in September 2018, following the UK government's Health & Harmony consultation. This Agriculture Bill aims to achieve an orderly transition from CAP & establish arrangements that are simpler than the current Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). ELMS will replace BPS & agri-environment funding & pay farmers using a performance related approach. Its test & trial period began in 2019 & Dartmoor has been approved to take part in one of the 43 'test & trial' applications accepted by Defra across the country. The Dartmoor Test & Trial was developed in partnership with the farming & landowning community on Dartmoor. It builds on Dartmoor Farming Futures (a partnership project involving commoners, the Commoners' Council, Duchy of Cornwall & Natural England) & the principles for the environmental land management developed by the Dartmoor Farming Task & Finish Group, chaired by Maurice Retallick & involving members of the Commoners' Council. A dedicated project officer has been appointed, to work in partnership with the farming community, to help put forward a plan that is fit for purpose, relevant & applicable to Dartmoor. The next phase of ELMS is dependent on the Agriculture Bill which still has to go through the parliamentary process. The Conservative Party have stated that they would make this a priority & aim to bring it back to Parliament in January 2020. Defra's current timetable is very much dependent on this happening as they intend to run a national pilot from 2021 to 2024 & then introduce ELMS gradually from 2024 onwards with full implementation from 2027.

Management Plan

DNPA started the process of reviewing the Dartmoor Management Plan last year through a series of Dartmoor Debates. They hope to issue the Review for consultation early next year. One of the actions currently in the Review is to re-examine the Moorland Vision, to look at how it can be updated & used as a potential model to set local priorities for ELMS. Dr Bishop suggested that it would be really helpful if Council fed the work it's been doing on the condition of the commons into the Management Plan Review.

Livestock Issues

DNPA set up a Rural Crime Initiative with the Police, which has now been running for just over 12 months. This initiative uses the information that Dartmoor's Livestock Protection Officer gathers from the farming community to lever in police support. The recent Rural Crime Seminar hosted by Devon & Cornwall Police demonstrated that they are taking rural crime seriously.

Kevin Bishop finished his presentation by taking questions from Council Members.

The Chairman thanked Kevin Bishop for the very useful update.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 22 January 2020 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

Signed: *John Waldon*

Date: *22 January 2020*

Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer's Report

Road Traffic Accidents – A round up to date

173 (132 animals killed & 41 injured):

Cattle 2 killed & 6 injured
Ponies 26 killed & 17 injured
Sheep 104 killed & 18 injured

The disposal costs alone (not including the worth of the animal) of those killed amounts to £3,684.

I attended the Rural Crime Seminar at WestPoint, Exeter on Monday 18 November 2019. It was a presentation of rural policing in Devon & Cornwall. I was encouraged to hear that road traffic accidents involving animals & dog worrying are being given a high priority, together with poaching, sheep theft & illegal raves.

Simon Lee, from Dartmoor National Park Authority, gave a good presentation highlighting the particular welfare difficulties on Dartmoor & was able to use my statistics. It's a lengthy process, collecting data all year long & spending so much time on the telephone to the Police.

Please continue to send your information in to me. This is so important in building as accurate a picture as possible.

Dog Attacks

There have been 87 dog attacks reported to me this year. This represents almost 2 attacks a week. I am sure this is not accurate as I'm sure many go unreported. You only need to see the number of people & dogs visiting Dartmoor each year & those dogs that are allowed to run around out of control. I find this very concerning.

I have, however, collected many monetary compensations to pass on to the farmers & I have helped the Police in getting dog owners issued with Dog Control Orders.

Only last week, at Skaigh, a lurcher type dog was pulled off a mauled sheep. The owner was located & compensation will be paid. A Dog Control Order will be issued, which means that the dog has to wear a muzzle & a lead when being exercised on the commons. Hopefully, this will be the end to a spate of dog attacks in the Skaigh area.

It's worth mentioning that I have received more calls about cows with calving difficulties this autumn than in previous years.