

DaCC update to members May 2020

This note is intended to update members at a time when the lockdown, imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, prohibits meetings and non-essential travel. The Council's meeting on the 6th May was cancelled and fate of future meetings is unclear at this time.

Whilst the office remains closed the day to day work of the Council continues. Sara is working from home with access to the live-register and other essential information. The registration and banking of dues has progressed smoothly.

The idea of using video-conferencing to replace our meetings has been suggested but found to not be suitable. All 27 members would have to be able to participate and this number cannot reasonably be accommodated and all council members would have to be enabled to participate otherwise we would be discriminating against some of our members.

The following information is provided to update you on matters relevant to Council:

1. Sara and I have participated in two **RPA Commons Stakeholders Meetings** via phone conference calls. Following the move from Natural England to the RPA of the agri-environment schemes (HLS & Countryside Stewardship) these meetings address issues arising from the BPS and more recently Agri-environment agreements on common land.
 - a. The RPA reported good progress on settling 2020 BPS claims and that nationally there remained 12 commons claims from 2019 to pay. These claims have been taken off-line to be resolved manually.
 - b. CS/HLS claimants will be offered bridging payment for 2019 claim year (75% will be paid in May).
 - c. The window to submit applications for BPS & claim CS/HLS to be extended by one month to 15th June.
 - d. The RPA stated that pre-populated claim forms have been sent out by email (if an email address was provided and consent to use email was received) or by post to the business address on the account. If a claim form has not been received please check all potential postal addresses and emails and then if forms not found contact the RPA.
2. Progress with the **Dartmoor Test & Trials** initiative has been significantly affected by the lockdown. Harriet Bell, the project officer, continues to work on information gathering. Defra have offered a more flexible programme and a small Project Board to oversee the work has been established but yet to meet. Council will be represented on the Board. The larger Advisory Group, composed largely of farmers and commoners, is due to hold its inaugural meeting (by phone or teleconferencing) this week.
3. **Your Dartmoor: Dartmoor National Park Management Plan**, the deadline for responses to this important plan has been extended enabling those members of Council who volunteered to draft a response to do so. Paul Cottington is organising a videoconference to progress this.
4. We were preparing to hold the **Council's elections** in June but it is most likely that the restrictions will still be in place and so we need to prepare to postpone the elections or adopt a new approach. A letter has been sent to all of the Members of Council whose term in office ends this year and although we have yet to hear from two members one member has announced his intention not to stand for re-election. This together with notification that others from the commoning community intend to seek election confirms that the elections

will have to take place. Until the longer term lockdown regulations are known it is difficult to plan so a decision on the elections will be delayed until the position is clearer but a postponement is likely.

5. Members of the **Defra equine id** team have contacted Council seeking a meeting but this has been deferred until the lockdown is lifted.
6. At a previous council meeting it was agreed to invite **Natural England's** chief executive Marian Spain to Dartmoor to discuss issues relating to commons. The visit to Dartmoor had been confirmed for 1 July 2020 but is now on hold.
7. A submission from Council to the Defra consultation on **Environmental land management: policy discussion** has been prepared with many council members offering contributions. The consultation has been paused due to feedback from stakeholders and the effects of the coronavirus (covid-19) outbreak. The consultation will restart when it's practical to do so.
8. The local commons associations exhibited considerable restraint and did not undertake **swaling** due to the potential to cause problems for the emergency services. Unfortunately there has been a few incidents of arson in the Chagford area that is now in the hands of the police. A suspect has been identified.
9. Council receives regular **TB related information** that is then circulated to members. The latest confirms that a temporary amendment to the TB testing instructions is in place retrospectively from 23 March 2020 until further notice. Calves under 180 days old at the start of a routine or targeted herd surveillance TB test can be excluded from skin testing in officially TB free (OTF) herds if, in the vet's judgement, they can't be tested safely in line with social distancing. This temporary amendment will be applied retrospectively to incomplete tests where the final part of the test would have commenced on or after 23 March 2020, and to any qualifying tests from now on until further notice. It will be kept under regular review while the social distancing measures related to the Covid-19 outbreak are in place.

Note: The Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) have confirmed that the new maps for the TB Control Plans can wait and now understand how these maps were created in the first place.

10. **Lockdown.** The Government's position is that non-essential journeys are not to be undertaken and all exercise is to start from the participant's home. In mid-April the College of Policing guidance and associated press coverage appeared to contradict the government position, suggesting journeys to the countryside were permitted if the walk or run were longer than the car journey. The National Park Authority has made strong representation to the Home Office and Defra opposing the police guidance and sought assurance that the Government's position has not changed. The police guidance undermines the DNPA's position to enforce unnecessary activity. Meanwhile report any incidents or concerns to DNPA ASAP. The main routes to do this in normal office hours are via 01626 832093 or by email to hq@dartmoor.gov.uk The DNPA website and recent press releases inform the public not to use vehicles and go to Dartmoor for exercise.

Please stay safe and well. I hope we can all meet soon.

Note provided by John Waldon, Chairman, 5 May 2020