

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 22 January 2020.

Present:

Mr J Waldon - Chairman	Mr P Cleave	Mrs K Little
Mr P French – Vice Chairman	Mr A Coaker	Mr Gordon Mortimore
Mr P Abel	Mr N Cole	Mr M Reddaway
Mrs M Alford	Mr J Cooper	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:

Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	Mr E Humber (NFU)
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Open Meeting

The biannual opportunity for members of the public to address Council prior to the start of the meeting was offered by the Chairman.

Miles Partridge asked for Council's view on some of the decisions made by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) & Natural England (NE) regarding commons vegetation & stocking rates, which some commoners consider to be in an unfavourable condition. He suggested an independent assessment of the commons. During the discussion that followed, some Council Members felt that the RPA had also incorrectly interpreted the mapping of some areas of the commons & were concerned about the implications of this. The Chairman said that he understood that the majority of mapping issues had been sorted following the mapping sessions that Council had coordinated between Local Commoners' Associations (LCA) & the RPA. He agreed to look into this further. Following the discussion, the Chairman advised that although many of the issues relate to specific agreements with the Associations, he felt that there is an increasing role for Council to challenge some of the decisions being made. The Chairman apologised to Miles that Council was not able to give specific answers.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He formally thanked John Cooper for accommodating 'Perfect Pooch Devon'- a dog behaviour specialist who uses John's farm & sheep to run sheep worrying workshops & trains dogs to ignore sheep. <https://www.perfectpoochdevon.co.uk/>

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr C Alford & Mr P Cottington (Mr Ed Humber from NFU attended instead).

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Meeting held on 4 December 2019 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters Arising:

4.1 Chairman & Vice-Chairman Job Description

The final draft of the job description had been sent to all Council Members for consideration. A copy is attached (Appendix A). It has yet to be formally adopted by Council.

4.2 Dog Worming Research: Update

Stuart Lake gave a report to Council Members on the different types of worm that can be transmitted through animals & the impact this has on humans & livestock. A lengthy discussion followed on the importance of worming dogs correctly & how this message can be communicated to the wider public. A discussion on Wormer Resistance in sheep followed, which included some factors that contribute to the development of resistance. It was suggested that a small working group convene to progress the matter & come up with the right information, in a simple format, that can be widely circulated. Philip French offered to chair the group.

4.3 Review of Condition of the Commons: Update

Ann Willcocks reported that having spoken to a lot of people, she has been working with Paul Cottington (NFU) to produce a draft document on the current situation. The document captures basic information including the roles of the common's owners, NE, Dartmoor Commoners' Council & DNPA. It considers the condition of the common's agriculture as it was in the past & looks ahead at matters such as carbon & the practical management of the commons. Ann hopes to be in a position to circulate this document shortly. She stressed that it is still a working progress & acknowledged that further input is required.

5. Matters Brought Forward at the Direction of the Chairman

None.

6. Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons Bid

The Chairman confirmed that Council Members had agreed (via an internal email exchange) to provide a letter of support for Our Common Cause's application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for Delivery Phase Funding. Additionally, Council agreed a pledge to provide £2000 (in total) for the 3 years of the delivery phase on condition that regular updates of progress are provided. Our Common Cause will hear in March if their application is successful.

7. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Rob Steemson reported on the following:

The draft Management Plan will be issued for consultation at the beginning of February.

The ELMS Test & Trials project officer, Harriet Bell started on 14 January 2020 & John Waldon has been invited to join the steering Group, as Chairman of Dartmoor Commoners' Council.

Dartmoor Hill Farm Project recently hosted a talk by Chris Clark 'Is Less really More for Upland Livestock Farm?' which was well attended.

Partnership patrols by DNPA Rangers, Forestry England & the Police prevented a rave taking place on Boxing Day at Fernworthy & Bellever woods. However, there was a rave later that day at Cadover Bridge. This is still being looked into.

Unfortunately, there has been an epidemic of joyriding & 4x4 vehicle damage across various commons & other access land sites around the south west side of the Moor. Rob met with the Rural Crime Officer & worked with BBC Spotlight to highlight the problem. Rob went on to report that earlier he was informed that some 4x4 vehicles were stuck on Penn Moor, but they had gone before he got to the site. However, Rob received some intelligence, from a member of the public & a potential witness, of photographs which the alleged offender had put on their Facebook page, which have been passed on to the Police.

Rob concluded that PC Martin Beck, Rural Crime Officer would welcome the opportunity to attend a future Council Meeting. Council Members fully supported this.

George Hill raised concerns over the damage to over 80 acres of the Mary Tavy Commons, caused by commercial horse-riding. Rob agreed to look into this.

8. Rural Crime Initiative:

8.1 Road Focus Group

Philip French updated Council on the recent meeting that he & Karla attended on behalf of Council. He advised that a joint activity calendar has been produced which sets out different issues such as dog worrying, lambing, speeding & how these issues will be highlighted throughout the year.

8.2 Livestock Theft Group

Philip French represented Council on this group which is a sub-group of the Rural Crime Initiative to address the issue of livestock theft. The key message currently is to report missing livestock to Council's Office Administrator or directly to the Police by phoning 101 or emailing <https://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/contact/contact-forms/101-non-emergency/>. It was agreed that this message be circulated to all LCA secretaries.

9. Financial Estimates for 2020/2021

Copies of the estimate were sent to all Council Members with the agenda. Being self-explanatory with no major queries or comments, Council agreed to the estimates provided.

Council formally recognised the annual contribution from the Dartmoor Livestock Protection Society towards the work carried out by Dartmoor's Livestock Protection Officer.

10. Dartmoor Commoners' Council Elections 2020

Initial details of which councillors are due for election were sent out with the agenda (see Appendix B). These details will also be sent to all Local Commoners' Association Secretaries for onward circulation to registered commoners. Nominations can be received up to 7 days before the election dates & further details will be circulated in due course.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 4 March 2020 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

Signed: *John Waldon*

Date: *2 September 2020*

Dartmoor Commoners' Council: The role of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman

A note to clarify the roles, duties & expected behaviour from Council's representatives. In advance of describing the duties & role of the Chairman, it is valuable to understand the status of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council. Established by the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 (The Act), the Council is not a public body but is referred to as a statutory body. A public body is generally thought of as an organisation that delivers a public service, whilst a statutory body is an organisation that has been created by a parliament, in this case by an Act of Parliament. The terms Chairman & Vice-chairman in this note do not denote the gender of the post holder.

The Chairman

The appointment of a chairman is referred to within the Act. The principle reference is; *SCH 2, section 4 (1): The Commoners' Council shall, at their annual meeting in each year, appoint one of their number to be chairman & the chairman shall, unless he resigns his office or ceases to be a member of the Commoners' Council, continue in office until a successor is appointed.*

The chairman's duties as described within The Act include:

- The chairman will preside at meetings of the Commoners' Council, (SCH 2, section 5 (1)).
- The chairman will be present at any election meeting, ensure nominations meet the qualifying criteria & announce the successful candidate, (SCH 1, section 14 (3)).
- The chairman can call a meeting of Council at any time, (SCH 2, section 3 (3)).
- The chairman's signature can authenticate the use of Council's seal, (SCH 2, section 12).

The majority of these duties are reiterated within Council's Standing Orders (revised & adopted by Council on 3 October 2018), the exception relates to the appointment of a Presiding Officer for the election meeting in each quarter, although the presiding Officer could be the chairman.

Since the Council's formation in 1986, the role & duties expected from the chairman have evolved & developed to reflect the ambitions of Council. Whilst the fundamental duties remain, additional responsibilities & duties are now expected of the chairman. These include:

- representing Council at functions and events,
- responsible for the appointment & management of staff (currently Council's secretary / office administrator),
- oversee the response to consultations & changes to Government policy,
- liaising with Dartmoor National Park Authority, Defra, Natural England & other agencies on specific issues,
- responding to letters, requests & issues as they arise &
- supporting staff on specific issues.

Council has confirmed its wish for the chairman to use delegated powers to address issues whilst recognising that those issues of relevance to Council's policies on specific issues would be raised with Council at the first opportunity, usually at a regular Council Meeting.

The Vice-Chairman

As with the chairman, the position of vice-chairman is referred to in both the Act & Council's Standing Orders. The appointment of a vice-chairman is similar to that of the chairman & referred to in the following paragraph (2) of the same part of the Act (SCH 2, section 4).

The vice-chairman's duties relate to those of the chairman & can be summarised as presiding at meetings &/or fulfilling other functions in the absence of the chairman.

In consultation with the chairman, the vice-chairman may take the lead on specific issues & represent Council when required.



DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

DETAILS OF FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS 2020

The following members of the Commoners' Council will have served their term as at 30 June 2020 & shall be eligible for re-appointment, unless they choose not to stand again or other nominations are put forward, in which case there shall be an election.

COUNCILLORS DUE FOR ELECTION

<u>QUARTER</u>	<u>MORE THAN 10 LUs</u>	<u>LESS THAN 10 LUs</u>
NORTH	Mr John Cooper Mr Brian Lavis	Mrs Kate Little
SOUTH	Mr Anton Coaker Mr Philip French	Vacant
EAST	Mr John Jordan Mr Maurice Retallick	Vacant
WEST	Mr Neil Cole Mr George Hill	Vacant

All commoners nominated, nominating or voting, must have paid their contributions for the current financial year. No contributions will be accepted at the election meetings.

Further details will be available & circulated nearer the time.