

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 28 July 2021.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr P Cottington	Ms T May
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mr W Dracup	Mr G Mortimore
Mr P Abel	Mr K Edwards	Mr M Radmore
Mr C Alford	Mrs C Faulkner	Mr M Reddaway
Mrs M Alford	Mr G Hill	Mr R Steemson
Mr R Ashford	Mr J Jordan	Mr T Stratton
Mr A Coaker	Mr S Lake	Mrs P Warren
Mr J Cooper	Mrs K Little	Mrs A Willcocks
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	

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.

Neil Cole asked that a proper gather of ponies in the west quarter be organised this autumn; in particular the areas between Merrivale, Hentor Warren/Willingswall Warren, Sheepstor & the relevant part of the Forest. The Chairman noted this request which will be passed to Council's Pony Working Group.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman formally opened the Annual Meeting. He welcomed Council Members & those sat in the public gallery.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr R Leigh & Mr J Waldon.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the last Council Meeting had been circulated to all Council Members requesting that any comments be made ahead of tonight's meeting. No comments were received. However, Mary Alford questioned why a particular matter discussed regarding ponies had not been recorded under item 8 'Pony Matters' & she also asked that under item 8.2 'Pony Consultation' any letters received be brought to Council, as stated in Council's Standing Orders.

The Chairman agreed to withhold from signing the minutes of the last meeting until these points had been clarified.

He also asked that in future all Council Members read the draft minutes when they are circulated & make any comments by the set date to avoid any unnecessary deferment in confirming minutes at Council meetings.

4. Chairman's Report

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

Elections:

5.1 Election of Chairman

The Vice-Chairman, Layland Branfield, took the chair & asked for nominations for the post of Chairman. Anton Coaker considered that the current Chairman had dealt with a number of very difficult subjects during the past 12 months with a steady hand & the upmost diplomacy & proposed that Philip French continue for a further year. Phil Abel seconded the proposal. As no further nominations were put forward, Philip French accepted the position & was duly re-elected as Chairman for the year 2021-2022. He thanked Council Members for their support during what has been an unusual yet extremely busy year. Ann Willcocks thanked the Chairman & his wife for the tremendous amount of work they had done over the last 12 months.

5.2 Election of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman asked for nominations for the post of Vice-Chairman. Ann Willcocks proposed that Layland Branfield continue for another year & Anton Coaker seconded the proposal. There were no further nominations & Layland Branfield was duly elected as Vice-Chairman for the year 2021-2022. He thanked Council Members & undertook to support the Chairman as much as he can.

At last year's AGM appointing a Deputy Vice-Chairman was discussed. As Council's Standing Orders would have to be reviewed to enable this, Council decided to increase its efforts to work as a team & review the position. The Chairman feels the current set up is working & does not wish to propose any changes.

5.3 Confirmation of Honorarium

Council Members were reminded of how the Chairman chose to use his honorarium payment of £5000 last year: He received a payment of £3000 with the residual £2000 used as a recognition payment for those Council Members who undertook work delegated to them. The Vice-Chairman received a payment of £1000. The Chairman wished to continue with this arrangement for the coming year & expressed his gratitude for the extra help he had received from a number of Council Members. Mary Alford asked for details of the recipients & amounts of the recognition payment. However, the Chairman preferred to reserve the right to release this information & felt it is within his discretion how his honorarium payment is used. The majority of Council Members supported this.

5.4 Appointment of Dartmoor National Park Representatives

Under Section 3 (2) (b) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Will Dracup was appointed to represent the Dartmoor National Park Authority on Council for a period of 4 years from 1 July 2021. Andrew Cooper was appointed as his deputy. Will Dracup has the voting right together with Rob Steemson.

5.5 Co-option

As advised by the Chairman in his report, John Waldon is not standing for re-election as a co-opted member. Under Section 3 (3) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, appointing a co-opted member is optional. It was agreed that, with so many changes afoot in agricultural policy, Council may need to call on someone with expertise in a particular field at some point & to leave the co-option position vacant for the time being to accommodate this if necessary.

5. Review of Council's Working Groups & the members

Council currently has four formal working groups operating. In accordance with Council's Standing Order no.7, the members of these Groups were reviewed & the Terms of Reference for each Group updated to determine how it will run for the next twelve months.

6.1 Peatland Working Group

Philip French (Chairman), Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Mary Alford & Anton Coaker (Council's Representatives on Mires Restoration Project), Tracy May, & Colin Abel (Co-opted - Forest of Dartmoor Commoners Association Chairman).

6.2 Pony Working Group

Phil Abel (W), Crispin Alford (N), Mary Alford (W), Neil Cole (Co-opted), Ken Edwards (E), Charlotte Faulkner (E), Philip French (S), John Jordan (Chairman), Stuart Lake (Vet), Karla McKechnie (DLPO), Sue Martin (Co-opted), Gordon Mortimore (E), Mark Radmore (W), John Shears (Co-opted), Rob Steemson (DNPA), Ann Willcocks (S).

6.3 Shaugh Prior Commons (CL190) Issues Working Group

Philip French (Chairman), Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Anton Coaker, Robert Leigh & Sara Sloman (Office Administrator).

TB Working Group

Colin Abel (Co-opted), Mary Alford, Layland Branfield, Anton Coaker, Will Dracup, Michael Reddaway, Helen Radmore (Co-opted) & Ann Willcocks.

7. Review of who Represents Council on other Groups.

Council reviewed its record of the organisations that Council is represented on & by whom. Representatives will be required to give a brief report to Council following each meeting they attend. This only applies if a formal note or minute is not anticipated & circulated. A list of the organisations that Council is represented on & by who will be circulated to all Council Members.

Dartmoor National Park Authority

Following a discussion, Anton Coaker proposed that Council writes to the Rt Hon George Eustice MP (Secretary of State, Defra) to request that, as part of any subsequent National Park policy review, local farmer organisations (Dartmoor Commoners' Council for Dartmoor) automatically have a seat on the Management Committee of the relevant National Park. Mary Alford seconded the proposal.

8. Propose Dates for:

8.1 Stallion Accreditation Day

Council agreed to hold its annual Stallion Inspection on Wednesday 20 October. Neil Cole has kindly agreed to hold it at the Prison Farm, Princetown again, which worked very well last year. Further details will be sent to pony keepers & Local Commoners Associations at the beginning of September.

Due to the current Strangles outbreak on Dartmoor, Council will seek advice from Council's vet & Livestock Protection Officer on whether this event can go ahead.

8.2 Local Commoners' Association Meeting

It was agreed to contact the Local Commoners' Association secretaries to ascertain if they would like Council to arrange a meeting & at the same time, ask if there are any matters they would like to see discussed.

8.3 Sheep Prohibition Period

Council provisionally agreed the dates for this year's mandatory sheep clearance. The South moor clear period will be from 6-20 November & the North moor clear period will be from 13-27 November. Official notice will follow in due course.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 8 September 2021 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

10. Other Business

10.1 Press Release/News Article

Rob Steemson had prepared a news article with help from Mary Alford, Charlotte Faulkner & Ann Willcocks. It was agreed that this would be circulated to Council Members for comment prior to being sent to various media outlets.

10.2 Environment Bill

Mary Alford raised concerns regarding a probing amendment to the Bill made by Lord Cameron which would affect those with common rights. However, at this stage the amendment has not been taken forward & there is no suggestion that it will be revived. The matter will be discussed at Council's next meeting.

11. Confidential Matters

The Chairman proposed that the following matters be discussed 'in committee':

- **Confirm Minutes of Confidential Meeting held 30 June 2021**
- **Pony Matters**
- **Notice of Grievance**

The outcome of these discussions is recorded in the confidential section of the meeting minutes, available to Council Members only.

Signed: *Philip French*

Date: 8 September 2021

Chairman's report to Council – July 2021

This is my first report as Chairman. Following on from our previous Chairman has not been an easy task and I have had to continue to deal with a number of ongoing issues. However, John's advice and guidance to me over the last twelve months has been much appreciated. John is not standing for re-election as a co-opted member and we wish him well for the future.

We look forward to returning to the new "normal" following the lifting of the Covid-19 lockdown regulations. The Pandemic has made Council's working arrangements extremely difficult over the last year. Thanks to Sara for her efforts in running the office in what have been challenging circumstances at times.

Council has only been able to hold 3 formal meetings this year, including one "outside" – numbers being restricted to under 30 meant even those could not be attended by the public. In order to allow discussion some informal catch up meetings were held, which allowed us to hear members concerns. Any issues requiring formal approval were dealt with by a proposal being presented to Council. These have been posted on Council's website. Unfortunately, this and other specific issues have all caused an increase in workload for both myself & Sara, which Council will need to address.

The pandemic has also caused increasing problems on commons from visitor pressure and behaviour. Council has and continues to work with the National Park and others to address these issues in an attempt to maintain the balance for those living/working on Dartmoor as well as those visiting. The initiative by National Park to use a range of resources which includes employing Dartmoor Marshalls is welcome. Our thanks goes to Karla for her efforts, on behalf of Commoners, in relation to dog attacks and road traffic accidents. We jointly continue to make representations on these issues through the rural crime initiative. On behalf of Council, I would like to thank Karla for her hard work and dedication. I am sure you will all agree that she does a fantastic job. Unfortunately, we have also seen some severe outbreaks of Strangles in some areas which has created more work for Karla.

Over the past year Council has responded to the following consultations: Environmental Land Management: Policy Discussion, Your Dartmoor: DNPA Management Plan, Financial Assistance Statutory Instrument, Public Space Protection Order, Changes to the measurement (metric) used to report on the condition of SSSIs in England, Improvements to Animal Welfare in Transport, Inclusive Access to Protected Landscapes, The Heather & Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2021 & Bovine Tuberculosis proposals to help eradicate the disease in England. All the responses to these have been co-ordinated by Council members and working groups of Council and I would like to thank all those involved.

Council is also having to address other issues, many not of Council's making, which is putting increasing pressure on Council. We have formed various internal working groups to advise on these often complex matters. Much credit and thanks must go to those Council members who have spent so much time and effort on Council's behalf.

Defra's Test & Trial programme looking at designs for the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) has continued on Dartmoor with 4 commons now involved in detailed trials, along with some farms. Several Council members along with others have been involved in these trials.

The roll-over and administration of commons HLS agreements has caused issues which Council continue to engage with Natural England and RPA, following Defra's decision to transfer the administration of these schemes from Natural England to RPA. Likewise the Peatland re-wetting work has caused concerns to Commoners. Council organised a visit to two sites in June. Following which Council's Peatland working group made various requests for actions to be included in any new funding bid for future Peatland work.

Moving forward and on a positive note, Defra has launched its Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FiPL). This will provide funding for one-off projects to support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage and support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. There is an opportunity for Council to apply for some of this funding which should benefit commoners.

Thank you everyone for your support during the last year.