

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 30 June 2021.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr A Cooper	Mrs K Little
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mr J Cooper	Ms T May
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 J Waldon
Mr P Cleave	Mr S Lake	Mrs P Warren
		Mrs A Willcocks
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	

Note

Under the Government's current COVID-19 guidelines, Council was able to hold an indoor meeting at its regular venue, subject to specific conditions. As such, this meeting was not open to the public.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed Council Members back to the Two Bridges Hotel for the first indoor Council Meeting since September last year. Everyone was reminded that, due to COVID-19, the social distancing measures should be followed & masks must be worn when moving around & using the hotel facilities.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr R Leigh & Mr T Stratton.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the last Council Meeting had been previously circulated to all Council Members requesting that any comments be made ahead of tonight's meeting. No comments were received and the minutes of the Meeting held on 19 May 2021 were confirmed & signed.

The Chairman advised that details of all the resolutions passed by Council & consultations responded to during the period when Council was unable to hold formal meetings will be available on Council's website.

Mary Alford questioned why the notes of the virtual meetings held were not being confirmed. The Chairman advised that it was stated at the time that these meetings would take the format of a discussion rather than a formal meeting & as such formal minutes would not be produced or put on Council's website. However, a note, for information purposes, would be circulated to Council Members. The Chairman asked that if Members have any particular issues regarding the contents of the notes, they email the office outlining their concerns.

4. Matters Brought Forward at the Direction of the Chairman

None.

5. Correspondence received by the Chairman or Office Administrator

5.1 Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FiPL)

The Chairman reported that this national programme, with dedicated, ring-fenced funding from Defra, has now been launched. It will provide funding for one-off projects which allow farmers & land managers in protected landscapes to:

- support nature recovery
- mitigate the impacts of climate change
- provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy & understand the landscape & its cultural heritage
- support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses

The programme will run from 1 July 2021 to 31 March 2024. Each National Park & AONB will be allocated funding to be spent on FiPL. Further details of the programme, including how to apply, who is eligible & the types of projects that could be eligible, are available from the DNPA website <https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/farming/farming-in-protected-landscapes>

DNPA are seeking to recruit a dedicated Project Officer to help run this programme & provide advice /guidance for farmers. James Sharpe is managing the programme & David Attwell is assisting with advice & guidance for farmers. Applications over £5,000 will be determined by a Local Assessment Panel (LAP). Subject to approval by the National Park Authority, Council will be invited to join the LAP in addition to 3 farmer representatives.

The Chairman advised that, subject to sufficient demand, Council hopes to arrange a FiPL information evening.

5.2 Notice of Advertisement of deregistration of part of Yennadon Common

An application has been made under section 16 of the Commons Act 2006 for land forming part of the above-mentioned registered common land (the release land) to cease to be so registered to enable an extension to Yennadon Quarry. It is proposed that land be registered as common land in place of the release land. Further details are available from the office (all 539 pages via a Mimecast link which expires on 9 August 2021).

The Chairman informed Council Members that he had scanned through the documents & it appears that the replacement land is a larger, better quality area of agricultural land north east of CL38 Little Yennadon which adjoins CL191 Yennadon Down. It is understood that virtually all of the rights exercisable over CL191 are duplicated over CL38. The Chairman invited Council Members with any concerns, particularly the west Quartermen, to visit the site & request the Mimecast link.

6. Members representing Council at Meetings:

- **Defra/Dartmoor Semi-Wild Equine Group***: 21 May 2021 – Philip French
- **Dartmoor Rural Crime Initiative**: 27 May 2021 – Philip French & Tracy May
- **Semi-Wild Equine Forum***: 11 June 2021 – Philip French, Mary Alford & Charlotte Faulkner

- **Dartmoor Visitor Management Group***: 24 June 2021 – Philip French

*Notes available.

Notes have since been produced for:

- Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons Partnership*: 20 April 2021.

If any Council Member wishes to receive copies of any notes, please email office@dartmoorcommoners.org.uk

7. Mires Restoration Project/Rewetting

7.1 Report on Council's Site Visit

The Chairman thanked Tracy May for her help liaising with the Peatland Partnership & arranging the Council visit on 7 June 2021 to the peatland restoration work sites at Amicombe & Hangingstone. The feedback received suggests that Council Members found the visit useful & appreciated the opportunity to see the work first hand.

7.2 Update from Council's Peatland Working Group

Following the resolution passed at Council's previous meeting to form a Working Group to review the current peatland rewetting works on Dartmoor, the Group held its initial meeting & came up with a number of suggestions to help address commoners concerns. These have been reported to the South West Peatland Partnership & include:

- better communication with commoners on the ground & perhaps rewarding commoners or their representatives for their time in attending the works periodically to monitor & report back any concerns
- ensuring there are better access routes through the areas to facilitate livestock movement & shepherding
- analysing loss of grazing caused by the works, particularly the areas of water
- researching the risk to animals & commoners caused by the work

The Peatland Partnership has submitted a bid to the Natural England Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme which includes not just funding for restoration works but also for surveys & monitoring, community engagement & staffing for 3 Peatland Project Officers & a Historic Environment Officer for Dartmoor, plus a farm liaison post & community engagement & communications positions. A decision is expected late summer.

Further discussions followed during which a number of Council Members expressed their concerns which included:

- whether maintenance structures are planned for the peatland restoration areas
- if money has been set aside to compensate commoners for loss of stock due to the restoration work
- local commoners' associations being pressurised by NE/RPA regarding rewetting works on the commons being part of agri-environment agreement rollovers. There have been cases whereby rewetting supplements paid have been clawed back.

The Chairman advised that, although some of these concerns have been raised before, they will be addressed again through the Peatland Working Group. He also advised Council Members that the Peatland Partnership would be happy to try & facilitate further visits to restoration work sites if required.

8. Pony Matters

8.1 Report from Pony Working Group

John Jordan gave a brief report on the meeting held 24 May 2021 which included the concerns raised regarding the condition of some of the ponies & the number of unmarked ponies on Haytor. Subsequently, arrangements were made with the Chairman of Haytor Commoners Association & local commoners to address the issue. However, for a number of reasons, plans had to be cancelled & now there are confirmed cases of ponies with the strangles virus on Haytor, Trendlebere Down & Blackhill Down. As such, any further attempts to gather any of the ponies must be left until the virus has passed. Karla will continue to monitor the situation & has Council's full support to deal with any pony on welfare grounds.

It was agreed that Council advise local pony keepers of the strangles outbreak & ask that no ponies be removed from the area unless it's for welfare reasons.

8.2 Council's Pony Consultation

The Chairman reported that Mary Alford & Charlotte Faulkner continue to question why this piece of work was not being led by Council's Pony Working Group & that they felt that views should only be gathered from those who are registered with Council as pony keepers & actually graze ponies on Dartmoor Commons. The Chairman reminded Council Members that his proposal to consult with interested parties with the aim of creating a list of concerns & issues relating to ponies & their management was approved by Council earlier this year by 20 votes in favour & 1 vote against. He reported that, with the help of Ann Willcocks, views are being collated & he is not prepared to exclude any interested party from the consultation. The information gathered will be brought to Council's Pony Working Group for comment & any recommendations put to full Council.

Charlotte Faulkner had previously circulated a note to Council Members querying why Council's Pony Working Group was not leading on the consultation. She made the following proposals & asked that they be discussed at tonight's meeting:

- A review of work being undertaken by the Pony Working Group to see if there is anything outstanding & a plan of work agreed if there is.
- A protocol agreed by Council that any communications received related to a subject for which there is a specialist committee, that it is forwarded to that working group for discussion & brought back to Council with recommendations, for discussion & actions agreed.

Following a discussion, the proposals were not seconded & the Chairman again gave his assurance that once the information has been collected, it will be presented to Council's Pony Working Group for consideration.

8.3 Unmarked Ponies

Russell Ashford expressed his concerns over the number of unmarked ponies still running the commons, despite previous efforts to address this. Ken Edwards asked if having a pony clear period would be a practical solution. The Chairman agreed to put the question to Council's Pony Working Party for consideration.

9. Dartmoor Visitor Management

The Chairman reported that at the recent DNPA Visitor Management Group meeting he attended on behalf of Council issues regarding camping, cyclists & dogs were high on the agenda. DNPA are using a range of resources, supported by robust ongoing communication, in an endeavor to keep the balance right for both the people living & working on Dartmoor as well as for those visiting the area. Rangers are being supported by volunteers, the outreach & engagement team, National Park Marshalls & Dartmoor Specials (a group of Special Constables dedicated to Dartmoor).

9.1 DNPA Byelaws Review

It was reported that a draft set of Byelaws has been produced & that further informal consultation is required.

Once again, the issue of commercial dog walkers walking dogs on the commons was raised & whether the DNPA Byelaw on commercial activities will be amended & used to prevent this. Some local authorities have Public Space Protection Orders which limit the number of dogs that can be walked at any one time in certain areas.

9.2 Press Release

At the last Council meeting it was agreed that the draft press release be tidied up & recirculated to Council Members for comment & approval. However, it turned out that there was insufficient time to do this ahead of the May Bank Holiday weekend & it was subsequently suggested that individuals could send out this particular press release omitting any reference to Council. A discussion followed on Council Members wish to engage with the media & a suggested strategy. It was decided to form a small working group of Council Members who would be interested in putting together a monthly editorial on commoners & commoning for publication in the local press & links magazines. Any Council Member interested in contributing should initially contact the office by email.

10. Consultations Update

10.1 Changes to the measurement (metric) used to report on the condition of SSSIs in England

Natural England received 57 responses to this consultation. These are currently being analysed & a report is due shortly.

10.2 Improvements to Animal Welfare in Transport

The responses are being summarised.

10.3 Inclusive Access to Protected Landscapes

A write up of the key points from the Defra workshop discussion is available as well as a summary of the responses to the pre-workshop survey.

10.4 Bovine Tuberculosis Proposals to help eradicate the disease in England

This consultation & a parallel call for views sets out the proposals for delivery of the next phase of the 25 year strategy to eradicate bovine TB in England by 2038, in keeping with those priorities. Further details are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/bovine-tuberculosis-proposals-to-help-eradicate-disease-in-england>

Some Council Members expressed their disappointment that the suggestions regarding 6 monthly testing hadn't been included. Mary Alford requested that the TB Group meet with APHA in Exeter as previously 4 monthly/8 monthly testing has been discussed. It was agreed that this be arranged.

11. The State of the Commons on Dartmoor: A Common Perspective

The Chairman thanked Ann for the time & effort she has put in to producing this document. A copy of the final draft had been previously circulated to Council Members who were encouraged to read the document through & contact Ann directly with any final comments. Council Members were also asked to give some consideration to how the document may be used going forward.

12. Dates of Next Meetings

The proposed meeting dates for the remainder of 2021 were agreed as follows:

- **Wednesday 28 July 2021 (Annual Meeting)** with 10 minute slot for members of public to address the Council.
- **Wednesday 8 September 2021**
- **Wednesday 27 October 2021**
- **Wednesday 1 December 2021**

13. Other Business

13.1 Agri-Environment Agreement Extensions on Commons

Layland Branfield reported that he represents Dartmoor on a group, made up of national organisations acting for commoners, formed to address inconsistencies within NE. The Group have sent a letter, setting out its concerns, to the Prime Minister, George Eustice (Minister of State), Tim Farron (Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hill Farming), Neil Parish (EFRA Chair) & to local MPs. Furthermore, the Group presented NE with 27 case studies setting out NE's approach to a rollover for each individual common. NE has explained how they carried out the various assessments & the rollover recommendations to the RPA. They have advised that, in each case, the assessments were consistent but the commons were not. The Group is continuing with its efforts to advise NE how important it is to work *with* commoners so as not to lose the agri-environment gain from the last 25 years.

13.2 Commons Day

Mary Alford felt that there are a number of issues that should be brought to the attention of the local MPs with Dartmoor as part of their constituency & made a proposal to this effect. Ann Willcocks put forward a counter proposal to look into arranging a 'Commons Day' to highlight what commoners do & celebrate what's been achieved & invite local MPs to this event. The majority of Council Members were in favour of this idea & it was agreed that a small committee (Mary Alford, Charlotte Faulkner & Ann Willcocks) put together a more detailed proposal, to include a suggested itinerary, to be circulated to Council Members for further consideration.

14. Confidential Matters

The Chairman proposed that the remainder agenda items be discussed 'in committee':

- **Office Administration**
- **Shaugh Prior Commons (CL190) Issues**
- **Straying Stock**
- **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*