

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 8 September 2021.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr P Cottington	Mrs K Little
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mr W Dracup	Ms T May
Mr C Alford	Mr K Edwards	Mr G Mortimore
Mrs M Alford	Mr J Jordan	Mr M Radmore
Mr R Ashford	Mr S Lake	Mr R Steemson
Mr P Cleave	Mr R Leigh	Mr T Stratton
Mr J Cooper		Mrs A Willcocks

Mrs S Sloman

Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed Council Members to the Meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr P Abel, Mrs C Faulkner, Mr M Reddaway & Mrs P Warren.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

3.1 30 June 2021

The Chairman had agreed to withhold from signing these minutes until the two points raised by Mary Alford at the last Meeting had been clarified: The matter discussed regarding ponies had been recorded in the confidential section of the minutes & the correspondence in relation to the pony consultation had been resent to Mary Alford (this correspondence had previously been circulated to all Council Members). The minutes were therefore approved & signed without amendment.

3.2 28 July 2021 (AGM)

The minutes of the AGM had been previously circulated to all Council Members requesting that any comments be made ahead of tonight's meeting. No comments were received & the minutes of this Meeting were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters outstanding from previous Meetings:

4.1 News Article/Press Release

The Chairman thanked Mary Alford, Charlotte Faulkner, Rob Steemson & Ann Willcocks for putting together a news article titled 'Respect Dartmoor's peace, wildlife & beauty' which was published by several local media outlets. It was suggested that Council produces this type of news article on a seasonal basis & suggestions on topics would be welcome. Ann Willcocks offered to draft an editorial on cows on the common & swaling.

4.2 TB Working Group meeting with APHA

A meeting has been arranged for Thursday 7 October 2021, on Dartmoor. Further details including a venue & itinerary will be arranged with the TB Working Group. If anyone has any TB related matters they wish to raise, please contact Council's Office Administrator or a member of the Working Group.

4.3 Commons Day

At Council's meeting in June, Mary Alford suggested that local MPs with Dartmoor as part of their constituency should be made aware of some of the issues facing commoners. As such, a number of Council Members have organised &/or attended meetings with MPs: Ann Willcocks has met with Luke Pollard MP & Gary Streeter MP; Mary Alford attended a meeting with Geoffrey Cox MP who, with input from the NFU, has offered to arrange & chair a local meeting, to be held in November, between Natural England & grazing commoners; & Charlotte Faulkner is liaising with Mel Stride MP.

4.4 Local Commoners' Association Meeting

The Chairman reported that Local Commoners' Association secretaries have been contacted & there is a high demand for Council to hold a meeting this year. The intention is to combine a meeting with a presentation from the team running the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FiPL). A date has yet to be arranged.

5. Matters brought forward at the direction of the Chairman

5.1 Foundation for Common Land

Tracy May advised that the Foundation for Common Land Test & Trial have arranged for Ordnance Survey to hold a workshop on Wednesday 6th October 2021 at The Bedford Hotel, Tavistock. The event is free & will demonstrate how to gather data & use mapping software to create a baseline map & future maps of what public goods are produced on the common & how to apply the relevant information required to create management plans. Please contact Tracy to book a place.

5.2 DNPA Byelaws Review

The Authority has agreed draft proposals to review Dartmoor's byelaws. A draft set of byelaws will go out for public consultation w/c 20 September 2021. The consultation will be circulated to Council Members for comment in order that a coordinated response can be drafted. A member of DNPA staff would be willing to meet with Council Members if required.

6. Members representing Council at Meetings:

- **Defra ELM Stakeholder Group: Sustainable Farming Incentive Scheme (Moorland Grazing):** 20 July 2021 – Tracy May
- **Dartmoor Visitor Management Group:** 28 July 2021 – Philip French

Notes have since been produced for:

- Defra Commons Options Workshop: 17 May 2021.

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

7. Consultations

7.1 Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) Consultation - Dogs

Last summer, Council responded to West Devon Borough Council's consultation relating to dogs in public spaces. Following a delay, due to COVID-19, the Public Space Protection Order 2021 is now in force for the next 3 years. Council has recently responded in a similar manner to a review undertaken by Teignbridge District Council of their Public Space Protection Order relating to dogs in public spaces.

Unfortunately, these Orders do not apply to common land

7.2 National Food Strategy for England

Council responded to the consultation last year. An independent report, published in July 2021, makes recommendations for government, which has promised to respond formally with a White Paper within 6 months. Further details are available from <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/>

7.3 Improvements to Animal Welfare in Transport

Council responded to this consultation earlier this year. The government has since introduced the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, which includes measures to ban live animal exports for slaughter & fattening. A summary of responses are available from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1011728/animal-welfare-in-transport-consultation-response.pdf

7.4 Animal Welfare Committee: Castration & Tail Docking of Lambs - Call for Views

The Chairman thanked Layland Branfield & Ann Willcocks for helping him draft a response which was then circulated to Council Members for comment prior to being submitted.

The Chairman reiterated his thanks to everyone who has helped respond to the many consultations over the past year. Copies of Council's responses to all of the above-mentioned consultations are available from the Office upon request.

8. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

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

Karla advised that she has received a number of calls regarding members of the public being chased by cows on common land. She always reports such incidents to the Office. Council has no powers to insist that these animals be removed, unless it's proved they are dangerous. However, in all cases, Council alerts the farmer (if known) of the incidents & makes them aware of the Health & Safety Executive guidelines. It was suggested & agreed that the Local Commoners Association secretaries are also informed of any incidents.

Karla recently had a conversation with the New Forest Commoners Defence Association who are interested in having further talks with other National Parks on this matter.

9. Stallion Accreditation Day

Following a discussion, it was agreed that, due to the current Strangles outbreak, this event be postponed until January/February next year.

10. Environment Bill

Concerns have been raised with Council regarding a probing amendment to the Environment Bill to make regulations giving responsible bodies an option to purchase common rights. However, the amendment has not been taken forward.

Ann Willcocks expressed her misgivings about the Bill establishing conservation covenants, which will allow landowners to make legally binding agreements to deliver lasting conservation & will be used to support delivery of the Environmental Land Management schemes. Ann believes that conservation covenants should not be applicable on land with common rights because a landowner cannot govern the commoner. She is working with the NFU & they have a meeting with Defra on this topic. Council has offered its support & Ann will report back to Council after the meeting.

11. Dates of Next Meetings

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 27 October 2021 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

12. Other Business

12.1 Natural England – Common with SSSI not in Agri-Environment Agreement

Ann Willcocks asked how Natural England (NE) would enforce grazing restrictions (& other restrictions) on a common that is a SSSI but not in an agri-environment scheme. E.g. if NE decided the common was overstocked, would the individual commoner who is overgrazing be liable & penalised or everyone who grazes the common? It was agreed that the Office Administrator contacts NE & asks a nonspecific question.

12.2 Dartmoor Marshalls

Rob Steemson reported that the National Park Marshalls initiative, used to address visitor management issues, has now finished for this year. Okehampton Hamlets Parish paid to have the Marshalls in that area for an additional two weekends.

12.3 Ten Tors Team Manager's Training Day

This has been arranged for Saturday 9 October 2021. John Cooper has kindly agreed to undertake the requested farming input on behalf of Council.

12.4 Pony Working Group - Chairman

Due to personal circumstances, John Jordan asked if he could step back from his role as Chairman of the Pony Working Group for the time being. He proposed that Mary Alford stand in as Chairman. Stuart Lake seconded the proposal which was approved.

The Chairman, on behalf of Council, offered his sympathy & support to John during this difficult time. Ann Willcocks thanked John for his advice & guidance to all Pony Keepers during his long reign as Chairman of the Pony Working Group.

13. Confidential Matters

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

- **Confirm Minutes of Confidential Meeting held 28 July 2021**
- **Office Administration**
- **Shaugh Prior Commons (CL190) Issues**

- **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: 27 October 2021

KARLA McKECHNIE LIVESTOCK PROTECTION OFFICER

REPORT TO COMMONERS' COUNCIL 8th SEPTEMBER 2021

Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs)

Total number of RTAs to date is 86. It's interesting that the RTAs to 25th May was 30, so in the last three months the number has almost doubled the RTAs occurring in the first five months of the year.

I attended a recent RTA at midnight involving a cow on Merrivale Bridge which had suffered a broken front leg. It was a difficult situation, the cow was wild, it was pitch black and foggy and I was grateful for Colin Abel's help, especially when the armed police turned up 20 minutes later after Colin and I had dealt with the situation and dragged the cow off the road.

A highland cow was hit and killed outright near the Warren House Inn on Friday 3rd Sept and I recently had a call about a foal on Roborough Down with a potentially broken back leg. On arrival I realised that both back legs were broken and had obviously been involved in a serious car accident as there was a two-metre-long skid mark of bone down the road. I can't believe that the driver didn't consider it necessary to report it.

These are just three recent ones in a growing list.

Dog Attacks

There have been 84 dog incidents on livestock so far this year. Sadly, this is the most it's ever been over a nine-month period.

A bad dog attack back on 22nd May was a second offence for this dog, the first having occurred only five weeks previously when the owner had received a voluntary control order. Having breached this order, the police are taking this very seriously and it is likely to end up in Court, which will be a first. I will keep you updated.

Dogs are a continuing problem and will be interested to hear how the DNPA's bye-laws consultation is going, though I fear that with the ever-increasing footfall on the moor the problem will only get worse.

Strangles

Just a quick up-date on strangles. It is still on Haytor, Black Hill and Trendlebere Down at various stages, but I'm optimistic that it will burn out. This has kept me seriously busy over the past twelve months and I've never seen so many poorly looking ponies suffering with this infection.