

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Monday 7 February 2022.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr W Dracup	Ms T May
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mrs C Faulkner	Mr G Mortimore
Mr P Abel	Mr G Hill	Mr M Radmore
Mr C Alford	Mr J Jordan	Mr M Reddaway
Mrs M Alford	Mr S Lake	Mr R Steemson
Mr R Ashford	Mr R Leigh	Mr T Stratton
Mr P Cleave	Mrs K Little	Mrs P Warren
		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.

Charlie Serpell, Chairman of Hentor Warren & Willingswall Warren (HW&WW) Commoners' Association, read out a statement on behalf of the commoners with grazing rights, registered at Devon County Council under the Commons Registration Act 1965, over the HW&WW part of Shaugh Prior Commons CL190. This part of the common is owned by the National Trust & the statement highlighted the longstanding, on-going issues regarding the management of this land, which is SSSI & the ambiguity surrounding the right to graze this land that the National Trust has offered two separate tenants. Mr Serpell & those commoners he represents believe that they have suffered an injustice due to one of the tenants inclusion on Council's live Register. They believe that this has resulted in HW&WW Commoners' Association losing its HLS rollover agreement with Natural England & ask that Council look into this matter without further delay & clarify the position.

The Chairman responded that Council's Working Group is continuing to look into a number of issues relating to Shaugh Prior Common. He apologised for the time it is taking & advised that, although he shared Mr Serpell's frustration, it is important that these complex matters are thoroughly looked into. Council will address the points raised in due course.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting & thanked Members for their understanding of meetings being postponed & rearranged on different days due to the on-going impact of COVID-19.

He formally advised Council of Alison Kohler's retirement at the end of last year & the appointment of Richard Drysdale as the new Director of Conservation & Communities for Dartmoor National Park Authority.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr A Coaker, Mr J Cooper, Mr P Cottington & Mr K Edwards.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the last Council Meeting had been circulated to all Council Members requesting that any comments be made in advance of tonight's meeting. No comments were received & the minutes of the Meeting held 1 December 2021 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters outstanding from previous Meetings:

4.1 Natural England – Common with SSSI not in agri-environment agreement

At the last Meeting, it was agreed that the Council consider whether the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 has any bearing on Natural England (NE) & Defra's ability to impose restrictions on SSSI land. Although the general consensus is that Council has no such powers under its Act, members are very concerned at some of the recent actions taken by NE & felt that a more definitive answer should be pursued & to consider whether to obtain a legal opinion on the strength of a commoner's right to graze vs NE's empowerment to remove graziers, purchase land & enter into agreements with landowners i.e. conservation covenants. Following a discussion, while it was reported that the Foundation for Common Land is addressing some issues nationally, it was suggested that questions specific to Dartmoor (with its Act), be prepared with a view to seeking a quote for legal advice for further consideration by Council.

The Chairman reported on a letter, received from a commoner, requesting Council's support. The common over which they graze has SSSI status & has not rolled over its agri-environment agreement. Consent to graze was requested from NE in December & the commoner has continued to graze their livestock at the stocking level stated within the agreement. However, they have now been threatened with legal action by NE for not removing all of their stock from the common until permission to graze has been granted, which could take up to 4 months. Council Members strongly objected to NE's handling of this matter & agreed to support the commoner by sending a letter to NE challenging their actions. It was also agreed to question NE on whose responsibility it would be to shepherd straying stock from a common, not in an agreement, with no grazing livestock due to NE not giving SSSI Consent.

4.2 Night-Time Events

It was previously agreed to clarify the position with DNPA regarding the approval of recreational night events as it was understood that the Recreation Events Policy did not support night-time events. The policy, drawn up by DNPA, Council & the Common Landowners Association & adopted in January 2019, states **'there will be a presumption against all night events on Dartmoor, whatever the size. Events will be considered on a case by case basis & will be dependent on the level of anticipated impact, including disturbance to stock, wildlife & local communities. For a night event to be supported it must have full support from all consultees'**. The Policy advises that all events must be notified to DNPA no less than 8 weeks prior to the event. Once received by the secretary of Commoners' Council, the notifications & event consultations are circulated to the relevant Local Commoners' Association secretaries & Quartermen for comment directly to DNPA.

5. Matters brought forward at the direction of the Chairman

5.1 Government Response to the Landscapes Review

Defra has launched a consultation seeking views on the Government's response to the landscapes review carried out by Julian Glover (which Council responded

to). The Chairman intends to arrange a working group to look at the document & formulate a draft response on behalf of Council. Please advise the secretary if you wish to participate. The consultation closes 9 April 2022.

5.2 Harriet Bell

As you may be aware, Harriet has now finished the Test & Trials Project, the results of which are on the Hill Farm Project section of the DNPA website. Harriet has built up a good relationship with commoners & the Chairman felt it would be beneficial for Council to set up a working relationship with Harriet who would be able to offer ad-hoc assistance to Council & help respond to certain consultations. With no objections from Members, the arrangement will be trialled & formally reviewed at the AGM.

5.3 Swaling

Rob Steemson confirmed that there is currently no embargo on swaling for this season. It was acknowledged that the Swaling Checklist leaflet, dated 2019, was slightly out of date in that it refers to the Heather & Grass, etc. (Burning) Regulations 2007, which were updated in 2021 & the Fire Service contact number has changed. However, there are currently no plans to reprint the leaflet. The secretary will ensure that the details on Council's website are correct. Please note

Devon & Somerset Fire Control Contact Number is 03333 990 014

5.4 Wild Fire Training

Rob Steemson reported that due to the high number of Covid cases in the Fire Service, the arranged training evenings had been cancelled. For the purposes of Commoners updating their ticket to enable them to assist the Fire Service on any wild fire call out, the process for the time being is to read & understand electronic guidance issued by the Fire Service, which has been circulated to Local Commoners Association secretaries. Rob must be advised that the 'online training' has been completed by the set date to enable him to organise the respective fire tallies. Rob's contact details are Tel: 07711 856206 or Email: rsteemson@dartmoor.gov.uk

6. News Article for January 2022

The draft article was approved by Council slightly later than planned due to the postponement of Council's last meeting.

7. Financial Estimates for 2022/2023

Copies of the estimates were sent to all Council Members in advance of tonight's meeting. Members discussed the projected shortfall & its potential increase due to a rise in the personnel costs budget if Council agrees to the Chairman's proposal to prioritise the work being carried out to verify all common rights registrations on Council's Register & complete this exercise as soon as possible.

The Chairman further proposed that Council draw from its reserves to cover the projected deficit rather than increase the contributions due from commoners.

Both proposals were agreed & the financial estimates for 2022/2023 were formally approved.

Backing Up Paper Records

The Chairman again raised his concerns that all of Council's records prior to 2012, including Minutes, are held in paper format only & that these documents could be permanently lost if there was a fire or flood, for example. He felt that Council needs to seriously consider getting these backed up electronically. It was suggested that Council may be able to apply for a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant to have the papers archived & the Chairman agreed that this be looked into further.

8. Dartmoor Commoners' Council Elections 2022

Initial details of which councillors are due for election were sent out with the agenda (see Appendix A). 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.

9. Members representing Council at Meetings:

- **Peatland Partnership:** 7 December 2021 – Philip French
- **Defra Semi-Wild Equine Group*:** 9 December 2021 – Philip French
- **MOD Steering Group:** 29 December 2021 – Philip French
- **Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons Local Area Group*:** 14 December 2021 – Mary Alford

*Notes available.

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

10. Pony Matters

The Chairman reported that Council will be represented at a forthcoming meeting hosted by Defra Equine ID on disease management within Semi-Wild Equines, which has been prompted by the ongoing strangles outbreak on Dartmoor. A date has yet to be confirmed.

He also advised that Defra Equine ID have yet to launch their consultation on Improvements to Equine ID & Traceability in England.

11. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

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

It was reported that Karla & Council have been approached by Dartmoor Forest Parish Council to be part of a steering group set up to progress their 'Vision Zero' initiative to reduce road traffic accidents on the B3212 road between Peek Hill & Princetown. An initial meeting has yet to be held.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on **TUESDAY** 8 March 2022 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

The Chairman thanked those in the public gallery for attending & declared the meeting closed.

A motion to go into a closed session was then proposed by the Chairman. The outcome of these discussions is recorded in the confidential section of the meeting minutes, available to Council Members only.

Signed: *Philip French*

Date: *08 March 2022*



DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

DETAILS OF FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS 2022

The following members of the Commoners' Council will have served their term as at 30 June 2022 & 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 & DATE</u>	<u>MORE THAN 10 LUs</u>	<u>LESS THAN 10 LUs</u>
NORTH	Mr Crispin Alford Mr Michael Reddaway	Filled
SOUTH	Mr Phil Cleave Mrs Ann Willcocks	Vacant
EAST	Mr Layland Branfield Mr Gordon Mortimore	Filled
WEST	Mr Phil Abel Mrs Mary Alford	Filled

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.

Appendix A

RTA's

So far this year there have been 7 traffic accidents involving livestock, 4 sheep and 3 ponies. We are in the worst weeks because of the lack of daylight hours and poor weather conditions. The police have been out with speed vans. I have supplied the police with the annual statistics for RTA's and they have posted them on social media, which caused quite a lot of controversy with some people saying that the numbers had been well exaggerated. (This is what we're up against!). At least the police accept the numbers.

Two of the DLPS speed monitors were vandalised last year, one at Sharpitor the other at Bennett's Cross. The one at Haytor has been moved to Sharpitor as we feel this is a hot spot area. One monitor has been fixed and the other has been sent away for repair.

Last year's RTA total was 117 with 89 deaths and 28 injured.

DOG ATTACKS

An horrendous start to the year with 13 dog attacks so far: 2 dogs that were on control orders re-offended and both of them were put down, the decision being made by their owners after long discussions with me.

Two big hits on farmers, one on Roborough that you may have seen about on the TV and in the Tavistock Times when 4 sheep were attacked and killed over a period of one week, and the other a farmer from Widecombe with 3 dead sheep and 32 attacked in a field with no footpath.

Last year the number of dog attacks was 108, the worst I've ever recorded.

STALLION INSPECTION

The stallion inspection day was held at Neil Cole's Princetown farm. It ran really smoothly with all 5 stallions passing. Big thanks to Neil Cole and Ida and to everyone else who helped. It worked very well with allotted time slots.

STRANGLES

A quick update. Strangles is now present at Dunnabridge Farm but no reports of the infection having spread to any other commons at the moment.

A GOOD ENDING

I was called about a sheep trapped on a 90ft ledge at Dewerstone. Dartmoor Rescue attended and said the sheep was too lively for them to handle. However, two primary school teachers who were abseiling managed to rope the sheep and lift her to safety. The farmer was there to retrieve her and took her back to the farm and he added that you wouldn't have known that she had been stuck there for over a week!

Karla McKechnie