

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Tuesday 8 March 2022.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr A Coaker	Mr R Leigh
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mr J Cooper	Mr G Mortimore
Mr P Abel	Mr P Cottington	Mr M Radmore
Mr C Alford	Mr K Edwards	Mr M Reddaway
Mrs M Alford	Mrs C Faulkner	Mr R Steemson
Mr R Ashford	Mr J Jordan	Mrs P Warren
Mr P Cleave	Mr S Lake	Mrs A Willcocks
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

He thanked the NFU, at Ann Willcock's behest, for arranging Defra's recent visit to Dartmoor attended by Henry Ashcroft, Policy Advisor & Catherine Boyd, from the Environmental Land Management Development Team.

The Chairman informed Council of the change of personnel to the Project Officer role. He thanked Mark Sloman for the work that he has done & advised Members that Laura Talbot has been employed to review Council's Register of Common Rights, on the same terms & conditions as previously.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr W Dracup, Mr G Hill, Mrs K Little, Ms T May & Mr T Stratton.

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 7 February 2022 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters outstanding from previous Meetings:

4.1 Consultation: Government Response to the Landscapes Review

A virtual meeting, open to all Council Members, was held to discuss this document. The Chairman thanked Layland Branfield, Tracy May & Ann Willcocks for their input. They are in the process of formulating a response on behalf of Council which will be circulated to Members for comment, prior to submission.

5. Matters brought forward at the direction of the Chairman

5.1 Semi-Wild Equines Disease Management Meeting

The Chairman thanked those that attended this meeting on behalf of Council. Notes will be made available once they have been produced by Defra.

5.2 Shaugh Prior Commons (CL190) Issues Working Group

As some of the issues being addressed by the Group are likely to crop up on other commons, it is to be proposed that the Group's name will be changed to the Rights Issue Working Group. This will be brought to Council for formalisation once the Terms of Reference have been updated.

5.3 Common Owners' Right to Graze

Following matters raised during the public session at the last Council Meeting, the Chairman reported that Council may need to revisit the position regarding a common owner's use of the commons & their right to graze that common. Consideration will be given to developing a Code of Guidance.

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

As agreed at the last meeting, Council wrote to NE challenging their handling of a situation where a commoner has been threatened with legal action for not removing their livestock from a common with SSSI status, no longer in agri-environment agreement, while they await Consent to graze (which could take up to 4 months). The Chairman reported that NE has sent a reply which basically just confirms its SSSI procedure & fails to address the specific questions put to them in Council's letter. He advised that Council intends to write a further letter pressing NE for detailed answers.

7. News Article for March 2022

It was agreed that Mary Alford, Charlotte Faulkner, Rob Steemson & Ann Willcocks get together to prepare a draft article which will be circulated to Council Members for approval before being sent to media outlets for publication at the end of March.

8. Dartmoor Commoners' Council Elections 2022 - Venues

To avoid the cost of booking village halls, it was agreed that Council continues to make use of the gazebo purchased for the Elections held during the Pandemic & hold this year's election meetings outside. The Secretary will decide on appropriate venues for each quarter & further details will follow.

The forthcoming elections will be a ballot of those attending the election meeting in person. Postal votes & telephone votes will not be accepted.

9. Members representing Council at Meetings:

- **Defra Semi-Wild Equine Group Meeting on Disease Management:** 1 March 2022 - Mary Alford, Stuart Lake, Karla McKechnie & Sara Sloman

*Notes available.

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

10. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Rob Steemson reported on the following:

- Members recently approved the use of **bodycams to be worn by Rangers** for a trial period. They also agreed that Authority staff will work in partnership with the local authority to support the Community Protection Notice process as already operated across the National Park.

- The **Dartmoor Environmental Land Management Test & Trial** final report was submitted to Defra at the end of last year. This is available on the Hill Farm Project section of the DNPA website. Ann Willcocks expressed her disappointment that there had not been a presentation to Dartmoor on the Dartmoor ELM Test & trial. Both the Chairman & Rob Steemson agreed to take this back to DNPA.
- **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** has committed to £253K worth of projects as at the end of 2021. The team are presently working with applicants to develop projects for 2022/2023 although the funding allocation for that period has yet to be confirmed.
- **The Byelaw Review** is ongoing with DNPA officials still considering & analysing the responses. A report will be taken to the Authority later this year which will advise the decision-making process & next steps.

Mary Alford referred to the **Great Western Railway leaflet** titled 'A Guide to the Dartmoor Line' which has recently been circulated to households promoting the reopening of Okehampton Station as '*a gateway to Dartmoor providing a sustainable travel solution for getting to the National Park*'. The leaflet states that the Dartmoor Line is expected to be popular with cyclists & advises that, as there is very limited space on-board for bikes, to use local cycle hire places. Mary Alford stated her dissatisfaction that, although the leaflet displays the DNPA logo, there is no mention that cycling on open moorland or common land is not allowed unless on a public bridleway or designated routes. Following a discussion, it was agreed that it should be DNPA's responsibility to approach cycle hire venues & ask that customers hiring bikes are made aware of the cycling code on Dartmoor. Rob Steemson agreed to feed this back to DNPA.

Public Rights of Way & Access to Land: A number of incidents were reported where people had walked through farmyards &/or farmland &, when challenged, claimed the route is shown on Google Maps or similar on their phones. Some Council Members have contacted DNPA & requested their help in educating the public & raising awareness that not all tracks are public rights of way, which Council supports. A discussion followed on how the CRoW Act 2000 introduced a provision for a cut-off date of 1 January 2026 for the recording of historic rights of way. Any route not recorded on the Definitive Map by this deadline would be extinguished. However, that provision has now been removed & there is currently no date for the implementation of a cut-off date. Further discussions were had on how land may be protected from public right of way claims based on informal public use. A Highways Act Section 31 (6) mapped deposit, with the local authority, provides protection against claims for routes based on informal public use, & it was suggested that landowners may want to supplement that protection with locked gates, signs & challenges to users where use is taking place.

11. **TB including Control Plans for 2022**

The notes of the meeting held with APHA last November were recently received. A number of actions need to be reviewed by Council's TB Working Group before the notes & information are made available to Council & Local Commoners' Associations. It was agreed that Ann Willcocks coordinates a meeting of the TB Working Group to consider the meeting note, action points & approve this year's Cattle Grazier Packs incorporated within the TB Control Plan.

12. Other Business

12.1 Projector & Screen

At recent meetings, Council has used the venue's projector & screen to display information to Members. A charge has now been introduced for hiring this equipment (£60 a time). Members have been asked to consider whether the concept of displaying documents during meetings is useful & if so, whether Council should purchase its own equipment. It was agreed that the secretary obtain some costings in order that the idea can be considered further.

12.2 Drake Field Secure Dog Walking Area

Karla McKecknie, Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer, was invited to visit the proposed site which will provide a much needed, safe environment where dogs can be let off the lead without any risk to the livestock on the moor. Council sent a letter of support for the planning application to West Devon Borough Council.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 6 April 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: *6 April 2022*