

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 6 April 2022.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr A Coaker	Mr R Leigh
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mr J Cooper	Mrs K Little
Mr P Abel	Mr P Cottington (virtually)	Mr M Radmore
Mrs M Alford	Mr W Dracup	Mr M Reddaway
Mr R Ashford	Mr K Edwards	Mr R Steemson
Mr P Cleave	Mrs C Faulkner	Mrs A Willcocks
	Mr G Hill	

Mrs S Sloman (virtually)

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting. He explained that the Secretary was not present in person, but would join the Meeting by a video link set up (thanks to Ann Willcocks), as would Paul Cottington.

Following a request from the Secretary, the Chairman asked that Members be mindful not to interrupt when someone is speaking or talk amongst themselves during Council Meetings as it makes listening to the tape recording used to document the minutes challenging.

Preliminary details were shared of a meeting, to be chaired by Sir Geoffrey Cox QC MP that the NFU are facilitating between Natural England & commoners, which will focus on different parties' perspective on the condition of commons. The meeting is being held on the evening of Thursday 12 May 2022 at the Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown. Further details will follow & initial interest can be registered by emailing southwest@nfu.org.uk.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr C Alford, Mr S Lake, Ms T May, Mr G Mortimore, Mrs P Warren & Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO).

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 8 March 2022 were confirmed & it was agreed that the Chairman sign these when he next meets with the Secretary.

The Chairman thanked Paul Cottington for providing the information on Public Rights of Way & Access to Land which was circulated to Council Members with the minutes.

4. Matters outstanding from previous Meetings:

4.1 Consultation: Government Response to the Landscapes Review

The Chairman thanked Ann Willcocks for formulating Council's response with input from himself, Tracy May & Paul Cottington. A copy is available from the Office upon request.

4.2 Natural England: Common with SSSI not in Agri-Environment Agreement

Council wrote to NE & invited them to tonight's Meeting. Unfortunately, no one was available to attend. Council continues to express its wish to engage with NE in meaningful dialogue to address a growing number of issues.

The Chairman reported that NE has refused a commoner Consent to graze a common with SSSI status & the commoner has been asked to remove their stock from the common ahead of any reduction to the livestock allocation rates of other graziers, despite this grazing being recognised on Council's live register. However, how NE has interpreted this particular commoner's entitlement to graze is a concern to Council, & the Dartmoor Commons Owners Association (DCOA) who has written to Council & NE setting out their understanding of the different common owner's right to graze. In this case DCOA believes the right to be proprietorial rights & not surplus rights which would be determined annually. This matter will now be considered by Council & an update will be given in due course.

4.3 News Article for March 2022

Council was not able to pull an article together for publication at the end of March. As the DNPA had issued a news release titled 'Love Moor Life: Protect wildlife & animals', the secretary suggested that Council liaise with DNPA's press office & possibly work together on future articles. However, Mary Alford, Charlotte Faulkner, Rob Steemson & Ann Willcocks agreed to work on a draft article for release in the summer.

4.4 TB Working Group: Meeting update

The Chairman thanked Council's TB Working Group which had met to consider the action points & queries raised following their meeting with APHA. The relevant information & Cattle Grazier Packs have been circulated to Local Commoners Associations

5. Correspondence received

A list of correspondence received was circulated to Council Members with the agenda. The secretary explained that correspondence received by email or by letter is recorded on the list. However, the 'cut-off point' for the correspondence list is when the agenda is circulated to Council Members. Correspondence received after then will be recorded on the next list.

Copies of correspondence received are available to Council Members only.

6. Matters brought forward at the direction of the Chairman

6.1 Dartmoor Wildfire Plan: Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Bid

The Chairman advised that he has been in discussions with a number of Council Members over the notion of Council taking the lead & putting in an application for FiPL funding to progress a Dartmoor Wildfire Plan. The objective being to create a strategic plan, for combatting wildfires, over the whole of Dartmoor, based on the model used by the Forest of Dartmoor. The initial bid would be to cover costs

of the preliminary work to include collating the different commons fire plans, entering them onto QGIS mapping & identifying any gaps where fire breaks need to be created &/or access improved. An application would then be made for further funding to carry out the necessary work. The Chairman asked if Council would be willing to support the idea. Following a discussion, Kate Little proposed that Council takes the lead on creating a Dartmoor Wildfire Plan to ensure it's a farming led project & puts in an application for FiPL funding. Ann Willcocks seconded the proposal & it was agreed that Council progress this.

Ann Willcocks asked for clarity on how Natural England would view a situation where a common carries out a controlled burn which then moves to a wild fire, despite commoners efforts to prevent this from happening & abiding by the 'rules'. She asked if NE would penalise the common for something that is not a breach under an HLS agreement but an accident. The Chairman agreed to take this point up with NE & press them to act consistently across all commons.

7. Grazing Rights Issues Working Group

As advised at the last meeting, it is to be proposed that this be the new name for the 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. The Terms of Reference will be updated & brought to Council for formalisation.

8. Environment Bill & Conservation Covenants – Update by Paul Cottingham

Paul Cottingham provided the following update:

The Environment Act, which became law in 2021, acts as the UK's new framework of environmental protection. Once the UK left the EU, rules on nature protection, water quality, clean air & other environmental protections that originally came from Brussels were at risk. This Act is intended to fill the gap.

A conservation covenant is a new type of land management commitment, which will secure the long-term management of land. Conservation covenants must have a conservation purpose, & is intended to be for the public good. They have been created under Part 5 of the Environment Act (2021), with a complex legal regime behind them. They are essentially a voluntary but legally binding agreement between a landowner & a designated 'responsible body', such as a conservation charity, public body or for-profit body, to conserve the natural or heritage features of the land. So, "conservation" in this context not only relates to the natural environment or natural resources of land, but also to places of archaeological, architectural, artistic, cultural or historic interest. They will be legally binding not only on the landowner who agrees to them, but also on subsequent owners of the land. Regulations will need to be passed to bring the relevant parts of the Environment Act on conservation covenants into force.

We are now waiting further guidance from Defra. The NFU have seen a couple of draft versions on this & have sent back comments. It's anticipated that additional guidance won't be available until sometime next year.

The Chairman thanked Paul for providing Council with this update.

9. Members representing Council at Meetings:

- **Our Upland Commons Local Area Group***: 15 March 2022 - Mary Alford gave her apologies
- **Dartmoor Working Group**: 23 March 2022 – John Cooper
- **Our Upland Commons Partnership Meeting***: 31 March 2022 – Philip French

*Notes available.

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

10. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

Karla McKechnie had provided a copy of her report in advance of tonight's meeting which the Chairman read out in her absence. A copy of the report is attached (appendix A).

The secretary thanked Charlotte Faulkner & her husband for their swift assistance in collecting an unmarked colt that had been brought in off the commons.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 25 May 2022 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

12. Confidential Matters (to be discussed 'in committee').

As the only matter was to approve the Minutes from the last meeting, the Chairman proposed that this be postponed until the 'in committee' session at the next Council Meeting.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending & declared the meeting closed.

Signed: *Philip French*

Date: *25 May 2022*

LIVESTOCK PROTECTION OFFICER
REPORT TO COMMONERS' COUNCIL
6th April 2022

KARLA McKECHNIE

I have attended two meetings recently with the Police, one with Sgt. Seth Saunders of Chudleigh Police and the second at Tavistock. Both wanted to maintain contact with me over dog attacks and rural matters. Tavistock Police are out and about regularly on the moor and are really determined to help with the dog attack problem.

Sgt. Saunders wanted me to ask Council if any of you would be interested in machinery DNA to aid in thefts from farms. He would be happy to attend a meeting if anyone wanted more information.

Tavistock Police are keen to trial fluorescent collars on ponies in areas where we have high numbers of animal deaths. The Police, together with Dartmoor Forest Parish Council, have hopefully secured some funding to help trial the collars. A couple of farmers who run ponies on commons beside the B£"! have agreed but I wonder if anyone else here would be interested. Please contact me.

A pony hit by a car on Whitchurch Down and severely injured with a huge gash on its side, was taken back to the farm very promptly after I called the owner. My thanks to Mary Alford for her immediate response and the pony is doing well at home. I am always grateful to the many farmers who act quickly when I call them.

I have received vast amounts of calls and social media messages about a certain farmer's sheep/ponies in the west quarter that are constantly where they shouldn't be i.e. on busy roads or in other people's fields or with lambing problems. I have alerted Council's secretary to this.

I will give an update on dog attacks and RTA statistics next time.

Karla McKechnie