

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 20 July 2022.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr K Edwards	Mr M Radmore
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mrs C Faulkner	Mr J Reddaway
Mr P Abel	Mr P Heard	Mr J Shears
Mrs M Alford	Mr E Humber (NFU)	Mr R Steemson
Mr A Coaker	Mr R Leigh	Mrs P Warren
Mr J Cooper	Mrs K Little	Ms A Webber
Mr W Dracup	Ms T May	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.

Tim Ferry (Trustee of charity, Moor Trees), asked 'What change in Defra funding for hill farmers needs to take place for the 2000 hectares of new valley native broadleaf woodland in the National Park's Management Plan to happen by 2026?'. The Chairman briefly responded that any discussions Council may have with Defra on funding for hill farmers would focus on appropriate support to enable commoners to uphold a viable business. Tree planting is not within Council's remit & Council would be unlikely to condone any large scale planting of trees on Dartmoor commons.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting. He thanked the retiring Council Members, Crispin Alford, Gordon Mortimore, Michael Reddaway & Stuart Lake, for their input & commitment to Council over many years. The newly elected Council Members, Peter Heard, James Reddaway, John Shears & Ali Webber briefly introduced themselves.

The Chairman advised Council Members that after the formalities of the Annual Meeting, there would be a short break followed by a number of updates & then a presentation from James Sharpe (Strategic Planning & Projects Manager, DNPA).

Dartmoor Marshals

The Chairman reported that DNPA have appointed marshals to support the work of its Rangers engaging, encouraging & educating the public to act responsibly & adhere to the Byelaws.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr R Ashford, Mr P Cleave, Mr P Cottington, Mr J Jordan & 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 ahead of tonight's meeting. No comments were received & the Minutes of the Meeting held 25 May 2022 were confirmed & signed.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chairman read out his report. A copy is attached (Appendix A).

5. Elections:

5.1 Election of Chairman

The Vice-Chairman, Layland Branfield, took the chair. On behalf of Council, he thanked Philip French, for the work he has carried out over the past year, much of which has been very time consuming, has taken a lot of effort & a tremendous amount of commitment. He also thanked the Chairman's wife, Charlotte French, for the support she has given Philip in his role as Chairman. The Vice-Chairman asked for nominations for the post of Chairman. Ann Willcocks proposed that Philip French continue for a further year. John Shears seconded the proposal. As no further nominations were put forward, Philip French accepted the position & was duly re-elected as Chairman for the year 2022-2023. He thanked Council Members for their support.

5.2 Election of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman thanked Layland Branfield for his support & advice during the past year. He asked for nominations for the post of Vice-Chairman. Kate Little proposed that Layland Branfield continue for another year & Anton Coaker seconded the proposal. As there were no further nominations, Layland Branfield accepted the position & was duly elected as Vice-Chairman for the year 2022-2023.

5.3 Confirmation of Honorarium

The Chairman & Vice-Chairman are currently allocated an honorarium payment of £5000 & £1000 respectively. The Chairman confirmed that he was prepared to continue with his role with the current honorarium offered & John Shears proposed that the existing payment be made for the coming year. Ann Willcocks seconded the proposal. The Vice-Chairman confirmed that he was also content with the existing honorarium. Ann Willcocks proposed that the current payment be made for the coming year & this was seconded by Anton Coaker.

Ann Willcocks caveated that as the work load increases; the honorarium amount does need to be considered. The Chairman advised Members that he may consider setting up an independent group to look at the workload of Council Members & its Officers & how they may be remunerated going forward.

5.4 Appointment by DNPA of Representative for Owners of Common Land

Under Section 3 (2) (d) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Russell Ashford was re-appointed by the Authority to represent the interests of owners of common land on the Council. This is for a period of four years ending 1 July 2026.

5.5 Appointment of Veterinary Surgeon to Council

As advised by the Chairman in his introduction, Stuart Lake is standing down. Under Section 3 (2) (e) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Council needs to consider filling this position with a veterinary surgeon whose practice does not include the care of any livestock grazing in Dartmoor National Park. Council

Members were asked to advise the Secretary of any potential candidates that could be approached.

5.6 Appointment/Formalisation of Co-opted Positions

Under Section 3 (3) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, there are 2 co-opted positions available. One is customarily an NFU position (filled by Paul Cottington, who has recently left the NFU) & the other position is currently vacant. Council Members had previously discussed the co-opted positions in the confidential section of the last Council Meeting. It was agreed to invite Ed Humber (Assistant Devon County Advisor, NFU South West) to fill the NFU position & ask Paul Cottington to remain as the other co-opted member until his term ends next year, when the position will be reviewed again. This arrangement was formally proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Anton Coaker with all Council Members in favour. The Chairman formally welcomed Ed Humber to Council & gave him an opportunity to briefly introduce himself.

6. Council Members Code of Conduct & Declaration of Eligibility

Currently, Council does not use either of these policies or documents. Following a discussion, a proposal by Charlotte Faulkner, seconded by Penny Warren, that as a statutory body, Council should give further thought to having something along these lines in place, was agreed. The Secretary will draw up initial draft documents for consideration by Council Members.

7. Review of Council's Working Groups & the members

At this time, Council has three formal working groups operating. In accordance with Council's Standing Order no.7, the members of these Groups were reviewed & the Terms of Reference for each Group updated to determine how it will run for the next twelve months. There are currently two committees appointed to consider different grievances in accordance with the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Schedule 2, section 6. The Members & Terms of Reference were reviewed.

7.1 Peatland Working Group

Philip French (Chairman), Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Mary Alford & Anton Coaker (Council's Representatives on Mires Restoration Project), Tracy May, & Colin Abel (Co-opted - Forest of Dartmoor Commoners Association Chairman). Proposed by John Shears & seconded by Phil Abel. Terms of Reference unchanged.

7.2 Rights Issues Working Group

Philip French (Chairman), Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Anton Coaker, Robert Leigh, Ann Willcocks & Sara Sloman (Secretary). Proposed by Philip French & seconded by John Cooper. Terms of Reference unchanged.

7.3 TB Working Group

Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Colin Abel (Co-opted), Mary Alford, Anton Coaker, Will Dracup, Ed Humber (NFU) (proposed by Ann Willcocks & seconded by Anton Coaker), James Reddaway (proposed by Anton Coaker & seconded by Layland Branfield), Helen Radmore (Co-opted) & Ann Willcocks. Terms of Reference updated with new members accordingly.

7.4 Grievance Committee: Appointment of Small Grazier Representative in the North Quarter

Stephen Nankivell (Independent Chairman), Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), John Cooper (Grazier Representative for the North Quarter) & Tom Stratton (Duchy of Cornwall Representative). The Chairman proposed that as these Members are in the process of considering the grievance, they continue with the process. Anton Coaker seconded the proposal. Terms of Reference unchanged.

7.5 Grievance Committee: Removal of Common Rights Registration (land at Cholwichtown) from Council's Register

The Members of this new committee were appointed in the confidential section of the last Council Meeting. These being Russell Ashford (Commons Owners Representative), George Hill (Grazier Representative for the West Quarter), Kate Little (Small Grazier Representative for the North Quarter) & Tracy May (Grazier Representative for the North Quarter). Russell Ashford will Chair the Committee. The Terms of Reference had been circulated to all Council Members ahead of it tonight's meeting.

John Shears questioned why the committee wasn't made up of Council representatives from each quarter. The Chairman explained that it was only those four Members that had volunteered to be on the Committee. Furthermore, a number of Council Members were not able to sit on the committee as they were part of the Working Group that had considered the matter & recommended the decision to remove the registration from Council's Register. John Shears expressed his wish to sit on this grievance committee.

Mary Alford strongly objected that the small grazier representative in the North Quarter be part of this particular grievance committee as they are involved with an ongoing grievance on another matter. The Chairman explained that this had previously been considered not to be an issue, with input from the solicitor advising Council of the procedures relating to this other grievance, & reiterated that the committee members had been formally appointed in the confidential section of the last Council Meeting. The Chairman proposed that the Terms of Reference be approved. Mary Alford continued with her objection & proposed that the small grazier representative in the North Quarter stands down from this particular committee. The counterproposal was seconded by Penny Warren. Council Members voted by secret ballot with 7 votes in favour, 13 votes against & 1 abstention. With the counterproposal defeated, the Chairman proposed that the Terms of Reference be approved, with the addition of John Shears on the committee. Anton Coaker seconded the proposal. With the majority of Council Members voting in favour, this motion was carried.

8. Review of who Represents Council on other Groups.

Council reviewed & updated its record of the organisations that Council is represented on & by whom. Representatives will be required to give a brief report to Council following each meeting they attend. This only applies if a formal note or minute is not anticipated & circulated. A list of the organisations that Council is represented on & by who will be circulated to all Council Members.

Dartmoor Hill Farm Project: John Shears agreed to represent Council on this Group with Phil Abel acting as deputy.

South West Peatland Partnership: Secretary to enquire if Group is still active as Council does not appear to have been invited to any meetings for some time.

Uplands Stakeholder Forum: Secretary to write & ascertain which organisations are members & whether Council can have a seat.

9. Proposed Dates for:

9.1 Stallion Accreditation Day

This will be held on Wednesday 19 October 2022. Neil Cole has kindly agreed to hold it at the Prison Farm, Princetown. Charlotte Faulkner will ensure that the pony crush is disinfected & available if required. Further details will be sent to pony keepers & Local Commoners Associations at the beginning of September.

9.2 Local Commoners' Association Meeting

The Chairman reported that this was well received last year & proposed holding a similar event this year. It was agreed that the Secretary go ahead & organise this event.

9.3 Sheep Prohibition Period

Council agreed the dates for this year's mandatory sheep clearance. The South moor clear period will be from 12-26 November & the North moor clear period will be from 19 November – 3 December. Official notice will follow in due course.

10. Date of Next Meeting

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

The Chairman declared the formal part of the meeting closed & reminded Council Members there would be a short break before the presentations began.

Signed: *Philip French*

Date: *7 September 2022*

Presentations:

- James Sharpe: Update on Dynamic Dartmoor – A bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Tracy May: Peatland Project – Update on commoner liaison monitoring
- Philip French: ELMs Test & Trials Project Board Update (Appendix B)

Chairman's report to Council – July 2022

Council has been able to return to a more normal meeting schedule over the last year, whilst remaining aware of all Covid-19 requirements.

Council's biennial elections were held in June. Crispin Alford, Michael Reddaway and Gordon Mortimore decided to step down as Council members. We thank them for their many years of service on Council.

We welcome James Redddaway, Peter Heard and John Shears as Council members, entitled to graze more than 10 livestock units. We also welcome Ali Webber as a grazier in the South Quarter, entitled to graze less than 10 livestock units. This brings those Council members elected by commoners up to the full number for the first time in many years!

Thanks to Sara for all her efforts in managing Council business and running the office with often complex issues to address and to Karla for her work on behalf of commoners, which this year has included a particularly nasty outbreak of strangles in ponies.

Council has employed Laura in a support role to Sara. At present she is working closely with Sara, principally dealing with the registers and checking the information Council holds is accurate. Laura's employment is on an initial temporary basis with flexi working.

I would also like to thank those Council members who have put so much effort into helping Council with replies to consultations from Defra which are noted in Council's minutes – anyone wishing to see the replies, please contact Sara at the office. The support and advice of Council's working groups has also been invaluable.

We continue to be involved with the National Park over their by-laws review and other issues.

Following a meeting, organised principally by Sir Geoffrey Cox, around continued concerns of stocking requirements being requested for some agri environment agreements and SSSI designations, we are engaged in discussions with the various parties involved to try to find practical solutions.

As a result of requests from Council's Peatland Working Group for more farmer monitoring of the effects on commoners and livestock from the peatland work, funding has been allocated in the latest round of peatland work. Tracy is organising this monitoring.

Council's TB working group continues to engage with Animal & Plant Health Agency (State Vets) around the TB control plan and this year included concerns regarding the effects of the change to six monthly routine testing on leared herds having to be temporarily removed in the summer grazing period.

Note provided by Philip French, 20 July 2022

Dartmoor Test & Trials – July 2022

The first Dartmoor Environmental Land Management (ELM) Test & Trial concluded late 2021 & the final report, as submitted to Defra, can be downloaded, (*see below*).

Recently Defra has offered an opportunity to develop some of the findings from the first Dartmoor Test & Trial. An outline proposal, to build on two aspects of the first Test & Trial was submitted by the Project Board, established to oversee the first Test & Trial. The proposal focuses on:

- the application of Payment by Results on common land; &
- the governance required to administrate ELMs on commons.

This outline proposal has been accepted by Defra & we have been asked to submit a formal, costed proposal. However, the proposal has to be received by Defra before the end of July & there is no guarantee the proposal will be successful. It is also possible that the Project Board will be unable to provide all the information Defra require within the extremely tight timetable, however we intend to do our best.

The strong message the Project Board received from the farming community during the first Test & Trial was that there was support to engage in the development of ELMs & to try to ensure ELMs is fit for purpose on common land. If successful, the second Dartmoor Test & Trial would be one of only a handful of proposals addressing commons in England.

The application will seek to address how a Payment by Results reward structure can be applied to commons & what form of governance is required to ensure those that carry out the work are correctly rewarded. The work achieved during the first Test & Trials will be essential to this second proposal.

How the second Dartmoor Test & Trial will be undertaken has yet to be decided although engagement with farmers, & particularly with commoners & landowners will be essential, & farmer participation will be stressed within the proposal.

Once again, the National Park Authority has kindly agreed to administer & host the project but it remains a partnership initiative between commoners, farmers, landowners, Natural England & the Authority. Importantly, we have also sought to include the Rural Payments Agency in the second Test & Trial. We believe this is important so they can input their expertise & experience.

A copy of the proposal will be made available. Meanwhile if you have any questions please contact the project board via Chris Giles (DNPA) who is leading for the Authority.

The first Dartmoor test & Trial report can be downloaded from:

<https://www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk/post/dartmoor-elm-test-trial-final-report>

Note provided by the Dartmoor Test & Trial Project Board, 15th July 2022.