

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

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

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr K Edwards	Ms T May
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mrs C Faulkner	Mr M Radmore
Mr P Abel	Mr P Heard	Mr J Reddaway
Mrs M Alford	Mr G Hill	Mr J Shears
Mr R Ashford	Mr E Humber (NFU)	Mr R Steemson
Mr A Coaker	Mr J Jordan	Mr T Stratton
Mr A Cooper	Mr R Leigh	Mrs P Warren
Mr J Cooper	Mrs K Little	Mrs A Willcocks
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting. This was followed by the introduction of Richard Drysdale (Director of Conservation & Communities for Dartmoor National Park Authority).

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr P Cleave, Mr P Cottington, Mr W Dracup (Mr A Cooper attended instead) & Miss A Webber.

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 20 July 2022 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters outstanding from previous Meetings:

4.1 Appointment of Veterinary Surgeon to Council

The names of potential candidates were put forward & the Secretary will make further enquiries prior to contacting them.

4.2 Local Commoners Association Meeting

This has been arranged for Wednesday 2 November 2022. To be held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown commencing at 7:30pm. The Chairman requested that Council Members attend. Further details will be circulated at a later date.

5. Correspondence received

A list of correspondence received was circulated to Council Members with the agenda. No further questions were received.

6. Matters brought forward at the direction of the Chairman

6.1 South Dartmoor SSSI: Appeal against Refusal of Consent

Council has been notified that an appeal has been lodged with the Secretary of State over Natural England's decision to refuse a commoner consent to continue to graze a SSSI. Council has been given an opportunity to make comments

regarding the Refused Consent. Council Members were asked to familiarise themselves with the correspondence & make relevant comments to aid the Rights Issues Working Group to formulate a response.

6.2 South Dartmoor SSSI: Unit 61 (Part of CL190 - Willingswall & Hentor Warren)

Council has been made aware that Natural England (NE) has written to a number of people asking for views on management recommendations which they deem necessary to achieve a favourable condition on this common. However, Council has not received a copy of this letter, despite being the Statutory Body responsible for the maintenance of the commons. It was agreed that Council write to NE to question why a copy had not been received directly & raise concerns that the letter was not sent to all relevant & necessary parties.

6.3 Proposal sought by DNPA to use Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 (Part III Section 10 (4) (c)) to reduce risk of fire.

The Chairman reported that, on behalf of Council, he had given support to DNPA to use a provision under Council's Act to bring in a temporary ban on the use of BBQs & open fires across all of the Dartmoor Commons with effect from 10 August 2022 for a period of 28 days. The ban was introduced in response to the prolonged dry weather & the increase in risk of wildfires.

6.4 New Defra Minister

Ed Humber (NFU) gave a brief update on Ranil Jayawardena who was just been appointed Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. The Minister has previously been very supportive of agriculture & we await to see who makes up his team.

6.5 Pigs on Brent Moor Common

The Chairman declared a conflict of interest so the matter is being overseen by the Vice-Chairman with the help of Anton Coaker. From the Chair, the Vice-Chairman reported that the new owner of Brent Moor common allegedly unloaded a drove of pigs onto an area of privately owned land contiguous to the common. Inevitably, the pigs have since strayed on to the common where the majority of them remain. It was reported that both Council's Secretary & the Livestock Protection Officer have received numerous communications raising concerns about the legality & welfare of these pigs as well as the damage they are causing to the area & the potential risk to members of the public. Initial contact with the owner requesting that the pigs be removed was unsuccessful. Council is liaising with other interested parties in its attempts to address the matter. The Chairman returned to the Chair.

7. Pony Management

The following proposal from the Chairman was circulated with the agenda:

All ponies depastured on the common as at 15th January each year must be microchipped. All microchip numbers will be logged with Council as the statutory body.

The Chairman explained that he considers the management of ponies on the commons to be a priority for Council. Echoed by the fact that Council has been challenged about the accuracy of its pony derogation records which exempts ponies correctly listed on it from being microchipped & passported.

After the agenda for tonight's meeting had been circulated, Council became aware of the Dartmoor Hill Pony Association's (DHPA) application for a FiPL grant (Funding in Protected Landscapes) which contained a proposal to microchip ponies belonging to their members. The Chairman gave Joss Hibbs, secretary to DHPA, an opportunity to give a statement to Council Members on the application & take questions. Furthermore, DNPA, who oversee the FiPL initiative, have arranged a meeting between representatives from the different pony organisations on Dartmoor to discuss a potential collaboration for a Dartmoor wide pony management plan.

In view of this & in order to further consider the comments & suggestions received on this matter since the agenda was circulated, the Chairman proposed to defer a vote on his original motion to Council's next meeting in October.

The motion to defer a vote on the Chairman's original proposal was carried with 21 Members voting in favour, none against & 1 abstention.

8. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Rob Steemson reported the following:

- The **Farming in Protected Landscapes** Panel next meet on 28th September & the FiPL team would welcome the opportunity to engage with as many farmers/commoners as possible with potential applications. All information available on the DNPA website <https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/farming/farming-in-protected-landscapes>
- Following the **Byelaws** consultation last year, staff have read through approx. 4000 responses. An Update Paper will be presented to Authority Members on 14th October. Council's Chairman will attend a meeting with other representatives to discuss the proposed amendments.
- The next **South West Peatland Partnership** meeting is on 11th October & will include a site visit to Prison Farm, Princetown.
- The **Dartmoor Marshalls**, who have undertaken daily evening patrols since late July, finish on 10th September. A full report on this summer's visitor management will be presented to the Visitor Management Group, which Council's Chairman attends, in November.
- Dr Kevin Bishop (CEO, DNPA), Philip French (Chairman of Dartmoor Commoners' Council) & Russell Ashford (Chairman of Dartmoor Hill Farm Project) have written a joint letter to the new **Secretary of State, Ranil Jayawardena**, inviting them to Dartmoor.
- The Cabinet Office are advertising for a new Chair for the **Dartmoor Steering Group**; the Body that seeks to reconcile military training & National Park purposes on Dartmoor.
- **Ten Tors**: Rob will attend the Policy meeting this week & the Team Managers Training Day is being held on Saturday 8 October 2022. John Cooper has agreed to attend & Council's Chairman expressed his thanks to John.

9. News Article

Suggested topics for the autumn news article were pony drifts, calving, sheep gathering & traffic. It was agreed that the group designated with the task of producing these articles put a piece together & send to the secretary to submit to media outlets.

10. Members representing Council at Meetings:

- **Dartmoor Working Group:** 21 June – Philip French & John Cooper
- **Our Upland Commons Local Area Group*:** 21 June – Mary Alford (apologies)
- **DNPA National Park Forum:** 6 July – Philip French
- **DNPA Partnership Board Inaugural Meeting:** 25 July – Philip French

*Notes available.

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

11. Update on Dartmoor Wildfire Plan (FiPL application)

The Chairman reported that the FiPL panel have agreed to Council's application, subject to further discussions regarding the initial funds requested. We await official confirmation, but it is understood that the Panel consider the Wildfire Plan to be a bigger job than the application suggests & recommends that funding be awarded in phases. A further update will be given when we know more.

12. Other Business

12.1 Notice of Grievance

Mary Alford questioned why this matter was not on the agenda. She was advised that the matter is still being considered by the Committee, who are checking facts & in the process of drafting their response. An update will be given as soon as practicable.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 19 October 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: 19th October 2022

IMPORTANT DATES FOR 2022:

Stallion Accreditation Day – Wednesday 19 October

Local Commoner Association Meeting – Wednesday 2 November

Sheep Prohibition Period - South Moor: 12 November to 26 November

Sheep Prohibition Period - North Moor: 19 November to 3 December