

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 19 October 2022.

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman	Mr J Cooper	Mrs K Little
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair	Mr P Cottington	Ms T May
Mr P Abel	Mr W Dracup	Mr J Reddaway
Mrs M Alford	Mr K Edwards	Mr T Stratton
Mr R Ashford	Mrs C Faulkner	Mrs P Warren
Mr P Cleave	Mr G Hill	Miss A Webber
Mr A Coaker	Mr J Jordan	Mrs A Willcocks
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	Miss L Talbot

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting & introduced Laura Talbot, whose role is to assist the Secretary, primarily in reviewing Council's Register of Common Rights.

He advised of a forthcoming Rural Payments Agency Common Stakeholder Group meeting & asked Council Members to contact the Secretary with any points to be raised.

The Chairman reported that Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) are hoping to undertake further Test & Trials subject to final confirmation from Defra. Details will be given in due course.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr P Heard, Mr E Humber (NFU), Mr R Leigh, Mr M Radmore, Mr J Shears, Mr R Steemson

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 September 2022 were confirmed & signed. There was a subsequent request to see documentation relating to Council having been challenged on the derogation (item 7) and Council is happy to provide this, if available, as it was acknowledged that this may have been verbal rather than in written form. The confidential minutes of the Meeting held in committee on 7 September 2022 were read out to Council Members & agreed as they solely related to the approval of confidential minutes from 25 May 2022.

4. Financial Accounts: Year ending 30 June 2022

Draft copies had been circulated to members. Council is working with a deficit due to additional office support to assist the Secretary & legal fees incurred. A number of queries were answered & the accounts were formally approved by Council. The Chairman & Secretary were commended for keeping the deficit so small despite the increased work undertaken during the year.

5. Matters outstanding from previous meetings:

5.1 Appointment of Veterinary Surgeon to Council

A potential candidate had been contacted but unfortunately is unable to commit to the position. The secretary will provide details of the role to Will Dracup, who has offered to contact Western Counties Veterinary Association.

5.2 Local Commoners Association Meeting

This will be held on Wednesday 2nd November at Two Bridges Hotel & members are invited to attend.

5.3 Pigs on Brent Moor update

The Chair stepped aside for this item due to a conflict of interest. The Vice-Chairman reported that there have been several attempts to remove the pigs which have fallen through at the last-minute meaning they are still on the common. Karla has spoken with the owner many times & is ensuring he deals with any welfare issues in a timely manner. However, Council's Secretary, the Livestock Protection Officer & DNPA continue to receive a large number of complaints regarding these pigs. Council acknowledges the damage being done to the common & appreciate the help being offered locally. The efforts to address the matter will continue. The Chairman returned to the Chair.

5.4 News article

A piece has been sent to the usual media outlets & all contributors were thanked for their input. Karla is to appear on breakfast radio later this week to talk about the article.

6. Correspondence received

All items of correspondence received before the cut-off date (when the agenda is sent) were circulated & it was confirmed that this includes emails.

7. Matters brought forward at the discretion of the chair

None

8. Pony Management

At the last meeting it was proposed & agreed to delay the discussion on microchipping ponies as the Dartmoor Hill Pony Association (DHPA) had submitted a proposal to the Funding in Protected Landscape (FiPL) panel which included microchipping ponies belonging to their members. The Chairman advised that, as this proposal is being considered for an initial pilot, he considered it would not be right, at this stage, to move forward with Council's own plan. He hoped that the results from DHPA's pilot scheme could feed into Council's consultation on pony management which is now scheduled for the new year.

9. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

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

With reference to the increase in dog attacks, Members asked if more could be done to promote Dog Walking Fields; designated enclosed & secure fields where people can bring their dogs. Will Dracup agreed to look into DNPA promoting these areas on their website & also promoting dog training for moor walking.

10. Natural England: South Dartmoor SSSI

10.1 Appeal against Refusal of Consent Notice – Interested Parties

The Chairman thanked those members who helped draft a quick & robust response to Defra. Council has received an acknowledgement advising that the appeal will be dealt with by a public inquiry. The date is yet to be set & the Chairman expects Council to appear at the inquiry.

10.2 Unit 61 (Part of CL190 – Willingswall & Hentor Warren)

The Chairman advised that a letter had been sent to Natural England (NE) querying why Council had not been asked to comment on the management recommendations deemed necessary to achieve a favourable condition on this common & to raise concerns that not all relevant & necessary parties had been consulted. We await an acknowledgement or response.

11. Dartmoor Wildfire Plan: FiPL Application

The application has been agreed in principle & a meeting now needs to be arranged with relevant parties to progress the Project.

12. Any reports from members representing Council at meetings

12.1 Dartmoor Common Owners Association: 16 Sept – Philip French

12.2 Dartmoor Working Party (MOD): 21 Sept - Philip French & John Cooper

12.3 Vision Zero South West Initiative*: 21 Sept – attended by Karla McKechnie

12.4 South West Peatland Partnership: 11 Oct – Mary Alford & Philip French

13. Notice of grievance

The following statement was read out:

In June 2021, Council received formal notice of complaint from solicitors acting on behalf of Mary Alford & supported by 6 other commoners regarding the appointment of the small grazier representative in the North Quarter at the 2020 elections. Council Members voted to appoint a solicitor to advise on the correct procedure to be followed. A committee was set up, with an independent chairman, to consider the grievance in accordance with Section 7 (6) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985. The committee was given full delegated powers of the Council & it was agreed that the decision of the Committee would be final & reported to Council in due course. The Committee has carefully considered the grievance & all of the representations made, which included opportunity for the lead complainant & their legal representative to be heard by the Committee.

After careful consideration of all the facts, the Committee's decision is not to accept the complaint.

The committee were thanked for their time & work in considering this grievance.

14. Meeting dates for 2023

Council discussed the proposed meeting dates, subject to venue availability. The dates will be confirmed at the next Council Meeting.

15. Date of next meeting: 7 December 2022

Signed: *Philip French*

Date: 7 December 2022

LIVESTOCK PROTECTION OFFICER
REPORT TO COMMONERS' COUNCIL
19th October 2022

Dog Attacks

89 dog attacks this year. I report all of them to the police and obtain a crime reference number.

A very bad dog incident on 29th June, where two dogs got loose on Pew Tor at 12.30 p.m. were then found six and a half hours later in fields at Collaton having killed 4 sheep and attacked a further nine very badly. These nine had to be put down later in the evening and following morning. The police responded and sent out DNA forensics the next day for added evidence if needed. The dog owner has admitted full responsibility and liability and has paid substantial compensation and disposal costs. The police will be issuing a severe dog control order and it is of the utmost importance that if these dogs are seen at large or loose I must be told. It was the farmers' choice to take compensation rather than prosecute.

Please keep informing me about any dog attacks.

Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs)

123 RTAs so far this year. This is higher than last year. The Vision Zero South West Road Safety partnership recently obtained funding for livestock reflective neckbands. The neckbands are initially being trialled on livestock along the B3212 road from Peek Hill to Princetown. It will be interesting to see whether we get any animals killed that are wearing these.

It's been a very bad summer for ticks, lame sheep and louping-ill. There were still a lot of sheep in their coats in August. I know some farmers are trying to shear the ewes and wean the lambs at the same time, but Mid-August seems quite late to me considering the hot weather we've had.

There have been a few cows lost due to bad calvings through the summer.

Drifts

I would like to stress that the ponies I saw at the drifts and those I had reports of, all looked very fit and well and ready for the winter.

Pigs

Pigs on Brent Moor have taken up a considerable amount of my time and it's looking though they're going to for the foreseeable future.

Rural Crime Initiative

It's good to see that we have a meeting arranged for 22nd November 2022 at Parke. I'll give an update at the next meeting.

KARLA