

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

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

Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman
Mr P Abel
Mrs M Alford
Mr R Ashford
Mr P Cleave
Mr K Edwards

Mr P Heard
Mr G Hill
Mr J Jordan
Mr R Leigh
Mrs K Little
Ms T May

Mr M Radmore
Mr J Reddaway
Mr J Shears
Mr R Steemson
Mr T Stratton
Mrs A Willcocks

Miss L Talbot

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting & began with a time of reflection following the passing of Brian Lavis, a long-standing, former Member of Council.

The Secretary's absence was explained. Sara is convalescing & doing some work from home. She will be back in the office in the New Year.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr L Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Mr A Coaker, Mr J Cooper, Mr P Cottington, Mr W Dracup, Mrs C Faulkner, Mrs P Warren, Mrs Ali Webber & 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 19 October 2022 were confirmed & signed.

4. Matters outstanding from previous meetings:

4.1 Pigs on Brent Moor

The Chairman once again declared a conflict of interest. A statement was read out on behalf of the Vice-Chairman who could not attend tonight's meeting. Layland has spoken at length with the owner of the pigs. In summary, apparently there are 5/6 pigs remaining & the owner would like to leave them out as an ecological experiment over winter. Seemingly, he has been advised that pigs are used to encourage the habitat to change. He would invite Council Members to visit the site in the spring following the pilot experiment.

Karla also provided an update saying that she's had reports of a skinny sow & would be very concerned about the welfare of the pigs were they left out over winter.

A lengthy discussion ensued with a number of concerns raised: the state of the common & Natural England's lack of interest in working with Council to take any action; the welfare of the pigs & the potential impact this will have on Karla's workload over the coming weeks; the legality of the pigs being on the common & the fact that the owner has made no attempt to register his intention to put these animals on the common & follow the legal requirements of Council. Those Council Members that have visited the site or seen photographs confirmed that the damage is very bad & the area is a mess.

It was agreed that Council needs to write formally to the owner of the pigs, as a follow on to its letter sent at the end of the summer & to the letter sent by the Dartmoor Commons Owners Association. The letter needs to express the concerns raised, the procedures that should have been followed & request that the pigs are removed by the end of the year. Members were not opposed to the idea of an ecological experiment but want this to be carried out on the owner's private land with the pigs are fenced in.

This will be relayed back to Layland as Vice-Chairman.

4.2 News Article

Praise & thanks had been received for Council's previous article titled Animals Grazing the Moor. The next release is due in January & suggested topics include TB testing & snow. Any further suggestions are invited to be sent to Ann Willcocks who will work on the article with Mary Alford, Charlotte Faulkner & Rob Steemson.

4.3 Natural England: South Dartmoor SSSI Unit 61 Part CL190 (WW&HW)

Council has now had an acknowledgement to its letter giving comments & observations on the draft management plan. Natural England have advised that they are now considering all comments received & reviewing the mechanisms available to them to enable the high grazing levels on this site to be addressed so that favourable condition for the protected habitats on this site can be restored.

The Chairman reported that Council has not received any further details or date regarding the public inquiry about the appeal against the Refusal of Consent Notice.

5. Correspondence Received

All details have been circulated & Council Members can request copies if required.

6. Matters brought forward at the discretion of the chair:

6.1 Discussions with Natural England (NE)

Following on from the open meeting with NE in May, organised by the NFU & chaired by Sir Geoffrey Cox QC MP, the Chairman reported that Council has been involved in two further local meetings. The Chairman thanked Dr Kevin Bishop (DNPA) for facilitating these meetings. It was agreed that maintaining a dialogue with NE is vital & to enable this the participating organisations jointly fund the appointment of an independent Chairman &/or Facilitator to consult with Commoners on the challenges around finding the right condition for Dartmoor & look to the future delivery of agri-environment schemes.

Following a lengthy discussion, it was noted that some Council Members were against Council funding an outside Facilitator. However, the general consensus was that using a Facilitator to continue these essential discussions with NE was the best option.

A proposal (made by John Shears & seconded by Tracy May) was put forward that Council agrees in principle to contribute to funding an independent Chairman &/or Facilitator, subject to the amount & other partaking organisations contributing. Council Members agreed to the proposal by 16 votes to none with 2 abstentions. It was further agreed that Council's representatives would consult Members on which potential candidate to support for the role.

The Chairman asked that if anyone had any suggestions of suitable candidates, to contact the office.

7. Sheep Clearance

Quartermen reported that the clear periods seemed to go well; there were reports of some sheep not being cleared in the North quarter & the Chairman asked that details be sent to the secretary. It was noted that a common issue, Dartmoor wide, is poor stock proof fencing on land adjacent to the commons. It was agreed that Council will endeavor to remind landowners of their responsibility to fence against the common.

8. Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

Rob Steemson reported that DNPA recently hosted the **Dartmoor Rural Crime Initiative** meeting attended by our Chairman & Karla (DLPO) & the **Park's Partnership** meeting.

9. DNPA – Dartmoor Test & Trials

The Chairman reported that it has been suggested that Janet Dwyer from the Countryside & Community Research Institute (CCRI) run this next round of Test & Trials. More details will follow once contracts have been signed.

10. Reports from Members representing Council at meetings:

- **Defra Semi-Wild Equine Forum***: 20 October – Philip French, Sara Sloman & Karla McKechnie
- **RPA Commons Stakeholder Group***: 20 Oct – Philip French & Sara Sloman
- **Our Common Cause Our Upland Commons Partnership***: 2 Nov – Philip French
- **Dartmoor National Park Forum***: 11 Nov – Philip French

*Notes available.

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

11. Confirmed/Revised Meeting dates for 2023

All Council Members have received a copy of the confirmed Council Meeting dates for 2023 & these are attached(Appendix A).

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 25 January 2023 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

The Chairman thanked those in attendance & declared the meeting closed.

Signed: *P French*

Date: *25 January 2023*



**CONFIRMED MEETING DATES OF
THE DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL
2023**

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| Wednesday | 25 January 2023 (10-minute slot for members of public to address the Council) | |
| Wednesday | 01 March 2023 | |
| Wednesday | 19 April 2023 | |
| Wednesday | 31 May 2023 | Devon County Show 18-20 May |
| Wednesday | 12 July 2023 – Annual Meeting (10-minute slot for members of public to address the Council) | Royal Cornwall Show 8-10 June |
| Wednesday | 13 September 2023 | |
| Wednesday | 18 October 2023 (Annual Accounts & Independent Examiner's Report) | |
| Wednesday | 06 December 2023 | |