

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 25 January 2023.

Participants:

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

Open Meeting

The biannual opportunity for members of the public to address Council for 10 minutes prior to the start of the meeting was offered by the Chairman. No questions were raised from the public gallery & the time will be offered again at the Annual Meeting in July. Members of the public who wish to speak are encouraged to inform the secretary before the meeting date.

1. Chairman's Introduction

Sara is welcomed back & thanked for the work she continued to do during her recovery.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr E Humber (NFU), Mr R Leigh & Mrs A Willcocks.

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 December 2022 were confirmed & signed following the deletion of a duplicated word in the first paragraph.

4. Matters outstanding from previous meetings:

4.1 Pigs on Brent Moor Update

As previously, the Chairman declared a conflict of interest & the Vice-chairman gave an update on the situation. He reported that a working party had inspected the land at Brent Moor just before Christmas & had documented the impact of the pigs. This included considerable areas of rooting which has the effect of denying grazing of other livestock belonging to those with common rights & some evidence of erosion caused by water run off from the damaged areas. There are also have concerns regarding the welfare of the pigs & their ability to survive harsh winter weather without sufficient shelter & food. Although it is Council's understanding that the pigs have now been collected, it was agreed that a letter be sent to the owner of the pigs reminding them of their responsibilities as an owner of common land & also the requirements that must be adhered to when stock is turned out on the common.

It was further agreed that Council consider revisiting its Regulations to prevent similar incidents happening in the future.

The Chairman returned to the Chair and thanked those members of Council who visited the site.

4.2 Discussions with Natural England (NE) Update

At the last Council meeting, members agreed that maintaining a dialogue with NE was important. The Chairman invited Council Members to attend an informal 'drop-in' meeting with himself & the Vice-Chairman at the Two Bridges Hotel on Wednesday 1 February 2023 from 7:00pm. This is an opportunity to share thoughts & views, on the restrictions being imposed by NE, in the hope of finding a way forward. The Chairman would also welcome phone calls from anyone who has a view but cannot make the drop-in session.

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 Peatland Restoration

The Chairman informed Council Members of a meeting being held on the evening of 26 January 2023 at the Two Bridges Hotel to provide more information on local peat restoration & monitoring. It's open to all commoners to attend.

7. News Article

Thanks was given to Mary Alford, Charlotte Faulkner, Rob Steemson & Ann Willcocks for drafting the news article, on the topics of TB testing, fencing against common land & swaling, which has been sent to local media outlets.

8. Consultations:

8.1 Dartmoor National Park Authority Byelaws

As part of the review process, the 'minded to make' amendments were circulated to Council Members for comment. As no comments were received, the Chairman called on a few Council Members to assist him in submitting some observations prior to the deadline (25 January 2023).

However, since this meeting the Dartmoor National Park Authority members have voted to pause the byelaw review whilst the Authority considers the impact of the judgement made recently on wild camping on Dartmoor.

8.2 Changes to the Measurement used to Report SSSI Condition – Update

This consultation closed in January 2021. A Report has now been produced to describe the extent of the consultation & the responses received. The primary concern was whether the new approach would remove the ability for landowners to report the condition of their landholding & understand the necessary management measures needed to bring out condition change. Natural England has listened to stakeholders & devised a mechanism to continue to report condition at a unit scale, whilst progressing with the change in metric to officially report SSSI condition at feature scale from April 2023.

8.3 Improvements to Equine Identification & Traceability in England – Update

The consultation seeking views about improving England's equine identification & traceability system received 394 responses. Defra will further develop those proposals

which have received support, as outlined in the consultation response. They will also amend the Equine Identification (England) Regulations 2018, as required, to implement those supported proposals that require legislative change. The timescale for this is expected to be summer 2023.

8.4 Environment Act 2021: Environmental Targets – Update

Following the conclusion of this consultation, Defra are going to lay Statutory Instruments setting out the final targets they will proceed for approval by Parliament. Each long-term target will be accompanied by non-statutory interim targets, of up to 5 years in duration, in the Environmental Improvement Plan, to be published by 31 January 2023.

Since this meeting, the Environmental Improvement Plan has been published
[Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/environmental-improvement-plan-2023)

Copies of reports & consultation responses are available to Council Members upon request, from the secretary.

9. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

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

10. Financial Estimates for 2023/2024

Details of financial estimates were sent to Council Members in advance of the meeting with no questions raised. It was reported that there is an increasing deficit & that increasing the dues payable by those registered on Council's Register, with effect from the financial year commencing 1 July 2023, would help to alleviate this. It is understood that dues were last increased over 10 years ago.

A discussion followed & a number of questions were raised & answered: The Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 stipulates that any rise must be on a ratio of 1:6, meaning a 1p per livestock unit increase in non-graziers' dues result in a 6p increase per livestock unit for graziers. The Act also states that for the purpose of meeting its net revenue requirement, Council uses 'the prescribed sum' being the number of livestock units one is *entitled* to turn onto the common, even if they turn out less, which is often the case.

Although some Members were opposed to any rise in dues, it was acknowledged that if the deficit continues, Council's reserves will deplete rapidly.

It was agreed to vote on the *principle* of raising dues but no decision to be made on the amount until the matter has been considered further: 18 Members voted in favour of this proposal, 4 voted against with 1 abstention.

11. Reports from Members representing Council at meetings:

- **Dartmoor Rural Crime Initiative***: 22 Nov – Philip French, Tracy May & Karla McKechnie.
- **Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons***: 13 Dec – Mary Alford

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

12. Pony Management

The Chairman reported that over the coming months, Council will be reviewing its existing procedures & regulations on pony management, with a view of reducing the number of unmarked/illegal ponies on the commons & to strengthen the pony derogation it maintains on semi-wild ponies living on the commons. He further advised that, as a starting point, a 'baseline' to work with, we need to ascertain the current position on the ground. In an initial attempt to update the pony records currently held by Council, Local Commoners Associations have been asked to provide information

on the number of ponies on their common & who owns them. Following this, all pony keepers registered with Council will be sent a letter requesting further information. The Chairman asked Council Members to encourage the pony keepers in their area to respond to this request to ensure they are included in any future pony management plan.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 1 March 2023 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

A request was made to move some meeting dates due to lambing. However, it was pointed out that this was discussed when the meeting dates for 2023 were confirmed by Council & it was acknowledged that Council Members may not be able to attend all Council Meetings due to their farming commitments.

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

Signed: *Philip French*

Date: *1 March 2023*

LIVESTOCK PROTECTION OFFICER
REPORT TO COMMONERS' COUNCIL
25th January 2023

A round-up on last year's statistics for RTAs and dog attacks:

RTAs 139 with 119 dead and 20 survived. This is higher than last year's figures which were 117 with 89 dead and 28 survived.

Dog attacks for 2022 were 105 and for 2021 they were 108 which was the highest ever.

So far this year we've had 8 dog attacks.

It's vital that you report all dog attacks and RTAs to me as the police are taking an active role whenever possible.

There was a bad attack recently at South Tawton on a flock of 40 sheep. 2 sheep were killed and 10 badly bitten. I managed to get all the necessary information and the dog owner has paid substantial compensation and a control order has been issued by the police.

Touching on the sheep clearance last year, there weren't many problems, just a few stragglers that were collected.

I have a few reports coming in of thin ponies. One has been collected and the others I will keep a close eye on and will let you know.

At the end of last year, I had a meeting with the police and they have DNA kits which are police 101 issued. The kits come with 100 samples attached. These are for farm vehicles and machinery and if stolen and found by the police they are able to identify the owner of the vehicle. If anyone is interested, please contact me.

I seem to be getting a lot of calls about sheep that aren't where they should be, sheep tangled up in brambles and lame sheep.

KARLA