

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 31 May 2023.

Participants:

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

1. Chairman's Introduction

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He confirmed the date of the next Council meeting, being the AGM on 12 July 2023.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr R Ashford, Mr R Steemson & Mrs A Webber

3. Confirmation of Minutes

Minutes of the last Council meeting had been circulated to all Council Members inviting comments ahead of tonight's meeting with none received. However, Mary Alford insisted on mentioning that the point she had raised at the last meeting regarding who writes the minutes had not been noted to her satisfaction. Despite the Chair reminding her that any issues should have been raised beforehand, Mary Alford continued, stating that there is nothing in Council's Act to say comments regarding Minutes have to be made in advance, & questioned who was being paid to write Council's Minutes. Several Council Members voiced their frustration with Mary Alford's comments. The Chairman reaffirmed that he was satisfied with how the minutes are written & expressed his disappointment at the criticism of them. He confirmed that paid office staff write the minutes & proposed that they be duly agreed & signed.

The motion was carried with 16 Members voting in favour, 4 against with 2 abstentions.

4. Matters outstanding from previous meetings:

None

5. Correspondence Received

A list of correspondence received had been circulated to all Council Members with copies emailed to some Members upon request.

6. Matters brought forward at the discretion of the chair

None

7. Natural England: Dartmoor HLS Rollovers & Stocking Levels

The Chairman reported on the last meeting held with stakeholders to progress a workable way forward for agri-environment agreement rollovers on Dartmoor. A note of the meeting has been circulated to Council Members & Local Commoners Associations.

Since then, Ministers have agreed to an independent grazing review being undertaken on Dartmoor, to be commissioned & financed by Defra. The Chairman felt it important that Council is prepared to feed into the Review & offer practical solutions & he advised that Council had been given an opportunity to suggest ideas on the Terms of Reference. It is hoped that the Review will be completed by the Autumn.

The majority of commons on Dartmoor, considering rollovers to their agreement, had been sent a letter from Natural England advising that recommendations would be made to the RPA for a one-year extension to their agreement without changes to the existing stocking calendar while the independent review is conducted. However, Council has been made aware that a small number of commons on Dartmoor are being pressured to reduce stocking levels during year one if they wish to rollover their agreement. It was agreed by all Council Members that Natural England appear to be pre-empting the outcome of the Review in these cases, which is not acceptable & Council should contact the RPA & write to The Rt Hon. Mark Spencer MP to ascertain if this was permitted.

8. Reports from Members representing Council at meetings:

- **Dartmoor Rural Crime Initiative:** 4 May – Tracy May & Karla McKechnie.
A brief discussion was had about the proposed revised byelaw regarding dogs on leads. Will Dracup offered to send the secretary further information for circulation.
- **Dartmoor Common Owners Association:** 12 May – Philip French

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

9. Magistrate Court Appeal: Mary Alford v Dartmoor Commoners' Council

The Chairman reported that a case management hearing was held last week. Council's legal representatives have served an abuse of process application questioning whether Mary Alford's appeal may be brought to the Court. The Court will give judgement on this orally by CVP on 28 June 2023. Depending on the outcome of this, the matter is scheduled for a final hearing on 27 July 2023 with advocates & witnesses appearing in person.

10. Pony Management

The Chairman advised that he intends to discuss the proposals put forward in the confidential section of the meeting. However, he expressed his disappointment that the Dartmoor Hill Pony Association (DHPA) had circulated correspondence which referred to Defra's consultation on equine ID which Defra's Semi-Wild Equine Forum had asked be kept confidential for now. Although the DHPA representative advised that they had obtained consent to share this information, this differed from what Council's secretary had been told. The Chairman advised that he did not think it was appropriate for members of the Council, a statutory body, to be seen to have shared confidential details of Defra consultations. He proposed further discussions be held in the confidential part of the meeting.

The motion was carried with 14 Members voting in favour, 7 against with 1 abstention.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be the Annual Meeting to be held on Wednesday 12 July 2023 at 7:30pm at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

The Chairman declared the public meeting closed & proposed a motion to go into a closed session. The outcome of these discussions is recorded in the confidential section of the meeting minutes, available to Council Members only.

Signed: *Philip French*

Date: *12th July 2023*