

## DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

### Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 18 October 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 E Humber	Mr T Stratton
Mr P Cleave	Mr J Jordan	Mrs A Webber
Mr A Coaker	Mr S Lee	Mrs A Willcocks
	Mr R Leigh	
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	Miss L Talbot

#### 1. Chairman's Introduction

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### 2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr J Cooper, Mrs K Little & Mrs P Warren.

#### 3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the last Council Meeting had been circulated to all Council Members requesting that any comments be made ahead of tonight's meeting. No comments were received & the Minutes of the Meeting held 13 September 2023 were confirmed & signed.

A point was raised with regards to approaching Mr Peter Beale, an ecologist, to ask if he would be interested in being considered to fill the current vacant co-opted position on Council. Likewise, any other suggestions for potential candidates are welcomed. Please provide the secretary with contact details. Suitable candidates will be approached & asked to provide their CV & a statement to be considered by Council.

#### 4. Financial Accounts: Year Ending 30 June 2023

A copy of the draft financial statements had been sent to all Council Members ahead of the meeting. The secretary gave a brief report of the accounts & explained the operating deficit of £25,034. This is due to the carried forward deficit from the previous year (£12,115) & the additional legal costs incurred during the financial year as a result of the Mary Alford v Dartmoor Commoners' Council court case. When the financial estimates for this accounting year were presented to Council in January 2022, we were not aware of the court case so the amount estimated for legal costs was £3,500 when the actual amount spent was approx. £12,000. This largely accounts for the additional deficit shown in the year end accounts for June 2023.

As at 30 June 2023, the legal case was ongoing with costs incurred in excess of £20,000. Due to the outcome of the case, there is potential to claim back some of the costs involved. This, together with the increase in contributions due from commoners for the financial year ending June 2024, will recoup the current operating deficit.

The secretary has raised some queries with the accountants that have yet to be resolved. As a result, the accounts are currently not ready to be approved by Council.

## **5. Matters outstanding from previous meetings:**

### **5.1 Natural England Stop Notice: HW & WW Common (Unit 61 of South Dartmoor SSSI)**

Council wrote to NE, objecting to the Stop Notice, setting out the implications & seeking clarification on who would be responsible for straying stock. NE has replied setting out their enforcement guidelines, stipulating that the letter was *advisory* & that to date, no Stop Notice has been issued. Unfortunately, not all of the points raised in Council's letter were addressed & in order to keep lines of communication open, the Chairman & Secretary arranged an online meeting with NE. It has been confirmed that if issued, the Stop Notice would be served on those actively grazing the area. However, NE confirmed that neighbouring commons, including the rest of CL190 had not been sent the advisory letter & when questioned about straying stock, NE did not seem to know what they would do about this.

Following a discussion, Council Members suggested that Council's concerns be taken to a higher level, including MPs & the Minister. It was agreed that the forthcoming meeting for Council Members, being held by Sir Geoffrey Cox MP, would be a good place to start.

## **6. Correspondence Received**

A list of correspondence received had been circulated to all Council Members with copies emailed to some Members upon request. No further questions were raised.

## **7. Matters brought forward at the discretion of the Chair**

### **7.1 Meeting with Sir Geoffrey Cox MP**

Council have been contacted on behalf of Sir Geoffrey Cox MP, inviting Council Members to an exclusive meeting on 10 November 2023. A show of hands suggested that many Members keen & able to attend.

## **8. Reports from Members representing Council at meetings:**

- **MOD Working Party:** 12 Sep – Philip French & John Cooper
- **Dartmoor Commons Owners Association:** 22 Sep – Philip French
- **Our Upland Commons Local Area Group\*:** 26 Sep – Mary Alford

\*Notes available. If any Council Member wishes to receive copies of any notes, please email [office@dartmoorcommoners.org.uk](mailto:office@dartmoorcommoners.org.uk)

## **9. Ten Tors**

Tony Clark (Adviser to Director of Ten Tors) gave an informative & concise report to Council on this large-scale annual event. He had attended the Ten Tors Team Managers Training Day held earlier this month, on behalf of Dartmoor Commoners' Council & gave a presentation on life & traditions on the Dartmoor Commons to approx. 250 attendees.

The Chairman thanked Tony Clark for his report & for representing Council.

Further, more detailed information is available on the Ten Tors website <https://www.tentors.org.uk>

Ten Tors Duty Officer – weekends 8 Oct to Event only: 07966 495 504  
Headquarters Dartmoor Training Area (HQ DARTA) – all year: 01837 657210

#### **10. Natural England Review Update**

Officers of Council have received very positive feedback from the recent event which gave Local Commoners Association chairmen, secretaries & commoners the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Independent Review Panel. Thanks was given to all those who helped facilitate on the night which had around 100 attendees.

Council has submitted its response to the Independent Review. A copy will be circulated to all Council Members. The Chairman asked Members to be mindful that the document is remain private until the end of the Review. The Review Panel is due to report to Defra on 30 November 2023.

#### **11. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer**

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

She added that the ponies were looking good at the recent pony drifts she had attended & the Chagford Pony Sale.

Karla thanked all those who help her out & said that she could not do her job without this support. Thanks was reciprocated to Karla.

#### **12. Changes to Bovine Identification, Registration & Movement - Consultation**

Defra has launched a consultation seeking views on government proposals for improving bovine identification, registration & movement in England. It was agreed that the consultation details be circulated to all Council Members & any comments be submitted to the Office by Tuesday 24 October 2023. A working group will then be formed to pull together a response on behalf of Council. Council Members wanting to be part of this group are to contact the Office by this date. The consultation ends on the 15 November 2023

#### **13. Potential Meeting Dates for 2024**

The proposed meeting dates, subject to venue availability, were presented to Council. A request to move the April meeting was discussed. It was explained that for the administration of Council to run efficiently, meetings need to be held at regular intervals (ideally every 6/7 weeks). It was acknowledged that occasional absences at any time of year is understandable & previous April meetings have had a similar attendance to other meetings throughout the year. The dates will be confirmed at the next Council Meeting.

#### **14. Pony Working Party**

The Terms of Reference for the Pony Working Group was presented to Council. A proposal to adopt these was made by Ken Edwards, seconded by John Shears with all Members in agreement.

#### **15. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of Council will be held on Wednesday 6 December 2023 at 7.30pm at the Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

**Signed: *Philip French***

**Date: 6 December 2023**

**LIVESTOCK PROTECTION OFFICER**  
**REPORT TO COMMONERS' COUNCIL**  
18<sup>th</sup> October 2023

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### **Louping-ill Virus**

There have been lots of sheep dying of louping-ill this autumn in several locations. Many died in the spring as well.

Having recently attended a talk on ticks & tickborne diseases, I learned of a nationwide rise in instances of louping-ill. A vaccine is being developed but this may be two years or more away.

I am wondering whether the more than usual number of cow deaths recently could be linked to louping-ill & not always to staggers?

### **Cattle/Human Encounters**

It seems to be a growing problem for me to receive calls from members of the public encountering cattle on the moor. Sometimes though, people deliberately put themselves at risk & I have witnessed this at first hand.

### **Cattle RTA Deaths at Cadover/Wotter**

A farmer on the west quarter suffered six cattle RTAs, resulting in four deaths, one severe injury & one survival, all in the last three weeks. One of the cows was left dying in the middle of the road as the motorist fled, but his vehicle's registration plate was discovered at the scene. Subsequently the motorist was traced, ironically after I posted a piece on social media & he paid compensation. These RTAs have generated a lot of interest from local councillors, parishioners & the media. I fear there may be several meetings about this to which I'll be asked to attend.

So far this year I have recorded **143 Road Traffic Accidents & 92 dog attacks on sheep**.

My thanks to the farmers who go above & beyond to help me over livestock problems when I call. It is much appreciated.

KARLA