

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 24 January 2024.

Participants:

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

Open Meeting

The biannual opportunity for members of the public to address Council prior to the start of the meeting was offered by the Chairman.

Tony Whitehead referenced the Independent Review of Protected Site Management on Dartmoor & asked a number of questions on how Council intends to act on the recommendations made.

Guy Shrubsole asked if Council would be more effective if it were to become a public body & be subject to the public sector general biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021.

Joe Hess drew Council's attention to what he believes are flaws in Council's governance & administration, in particular with regards to maintaining the 'live' register. He mentioned the recent formal grievances that Council has had to deal with. He reiterated his request for a face-to-face meeting with the Chairman to discuss the matters on which he is instructed to act & asked that Council undertake a thorough review into the manner in which the registers are maintained & the policy under which grievances are handled.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their addresses. He advised that Council will give appropriate written responses in due course.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr G Hill, Mr R Leigh & Mrs A Webber.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the last Council Meeting had been circulated to all Council Members requesting that comments be made in advance in order that they can be dealt with ahead of the meeting. On the night, a request was made that names be attributed to a number of allegations made at the last meeting. The Chairman felt this was not necessary as the

minutes reflected what was said. Following a vote, the request was rejected & the Minutes of the meeting held 18 October 2023 were confirmed & signed with no changes.

Members are asked to raise any points to the Secretary in the timeframe stipulated when draft minutes are circulated.

4. Matters outstanding from previous meetings:

4.1 Dartmoor Wide Animal Marks Book – Tracy May

Tracy May gave an update on this initiative, which is being funded by a FiPL grant & the Forest of Dartmoor Commoners' Association. The books will be printed in quarters & each grazier with an entry in the book will be provided with a copy. To ensure accuracy, each grazier will be sent a copy of their page to check prior to publication. As part of the information being sent out with this year's invoices, graziers have been given information on how to opt out. However, due to GDPR, anyone who opts out will not receive a copy.

5. Correspondence Received

5.1 Response from Dr Peter Beale

Dr Peter Beale has declined the offer to become a co-opted member. He has offered to help Council in any way he can but without having to attend the regular Council Meetings.

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

Questions are invited on all aspects of the correspondence list but nothing is raised.

6. Matters brought forward at the discretion of the Chair

6.1 Natural England Stop Notice: Unit 61 of South Dartmoor SSSI

Natural England has written to Council advising that an appeal has been lodged with the Secretary of State over the Refused Consent to graze this area. The appeal will be dealt with by a Hearing & Council has been given the opportunity to make comments.

A request is made that all correspondence on this matter be circulated to Council Members who are invited to submit any comments to the Secretary in order that a response can be drafted on behalf of Council.

7. Reports from Members representing Council at meetings:

- **Our Upland Commons Partnership:** 6 Dec 2023 – Philip French
- **Dartmoor Commons Owners Association:** 10 Jan 2024 – Philip French
- **Dartmoor Test & Trials*:** 16 Jan 2024 – Philip French

The Chairman advised that a round-up meeting on Test & Trials is being held on 19th February 2024 in Postbridge.

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

8. Dartmoor Review: Independent Review of Protected Site Management on Dartmoor

The Chairman reported that an informal meeting for Council Members had been arranged for 6th February to discuss how Council will respond to the Review. He advised that David Fursdon has asked for the response to be proactive & indicated being negative may mean missing an opportunity & the whole process being taken out of

commoners' hands. The Chairman offered his apologies to any members of the public who had come to hear this discussed further tonight. He explained that he felt it was important to dedicate a separate meeting to this matter to allow Council Members to openly discuss their views. Council members are encouraged to read the report in advance of the meeting & to take time to digest the report so that Council can come up with a coordinated response.

He also reported that he has already asked Council Members Kate Little & Will Dracup to lead on reviewing Council's Standing Orders, Declaration of Interest reporting & introducing a Code of Conduct.

9. Public Safety with Cows – Anton Coaker

Members of Council have been working on a risk assessment paper for cattle graziers, which can be used to show due process to mitigate risks to the public from cattle. If a member of the public was involved in an incident with cattle, cattle graziers could show what they have done to try & reduce the likelihood of it happening. The document, which was circulated to all Council Members ahead of the meeting, consists of advice for cattle graziers, an annual checklist to have on file & an advisory document for the public.

A proposal that Council adopt the Cattle Risk Assessment Document was made John Shears, seconded by Russell Ashford & supported by all Council Members apart from 1 abstention.

The information will be sent to all Local Commoners' Association Secretaries with the TB Control Plans/Cattle Grazier Packs for 2024 for onward circulation to cattle graziers & also feature on Council's website. It was further suggested that it be sent to DNPA for use.

The Chairman thanked Anton Coaker & the Group tasked with producing this document.

10. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer

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

11. Financial Estimates for 2024/2025

Details of financial estimates were sent to Council Members in advance of the meeting with no questions raised. A projected deficit of just under £5.5k was reported & the following points were noted:

- Operating costs & in particular, utilities have increased significantly
- The office administrator's hours & associated employers' national insurance contributions, are a guestimate as they work on an ad-hoc basis for specific pieces of work, which is currently undertaking the checking of rights on Council's Register of Commoners.
- An amount of £4k for solicitor's fees/legal advice has been included but hopefully, this expense will not be incurred.
- Honorariums need to be reviewed. They have been at the current level since 2018.
- The Commoners' Council net revenue for 2024/2025 is very much an estimate based on the Register as it currently stands. This figure constantly fluctuates depending on the number of registrations & will decrease or increase accordingly.
- When Council agreed to increase the dues with effect from the financial year commencing 1 July 2023, it was also mentioned that, to get back in line with previous rises, fees would need to rise again with effect from 1 July 2025.

The financial estimates for 2024/2025 were formally approved by all Council Members.

Copies of the audited accounts for the year ending 30 June 2023 are available from the Secretary upon request.

12. Dartmoor Commoners' Council Elections 2024

Initial details of which councillors are due for election were sent out with the agenda (see Appendix B). These details have also been sent out to all registered commoners with this year's invoices. Nominations can be received up to 7 days before the election dates & further details will be circulated in due course. This year's Elections are likely to be held during the first three weeks of June 2024.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of Council will be held on Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 7.30pm at the 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: 13 March 2024

LIVESTOCK PROTECTION OFFICER
REPORT TO COMMONERS' COUNCIL
24 January 2024

A quick round-up of last year's stats:

Dog attacks

95 - another really high year. Please can you report all dog incidents to me so I can crime reference with the police. Lambing is fast approaching & PC Jules Fry is really keen to get some new ideas & messages out there.

RTAs

161 animals involved in road traffic collisions.
126 of those were either killed or dispatched.
27 ponies killed/11 survived
84 sheep killed/20 survived
15 cows killed/4 survived

I was thinking it may be a good opportunity for Council to invite PC Jules Fry to a future meeting. He is the go to for rural & it may be good to familiarise yourselves with him – put a face to the name. I like him & he is very passionate about Dartmoor.

Dog attacks this year

It's been a bad start to the year for dog incidents with 11 already. One of these is being investigated as all the relevant info was obtained.

RTAs this year

There have been 5. Three of them ponies & one of these incidents was where 4 sheep were hit on the road as a result of an out of control dog chasing the flock into the road. 3 died.

Young foals

There are a handful of young foals on the moors at the moment that I am keeping an eye on. All are doing exceptionally well despite the awful weather we experienced in December. One of them was born just before Christmas Day. They are in Widecombe, Cadover, Cox Tor, Princetown & Belstone.

Social media is becoming very bad. It might be an idea to do a big publicity push to educate moor users...how to behave around cows, responsible dog ownership & keeping dog under control plus cow concerns & attacks.



DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

DETAILS OF FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS 2024

The following members of the Commoners' Council will have served their term as at 30 June 2024 & shall be eligible for re-appointment, unless they choose not to stand again or other nominations are put forward, in which case there shall be an election.

COUNCILLORS DUE FOR ELECTION

<u>QUARTER & DATE</u>	<u>MORE THAN 10 LUs</u>	<u>LESS THAN 10 LUs</u>
NORTH	Mr John Cooper Ms Tracy May	Mrs Kate Little
SOUTH	Mr Philip French Mr Anton Coaker	Filled
EAST	Mrs Charlotte Faulkner Mr John Jordan	Mr Ken Edwards
WEST	Mr George Hill Mr Mark Radmore	Mr Robert Leigh

All commoners nominated, nominating or voting, must have paid their contributions for the current financial year. No contributions will be accepted at the election meetings.