

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 11 September 2024.

Participants:

Mr L Branfield – Chairman	Mr N Cole	Mrs K Little
Ms T May – 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 R Jordan	Mrs P Warren
Mr A Coaker	Mr S Lee	Mrs A Webber
		Mrs A Willcocks
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman advised the Council that we are all trying to get to grips with everything new and hopefully we will work our way through in due course.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr J Cooper, Mr J French & Mr R Leigh

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the last Council Meeting held on 31st July 2024 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. It was explained that the requirement that comments had to be in and correspondence received before the agenda was published, in order to be included, had been standard practice for some time.

No comments had been received by the set date and following a vote, the minutes of the Council Meeting held 31st July 2024 were confirmed & signed.

The draft minutes of the AGM also held on 31st July 2024 had been circulated and no comments had been received. Following a vote the draft minutes of the AGM were agreed.

4. Matters outstanding from previous meetings:

4.1 Cycling on the Commons – Concern was raised that 'no cycling' signage had been removed on public footpaths. The DNPA reps. agreed to investigate and put up more signs as necessary. They pointed out that the DNPA did consult on organised cycling events, including at night and it was up to the consultees to raise their concerns at that point. The legal use of electric mountain bikes was also raised and the speed they went at. The DNPA has a project in the pipeline which will engage with this issue with cycling clubs and social media. In addition the byelaw review will consider the matter. There was a need to educate people that cycling on the moor (not on designated routes) was not permitted.

4.2 Stallion Accreditation Day – This will take place on 30th October at Prison Farm, Princetown, courtesy of Neil Cole.

4.3 Co-Opted Position (NFU Rep) – The Chairman is awaiting information from the NFU and will bring the matter back at the next meeting.

5. Correspondence received

Correspondence received has been circulated.

The Chairman has written to Steve Reed, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, inviting him to visit Dartmoor to gain an understanding of the grazing issues here. It was pointed out that there were scant grant opportunities in the uplands compared to the lowland areas which should be drawn to his attention.

The Council is looking to Devon Highways to repair fencing at Dartmeet.

6. Matters brought forward at the direction of the Chairman

There were none.

7. Meetings with Council Representation: Reports only required if a formal note is not anticipated:

7.1 Our Upland Commons – Local Area Group: 3 Sept – Mary Alford to report – Learnt a lot about dung beetles and the importance of invertebrates. The legacy of the projects was specific to Dartmoor, including the digital wildfire response to routes across Dartmoor. There will be a conference on 18th Oct at Buckfastleigh.

7.2 MOD Dartmoor Working Party: John Cooper was unable to attend.

8. Fire Plans – Update by Tracy May on:

8.1 Dartmoor Strategic Fire Plan – This has FiPL funding for both phases. Phase one was the preparation stage, digitising existing maps and loading DNPA data layers. This will be loaded onto the DaCC computer. The second phase involves working with the local commoners associations to update the existing information held. This will help the associations to create a wildfire response plan on LandApp

The key fire access routes are all existing well used tracks being widened (up to 8m wide) and repaired as necessary as they all need to be self-maintaining. River crossings are also being improved. Will have to agree protocols for sharing live data with the DNPA and the Fire Service. The associations will be able to use the plans we helped them to create, (there will be a cost of printing from LandApp post FiPL if using more than the basic free maps).

The FiPL budget is tight this year and this is the last year of funding. Therefore all work must be done and paid for by March 2025. This project is currently on track

8.2 Land Management Working Group (Defra Wildfire Strategy Action Plan) – The Home Office had committed to scoping a Wildfire Strategy Action Plan by mid-2024 with the following goals:

- Improved resilience of landscape and communities to wildfire threat.
- Reduce health and economic impacts of wildfire
- Improve integration across Government, land managers and communities
- Support fire services and improve their wildfire response

The Land Management Working Group (drawn from many relevant disciplines and one of many groups) was to be set up to discuss these issues. There were six sessions to discuss the following issues:

- Managing land to be resilient to wildfire and knowledge of how to respond to wildfire
- Training, learning and knowledge sharing
- Wildfire resilience in new building designs and risks at the rural urban interface
- Wildfire resilience of community spaces and infrastructure
- Knowledge and understanding of causes of wildfire in England
- Impact of climate change on the risk of wildfire and forecasting wildfires

The Home Office will now draw up a strategy, and an action plan and secure funding to support them. Wildfire resilience will take precedence over some elements of other environmental legislation but not all.

9. Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer. Karla reported as follows:

It has been a really busy summer and I have found myself monitoring lots of areas checking lame ponies, ponies with bad eyes and lame sheep. This is apart from RTAs and dog attacks and other general problems.

RTAs

There have been 96 so far this year. This time last year there had been 128, so numbers are down. However, evenings haven't pulled in and the roads haven't been gritted yet, so we shall see.

Reflective cow collars have been put on in some areas and I have a large amount of pony collars to be distributed as and when pony keepers are ready. Might I add we haven't had a single animal killed yet that's wearing a collar.

I have attended some very badly injured foals that have been hit on the road that needed dispatching.

Dog Attacks

There have been 88 dog attacks so far this year. This time last year there had been 85, so we are up slightly and some of these instances are more than one sheep. I was disappointed to have a commoner contact me yesterday saying that he had brought lambs in for weaning and 6 of them had infected bite marks on them. All from the Pew Tor area on the west quarter.

DNA

I attended a canine DNA recovery project meeting in June run by John Moore's University, Liverpool, at Tavistock Police Station. This particular research project is focused on refining the best methods of collecting DNA samples, concentrating on dog attacks on livestock. In attendance, vet from Castle Vets, DNP, NFU, the police, the farmer whose sheep were attacked back in February and myself. We went on to the farm in Lamerton to do a practical field demonstration on how to use the DNA kits.

DNA sample boxes include either sticky tape, scissors or swabs for use and bags, and a bar code is provided on the box that you can access via YouTube to give a tutorial on step by step guide to using the kit in the field. The kits were distributed and Tavistock Police hold a large number of them and I have a few permanently in my truck.

I did my first DNA sample in the middle of the moor with no phone reception and therefore no step by step tutorial, in the pouring rain and with a lamb that was dying after being savaged by a dog. I used the scissor DNA kit with tweezers that broke and everything got soaking wet. However, I did my best and, after dispatching the lamb, took the sample to the Police Station where it is held in a freezer specifically for DNA.

I do feel this is a big step forward, but so far it is only for research purposes and to figure the best way of taking samples. Anybody suffering a dog attack please let me know, but taking samples is only possible if it is all very fresh and the sheep must not have been moved because it has to be treated as a crime scene, like Nikki Alexander off Silent Witness!!

I speak to so many of you farmers about all this and I just want to thank, in particular, James Reddaway for assisting me with an injured pony in a difficult area of the moor, James French, Phil Cleave, Mary Alford, Mark Radmore and Neil Cole for assisting me with tricky moorland problems and always being at the end of the phone. And others too.

It was highlighted that codd (contagious ovine digital dermatitis) is becoming a problem and it should be drawn to the attention of sheep breeders on the moor. This was agreed and it should be a task for the Council to address.

10. Council's Sub-Committees: Terms of Reference, Nomination of Lead person & allocated tasks.

The Fursdon Review advised that the Council had to work more efficiently and effectively and these sub committees were set up to facilitate this. Each Council member was allocated to a group.

- **Livestock Sub Committee (husbandry and management)**– The terms of reference have been written and Mark Radmore will be the lead person. A WhatsApp group has been set up.
- **Commons Issues Sub Committee** – Yet to complete the terms of reference. A meeting would take place after the Council meeting.
- **Landscape and Conservation Sub Committee** – The first draft is done and will have a meeting to complete.
- **Policies and Procedures Sub Committee** – Yet to complete the terms of reference.
- **Ponies** – Will use the existing terms of reference. Neil Cole will be the lead person.
- **TB Group** – Will use the existing terms of reference. James Reddaway will be the lead person.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of Council will be held on Wednesday 23 October 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: *Layland Branfield*

Date: *23 October 2024*