



# DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

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**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 24 September 2025**  
**Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown, at 7.30pm.**

**Present:**

**The Officers:** Ms Tracy May - Chair, Mr Robert Jordan Vice-Chair, Mrs Dru Butterfield & Mrs Sara Sloman – Joint Secretaries.

**Council Members:** Mr P Abel, Mrs M Alford, Mr L Branfield, Mr A Coaker, Mr N Cole, Mr J Cooper, Mr W Dracup, Mr K Edwards, Mr P Heard, Mr S Lee (DNPA), Mr S Lee (NE), Mrs K Little, Mrs E Magee (Duchy of Cornwall), Mr M Radmore, Mr D Reddaway, Mr J Reddaway, Mr J Shears, Mrs P Warren & Mrs A Willcocks.

**Non-Council Member in Attendance:** Mrs K McKechnie (Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer)

## 1. Chair's Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and observers to the meeting and noted housekeeping matters. She reminded attendees of meeting procedure, including rules on speaking, politeness, GDPR considerations, and the need to declare any conflicts of interest.

*Updates:*

- **FiPL Cattle Course** – 20 cattle graziers are confirmed for the cattle behaviour course with Miriam Parker on 3 October. This training is funded through a FiPL bid.
- **Defra Equine ID & Traceability Visit** – A visit took place on 1 July to discuss derogation requirements. Thanks were recorded to Neil Cole for organising. Following the visit, the Derogation List requirements have been simplified, and the new form has been issued to pony keepers via LCA Secretaries. Annual updates will be required by 31 January.
- **Monthly Updates** – Weekly Monday Zoom calls have been introduced between the Chair, Vice-Chair and the two Secretaries to monitor workload. Monthly update notes are also being circulated to Council members. The Chair proposed that these monthly updates should be appended to the minutes to form part of the official record. This was unanimously agreed. See (**Appendix 1**).

## 2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from: Mr J French, Ms S Herd (NFU) and Ms A Webber.

## 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the AGM held on 30 July 2025, with no amendments received by 18 August, were approved as a true and accurate record. The Chair signed them accordingly.

#### 4. Financial Matters

The draft accounts for the year ending 30 June 2025 had been circulated in advance. Owing to last-minute amendments, the Chair advised that consideration would be deferred. The revised accounts will be finalised and circulated to Council members following the meeting for review and approval.

#### 5. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

- **Veterinary Surgeon Position** – The vacancy remains unfilled. It was suggested the Council should approach the Western Counties Veterinary Group to invite expressions of interest in the position.

- **Stallion Accreditation** – Due to an outbreak of Strangles in the South Hessary to Nuns Cross area, the annual accreditation day at Prison Farm is cancelled. Instead, individual farm visits will be undertaken during October. Pony keepers with stallions requiring inspection must contact the office by 3 October. In addition, stallions purchased at the October pony sales will be eligible.

#### 6. Correspondence

A summary of correspondence received since the last meeting had been circulated. Council agreed to append the summary to the minutes. See – (**Appendix 2**)

- **FOI/EIR Requests** – Five requests (now increased to seven) were received from a single individual, absorbing significant officer and Chair time. Council supported the Chair's proposal to deem these "manifestly unreasonable" under Regulation 12(4)(b) of the Environmental Information Regulations and to respond on that basis. To avoid this situation in the future it was suggested the introduction of a standardised data capture form to be used for all future enquiries.

#### 7. Matters Brought Forward at the Direction of the Chair

- **Peatland Rewetting** – A council member raised concerns about the Mires restoration project. The Chair cited lack of safe quad bike access across sites and risks to livestock management. Pools created by dams were also highlighted as a safety risk. Council agreed the Landscape Sub-Committee, together with Mr. A Coaker, Mrs. M Alford and the Vice-Chair, will draft a letter setting out concerns.

- **Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) Rollovers** – Concerns were discussed about the legality of annual rolling tenancies. The Chair explained the Secretary's process: she requires a copy of the FBT, checks ownership with Land Registry, seeks confirmation from both landlord and tenant when a fixed-term FBT expires, and reconfirms every three years. Council noted this system ensures rights can be accurately entered in the Register. Concerns had been raised over a specific FBT which was used as an example.

**Proposal:** Dartmoor Commoners' Council to write to the affected Local Commoners Association clarifying the status of the aforementioned FBT.

**Proposer:** Mrs. A Willcocks

**Seconder:** Mr. A Coaker

## 8. Matters Dealt with by Officers since the Previous Meeting

- **Fencing at Prison Farm** – Written to the landlord; a local commoner is addressing the matter directly.
- **Policy Sub-Committee** – Reconstituted as a Working Party (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary plus previous members). Policy underpins Council's governance and requires continuous attention. Terms of Reference are being redrafted.
- **Walkhampton Common** – Ongoing communication with the tenant's land agents continues.
- **Mediation Process** – Deadline of 31 October 2025 set for mediation to progress; if not, the Council will regard mediation as no longer viable.

## 9. Round Table Sessions

- **CL190** – Recommendations arising from the recent round table information-gathering exercise were presented to Council. See (**Appendix 3**). Council resolved to adopt all recommendations and actions en bloc, with one member abstaining.

**Proposal:** To adopt all recommendations and actions en bloc

**Proposer:** Mrs A Willcocks

**Seconder:** Mrs P Warren

- **Ponies and Trees** – The planned meeting on 17 September was cancelled due to low attendance (only four confirmed). Pony matters will be referred to the Sub-Committee. Any tree-related concerns are to be submitted in writing to the office.

## 10. Reports from Members Representing Council at Meetings

**MOD Working Group:** Mr John Cooper reported on meeting held 9 September 2025 - See (**Appendix 4**)

**Dartmoor Fire Partnership:** Ms Tracy May (Chair) reported on meeting held 18 September. She noted:

- Swaling this year was well managed and compliant with procedures.
- Several wildfires were started by the public, not Commoners. One incident posed serious risk to property; police confirmed such acts could be prosecuted as arson with intent to endanger life (a custodial sentence of up to life).
- Numerous illegal campfires were reported, causing scorched ground and dug fire pits, though none spread uncontrollably.
- Phase 3 of the Dartmoor Fire Plan has FiPL approval and implementation work will begin shortly.

## 11. Sub-Committee Reports

- Livestock Committee – Membership updated: Mr R Jordan replaced by Mr D Reddaway.

## 12. Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer's Report

The DLPO's written report was received. Members raised questions on recent livestock incidents and actions taken. Council noted the report and recorded thanks for the officer's ongoing work. See (**Appendix 5**). The DLPO provided an additional update: since her report, three cows have been involved in hit-and-run incidents during the hours of darkness. Graziers are reminded that, in order to claim on insurance, all accidents must be reported to the Police within 24 hours of the incident.

**Proposal:** To issue a cattle awareness press release

**Proposer:** Mrs. A Willcocks

**Seconder:** Mr. J Shears

### **13. Council Meeting Dates for 2026**

Council confirmed the following dates: 28 January, 4 March, 10 June, 29 July (AGM), 23 September, 2 December.

The January meeting has been moved from the 21st to the 28th as The Two Bridges Hotel is unavailable.

Bi-annual elections will take place in the weeks commencing 15 June and 22 June 2026.

### **14. Date of Next Meeting**

Confirmed as Wednesday 3 December 2025, 7.30 pm at The Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

### **15. Confidential Session**

The Chair resolved to only review and agree the Minutes of the previous confidential meeting for sign off.

The Meeting ended at 8.55 pm

Minutes prepared by: Dru Butterfield Secretary

Date: 29 September 2025

Signed: *Tracy May* (Chair)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_24/09/2025\_\_\_\_\_

*The Confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record, signed, dated and filed.*

## Dartmoor Commoners' Council

### August Monthly Officers' Update

*(For Council Members – overview of key activities, not day-to-day office operations)*

**Weekly Officers' Meetings:** Officers meet weekly via Zoom to work through a priority-based To Do List prepared by the Secretaries.

- This ensures efficient workload delivery, effective decision-making, and keeps the small team fully informed.

#### **Chair's Activities on behalf of Council**

- As part of her role with the DLUMG, the Chair spent two days on the commons (Holne, Spitchwick, Throwleigh, Harford, and Ugborough) with academic experts, exploring future management challenges and opportunities.
- Next steps: Nature Restoration Work Stream meeting (26/08) and full DLUMG meeting (27/08).
- Met with Marian Spain (Chief Executive, Natural England) alongside the Duchy of Cornwall and Peatland Partnership to explore ways forward for Dartmoor.
- Participated in a farmer-led habitat assessment on Lydford Common developed by the Foundation for Common Land.

**CL190:** Officers compiling a full history and presentation to inform recommendations at the CL190 Round Table (27/08/2025, Two Bridges).

**Ponies:** Derogation form and Pony Keeper letters updated for GDPR compliance; return date set for 31 January 2026.

**Sheep Clearance:** WMN advert to run in early September promoting Clear Days.

**HSE (Health & Safety Executive):** Online Cattle Form now live and promoted via DNPA social media.

- Personnel changes – Head Inspector Jo Fitzgerald leaving; Paul Moran remains main contact; Victoria Buchanan appointed Lead Inspector (recent visits to Belstone and South Tawton); Harvey Wild remains overall inspector.

**Cattle Questionnaire Results:** 116 sent; 45 returned (39% response rate).

- 24 graziers request training; 22 report concerns about pinch points; 6 no longer keep cattle.
- Training booked – Cattle Behaviour & Risk Assessment Advice with Miriam Park (Cattle Behaviour Expert), 3 October 2025; FiPL funding application in progress.

**Code of Conduct & Standing Order Review:** Circulated to all members; amendments due by 31/08 for Policy Sub-Committee review before Council ratification.

## Appendix 2



### Dartmoor Commoners' Council: Correspondence Log –Council Meeting 24 Sept 2025

Date	Subject
11/09/2025	FOI/EIR Request
11/09/2025	Enquiry – Help Equine Passport
11/09/2025	Fencing against Common Land
09/09/2025	Urgent Request for Meeting - Tenancy, Area C of CL190
09/09/2025	Clarification of Grazing Rights on Walkhampton Common
04/09/2025	Closed sessions on DCC meetings
04/09/2025	FOI/EIR Request
04/09/2025	Cattle Incident
03/09/2025	FOI/EIR Request
22/08/2025	FOI/EIR Request
22/08/2025	Fencing Concerns – South Hessary
22/08/2025	Grazing livestock causing pollution
21/08/2025	FOI/EIR Request
18/08/2025	Acknowledgement of Letter 12/08/2025
18/08/2025	FOI/EIR Request
15/08/2025	Walkhampton Common
12/08/2025	Letter regarding fencing at Southerly Down
12/08/2025	Formal Complaint and Demand for Evidence
06/08/2025	Thank You for Your Generous Support
05/08/2025	Follow-Up Response – CL190 Area D
05/08/2025	Walkhampton Common
30/07/2025	Agenda AGM – Protocol at Council Meetings
25/07/2025	Broken Waterpipe at Cox Tor - Livestock Safety Concern
24/07/2025	Correspondence from Dartmoor Commoners Council Chairman – to LCA email of 19/07/2025
22/07/2025	Fencing against Common Land – South Hessary
19/07/2025	Correspondence to Dartmoor Commoners Council Chair Local Association letters: Fire Coordination & Rangers Resources

## Appendix 3

### Dartmoor Commoners' Council Briefing Document CL190: Summary and Recommendations following 27 August 2025 Roundtable Meeting

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#### 1. Financial Management and HLS Agreements

##### 1.1 HW&WW Contingency Funds: Query regarding the treatment of contingency funds deducted from all HLS agreement members (excluding the owner) during the agreement period and a request for detailed final accounts and clarification on redistribution of remaining funds.

###### **Recommendations:**

Those present unanimously agreed that internal financial arrangements of Local Commoners' Associations fall outside the remit of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council, which holds no statutory authority to intervene in such matters.

#### 2. Governance and Fair Representation

##### 2.1 Association Dynamics: Allegations of internal bias, exclusionary governance and lack of transparency within Local Commoners Association

###### **Recommendations:**

Those present unanimously agreed that such matters fall outside the remit of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council.

#### 3. Common Rights and Register Disputes

##### 3.1 Entry No. 88 CL190: Query regarding whether the rights attached to this land are exercisable over the HW&WW part of CL190 (Area D)

###### **Recommendations:**

This amendment clarifies that the rights attached to the land within entry 88 are exercisable over all of CL190 except for the Crownhill Down part. So, this includes the HW&WW part (Area D).

##### 3.2 Entry No. 127 CL190 Rights in Gross (20 livestock units): These rights are registered with Dartmoor Commoners' Council and are currently being exercised by a person different from the individual recorded in the Register of Common Land. Is the person exercising these rights illegally grazing?

###### **Recommendations:**

No further action is required. Entry 127 of CL190 has been superseded by Entry 216 of CL190, which confirms that the Rights in Gross (20 livestock units) are now recorded in the name of the individual currently exercising these rights over the HW&WW section of CL190 (Area D).

#### **4. Use and Status of Cholwichtown Farm**

##### **4.1 Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) Legitimacy: Questions over the issuing of an FBT on land designated for mining, challenging its legal basis under the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995.**

###### **Recommendations:**

It was unanimously agreed that this matter has been previously addressed, and the Council will not be revisiting it at this time.

#### **5. National Trust Tenancies**

##### **5.1 Tenancy over Part CL190 - Area C (Trowlesworthy) and Area D (HW&WW): One tenant has grazing rights, yet to be quantified, over these areas. Additionally, these rights have not been registered with Dartmoor Commoners' Council. As a result, the current grazing activity by the tenant is considered to be illegal.**

###### **Agreed Action:**

A letter be sent to the National Trust as a matter of urgency requesting a meeting with the Chair of Dartmoor Commoners' Council to discuss the ongoing issues.

##### **5.2 Tenancy over Part CL190 - Area D (HW&WW): The following questions were identified as critical to answer following the consultation period:**

###### **5.2.1 Clarification of the right to graze this area granted under FBT.**

###### **Recommendations:**

The Dartmoor Commoners' Council considers the principle of owners' rights on a case-by-case basis. In this particular instance, historical use of the land has been a key factor - specifically, that the tenant was grazing the land continuously prior to its registration as common land and has continued to do so since. This long-standing use supports the principle that the entitlement to graze arises from the landowner's proportion. This position is further supported by confirmation from Solicitors acting on behalf of the landowner, who have stated that the rights granted under the FBT are not surplus rights, and that the tenant is grazing the landowner's proportion.

###### **5.2.2 Clarification of terminology used in FBT**

###### **Recommendations:**

Council to write formally to the landowner requesting that the wording within the tenancy document is clarified in an addendum.

###### **5.2.3 Clarification of type of livestock permitted under the FBT.**

###### **Recommendations:**

No further action – The tenancy agreement clearly states that the tenant may graze cattle and sheep.

##### **5.2.4 Is the tenant illegally grazing HW&WW as no consent to graze given by Natural England and out of agreement?**

###### **Recommendations:**

It is for Natural England to deal with SSSI consent not Dartmoor Commoners' Council.



### **5.2.5 Call for legal review of above National Trust Tenancies**

#### **Recommendations:**

It was unanimously agreed that pursuing this matter directly was not an appropriate course of action for the Council.

## **6. Impact on Area-Based Payments and SFI**

### **6.1 How were the tenant's 380 livestock units over HW&WW derived and is this figure still appropriate?**

#### **Recommendations:**

The 380 LU figure reflects the tenancy allocation and the Council's conversion rules. Council is not in a position to change this figure that is registered any more than it can change the figures prescribed in the Register of Common Land (1965 Register).

### **6.2 Allocation: Financial impact on other commoner's area allocations**

#### **Recommendations:**

The financial impact on other commoners' area allocations does not fall within the remit of Dartmoor Commoners' Council. These matters rest with the RPA.

#### **Appendix 4 – Dartmoor Working Party 9 September 2025**

**Report by Mr J Cooper**

- **Military Debris** – 3 items found: 1 hazardous, 2 non-hazardous.
- **Range Incursions** – 2 incidents at Willsworthy.
- **Fires** – None reported. Military were on Amber alert and no pyrotechnics were used. They did well considering the weather conditions.
- **Natural England Monitoring** – D Hazelhurst said that the Natural England approach to monitoring is being revised due to costs. He also said his team has lost a lot of staff. They have finished monitoring and are using it to discuss with commoners for transitioning to Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery when current agreements come to an end.
- **Staffing** – D Glaze and E Crowe have retired.
- **National Park Marshalls** – S Lee (DNPA) reported the National Park Marshalls had done their best around the moor.
- **Governance Changes** – Pamela Woods has stepped down from Chair and has been replaced by our own Will Dracup, with Mark Renders as Deputy. Kevin Bishop, after 18 years, will also step down in March next year.
- **Princetown Visitor Centre** – Will close to the public at the end of October.
- **Duchy of Cornwall** – Representative referenced that Emma Magee has started in her new role with the Duchy.
- **Curlews** – The curlews have flown; only one loss out of 26 so far.

**Appendix 5 - Karla McKechnie Livestock Protection Officer  
Report to Dartmoor Commoners' Council Meeting on 24 September 2025**

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It feels like summer has suddenly slipped away with autumn and winter quickly approaching.

Apart from this very wet week, the weather has been particularly dry these last few months and a huge number of people have visited the moors.

Most people call me with sincere enquiries but a lot of calls clearly show how many people coming to Dartmoor have no idea about livestock and the landscape in which they graze. I am always more than happy to give them a clearer picture.

**Sheep** - Louping ill has been significant again this year and most commons have had sheep die. One farmer had more than a dozen sheep perish over the course of a few days at the end of April, a carcass was sent to Star Cross and the PM confirmed louping ill. Many calls about lame sheep over the summer and too many calls about fly strike. I have had several sheep/lambs stuck in wet marshy areas that have needed assistance to be pulled out and sheep stuck on rocky outcrops that have needed roping and taking down to safety. Calls about sheep stuck in saggy fencing and one sheep stuck at the hips in the v of a tree!

**Cows** - There have been a few suspected cases of red water and several lame cows on various commons. Without tempting fate there have been no cattle RTAs to date.

**Ponies** - A concerning number of pokey ponies on Clearbrook this spring. One was taken off and although some have picked up, I'm concerned for the winter ahead. A drift is needed before the winter. There have quite a few aborted fetuses this spring/summer, some early and some nearly full term. There have been several poorly foals with scour and on the point of collapse that have needed dispatching. A small pocket of ponies in the South Hessary area have gone down with strangles. The ponies and foals are managing well and I'm hoping that if ponies are left well alone the strangles will blow through. A meeting last week between pony keepers in this area was held and it has been agreed that the Merrivale and Walkhampton drift be postponed. I have spoken to my equine vet and it was agreed that no pony should be gathered from that area on welfare grounds, to stop the infection spreading and to ultimately not compromise the autumn sales. I am keeping pony keepers from that area up to date.

**Stats:**

**RTAs** to date 83. Numbers are down on last year. Fingers crossed this continues.

**Dog attacks** to date 74. Although I have had the worst number of dog attacks to deal with this winter and spring, the numbers have fallen away throughout the summer months. However, a sheep badly attacked only a couple of days ago, which resulted in its front leg nearly being torn right off, had to be dispatched immediately. In another attack a couple of weeks ago a sheep was killed near Shipley Bridge when a woman went there to meditate with her 3 dogs. Whilst she was meditating the dogs took off chasing and killing a sheep. Car registration details were taken and the police have a positive ID. This will be investigated and the farmer will be kept updated.

A few of the different calls I take include: A fox with a broken back that had been hit on the road. Buzzards with broken wings. Deer caught in fencing or hit on the roads. Bats in someone's bedroom. Calls about sheep in Wales, Exmoor and Yorkshire. A late-night call from the police about two black pumas stalking domesticated horses.

I'm always grateful to you all in receiving my calls.

Karla McKechnie Livestock Protection Officer – 07873587561

12/09/2025

Working with Dartmoor Livestock Protection Society & Dartmoor Commoners' Council