



DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 25 March 2026
Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown, at 7.30pm.**

Present:

The Officers: Ms Tracy May - Chair, Mr Robert Jordan - Vice-Chair & Mrs Dru Butterfield - Joint Secretary.

Council Members: Mr P Abel, Mrs M Alford, Mr R Ashford, Mr A Coaker, Mr L Branfield, Dr V Childs, Mr P Cleave, Mr N Cole, Mr J Cooper, Mr W Dracup, Mr K Edwards, Mr J French, Ms S Herd (NFU), Mr R Leigh, Mrs E Magee (Duchy of Cornwall), Mr M Radmore, Mr D Reddaway, Mr J Reddaway, Mr J Shears, Mrs P Warren, Ms A Webber & Mrs A Willcocks.

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

1. Chair's Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and observers to the meeting and noted housekeeping matters including the requirement to declare conflicts of interest.

Commoners' Dues for the year ending 30 June 2026 are now payable. Members should have received their QuickBooks invoice by email. If you have not opted for direct debit, please arrange payment by BACS, quoting your invoice number as the reference.

The Foundation for Common Land has advised that the current Defra computer system cannot process Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier applications on commons with multiple graziers. As a result, no agreements will be offered to commons in 2026, with no certainty for 2027. Existing HLS agreements will not be uplifted to Higher Tier payment rates.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Mr P Heard, Mr S Lee (DNPA), Mrs K Little,

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Approval of Minutes - No further amendments or comments were received by 13 February 2026 deadline. The Chair approved the Minutes be signed as a true and accurate record.

Decision:

- Minutes signed: 25 March 2026
- Outcome: All agreed

4. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

1). Peatland Restoration –

The Chair reported that an acknowledgement has been received for the letter sent on 12/01/2026; however, no formal response has yet been provided. It was agreed that the Chair will follow this up directly with the Peatland Partnership.

2). CL192 Awaiting Supplemented Maps –

No further update is available

5. Correspondence

A copy of the Correspondence has been circulated to all members as part of the regular monthly update.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1** January Monthly Report
- **Appendix 2** February Monthly Report
- **Appendix 3** March Correspondence List (as of 13 March 2026)

CL96 & CL97 – Maintenance of boundary fence – A follow-up letter was sent to the late tenant's son and copied to the owner.

6. Matters Brought Forward at the Direction of the Chair

1). Council Members Standing for Election

The following members are due for re-election: North: Mr Peter Heard & Mr James Reddaway; East: Mr John Shears; West: Mrs Mary Alford & Phil Abel.

- The following members have confirmed they will not stand again: South: Mr Philip Cleave & Mrs Ann Willcocks; East: Mr Layland Branfield.
- Mr Phil Abel has indicated he might step down if a suitable candidate comes forward.

2). Outcome of Judicial Review – Report from the Chair

The High Court issued its Judgment on 17 March 2026 in proceedings concerning the Council's statutory duties under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985.

The judge rejected 7 of the 8 Grounds raised by Wild Justice.

These are

Ground 1 – Failure to issue or consider limitation notices under section 5 of the 1985 Act

Ground 3 – Failure to have regard to conservation of natural beauty (section 4(1))

Ground 4 – Breach of section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Ground 5 – Breach of regulation 9(3) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

Ground 6 – Ultra vires / improper purpose

Ground 7 – Apparent bias in the December 2024 and January 2025 resolutions

Ground 8 – Unlawful fettering of discretion

The only ground to succeed is

Ground 2 – Failure to assess stocking levels under section 4 of the 1985 Act

The judge's conclusion states

As the Defendant itself stated in its evidence to the Fursdon Review, it is for the Defendant to determine grazing levels on the commons. The Defendant's assessment of the number of animals which can properly be depastured on the commons from time to time is central to the performance of its regulatory functions under sections 4 and 5 of the 1985 Act. As the Chairman's Report acknowledges, there is a need for the Defendant to make its own periodic assessment under section 4 of the 1985 Act. It is not for NE or for the LUMG to carry out that assessment, it is for the Defendant to do so. It is for the Defendant to decide how to undertake that assessment within the limits of its resources. Nevertheless, the Defendant is a regulatory body fulfilling statutory functions. The method which it adopts for the purposes of making the assessment must be reasonably fit for its purpose; and such as to discharge the Defendant's Tameside duty of reasonable inquiry in fulfilment of its functions under sections 4 and 5 of the 1985 Act. I accept the Claimant's submission that the Defendant's purported assessment in paragraph 5.8 of the Chairman's Report fails those requirements. It is not a legally adequate assessment for the purposes of discharging the Defendant's duty under section 4(1) of the 1985 Act.

For these reasons, ground (2) succeeds.

In summary, the Court has found that the Council has failed to carry out a lawful and meaningful assessment of the number of animals which can properly be depastured on the commons from time to time. In due course we will receive a mandatory court order requiring us to do so.

This has significant implications for the Council's work going forward.

Given the legal and operational sensitivity of this matter, I resolve that detailed consideration will take place in the confidential session.

7. Reports from Members Representing Council at Meetings

Dartmoor Working Party - J Cooper **Appendix 4 Report**

8. Working Parties

1). Policy

- Following the Policy Working Party and Officers thorough review of the Declaration of Interest and creation of the new Environmental Information Regulation and Methodology for Funding Projects and Grant Approval documentation the Chair proposed the council accept the recommendation for the following documentation:

1. Revision of Declaration of Interest Form

Vote:

For 21 Against 0 Abstain 2

2. Newly created Environmental Information Regulation Form

Vote:

For 18 Against 0 Abstain 5

3. Methodology for Funding Projects and Grant Approval Document

Vote:

For 15 Against 0 Abstain 8

9. Sub-Committees

1). Commons Issues – CL190 Area C

The chair resolved to take this matter into confidential

2). Ponies – Recommendations

The Pony Sub Committee met with Officers on the 5 March 2026 to discuss matters surrounding equine husbandry, disease control on the commons and unmarked stock.

Due to the recommendations not being circulated in time it was agreed to move this agenda item to the next meeting.

10. Report from the Dartmoor National Park Authority

Council members considered the report and no questions were raised – **Appendix 5 DNPA Report**

11. Date of Next Meeting

Confirmed as Wednesday 10 June, 7.30 pm at The Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown.

12. Confidential Section

(The Chair resolved to exclude the public due to the confidential nature of the business.)

Resolved

- 1.) The Commons Issues Sub Committee provided an update on CL190 Area C and agreed to further investigate statutory process.
- 2.) The Chair updated council members on current legal proceedings in connection with the court judgement.

The meeting ended at – 9.30 pm

Minutes prepared by: D Butterfield Secretary

Signed:  (Chair)

Date: 10/06/2026

Appendix 1

Dartmoor Commoners' Council

January Monthly Officers' Update

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

- **Council Updates:** Monthly documents sent to Council Members - Monthly Update December, Correspondence December, Part January and Correspondence Logs for December and Part January.
- **Veterinary Surgeon Vacancy on Council:** Continued with recruitment process, Vanessa Childs offered position as agreed at full Council meeting on 28 January 2026.
- **Cattle Incident Reports:** All information for 2025 has been collated into one generic spreadsheet for recordkeeping and future monitoring purposes.
- **Dartmoor Dynamic Landscapes:** A fruitful meeting was held with project lead Hazel Kendall at the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project and a Council member to further advance improvement of governance and Local Commoners Secretary Support.
- **Commons Issues Sub Committee:** Officers met with the sub-committee to discuss CL190 Area C.
- **Event Consultations:** Processed 8 event consultations and liaised with the Dartmoor National Park Access and Recreation Team to discuss consultations that may have potential issues before they are sent out to relevant Quartermen and Local Commoners Association Secretaries.
- **Pony Derogation and Council Pony Notice:** A reminder was sent to all Local Commoners Association Secretaries with a request for pony keepers to follow council guidance and return updated Derogation paperwork to the office by 31 January 2026 deadline.
- **QuickBooks & BT Cancellation:** The transition to an online invoicing system was implemented in January, alongside the option for payees to switch to Direct Debit, which has seen strong uptake. The first tranche of invoices have been sent by email. The move to QuickBooks forms part of a broader cost-reduction initiative, primarily by reducing postal expenses. As part of the same cost-cutting drive, the BT contract was cancelled and replaced with the office mobile number. This change was communicated in the invoice run and has also been updated as the primary point of contact with email on the website.

Updates to the Dartmoor Commoners' Council Register of Commoners

- **9 Entries:** CL CL56, CL84, CL85, CL86, CL146, CL164 x 2, CL194, CL210
- **23 Enquiries:** Responses were provided to land agents, buyers, and solicitors regarding the following registrations: CL3, CL73 x 4, CL110 x 2, CL112 x 3, CL134, CL135, CL155, CL161, CL164 x 5, CL176, CL193, CL195 x 2

In accordance with GDPR requirements, specific registration details are not disclosed in this public document.

Chair's Activities on behalf of Council

- **Attended South West Peatland Partnership Meeting**
- **Attended 4 X Dartmoor Land Use Management Group meetings**

Appendix 2

February Monthly Officers' Update

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

- **Council Updates:** Monthly documents sent to Council Members - Monthly Update February, Correspondence and Correspondence Log for January.
- **Veterinary Surgeon Vacancy on Council:** Continued with recruitment process, Vanessa Childs offered position as agreed at full Council meeting on 28 January 2026.
- **TB Packs** – These have been updated and circulated to Local Commoners Association Secretaries.
- **Dartmoor Dynamic Landscapes:** A fruitful meeting was held with project lead Hazel Kendall at the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project and a Council member to further advance improvement of governance and Local Commoners Secretary Support.
- **Commons Issues Sub Committee:** Officers met with the sub-committee to discuss CL190 Area C.
- **Event Consultations:** Processed 13 event consultations and liaised with the Dartmoor National Park Access and Recreation Team.
- **Pony Derogation** – By the closing date of 31 January 2026, a total of 27 responses had been received. At present, 763 ponies are recorded under the Dartmoor Commoners' Council Derogation including 29 stallions.
- **Environmental Information Request Form, Methodology for Projects & Grant Requests & Declaration of Interest:** Officers and members of the Policy Working Party have reviewed the existing Declaration of Interest and considered new procedures, including the Environmental Information Request form and the Methodology for Project and Grant Requests. This work forms part of the Council's ongoing commitment to robust governance, transparency, and effective management of potential conflicts of interest.
- **Strangles** - The infection has now been confirmed on Whitchurch Down, Whitchurch and Holne Commons. The Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer continues to provide regular updates to officers and is closely monitoring the ponies, despite the exceptionally challenging weather conditions.
The website is being updated on a regular basis to ensure that accurate and timely information is available regarding those commons where cases of Strangles are currently present, or have previously been identified.
- **Invoices** – The first tranche of invoices has now been issued to commoners, and the office is pleased to report a strong uptake of Direct Debit arrangements. A substantial number of mandates have been received in recent weeks following the transition to QuickBooks, reflecting a positive response to the new system.

Updates to the Dartmoor Commoners' Council Register of Commoners

- **14 Entries:** CL64, CL69, CL70, CL96, CL112 x 4, CL164 x 2, CL195 x 2
- **41 Enquiries:** Responses were provided to land agents, buyers, and solicitors regarding the following registrations: CL3 x 2, CL48 x 2, CL64, CL73 x 5, CL84 x 2, CL85 x 2, CL86, CL125 x 2, CL126 x 2, CL135, CL155, CL161, CL164 x 10, CL173, CL176 x 3, CL188, CL193 x 2, CL210 x 2.

In accordance with GDPR requirements, specific registration details are not disclosed in this public document.

- Attended 2 X Dartmoor Land Use Management Group meetings

Appendix 3

Dartmoor Commoners' Council – Correspondence List Summary (as of 13 March 2026)

March 2026

- Ref: March 1 – CL96 & CL97 Fencing Against the Common Update Letter
- Ref: March 2 – CL194 Planning Inspectorate Decision

Appendix 4

Dartmoor Working Party Report

Author: John Cooper (Dartmoor Commoners' Council Member)

Date: 10 March 2026

Security and Vandalism

There have been three reported incidents of debris-related vandalism at Yes Tor Hut. Damage includes a broken window shutter and a smashed window.

MOD Estate Updates

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has confirmed the following planned works and maintenance activity:

- Refurbishment of MOD signage across the estate, with several signs having become faded.
- Renewal of the lookout at Stannon Hill, to be repositioned slightly from its current location.
- Replacement of the Hangingstone Hill lookout, also to be sited in a slightly altered position.
- Future replacement of the Oak Tor stable, although it remains serviceable at present with some remaining lifespan.

Access and Infrastructure

Improvement works have commenced on the Ring Road, with the Tawmarsh track scheduled to follow.

Governance

The Steering Group is currently inactive due to the absence of an appointed Chair, and as such, no meetings are being held.

Dartmoor National Park Authority

Tom Surrey assumed office as the new Head of the Dartmoor National Park Authority on 18 March 2026.

Appendix 5

Dartmoor National Park Authority Report March 2026

Visitor Management (Summer 2026)

- The Dartmoor Marshal scheme will operate from the May Bank Holiday to mid-September, with four marshals deployed in two vans during peak periods.
- The scheme aims to promote responsible visitor behaviour, support rangers, deter anti-social behaviour, assist with byelaw enforcement, and provide public reassurance.
- Engagement Volunteers will operate at key locations on weekends (May–September, 11:00–16:00) to communicate key messages to visitors.
- Additional seasonal signage will be installed, including 120 cattle awareness signs.

Dartmoor's Dynamic Landscapes (2025–2030)

- Partnership programme supported by £3.1m from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- Focus on river catchments (Okement, Dart, Erme & Yealm) and communities including Okehampton, Princetown and Ivybridge.
- Key activities include:
 - Habitat and species monitoring (grasslands, rivers, moorland birds, ancient trees).
 - Peatland restoration, woodland management, and natural flood management.
 - Farm support initiatives and knowledge-sharing (e.g. Hillfarm Hub, Hall Farm).
 - Community engagement through festivals, grants (Moorscapes), and volunteer programmes.
 - Access, education, and sustainable travel initiatives (Gateway Hubs, Bike It Moor).
 - Outreach projects connecting Dartmoor with urban communities.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

- Programme extended 2026–2029 (annual project basis; no multi-year agreements).
- Currently focused on completing existing projects; new applications open from 1 April 2026.
- Open to farmers and land managers within Dartmoor National Park, including common land groups.
- Supports innovative projects aligned with four outcomes:
 - **Climate** (carbon reduction, flood mitigation)
 - **Nature** (habitat and biodiversity)
 - **People** (access and engagement)
 - **Place** (heritage and sustainable land management)
- In-person drop-in sessions will be held during 2026 to support applicants