

DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 12 July 2023.

Participants:

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| Mr P French – Chairman | Mr W Dracup | Mrs K Little |
| Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair | Mr K Edwards | Ms T May |
| Mr P Abel | Mrs C Faulkner | Mr M Radmore |
| Mrs M Alford | Mr G Hill | Mr J Reddaway |
| Mr R Ashford | Mr J Jordan | Mr J Shears |
| Mr P Cleave | Mr S Lee | Mrs P Warren |
| Mr A Coaker | Mr R Leigh | Mrs A Willcocks |
| Mr J Cooper | | |

Mrs S Sloman

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.

Tracy Lear referenced the ongoing grievance brought against Council by a Council Member & raised concerns over the amount of time, effort & money being spent, stating that many commoners do not understand the case. The Chairman acknowledged this & confirmed that proceedings are ongoing with a court date set for the end of July. He advised that the finer details of the case cannot be released until a judgement has been made. In response to a question from a council member, the Chairman confirmed Council has had to spend £17,800 to date on legal fees & that this figure will increase.

Tim Ferry (Trustee of charity, Moor Trees) had submitted a question regarding fencing areas of common land adjacent to existing valley-floor woodland to allow the natural regeneration of wood pasture. It was agreed that Mr Ferry put his question to the Foundation for Common Land who are running a webinar next week titled 'Trees on Common Land'.

Tracy Lear mentioned a recent article in the Western Morning News on tracking race horses i.e., how many times they are sold, where they go, etc. & asked if Council had any information on plans around tracing ponies on the moor. The Chairman advised that Defra have consulted on equine identification & traceability & we await further information on how the Government intends to respond.

Margaret Rogers asked what regulatory body oversees Dartmoor Commoners' Council. The Chairman advised that the Council is a statutory body with its own Act of Parliament & agreed that more information will be sought to confirm the position.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting. He thanked retiring Council Member, Rob Steemson for his input & commitment to Council over many years & welcomed Simon Lee as the new DNPA Representative. Mr Lee gave a brief introduction to Council.

The Chairman advised that David Fursdon had been appointed by Defra to chair the Independent Dartmoor Grazing Review. Concerns were raised that a number of commons are approaching the date when their HLS agreements are due to rollover & Council continues to pursue answers on how these will be addressed prior to the outcome of the Review.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr P Cottington, Mr P Heard, Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO) & Ms A Webber.

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 31 May 2023 were confirmed & signed.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chairman read out his report. A copy is attached (Appendix A).

5. Elections:

5.1 Election of Chairman

The Vice-Chairman, Layland Branfield, took the chair. On behalf of Council, he thanked Philip French, for the work he has carried out over the past year, much of which has been very time consuming, has taken a lot of effort & a tremendous amount of commitment. The Vice-Chairman asked for nominations for the post of Chairman. Ann Willcocks proposed that Philip French continue for a further year. Anton Coaker seconded the proposal. As no further nominations were put forward, Philip French accepted the position & was duly re-elected as Chairman for the year 2023-2024. He thanked Council Members for their support & advised that this would be his final year in office.

5.2 Election of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman thanked Layland Branfield for his support & advice during the past year. He asked for nominations for the post of Vice-Chairman. Anton Coaker proposed that Layland Branfield continue for another year & John Cooper seconded the proposal. As there were no further nominations, Layland Branfield accepted the position & was duly elected as Vice-Chairman for the year 2023-2024.

5.3 Confirmation of Honorarium

The Chairman & Vice-Chairman are currently allocated an honorarium payment of £5000 & £1000 respectively. When asked, both confirmed that they were happy with the amounts received, considering the amount of time & effort they each put into their role. Anton Coaker proposed that the existing payments be made for the coming year. Phil Abel seconded the proposal.

5.4 Appointment of Dartmoor National Park Representative to Council

Under Section 3 (2) (b) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Simon Lee was appointed as the member representing the Dartmoor National Park Authority on Council for a period of 4 years from 1 July 2023. Will Dracup continues his term as the other DNPA Representative.

5.5 Appointment of Duchy of Cornwall Representative

Under Section 3 (2) (c) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Tom Stratton was re-appointed as the member representing the Duchy of Cornwall on Council for a period of 4 years from 1 July 2023.

5.6 Appointment of Veterinary Surgeon to Council

This position remains vacant. Council Members are encouraged to make suggestions as to a suitable person to fit the role. However, this proves difficult as the veterinary surgeon's practice cannot include the care of any livestock grazing in Dartmoor National Park.

5.7 Co-opted Positions

Under Section 3 (3) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, there are 2 co-opted positions available. One is held by Ed Humber (Assistant Devon County Advisor, NFU South West). Paul Cottingham's term has now ended & the Chairman formally thanked him for his service on Council.

This leaves a position vacant. It was suggested, in light of upcoming issues, that filling the position with an ecologist would provide good value & guidance to council. Several names were mentioned & other suggestions are welcomed. It was agreed that potential candidates are approached &, if interested in the role, asked to provide a CV & statement which Council can use to consider the position further.

6. Review of Council's Working Groups & Members

At this time, Council has two 'formal' working groups operating. In accordance with Council's Standing Order no.7, the members of these Groups were reviewed & the Terms of Reference for each Group updated to determine how it will run for the next twelve months.

6.1 Peatland Working Group

Philip French (Chairman), Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Mary Alford & Anton Coaker (Council's Representatives on Mires Restoration Project), Tracy May & Colin Abel (Co-opted). Terms of Reference unchanged.

6.2 TB Working Group

Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman), Colin Abel (Co-opted), Mary Alford, Anton Coaker, Will Dracup, Ed Humber (NFU), James Reddaway, Helen Radmore (Co-opted) & Ann Willcocks. Terms of Reference unchanged.

6.3 Pony Working Group

John Shears asked that this be re-established & the Chairman agreed that it can be discussed at Council's next meeting in September.

7. Review of Council's Grievance Committees & Members

The committees appointed to consider the following grievances have given their verdicts & the groups have been formally disbanded:

- **Appointment of Small Grazier Representative in the North Quarter**
- **Removal of Common Rights Registration (land at Cholwichtown) from Council's Register**

The Chairman thanked all members for their & efforts.

- 7.1 In accordance with the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Schedule 2, section 6, the members of the following group were reviewed & the Terms of Reference updated to determine how it will run for the next twelve months:

Grievance Committee: Alleged erroneous amendments made to Council's Register of Commoners relating to entries for Venton Farm & Chittleford Farms

Layland Branfield (Vice-Chairman & Grazier Representative for the East Quarter), Anton Coaker (Grazier Representative for the South Quarter) & Robert Leigh (Small Grazier Representative for the West Quarter). When questioned, all confirmed there were no conflicts of interest. The Chairman proposed that as these Members are in the process of considering the grievance, they continue with the process.

The motion was carried with 21 Members voting in favour & 1 against.

8. Review of who Represents Council on other Groups.

Council reviewed & updated its record of the organisations that Council is represented on & by whom. Representatives will be required to give a brief report to Council following each meeting they attend. This only applies if a formal note or minute is not anticipated & circulated. A list of the organisations that Council is represented on & by who will be circulated to all Council Members.

Our Upland Commons Local Area Group: Mary Alford is happy to continue as Council's Representative & asked that the secretary find out when the Group is next due to meet as last meeting was held in March.

Pony Action Group (PAG): No longer in operation

Semi-Wild Equine Forum: Ken Edwards interested in representing Council. The Secretary will make enquiries. If needs be, Charlotte Faulkner can attend under another organisation.

Uplands Alliance: Council has no seat but Layland Branfield attends in his own right. He gave a brief outline on what the group does & will feed back to Council any relevant issues & ideas discussed.

Following on from previous enquires:

South West Peatland Partnership: Confirmation received that this group is still active. There was a rebranding earlier this year & a new website has been set up [South West Peatland Partnership](#)

Uplands Stakeholder Forum: For national level organisations with common land & commoning represented by the Foundation for Common Land.

The Chairman thanked all members who attend meetings & represent Council.

9. Proposed Dates for:

9.1 Stallion Accreditation Day

The proposed dates are for the week beginning 16 October 2023, based on Neil Cole's availability at Prison Farm, Princetown & when Ulli Arnold (vet) can attend. Further details will be sent to pony keepers & Local Commoners Associations at the beginning of September.

9.2 Local Commoners' Association Meeting

The Chairman proposed that this event is replaced with trying to arrange for David Fursdon (Chair of the Dartmoor Grazing Review) to meet with commoners. Diaries will need to be checked & it was suggested that Janet Dwyer also be invited.

9.3 Sheep Prohibition Period

Council agreed the dates for this year's mandatory sheep clearance. The South moor clear period will be from 11-25 November & the North moor clear period will be from 18 November – 2 December. Official notice will follow in due course.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday 13 September 2023 at 7:30pm at 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: *13th September 2023*

Chairman's Report to Council – July 2023

The past year has continued to be extremely busy for Sara and Laura. I would like to thank Sara for all her efforts and dedication to Council, often dealing with complex issues in an efficient and professional manner. Laura is increasingly able to deal with a wider range for Council's administration, providing valuable assistance to Sara.

Karla has had an increasing number of incidents, particularly in relation to dog attacks, following the end of Covid restrictions. We have continued to raise this, along with road traffic accidents, to the joint Dartmoor Crime Initiative. The support Karla provides to commoners is much appreciated and we thank her for all her efforts.

During the year Natural England's proposals for substantial stock reductions have raised increasing concerns for Commoners. Council has continued to work with other organisations to outline the grave implications to commoning on Dartmoor from Natural England's Policy. Thanks to the intervention of Dartmoor's MPs, Defra have now instigated an independent review. We look forward to inputting into the review. Hopefully there can be a better way forward, which delivers multiple benefits for Dartmoor, whilst giving a more assured future for Dartmoor's farmers.

Council continues to be represented on several working groups of outside bodies. Although the number of Defra consultations has reduced during the last year, Council has continued to reply to those relevant to Dartmoor.

The National Park is running a Test & Trial of some aspects of the new ELMs Scheme related to commons. It is to be hoped this initiative will lead to a smoother transition to ELMs and provide useful information to Defra in their design and delivery of these new schemes. Council and Commoners continue to be actively engaged in this initiative. Likewise, the Foundation for Common Land have been running a trial looking at how Defra's SFI (Sustainable Farming Incentive) might work on commons. The Dartmoor part of this trial is being led by Tracy May, which we hope will produce useful information to feed back to Defra. Hopefully these initiatives lead to positive outcomes for Commoners.

I would also like to thank Layland and the Council members who have put so much effort into helping Council, during the last year.

Note provided by Philip French, 12 July 2023