

## DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

### Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 31 July 2024.

#### Participants:

Mr P French – Chairman (outgoing)	Mr J Cooper	Mrs K Little
Mr L Branfield – Vice Chair (outgoing)/Chairman (new)	Mr W Dracup	Mr M Radmore
Ms T May – Vice Chair (new)	Mr K Edwards	Mr J Reddaway
Mr P Abel	Mr J French (newly elected)	Mr J Shears
Mrs M Alford	Mr P Heard	Mrs P Warren
Mr R Ashford	Mr J Jordan (retiring)	Mrs A Webber
Mr P Cleave	Mr R Jordan (newly elected)	Mrs A Willcocks
Mr A Coaker	Mr R Leigh	
Mrs S Sloman	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	

#### 1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman opened the Annual General Meeting. He thanked retiring Council Members, George Hill & John Jordan, for their dedication to Council over many years. John Jordan said a few parting words. The Chairman welcomed new Council Members, Neil Cole (apologies given), James French & Robert Jordan. Those present briefly introduced themselves to Council.

#### 2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr N Cole, Mrs C Faulkner, Mr S Lee & Mr T Stratton.

#### 3. Chairman's Report

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

#### 4. Elections:

##### 4.1 Election of Chairman

Two Members accepted their nominations for the post: Layland Branfield was proposed by Anton Coaker, seconded by Robert Leigh & Ann Willcocks was proposed by John Shears, seconded by Phil Abel. The results of a ballot were 13 votes for Layland Branfield & 8 votes for Ann Willcocks. Layland Branfield was duly elected as Chairman for the year 2024-2025. He thanked the outgoing Chairman for all the work he has done on behalf of Council.

The outgoing Chairman was presented with a gift on behalf of Council & flowers for his wife, Charlotte.

##### 4.2 Election of Vice-Chairman

Two Members accepted their nominations for the post: Ann Willcocks was proposed by John Shears, seconded by Phil Abel & Tracy May was proposed Phil Cleave, seconded by James Reddaway. The results of a ballot were 11 votes for Tracy May & 10 votes for Ann Willcocks. Tracy May was duly elected as Vice-Chairman for the year 2024-2025.

### 4.3 Confirmation of Honorarium

The Chairman & Vice-Chairman are currently allocated an honorarium payment of £5000 & £1000 respectively. As part of the procedures adopted for reinforcing Council's effectiveness, consideration is to be given to setting aside a sum of money to be used as a 'recognition payment' for those Council Members who lead on certain tasks.

During a discussion, it was acknowledged that although the amounts of honorarium paid need to be seriously reviewed, due to the amount of time & effort the roles entail, the affordability for Council must also be considered. It was agreed to keep the current position & review it when Council's estimates for the next financial year are presented in January.

### 4.4 Confirmation of Dartmoor National Park Representative to Council

Under Section 3 (2) (b) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Will Dracup & Simon Lee continue their term as the member & officer representative respectively representing the Dartmoor National Park Authority on Council. Peter Smerdon has been appointed as member deputy. However, although he may contribute to a debate, he shall not be entitled to vote.

### 4.5 Appointment by DNPA of Representative for Owners of Common Land

Under Section 3 (2) (d) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Penny Warren was re-appointed by DNPA to represent the interest of owners of lands forming part of the commons (other than the Duchy of Cornwall & the Park Authority) on Council for a period of 4 years from 1 July 2024.

Russell Ashford continues his term as the other advocate for common land owners.

### 4.6 Appointment of Veterinary Surgeon to Council

This position remains vacant. Finding a suitable person to fill the role proves difficult as the veterinary surgeon's practice cannot include the care of any livestock grazing in Dartmoor National Park. The Chairman has a couple of ideas that he will pursue in due course.

### 4.7 Co-opted Positions

Under Section 3 (3) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, there are 2 co-opted positions available. Following Ed Humber's departure from the NFU, this leaves both positions vacant. As there is no requirement to fill these positions at the AGM, it was agreed to leave both positions vacant for the time being.

## 5. Council's Sub-Committees, Working Groups & Members

The Chairman reported that, in line with the document adopted for reinforcing Council's effectiveness, the officers of Council have allocated Members to specific sub committees set up to ensure that the duties & functions of Council, as set out in the Act, are carried out efficiently & effectively. The sub committees & its Members are as follows:

- **Livestock - Husbandry, Management etc:** James French, Robert Jordan, Mark Radmore, James Reddaway & Karla McKechnie
- **Commons Issues - Fencing, Illegal Grazing etc:** Russell Ashford, Phil Cleave, Anton Coaker, John Cooper, Peter Heard & Tom Stratton
- **Landscape & Conservation - Peat Restoration, Swaling etc:** Mary Alford, Simon Lee, Tracy May, Penny Warren, Ali Webber & Ann Willcocks
- **Policy & Procedures:** Will Dracup, Robert Leigh, Kate Little & Ann Willcocks

- **Ponies:** Phil Abel, Neil Cole, Ken Edwards, Charlotte Faulkner, John Shears & Karla McKechnie
- **TB:** Mary Alford, Anton Coaker, Will Dracup & James Reddaway

The Chairman recognised that there has to be a period of adjusted for this new way of working, which will be open to review.

The first task for each Group will be to draft a Terms of Reference, in accordance with the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Schedule 2 (sections 6 to 10) & to nominate an appropriate lead person to be responsible for the delivery of a task within the timescale requested.

## **6. 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.

## **7. Proposed Dates for:**

### **7.1 Stallion Accreditation Day**

Suggested dates were week commencing 21 October or 28 October depending on Neil Cole's availability at Prison Farm, Princetown & when Ulli Arnold (vet) can attend. The Pony Sale is scheduled for 10 October. Secretary to liaise with Pony Sub-Committee & further details will be sent to pony keepers & Local Commoners Associations in September.

### **7.2 Sheep Prohibition Period**

The dates were set for this year's mandatory sheep clearance. The South moor clear period will be from 9-23 November & the North moor clear period will be from 16-30 November. Official notice will follow in due course.

The Chairman declared the annual 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: *11 September 2024***

Chairman's Report to Council – July 2024

Council's biennial elections held in June saw John Jordan, George Hill and myself step down as Council members. I would like to thank John and George for their many years on Council. We welcome Robert Jordan, Neil Cole and James French to Council.

Sara continues to run the office in a competent and professional manner, in what have at times been difficult circumstances. On behalf of Council, I would like to thank Sara for her work. Laura has left her temporary position with Council in assisting Sara. Some of the long-standing complex issues Council has had to deal with have now been resolved, with others hopefully nearing a conclusion.

Council has completed an internal review of its workings with the aim of increasing Council's effectiveness – some actions have already been implemented, with Council agreeing to the introduction of others over the next year. We hope these changes will enable some of Sara's workload to be streamlined, with the work more widely spread amongst Council members.

Council and the wider commoning community have spent much time and effort engaging with the "Dartmoor Review" established by Defra. David Fursdon and his team, who were established to do the review, are to be commended for the speed and thoroughness of the Review. At the time of writing, we await to see if the Reviews recommendations are implemented, especially in relation to the establishment of a "Land Use Management Group". We remain hopeful there can be a positive way forward delivering a viable future for Commoners.

The TB working group continues to engage with APHA to ensure Dartmoor's TB Plan is working and raise any other TB issues. We have also responded to several consultations and requests for input on various topics where these are relevant to Commons. During the last year Council has adopted two advisory codes regarding cattle; one focusing on public behaviour around cattle and the other focusing on cattle keepers identifying aggressive behaviour. Council continues to be represented on the MODs working and steering groups, as well as the Peatland working group, along with others.

The Test and Trial looking at certain aspects of the new ELMs Scheme has now concluded. This Defra sponsored trial run by the National Park, with engagement from Council and others, produced a large amount of information, including an assessment of the impact on Commoners businesses. Many Commoners participated in providing information for this report.

Karla has seen an increasing number of incidents over the last year. Her knowledge and support is invaluable. To have someone available day and night for animal incidents is much appreciated by Commoners: Thank you. The Dartmoor Crime Initiative has now been widened in scope and Council continues to engage with those aspects relevant to Commoners. It remains important any incidents are reported to Council.

I am now standing down as a Council member having not sought re-election. I would like to thank all those Council members who have given me much support over my term as Chairman. I would also like to thank Sara for her advice and support during my term as Chairman. It has been a privilege to serve as your Chairman.

I wish Council, its staff, officers and members well in the future.