

## DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

### Minutes of the Meeting of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council held at Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

#### Participants:

Mr L Branfield – Chairman	Mr K Edwards	Mr M Radmore
Ms T May – Vice-Chairman	Mrs C Faulkner	Mr J Reddaway
Mr P Abel	Mr J French	Mr J Shears
Mrs M Alford	Mr P Heard	Mr T Stratton
Mr R Ashford	Mr R Jordan	Mrs P Warren
Mr A Coaker	Mr R Leigh	Mrs A Webber
Mr N Cole	Mrs K Little	Mrs A Willcocks
Mr J Cooper		Mr R Williams
Mrs D Butterfield	Mrs K McKechnie (DLPO)	

#### 1. Chairman's Introduction

Dru will be acting as Secretary in Sara's absence. A request was made to keep comments succinct, clear and not to talk over one another.

#### 2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Mr P Cleave, Mr W Dracup & Mr S Lee

#### 3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting 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. No comments had been received by the set date & following a vote, the minutes of the Council Meeting held 23 October 2024 were confirmed & signed.

#### 4. Matters Outstanding from Previous Meetings:

- 4.1 **Council's Sub Committees:** Terms of Reference awaited from Commons Issues Sub Group: Due to issues with technology a chair is yet to be determined, this will be finalised, with terms of reference by the next meeting.
- 4.2 Future meeting dates for 2025 have since been published on the Dartmoor Commoners' Council website and circulated to Local Commons Secretaries.

#### 5. Correspondence Received

This has been circulated.

#### 6. Matters Brought Forward at the Direction of the Chairman

A letter of thanks will be sent to the NFU in respect of their ongoing support towards legal costs in the Wild Justice case.

#### 7. Meetings with Council Representation:

- 7.1 **Our Upland Commons Partnership:** 22 November - Layland Branfield not able to attend.

## 8. **Sheep Clearance Report from Quartermen**

Due to the good weather sheep clearance went well in all quarters. Phil Abel reported his concerns over an increase in sheep thefts, Karla McKechnie urged anyone experiencing this problem to report to the police using the new reporting system.

## 9. **Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer - See Appendix A**

## 10. **Limitation Notices: Consideration of the Chairman's Report on Limitation Notices & discussion /vote on whether to issue any.**

Key Points Discussed:

\* Chairman's Introduction: The Chairman introduced the following proposed Resolution: *"The Council has considered its power to issue limitation notices to limit the number of livestock depastured on any unit of the commons pursuant to Regulation 9 of the Regulations Prepared Under Section 5 of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 & its duties pursuant to sections 4(1) & 5(1) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, sections 28G(1) & 28G(2) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 & Regulation 9(3) of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 & has RESOLVED to not issue any limitation notices at this time for the reasons contained in the Report prepared by the Chairman of Dartmoor Commoners' Council dated 26 November 2024."*

Members were reminded that this proposed Resolution was detailed in the Report, prepared by the Chairman of Dartmoor Commoners' Council dated 28 November 2024 (the Report), circulated with the Agenda & all supporting documents as set out in the Appendix to the Report.

\* Legal Context: Powers & obligations under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 & Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (as set out in detail at section 3 of the Report) were reviewed.

Council members were sent all the written public comments received prior to the meeting & asked to read & consider these as part of the process.

\* Highlights from Council Members Comments:

Environmental & Practical Concerns: Discussion highlighted SSSI conditions, overgrazing & under grazing challenges, including outdated data from Natural England & recent findings from assessments conducted by other stakeholders.

Issues were raised regarding the complexity of implementing limitation notices, the risk of creating grazing vacuums & the need for proportionality & fairness across the commons.

Concerns were expressed about the impact of grazing reductions on wildlife & landscape management, including issues with vegetation dominance, fire risk, erosion & farming.

\* Limitations of Issuing Limitation Notices:

Limitation notices must be issued on a unit-by-unit basis. A determination of overstocking of a particular species of livestock is required & any limitation notice must:

- \* Apply to all commoners with rights to depasture that species on the specific unit.
- \* Be implemented proportionately & on a pro rata basis across the entire unit.
- \* Limitation notices on SSSI sites would require consent from Natural England. Failure to secure consent could lead to prosecution for criminal damage to a protected site. For

commons under HLS agreement any limitation notice could cause a breach of that agreement.

\* Role of the Land Use Management Group (LUMG):

The importance of working within the framework of the LUMG was emphasised. This group is in the process of being established & aims to formalise collaboration with stakeholders, including Natural England, to pool information & develop effective management strategies.

\* Future Collaboration with Natural England:

Optimism was expressed about working with Natural England's new team to balance grazing & conservation needs in a more realistic & collaborative manner.

The chairman re-read the proposed Resolution including the revised wording to include 'at this time'. Resolution Voted Upon:

*"The Council has considered its power to issue limitation notices to limit the number of livestock depastured on any unit of the commons pursuant to Regulation 9 of the Regulations Prepared Under Section 5 of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 and its duties pursuant to sections 4(1) and 5(1) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, sections 28G(1) and 28G(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Regulation 9(3) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and has RESOLVED to not issue any limitation notices at this time for the reasons contained in the Report prepared by the Chairman of Dartmoor Commoners' Council dated 28 November 2024."*

Vote Outcome:

In Favour: 22

Abstentions: 1

Against: 0

Conclusion:

The Council decided not to issue limitation notices at this time, emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts through the LUMG & with Natural England to address environmental & agricultural concerns in a balanced & informed manner.

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of Council will be held on Wednesday 22 January 2025 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: 5 February 2025**

**LIVESTOCK PROTECTION OFFICER**

Report to Commoners' Council

4 December 2024

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**Sheep Clearance**

I haven't had many issues with the clear periods. A few stragglers were got in and some sheep have now been turned back out.

**Pony Drifts**

The pony drifts I attended were well organised. Haytor, once again, hasn't been drifted and I would like this to be looked into because there are so many unmarked ponies and no one takes responsibility.

**Pony Sales**

I attended the pony sales and they seemed to run smoothly, the ponies looked well and the prices were fairly good.

There are a few very young foals on the moor that I'm keeping a close eye on.

I'm pleased to see ponies wearing reflective collars.

**Cows**

I have been phoned about cow problems/attacks but I always direct these calls to the office to be officially recorded.

There have been a few cows die on the commons, thought to be louping-ill.

**Dog Attacks**

A round-up of the number of dog attacks is 105, which is higher than usual. Last year for the whole year the number was 95.

I have now taken and submitted 3 DNA samples that will be collected by Dr. Nick Dawney of Liverpool John Moores University in January. Anyone who suffers a dog attack, please give me a shout immediately so I can take DNA.

**RTAs**

There have been 137 to date this year. Last year there were 161 for the full twelve months.