

**MINUTES OF THE 47th MEETING OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP
MEETING**

WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY 2008

Present:

Richard Thomas	Chairman
Nigel Hoskin	Chairman Dartmoor National Park Authority
Christine Marsh	Member, Dartmoor National Park Authority
Maurice Retallick	Member, Dartmoor National Park Authority
Ian Mercer	Chairman Commoners' Council
Richard Bailey	Government Office South West
Caroline Bullock	Natural England
Simon Bates	Natural England
Brig Andy Salmon	CTCRM
Brig Jolyon Jackson	HQ 43 (Wx) Bde
David Olney	Defence Estates
Roger Halliday	Duchy of Cornwall
Kevin Bishop	Chief Executive Dartmoor National Park Authority and Joint Secretary
Lt Col James Porter	DTE South West and Joint Secretary

In attendance:

Lt Col Tony Clark	Comdt DTA
Lt Col Paul Norrington-Davies	Chairman SMTOD Project
Major Hamish Miln	Secretary SMTOD Project
Martin Coulson	Defence Estates
John Loch	Defence Estates
Rebecca Webber	Dartmoor National Park Authority
Rob Steemson	Dartmoor National Park Authority

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed members to the 47th meeting of the Dartmoor Steering Group (DSG) and asked that the minutes record the thanks of the Dartmoor Steering Group members to Dr Nick Atkinson for his work as Joint Secretary prior to his retirement in September 2007. This was agreed unanimously.

2. Minutes of the 46th meeting of the Dartmoor Steering Group held on 17 January 2007

It was noted that these had been agreed by circulation.

3. Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda

It was reported that:

- Membership changes arising from the formation of Natural England have been proposed to Ministers and accepted.
- New ways of monitoring statistics are still being looked at within the DWP with a view to incorporating improvements based on experience of the current Licence Re-negotiation process.
- Funds for the replacement of the Holming Beam Range Hut have not yet been approved. Currently work is being undertaken on gaining planning and other consents.
- Starting with the 46th meeting, the DSG minutes and Annual Report have been published online via the Dartmoor Training Area and National Park Authority websites.

Ian Mercer requested that the summary note of lessons to be learnt from the BV 206 exercise be circulated to all parties.

AGREED: that the National Park Authority would circulate the summary note to all interested parties.

4. Minutes of the Dartmoor Working Party meetings held on 13 March 2007, 10 September 2007 and 7 November 2007

It was noted that:

- Two Training Area Marshals are now in post on Dartmoor working directly for the Commandant, Lt Col Tony Clark and that support of the DSG had been instrumental in gaining MOD funds for the posts.
- A meeting of interested parties had been held under the auspices of the Duchy of Cornwall in order to discuss a way forward for the Loop Road.
- The new National Park Management Plan for Dartmoor was published in December 2007 following extensive consultation, with partner organisations signing up to the principles that underpin the Plan.
- As a result of the 2006 Breeding Bird Survey, the sensitive areas have changed and new maps are being issued.

5. Review of Ten Tors

Brigadier Jolyon Jackson Commander 43 (Wessex) Brigade made a presentation to the meeting summarising the review that had been undertaken by his Brigade. He:

- expressed his gratitude to DNPA for its assistance with the review stating that he understood the potential conflict with the first purpose of National Parks but that Ten Tors clearly had positive benefits in terms of the second purpose (promotion of enjoyment and understanding);
- stated that the review clearly demonstrated that if Ten Tors was to be organised with military support it had to be held in May;

- confirmed that he was fully committed to implementing revised guidelines for the training period which would help reduce the pressure on the Moor during training; these would include an instruction to teams to conduct their initial training away from Dartmoor, a new training DVD to help raise awareness of the conservation value of the area and National Park purposes and a limit set of two training walks per team on the north Moor;
- confirmed that the Military would actively 'police' the new guidelines in order to reduce any impact on nature conservation interests and that this would include additional scrutineers and consideration of an electronic checking system for the event;
- emphasised that the present format of Ten Tors reinforced the team work that surrounded it and that he was personally committed to retaining that value; and
- reminded the meeting of the popularity of the event: applications to take part in Ten Tors greatly exceeded the numbers who currently took part – a total of 400 teams of 6 people and up to 200 in the Jubilee Challenge each year.

The Chairman thanked Brigadier Jackson for his presentation and the work that his staff had undertaken in completing the review before opening the item for discussion.

Prof Mercer stated that the Commoners were still concerned about the timing of the event and the route changes and had not had a chance to comment. He asked that the Working party established in 2005 be reconvened.

Brig Jackson said that he thought his report had addressed all of the Commoners' worries which were around lambing and calving issues. The difficulty the review had faced was that some concerns had been expressed which had not been supported by any factual evidence.

Prof Mercer accepted this and undertook to relay to the Commoners the need for factual evidence to support their concerns.

Nigel Hoskin expressed his gratitude to the Brigadier and Lt Col (Ret'd) Peter Mellor for the review. He confirmed that the National Park Authority was supportive of Ten Tors but remained concerned about the potential impact on nature conservation. He reiterated the fact that Ten Tors was the only major event that took place during the bird breeding season as every other event had been moved to a different time of the year. He welcomed the proposed amendments to the management of the training period and enhanced 'policing' by the Military and stated that he was hopeful that this would reduce the impact. He committed the National Park Authority to supporting, as far as possible, the new training regime; stated that an annual post exercise review would help identify areas for further improvement; and requested that a full review (to include timing) be undertaken in three years time and reported to the DSG.

Maurice Retallick accepted the changes but noted concern from both the Commoners and the National Park Authority as to how the monitoring and policing would take place. He went on to state that the resources that would be required

might not be made available and asked for assurance that there would be enough people on the ground to police the event.

Brig Jackson explained that teams were required to submit training programmes with routes in advance and this would be subject to monitoring by his HQ.

Richard Bailey stressed the benefits to children both individually and collectively, making the point that the development value received from Ten Tors would enhance the future of the region where former Ten Tors participants stayed to live and work in the area. He suggested that the health benefits be explored in more detail, reminding the meeting that this was the first generation for 600 years where life expectancy had begun to drop below that of their parents.

Brig Salmon thanked Richard Bailey for his refreshing point of view and asked that no further hurdles should be placed in the way of Ten Tors which all agreed was a good event and should not be smothered by administrative difficulties.

Simon Bates thanked Brig Jackson for his report, endorsed the report, stressed the importance of continued monitoring and emphasised the value of Ten Tors in terms of getting young people active.

Following discussion it was agreed that:

- There would be an annual post-exercise meeting convened by the Military to review experience and identify lessons to be learnt and that this meeting would involve the Dartmoor Commoners' Council as well as Natural England and DNPA and an annual report would be brought to the DSG.
- There would be a full review after three years to explore impact and timing issues and this would be reported to the DSG for deliberation.

The Chairman brought the discussion on Ten Tors to a conclusion thanking all the participants including Lt Col (Ret'd) Peter Mellor (who was not present).

6. Sustainable Military Training on Dartmoor (SMTOD)

A report was provided by Lt Col Paul Norrington-Davies from the SMTOD project management team explaining how Defence Estates (DE) had been tasked by the Secretaries of State (MOD and Defra) to demonstrate that:

- There is a continuing military need to train on Dartmoor; and
- The management of the Dartmoor Training Area (DTA) for military activities will continue to be sensitive to environmental, farming and public access issues and is thus sustainable in the long term.

He explained that the process of answering these two questions had been endorsed by the Secretary of State for Defence and presented to all stakeholders at the outset of the project, that a variety of different consultants had been used in order to help

demonstrate independence and that all reports and studies had been placed on the DTA website. He outlined the extent of the work which, in order to answer the first question, included the production of two separate studies, one by Rural Planning Services (RPS), an independent consultancy specialising in environmental issues, and one by Defence Training Estates (DTE) on military need; both had concluded that there was a continuing need to use DTA for live firing and dry training.

Environmental sustainability issues were addressed initially by an audit of the existing Dartmoor Environmental Management System conducted in consultation with stakeholders by RPS; other studies included a socio-economic study conducted by Exeter University, a bird survey conducted by the RSPB, as well as a National Vegetation Classification Survey. The last major piece of work - an Environmental Appraisal (EA) conducted by Entec UK Ltd, an independent consultancy specialising in environmental issues, was preceded by a Scoping Report (SR) which stated that the EA would assess the environmental impact of the status quo within existing boundaries and at the current level of military activity. The Scoping Report was widely consulted before the commencement of the EA. He went on to say that this work had now been completed and that the EA had concluded that, in general terms, the MOD had implemented a number of measures over time which helped to ensure that DTA was being managed in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner and that the activities of the MOD were not having a detrimental impact on the environment. However, he also pointed out that the EA did state that whilst live firing had a significant impact on public access, this was mitigated by the MOD which had agreed to limit the number of days when the ranges were in use in order to provide guaranteed access periods (currently 240 days per year on Okehampton) and the use of the Firing Notice which gave advanced warning (currently 6 weeks) of additional periods when access would be available. As a consequence of implementing these measures the overall effect of live firing on access was deemed to be insignificant. He went on to explain that where new mitigation measures had been identified in the EA, HQ DE would seek to implement these where they did not adversely affect the delivery of military capability and as and when funding became available.

He accepted that there were some outstanding issues/questions and these it was felt would be best resolved locally.

Comments from members:

Nigel Hoskin thanked Lt Col Norrington-Davies for his report.

On the issue of military need, he stated that the National Park Authority remain concerned that there has been no independent assessment of military need for both live firing and dry training on DTA since the Sharp Inquiry which reported in 1977 – some 30 years ago. He suggested that there would be merit in a truly independent assessment of military training needs across the UK that examined need and a spread of options for meeting that need. Whilst not seeking to deny a current military need for training on Dartmoor, he wished to record his regret that the SMTOD review had seemingly relied upon assertion rather than demonstration, and been designed to exclude an exploration of options essential to confidence-building for the future.

Turning to the second test concerning management of the DTA for military activities and the need to be sensitive to environmental, farming and public access issues, he reminded the Steering Group that the National Park Authority (like other stakeholders) had participated in the SMTOD process on a 'without prejudice' basis and that this was the first opportunity for the DSG to consider issues raised during the EA process.

He stated that the National Park Authority's position on military training on Dartmoor had been consistent and clear and was best summarised by the ambition in the current National Park Management Plan which is that "All military training taking place on Dartmoor will be consistent with national park purposes, and Defence Estates land is managed as an exemplar of conservation and recreation opportunity". It is against this background, and the statutory purposes of National Parks, that the National Park Authority must view the EA and the wider issue of potential licence renegotiation.

He asked that the meeting record the fact that the National Park Authority was unable to endorse the EA in its present form as a basis for potential licence renewal. He went on to state that he did not believe it appropriate to try and discuss points of detail at the meeting but highlighted the following strategic concerns:

- The lack of a detailed options appraisal linking various military training scenarios with associated impacts on training needs and public benefits
- Insufficient weight being accorded to National Park status in the assessment of significance
- A focus on the past and present with little detail as to how environmental impact and 'significance' might be assessed into the future. The end date of the current licence is still four years away and much will change in a fast moving world between now and 2012: what might be deemed insignificant now might well not be in 2012 and vice versa. Also, impact will be associated with the level of use but there are few data on the number of personnel likely to be using the Dartmoor Training Area, the maximum number of large-scale exercises envisaged and the extent to which new training practices might be introduced.

In conclusion he argued that the EA process had highlighted a number of areas and outstanding issues where further discussion would be useful. In his view, the members of the DSG should explore those areas further before there could be any question of the DSG endorsing the EA process as an adequate basis for licence renewal.

His list of areas requiring further discussion included:

- How to maximise socio-economic benefits for local communities
- How to maximise public access opportunities compatible with required training needs at any particular point in time
- How to manage the cultural and ecosystem services associated with the DTA effectively

- How to develop a clearer monitoring strategy/programme
- The long term objectives for the area

Caroline Bullock said that Natural England was appreciative of all the work that had been done, that they valued the good working relationship and look forward to that continuing but she went on to comment that the views of Natural England were similar to those of the National Park Authority with particular reference to conservation where the impacts were not qualified or quantified, and to public access where military activities and access were not reconciled in any way. She suggested that discussions continue with the aim of resolving these issues where possible. In particular, she queried the difference in the number of days allocated to live firing and those actually used, and suggested that this apparent discrepancy might be resolved by reducing the number of days currently permitted for live fire practice purpose.

Brig Salmon suggested that all this detail was really for the Working Party to address and that to the best of his knowledge any suggestion of extending the notice period from 6 weeks would impact adversely on training and begin a trend by which public access would increase to fill the space offered to it, so that, if at any period in the future the military required all those days permitted under the licence, they would never again be able to recover them.

Simon Bates asked for reconciliation between the under-utilisation of the range and the claim that not enough training area was available. He suggested that the EA was based on the existing level of use without any assessment of future requirement.

Brig Jackson explained that the discrepancy between permitted days and days used was dependent on weather and the current deployment of troops internationally. He gave the statistic that the MOD's intent was for a steady state maximum of 20% of troops on operations at any one time whereas at present 36% were deployed on operations.

Brig Salmon stressed that increasingly the lessons coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan was that the troops needed to do more live firing rather than less, so the live firing requirement is likely to go up and will always be at a high level. Already the changes were being reflected in the fact that more ammunition was being provided for CTCRM and as the Brigadier in charge he very much wanted to retain the capacity for live firing on Dartmoor at the present level.

Prof Mercer said that, with personal experience of the Sharp Inquiry, he could record the same arguments being used for the last 30 years. As there were four years between now and 2012 he asked that outstanding issues be pursued in parallel with negotiations for the new licence. He contended that the National Park would be a better place without live firing but fundamentally felt that the next four years should be used to address the factors, one of which was the way the ranges were booked and perhaps the balance between demand and use could be clarified in the intervening period. Meanwhile it was his opinion that we should not go to the Ministers with a firm view on the EA now. He also suggested that more could be done with regards to local procurement and asked for the opportunities to be examined in more detail with particular regard to red meat.

Richard Bailey expressed concern that it appeared that the EA is still evolving and questioned where responsibility lay for any additional work beyond that already scoped and agreed? What are the outstanding issues and should not DSG now draw a line under them as soon as possible? He wanted to know the history of the two tests set by Ministers and wondered why socio-economic impacts had not been weighted more heavily. He wondered whether the National Park Authority was sufficiently focused on this issue because, from the point of view of the Govt Office SW, the value of the Royal Marine encampments was immense and without Dartmoor these facilities might easily close with a serious socio-economic impact on the SW.

David Olney stressed how the whole EA had been undertaken openly and with transparency. The response to the two Ministerial tests had been undertaken as independently as possible short of allowing for the possibility that all military training should move to Scotland, which was the only alternative space for conducting the training carried out on Dartmoor, but this was too far from existing bases, leaving aside the political considerations. There was no proposal to move to Scotland so there were no alternative sites to Dartmoor. He argued that Defence Estates is an acknowledged exemplar of good practice to the point of mitigating the majority of the adverse effects of military training. Evidence to this effect had been provided and any remaining issues such as those raised by Natural England could be picked up by the Working Party, leaving no fundamental issues left for resolution (given that, as a point of principle, public access and live firing are incompatible). He then went on to say that there was a degree of urgency. With only four years left to expiry of the current licence, time had to be left for any future consultative process and, if it were decided that there was to be no more training on Dartmoor, MOD would need time to transfer any remaining training to a new training area. In conclusion, though fundamental differences of view remain, there is every reason for the stakeholders on Dartmoor to continue to work together as before.

Brig Salmon picked up the issue of the socio-economic position with particular reference to the future of CTCRM. He said the location at Lympstone was ideal with Woodbury Common on their doorstep, Devonport adjacent and Dartmoor a short distance away. They could not afford to go elsewhere to train in terms of cash or time. They could not use Sennybridge, due to insufficient capacity, and so they needed Dartmoor. Other issues included sustaining current operations because more and more courses are being directed to CTCRM from the Navy and CTCRM is struggling to keep sufficient instructors to maintain these courses. In addition to which, coalition forces have also got to be trained up to the same level, as do ancillary workers such as chefs and logistic personnel. His basic strategy was to increase the skills for all Royal Marines and that was his management plan. When he compared the lives of his troops with the management aspirations of the National Park there is no contest as to relative importance. As the National Park Management Plan has little to do with National Security, the fulfilment of his plan should not be inhibited with some additional bureaucracy because at the end of the day he still needed Dartmoor. He felt that some other members of the DSG were prevaricating.

Roger Halliday joined the meeting at this point and reported as follows: the Duchy is supportive of military training and when it is asked to renegotiate the current licence, will be inclined to give a positive response. He understood the concerns of the National Park Authority and was aware of the tensions and suggested therefore that

the Duchy would look at the licence in a new way, separating administrative licence arrangements from practical matters of land management. There will be an overarching agreement and under that a requirement to prepare a management plan for the training area in order to manage the moor more flexibly within the framework of National Park purposes. The Duchy regards any licence as a private arrangement between landlord and tenant but would seek the involvement of key stakeholders in the preparation and monitoring of any management plan. He stated that they have a similar arrangement for Properties in Care managed by English Heritage on behalf of the Duchy. For each of these there is a management plan which provides the basis of how issues are to be dealt with from day to day all under an overarching agreement.

In summing up on item 6 the Chairman welcomed the progress on SMTOD and the work undertaken by the MOD. He stated that the DSG's obligation was to produce a clear annual report to Ministers and Parliament reflecting the maximum possible consensus on the subject.

Given that discussions between various parties were ongoing, he proposed that this agenda item not be closed, but that members of the DSG take a little more time to work on agenda item 6 under the following heads:

1. A list of outstanding aspirations/issues will be drawn up and agreed, and work on them will be taken forward in the DWP and DSG, with a view to seeking resolution wherever possible.¹
2. Although on some issues the MOD's and the DNPA's objectives are inevitably conflicting, discussions will continue in any future licence period in order to narrow and manage the differences wherever possible.
3. Ministers will be recommended to establish an agreed consultation process in advance of any future licence renewal exercise.
4. The implications of the Duchy of Cornwall's proposal in relation to the format of licences, and the opportunities they offer for improved sustainable management, will be explored and a suitable text prepared for the DSG minutes.²

There was unanimous support for the Chairman's proposal.

7 Any Other Business

Prof Mercer asked that the Commoners' Council should have a seat on the DWP. This was agreed by members of the DSG.

Prof Mercer stated that the stock clearance by the military does not only affect grazing it also raises concern as to the efficiency of the clearers themselves. He asked that DE deal with their contractor and provide the reassurance that was sought.

In response, Lt Col Porter said the matter was being addressed and he hoped a conclusion would be reached shortly.

NOTES:

¹ The Dartmoor Working Party discussed the list of outstanding issues/aspirations it was asked to produce by the DSG at its meeting in February 2008.

There was universal recognition of the improvements to the management of, and public access, to the Dartmoor Training Area in recent years and a strong desire to build upon this momentum and maintain the good working relationships established.

The Working Party focused on identifying the key strategic issues as opposed to more specific issues that pertain to the day-to-day management of the training area.

A first draft of the issues was prepared under the following headings

1. Management of the cultural and ecosystem services
2. Maximising public access opportunities
3. Maximising socio-economic benefits
4. Monitoring programme
5. Need for military training

The Working Party did not conclude its discussions but the general feeling was that progress could be made on items 1 – 4 within the DWP/DSG structure subject to further discussion. On item 5, all parties accepted the short-term need for continued military training on Dartmoor. However, there was disagreement on the long-term objectives. The National Park Authority and Natural England raised the issue of whether the expectation is that military use (contrary to National Park purposes) will continue indefinitely or that all or most of it will come to an end in the not too distant future and who determines the long-term objective. MOD's view is that they have proven, through independent study, continued military need.

² The following form of words was subsequently agreed by the Duchy of Cornwall following discussion with members of the Dartmoor Working Party:

“The Duchy of Cornwall proposes that a Management Plan will support the new licence. It will build upon work ongoing in the current Defence Training Estates Dartmoor Integrated Land Management Plan and the Environmental Management System. It will be produced by the Duchy and the MOD and kept under review with the engagement of stakeholders (DNPA, NE, EH, the Commoners Council and others as appropriate) through the DWP and DSG. It will, wherever possible (subject to the Duchy's ultimate veto), have regard for National Park purposes and, as such, support the National Park Management Plan's Key Principles”.