

## From the Chairman of the Dartmoor Steering Group

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Lord Gardiner of Kimble  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of  
State for Rural Affairs & Biosecurity  
Defra  
Nobel House  
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LONDON  
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Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
and Minister for Defence People &  
Veterans  
MOD Main Building  
Horseguards Avenue, Whitehall  
LONDON SW1A 2HB

Dear Ministers

### **Dartmoor Steering Group**

As the Independent Chairman of the Dartmoor Steering Group, I have pleasure in submitting this Annual Review letter covering the calendar year 2017.

It is established that this letter is a public document and the Joint Secretaries to the Steering Group will be placing a copy on the website of the Dartmoor National Park Authority. I would also request that you kindly arrange for a copy to be placed on the gov.uk website, together with the Minutes of the Dartmoor Steering Group (attached).

I am very pleased to report that all the members of the Steering Group continue to view the Group's existence as a crucial, cost effective, and valued mechanism to help reconcile different interests, and facilitate effective partnership working on issues that arise from the military use of Dartmoor National Park.

Below I have set out the substantive issues that the Steering Group has considered, and that I believe warrant your attention.

#### **1 Mid Term Review**

When the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Ministry of Defence authorised Licence renegotiation, they agreed that the Ministry of Defence would provide a report at the mid-point of the new licence that would be a stock take of the training area's environmental management system, which includes environmental management tools and monitoring, usage data and public access (Hansard 27 January 2009).

The Steering Group has been clear in its view that the mid-term stock take will need to be able to report time series data, and that it would be of benefit if there was consultation on the data to be collected/reported and method for collection. I am pleased to report that the Steering Group received an up-dated monitoring schedule when it met in November 2017. Whilst it is not for the Steering Group to agree the monitoring programme, I hope the process of engagement that the Group has facilitated will ensure a robust approach to the mid-term stock take.

In support of the mid-term stocktake 2017, the Ministry of Defence has funded full archaeological surveys of Cramber, Ringmoor, and Merrivale training areas, made a financial contribution to the Peatland Partnership, and contributed to the Dartmoor National Park Visitor Survey - both in terms of assisting DNPA with funding, as well as adding a small question set, based around military training on Dartmoor. The Ministry of Defence has also undertaken a five day visitor survey at Cramber Tor training area, as part of separate planning conditions, but ensured the question set informed opinion of military training in the wider Dartmoor context. At the time of writing, the final results of the visitor surveys are, as yet, unpublished.

There remains concern about on-going time series data relating to nesting bird species, as there will now be just one survey by the time of the mid-term stocktake. This survey is scheduled to commence in spring 2018.

I hope that the Ministry of Defence continues to recognise the commitment they entered into regarding the mid-term stock take, and stewardship of the training area, and continue to provide the resources necessary for this to take place.

## **2 Review of MOD Byelaws**

In previous correspondence I have expressed concerns about the time delay in the review of byelaws, and the implications this has on the ability to manage the area with regard to National Park purposes by improving the aesthetic qualities of the landscape. My concerns remain, and I find myself having to repeat points made in previous correspondence. I would hope that Ministers will now give this issue serious consideration. I highlight my concern by reference to the Inter-Visibility Study. This was a commitment made under the Licence process and required a review of the range infrastructure (look-outs, flags etc) to ascertain whether this infrastructure is in an appropriate location in terms of public safety (ie can the public see it as they approach the Range Danger Areas, and can look outs see the public approaching?) and associated landscape impact. Partners (Ministry of Defence, Duchy of Cornwall and National Park Authority) committed staff resource to this process. The review was completed and, whilst the MOD has concluded that the existing infrastructure is sufficient to provide a safe place, the study led to the identification of some potential aesthetic improvements, including: relocation/removal of some flags, relocation of some lookouts to improve the view along the boundaries which also has the benefit of removing them from skylines.

We have been informed that potential aesthetic improvements cannot be progressed due to lack of capacity in the Ministry of Defence byelaw review team to consider the required changes to the byelaws. This has been further compounded by the unforeseen economic climate in which Defence now has to operate. The Dartmoor Military Byelaws are not listed in the top fifty for review, with nuclear sites, US visitor sites and other more secure sites, a higher priority. Whilst I can understand the top priorities in terms of national safety and security, I would hope that the Ministry of Defence could find a way forward, such as if there is any unused capacity or budget at year end.

### 3 Sustainable Procurement

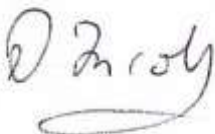
Since the licence renewal process, the Steering Group has been interested in exploring the opportunities for sustainable procurement on the MOD estate (both on Dartmoor and beyond). The former 43 Wessex Brigade ran a pilot exercise to scope these opportunities. We have had discussions with the Local Enterprise Partnership, and with MOD officials, but have not been able to progress beyond these discussions. Given the Government's commitment to the principles of sustainable procurement, and recent encouraging statements from the new Secretary of State at Defra it is hoped that, through your offices, you would consider initiating a sustainable procurement initiative involving the MOD estate in the South West (food, contractors and community benefit clauses). The Steering Group would welcome your views on progressing this opportunity.

### 4 Ten Tors

Ten Tors, the largest national outdoor challenge for young people, continues to be supported by all of the organisations represented around the Dartmoor Steering Group table. It is an excellent example of partnership working led by the Ministry of Defence. In recent years the format and management of Ten Tors has been amended to address concerns from stakeholders, and I was very pleased to learn that in 2017 there were no formal registered complaints about the event, or associated-training, from the Dartmoor community. This event provides an opportunity for almost 3,000 young people to participate in a navigation and challenge event in one of the country's finest National Parks. All of the partners are convinced of the benefits to those young people – it really is a life-shaping experience. 2017 marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jubilee Challenge, which is a challenge event designed specifically for young people with special needs, both physical and educational. I would also like to pay testimony to the many volunteers who give up their time to make Ten Tors work, from environmental monitoring during pre-event training, post event training, to the commoners who assist with the Team Managers' briefing and the Team Managers themselves. Ten Tors and Jubilee Challenge are excellent examples of the Government's ambition, as laid out in the 25 Year Environment Plan and 8 Point Plan for National Parks, to get more people engaged in the natural environment. We are grateful that the MoD continues to fund, sponsor and lead it.

I appreciate that there is considerable pressure on your calendars; however, if the opportunity arises to attend the Ten Tors and Jubilee Challenge events, the organisers and competitors would be most honoured.

Yours sincerely



David Incoll  
**Chairman, Dartmoor Steering Group**