

MINUTES OF THE 52ND MEETING OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

WEDNESDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2012

Present:

Members:

Richard Thomas	Chairman
Brig Piers Hankinson	Comd 43 Wessex Brigade (Wx Bde)
Col David Kassapian	Comd Commando Training Centre Royal Marines (CTCRM)
Col Christopher Sloane	Comd Defence Training Estate (DTE)
Bill Hitchins	Chairman, Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA)
Maurice Retallick	Deputy Chairman, DNPA
Phil McMahon	English Heritage
Roger Halliday	Duchy of Cornwall
Richard Andrews	Natural England (NE)

Joint Secretaries:

Lt Col Christopher Robinson	Regional Executive Officer DTE South West
Dr Kevin Bishop	Chief Executive (NPO), DNPA (Lead Secretary)

In attendance:

Rob Steemson	Head Ranger, DNPA
Victoria Harrild-Jones	HQ 43 (Wx) Bde SO2 LTAR
Nigel Sharpe	Senior Land Agent, DTE SW
Lt Col David Marino RM	Deputy Bailiff, Duchy of Cornwall
Lt Col Mark Hiskett	Comd DTE SW

Apologies:

Christine Marsh	DNPA
Prof Ian Mercer	Chairman, Dartmoor Commoners' Council

ITEM 1 – CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

- 1 The Chairman thanked CTCRM for hosting this, his last meeting as Chairman of the Dartmoor Steering Group, and welcomed members. He asked that everyone around the table introduce themselves.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE 51ST MEETING HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2010

- 2 Dr Bishop reported that the minutes had been circulated and agreed by correspondence.

ITEM 3 – MATTERS ARISING

- 3 Dr Bishop stated that, with regard to Para 4, the offer made by DNPA to host an event(s) for returning service personnel and/or their families remains open but, to date, has not had any take up from CTCRM. Col Kassapian replied that CTCRM was very grateful for the offer of a walk/family event facilitated by the DNPA, and hoped it could 'remain on the table'. He would remind Royal Navy/Royal Marines Welfare Organisation of the offer's existence.
- 4 Para 5 – at the last DSG meeting the matter of procurement had been discussed. For information, Dr Bishop tabled a copy of a response to a letter (dated 3 November 2011), written by the Chairman, from Ministers regarding sustainable procurement (previously copied to DSG members). In the letter, dated 2 December 2011, the Minister recognises the importance of this topic and says he has made the team concerned with the development of future regional contracts aware of our interest. He also states that, as a minimum, he would encourage contractors to work with local supply chains and investigate opportunities. No further contact had been received from the MOD and Dr Bishop felt that this agenda had stalled. He sought a steer from the DSG and the Chairman whether to invite MOD to provide a briefing/presentation for the next DSG meeting, or suggest an alternative way to progress.
- 5 Brig Piers Hankinson replied that Policy states units are only permitted to spend 2% of the total monthly mess budget with approved local traders. The only way to change the amount of 2% is to change the Policy, which would be a long process. However this year, the MOD had allowed local food stall-holders access to Ten Tors. Mr Retallick stated that the farmers had greatly appreciated the opportunity to attend Ten Tors and supply local beef. The farmers and he are hoping that this opportunity may be afforded them again. Dartmoor Farmers are keen to supply Dartmoor produce.
- 6 Brig Hankinson again reiterated that only 2% of the messing bill could be spent on locally produced food, but he would look at the possibility of the Ten Tors breakfast being made from local produce. Brig Hankinson stated that it was his intention to ensure that local farmers/businesses would be provided with an opportunity to trade from a stall within Okehampton Camp for Ten Tors 2013. Lt Col Robinson pointed out that the meat for the Dartmoor Commoners' Council lunch is sourced locally. Col Sloane stated that the Landmarc contract is very constrained and funding is limited. He feels the Policy needs changing to enable local barracks/troops more freedom of purchase.
- 7 The Chairman asked members for comments on how to proceed; should it be actively pursued or not? What would be the next sensible step?

- 8 Mr Retallick asked if there was someone at senior level who would be sympathetic to the cause of 'local produce being used by those using our land' who could be approached. Roger Halliday thought it would be better to approach Government, he feels that chipping away at a local level is not the answer. He suggests going back to the Secretary of State for Defence to ask for an increase, by some small degree, of the 2% allowance. Mr Hitchins agreed with Mr Halliday's comments.

AGREED: Letter to be sent to joint Ministers asking them to address the procurement issue or make possible further advances in local decision-making, or possibly make the Policy less rigorous/more flexible.

- 9 Para 8 - Clarity has been provided by Landmarc on the use of military equipment and Landmarc staff to fight wild fires and provide assistance with swaling. It was reported that the sub-group established to develop the monitoring framework, required as part of the 2012 licence, has met twice. Good progress has been made although, due to time constraints, Nigel Sharpe (lead officer) had not been able to produce a report for this meeting.

AGREED: That a framework for monitoring the impact of military training was a priority for the Steering Group. The Joint Secretaries should prioritise this work within the Working Party. Steering Group members indicated that they were willing to either bring forward the 2013 meeting or schedule an additional one, if required, to discuss and agree the draft monitoring programme.

- 10 Para 9 – Pound for the Park. Dr Bishop reported that this initiative had been launched for large scale recreational events on Dartmoor and expressed his gratitude for the support of 43 Wessex Brigade as it looks to include this formally within the Ten Tors process. Dr Bishop re-iterated that money raised through 'Pound for the Park' will be used for practical conservation and/or recreation tasks and that the Authority would welcome suggestions for practical projects that could be supported by funds generated. Brig Hankinson reported that this had been trialled last year and was well received. There is now a 'tick box' on the 2013 form, and so far it has received extraordinary support – one team going so far as to contribute £100! Dr Bishop stated that it was very encouraging to hear how much the teams all wanted to support this initiative and asked if it would be possible to print a 'thank you' in the booklet that is produced by 43 Wessex Brigade. Brig Hankinson thought that congratulating those teams who completed plus a piece on how the money had been/would be spent would be a good thing. Mr Halliday concurred that by congratulating everyone, and also publishing a short audit on how the money had been used, might encourage further contributions.

- 11 In para 18 of the minutes, the significance of the review of MOD byelaws was noted for the successful implementation of the Integrated Rural Management Plan (IRMP). Dr Bishop understood that there had been no progress on a timeline for the review and has been told that, without the review, a lot of actions in the IRMP cannot progress. Col Sloane stated that Defence Infrastructure Organisation is undergoing significant reorganisation and that, currently, the Byelaw Review Team is undermanned with a lot of staff working part time, there is a huge backlog of byelaw work to be undertaken and it is impossible to give a timeline with such a huge amount of uncertainty hanging over them. The Chairman asked if there was anyone the DSG could contact, or anything it could do to help the situation. Col Sloane

stated that until the DIO transfers are known there is nothing that can be done. The next 12 months are going to be quite crucial but that we should know where the byelaws are going in the next 12 months. The Chairman asked the Joint Secretaries, in liaison with Defence Estates, to clarify the impact of the delay in the byelaw review on delivery of the IRMP and, in particular, practical improvements on the ground so that he could report this to Ministers. Mr Halliday supported this approach as he was concerned about potential delays to the IRMP.

- 12 Para 19 Lessons Learnt – these were submitted to MOD in December 2011 following the last DSG. Copies were sent again to MOD and Defra in March and we finally received confirmation of receipt in July. The papers are now live on the DNPA website.

ITEM 4 – MINUTES OF THE DARTMOOR WORKING PARTY MEETINGS HELD ON 20 MARCH 2012; 12 JUNE 2012; 6 SEPTEMBER 2012 AND ISSUES AND ASPIRATIONS WORK PLAN

- 13 Lt Col Robinson reported that the minutes had been circulated previously to all, with enclosures that helped to expand the outcome of the three meetings. The matter of explosive ordnance clearance was raised at the meeting on 20 March; Lt Col Robinson reported that the permanently based REME bomb disposal had been withdrawn from Okehampton, which means that clearance of the moor had come to a halt. Emergency coverage/response would now be from Devonport.
- 14 Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) had been raised at the meeting on 6 September, Lt Col Robinson reiterated that this related to an EU Directive on airspace management and meant that air activity over the three live firing ranges on Dartmoor, Willsworthy, Okehampton and Merrivale, would remain at 10,000 ft. At other ranges and on days when dry firing was taking place, this 'ceiling' could be reduced to as little as 5,000ft. Mr Hitchins expressed his concern that this had appeared as an ultimatum with no consideration of the legal duty to have regard to National Park purposes, nor any consideration of the potential increased work required to implement the new system.
- 15 Col Robinson reported that the military had licence to use the ranges for so many days over the year, in the past this 'allowance' had not been used to its full capacity. However, in future this would be changing and the ranges will be used to a far greater extent.
- 16 The Chairman thanked the Dartmoor Working Party for all its work, he stated that he was grateful to it and for all it had achieved; he encouraged the members to press on and continue to do so in the future.

ITEM 5 – SUPERVISION OF THE DARTMOOR TRAINING AREA

- 17 Col Sloane stated that the entire structure had been under review, and that this was now finished, the proposals had been agreed and put to the Unions for consultation. The proposal is for a Grade 2 Military Staff Function post (ie postholder is required to have a military background) to be on Dartmoor. In due course Lt Col Robinson will be replaced by a retired officer who will be based at Okehampton full time. Bill

Hitchins endorsed the appointment of a full time official at Okehampton and Roger Halliday echoed that sentiment. He stated that it was essential to get someone in post who would be dedicated to the Dartmoor Training Area and that he knew the Prince of Wales shared that view.

- 18 Dr Bishop wanted to personally thank Lt Col Robinson for all his hard work in balancing a multitude of tasks/duties in recent months. Everyone around the table endorsed that, and the Chairman also wanted to thank him personally for all his hard work and dedication.

ITEM 6 – TEN TORS

- 19 Dr Bishop stated that DNPA is keen to support Ten Tors, to minimise its environmental impact and maximise its benefits to those who participate and the local communities. He asked that the Authority be kept fully informed of any proposed changes, including the timing of the event and the possibility of it being altered.
- 20 Brig Hankinson responded that Ten Tors 2012 had been a great success; even the weather was on side! Out of 401 teams entered 387 finished with 140 casualties and, out of 236 participants in the Jubilee event, only two did not complete the course. He was pleasantly surprised by the community voice of encouragement and support and was uplifted by the support of all around the table. Ten Tors 2013 will have a few minor changes in the routes to limit the usage of roads and Princetown. The 'Moor Group' and the 'Fall Out Group' will not be permitted alcohol during the duration of the Ten Tors event but, apart from that, not a lot of change will occur. He has produced a written intent and is concerned about the reliance on helicopter usage on the moor, both for outsourcing and evacuation purposes and the impact this can have on the resilience of the event. The number of Tor parties on top of the Tors will be reduced. The route committee, under the chairmanship of Tony Clark, will be working to get teams off the roads and away from rivers/water. The Chairman congratulated Brig Hankinson on a cracking 2012 Ten Tors.
- 21 Mr Hitchins stated that the National Park Authority is keen to support Ten Tors, to minimise its environmental impact and maximise its benefits to those who participate and the local communities. He asked that the Authority be kept fully informed of any proposed changes, including the timing of the event and the possibility of it being altered.
- 22 Brig Hankinson thanked the Authority for its support and stated that he had been advised to maintain the current time slot.
- 23 Mr Retallick thanked 43 Wx Bde for the opportunity given to the Commoners to attend the team managers' briefing. The fact that they had been able to advise on matters was very much appreciated as the lead up to the event often causes more problems than the actual event itself. He hoped that this initiative would continue. Brig Hankinson replied that the Team Managers' meeting had been held in October and there had been very good engagement and this would be continued. He is appreciative of how well everyone regards Ten Tors.

ITEM 7 – HOLMING BEAM

- 24 Mr Hitchins recalled that, at the meeting held in October 2008, David Olney (DG Ops Defence Estates) announced that funding had been agreed to replace the hut with a new building in a different location. The hut was described by those present as an eyesore. However, the money for a replacement never materialised and the eyesore remains. Mr Hitchins wondered as to the current state of play? Col Sloane was unaware of David Olney's offer, but was concerned at the hut's possible removal as it serves as both a range control and wardens hut. Lt Col Robinson agreed that the hut is an eyesore but it is still functional and its position looks directly north covering the entire range, Merrivale could not operate without it. Following discussion Col Sloane stated that he would find resources to fund a potential replacement for the hut and that Defence Estates would discuss potential alternative locations with the National Park Authority.
- 25 Roger Halliday confirmed that the Duchy of Cornwall would be more than happy to help identify a new location for the hut that also gave overall coverage of the range. The Chairman reiterated that David Olney's correspondence showed there was to be a change of site/structure and any improvement that could be made, either through the hut's removal, or appearance, would be very welcome.

ITEM 8 – FUTURE OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- 26 Brig Hankinson advised that the regular army was in the process of reducing its numbers by 20,000. However, with troops returning from duty abroad and the increase of the Army Reserve (the old Territorial Army) the footprint of the regular army would increase significantly in the south west. The Third Brigade would be looking to train on Salisbury Plain, therefore if the Royal Marines have aspirations to train in the south west they would need to do so on Dartmoor, which means more use of the ranges. Col Kassapian concurred with what the Brigadier had said, if the army were to be using Salisbury Plain, the Royal Marines would be looking to train elsewhere. He thought that it was likely that there would be an increase in the demand and use of the National Park for military training.
- 27 Col Sloane stated that, although the scale alluded to was significant, the changes would not be immediate. Although the returning troops will impact on Dartmoor, he could not quantify by how much, as this would depend on the changes that would be going through the MOD as a whole. Dr Bishop emphasised the importance of having the methodology of monitoring the new licence in place and reiterated that the new licence had been predicated on existing levels of permitted use.

ITEM 9 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 28 The Joint Secretaries reported that, traditionally, they have produced an annual report which has been submitted to MOD and Defra on the understanding that this was placed in the House of Commons' library. The last acknowledgement received was for the 20th annual report, submitted in September 2008, which was in the form of a letter from the then Secretary of State for Defence. After enquiring about what

was actually happening to the annual reports, it has transpired that the reports have not been placed in the House of Commons library. It was proposed, with immediate effect, that the Chairman should send an annual letter to the two Secretaries of State, providing a short report on progress, key issues and highlighting any areas where further advice/involvement was required. This would replace the annual report and could then be placed on the DNPA and MOD websites. It was reported that MOD Officials supported this proposal.

AGREED: The Chairman will send an annual letter to the relevant Secretaries of State and this should be placed on the MOD and DNPA websites.

- 29 The Chairman then gave a farewell speech, this being his last meeting. He thanked the various members of the Steering Group and said he had enjoyed his time as Chairman and had learnt a lot about Dartmoor from all sides of the spectrum. He wished the Group the very best for the future and hoped his successor would soon be appointed. He also took the opportunity to formally thank Lt Col Chris Robinson and Phil McMahon, from English Heritage, who were also attending their last meeting as Dartmoor Steering Group members.
- 30 It was reported that, after some considerable delay, the process of appointing a new Chairman had commenced. An advert for the post had been placed on the Cabinet Office website and the closing dates for applications had now passed.
- 31 Bill Hitchins presented the Chairman with a book of Dartmoor Photographs on behalf of the Steering Group.

ITEM 10 – DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING

- 32 The next meeting will take place on 13 November 2013 at Okehampton Battle Camp unless there is a need for an earlier meeting to discuss the monitoring framework.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 12:30