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Dear Ministers

Dartmoor Steering Group – Annual Review

Following discussion with your officials it was agreed that the former annual report be replaced by an annual review letter from the independent Chairman of the Dartmoor Steering Group to the Ministers jointly responsible for the DSG. This decision was taken because the annual report had not, in recent years, been placed in the House of Commons library as Steering Group records would indicate had been the original intention and earlier practice. I believe that the annual review letter should be a public document and am instructing the Joint Secretaries to place a copy of this letter on the National Park Authority's web-site. I would also like to recommend that you arrange for a copy to be placed on the gov.uk website along side the minutes of the Steering Group.

I am pleased to say that all members of the Steering Group continue to see the Group as a valuable, cost effective mechanism to help reconcile different interests and facilitate efficient partnership working on matters relating to the military use of Dartmoor.

There are a number of issues arising from DSG discussions that I would like to bring to your attention in this first annual review letter:

Procurement

During the licence renewal process for military training on Dartmoor all parties represented on the Dartmoor Steering Group expressed an interest in developing sustainable food supply chains to benefit the local economy and the environment and to support military training.

Defence Training Estate and the National Park Authority have pursued this agenda through meetings with Ministry of Defence officials and discussions with local suppliers. 43 (Wessex) Brigade have been involved in a separate project to Develop Sustainable Food Chains focused on the county of Wiltshire; the findings from this project have been shared with the Dartmoor Steering Group. Whilst we have enjoyed some success with catering for special functions, I understand that this may only represent 2 per cent of the

MOD victualing budget and we have not been able to get clarity on how the Government's stated aims for sustainable procurement are being reflected in the tender process and subsequent multi-activity contracts.

I wrote to the Rt Hon Andrew Robathan (then Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans) seeking official support to explore the issues we had highlighted in more detail. His response (2 December 2011) indicated that MOD were reviewing the Multi-activity contracts and that sustainable procurement was one of the issues to be addressed. He also indicated that he would make the team concerned with the development of future regional contracts aware of our interest. We have had no follow-up to this letter and I hope that you can now provide a contact name for an official who is in position to help us take this agenda forward.

Mid-term stock take

When Ministers agreed that licence renegotiation could proceed (January 2009) Defra asked the MOD to provide a report at the mid-point of the new licence which would be a stocktake of the training area's environmental management system, which includes environmental management tools and monitoring, usage data and public access information. Reduced capacity within the Defence Infrastructure Organisation has delayed progress on an agreed monitoring programme but the Steering Group has prioritised this work for 2013. Members of the Steering Group have indicated that they are willing to either bring forward the 2013 meeting or schedule an additional one, if required, to discuss and agree the draft monitoring programme. This is an important area of work – early agreement on what is to be monitored and how this is to be done against an agreed baseline is critical. I would therefore be grateful if officials could be tasked with providing an adequate counterpart to enable monitoring to proceed on agreed terms.

Holming Beam

I am pleased to report that the Defence Infrastructure Organisation has re-confirmed that it will find the resource to fund a replacement of the look out hut and are in discussions with the National Park Authority and Duchy of Cornwall about potential alternative locations. This is a welcome development as there is agreement amongst members of the Steering Group that the hut is an eyesore.

MOD Byelaw Review

The Steering Group were advised that the review of MOD byelaws was delayed due to reduced capacity in the Review Team. This will impact on the delivery of the Integrated Rural Management Plan and, in particular, on work to reduce the visual intrusion of the military infrastructure in the National Park. It would be helpful if Ministers could signal Dartmoor as a priority in the mounting backlog of MOD byelaw work.

Ten Tors

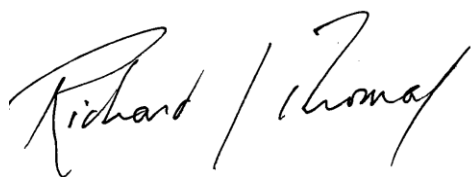
Throughout my time as Chairman of the Steering Group I have been impressed by the organisational effort behind Ten Tors and the real benefits and sense of achievement it provides to thousands of young people as well as the positive effect which it has on public perceptions of the armed forces. During 2012 steps were taken to further minimise its

environmental impact; involve commoners in the training of team managers (to develop their sensitivity towards farming on the moor) and maximise the local economic benefits. I hope that the MOD will be able to continue to support Ten Tors and that the other bodies involved in this important event will also continue to support it. I appreciate that Ministerial diaries are always busy but if you do get the opportunity it would be worth attending the Saturday start to get a sense of the scale of the challenge and the enjoyment it brings to able bodied participants and to the less able bodied young people who participate in the Jubilee Challenge.

Notwithstanding reduced capacity amongst all the member organisations I hope that work by DIO to support the Dartmoor Mires project, conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, public access and interpretation can be sustained, as positive work in recent years contributed to the support for licence renewal.

In summary, the Dartmoor Steering Group (and supporting Working Party) continues to play an important role in ensuring efficient and effective partnership working on Dartmoor.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and 'T'.

Richard Thomas
**Independent Chairman,
Dartmoor Steering Group**