

MINUTES OF THE 58TH MEETING OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

Thursday 6th December 2018

Held at Okehampton Camp BLD 57 – 1400hrs

Present:

David Incoll(DI)	Chairman
Chris Gregory(CG)	Land Steward Duchy
Dr Kevin Bishop(KB) (DNPA)	Chief Executive Dartmoor National Park Authority
John Waldon(JW)	Chairman Dartmoor Commoners Council
Lt Col Tim Jalland(TJ)	Regional Commander DIO SD Trg SW
Nigel Sharpe(NS)	Defence Land Agent, DIO Land Management Services
Lt Col David Marino RM(DM)	Deputy Bailiff Duchy of Cornwall (arrived 1200hrs)
Maj Crispin d'Apice (CD)	Training Safety Officer DIO SD Trg SW
Bill Hitchins(BH)	Chairman Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA)
Robert Steemson(RS)	Dartmoor National Park Authority
Maurice Retallick(MR) (DNPA)	Deputy Chairman Dartmoor National Park Authority
Eamon Crowe(EC)	Natural England

Apologies:

Peter Harper Dartmoor National Park Authority

ITEM 1 – CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

1.1 The Chairman welcomed all members to the 58th meeting of the Dartmoor Steering Group.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE 57TH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15th NOVEMBER 2017

2.1 Previous minutes were confirmed by way of circulation.

ITEM 3 – MINUTES OF THE DARTMOOR WORKING PARTY

3.1 TJ briefed the Steering Group on the progress being made by the Working Party. The Working Party had again met three times over the past year with a focus on Mid-Term Review as well as the continuing oversight of the day-to-day management of the Dartmoor Training Area. He took the opportunity to thank all members of the Working Party for their help, support and guidance over the past year. It had been much appreciated and had again led to a productive year.

On a strategic level TJ made the Steering Group aware that more change had taken place. In short, the Army had replaced the Defence Infrastructure Organisation as the Top-Level Budget holder for the Defence Training Estate. However, despite the change, the Working Party had continued to deliver what was required and more. He indicated that the emphasis had switched, quite rightly, from the day to day business of stewarding the estate, which he considered was in a good order due to the collaborative efforts of the Working Party, to concentrate on the future, concentrating on the delivery of the Mid-Term Review and beyond. TJ said that the Working Party had continued to progress towards the change to the footpath route in Okehampton Camp to better ensure the safety, safeguarding, and security of the users. Work was still ongoing to make it so but with the support of all parties involved he was confident that the work would be completed in the coming year. He was grateful to all concerned for their help.

Alongside the re-direction of the footpath the Working Party had also been looking at a couple of other matters relating to the Camp. First, demolition of some of the older and potentially dangerous buildings in the Camp. On current planning the demolitions would take place within the financial year. Second, a review of the Okehampton Camp Landscape Plan had taken place and since the last review many of the actions had been carried out, including the felling of 2 conifer plantations, replaced by mixed broadleaf trees. However, he raised the challenge from Ash die-back, indicating the MoD would be removing it as quickly as possible. This might have a significant visual impact but the plan would be to replace trees in order to ensure the woodlands were sustained. The remaining conifer area required some management with thinning and under-planting taking place. The intent was to extend the plantation to provide a more varied training environment.

TJ suggested that over the past 3 years, at least, the Working Party and indeed Steering Group had been discussing the economic impact of military training on Dartmoor. He had not received any feedback from Tim Jones (Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership) and would like to recommend that the Steering Group did not prioritise this work area.

TJ said that wildfire control was rightly an important issue on Dartmoor. Although current arrangements broadly worked, as evidenced by the relatively few fires seen and the fact that these few were normally put out very quickly, the MoD had taken the opportunity to review its procedures. The key outputs from this review were:

- A review the location of firebreaks at Willsworthy in conjunction with Natural England and a decision not to move their location;
- The introduction of a more cohesive three-phase approach to wildfire control on the MOD-owned estate or where the fire is the result of MOD activity;
- Collaborative work was ongoing between the MoD and the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service to better link the two as part of the Dartmoor Wild Fire Control Plan.

He considered that the efforts would lead to a yet more effective approach to MOD wildfire control on the Moor.

TJ reported that he was trying to finalise the latest version of the Integrated Rural Management Plan. The draft had been circulated and commented upon by the National Park, for which he was extremely grateful. However, there had been a challenge with the mapping which should be included in the IRMP. Due to the loss of the DIO mapping cell he had not been able to put the maps into the final document as he would have liked. He remained confident that the maps would appear in due course. However, the lack of IRMP would not detract from the continued efforts towards the stewardship of Dartmoor in collaboration with the Duchy, National Park Authority and the Commoners.

The monitoring of military debris was ongoing to ensure that those using the Moor continued to treat it with the respect it deserved. Where this has been reported the MoD team at Okehampton had continued to act at speed to either recover the debris or have it destroyed by the MoD Explosive Ordnance Clearance Team. The latter had recently been carrying out a clearance operation on the Moor in the area of the Sandpits and East Mill Tor. The team had many calls on its time and the fact that the MoD had been able to get them for such a long deployment was further testimony to the importance it places on the need to support responsible public access to the Moor.

TJ considered that the military users' general good behaviour was an indicator of the efforts of the Okehampton Team to ensure they were being correctly briefed on how to behave properly. The monitoring was not just done by the military and he was very grateful to the Dartmoor Rangers for their support in this. It had been a two way process this past year where the military staff had also been reporting, to the National Park Rangers, debris left by civilian users following cycling and walking events. Another such example of this support to Dartmoor was the hosting of two walks during the Dartmoor Walking Festival and several visits from local community and interest groups. He had also been grateful to the National Park Authority for dealing with the Japanese Knotweed in the Willsworthy Car Park.

In summing up, TJ hoped that the Steering Group would see that the good collaborative work that had been ongoing had continued to help improve the stewardship of the Moor, benefitting all. Again, he thanked all stakeholders for their continued support and effort.

Questions/Actions/Comments:

KB asked if the Issues and Aspirations paper that the Steering Group had requested be developed post the new license should be re-considered. It was agreed that KB would send TJ a copy, so it could be circulated to all.

In discussion, it was noted that Defra was leading on a sustainable food procurement programme and it was suggested that this was, once again, raised as an issue in the annual letter to Ministers.

BH took the opportunity to thank the DIO for its financial and practical support in the National Park over the last 12 months.

ITEM 4 – MID TERM REVIEW (INCLUDING IRMP AND SURVEY REPORTS)

4.1 Mid-Term Review

TJ thanked all stakeholders for their support in for the work towards the Mid-Term Review. I hoped that the detail he was about to give would indicate, to the Steering Group, the good work that had been carried out in support, not only towards the Mid-Term Review, but also towards the better stewardship of the Moor. He again pointed out that it had been a truly collaborative effort from all concerned.

TJ said that it was lucky that he was again able to make the most of three MoD Conservation Stewardship Fund, a fund with a value of £1.8m to help steward the MOD's estate across the country. To ensure Dartmoor had a good shout his team had continued to work closely with the National Park to ensure he had been able to put in good and timely bids to have a better chance of gaining funds. This past year the following funds had been obtained:

- £10k for the demolition of some of the old and derelict buildings in Okehampton Battle Camp – it was planned that these demolitions would take place before the end of the financial year.
- Another £5k had been provided in support of the Peatlands Project.
- £10k was obtained to help complete the Willsworthy Archaeological Survey which had been done and as such was up to date with the 5-year programme.
- The fund had paid for a Breeding Bird Survey to the tune of £50k and was hoped that survey report would be received from the RSPB in December.
- The Okehampton Camp Footpath Diversion had been supported with a sum of £8k.
- £2k was obtained to support work on erosion work at Cowsic, however, it had been decided that it was not the appropriate time to carry this out.
- £3k had been allocated to the Merrivale Peat Causeways.
- The Stewardship fund would be funding repairs to the Wickham Trolley Railway “shed” the tune of £10k.
- The Dartmoor Visitors Centre film piece funded by the Stewardship fund to the tune of £5k had been showing on a regular basis in the Centre since July.
- The Cramber Tor funded survey had been carried out which had indicated that there was no damage to the site and the condition of the archaeology had improved.
- £1,500 was provided to help with the National Park's Visitors Survey which took place in the summer which indicated that the military presence had no significant effect on visitors to the Moor.
- £5k was granted to work on tracks around the Peat Works Area.

TJ hoped the Steering Group would see that Dartmoor did well out of the Stewardship Fund. He emphasised that it did require good collaboration between all

Stakeholders to make it so. It was important that this continued to ensure the most was made of the funds to better support the maintenance of the Moor. He again thanked all concerned for their efforts over the past year and urged that this continued to ensure the continued chance of obtaining the funding over the coming years.

ITEM 5 – USAGE STATISTICS

5.1. Live Firing

CD indicated that usage of all 3 live firing areas was fairly steady. Cancellations (and particularly late cancellations) were down, possibly due to improved scrutiny of bids by Training Area staff.

5.2. Overall Training Area Usage

CD suggested that it had been a mixed year; usage of Okehampton, Merrivale and Ringmoor was down whilst usage of Cramber and Willsworthy was up. It was difficult to deduce any significant patterns in these figures. Usage may have been affected by several large-scale overseas exercises and operations which may have reduced the number of troops training. At the same time the challenging recruiting environment had reduced the number of recruit troops coming from CTCRM. The increased usage of Willsworthy was not reflected in the number of days that the area used for live firing which had remained broadly unchanged; the increase was therefore probably due to greater numbers of troops firing on live firing days and increased usage of the area for dry training.

By 2020 SPTA would be 60% over burdened with training and therefore it was likely that other areas in the South west would see the effects.

Questions/Actions/Comments:

KB asked what the definition was of man training days? CD explained that for example if there was a unit of 50 people on exercise for 5 days that would count as 250 man training days (50 people x 5 days). This information was provided from the unit training bid, therefore the unit might bid for 100 to attend and only 80 actually turn up of which 10 are administration only. This made it more difficult to break down. The figures on the bid were the maximum and units could not go above the figures on the bid.

KB asked what the percentage was of the use of British forces compared with foreign forces. CD explained that he does not have the figures but confirmed that the Dutch Marines did use Dartmoor. It was agreed that it would be useful to be able to differentiate, going forward, between use by domestic forces and the armed forces of other nations and joint exercises.

ITEM 6 – TEN TORS

6.1. 2018

CD said that training went well with only 3 complaints from the local community. These all involved incorrect assumptions that private lanes were public rights of way. The deployment of volunteer Environmental Compliance Monitors to oversee teams in training was again well received. 2018 also saw the successful roll out of “*Where’s To.*” A quiz open to Ten Tors trainees designed to encourage a broader understanding of the Moor.

6.2 2019

The mandatory Team Managers’ Brief had already happened and once again involved briefings on responsible training from Ten Tors and DNPA staff and several Commoners. Given the issues with private lanes in the previous year’s training this area was heavily briefed. The Ten Tors Rules had been completely rewritten; including making the Green Card, which details how to train sensibly, much clearer and more user-friendly. CD asked the Steering Group members for ideas for guest activities that it would like to see at Ten Tors in 2019. He needed to be informed as soon as possible.

Questions/Actions/Comments:

DI asked if there was some way that a short film of Ten Tors could be shown at the Visitors’ Centre as he considered it would be beneficial to those who could not attend.

CD explained that people were encouraged to train by and on the rules and where possible other than on the North Moor, were still following the agreed restrictions made by the Steering Group to minimise the amount of training on the North Moor from 1st February to the date of the event itself. This was either 4 days or 2 weekends per team. In addition, there was still a restriction in place that anyone training on Dartmoor from mid-January onwards had to let the MoD know where they were training. CD had stressed at the Commoner’s briefing that if they, the Commoners saw anything or anyone that upsetting them to make a note of the team number (teams were mandated to carry this with them) and report it so that follow up action could be taken. If teams did get things wrong repeatedly during training, then there was a possibility that they would not be able to take part in the event.

RS commented that they were looking at ways to influence other areas for camping and move people away from the most popular spots. The compliance monitoring team were worth their weight in gold. CD would liaise with RS about pushing information out especially on the website.

KB expressed that he recognised the points raised in terms of large scale recreational events and National Park farming communities but for the record Ten Tors was a good practice model from the National Park’s perspective and one that it would hold up to other event organisers in terms of the degree that went into route planning, scrutinising the training in terms of environmental compliance and the management of the event itself and promoting “Donate for Dartmoor”. From the Park’s perspective, he thanked CD for what had been done, holding up the event as an example of good practice and asked that Ten Tors be kept going. The key issue, from the National Park Authority’s perspective, regarding Ten Tors, is that it takes place in the middle of the bird breeding/lambing season. KB indicated that there was

a longstanding aspiration, on behalf of the National Park Authority, to look at moving the date of Ten Tors, so that it did not clash with the breeding season. CD indicated that the previous year's compliance monitoring report would include the number of times groups had walked into bird breeding areas. This report had been done for the past 2 years.

KB explained that 2019 was the Government's 'Year of Green Action' and he thought that it would be useful to promote Ten Tors as a good example of getting people active and involved in the environment. The "Where's To" leaflet might be used as an example of engaging people in the environment.

DI asked if all the local MPs had been invited to Ten Tors 2019 and CD explained visit plans were being put in place.

KB asked if the Oxford Brookes University Study results have been published yet? CD explained that the person who was dealing with the study remained on maternity leave. However, he would see if he could glean further information.

RS explained that the Donate for Dartmoor funding was greatly received, and most was going towards repairs on the Harter Lands path at Postbridge. KB asked if the detail and explanation could be put into the Ten Tors booklet and this was agreed.

ITEM 8 – LETTERS TO MINISTERS

7.1 DI explained that no response had been received to date to his annual letter for 2017 (despite chasing for a response) and it had been suggested a separate letter was sent to each department for a response. DI explained that the annual letter (covering the issues from the SG) would be produced in consultation with TJ and KB.

ITEM 8 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8.1 NS explained that the annual licence renewal covering Sheeps Tor had expired. It had been concluded that there was no longer a requirement for military training Tor and as such the licence had not been renewed.

8.2 KB explained that the National Park Management Plan was being reviewed and was grateful for the input from DIO, the Duchy, Natural England and the Commoner's Council; there was to be a Steering Group meeting in 2019.

8.3 KB explained that the Government had commissioned an independent review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England. The review was being led by Julian Glover and would report in Autumn 2019.

ITEM 9 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9.1 The next meeting will take place on Thursday 5th December 2019 at 1400hrs in Okehampton Camp, BLD 57, lunch was to be provided.

9.2 There being no other business the meeting closed at 1500hrs. David Incoll thanked all for their attendance.