



Dartmoor Access Forum

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To: All Members of the
Dartmoor Access Forum
(see below)

DARTMOOR ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES of meeting held on Tuesday, 22 April 2025

James Wright
Recreation Strategy Development Officer
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Present: Mrs Gillian Branfield, Mrs A Clish-Green, Ms K Donohue, Mr Luke Fursdon, Mrs A Head, Mrs J Lewis, Mr G Lindsay, Mr C Mason, Mrs S Morgan, Mr Michael Owen, Mr Mark Owen Mrs S Parrott, Mr P Spear & Mrs P Warren

DNPA: Mr R Drysdale, Mr T Russell & Mr J Wright

612) Declarations of Interest

Chris Mason – Works for WSP and Devon County Council and is producing the Dartmoor National Park Active Travel Plan

613) Welcome and Apologies

The meeting was opened by the current Chair Michael Owen (MO) who welcomed members.

Apologies from Dr Rachel Manning who has submitted her resignation from the Dartmoor Local Access Forum.

614) Minutes of meeting held on 19 November 2024

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 November 2024 were accepted as a correct record by the Chair Michael Owen and seconded by Alison Clish-Green.

615) Update from Director of Conservation and Communities Richard Drysdale on the Funding Situation for the National Park Authority for the 2025/26 financial year.

The Director of Conservation and Communities highlighted the challenges facing National Parks across England. The National Park Authority has now received notification of the settlement for the 2025/26 financial year which is £3.5 million. This is equivalent to an 8.2% cut in revenue funding. When combined with National Insurance costs and inflation, the funding equates to more than a 10% cut. The



Director highlighted that due to stagnant funding of National Park Revenue budgets for more than 10 years, the current budget was equivalent to more than a 50% cut over the same period.

It was noted that revenue funding is the fund used to cover staffing costs and overheads which utilises most of this budget.

DEFRA have awarded the National Park £1.4 million in capital funding as well as an additional Access for All capital pot of approximately £122,800. The direction from DEFRA has been that National Park Authorities in England should use this money to support income-generation to support future budgets. The Director confirmed that the Chief Executive of the National Park is leading on an investment strategy where all options are being considered for future income generation.

The National Park Authority have asked for greater clarity on what costs capital funding can cover. There are legislative differences between National Park Authorities and Local Authorities on what can be covered by capital funding. National parks currently have more restrictions on how capital funding can be spent meaning many roles within the organisation cannot be capitalised.

DEFRA have confirmed that the £1.4 million capital pot must be spent within this financial year.

The Director highlighted the risk of public perception from certain investments and how this would require careful management.

It is correct for National Park Authorities to be challenged on value for money, but this is becoming increasingly difficult and harder to prove with such limited budgets for delivery.

The Director confirmed that Authority members had agreed to use £650,000 from reserves to support staff costs for the 2025/26 financial year with a decision on future spending to be made following the next government spending review, which should provide clarification of the likely level of funding over the following three years.

The Chair of the Access Forum raised concerns over staff resource required to complete the investment strategy and how this might detract from National Park priorities. Director agreed that this was a concern and that multiple staff members will likely have to spend significant amounts of time to ensure the best strategy is identified and implemented prior to the March 2026 deadline.

Ms Clish-Green asked whether there was any consideration being given to a tourist tax. The Director confirmed that all options were currently on the table and that the Park Authority work with the Devon Local Visitor Economy Partnership which would need to be engaged in such discussions.

Mr Fursdon asked whether running a Bus Transport scheme would be a feasible profit-making option. Ms Page highlighted that rural bus routes typically run at a loss and that passenger numbers need to be significant to become profitable.

Some members raised the fact that the Chief Executive of Dartmoor National Park had mentioned charging to enter the National Park, both the Director and Authority member Ms Morgan clarified that the comment was made to provoke thought about National Parks, why they were created and how they should be accessible for all to visit.

Authority member Ms Morgan who sits on the Audit and Governance committee for the park highlighted that the National Park Authority is consistently as good as it gets in terms of delivery of public goods for public money.

The Director highlighted the need for the National Park Authority to be appealing to other arms of public funding as the National Park offers multiple public services least of all significant opportunities for improving public health and well-being.

The Director closed by welcoming any suggestions and input from the Dartmoor Local Access Forum regarding investment opportunities.

616) Cattle Incidents on Dartmoor – Director of Conservation and Communities

The Director of Conservation and Communities shared an update on Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigations into cattle incidents on Dartmoor. Dartmoor has seen a spike in cattle incidents in the last few years. HSE have tasked Dartmoor Commoners' Council and Dartmoor National Park Authority with improving recording of incidents as well as improved public messaging through appropriate communication channels and signage. Twenty-one incidents between members of the public and cattle have occurred on Dartmoor over the last year. Three of these incidents were blue-light emergencies.

In April, the National Park Authority and Dartmoor Commoners' Council hosted a cattle behaviourist who raised informative points about risk assessment and the duty holder's responsibility for the safety of the public.

Ms Clish-Green suggested that incidents mostly related to people walking their dogs, but the Director confirmed that in the three most serious cases, none of the victims were walking a dog.

Dartmoor National Park Authority will continue to work in partnership with Dartmoor Commoners' Council and HSE to ensure the risks to the public from livestock on the common are minimised as far as possible. Specifically, the National Park Authority will implement a strategy to improve education and public awareness of how to behave around cattle and highlight the risks of approaching cattle on the common, especially when calves are at foot.

An action plan will be presented by both parties to HSE on the 11th June 2025.

617) Update on Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) from Alison Clish-Green

Ms Clish Green shared an update on recent FiPL developments. Two show events have been held demonstrating the value of the funding scheme. Visits were held at Tor Royal farm and Chagford where demonstrations were given and collaboration of land managers was evidenced through projects such as Molinia trials which received FiPL funding.

Other example projects included farm visits with school groups and Deer management in the Teign Valley.

Ms Clish-Green repeated her request for NP officers to share the FiPL Fortnight update with DAF members. Director of Conservation and Communities confirmed there is no issue with sharing this and would speak to the communication officer for FiPL.

The Director of Conservation and Communities confirmed that FiPL has been extended for another year with Dartmoor National Park Authority receiving a further £759,000 to award in 2025/26. The scheme is closed to new applications until further notice.

618) Access for All – Access Projects Officer and Graham Lindsay

Access and Recreation Projects Officer Tim Russell provided a presentation on Access for All projects delivered in the 2024/25 financial year. Over a dozen projects were successfully delivered through the dedicated DEFRA funding of £73,000.



Projects included path surfacing improvements at multiple sites to improve accessibility as well as the purchase of a tramper (off-road mobility vehicle) which will be hireable from Postbridge Visitor Centre from summer 2025.

The Project Officer confirmed that the National Park Authority has received further funding of £122,800 for delivery of further projects in 2025/26 financial year.

Ms Clish-Green asked whether tramper hire would generate income. Project Officer confirmed that there would be a very small charge to cover power charging and maintenance costs, but the aim was to make Dartmoor more accessible and not charge more than a few pounds for hire.

Graham Lindsay provided a presentation to members highlighting the demographics of populations bordering Dartmoor National Park and the role the Park Authority has in providing opportunities for access to all. The presentation highlighted the challenges of accessing the National Park using public transport while a significant number of local people do not have access to a private car. Mr Lindsay proposed a cross-moor link from Exeter to Plymouth to ensure city populations can access the National Park for health and well-being. Mr Lindsay also challenged the National Park Authority to improve access to accurate bus information.

Mr Lindsay highlighted the success of the Farm to City project but suggested that this should be repeated in local cities, Exeter and Plymouth, where there was in many cases an equivalent lack of exposure to understanding the rural environment.

Mr Lindsay reflected on experience in other National Parks including a recent visit to the Lake District where an explorer bus service was provided in partnership between the National Trust, National Park and the local council. In addition to public transport options there were offers of volunteer led guided cycle and walking trips. Mr Lindsay suggested the same offer could exist on Dartmoor.

National Park Officers will continue dialogue with Mr Lindsay to further consider how some of these proposals could be implemented on Dartmoor.

619) Volunteering on Dartmoor – Graham Lindsay and Kath Donohue

Mr Lindsay and Ms Donohue highlighted examples of volunteering offers in other National Parks and how other organisations operate solely using volunteers. Examples from the Lake District National Park and North York Moors National Park were referred to, both of which have over 500 volunteers on roll.

Mr Lindsay highlighted that significant numbers of Lake District National Park volunteers are in public facing roles, something that Dartmoor National Park could also benefit from. A criticism of Dartmoor National Park's volunteering offer was frustration around enrolment and lack of follow up. Ms Morgan suggested that once contact was made a significant number of opportunities are presented.

Mr Lindsay stated that the only large-scale volunteering opportunities are litter pick events, but this could be expanded to a greater number of tasks if a volunteer co-ordinator was employed or recruited as a volunteer.

Ms Donohue suggested that local Universities could provide a significant untapped volunteer resource. Ms Donohue is keen to explore how at induction and through the student union there could be partnerships to provide opportunities for student engagement. Mr Fursdon suggested this should be expanded to include land-based study centres and practical education such as Duchy College, many students of which are often seeking opportunities to apply their skills and gain experience.

Mr Mason highlighted that opportunities for volunteers to work on Active Travel routes was something being considered as part of the Active Travel plan.

Recreation Strategy Development Officer (James Wright) noted all member comments and will feedback to Head of Organisational Development who is



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completing a review of Dartmoor National Park's volunteering offer. Officers will provide an update at the next meeting.

620) Dartmoor National Park Active Travel Plan – Recreation Strategy Development Officer and Access Forum Member Chris Mason

Recreation Strategy Development Officer provided an update on the development of Dartmoor's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. The update covered the emerging priorities from the plan for walking and multi-use routes. An overview of these emerging priorities will be shared following the meeting for members to offer any comment or feedback on the proposals.

621) Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Areas (LRA) and the Vision for Central Dartmoor LRA

Recreation Strategy Development Officer provided an overview of the aims of Landscape Recovery and what this means for public access. The officer stated that the aims of Site Access Plans (SAP) are to identify opportunities for improving existing access as well as identifying opportunities for new access. The SAP is a critical component of Landscape Recovery and is one of six plans required as part of the submission to DEFRA.

The officer suggested this was an opportunity to improve the quality of access on Dartmoor with more consistent waymarking/route finding, improved access infrastructure and accessible interpretation providing education about the landscape and its management.

The officer confirmed that there are three Landscape Recovery Areas on Dartmoor and officers from the National Park are completing Site Access Plans for the East Dartmoor and Walkham LRAs while supporting development of the Central Dartmoor plan.

Authority and DAF member Mark Owen who is also Secretary for the Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster presented the Vision for the Central Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Area. Mr Owen stated that the initial aim for the Central Dartmoor LR was to be clear on what Dartmoor should look like. Through stakeholder engagement and discussion this led to the formation of a Vision for the Central Dartmoor LRA.

Members were shown images of the proposals of what Central Dartmoor should look like with the landscape broken down into High Moor, Enclosed Uplands and Valleys and Foothills. Members were told how the Vision aims to forge consensus on how Dartmoor can provide a healthier landscape for nature and people through employment and responsible access. The Vision for the Central Dartmoor Landscape Recovery area will be formally launched on 12th May. The Vision will be used to help steer future management of land parcels to produce a high-quality environment that produces for people and nature.

The Chair of the access forum asked what the timeframe for delivery was. Mr Owen confirmed that the first year is used to build proposals/plans which would then be



submitted to DEFRA for approval which, if successful would lead twenty plus years of project funding subject to delivery targets being met.

Ms Parrott asked whether the project could support improved access rights on horseback to CRow Access land. Mr Owen confirmed that payments for permissive access were available through landscape recovery and that upgrading access rights for different user groups is available to landowners and managers. Recreation Officer stated that the return of access payments which have been missing from Agri-environment schemes for some time, are a welcome return and the site access plans for the three Dartmoor LRAs should make use of them wherever possible.

Mr Mason asked whether the general public had been consulted on the Vision. Mr Owen shared the broad list of stakeholders who had been consulted but stated that there had been no consultation with the wider public for the Vision but that this would be carried out through the site access plan once proposals have been identified. Mr Owen stated that the next step was to share with Commoners.

Ms Warren complimented the Vision for its clarity and simplicity.

622) Dates of Next Meeting

National Park Secretary to the forum will send out a poll to secure dates for the summer site visits and the Autumn meeting.