

## **MINUTES OF THE 60<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP**

**Friday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 1400**

### **Present:**

David Incoll	Chairman
Dr Kevin Bishop	Chief Executive Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA)
Tim Jalland	Regional Commander Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) Trg SW
Chris Gregory	Land Steward Duchy of Cornwall
Philip French	Chairman Dartmoor Commoners Council
Crispin d'Apice	Training Safety Officer Dartmoor
Peter Harper	Deputy Chair of DNPA
David Marino	Deputy Bailiff Duchy of Cornwall
Nigel Sharpe	Defence Land Agent, DIO Land Management Services (LMS)
Robert Steemson	Community & Land Manager DNPA

### **Apologies:**

Pamela Woods	Chair DNPA
Kevin Ball	Member of Devon County Council and DNPA

### **ITEM 1 – CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS**

1.1 The Chairman welcomed all members to the 60<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Dartmoor Steering Group.

### **ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE 59<sup>TH</sup> MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2019**

2.1 The previous minutes were confirmed.

### **ITEM 3 – REPORT ON THE DARTMOOR WORKING PARTY (DWP)**

3.1 Tim Jalland explained that despite the challenges of Covid 19 the DWP had continued to work as closely as possible together to continue to best support the stewardship of the Moor. Due to the initial lockdown the first of the three DWP Meetings usually held in March was cancelled. However, two dial-in meetings had been held in July and October of the year. Members did well to overcome this way of working and he could report the following:

3.2. The Willsworthy Access Agreement had now been placed on the DNPA Website.

3.3. The first of the Annual Integrated Rural Management Plan reviews was starting in September and the DIO was still awaiting the output.

3.4. The Working Party was still monitoring stakeholder engagement to ensure that collaborative work was taking place to support wildfire fighting on the Moor in support of the Wildfire Partnership. This had included liaison with 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery to investigate the use of some of their vehicles to help create firebreaks.

### **ITEM 4 – MID-TERM REVIEW**

4.1. **Monitoring.** Tim Jalland explained that Natural England (NE) had been undertaking some monitoring of the SSSI. DIO LMS would approach NE for an update of findings.

4.2. **Water Framework Directive (WFD).** DIO LMS last met the Environment Agency (EA) in 2017 to discuss the WFD; at this meeting the EA confirmed that there had been no water quality issues attributed to MOD activity on Dartmoor. The results of the EA monitoring are published on their website, and the link is captured in the monitoring matrix.

4.3. **Archaeology.** The rolling programme of condition surveys continues to be funded and undertaken; these surveys provide time-series data on scheduled and non-scheduled sites. The latest survey was on Okehampton Range which was completed in January 2020 and concluded that there had been very little change to the condition of the sites surveyed since the last survey in 2014. Where decline was identified it was mainly attributed to public interference (building shelters or modifying prehistoric cairns), increase in vegetation, or livestock poaching the ground; no damage was attributed to military use. Funding had been allocated for the resurvey of Cramber Training Area archaeology this winter (20/21) and a bid for undertaking the resurvey of Merrivale archaeological condition had been submitted for 21/22.

4.4. **Other works.** The following items had received funding to ensure work was done during this current financial year:

- **Peatlands Partnership.** A £10k contribution was made to the Peatland Partnership who had undertaken practical peatland restoration at four sites including Hangingstone and Amicombe Hills in Okehampton Range. The work at Amicombe was completed in February 2020 with 118.6Ha restored. At Hangingstone, as of August 2020, 57Ha of peatland had been restored out of a total area of 104.95ha.
- **Remote Sensing Habitat Mapping.** A £5k contribution was made to the DNPA towards the recently developed mapping produced by Exeter University.
- **Scrub Clearance.** A £1,250 contribution was made to the DNPA in support of scrub clearance works on Nattor Down, Willsworthy, to remove damaging scrub from scheduled monuments. DNPA's archaeologist had arranged for Tavistock Taskforce to undertake the work in January 2021.
- **Shovel Down Newtake.** A £4K grant was paid to the DNPA in March 2020 to make repairs to the Newtake wall and stile.

4.5. **Review Document.** It was intended to have a draft of the Mid-Term Review completed in time for the 2021 DSG for comment prior to submission in 2022.

4.6. **Questions/Actions/Comments.**

- Peter Harper asked if the MOD could provide further support to the Peatland Partnership to assist with coping with Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) as this was proving to be a major cost which would have to come out of public funds. Tim Jalland stated that the MOD did not have a substantial in-house UXO clearance capability and that UXO clearance would have to be a joint effort across the Peatland Partnership. It was agreed that the issue would be discussed at separate meetings. David Incoll stated that he had raised this issue in his 2019 letter to Ministers and would raise it in his 2020 letter. Kevin Bishop stated that he believed that using a private contractor to conduct UXO clearance in support of peatland restoration as was currently the case was not the best use of public money.
- Kevin Bishop thanked the MOD for its continued support to practical conservation and access work on Dartmoor.

## **ITEM 5 – ANNUAL SUMMARY OF USAGE AND INCIDENTS**

5.1. Crispin d'Apice explained that the Covid-19 pandemic had affected usage in some ways more than others. In summary:

- Compared with previous years, military training on Dartmoor in Q1 had been normal, in Q2 had been next to non-existent, in Q3 had been reduced, and in Q4 had been increased.
- Across the year live firing had reduced on Okehampton Range and remained much the same on Merrivale and Willsworthy.

5.2. There had been no wildfires attributable to military training (3 in 2019).

5.3. The increase in visitors to Dartmoor had resulted in more reports of military debris than in previous years however there had been no substantial increase in recent or potentially hazardous items. In summary:

- 20 items of military debris had been reported (12 in 2019).
- Of these:
  - 7 were assessed as being from recent training (i.e. <20 years old) (6 in 2019) and 13 were legacy (i.e. >20 years old) (6 in 2019).
  - 6 were potentially hazardous (6 in 2019).

5.4. The increase in visitors to Dartmoor had resulted in more incursions into live ranges than in previous years with 37 reported (22 in 2019).

## **ITEM 6 – TEN TORS**

6.1. Crispin d'Apice explained that he had handed over as the Event Coordinator in October 2020. The new coordinator is Lt Col Dominic Maxwell-Batten. The 2020 event had been cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic and planning was underway as to what form Ten Tors might take in 2021. Kevin Bishop stated that 2021 would be the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of Dartmoor National Park and that it would be appreciated if this could be marked in the event. He also reiterated that the DNPA were keen to continue to be involved in planning for future Ten Tors.

## **ITEM 7 – LETTER TO MINISTERS**

7.1. The Chairman stated that the 2019 letter had been sent on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 and he had not yet received a response; Kevin Bishop apologised for the late dispatch of this letter which was due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

7.2. Recognising that a response to the 2019 letter had not yet been received, it was agreed that the Chairman should consider raising the following matters in his 2020 letter:

- **Byelaw review.** The concerns raised in previous letters remained and it might be appropriate to ask for a set deadline for byelaw review as opposed to a 10 year one which always seemed to roll over.

- **UXO.** The concern over how best to use public funds to enable UXO clearance – particularly in support of peatland restoration – was pertinent.
- **Sustainable procurement.** The request that the MOD consider sustainable local food procurement still stood. Crispin d’Apice stated that he believed this matter was outside the terms of Reference of the DSG which were ‘to keep under review the best possible reconciliation between the requirements of military training, conservation and public access’.
- **Ten Tors.** It was agreed that the importance of the event should be reiterated to Ministers however it would not be appropriate to include an invitation to attend as this should be done by the Army.

#### **ITEM 8 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

8.1. Kevin Bishop explained that the application to extend the Chair in post for a year had been sent to DEFRA and the MOD to consider.

#### **ITEM 9 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

9.1 It was agreed that the date of the next meeting would be decided subsequently due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

9.2 There being no other business the meeting closed at 1530hrs. The Chairman thanked all for their attendance.