

Dartmoor Steering Group – Annual Review

As the Independent Chairman of the Dartmoor Steering Group I have pleasure in submitting this Annual Review letter. It has previously been established that this letter is a public document and the Joint Secretaries will be placing a copy on the website of the National Park Authority, and a copy on the gov.uk website, together with the Minutes of the Steering Group.

I am very pleased to report that all the members of the Steering Group continue to see the Group as a crucial cost effective mechanism to help reconcile different interests and facilitate effective partnership working on issues arising from the military use of Dartmoor. I have set out below a number of issues arising from the discussion at the meeting that I wish to bring to your kind attention.

Review of MOD Byelaws

There was disappointment that, as a result of the criteria used to prioritise the review of byelaws nationwide, current resources would not enable the Dartmoor Byelaws to be reviewed in the near-term. However, it was agreed that the Inter-visibility Study should continue so that the identification of the required revisions was up to date and available for consideration when the Review did take place.

Review of the Dartmoor National Park Management Plan

The National Park Authority has reviewed the Plan on behalf of partners and it contains specific ambitions around military training which are carried through from the predecessor plan. However, one indicator that has been proposed to be monitored within the plan is public access to the ranges where it is limited due to live firing. In that respect, the Steering Group received the live firing usage for 2013, the details of which are shown at attached Annex.

The Steering Group received an update on the likely consequences for Dartmoor of the decisions flowing from the Strategic Defence Review and the return of troops to the UK who are currently based overseas

It was acknowledged that there could be an increase in light training moving to Dartmoor, albeit that this would have to be accommodated within the days licensed. The Dartmoor National Park Authority restated a previously raised desire to see the Notice Period for live firing extended. The MOD considered that this was not acceptable, not least during a period when the Strategic Defence Review was being worked through. As this issue appears to have remained unaddressed because of the lack of objective statistics, I have tasked the Dartmoor Working Party to address the subject and to advise the Steering Group.

The Group was also updated on a proposal to use the training ranges for an unmanned drone which would be flown only during the current permitted closure days.

Mid Term Stock Take

The National Park Authority referred to the 2009 request by Defra to the MOD to provide a mid-point stock take of the training area's environmental management system. The Steering Group felt it would be useful if the parameters were agreed in advance, so that when the mid-point of the new licence period is reached in 2022, consensus exists on

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the remit and approach. The role of the Group is not to formally endorse the strategy but to endorse the approach to be adopted and report to Ministers.

There also exists an agreed objective to deliver the Integrated Rural Management Plan which outlines the proposed management of the MOD estate and activities on those parts of the training estate where the MOD do not have land management responsibility. Whilst views varied on including the economic impacts of the MoD's presence on Dartmoor in this assessment, there exists a general recognition that this is an important issue that should be assessed.

Procurement

The Steering Group has had a long interest in the opportunities for sustainable procurement, but lack of progress meant that at its meeting in November 2012 the Steering group mandated the then Chairman to write to Ministers requesting the identification of a named official with the authority to progress this issue. There has been little progress to date. However, the Steering Group recognises the constraints applicable to MOD procurement and welcomed the MoD's offer to arrange meetings with some of the relevant members of the MOD procurement teams, and this will now be progressed through the Working Party. I hope that Ministers will welcome and fully support this initiative so that the procurement process creates sustainable supply chains that provide a reasonable and cost effective opportunity for local food producers to bid to supply local produce to the holders of relevant major food supply contracts to the MoD. Achieving this would not only foster considerable good will amongst the local agricultural community whose co-operation is so fundamental to military training on Dartmoor, but reflect the Coalition Government's commitment to small business procurement and ethical standards of food production.

Holming Beam Hut

I am pleased to report that progress had been maintained since last year with the Architects appointed by HRH being involved in the design of the new Hut. It is hoped that the plans will be completed and the necessary consents obtained by the end of the financial year.

Ten Tors – New Approach

This event continues to attract thousands of young entrants each year and the resultant publicity reflects extremely well on the armed forces whose commitment makes the running of the event possible. Wessex based units of 43 Wessex Brigade will continue to support the event in 2014 but with a new approach to the event based on resilience and safety. Potential demand for helicopter transfers has been reduced as have the number of river crossings.

The event also makes a helpful contribution to maintaining the National Park with the '£ for the Park' fund-raising initiative.

Whilst the pressure on Ministerial diaries is acknowledged, I would nevertheless suggest that if you were able to attend the start of the Ten Tors you would appreciate the scale of the Event, the esteem with which it is held by both participants and supporters, and the physical challenge it presents, particularly to the less abled bodied entrants who participate in the Jubilee Challenge. This year's event will be held on the weekend of 10-11 May.

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The challenges facing all the parties involved in the work and activities considered by the Steering Group are not diminishing, but the maturity of the relationships within the Group reinforces the continuing need for the Steering Group in view of its positive contribution to efficient and effective partnership making which is so beneficial to Dartmoor.

Yours sincerely

David Incoll

Independent Chairman – Dartmoor Steering Group

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DARTMOOR TRAINING AREAS LIVE FIRING USAGE 2013

OKEHAMPTON RANGE:

Days available for firing: 112

Firing days published: 70

Firing days cancelled: 13

Firing days used: 57

MERRIVALE RANGE:

Days available for firing: 174

Firing days published: 103

Firing days cancelled: 25

Firing days used: 78

WILLSWORTHY RANGE:

Days available for firing: 246

Firing days published: 151

Firing days cancelled: 31

Firing days used: 120

Definitions:

Days available: The total annual number of days allowed by licence for live firing

Days published: Notice of live firing days made available to the public at 6 weeks notice

Days cancelled: Published firing days cancelled prior to use and made public.

Days used: The total annual number of days on which firings were conducted and the range area not available for public access