



MINUTES

Meeting held Tuesday 8 November 2022

Parke – DNPA Headquarters



Present: M Walker, A Clish-Green, P French, J Howell, L Martin, J Hayes, A Lovell, J Daymond, D Moyse, S Viccars, P Warren,

Officers: Mr Andrew Watson (Head of Recreation Access & Estates)
Mr T Russell (Recreation and Access Projects Officer)
J Wright (Recreation Strategy Development Officer),
Richard Drysdale (Director of Conservation and Communities)

Apologies: G Branfield, J Lewis, M Owen, G Kelly, P Smerdon.

573) Minutes of meetings held on 12 April 2022 and 28 June 2022

- The minutes of the meeting, held on 12 April 2022 and 28 June 2022 were duly signed and agreed by the Chair as a correct record.

574) Membership

- Two vacancies currently exist for the forum
- Vacancies for representatives for farming and wider interests will be advertised before the end of this year
- The Chair expressed a wish to have representation from other user groups on Dartmoor such as people with limited mobility, dog walking, cycling and mountain biking

575) Recreation and Access Update

Visitor Management (Summer 2022) – Andrew Watson

- Summer 2022 saw return to more usual numbers of visitors
- There were significant challenges linked to the extended heatwave with increased messaging about risk of fires, with an increase in ranger patrols, supported by our volunteers. Worked well with partner engagement and shared messages. Despite the busy summer there were no instances of wildfires over the peak season. Received widespread media coverage through local radio and TV.
- Widespread public support for BBQ ban due to high fire risk
- There was an increase in the number of wildfires reported caused by swaling getting out of control as reported to the April meeting
- Third year of the Dartmoor Marshal scheme supported by local landowners and organisations. Suggestion from DAF member PW that financial support from some landowners unlikely in the future
- Request from the Chair for any comparative data collected from the Dartmoor Marshals initiative to measure trends from previous years. Including data from vehicle and people counters which will help inform decisions on visitor

management etc. RD and AW confirmed data is currently being retrieved from the summer which could be shared with the forum once retrieved

- PF shared FiPL project ambition for firebreak project which is currently under review due to underestimation of costs
- PF and PW were concerned that swales that went out of control were being classified as wildfires

575 cont.)

Access Projects Update – Tim Russell

- Summary of projects to date including Haytor quarry upgrades, Longtimber woods infrastructure improvements, Avon Dam easy access picnic benches
- Desire from the DNPA Access and FiPL teams to work with farmers and landowners to develop access orientated FiPL projects. TR and JW working on this
- DNPA now received confirmation of DEFRA Access for All funding to improve accessibility to Dartmoor. Three-year project with funding in years 1 and 3. Current projects for delivery include plan to upgrade Burrator Arboretum to a sensory trail, install an accessible trail and bird hide at Yarnor wood and the development of a walking app with route mapping and descriptions for a series of Dartmoor walks
- DNPA received donation from BMC as part of their 'Mend our Mountains' project. This enabled the park to carry out maintenance of a well-worn car parking area at Bonehill rocks.
- Request from TR for DAF members. Please share/submit some potential routes which could be added to the existing 'Miles without Stiles' routes. DNPA are looking for circular routes which are already reasonably accessible and have parking access. These routes could be upgraded to be usable for people with mobility issues

Byelaws update – Richard Drysdale

- Authority members are meeting on 11th November 2022 to note the progress made on the review of the national park byelaws
- There will then be further discussions with statutory consultees before a final report is taken to Authority in early 2023
- There would then follow a 42 day period from when the final set of byelaws are advertised before sending to Defra with any representations received

DNPA Authority Update – Richard Drysdale

- Core government funding has been stagnant for the past 12 years
- DNPA has a minimum shortfall of £500,000 due to increases in salaries, utility bills and inflation costs
- DNPA undertaken a business review over the past few months and have had to notify 10% of DNPA staff that their posts are at risk with most of these relating to the communication and visitor centre teams
- Princetown Visitor Centre will be closing to save on costs associated with maintenance and staffing
- The post generated by the retirement of a ranger will not be replaced due to funding. The sector will be split between existing rangers
- DAF members can send any thoughts to RD who will share with leadership team

576) National Park Societies Conference

Report back from Alison Clish-Green

- Welsh government are supporting Welsh national parks with significant recognition of the value of protected landscapes
- Covid issues have been replicated across the national parks with many facing the same challenges
- DAF member and RD confirm that Scottish and Welsh national parks have far greater access to government ministers
- Question raised by AC-G: National Park cannot lobby government but can societies/forums combine to lobby government on their behalf?
- DAF member suggest the 'Campaign for National Parks' group are lobbying to achieve results

577) DAF Ways of Working Effectively

Andrew Watson presentation and discussion

- Presentation shared with DAF members and key points were
- DAF are an independent statutory advisory forum established under CROW Act 2000
- DAF have a role in advising DNPA, DEFRA, Natural England and others should they wish. DAF can advise on improving access and opportunities to enjoy and explore the national park. Can advise on issues relating to recreational access as well as functional access e.g. commuting to work, school, access to health services
- List of areas in which DAF could consider advising on is shared in the presentation
- DAF can choose whether it is a reactive or proactive forum
- DNPA and other s94 bodies have a duty to have regard to advice given by the forum
- DAF can utilise external speakers for gaining better understanding of issues
- DAF can form sub-groups to look at issues in depth and report back to main meetings
- AC-G asked whether there was scope for greater ownership in the recruitment of DAF members. AW confirmed that DAF can say where it thinks the gaps in membership/ expertise are, but it is the authority that makes the appointments. Recruitment process can specify/target the areas of interest that the forum needs.

578) Future Agenda Items and DAF Priorities

- Chair shared desire for DAF to form sub-groups to meet aims of partnership plan and Vision for Dartmoor 2045. The Chair ran a group task for identifying DAF priorities and desires however this was limited due to time available. Members formed small groups to consider issues and priorities the forum could focus on over the next 2-3 years.

The main priorities identified were:

- Education and Information - enabling everyone to have the ability to learn more about Dartmoor. To have the Countryside Code included as part of the national curriculum.
- Managing public expectations including the reviewing the capacity of facilities
- Public Transport and Green transport strategy

- Future funding challenges with reduced resources whilst visitor pressure increases. Suggestions as to how this could be addressed included external sponsorship and commercial funding, introduction of a tourist tax or even congestion type charging scheme.
- Improved clarity on respective roles and responsibilities for who looks after the national park – DNPA, Defra, Natural England, local authorities ,farmers, landowners and commoners etc.
- DAF groups provided feedback to the task and identified topic themes to be considered by working sub-groups. These themes will be shared with the forum by the Chair and are to be considered by DAF members with the ambition of sharing thoughts prior to the next DAF meeting.
- Chair sits on the FiPL assessment panel and stated concerns of lack of FiPL access related projects being applied for. Chair has offered the opportunity for other DAF members to sit on the assessment panel in his absence.
- **ACTION: Any members interested in sitting on the FiPL assessment panel to represent DAF to contact Mark Walker**

579) DAF Training

- DAF members to consider any specific training they might like to carry out in the future.
- ACTION: Requests to be sent directly to the Chair**

580) Dates of Next Meetings

- Meeting previously scheduled for 18th April 2023 is moved to **25th April 2023** at Parke, 6.00pm. Confirmation to be emailed to DAF Members.
- June 2023 training and November meeting dates to be confirmed

End of Meeting