

Dartmoor National Park Authority

Public Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on 27 June 2025

Present: Will Dracup, Michael Fife Cook, Peter Harper, Gay Hill, Mike Jeffery, Richard Keeling, Jack Major, Sally Morgan, Caroline Mott, John Nutley, Mark Owen, Guy Pannell, Mark Renders, Stuart Rogers, Mary Seddon, Catherine Shewan (Independent Person), Peter Smerdon, Dan Thomas, Mark Williams, Pamela Woods

Apologies: None

Officers in attendance: Kevin Bishop (Chief Executive (National Park Officer)), Neil White (Head of Organisational Development), Angela Stirland (Head of Business Support, James Wright (Recreation Strategy Development Officer) (Penny Bailey (Business Support – Minutes)

3683 Declarations of Interest

Mr Dracup declared an interest in Item 9, Dartmoor National Park Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), due to Dartmoor's Dynamic Landscapes being mentioned in the report.

3684 Minutes of the Authority meeting held on 9 May 2025

The public minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2025, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3685 Chair's Report

The Chair reported a very successful Team Dartmoor Day and hoped that everyone had enjoyed their day. Mr Harper asked that thanks be fed back to those staff who had organised the day and the various workshops which had been offered

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) reported that there had been a significant development since the last Authority meeting, that of the Supreme Court judgment which ruled in favour of the Authority, which was very welcome news. The judgement confirms that people have a legal right to backpack camp as long as they follow the code of conduct which can be found on the website, and in accordance with the interactive map. Some of the Authority's costs will be recovered; the crowdfunding initiative undertaken by Dartmoor Preservation Association ran which raised over £130,000 from members of the public can now be used to fund access projects and outreach for the National Park. The Chair thanked the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) and all of the staff for their work throughout the legal process.

3686 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

None.

3687 Public Participation

None.

3688 Capital Investment Strategy

Considered: Report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) (NPA/25/021).

Members were advised that the Authority's National Park Grant (NPG) had changed this year in that, traditionally 100% of the grant had been revenue grant. However, the revenue grant for 2025/26 has reduced in real terms by 13% in one financial year. The Authority has been given an increased capital grant of £1.4million. He explained the criteria for capital spend.

In response to Member questions, the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) responded as follows:

- Defra had made it quite clear that the grant had to be spent, not committed (as confirmed by the Head of Business Support, Section 151 Officer);
- Funds can be invested as long as they are taken out of the Authority's bank account and the funds are effectively 'off the books';
- He clarified that Members wanted a formal letter of feedback to go to the Minister, highlighting the real impact to the Authority of the late receipt of grant funds; the use of reserves to effectively bank roll the Authority's business and resultant loss of interest, and the requirement to spend the capital grant in just over nine months, which they confirmed;
- Assurances regarding environmental standards and appropriateness of projects would be work that the task and finish group would need to look at in detail; there is a balance between ensuring that we adhere to environmental standards and that we're acquiring the right premises versus generating revenue
- existing businesses that the Authority might be able to partner with - the work that we've done on the visitor option includes looking at working with some existing businesses;
- Capital funds could not be used for the purchase of retail stock;
- In response to the suggestion of whether the money could be used to potentially acquire a cultural asset and a centre that might promote heritage, if it was a tangible capital asset then the money could be used for that purpose. Checks would need to be made to ensure that National Park purposes were being delivered and it was supporting the Authority long term
- Funds could be used to acquire additional car parks across Dartmoor;
- With regard to other National Parks, we are liaising; most of the Parks are looking at how they can convert some of that capital to revenue to support staff costs because the big challenge is our 13% cut in revenue grant that threatens staffing. All Parks have received a 13% real terms cut to their revenue grant and they've all received an increased capital grant;

- Provision of a capital loan to a district or the county council for which the Authority would receive interest back is an interesting idea and one that could be considered further;

A Member commented that the timeline for actual spend of the Capital Grant is extremely tight and suggested that a list of suggested projects be taken back to the next Authority meeting scheduled for 25 July 2025, with a full workup of chosen ideas to be determined at the meeting in September.

The Chief Executive added that there should be a fourth recommendation in relation to the proposed letter to be sent to the Minister, as detailed above.

Resolved: Members:

- (i) noted the capital grant that the National Park Authority will receive in 2025/26 the criteria governing spend and the requirement that spend is incurred before 31 March 2026;
- (ii) noted the three themes identified for spending the capital grant and agree that we should prioritise spend on investment opportunities that will generate an ongoing revenue return; and
- (iii) establish a small Member and Officer Task and Finish group to work at speed to develop a business case for the capital investment opportunities identified above for the Authority to consider at a future meeting. The task and finish group would consist of Mr Dracup, Mr Renders, Mr Harper, Mrs Mott and Mrs Morgan
- (iv) Agreed that the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) write, on behalf of Members, to the Minister highlighting the real impact to the Authority of the late receipt of grant funds; the use of reserves to effectively bank roll the Authority's business and resultant loss of interest, and the requirement to spend the capital grant in just over nine months

3689 Dartmoor Land Use Management Group – Grant Fund to the Foundation for Common Land

Considered: The report of the Head of Business Support

Resolved: Members approved the Authority transferring a grant contribution of £78,720 from the Dartmoor Land Use Management Group funding to the Foundation for Common Land.

3690 Dartmoor National Park Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

Considered: The Report of the Recreation Strategy Development Officer (NPA/25/023).

To the question regarding fatalities on roads, it was confirmed that information is taken from those sources and fed into the plan. Accident severity tends to push schemes up the agenda. Also, data from the Livestock Protection Officer is taken into account.

DNPA propose a walking link alongside the river between South Devon Railway and Dart Bridge Road. This would link into a proposed route led by Devon County Council between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh.

Compliments were given on the interesting report.

Regarding a plan that has been labelled long-term but is a frequently used route and often used by cyclists with children on very narrow roads, there is now a scheme in place with volunteers to highlight the Granite Way. There will be liaison with West Devon and Devon County Council to improve signage as a priority.

Regarding the increased usage of electric bikes these days it was suggested that electric bike charging points are made available however feedback suggested that people were more concerned about having somewhere safe to leave their bikes if they want to visit the shops, etc. Therefore, the idea would be to improve a more informative welcome to cyclists in towns eg. Princetown.

Regarding the public consultation and how to get more people involved and the timeline it was advised that the initial aim was to go out at the end of July and run through August pending discussions about the Partnership Plan strategic plan, we are hoping to have it complete this summer. It went out through all of our communication channels and received 210 responses which is comparative to other National Parks. The responses can be shared with Members.

The Members thanked the Officer for his report and relayed the positive feedback received from other members of the Access Forum as well as Bovey Tracey Town Council.

Resolved: Members:

- (i) Noted the work completed to develop the draft LCWIP for Dartmoor;
and
- (ii) Noted the recommendations in the draft LCWIP for Dartmoor.