

Dartmoor National Park Authority

Annual Review

2020/21

At the start of 2020 we set an ambitious Business Plan to deliver against key priority areas. This was impacted by Covid 19 - we diverted resources, amended work programmes and re-designed how we work as part of our local response to the global pandemic.

Despite the challenges we faced, our achievements during these unprecedented times can be largely put down to our relationships and contacts; making us uniquely placed to provide an agile, rapid local response to support our communities and hard to reach groups through a difficult year. We know this had an immediate impact on the lives of many of our residents during the lockdown, many of whom have greatly appreciated our support.

We also finalised our new Management Plan. We invited people to share their views and were delighted to receive both high levels of feedback and overwhelming support for the aims within the Plan.



Responding to the pandemic

Providing an agile local response, supporting communities and businesses in unprecedented times.

Dartmoor Coronavirus Community Support Grant

Launched seven days after the Government's announcement of a UK-wide lockdown in March 2020, the Coronavirus Community Support Grant Fund (CCSG) was set-up to rapidly provide immediate grants of up to £500 to Dartmoor-based voluntary and community groups. The funding supported projects that focused on community resilience and actions addressing the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Projects funded through the CCSG included food banks, community larders, patient transport and food distribution initiatives and activities to alleviate the feeling of isolation for those shielding or unable to travel.

- **64** grants awarded to **55** groups
- Over **32,000** hours of volunteer time
- Almost **29,000** people benefitted
- Matched with over **£82,000** of additional funding

Dartmoor Community Support Network

Set up as a direct response to Covid issues and following from the Community Support Grant and Covid Business Survey. The development of this network is supported by the Prince's Countryside Fund and aims to build resilience in communities by enabling businesses, community groups and social enterprise to learn from each other, and work together.

Through the Network, initiatives such as a 'Buy Moor Local' scheme will also be delivered, encouraging people to continue to support local businesses.

The project's key aim is to sustain and develop the many embryonic community ventures on Dartmoor that have arisen from the impact of the pandemic, and those more proven ones that have demonstrated a critical role in local resilience.

Learning In Lockdown

Turning our rich, experiential learning out on Dartmoor into a 'virtual classroom' that engaged learners, stimulated teachers and provided resources for parents 'surprised' at finding themselves at home in charge of schooling during lockdowns. The web-based resources were differentiated by age and explored specific Dartmoor special qualities that added value to the curriculum and helped with home-schooling.

Supporting Businesses

Three Covid Business Surveys gave us insight into the key challenges and risks facing Dartmoor businesses. From this we launched the #WeAreDartmoor social media campaign to showcase the faces behind Dartmoor businesses, helping and encouraging support for them through lockdown and the post-Covid recovery.

#WeAreDartmoor campaign

- Total social media reach: **247,319**
- Total social media engagement: **12,646**



Supporting Effective Homeworking

To support the lockdown and enable staff to work effectively from home several measures were swiftly introduced. This included upgrading to the Microsoft Office suite of applications to version 365 including Microsoft Teams for video conferencing and online collaboration.

Our Members were also able to continue to work; meeting and making important decisions by conducting all our Authority meetings online via video conferencing. To ensure transparency and local accountability they were also broadcast live via our website.

In the second half of 2020 we procured new laptops for staff to help support flexible working and working from home. This is with a view to having a more flexible approach to working going forward.

Visitor Centres - 'We're Good to Go'

Our Visitor Centres were closed for seven months during 2020/21 but when we were able to do so they operated as Covid secure destinations and part of the Visit Britain 'We're Good to Go' assurance scheme to support visitor and staff confidence. Great thought went into the visual and verbal information, including the use of the popular 'keep a pony apart' and 'follow the pony signage' for which we have received wonderful feedback.

By September the visitor numbers were only **40%** below pre-covid numbers despite us having strict limitations on numbers which slowed the flow of visitors.

Welcoming and Managing Visitors

Lockdown restrictions and the necessity to stay local and not travel abroad contributed to a significant increase in visitor numbers to the National Park. From our surveys we estimate at least a **20%** increase in visitor numbers and that **1 in 5** were new visitors. This is to be welcomed – a firm foundation to build on, anecdotally we had lots of positive feedback from our new audiences.

Whilst the majority of visitors were responsible, there was an unprecedented increase in anti-social behaviour which put considerable pressure on our services as reflected in the following:

- **354** Byelaw offences recorded compared with 109 recorded for previous year

- **91** bags of litter collected last summer compared to **46** in the previous
- **7** offences referred to the Police last summer compared to **3** the previous summer
- Having to introduce a month-long camping ban at Bellever and Riddon Ridge, utilizing section 10 of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985
- Having to employ a security firm as "Dartmoor Marshalls" to help enforce the no camping zone and engage with visitors to help them enjoy the National Park safely Circa **300 hrs** of Dartmoor Marshall team support



People

Giving more people more opportunities to explore, engage, enjoy and understand the landscape.

Dartmoor Connections Festival

During the first lockdown we saw a huge increase in online engagement via our social media channels. We doubled our followers, resulting in our reach across these channels hitting nearly **3.5 million!** We used this as an opportunity to take our wildlife and heritage events that we could not do in person and make them virtual.

The Dartmoor Connections 'online' Festival featured social media posts, talks, videos, challenges and workshops. It was delivered as a response to the clear public need for engagement and connection with Dartmoor even if they were unable to visit. Over four weeks we delivered:

- **92** posts about our unique heritage and wildlife
- **5** live online workshops
- **7** recorded workshops
- **41** videos
- **6** illustrated talks

Our reach increased by **99.5%** and our engagement rate increased by **132%**

Generation Green

This ambitious partnership between the 10 English National Parks, the Field Studies Council, the Outward Bound Trust, Girl Guides, Scouts and led by the YHA – has been successful in a **£2.5 million** pound bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. This funding will employ new environmental educators, develop apprenticeships and directly engage young people offering residential experiences – 'a night under the stars'.

For Dartmoor the funding will employ a new post: Youth Engagement Ranger, who will grow our existing Junior Ranger and Youth Ranger programmes, developing a more urban reach to young people and providing specific skills mentoring and training in countryside management.



Ongoing Digital Engagement

We continued to explore how to engage with our audiences online through our social media channels in several ways including, further online 'lockdown' talks, a Dartmoor Advent calendar, the Ranger Christmas video and our live Big Dartmoor Quiz on YouTube – all of which received positive feedback.

As a result of our increased digital engagement

- **84%** of visitors to the DNPA website in 2020/21 were new
- Our followers on social media grew to **67,337**

Postbridge Visitor Centre Opens!

The newly extended and refurbished Visitor Centre opened only a month later than originally planned, despite the pandemic halting work for 8 weeks on site.

The new centre that celebrates the importance of Bronze Age Dartmoor, will be a springboard for experiencing the area's natural and cultural richness. It significantly improves the visitor experience and understanding, providing state of the art interpretation celebrating the Bronze Age and significant discoveries from Whitehorse Hill. This will be coupled with events, school visits and other activities to ensure dwell time in the area is maximised for the benefit of the local economy. We have also created 6 new trails from the centre.



Making Routes More Accessible

A **2km** section of the Eylesbarrow bridleway has been repaired and improved to make access easier for a wider range of people to experience the high moor environment. The trail is now suitable for a wide range of users including walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers, as well as people with limited mobility who can access with an electric mobility type vehicle (e.g. Trampler).

We have also created six 'Miles Without Stiles' stile-free routes. The 20 miles of routes are suitable for a wide range of users including those in all-terrain powered mobility scooters and families with younger children.

All routes have been graded and checked by us, working with Dartmoor Wheelchair Access Group.



Place

Ensuring the quality and character of the landscape and its heritage is reinforced or enhanced. Developing a resilient and thriving economy.

South Park Glassworks Site

Following forestry work, a member of the public identified a previously unrecorded, unexpected and highly significant industrial archaeological site in South Park Woods, Gidleigh.

The site has been identified to be late 16th century (early post medieval) glass works. This is the only known example and therefore unique, glassworks known within Dartmoor. The site is likely to be of National significance and is worthy of designation. We are working with Historic England with further work such as analysis of material likely.

The identification of a glass works in Dartmoor has changed our understanding of the Dartmoor's Industrial past and highlights the significant role Chagford played in its history.

- Increased understanding of our Historic Environment
- Survey completed on time and within budget
- Public engagement using a local volunteer group to clear site



Surveying our Public Rights of Way

We have developed an Asset Management plan for Public Rights of Way to establish a baseline condition of paths and trails within the National Park, to identify the future level of investment needed and enable informed decision making to prioritise future maintenance and improvements.

- Length of PROW network **730km**
- Total value of the network and associated gates, stiles and signposts is approximately **£1.8million**
- Backlog of maintenance required to bring the network to a 'good' standard, is **£140k** for gates, stiles and signposts and **£250k** for surfacing and drainage works
- Annual cost of maintaining network in a 'good' standard: **£109k**



Helping Communities to Thrive

Planning has direct role to play in supporting the economy of Dartmoor; its businesses and its communities, making sure it is a vibrant place to visit, live and work. This has been particularly relevant during the effects of Covid 19 and is an essential tool to assist Dartmoor's recovery plan.

Local Plan Review

Examination in public undertaken in March 2021. Successful series of remote virtual hearings engaging specialists and a wide public audience. This will set the planning agenda for Dartmoor for the next decade and beyond.

Linhay Hill Quarry, Ashburton

Major extension to working quarry which produces stone products for the construction industry contributing approx. **5.8%** to Dartmoor's annual economy, safeguarding over **150** local jobs and supporting a further **300** Devon companies through their supply chain. Set against stringent environmental tests and working conditions appropriate to location in a protected landscape.

Affordable Housing Provision

Final phases of significant development under way at Chagford. **28** affordable homes delivered and occupied. Business units and car park handed over to the community. Work is underway to deliver **40** units of affordable housing in South Brent and a further **39** in Ashburton.

Buckfast Care Village

A high quality major redevelopment of a redundant industrial site to provide a Care Village with over **200** care units including a **92** bed nursing home and dementia centre on a site adjacent to the River Dart. This will transform care provision in this area of southern Dartmoor for residents and the local community who will have access to facilities and support networks.



Buckfast Care Village

Nature

Managing existing habitats for increased biodiversity and developing greater areas of wildlife rich habitats.

Species Rich Grassland – Seed Harvester Pilot

This piece of work developed outcomes from the Moor Than Meets the Eye project which had looked at Upland Hay Meadows as an area of work. With some of the project funds a brush seed harvester had been purchased with a view to developing the skills and market for local seed sources. In August 2020 the machine was modified, and a local young farmer trained to undertake the field operation including the processing of seed. Approximately 3 hectares of meadow were brushed across four sites involving the landowners or tenants in the process.

The results were promising and as well as developing the relevant skills it has formed the basis for further collaborative work with Plant Life in 2021. The seed generated has been used by a local charitable trust in the restoration of some of its meadows linked to educational and outreach programmes.

- **1** Young Farmer trained
- **3** Hectares of meadow brush harvested and seed processed
- Seed used for meadow restoration on Dartmoor
- Skills and knowledge will be used for future work in partnership with Plant Life



Dartmoor Headwaters Natural Flood Management

We have worked in five river catchments to reduce the flood risk posed to properties and communities downstream during this pilot project; working with landowners and farmers to install and trial practical natural flood management measures both on common land and enclosed farmland. Engaging with local communities, flood management groups and commoners, we have achieved our objectives and learned lessons along the way. Landowners and contractors have got on board, gathered new skills and are keen to work with us into the next 6-year phase of the project.

Habitats and water quality have been improved enriching the biodiversity of these river catchments.

- **6,000** trees planted
- **347** leaky dams of various types installed
- Soils surveys - **5** catchments covering **44km sq (4400ha)**
- Habitat enhanced **10ha**
- Floodplain reconnection **1km**
- Reducing flood risk as a result of climate change



Farming Cluster Supporting Nature Enhancement

The Postbridge farm cluster group was established in 2019 as part of a Natural England funded initiative, the Dartmoor Facilitation Fund project. The aim was to bring individual farm businesses together and explore opportunities for enhancing the environment collectively, achieving results together at a scale that exceeded what might be accomplished individually. This was initially to look at the Marsh Fritillary butterfly and how populations moved between farms.

Over the past two years the size, scope and ambition of the group has grown to explore broader options relating to nature enhancement. The group now comprises **10** businesses that mostly farm close to each other within the Webburn and East Dart river catchments. They have hosted several organisations presenting environmental opportunities to be considered in terms of business viability, risk and benefit.

The group have collectively developed a plan outlining potential environmental enhancements that span a number of farms close to each other within the landscape. These include biodiversity, access and flood mitigation options, which will result in a significant enhancement to the natural environment across a large area within two of the river Dart catchments. Opportunities for funding are currently being considered to enable works, while the formation of further farm cluster groups in these and other river catchments is underway.



Climate

More carbon is stored through careful management of the land, reducing the risk of flooding and making the landscape more resilient to climate change.

South West Peatland Partnership

The latest phase delivered through this partnership scheme of peatland restoration was completed on Dartmoor in March 2021.

In 3 years we have carried out restoration work on almost 320ha of Dartmoor's valuable peat bogs. This will benefit wildlife, reduce downstream flood risk, improve water quality and conserve the historic record of the environment that is locked up in the peat.

By reducing long term carbon emissions from damaged peat, it is also one of Dartmoor's responses to the climate and ecological emergency. This work contributes to the UK Peatland Strategy target of two million hectares of peatland in good condition, under restoration or being sustainably managed by 2040. The England Peatland Action Plan announced in May 2021 will fund a further 35,000ha of peatland restoration by 2025. On Dartmoor we are now planning how we can help meet this latest important government target in the fight against climate change.

- Total restoration work on Dartmoor to date: **385ha**
- **320ha** of this completed since April 2018
- Supports improved biodiversity through improved wet heath and mire habitats



Delivering Our Carbon Action Plan

Work to deliver the Authority's Climate Action Plan and achieve our aim of being a carbon neutral organisation by 2025 continues. The Covid pandemic has allowed significant progress to be made in reducing unnecessary travel and encouraging use of video conferencing software. Throughout the pandemic the Authority's emissions have reduced significantly. Our diesel, electricity and gas usage reduced by over **30%** between April to December 2020.

Updates from work over the last year include:

- Monitoring of the new Postbridge Visitor Centre has confirmed the new larger building consumes less energy than before thanks to heat pump technology. This means all DNPA's visitor centres are now heated with renewable energy technology.
- We have installed an electric vehicle charging point at Haytor Visitor Centre which is now the most remote charge point on Dartmoor.
- A review of the distribution strategy for the Enjoy Dartmoor magazine has likely reduced associated emissions by over **50%**

- We have worked with Devon County Council to better understand emissions from the Authority's pension investments and will now report on this annually.

Looking forwards, we are commissioning a carbon footprint of our owned land. This will tell us what carbon our land stores and how we can improve this in the future to offset our remaining emissions. We are looking to install further electric vehicle charging points at Postbridge Visitor Centre and as an organisation continue to adopt some of the more emission-free ways of working, building on our successes from the pandemic.





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