

# Dartmoor National Park Authority

## Public Minutes of Meeting held on 04 April 2025

### Present:

Will Dracup, Corinne Farrell (Independent Person), Gay Hill, Mike Jeffery, James McInnes, Sally Morgan, Caroline Mott, Mark Owen, Mark Renders, Philip Sanders, Lois Samuel, Mary Seddon, Peter Smerdon, Dan Thomas, Mark Williams, Pamela Woods

### Apologies:

Peter Harper, John Nutley, Guy Pannell

### Non Attendance

Jerry Brook

### Officers in attendance:

Kevin Bishop (Chief Executive (National Park Officer)), Richard Drysdale (Director of Conservation and Communities), Chris Giles (Head of Conservation and Land Management), Su Layfield (Business Support – Minutes)

#### 3661 Declarations of Interest

None.

#### 3662 Minutes

The public minutes of the meetings held on 21 March 2025, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read, confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

#### 3663 Chair's Report

The Chair reported having attended the following meetings:

- Partnership Board Meeting has now been agreed and is up and running (after the Shadow Partnership Board Meeting which Chair reported on attending at the last Authority Meeting) and Members will be updated on progress on a regular basis. All very positive and constructive.
- National Parks England will meet next week and no doubt, discussions will be about funding.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Authority has not yet received confirmation of funding for 2025/26. Indications to-date suggest a 8-9% reduction in the revenue grant and no assistance with the increased NI employer contributions payable from April 2026. This would be a real-terms reduction of more than 10% - probably more like 13% when the pay award is factored in.

We anticipate an enhanced capital grant as part of the 2025/26 settlement and have submitted ideas to DEFRA on how this might be spent, including how we might be able to capitalise some staff costs.

On 31 March 2025 the Chief Executives of all 10 National Park Authorities in England travelled to London to meet with Mary Creagh, the Minister with responsibility for National Parks. The Secretary of State joined the meeting briefly. The second part of the meeting consisted of National Parks putting forward funding ideas. We hope that DEFRA will respond favourably in

due course. Mary Creagh was clear that one of her priorities was the governance of National Parks.

Members were disappointed and angry that we commence the financial year without having had the budget confirmed. It was agreed that this does not help planning and indeed our mid-term financial plan has already been written 3 or 4 times to try and give an up-to-date picture to Members. It was also commented that the DEFRA plans and objectives for us will be compromised by their own lack of communication.

Members agreed that the Minister was not happy with the National Park Authority Boards' size and constitution. Members commented on the non-political aspect of the Authority as we work together for the good of Dartmoor rather than for political aims which they feel is a definite strength. The Chief Executive advised the meeting that 5 years ago, we wrote to the Government at the time outlining a proposed governance change to only 12 members, but we did not receive a formal response.

**3664 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

None.

**3665 Public Participation**

None.

**3666 Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest Plan 2025 – 2050 Public Consultation**

**Considered:** Report of the Director of Conservation and Communities (NPA/25/017).

The Director of Conservation and Communities advised the Board that the link to the draft plan would be sent to them next week and that Plymouth and South Devon Community Board had asked us not to distribute until after the launch.

It was confirmed that the expansion of the area would not necessarily mean an increase in the number of trees and that woodland pastures / areas of sparse trees were considered part of the plan too. This has DEFRA funding for another year after which further funding will be needed. No further cost to DNPA apart from officer time. The 3% of total area increase, which equates to a total of approximately 3,000 hectares on Dartmoor (2,000 hectares already in the Vision for Dartmoor) is for protected landscapes; river catchment, woodland pasture and national landscape areas. It was confirmed that there will be no compromise or reduction to grazing areas on common land. All ancient trees and the health of the woodland have been included. The Forestry Commission, (if not formally but as key stakeholders), commoners and farmers are all involved in this proposal.

Given the nature of the forest, the targets will have to be strictly monitored as the Forestry Commission are included in this. Using Citizen Science in some areas.

This works well with our Partnership plan – a key part of this plan explains what a community forest actually is and includes enhancing trees and woodlands in the wider area thus giving access to green and blue within 15 minutes with benefit to communities as well as enhancing nature and climate benefits.

**Resolved:** Members:  
(i) Noted the requirement of the Community Forest to produce a plan; and  
(ii) The draft 2025-2050 plan is launched for public consultation during April and May 2025.

## **3667**    **Nature Enhancement on Dartmoor – Approach and Progress**

**Considered:**    Report of the Head of Conservation and Land Management (NPA/25/018).

Members commented on the Curlew Headstart Programme and noted the ground-breaking nature of the work being undertaken.

The success in attracting external funding was noted as was the pressure to sustain this funding in order to maintain practical, on the ground project work.

Members asked about progress towards the Government's 30x30 target (30% of the land managed for nature by 2030). It was noted that Defra are developing criteria for the land that can be included and that the Authority would model this.

Members suggested that we should lead by example on the DNPA-owned land within Dartmoor. We have recently drafted a new management plan for Haws and Dendles. Development of Management Plans for the commons that we own is a key action in the 2025/26 Business Plan.

Regarding the Pine Marten Project, they were collared for about 3 months, and it is clear they have dispersed to a wide area including the South Coast and Newton Abbot area whilst some stayed on Dartmoor. After an initial settling period of 3 weeks, they are now predicted to move again in breeding season. We are hoping that national reinforcement projects in different areas of the UK will meet up.

Species monitoring has decreased radically since 2001 along with the staff working on these projects. We need to make the best of our resources and partners going forward. Natural England have resurveyed their methods of SSSI monitoring which is now broken down into blocks. This organisation's number of employees has been decimated over the past few years and they are now a very small body. We meet regularly with them and they are part of the Partnership Plan.

Members commended the Authority staff involved on such a substantial achievement despite limited resources and wanted to emphasise the following sentence, "Protected Landscapes offer perhaps the best of what remains to our heavily nature-depleted country and some of the best opportunities for restoration and enhancement".

**Resolved:**    Members noted and commented on the Authority's approach to, and progress towards, nature enhancement targets on Dartmoor.

There being no other business, the meeting ended.