

Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG)

Minutes of the Meeting

Held on 28 July 2025

Present: Phil Stocker (Chair), David Attwell, Kevin Bishop, Helen Booker, Layland Branfield, Laura Cardenas, Mat Cole, Kevin Cox, Stephen Dennis, John Dracup, John Howell, Claire Hyne, Simon Lee, Tracy May, Matthew Morris, Helen Radmore, David Smith, Tom Stratton, Tom Usher, Ann Willcocks.

Online: Liz Nabb

In attendance: Tamsin Thomas, Su Layfield (Minutes)

Apologies: Andrea Ayres, Jez Bretherton, Nick Bruce-White, Andy Crabb, Janet Dwyer, Paul Hawkins, Emma Magee, Dave Stone.

Minutes of Previous Meeting and Actions Arising

Minutes from the meeting dated 26 June 2025 were circulated in advance.

There was a request for future Minutes to have a clear distinction between reports and questions.

The meeting was reminded of two action points which arose from the last meeting:

- A seminar about favourable condition.
- Swaling – a workshop involving Natural England and to include evidence gathering

The links to reports in the previous minutes were slightly corrupted due to files being moved within Dropbox after the links were put in/sent out.

The Minutes were then agreed as a full and accurate representation of the meeting.

Update from Chairman, Phil Stocker

Concerns were raised about the speed things were moving whilst everyone is so busy. It was suggested time is taken to discuss required actions in order to ensure agreement and clarity and to keep people engaged.

Work-streams need to be focussed on their specific Defra asks and areas of potential commonality and / or overlap need to be identified with other work-streams to avoid duplication and drive efficiency of resource use.

Defining 'good' in terms of management condition across the whole of Dartmoor is a complex challenge. Whilst the Fursdon Review focussed on protected sites (and these are the priority), our task is to create a Land Use Framework that helps achieve the management of the whole National Park area. This needs to be done in a way that ensures environmental, economic and climate resilience.

The following key points were raised;

- Budget re-profiling agreed with Defra to achieve an almost equal weighting between the two years – approximately £275k for 25/26 and £250k for 26/27. £275k must be spent in 25/26

but Defra is relaxed about how this is used between work-streams. The Defra budget can be complemented by funding from other sources such as FiPL

- Tom Stratton appointed as Project Manager following a successful tender process. The Chair welcomed Tom.
- The work programme has been drafted together with a spend schedule. These need submitting to Defra by mid-August but can be fine-tuned between the project management team and work-stream groups leading to the next meeting.
- The revised, latest budget will be circulated

It was noted that the Nature Restoration work stream budget is all front-loaded. Although Andrea was not present, Simon Lee confirmed that she is happy this money could be spent as allocated.

5% was queried as an appropriate contingency in the context of the size of budget and the nature of the project. 10% is often used. It was agreed that when the budget has been revisited with each work-stream group, the contingency can be re-evaluated.

It was agreed that individual workstream budgets would be produced to aid clarity to each group, create a greater sense of empowerment to deliver and an ability for clear reporting back to LUMG meetings on spend, thus allowing periodic re-profiling of the whole budget as the project develops.

Tom Stratton – Initial Observations

Tom explained he is delighted to be working with the group. He confirmed he had read the Scope of Work papers that have been prepared to date, re-read the Fursdon Review and the Defra response. Tom acknowledged the significant task at hand and the excellent work that has been put in by everyone to date. Hearing the concerns about the existing structure of the Scope of Work documents, including the style of language used, Tom said he will set up meetings with the work-stream groups to ensure that the key Defra asks are being covered, work-streams complement each other and collaborate where appropriate and that the project delivery evolves in unison. Tom suggested that each project Scope of Works sets out Defra's asks clearly and that reports back to the LUMG are set against these.

Tom recognises the importance of this project to Dartmoor and the positive influence its success could have nationally. Tom is also aware that lots of existing work done has been done (locally and nationally) and this needs to be harnessed.

Tom stressed the importance of keeping the farming community engaged and enthused about the role of the project. Grazing and associated management trials that demonstrate an integrated approach to management will be key to this, and to informing the project's direction. The sooner these can start, the better. We need a powerful communications message to ensure we are explaining the project as it progresses and to keep farmers and other stakeholders engaged.

Feedback on Record Keeping, Stakeholder Comments and Meeting Locations

It was agreed that everybody in the LUMG should have access to the Scope of Work documents on a central repository (DropBox) with a copy of all the different versions clearly dated in the title of the document as they are added / edited.

External questions have been raised about what is the LUMG doing, when etc. Once the Scope of Work documents are finalised, this junction will be a timely point at which to communicate, including on planned onward action.

It was suggested that future monthly meetings should be located in different parts of Dartmoor to help profile the group's work. No decision was taken on this, however it was agreed that regular messaging is needed.

Potential Defra Rural Communities Pilot

Gemma Mortenson helped to facilitate a workshop given by Hilary Cottam at Parke 3 weeks ago. Hilary is a social entrepreneur, having worked in Social Services and Children's Services in Lambeth. Minister, Steve Reed is promoting the concept of utilising Hilary's assistance to run a trial on Dartmoor and in the Lake District, looking at the future of the rural economy. A decision will be taken on this in the autumn. This will not duplicate the work of the LUMG and the agreed consensus was one of support on the basis it does not distract from the group's delivery work. Although she has no background in rural management, Hilary may be able to give a new perspective. Steve Reed is liaising with DEFRA on this.

Work-Stream Updates

Evidence and Land Use – John Howell

Observatory

The Scope of Work is in draft.

First, it is necessary to establish a One Drive (or similar) site accessible to us all, as a repository for information from the members of the LUMG and beyond. This shared area will be used as the basis and DNPA will advise on how best to host. The DNPA team will help design a database. This is likely to be mainly spatial data, i.e. GIS structured, with documents, spreadsheets and numerical data as well. Some data will also offer links to other accessible databases. It should be noted that other databases may require a fee to access certain elements. The user interface should show available information and offer a search function and curating (e.g. forgotten passwords, etc).

A DNPA staff member, Honey Green will assist. The One Drive link should be sent shortly and we will be able to deposit information at this point. The aim is that access will be available via a web-link on completion. There are some key questions to address such as how to sustain resourcing for this, long term and copyright issues. Links to other organisations' databases also needs thought, e.g. Devon Biological Records Centre. Other data could be harnessed covering things such as fibre routes, gigabit connectivity, WiFi, natural flood prevention, etc.

There are some other observatories focused on cities and an initial attempt at something similar in Wales which wasn't completed, but nothing that can really be used as an example to follow.

Key Next Steps

Stage 1: Achieving the physical functionality of the system with DNPA leading based on their time being paid for.

Stage 2: Deciding which data to collect and setting out the ask to providers. Steve Crosby at DNPA will help do an existing data trawl

Stage 3: Data collection, prioritising information that complements what is already available on protected sites and that is helpful to this project

Stage 4: Considering longevity - future use beyond this group's existence.

The level of budget available makes achievement a challenge.

The group agreed to the use of £35,000 to cover the DNPA's costs in setting up the system and for dealing with the collection and processing of data. It was noted that the 'data ask' of providers should be clear, with a standard form for completion, so that those receiving it get relevant and helpful information. It is also important to identify what gaps exist in the existing Protected Sites data that NE hold so that work can be done to address how these are filled.

By the end September, the database framework should be in place. This will be populated and available for searches from November onwards.

Questions / Comments on Observatory

It was suggested that DEFRA could provide a Sharepoint which is publicly available (with a DEFRA IP) but we are keen to avoid the use of "gov.uk" as this comes with less control.

Are there any protocols for data sharing? The scoping exercise needs to ensure we are clear and compliant. Whether all data will be publicly accessible needs to be agreed. Data ownership was discussed and it is considered that this is owned by the original creator. Some data on protected species for example, is sensitive. Honey will meet the work-stream group and discuss in detail.

Kevin Bishop explained that there is Honey plus the GIS Officer and Head of IT who have other work to do, so resources are limited.

Land Use Framework

This has moved to a final draft Scope of Work and to encompass nature work-stream mapping needs. The work-stream group would like to draft a tender for this work shortly and secure agreement linked to DNPA procurement rules, to have informal pre-tender discussions with contractors, given the specialist nature of this work and likely need to evolve thoughts prior to tender production.

Stage 1 – A Land Use Plan – Shaping What Happens, Where

- a) A mapping exercise to identify what the land can support on the basis of soils, hydrology, habitats etc, drawing together the bio-physical data in as good a granularity as possible. Climate modelling should also form part.
- b) Prioritisation of different areas for protection and enhancement across the whole of Dartmoor National Park. e.g. peat re-wetting is the highest priority as defined by the Fursdon review and Defra, so we need to identify which peat could be efficiently re-wetted, as not all possible.

Stage 2: A Land Use Framework – To Guide Decision Making

Thinking on this is not yet well developed. There are examples of other work available, which need consideration. It will be much aided by production of the work in stage 1. A common understanding and agreement associated with the management priorities and the impact on the system of management needed to deliver it will be key, including the socio-economic perspective.

It was agreed that a meeting with Defra would be helpful to understand their thoughts and what they would like to see from the process, resulting in something that fits into a national context.

Actions:

The Chair agreed to contact Max Heaver at Defra to propose a meeting.

Tom Stratton and Tamsin will liaise with DNPA in relation to the concept of informal pre-tender discussions with contractors to ensure no procurement rules are breached. If acceptable to DNPA mapping contractors to be identified and engaged with, pre tender.

Tom and John Howell to meet to further discuss the Scope of Works.

Questions / Comments

Dave Smith explained that detailed data to guide decision making is critical, especially on moorland, where we are likely to need to take a more nuanced position that relying solely on SSSI condition data to guide a features based approach.

The LUMG should look at the Devon LUF developed as a pilot by the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.

There will be a series of meetings with the LUF / evidence group and others from across work-streams as needed, to ensure this work evolves efficiently and in a way that brings things together.

Engagement with farmers and other stakeholders as the process evolves will be key to ensure that any required practical management identified as needed, will happen.

The LUF must seek to balance all the priorities across the moor.

Nature Restoration – Simon Lee

Baseline and opportunities mapping to be developed with LUF. This needs to consider both habitats and species and to identify the priority species which need to be protected.

Natural England has a 'Reform' programme looking at protected sites and this covers how favourable condition is assessed against national standards. The Dartmoor work can usefully feed into this.

Action;

Simon Lee to liaise with John Howell and Tom to identify and bring together potential areas of overlap in the LUF and nature mapping work.

Questions / Comments

Climate modelling needs to be factored in to ensure that proposals for nature delivery are resilient to change. Climate change may make the path to favourable condition impossible in places.

Climate change scenarios are mapped out and already provided. We should choose the most likely and attach our plans to this.

We need to support dynamic, natural systems.

Natural England tried to be too prescriptive, but it is not possible. Appropriate numbers and types of livestock provide a fantastic mosaic, and this is what we want.

The Natural England CEO is coming to Dartmoor on 4th August and this will provide an opportunity for NE staff to update on the LUMG work.

Species need to be looked at and if concentrating on protected sites, we should be aware that this might be sub-optimal for some species. We need to embed a zero-extinction policy. We need to hold on to things and reverse the declines. There is a need to consider climate change although we cannot use these predictions as a justification for failure. Changing the way we monitor things does not help us. We can't not do things now, just because things may change in the future. This is critical for informing the grazing work stream as well, who will use the parameters set.

Common Standards monitoring is not going away. Dave Stone who developed this, explained to Simon Lee, that it is being used for something it was not designed to do; currently being used at a national level to report against high level condition across the Country.

There is a need to qualify the timescales for delivery, a need to say "working towards" rather than "achieving" as we will not achieve favourable conditions within our lifetime. We should measure step changes and celebrate these.

Communication and Engagement – Nick Bruce-White

Update to be provided at next meeting.

Grazing and Farm Viability – Janet Dwyer

Marecia Fraser is kindly visiting on 12th and 13th August to visit a number of commons, focussed particularly on possible trials looking at scrub and Molinia management. This has been arranged by Janet.

The importance of this work-stream is clear as is the need to develop a final draft Scope of Works document that encompasses a suite of trials in a way that complements the initial findings of the LUF team and the thinking of the nature work-stream.

A concern was raised about the current proposed trials being quite narrow although subject to further discussion with Janet and her team, it is considered these form one part of what will be wider work.

The current draft Scope of Works has been seen by the work-stream group, but not the wider LUMG.

Questions / Comments

Issues that have not evolved to date;

- Over-wintering of sheep – nothing mentioned in presentation but now has been included.
- Agro-forestry / wood-pasture
- Dartmoor-wide grazing scheme

Sheep grazing will be discussed by the grazing and farm viability work-stream. The understandable sensitivities with graziers were highlighted. . Trees have not come into the discussion to date, but will. It was agreed that the discussion around a Dartmoor wide grazing scheme needs to align with the work of the LUF.

Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster.

A short presentation on the establishment of the group was given by John, followed by Claire explaining how she and the team feel the CDLR group could most effectively work with and complement that of the LUMG. Claire produced a slide on this which she will share with Tom and Tamsin.

Action;

Slides to be sent to all members of the LUMG and the two other LRs will be asked to present at future meetings to provide a Dartmoor wide context on the LR work.

Next Meeting: Monday 29 September