

Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG)

Minutes of the Meeting

Held on 29 September 2025

Present: Phil Stocker (Chair), Andrea Ayres, Kevin Bishop, Layland Branfield, Nick Bruce-White, Mat Cole, Kevin Cox, John Dracup, Janet Dwyer (Teams), Paul Hawkins (Teams), John Howell, Simon Lee, Emma Magee, Tracy May (Teams), Helen Radmore, Tom Stratton, Tom Usher, Ann Willcocks.

In attendance: Tamsin Thomas, Su Layfield (Minutes)

1. Chairman's Introduction

Welcome to Jen Manning (Partnership Plan and Climate Officer, DNPA)

Members of DEFRA staff now responsible for our project;

- Mike Rowe, Director, Farming and Countryside Programme
- Ciaran Devlin, Deputy Director, Farming and Countryside Programme

2. Apologies: David Attwell, Helen Booker, Stephen Dennis, David Smith, Dave Stone, Laura Cardenas, Andy Crabb, Jez Bretherton, Claire Hyne, Liz Nabb

3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting and Actions Arising

These were approved.

All actions from the last meeting have been completed. Two queries raised by Kevin Bishop relating to earlier actions;

A discussion on what is meant by 'favourable condition': The Nature Restoration Group is dealing with this and will set out some thoughts for a DLUMG discussion.

A discussion on swaling: A NE literature review of swaling information is being reviewed to determine what information gaps need to be addressed by DLUMG's work. The project management team will feed back to the group.

4. Overview from Jen Manning

The Chair explained the interrelationship between the Partnership Plan and the DLUMG outputs. The capacity to deliver the Plans rests almost entirely with third parties beyond the DNPA and particularly, farmers and landowners. The land use framework will be a key tool to guide and enable management as will the viability of farming.

Partnership Plan process:

- On-line public consultation - done
- Stakeholder workshops planned for pre-Christmas covering key Plan themes. DLUMG to be profiled at each given relationship and capacity of its work including the land use framework to aid delivery
- Draft Plan in 2026
- Consultation on draft Plan. This should be in time for consideration of land use framework capability mapping
- New Plan adoption in 2027 for five year term

To avoid bias the team has attempted to ensure a broad representation on the invitation lists to workshops as well as imparting the message of consultation to as many as possible.

The initial on-line consultation received 2500 responses by including distribution to all Parish Councils and by using partners' distribution networks. 60% of respondents lived/worked outside the National Park.

An ambitious targets and monitoring framework will be included. This is an area that has been significantly built on since the last Plan. Whilst the Partnership Plan is a Statutory document, it does not make any non-Statutory targets that are placed within in, Statutory. The Plan will however contain Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework targets which, whilst not Statutory, are linked to goals in the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan which is Statutory, so there is weight attached to them which needs consideration both at a Partnership Plan level, but also in how DLUG structures its work and the outcomes it seeks through work such as the grazing and land management trials as associated targets and monitoring.

Seven workshops planned covering cultural heritage, farming, forestry, people, community and business.

5 spaces at each for Parish Council / Parish Meeting representatives. Jen happy to attend individual Parish Meetings to discuss.

It was suggested that separately themed workshops may not work as well as mixed. There is a danger, in dealing by themes that each audience struggles to understand that when looking at multiple land use /management decision making, not every subject theme will be able to be accommodated.

There was a misconception that the previous Plan consultation did not involve agricultural representatives – at least 40 farmers engaged in the debate.

The Importance of the Plan work being done in conjunction with that of DLUMG was stressed and discussions are taking place on the workshops and timing of LUF / Observatory work. It was noted that several members of the DLUMG Board also attend the Plan Board Meetings.

ACTIONS:

- TS or TT to attend the Plan workshops.
- DNPA to look back at consultation responses to Central Dartmoor and Duchy vision completed in 2025. Very relevant and can help inform the Plan and its vision
- TS and LUF work-stream to continue engagement with DNPA on LUF and Observatory work linked to the Plan.

5. Project Team Update

A progress report covering the last eight weeks had been circulated. This was well received and TS confirmed that on the basis attendees find this helpful, the management team will produce one each month. This could be made available on the website where appropriate.

Work had focussed on engagement with the work-stream groups, addressing areas of potential overlap, particularly on mapping, agreeing with Defra, a quarterly basis for project monitoring and identifying a rural communications specialist to help develop a communications and engagement

plan. The project profile is currently low and this is a key area to address, both within the Dartmoor stakeholder audience and beyond.

Updated work-stream briefs had been produced in a format which allows their regular updating as work is developed and delivered. These will be shared with DLUMG ahead of meetings.

The project is at an important juncture, where the endeavour of the work-stream groups will helpfully start to come together linked to the grazing and integrated land management trials. These will create a practical platform through which all the group's stakeholders can start to see action taking place that builds on previous work done on Dartmoor, importantly taking the group forward.

A project infographic setting out the structure and the interrelationship between the work-streams had been drafted and was discussed later in the Agenda.

Mike Rowe has now taken over from Jonathan Baker as Deputy Director at Defra and the Chair has spoken to Mike. Mike is keen to visit Dartmoor shortly.

ACTIONS:

- TS to provide monthly progress reports
- TS and TT to meet with the workstream leads regularly
- Costings are to be added to the work plan as soon as they are known.

6. Overview from each workstream lead

6.1 Grazing and Farm Viability – Janet Dwyer

A paper setting out the overarching direction of the grazing and land management trials had been circulated in advance. The proposals are twofold; an academic element focussed on Molinia management to provide robust results capable of influencing policy and systems-based, landscape scale grazing and land management trials that build on existing Dartmoor work such as Farming Futures and the Test and Trials to identify how a more integrated, multi-outcome approach to management can be achieved. These will aid discussions in coming weeks on Dartmoor wide grazing principles and governance.

Concern was expressed by some that the need for nature enhancement is included and that the landscape scale trials have key deliverables set out at the start so that success can be monitored. The short timescale in which DLUMG's work needs to be undertaken was stressed. It will not have all the answers by Spring 2027 however by building on a systems led approach and using existing work, it will be in as strong a position to make recommendations as possible. The fact that some trial work will benefit being continued beyond the next 18 months also needs consideration.

Key points relating to the trial work;

- Focus on 'how' outcomes are achieved
- Be clear about an integrated approach that includes nature enhancement
- Ensure the farmers have confidence in the actions
- Keep scale and positive impact in mind. We know or largely know the impact of individual actions, but how do we best apply these at scale
- Use existing learning where possible, including that relating to bracken and gorse management. We are driving forward the existing data reviews on these.
- A post-trial implementation plan needs thought
- A soils and seedbank assessment could form part of the trial work
- Consider potential incompatibility with existing HLS options – early engagement with NE and RPA needed to address derogations etc

- Keep economic viability of delivery in mind – a key area of DLUG work
- How do we find sites to trial winter sheep removal and deal with the economic affects
- Make communications with commoners and owners clear
- Commoner and landowner engagement event planned 4th Nov, 7pm Two Bridges to update on DLUMG work and seek sites for trials

Farm Economics

The work done by French students working with Janet Dwyer in 2021 on whole farm economics will be refreshed at a modest cost and the results are expected by the end of October.

Tracy May's work on the cost of commoning will also be refreshed and discussions are underway within the Grazing and Farm Viability Group on how costing work for the programme of delivering the trials is dealt with so that an assessment can be done of the economic impact/s of management changes – positive and negative. Quite clearly, sustainable financial delivery is a critical enabling condition.

It was noted that the previous cost of commoning work did not include an appraisal of the positive financial benefits of livestock grazing on Dartmoor in terms of the alternative costs of delivering the management via other means and this is something the Grazing group will consider.

Winter sheep grazing was discussed and the trials paper had included a summary of the challenges associated with removal. It was explained that the trials event will seek sites where people are willing to discuss this and it will also seek information on sites where sheep do not graze in winter and/or have been removed in recent years, so that the impact can be assessed.

The creation of large exclosures was discussed as were the various regulatory and practical challenges with their creation. Several small examples of these exist on Dartmoor and, whilst this method has proved successful, unless the fencing is permanent and a long-term transition in vegetation structure, including woodland is sought through targeted grazing and rest periods, when fences are removed, negative grazing pressure could return. It was concluded that short-term exclosures are not practical and that focus should be attached to using the trials to test methods of improving livestock distribution and trial adjustments to sheep grazing where engagement with commoners can be achieved.

ACTIONS:

- Grazing and land management trials paper to be re-worked to make the systems-based, landscape scale element clear. Revised version to be circulated to DLUMG
- Work-stream leads meeting to be arranged to unite grazing and nature / heritage work, this connecting with the systems based trials which in due course, will provide a useful test bed for the LUF
- Project management team to take forward reviews of existing work on bracken, gorse, nitrogen deposition and Molinia. Feedback to DLUMG. Focus to be had on using this data to inform practical trials
- NE swaling review paper to be looked at by management team to identify data gaps before feeding back to DLUMG
- Grazing and land management event to proceed.

6.2 Nature Restoration (including heritage)– Simon Lee

A paper had been circulated, setting out high level principles agreed by this group on management for nature and heritage.

Some expressed concern that these were too high level at this stage of the project, although in response, it was felt that this work had to be done to then enable the principles to translate into site specific action through the trials. One person asked if some minor changes could be made. These were requested to TS by email in the next five days so that they could be considered by the management team, the paper adjusted and circulated to DLUMG.

This group has spent its meetings agreeing these principles and also feeding into the work of the LUF, particularly on mapping and the development of data headings for the Observatory. This had been helpful in that all mapping work for DLUMG is now aligned with significant time and cost savings and farming, nature and heritage are seeing their connection with the LUF work, the latter sitting underneath the Partnership Plan.

The following were provided by way of an update on other matters;

- NE has £100k available for 25/26 through its Protected Sites budget to assist with DLUMG related work. Discussion is needed to include DNPA on how this can be transferred to the project if not all used by 31/3/26
- DLUMG needs to ensure it reflects the LNRS work in what it does. Data sharing agreed with LNRS team to include in LUF baseline and opportunities mapping. DLUMG provides a key delivery tool for this strategy
- SWW has provided an update on peatland data to help inform the LUF mapping
- The nature restoration group is looking forward to the trial work moving forward. This provides an opportunity to consider monitoring – both baseline habitat assessment to inform the trials and then monitoring
- Key to engage with LR projects linked to trial and other work as they are developing plans – Central for submission to Defra in February. TS explained he had spoken to Claire Hyne but will arrange a meeting with all three LR's aiming to unite thinking on plan development, monitoring and economics, wherever possible

ACTIONS

- TS to arrange a meeting with LR teams
- Any comments on high level nature and heritage management principles to be emailed to TS within 5 days to enable production of final paper and circulation to DLUMG.- TS to speak with John Dracup or one of the team re Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster.

6.3 Dartmoor Observatory and Multi-Functional Land Use Framework – John Howell

A paper had been circulated previously setting out the proposed structure of the Land Use Framework. Diagrams were attached to explain this and emphasis at this stage of the project, has been on considering and making clear the decision making process and separately, on the mapping element.

The mapping will consist of a collation of existing baseline information, a land capability assessment (soil, climate, exposure etc) to determine which land uses are appropriate where and with this to hand, it is proposed that a combination of map based and stakeholder engaged opportunities mapping will be done to assess what could potentially be delivered, where across the National Park area. This will be supported by the data Observatory and it is envisaged that both will be accessed via an on-line GIS system.

LUF

The paper and its diagrams were explained by JH and were well received. The following points were suggested;

- A 'feedback loop' is added at the end of the flow chart which helps balance site specific decision making with higher level, landscape scale objectives.
- DLUMG should look at the National Trust land capability process
- One person suggested that the priority pillar should sit above the enabling conditions pillar
- A shortened summary of the process and a worked example would be helpful and could be included in or form the centre piece for a communications release

ACTIONS

- Review the draft paper in light of comments and re-circulate
- TS to contact NT
- JH to draft short worked example and share with management team

Observatory

It was agreed that the initial data request went out in the summer too quickly and there was a need to be clear about what data is needed, why and the priority in which it should be called upon. That data request was not pursued and work is taking place to agree a set of key headings to guide the DNPA team.

The LUF mapping work will provide significant data.

A MoU is needed to formalise the instruction of DNPA and TS is drafting this.

It was agreed that DLUMG and any future data host cannot be responsible for the quality and accuracy of data. We will need terms and conditions to set this out.

Discussion took place about whether it is only Protected Sites data that is to be stored. This is not the case and all relevant data is welcomed. It is understood that the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre needs to charge for data however hopefully its availability could be noted within the Observatory, perhaps with a link to the DBRC payment system included.

It was suggested that Honey Green at DNPA could attend a DLUMG meeting to present an example of how the data would be stored and accessed. This was welcomed.

ACTIONS:

- Set of key data headings to be drafted by management team, shared with DNPA and specialists with DLUMG to ensure all information covered
- TS to draft MoU and share with the Chair and DNPA
- HG to be invited to a future DLUMG
- Enquiries needed with DBRC regarding data access / payment
- Ensure Landscape Recovery data utilised

6.4 Communications – Nick Bruce-White

It was proposed that the early work on communications is taken forwards with the appointment of a specialist rural communication PR agency – KOR Communications near Exeter. For a modest amount, they would help define a project mission statement, set of overarching values, a high level communications plan and a calendar based delivery plan. A meeting on 9th October is planned and on receipt of the report, DLUMG can reflect and decide which, if not all elements it feels it can manage internally and obtain costings for anything it would like to consider KOR leading on. If needed KOR can act on a day rate or retainer to help deal with ad hoc advice on the basis the project management team can do most day to day work. Defra supports a communications strategy and they are keen to engage with DLUMG on this subject.

The infographic that had been circulated was discussed. Most felt this was useful, but its audience was questioned. If for an 'external' audience, it was felt too detailed and there are not contacts included. A QR code linking to more information or addition of the project website and email contacts was suggested. It was concluded this would be discussed as part of the communications review.

A project logo was suggested by the management team. The group name is long and even when abbreviated it is not catchy and beyond the name, the group has no real identity. TS offered to explore ideas and feedback with costs. It was agreed this is not a priority over other work, including moving forward as planned, with farmer engagement such as the trials event.

ACTIONS:

- Consider infographic with KOR
- TS to obtain costings for logo concepts
- Comm's proposal and costs to be relayed to DLUMG post feedback from KOR expected mid-November

7. Next Generation

It was noted that the younger generation is not well represented on the group or within work-streams. Asking younger people to join the group may not necessarily mean they attend and that representation is limited to one. It was decided DLUMG needs a more dynamic means of engaging young people, one that covers the geography of Dartmoor.

A proposal to encourage young advocated linked to the trial work was supported as was hosting a dinner to discuss peoples' thoughts and concerns. The Hill Farm Project may be hosting a dinner so TS to check and ensure alignment.

ACTIONS:

- Link next generation proposal into trials event
- TS to liaise with HFP on a dinner

Next meeting to be Noon, Monday 24 November at Parke.