

DARTMOOR LAND USE MANAGEMENT GROUP (DLUMG) MEETING
24TH NOVEMBER 2025, DNPA HEADQUARTERS, PARKE, BOVEY TRACEY

Apologies

Jez Bretherton

(David Attwell and Paul Hawkins joined on Teams).

Minutes of the 29th September 2025 DLUMG

Minutes from the meeting held on 29th September 2025 were approved and signed as correct.

Actions from 29th September 2025 DLUMG

There are four actions outstanding from the last meeting, all of which are covered within the Agenda, bar the need for thought to be given in conjunction with Dartmoor Hill Farm Project regarding how the next generation is engaged in DLUMG work.

Kevin Bishop referred to previous actions regarding the workshop on SSSIs / favourable condition. There is an intention to address this within work on monitoring.

Chairman's Reflections

Whilst the DLUMG's work formerly started in January 2025, the Chair explained he has been contractually in post for twelve months and he felt it important to offer some reflections at this juncture. Key points are;

- Continued collaboration is critical to achieving the outcomes the group is tasked with delivering.
- The group needs to be timely and clear in its decision making.
- It remains key to balance the voices of all parties
- The group needs to challenge convention and test ideas with confidence and collective support to achieve improved ways of delivering management on the ground. It needs NE and Defra support for this.
- There are knotty challenges such as addressing Molinia dominance, better protecting dwarf shrub and considering future governance, including how the DLUMG can usefully aid the work on the Commoners' Council, that needs to be progressed.

Natural England said that the group needs to remind itself about the need for nature recovery within the vision. The existing and agreed high-level priorities need to be translated into working principles. The trials provide a good platform for this.

Members should speak up if they feel anything is not achievable.

Natural England went on to explain that the next couple of years would see uncertainty, but some things have to be decided in the short-term, such as HLS renewals and the terms of Landscape Recovery proposals. Natural England is encouraged by the spirit of collaboration that has been built up, but they are concerned about the timescales in which progress can be made to aid short term decision making. They want to support the group in taking risks to find better ways of working, but this needs to align with Statutory regulation.

Concern was expressed by farmers about an over-focus on target setting by Government and the impact this can have on freedom of thought and willingness to act. All agreed farmers must be engaged and trust the process.

A Summary of Key Decisions

It was agreed that a tabulated summary of key decisions made at each meeting would be helpful, with the wider context provided in the Minutes. For the 24th November meeting, this is;

Subject	Decision
The Land use framework – How does DLUMG see the final mapping being presented – a single plan of what should happen where or, a series of opportunities layers based on differing land use categories ?	A series of opportunities layers based on differing land uses
Observatory need – A question was posed relating to the need to develop an Observatory / data library	The management team explained that the DLUMG is required to produce one, has the funding and the majority feel that a compilation of relevant data will helpfully support the LUF and land use decision making. The DNPA is being contracted to develop this and a draft MoA is now approved for completion and signing
Observatory title – Is the DLUMG happy with ‘Observatory’ as a title or should this be reconsidered to be a Data Observatory or a Data and Resource Library	Await further discussions DNPA is having with the National Protected Landscapes Partnership about similar work elsewhere to align the title with other Protected Landscapes
The North star for the DLUMG’s work – Does the DLUMG align with the Partnership Plan held by DNPA and does it	Agreed

agree that the Central Dartmoor and Duchy vision usefully informs this and provides something to build on in DLUMG work	
Future agri-environment. Does DLUMG support the concept of a single agri-environment scheme or framework for Dartmoor under which individual agreements for commons and farms can sit? Does it also support DLUMG promoting this to Defra?	Agreed
Future Dartmoor management governance. Does the group agree that a small, focussed group looking at this would be helpful?	Agreed and management team to liaise in order to develop
Trials oversight group – Does DLUMG support the formation of a cross work-stream oversight group to oversee trial work, reporting back to DLUMG? This will comprise Tom Stratton as Chair, David Atwell, Nick Bruce-White, NE, Tracy May, Andy Crabb, 2 commoner rep’s from each relevant common, relevant owner’s rep and Janet Dwyer in an advisory capacity.	Agreed
Trial resourcing and procurement. The management team has agreement with Defra and DNPA to directly contract works to a value up to £20k per contractor without need for quotes or tendering if it can be proven that payment rates are competitive. Given the speed with which DLUMG needs to work and the established relations it has with a pool of known ecologists, botanists etc, is the group content that the management team can make these direct appointments to support trial work and data / literature reviews?	Agreed
Trial work project brief. It was recommended that a clear, simple brief be drafted for group approval to structure the trial work, its objectives etc	Agreed and management team to draft

Update on the Land Use Framework and Observatory

Observatory

Tom Stratton confirmed that the development of the Observatory is a DEFRA request and a positive response on their part to one of the Fursdon recommendations. It was previously agreed that the DNPA would be contracted to develop this work and a draft MoA structuring this has been agreed and is pending signature. Honey Green from DNPA will give an early demonstration of developments on this so far, in January. The Observatory will be linked to the LUF mapping system to help inform land use decision making.

Most agree that we need to ensure this is an easy and cost-effective (preferably free) service and that its management can be resourced into the long term. Some data will have to sit behind a paywall, however users will be able to access it as needed.

A draft list of data headings had been shared with the DLUMG specialists such as RSPB, for input and within DNPA. Tom agreed to circulate these to the whole group for any further thoughts.

NE is concerned to ensure data provision is efficient and that in part, it will potentially be providing data that is not publicly available. NE agreed to supply a list of relevant data they hold so the DNPA and LUF teams can review it and only call on what is needed, dealing with access restrictions / sensitivities as needed.

The Peak District is running their own Observatory for Protected Landscapes and they are not that far ahead. In part their work is using AI to put in place land use maps.

Action: TS to share data headings with whole DLUMG and send to DNPA and obtain data list from NE.

Land Use Framework

Discussions have been taking place with potential mapping providers. It seems unlikely, as thought, that one supplier can provide everything – all mapping and development of the all important user interface. Positive meetings have been held with two organisations, focussed on mapping, and a brief is being developed for pricing. If this work progresses as thought, DLUMG would have first site of the baseline / capability mapping, which includes the LNRS work, towards the end of January, enabling a move on to the opportunities mapping and associated stakeholder engagement in the early Spring 2026.

The mapping layers are substantially available already in Shape Files or in high resolution PDFs.

Key thoughts;

- Watch any reliance on SWEEP mapping
- Which proxies will be used to track change?
- The Duchy has a good example from the EA of presentational software
- Biodiversity Action Plan data is now all part of the LNRS
- Use trials to ground truth accuracy
- Ensure DLUMG gives regard to LNRS work
- Tracy May holds Farming Futures mapping for the Forest -all on QGIS
- Agreed that the nature and heritage restoration group need to be engaged throughout the mapping work to help further the work on priorities / opportunities

Feedback on October visit from Mike Rowe, DEFRA Director

The Chair explained that Mike Rowe enjoyed two days on Dartmoor on 30th and 31st October. On day one, Mike met David Attwell, Phil Stocker, Tom Stratton, Will Dracup (DNPA Chair) and Kevin Bishop together with the NFU. Following a lunch meeting in Chagford, a visit to the Walkham LR project took place. There was an NFU dinner in the evening, followed by a farm visit on day two.

Mike took great interest in Dartmoor and its challenges. A discussion was held about the existing agri-environment framework and concerns about the applicability of SFI on moorland. Landscape Recovery is seen positively but there are potential blockers associated with lack of clarity on break-clauses, payment basis and adding /removing land.

Mike gave a clear steer of support for the concept of a single agri-environment scheme or framework for Dartmoor and asked for a proposal on this which could be developed over the coming months by DLUMG. Mike could then obtain Ministerial level opinion on the idea.

Next Steps for Nature Recovery – Opportunities, Key Priorities and Integration with Trial Work

DLUMG has produced and agreed a high-level set of management priorities for nature and heritage. It was agreed these now need to be further developed into a set of working principles to inform short-term decision making with CS Higher Tier and LR discussions. These can also usefully connect with the DLUMG trials.

A query was raised about references that had been made outside the meeting to NE's Nature Recovery Plans. NE has confirmed these are not 'plans' in the true sense of the

word, but a recording of conversations between NE and commoners associated with the approach to management that is likely to be required under any new scheme. It was agreed that these discussions need to connect with the work of DLUMG and that a focussed nature restoration meeting should be organised pre-Christmas to focus on the development of working principles. Thought was given to including farming representatives in this discussion. There are farmers on the nature restoration group and this was left for management team reflection. The potential to use the 15th December DLUMG meeting place holder was mentioned.

Establishment of a Dartmoor wide agri-environment scheme or framework

A challenge has always existed in applying national policy to a complex landscape such as Dartmoor. Previous work, particularly on the Defra Test and Trial has recommended consideration being given to a single management framework under which individual contracts on farms and commons could sit. This could connect with the LUF.

The group supported further inquiry into this concept and the management team's suggestion of establishing a small focus group to produce some high-level principles was supported. This could then connect with pending work on a set of grazing management principles.

Action: Project management team to liaise with work-streams and propose a group and Chair.

Trials Work

Tom Stratton reported that there had been a well-attended farmer/ commoner and landowner event at Two Bridges on 4th November. Circa 75 in attendance and strong interest in engaging with the trials.

Attendees sat at tables for a presentation on the DLUMG's work and a summary of the overarching objectives for the trials. Ideas were captured on paper and Eol forms were emailed out for completion. Seventeen have been returned, ten relating to small scale trials where commoners would like to trial particular things and the balance being potential candidates for landscape scale work. A long-list has been produced for visiting pre-Christmas to enable a short-list to be compiled and considered in early January.

Key thoughts on this work;

- Mix practice with science
- Be bold
- Bring forward nature objectives
- Consider timing -some trials will need to run beyond the DLUMG if it ends in 2027. How will work be overseen and funded?
- EA and potentially other agencies need engaging
- Look at what works and what does not

- Set out a trials framework / project brief and share with DLUMG so all are clear on objectives and actions
- Monitoring is key and needs developing with NE, as are derogations where needed
- NE advised that they do not anticipate manager constraints, but need justification and consent. There are no rigorous processes. Evidence and monitoring should be a positive process.

The management team proposed that an oversight group is established representing the various relevant stakeholders within DLUMG. This would meet in January 2026. This was supported.

The challenge of procurement rules was explained which is twofold; timescale and the small pool of specialist resource needed that should ideally be local. A proposal was put forward to enable the management team to be able to use a pool of known people to support the trial work up to a value of £20,000 each over the course of DLUMG's work. This has been previously approved by Defra and DNPA.

Three additional pieces of work are being commissioned;

- Assembling an inventory of past and current site management, gathered through engagement with commoners and landowners.
- Molinia mapping – drawing together evidence and work done on this beforehand.
- The refresh of the French students' farm economics data (original in 2023) has just come to Janet and this will be circulated within a set of summary slides. Further work needs to be considered linked to the trials. Economics and farming systems information has been commissioned and completed.

Actions: NE to email Tom a template project brief and to liaise with Andy Nisbet on monitoring.

Management team to confirm appointment of Trials Oversight Group and arrange first meeting.

Trials Oversight Paper and Winter Sheep Paper

This paper is a revised and expanded version of that put to DLUMG on 29th September. The September paper brought together a summary of the challenges associated with winter sheep removal and details of a suite of trials that could be undertaken at both a site and landscape scale. It was agreed then that the intentions behind the landscape scale, systems-based trials were not clear and the revised paper deals specifically with

the trial work, leaving the challenges of winter sheep removal and the areas in which addressing these could be tested to be identified in a specific, separate paper.

The trials oversight paper provides an over-arching summary of why trial work is needed (including the scientific work on Molinia) and sets out the two suggested scales. The paper was circulated to a representation of nature, heritage and farming who joined a site visit to South Tawton common in October. The paper was supported by that collective, but it was agreed at the meeting on 24th November that it would have been helpful if it was issued to the whole DLUMG for comments before it was proposed for approval. Some members would like to provide comments, which the management team supported before the paper is finalised. Likewise was agreed in relation to the winter sheep paper. This does not slow the progress of work on the trials and it was agreed that a draft project brief for this work would be developed and shared with the whole group for comments.

Action: Members with comments on these papers to email Tom Stratton within two weeks.

An Update on Literature and Data Reviews Associated with Bracken, Gorse and Swaling

The management team have drafted a brief covering bracken and gorse and would like to move to instruct local ecologists to undertake these. The team has a NE review that was done on swaling, which provides a helpful start to a review on this subject which again, will be commissioned via a third party. All of this information can feed into the trials as so much existing work has been done before, locally and nationally. Sight of this as soon as possible will help empower thinking and action and it will be excellent if some winter work can be done in 25/26.

Action: Management team to commission review work

(Site Condition Monitoring)

Monitoring is a key piece of DLUMG which needs accelerating, not least as the group moves into the trial work. It was agreed this can be broken in two; a simple NE endorsed framework for the trials and a more substantive programme of thought and work to achieve a more nuanced approach to Common Standards monitoring. NE referred to a move towards a systems approach working with JNCC. Andy Nisbet and NE can support and NE and the management team agreed to discuss how this work is taken forward. Professor Jane Hill, the Ecologist who supported the Fursdon Review was mentioned as somebody who might help.

Action: Management team to discuss with NE.

Communications

As agreed at the September DLUMG, KOR Communications has produced a communications audit bringing forward the group's mission statement, drafting a set of values, a SWOT analysis and a stakeholder engagement map for future communications. This cost £2,750. An additional price of £4-5,000 net has been provided to develop a communications plan for delivery from January, develop a set of brand guidelines, design the info-graphic describing the project structure put to the group in September, and a group logo. The group was supportive of this work being progressed to provide a clear identity and a structure through which to deliver communications.

Action: Management team to instruct KOR.

Next DLUMG Meetings

There was a consensus that given the volume of work progressing now, DLUMG moves back to monthly meetings and keeps this under review. Next dates are;

Monday 26 January 2026

Monday 23 February 2026