



DARTMOOR LAND USE MANAGEMENT GROUP (DLUMG) MEETING
26th JANUARY 2026, DNPA HEADQUARTERS, PARKE, BOVEY TRACEY

1. Apologies, Minutes of meeting on 24 November 2025 and actions arising

Apologies

Nick Bruce-White, John Howell

(Liz Nabb, Laura Cardenas, Stephen Dennis joined on Teams).

Minutes of the 24 November 2025 DLUMG

An edit was agreed on page 5 from “evening, followed by a visit to Ann Willcock’s farm on day two” changed to “evening, followed by a farm visit on day two”

Actions from 24 November 2025 DLUMG

Observatory

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

Single Scheme

TS to liaise with work-stream leads and put together a group and Chair to take forward development of a set of principles to frame such a scheme / framework. **To be finalised at 26th January meeting.**

Trails Oversight

TS to establish the trails oversight group. **Done.**

Winter sheep grazing paper

DLUMG members to send TS any comments on this paper within 2 weeks. *The request will be recirculated by email.*

Literature and data reviews on bracken, gorse and swaling

Management team to take forward. TS advised that significant work has already been done on bracken management (locally and nationally) and likewise, swaling. Adrian Colston has offered to undertake a literature and data review on bracken, and assess expansion over time on Dartmoor. There is an internationally recognised team at Exeter University studying fire and moorland management and TS has approached them to see

if they might assist with compiling an evidence review which can be considered in conjunction with one produced by NE. The lead Professor, Claire Belcher, has been asked if she will speak to DLUMG.

A piece of work reviewing the extent of gorse on Dartmoor over time and a collation of locally tested management methods and their effectiveness needs to be done and the management team will pursue.

Kevin Bishop commented that in September DLUMG agreed to follow up the presentation by Dave Stone on SSSI Monitoring and he believes this should be a key issue for the DLUMG. It was advised that this would be picked up under monitoring, and would not be forgotten.

Action: Ensure SSSI Monitoring features in DLUMG activity.

2. Update on Project Plan and Delivery

Chairman's Reflections

Busy start to year:

- Dartmoor has been announced as the pilot area for work commissioned by Defra to social entrepreneur, Dr Hilary Cottam, to explore new ways of addressing the challenges faced by upland communities. This work will, in part, connect with that of the DLUMG, particularly around the 'systems-based' approach and economic viability. If successful, the Lake District will be the next focus.
- Ciaran Devlin, SRO from DEFRA visited last week. An evening dinner took place with representatives of DLUMG and the next day, Ciaran visited Spitchwick Common followed by a meeting at Parke where the Observatory work was presented and project finances were discussed.

The last few weeks have brought into sharp focus, the need for DLUMG to address its position on the relationship between nature outcomes and farming. We remain united by the shared visions comprising the Partnership Plan and Central Dartmoor / Duchy Vision.

We need to be brave and bold, take risks and push boundaries to shape the system/s needed and make the recommendations to achieve delivery. We do not want to waste this opportunity. It is clear that DEFRA want this approach and we have had a clear steer from Mike Rowe, who is keen to hear the DLUMG's ideas, particularly in relation to the concept of a single agri-environment framework for Dartmoor.

There were some questions about governance and how one thing leads to another. It was agreed that actions need to be grounded in evidence.

There was a question at the November meeting about clarity surrounding the basis on which DLUMG moves forward. TS explained that the project team reports to Defra against

a set of milestones that link to Defra's brief. These can be shared and in addition, a clear, costed work-plan will be presented for the February meeting.

Action: Share project milestones reporting sheet and produce costed work-plan.

3. Update on Land Use Framework and Observatory, with practical demonstration of Observatory development from Honey Green, DNPA

Honey Green presented the Observatory work to date. This includes the LNRS data.

This will be updated as we go along.

People will not need to register to use the Observatory. It will be possible to assess levels of use such as the number of hits on a page. It is intended to be simple to use and it will be connected to the LUF. Enquiries are being made into the most appropriate software through which to present the two work-streams to end users.

All agreed this was a great start. Thank you to Honey Green and Greg Davis for their work on this.

Baseline and capability mapping has been commenced for the LUF. The cost is £7K net for the baselining and Exeter will have the work completed in February for feedback to DLUMG. Potentially, Exeter can then look at nature and heritage opportunities mapping as a pilot to inform the basis of taking the rest of the opportunity mapping forward.

The suggestion of trade-off areas was mentioned, so where there are multiple objectives that could be delivered, weighting is given to the highest priority.

Action: Arrange work-shop style feedback session on Exeter baseline mapping for DLUMG members in early March.

TS to check with Honey to seeing if the Observatory can use Power BI

TS to ensure LUF and Observatory development meets Defra needs

TS to follow up receipt of NE protected sites data with Andrea

4. Nature Recovery Opportunities Mapping

Andrea Ayres had kindly drafted a Project Brief on taking this work forwards. Andrea explained the paper and confirmed TS will circulate it for comment. It was agreed that advancing this mapping will usefully support production of the Nature Principles and provide a spatial understanding of where to progress practical action.

Need to ensure we measure progress. This is a general reference and could usefully link with the LUF/Observatory and Partnership Plan monitoring. Progress needs to be defined in order to measure it. Could this be done spatially for example to show the priorities for delivery, action being taken etc. We need to be clear on priorities (habitats and species) and honest in identifying habitat areas that will be difficult to recover and why.

Action: JB to speak with TS/PS to check heritage aspects are covered on the basis we have a combined nature and heritage workstream.

5. Reflecting on Common Standards and Developing a Monitoring Framework for Land Managers

Andrea explained the paper that had been drafted covering two themes; a discussion based review of Common Standards Monitoring in order that the positives and negatives of this metric could be clearly understood and secondly, the commissioning of work to develop a simple and practical, more nuanced approach to monitoring which would sit alongside CSM. This could be tested through some of the DLUMG trials. NE have someone who could input into this work.

Trials will need specific individual monitoring in order to be accepted scientifically. This needs to be simple and user friendly.

CSM could be an indication of the direction of travel. MOR1 was a missed opportunity and did not go nearly far enough. A workshop on CSM and the opportunity to change things would be welcome and this is a significant opportunity that the DLUMG has to benefit Dartmoor and its management.

DLUMG should also look at how we are measuring Nature Recovery – species for example as well as habitats.

Confidence in any monitoring regime is key amongst those delivering on the ground and there is a need to connect all this work with LR schemes. The group can also usefully review the monitoring protocol used for Farming Futures.

The Project Brief will be circulated by TS for comment.

Action: Workshop to be arranged re CSM and Project Brief for monitoring development to be completed and priced.

6. Nature Recovery Group – draft principles update

It was recognised that the previously agreed nature and heritage management principles are high-level and that these need to translate to a more practical, working set of principles or actions that help guide the conversations on delivery, largely via farming.

The Nature Recovery group drafted a set of ‘working principles’ and Andrea talked through these as a starting point. These summarise the NE position in relation to evidence, management proposals and flexible working in order to get the best outcomes.

Action: Principles to be shared to the whole group after this meeting for comment by TS

Several members expressed concern about this document, not least because they had not been able to see it as yet. Concern was expressed by some that the principles set out a NE position on grazing and risk taking the discussion back, in terms of approach on stocking, to the pre Fursdon Review position. The section covering flexibility and where appropriate, targeted increases in cattle and ponies being needed, was accepted by farmers but the concerns focussed on there being a general reference to livestock numbers being reduced across Dartmoor and there being a need to make clear that the science being referred to is NE's.

Those in favour of the principles explained that the DLUMG cannot ignore NE's scientific advice and that this is what needs to underpin conversations on grazing levels however, decisions on stocking and the actions needed, should reflect the outcomes sought, linked to the relevant site.

It was agreed that the paper will be circulated for comment and that all DLUMG members would like a paper agreed by the group and not only the nature group, on the basis that these principles are so important in shaping the next stages of the group's work on grazing and farm viability.

DLUMG has limited time in which to work and produce actions / recommendations and whilst the trials will be helpful and provide opportunity for practical demonstration and testing, focus needs to be applied in looking at the system/s of management needed to deliver the nature and wider outcomes, on the basis we are unlikely to be able to see evidence habitat changes over their life, if conducted solely with the term of DLUMG.

Actions: TS to share nature principles paper for comment

7. Grazing and land management trials

A table setting out the long-list of potential trial sites, objectives and approximate budget was shared.

Three categories – i) system-based, ii) intervention-based, and iii) case studies and evidence reviews.

It was agreed that having a clear table was helpful and it was acknowledged that these sites have all been developed from the bottom up, meaning several need more work to ensure actions deliver against DLUMG / Fursdon aims.

It was recommended that a set of criteria is developed, against which to score proposals, which all supported.

TS commented that based on the current budget and time available for delivery, DLUMG could not take all sites forward and he and Tamsin agreed, there is a need to be very focussed on selecting sites that will deliver and flow information into DLUMG quickly.

TS explained the schedule of case studies / rapid reviews that are proposed, largely to be dealt with by Adrian Colston. These usefully utilise past and current experience to assess

what has worked, where and what has not. The group supported the principle of undertaking these although in relation to the separate, evidence reviews on swaling, gorse, bracken and heather beetle, cautioned against duplicating what has already been done elsewhere. The group concluded that this work should be a weaving together of what is already known, to inform DLUMG and make key, recurring points, clear.

TS explained that the Trials Project Brief had been circulated by email and thanked those who had made comments. These would be reflected in a final version which will be issued at the February meeting.

Andrea voiced her nervousness in the trials and reiterated the need to be clear in what we are doing and why. Originally, protected sites money of £200K over two years was pledged by NE to the DLUMG work, however Andrea confirmed it is unlikely this will now be available.

Actions: Finalise Trials Project Brief and review trials sites / further develop proposals to include production of a trial selection criteria.

Further enquiries into availability of Protected Sites funding with NE.

TS to follow up Tom Greaves work on swaling as recommended by Andy Crabb

8. An update on Landscape Recovery – John Dracup

John explained the mantra of LR is bold, radical and innovative. His team are currently consulting with individual graziers with support from Tracy May to try and secure agreement for commons grazing. This needs finalising by the end of March, before lambing with submission planned for May, which follows a 3 month extension period. Further meetings to be held during February. Every farm and common is to have their own contractual agreement which sits underneath the Central Dartmoor CIC umbrella. Payments rates are being developed. A five year rolling break-clause seems to be offered.

Base line surveys are done on a voluntary basis. There is no guarantee a LR agreement will be offered after bid submission. Outcomes are most important and John explained that there then needs to be flexibility to enable and structure practical delivery.

The submission will require a Memorandum of Understanding with each common / farm detailing what in principle, they are committing to deliver. This is a non-binding agreement but states willingness to consider signing up. This will need further legal agreement in the future. The final agreement is likely to reflect changes once the bid has been considered by NE/DEFRA.

The Walkham Valley project is currently running behind due to a later start and resourcing issues. The small geographical overlap between the two project areas is still being resolved.

9. A single agri-environment scheme / framework

During the October 2025 visit from Mike Rowe, he expressed interest from Defra in receiving a set of high-level principles associated with a single agri-environment framework for Dartmoor. This would not be a single contract and these would, as per Defra's response to Fursdon, remain with each farm or common however the framework would help address the nuances of Dartmoor, creating a platform through which individuals could be recognised for their part in delivering management across the landscape.

The idea had been supported by Sir Geoffrey Cox as well and Ciaran Devlin.

It was agreed that a small focus should be established to take this forward, meeting between now and the March DLUMG to draft some principles for discussion. If agreed and subject to any further development, these principles could be promoted at a spring Dartmoor Forum meeting.

Ann Willcocks offered to Chair with input from Janet Dwyer, Tracy May and Helen Radmore. The group will feedback to the March DLUMG.

Action: Ann Willcocks to arrange initial discussion meeting following receipt of summary brief from TS

10. Update on DEFRA Visit (January 2026)

Ciaran Devlin, Deputy Defra Director, made his first visit to Dartmoor in January, details of which are referred to above. The visit was very positive and Ciaran has quickly identified the key issues and recognises the complexity and breadth of DLUMG's brief. Ciaran remarked positively on the Observatory work, felt Defra will agree the rolling forward of the 25/26 underspend caused during the DLUMG's lull in initial staff resource and supported the LUF work, suggesting we have an update meeting with Max Heaver at Defra to ensure our work connects with the evolving national programme.

There was a good visit to Spitchwick in conjunction with the commoners and Botanist, Andy Byfield who is overseeing some bracken management trials involving outwintered Galloways which are being fed hay. The site is within Central Dartmoor LR and DWT and Butterfly Conservation are also involved. Andy is very happy with the results and so are Landscape Recovery. Dave Slater from NE was able to join, which was appreciated.

11. Communications

Tamsin presented the final project info-graphic, which can be used by the group to quickly convey overarching objectives. This was well received.

Tamsin shared the proposed logo options and the majority selected 2b, which will now be used on email footers, slides etc.

12. Budget

There is an underspend of circa £68k which has arisen due to the lack of initial staff resource and the fact that there have been some savings resulting from the project team doing work and preventing duplication, particularly on LUF and nature mapping work. Inevitably there is also a lead time attached to work being developed and commissioned and where work needs to be tendered, this slows commissioning and spending down. As mentioned, this has been raised by Defa and it is hoped the money can be rolled to 26/27.

Action: Budget summary to be circulated to all members.

The Meeting closed at 16:35.