

**Report of a meeting of the Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG) held at  
10.30am on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**Present:** Phil Stocker (Chairman); Simon Lunniss (Secretary) David Attwell; Dave Stone; Helen Booker; Helen Radmore; Janet Dwyer; Jez Bretherton; Kevin Bishop; Kevin Cox; Laura Cardenas; Layland Branfield; Liz Nabb; Matt Cole; Nick Bruce-White; Paul Hawkins; Rosie Byford; Simon Lee; Stephen Dennis; Tom Stratton; Tom Usher; Tracy May.

**Apologies:** Ann Willcocks; John Dracup.

**1. Welcome and introductions** Phil Stocker welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. He set out the background to the creation of the DLUMG and its origins in the recommendations of the Fursdon Review of the Management of Dartmoor's Protected Sites. He said that he felt honoured to have been asked by Defra Ministers to be the independent chair of the DLUMG and would do everything in his power to deliver its objectives. There followed a brief round of introductions by the members of the Group.

**2. DLUMG remit and governance**

- a. **Terms of Reference** the DLUMG terms of reference had been circulated to the Group. Defra Ministers had asked it to implement the government's responses to 25 of the Fursdon Review recommendations.

During the discussion of this item, Simon Lunniss confirmed that the group's remit covered the whole of the Dartmoor National Park. Members were keen to consider all aspects of land-use within the Park, including issues such as tree-planting. On behalf of Historic England, Jez Bretherton noted that 'protected sites' included ancient monuments and archaeology as well as ecological designations.

In response to questioning, Simon explained that the Group had no formal legal status as a public body. However, as a ministerial appointee, the Chair could make recommendations and representations directly to Defra Ministers on matters on relevant issues. The Group's terms of reference required it to build on existing public investments undertaken on Dartmoor through things such as Landscape Recovery Projects and to further the statutory purposes of the National Park.

The Group asked for these points to be summarised in an expanded explanation of the terms of reference. It also stressed that, in addition to delivering the objectives set out in the terms of reference, it would wish to provide feedback and to be a source of insight and ground-truthing for Defra on the impact of policy change and land management.

- b. **Defra funding** Defra had agreed a business case to fund DLUMG for £528,000 for the 3 financial years from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2027. This was to cover project spend and members' expenses, but not the costs of the

Chair and Secretary. The group noted that Defra had requested a costed work programme with associated milestones. The correct phasing and timing of expenditure would be important.

- c. **Fursdon Review recommendations** the Group received a summary of relevant commentary from the Fursdon review and a spreadsheet setting out the 25 recommendations it was to implement from the review and the government's response to each one.
- d. **Proposed sub-groups and DLUMG working method** in order to deliver the work of the Group, the Chairman proposed creating a number of task and finish sub-groups:
  - i. creating a Multi-functional Land Use Framework for Dartmoor;
  - ii. creating a Dartmoor R&D Observatory;
  - iii. Management of protected sites;
  - iv. Dartmoor grazing schemes;
  - v. Defra A-E schemes.

The DLUMG endorsed this structure but emphasised both the inter-related nature of activities across the sub-groups and the importance of actions being sequenced correctly in order for the group to achieve its objectives. The work of the DLUMG should be evidence-led, so the role of the Observatory, gathering data and identifying R&D gaps, would be central.

Considering the DLUMG's working method, members stressed that Dartmoor's landscape and ecology needed to be considered at an eco-system level, rather than focusing too closely on the management of individual sites and land units. Analysis also had to be undertaken in a dynamic framework, taking account of both spatial and temporal factors. Climate change mitigation and adaption would be a key factor impacting future land use patterns on Dartmoor, together with atmospheric pollution. Tom Stratton said that the Duchy had commissioned a meteorological report on the likely impact of climate change on Dartmoor, which he would share with the group. It was noted that this report and the associated specification would assist in scoping a more detailed piece of work that the DLUMG might commission looking at climate change and potential impacts on land use and management across the whole of the National Park.

The Group recognised the urgency of its task, with a finite two-year life in which to deliver its objectives and issues requiring urgent attention right across Dartmoor. Members stressed both that the commoning community was currently in crisis, with the future of upland farming in question, and the acute environmental and ecological challenges facing Dartmoor. The Group was acutely aware of the lack of spare capacity amongst its members and the time pressures they already faced. They recommended strongly that additional resources would be required to deliver its objectives.

- e. **Communications** the Chairman briefed the group on work to create a DLUMG website on which information and updates would be posted. Members noted the strength of interest generally in the group's work and the importance of early engagement and regular communication. It was suggested that professional advice and support be considered in this area.

- 3. **Natural England report** Simon Lee reported on Natural England's work. They would very shortly be communicating with HLS agreement holders, offering two-year extensions to current agreements, subject to some potential 'tweaks' to management plans. Simon indicated that NE would not be asking for a reduction in winter sheep numbers but was focusing on rotational management of dwarf shrub heath. Each amendment would be subject to Habitat Regulations Assessment. Comfort letters would be provided to anyone whose existing agreement expired in the meantime, but Simon anticipated that the process should be completed by the end of March. In response to questioning, Simon said that some existing HLS agreement holders might also be in the priority group to be offered a Higher-Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement.

Simon also noted that Natural England had a fund for R&D projects as part of its Protected Sites Strategy. He was bidding for funding for Dartmoor projects under it. The Group identified swaling as a topic that needed further research and evidence either through the work of the DLUMG or via Natural England.

Comments had been made on the operation of current agri-environment schemes under almost all of the meeting agenda items. In particular, members had criticised the decision not to allow the extension of Defra funding for the Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster Landscape Recovery Scheme, to allow additional commons to be brought with-in its scope. Comments had also been made on the conditions attached to particular actions and the increasingly random impact of the moorland line in determining who would or would not have access to particular actions in apparently similar circumstances.

- 4. **Land-Use Recovery Framework** Simon Lunniss had circulated a concept note for the creation of a Multi-Functional Land-Use Framework on Dartmoor (LUF). During discussion of this item, it was noted that the Defra consultation on LUFs was expected to be published on 31 January. It would be considered whether the DLUMG should submit a response. Next steps for the creation of a Dartmoor LUF would be to run a workshop to garner stakeholder support for it, to consider its potential use on Dartmoor and what information should be contained in the geo-spatial map that would be an integral part of it. The task of considering potential contractors to build the geo-spatial map would also continue.
- 5. **Next meeting** the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and positive contributions. The dates of the next meetings would be circulated as soon as possible.