

Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG)

Meeting Minutes 29th May 2025

Attendance

Present: Ms H Booker, Ms C Hyne, Mr T Usher, Mr P Stocker (Chair), Dr K Bishop, Mr D Attwell, Mr J Howell, Mr P Hawkins, Ms A Ayres, Mr D Smith, Mr K Cox, Mr N Bruce White, Ms L Nabb, Mr J Bretherton, Prof J Dwyer, Ms T May, Mrs H Radmore, Mrs A Willcocks

Online: Ms L Cardenas, Mr S Dennis, Mr M Morris, Mr R Hindle

In attendance: Ms T Thomas,

Apologies: Mr M Cole, Mr J Dracup, Mr D Stone, Mr L Branfield

Previous Minutes

Minutes from the previous meeting were circulated in advance. No amendments were raised, and the accuracy was complimented upon. Minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

Matters Arising from previous meeting

- The next meeting is scheduled for the end of May, with longer sessions planned.
- A full schedule of meeting dates for the year will be shared.
- A costed work plan is required and being developed.
- Recruitment for a project manager is ongoing.

1. Dartmoor Commons SSSI Condition Assessment

Andrea Ayres highlighted that the information regarding the recent SSSI Condition Assessments has now been shared with all owner-occupiers and key stakeholders as well as with members of the DLUMG group. It was acknowledged that overall, the condition of the SSSIs from these assessments is unfavourable no change (North Dartmoor SSSIs) or unfavourable & declining (East Dartmoor, South Dartmoor) and there is collective work to do to understand and seek improvements.

Concerns were raised within the group concerns about the methodology behind SSSI assessments (which is reflected in Fursdon) and there is recognition from Natural England that there is a need to look at how the process can be improved and look at opportunities to empower land managers to have a greater involvement/ownership in this.

Simon Lee and the NE team can be contacted for any further specific information relating to the assessment results.

2. Proposal for establishing a Land Use Framework – a plan for nature recovery on Dartmoor

Andrea Ayres requested to make a proposal to the group which was that before we can bring in other strands of delivery ('the how') we need to ensure that we are all collectively agreed on what good looks like for nature recovery on Dartmoor (the 'what') with a view to defining what the opportunities are for key ecological deliverables (please see slide attached for reference). Andrea highlighted that she sees a risk in the fact that although everyone around the table is committed to working collaboratively, we may not all have the same collective view of what good looks like and that will cause a problem later on.

This resulted in extensive discussions, which were robust and helpful and covered the following points:

- Recognition that it is important to consider, and where necessary unpack, language to ensure that everyone in the room has clarity and a common understanding.
- The group stressed the importance of engaging and supporting commoners, linking nature recovery with viable land-based livelihoods.
- Consensus that the work of DLUMG, which is to implement 25 of the Fursdon recommendations, went far wider and broader than SSSI sites alone. A wider Dartmoor approach is needed.

There were reminders that our work included challenging any narrow focus on special sites and to review whether the aims are achievable and whether there is adequate recognition of areas of special sites being better than others. The LR vision map provides a useful foundation for opportunity mapping (e.g. tree planting, rewetting). There is a need for shared understanding and stakeholder alignment before progressing. Involving Toby Diggins in our future land use framework activity was discussed. Discussion engagement and consensus is critical to ensure good outcomes.

Conclusion: The outcome of this discussion was that the group didn't support the proposal to bring forward this element of work to establish what good nature recovery would look like but would continue to progress the workstreams as proposed in parallel.

Next steps Delivery Timeline and Strategic Approach

The DLUMG now has 18 months to produce a land use framework, identifying and linking to achievable and practical actions. The SSSI re-assessment results are seen as a call to action, but must not restrict the broader, long-term vision for ecological and climate resilience. Integration of long-term goals, including climate adaptation, is vital. The LR vision can guide this process. It was acknowledged that full consensus may not be possible, and prioritisation will be required.

Key themes:

- Clarity is needed on long-term direction and measurable outcomes. (Land use framework and observatory)
- Discussion connected to the Fursdon Review and grazing management. (Grazing and farm viability workstream)
- Agreement that the protected site assessment process is open to criticism but it is currently the only available baseline for measuring progress.
- Suggested identifying what areas can contribute to specific public goods (e.g., peatland restoration). (Land use Framework and observatory)
- Nature restoration runs throughout.

Workstreams should consider the Land Use Framework and the creation of the Observatory. The SFI MOR1 scheme could support broader data collection. Language is important — 'priority area' is preferred over 'designated area'. Ten project briefs exist with 4 main workstreams and these will be prioritised. The guiding document will remain adaptive and evolve with other initiatives like peatland restoration and the LR scheme. There is currently no prioritisation from Natural England; phasing depends on a clearer strategic direction. The group agreed that farm viability must be maintained alongside environmental goals. It was acknowledged that landscapes may evolve and that the strategy must reflect opportunities across carbon, water, and other public goods.

Action: Make progress with workstream and project briefs to ensure they are well focussed on the Fursdon recommendations, aligned with other workstreams and briefs, and identify co-dependencies.

2. Project Delivery and Governance

- A costed workplan is now under advanced development to guide delivery across workstreams. Alignment with the 2025/26 budget is essential to avoid losing funding.
- DEFRA understands the budget complexity and accepts a fluid workstream process although there is little flexibility over total annual budgets.
- DLUMG members have been assigned to flexible working groups, with the option to include external experts.
- Scoping exercises for each workstream are due by the end of June, to be discussed at the next DLUMG, with milestones to follow in July.

Concerns were raised about resource adequacy, though external funding options may exist. Staffing identification and recruitments is still in progress; a project manager is hoped to be appointed within six weeks. A project facilitator and admin assistant are also included in our aspirations. It was clarified that Tamsin Thomas is contracted via the Foundation for Common Land (FCL), which has no governance role within DLUMG, though it may support our work through other projects. Management oversight for new hires needs clarification — possibly the Chair.

Working groups will include communication and resource planning for their workstreams but link with 'hearts and minds communication workstream.

Questions were raised regarding governance and decision making— the Chair will make final decisions, supported by the Management Board. Refer to group's terms of reference.

Actions:

- **Management Board to meet to: agree structure and capacity and appointment process for staffing resource; and approve budgeted workplan development.**
- **Progress appointments with urgency**
- **Communicate and approve plans with Defra**

3. Planning for workstream briefs

Breakout Sessions Summary

A. Evidence and Land Use Group Chaired by Mr J Howell

Main Focus:

Dartmoor Observatory:

- Central, open-source database for spatial data and literature currently dispersed across NE, NT, DWT, DNPA, and universities.
- Intended to be free and accessible, but financial sustainability is uncertain.
- Risk: Observatory may fail post-DLUMG due to lack of long-term funding.
- Key tasks: Identify knowledge gaps (e.g. grazing/cultivation and Molinia control), not necessarily commission full studies.

Land Use Framework:

- Must be evidence-based — aligned with land capacity and existing policy priorities (SSSI, peatland, nature priority areas).
- Initial step: Compile shapefiles and map current data within National Park boundaries and commons.
- Will integrate with national targets (e.g. 30x30 commitment and DLNRP).
- Concept note to be redeveloped for focus and clarity.
- Group to reconvene in two weeks.

B. Nature Restoration Group Chaired by Ms A Ayres

Main Focus:

- The initial outcomes were overly prescriptive — the group will propose amendments.
- Livestock grazing issues will be temporarily set aside to maintain open dialogue.
- Focus on improving data collection and linking with existing schemes.
- Acknowledgement that current data ownership is fragmented — aim to compile existing resources.
- A strong interest in tracking species abundance, not just diversity.
- Challenge: Defining how to measure ecological success meaningfully.

C. Grazing and Farm Viability Group Chaired by Prof J Dwyer

Main Focus:

- Practical focus on Molinia, gorse, and sheep management to improve habitat diversity.
- Plans to collaborate with IBERS to design scientifically robust trials — ideally launching in autumn 2025, with results by summer 2026.
- Will incorporate knowledge from outside Dartmoor and previous trials.
- Importance of scientific rigour to ensure credible results.
- Next steps:
 - Identify high nature value areas and archaeological sensitivity zones.
 - Finalize trial briefs and potentially issue contracts by end of June.
- Farm viability will remain a core consideration throughout.
- Key links with Land Use Framework and Observatory

D. Communication and Engagement Group Chaired by Mr N Bruce-White

Main Focus:

- A controlled communication strategy is essential — must be factual, neutral, and build public trust.
- Aim: Clearly present group progress to commoners, the public, NGOs, etc., free of dogma or opinion.
- Coordination with DNPA Partnership Plan board and NE to strengthen trust.
- Communication must reflect cross-workstream alignment.
- Governance will clarify external contractor roles and public messaging.

4. Next Steps & Support Needs:

Actions:

- **Workstream groups identified a need for more funding and administrative support.**

- **Next DLUMG group meeting: June 26th 2025.**
- **Ms Thomas will coordinate with project leads to set meeting dates and help address resourcing issues.**

Summary of actions:

- 1. Make progress with workstream and project briefs to ensure they are well focussed on the Fursdon recommendations, aligned with other workstreams and briefs, and identify co-dependencies**
- 2. Management Board to meet to: agree structure and capacity and appointment process for staffing resource; and approve budgeted workplan development.**
- 3. Progress appointments with urgency**
- 4. Communicate and approve plans with Defra**
- 5. Workstream groups identified a need for more funding and administrative support.**
- 6. Next DLUMG group meeting: 26 June 2025.**
- 7. Tamsin Thomas will coordinate with project leads to set meeting dates and help address resourcing issues.**

Phil Stocker
15th June 2025