

# Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG)

## Minutes of the Meeting

Held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025

### Attendance

**Present:** Phil Stocker (Chair), Clare Hyne (for John Dracup), Kevin Bishop, David Attwell, Andrea Ayres, David Smith, Kevin Cox, Nick Bruce White, Liz Nabb, Helen Radmore, Ann Willcocks, Mat Cole, Stephen Dennis, Dave Stone, Matthew Morris (for part)

**Online:** Rob Hindle, Tom Usher, Janet Dwyer,

**In attendance:** Tamsin Thomas, Su Layfield (minutes)

**Apologies:** John Dracup, Layland Branfield, Helen Booker, Matthew Morris, John Howell, P Hawkins, Jez Bretherton, Tracy May, L Cardenas, Simon Lee, David Hazelhurst.

### Minutes of Previous Meeting and Actions Arising

Minutes from the previous meeting were circulated in advance. There were a few edits made in advance of the meeting, and these were agreed as a full and accurate representation of the meeting.

### Workplan, Resourcing and Budgets – Phil Stocker

Recruitment for a Project Manager is ongoing, with the deadline for applications on Monday 30 June at midday. Currently 4-5 interested parties. (since extended to 9<sup>th</sup> July)

A summary was given by Phil Stocker about why the DLUMG was created and the steps that have been taken to get to this current stage.

We have made good progress; we now have a work plan which has been discussed and agreed, and we have created 4 work streams. It is imperative that these individual work streams work closely together to fulfil the 25 recommendations from the Fursdon report. This group / meeting should be the focal point for all work streams.

Next step is to put some detail into the milestones, connect this to the cash flow and produce a full costed workplan. NB currently the budget is weighted heavily for spending this financial year (April 2025 – March 2026) with minimal budget for the following financial year. This needs to be adjusted and reprofiled, if possible, to make agree this with DEFRA. We may need to employ some creative accounting with forward payments (committing money upfront) to ensure we make full use of the budget given and that it is shown we are serious about spending the money.

There is currently pressure from the Treasury on DEFRA, so we need to ensure that we have our plans ready for the meeting with DEFRA representatives next Wednesday (2 July 2025). Initial plans for the £500K budget have had to change due to the departure of Simon Lunniss, so now we are funding his role replacements from the core budget. Su Layfield has joined us for 1-day a week in an admin capacity, and it was confirmed that this was costed for in the original budget, Tamsin Thomas on a 3-day a week Project Facilitator and a Project Manager will be appointed shortly.

### ACTIONS:

**Phil Stocker** - Ask for solutions to the budget being so heavily front loaded.

**All** – To discuss how best to commission and tender the work.

**Phil Stocker & Tamsin Thomas** - Full costed workplan to be produced incorporating milestones – to be shared with DEFRA on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2025.

BREAK FOR REFRESHMENTS

## **1.Group A – Evidence and Land Use**

Kevin Cox spoke on behalf of John Howell and outlined the progress made within this workstream.

### **Dartmoor Observatory:**

The key risks identified are time constraints and funding. Hopefully it will be possible to circumvent a full tender process by going direct to DNPA and/or another organisation e.g. SW Peatland Partnership who have identified a potential staffing resource available.

It was commented that this information is so important for upland areas over the entire UK, potentially further afield, so funding should not be a barrier, and it needs to last longer than the initial period allocated to this project. We will need to ensure that this is agreed by DEFRA – potentially we could charge for the information to self-fund.

It was suggested that the project should or could be done in collaboration with another organisation to create an alliance and share costs.

It was agreed that the initial collection of information should concentrate on information relating to Dartmoor only, with a template then created to be used in future with the collection of national studies.

It was noted that some information may well be copyrighted and therefore quite a large amount of information within the Observatory might have to be “signposted” rather than held.

The data layers might need to be a quick and dirty study, and every detail might not be necessary. Other projects have taken 2 years to get their information together. It was suggested that we need to ensure we know what information is necessary and relevant for our workstreams and be pragmatic. We can collaborate with college and university studies and research to help gather information and it was agreed that many different people will have analysis of studies on Dartmoor, as well as repositories of information about Dartmoor.

The design of the database is very important, along with links to research reports and integration of data sources.

Regarding the population of the data, we can pull together data and feed this into the Observatory later, so that we do not have to wait until November. Other workstreams can help to provide this.

It was suggested that we explore current systems which are currently available and use these instead of recreating the whole thing.

The meeting was reminded that the requirement is a central library of data on protected sites. This is of limited value to DNPA and if this is the scope there would not be any interest in providing resources. However, what is being suggested would be a much broader scope. Clearly however, this will have an impact on both time and cost. It should also inform the Land Use Framework. Kevin Bishop feels that November is an unrealistic target for this and suggests that given the £30K budget, even 18 months will be impossible, and he advises that a scoping exercise would be better. He agrees that cutting out the tender process will help but feels there needs to be clarity on what should be included first. A quick and dirty start to inform the other workstreams and point them to the information sources. Whether this continues after the project is beyond our remit.

It was agreed that we should start with this approach; small blocks and build gradually. Perhaps make a note of what everyone would find useful for their workstreams, potential projects and groups and ask for any appropriate university research to be done.

Copyright and ownership of data

Tender process will be too long. DNPA does not have the capacity to host this, however, would be happy to help with a scoping exercise provided there is a grant and a member of staff seconded from outside DNPA.

### **Land Use Framework:**

It was suggested that the LNRS could support this work.

Regarding the LUF (Land Use Framework) this will cover the whole Moor, not just the commons and should bring all elements of economy, archaeology, etc. together.

Ongoing studies that can help with this:

The LUF for England has been done with consultation done awaiting results.

30 by 30 project

Landscape Recovery

It was agreed that we should make use of work that has already been done (LNRS) and potentially take on a partner to work with us. We need to take the LUF into account, although our project will be more granular, and then stage 2 of the project would follow on after, creating the framework and mapping with capabilities. The drawn map should show how we should use the land differently.

The process should build consensus. Get resilient future pattern of land use – need to take these processes to achieve consensus on land use going forward

Needs governance and structure to make consensual decisions. Rather than map to show where things are going to happen.

As suggested previously, this two-stage process we need to decide on what the priorities are: we need the map in place first, but second part is equally important. Without the map we cannot make the decisions.

The National LUF could be devolved into counties and then from this we could select the Dartmoor area as a subset to use their information from a top-down perspective. The decision is whether we create a separate Dartmoor map first or whether this sits within the National Framework and we work through as it emerges.

It was agreed that the Land Use Framework is very important and that this will enable us to make better decisions at a local level, especially if we can get their views on how this should fit within the National Food Production decisions. This will impact all other workstreams and we should try to pull DEFRA into these discussions. All agreed this was the way forward and agreed that this needs to feed into bigger strategic developments.

From the farmer's point of view, it is thought they need the LUF to be useful/helpful.

In response to comment that although strategically this will be useful, they were not sure it will be very useful on Dartmoor as the land is pretty much all the same, it was advised that a framework is

fundamental, and we need to finance this to have a clear view of the land. If it is going to inform the National LUF, we will need to be certain of what DEFRA wants.

It was decided that we should hold a Workshop first and produce mapping beforehand, so we have something to look at. Although, the areas of land won't look that different it will still be useful.

**ACTION:** Map should show land areas and take into consideration the priorities for LUM.

This project is central to the future of Dartmoor but currently seems to be a trade-off between farming and nature where instead, there could be a win-win situation.

It was felt that what is missing is "opportunities". This project should employ more positive language to encourage our stakeholders. We also need to ensure that we attract partners who can invest where possible. Agri-Tech could be interested but they do not share all our goals.

There was consensus that DEFRA should be involved to ensure this is done in accordance with their goals.

## **2.Group B - Nature Restoration**

Report given by Andrea Ayres.

Has not yet spoken with other relevant partner organisations (SWWPP / Duchy / Landscape Recovery Project etc.)

Purpose of the workstream is to create a vision which is engaged with by farmers. Commons have never had this opportunity as previously, all conversations about nature have been regarding protected site areas. This provides a real link for all the land and the Landscape Recovery projects very important in this.

We need to identify areas that could offer space for alternative uses, in conjunction with all of our stakeholders. This should be built from bottom-up with conversations held on-site with feedback, results from all protected sites and measuring / calibrating all previous success. Greatest risk is the time scale as we would like to advise all stakeholders and support them with new schemes going forward to support landscape recovery.

Questions to address regarding protected sites conditions – How do we evaluate this process? Where do we want to go? Where are we likely to get to? How does this framework work? How do we evaluate SSSI conditions? How are we deal with this moving forward? What is the vision here – where are we trying to get to?

Our biggest issue with resources is staff and how we carry out effective monitoring and tracking progress of SSSIs. We need to decide whether we are going for rewards and what are the indicators of success – habitats? Vegetation? Species? (Species specific e.g. Winchat or curlew)

To assess will take minimum 18 months but need to put in the process to start with. Biodiversity action plan from 25 years ago to be reviewed and LNRS have a process in place.

There were compliments for this workstream from the other workstream leaders. Nature restoration group fits well with grazing group. Working in parallel and / or together will be useful.

A lot of work has been done on Dung Beetles, and this could be a good starting point.

Need to find at least 2 people for assessments into more complex issues. Hoping to liaise with Natural England on condition monitoring to do different studies.

Plan to identify areas where things are being done well and not done well. There will be many workshops for those who are interested.

Ensure that the pressure from the general population (not SSSI), e.g. horse rider, dog walker, bike riders, etc. is included. Common areas and Frontage areas to be included as well as protected sites.

### **3.Group C – Holistic Grazing and Farm Viability**

Report given by Janet Dwyer (via Teams)

Trying to put together actions and collaborate with other groups rather than just within this workstream.

There has been a very constructive discussion with Marecia Fraser, who is an expert on grazing, which covered home commons; species, concerns, recovery and animals. It was a combination of broad discussion and review of evidence – particularly that which we would like to trial to produce new evidence formulated hypotheses.

Currently hoping for more funding from Natural England along with local expertise. To test and trial payment results with willing commoners to take this forward. This needs a good spread geographically and practical management planning as well as practical knowledge. The timeline is ambitious, but otherwise, won't get off the ground.

A planning meeting to be held with the group to talk about likely hypotheses around Molinia, bracken and commons recovery in mid-August. This will be a whole day looking at different commons and speaking with commoners.

We hope to engage with the community directly throughout September and get their feedback.

Trials to be launched in October. Requirements to be checked with commoners and Marecia on board for monitoring. We need very good species recognition skills, but we will not be short of people for this.

Also, this workstream tasked with getting a consensus on the role of Swaling – whether this has future viability (relating to grazing management and commons management).

Will start by putting together key features of support schemes by mechanism or framework. Progress landscape and habitat recovery on Dartmoor.

Potential budget drafted to fund trials and provide expert support. Have considered, who and where for this – what is feasible and who can we count on. Also, sites that are interesting and different. Need to have an idea of stock and history of sites. How many hypotheses can be tested. Need to ensure people are happy with the testing (lots of people can provide this support)

We have resources for review processes and outcomes, as well as pulling this together and making sense of results at the end of the trials.

Will dovetail well with Group B.

Exclusion of Grazing – is this something we should trial. Should be in the frame but can we find anybody who will be willing to do this. Where will they get money from if they do take part? We have been asked to address this by the Fursdon review.

Alternative would be more analysis and testing. Marecia will be objective and scientific.

Swaling to be concentrated on because this was picked up specifically by Fursdon review. Pros and cons of swaling fit into the wider scope: climate change or risk of wildfires if don't swale. Also, types of swaling – safe swaling possibilities? Current condition of vegetation makes it dangerous. Rocky land has limited opportunities to get on top of things – try and design something – issues to be aired and some consensus going forward.

Good to hear that the workstreams complement each other. The brief centred on the maintenance of certain spaces e.g. heather and shrubs versus gorse, but we also need to test exclosures in different locations to produce trial results and mapping. We need to cover home commons and home farms throughout the whole National Park to look at systems and the viability of these areas. We will need to look at agreements that have previously supported farms and commons. As Fursdon recommended, we should create a study on these areas to see the effect on shrubs and re-establishing populations.

Molinia – not great as we know what is necessary for this, however, need to ascertain the scale and repair. There has already been some work done on this and landscape recovery on home commons, however our focus is not just Molinia but all habitats.

Observatory would be used to its full capacity.

Test and trials work. If want to continue with commons being grazed, then need to have information to back this up.

Regarding land rewetting, we cannot solve the peat issue. Dartmoor grazing landscape is good as first huge trial already been done. Rewetting of some peat already in progress.

Farms need to be involved in this. There are currently major expectations on what we are going to achieve in such a small amount of time.

Feasibility study will show that certain land has better vegetation. We will need a willingness and capacity to move e.g. Cattle farmers who are willing to work with us but won't move to certain areas

Need to decide which commons should be involved. It would be ideal for us to use those not involved in agreements however do we have information, money and resources to do this.

Could bid for FIPL money (not all restricted at moment).

Swaling not going to move the agenda forward so need common strategic options and practical alternatives regarding nature, climate, etc. otherwise we will go round in circles. Fursdon review has created a safe space for innovations and discussion.

Fursdon – Dartmoor wide grazing scheme which suggests that most commons are interchangeable.

The Dartmoor-wide agro-environmental scheme and grazing schemes could lead to more money available. To be discussed within the group.

Cross common agreements are also covered. This needs to be rolled out in partnership with the Landscape Recovery.

Not clear in the Fursdon report that he wanted an investigation of governance. This will be touched on, but we could always call David back in for a discussion as we do need to look at the governance side of things. The Fursdon report gave us recommendations, and this could be the safe space we use. This has not been included yet, but we will try.

The common theme for all is the lack of time. Perhaps we need to ensure that the DLUMG evolve more. We should initially try to set things in motion with this group as they will not all be done within the tight time frame of this group. We are very central to everything that is going on and currently this is very key. Working with the review into farm profitability conducted by Minette Batters may help.

EFRA are a cross-party group who could be included in our groups.

#### **4.Group D – Communications and engagement**

Report given by Nick Bruce White.

Have not yet had any meetings.

Need to play to the audience who are not in the room – they should be looking at Dartmoor to allow this to flow on to the rest of the country.

We will need to bring in some professional Comms teams. Will need a Project Manager to convene and control this.

Will not need the full amount of the budget allocated to this group. (£25K)

Risks are that this becomes a point for all the moaning.

Potential at the end of the LUMG for workstreams and workshops to educate. When is the group coming out onto the Moor. Going out to visit people and attending events will be key. Communicating with farms is difficult. Using WhatsApp to get farmers involved and engaged. Needs to be a farm-friendly Comms plan so that all will want to be part of the group. Need to make sure they are engaged, and this will need to be done in limited time scale given. Need to avoid a massive veil being drawn over the project which could lead to conspiracy theories emerging. The Fursdon report brought people together and we need to ensure that we don't lose this positive basis.

Moorland Management Forums are a good opportunity for us to use as Q&A sessions.

Could we restructure this under the envelope of LUMG. All forums can be used. Some NGOs will be useful to communicate with. To be included in a programme of more events.

Kevin B and Nick to speak – move money to DNPA to get meetings going and develop the Communications strategy, would be an excellent proposal. Share work with Nick.

David and MMF – find out what the terms of reference of meeting are.

## **Conclusions**

TT & PS - Milestones and budgets to be sent to DEFRA.

TT & PS - Project Manager interviews to be done before the next LUMG. Winning tender might attend the next LUMG Meeting.

All - think ahead 18 months and consider how the continuation of this project will work if the project is not extended.

**Next Meeting: Monday 28 July**