

Dartmoor Steering Group



Twenty First Annual Report

of the

Dartmoor Steering Group

to the

Secretaries of State for Defence and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

May 2010

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

Covering the Period June 2008 to December 2009

Introduction and Membership

1. The Dartmoor Steering Group (DSG) was established in 1978 following the recommendations of Baroness Sharp's Inquiry into the Military Use of Dartmoor in 1975. Its Terms of Reference and current membership, together with that of the Dartmoor Working Party (DWP), which provides officer support to the DSG, are attached at Annex A. As required by the Terms of Reference an Annual Report is submitted jointly to the Secretaries of State for Defence, and for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
2. Since the last Annual Report¹ in September 2008 the DSG has met twice: in October 2008 and in October 2009. The DWP has met six times: September 2008, November 2008, March 2009, June 2009, September 2009 and December 2009. The DSG continues to be fully supported by the DWP under the rotating Chairmanship of the Joint Secretaries. Annual meetings of the DWP have risen from two to four in order to incorporate the need for a post-Ten Tors and a post-DSG meeting. The Dartmoor Commoners Council (DCC) is now represented on the DWP with two Members (plus a further two in attendance for the post-Ten Tors Meeting only).
3. The independent Chairman of the DSG, Mr Richard Thomas, reached the end of his three year tenure in January 2009. DSG Members unanimously recommended to Ministers that he be appointed for a second term of three years, and this was agreed by Ministers. Mr Thomas therefore continues until January 2012.

Sustainable Military Training on Dartmoor

4. Much of the land upon which military training occurs within the Dartmoor National Park is privately owned and training is undertaken under licence from landowners including the Duchy of Cornwall. This licence expires in 2012. Concerns over Defence use of the National Park caused MOD and Defra officials to draw up the following two conditions confirmation of which was required before formal licence renegotiation would be allowed by Ministers:

- there is a clear military need for military training on Dartmoor: and
- the management of Dartmoor Training Area (DTA) for military activities will continue to be sensitive to environmental, farming and public access issues and is thus sustainable in the long term.

¹ Twentieth Annual Report of the Dartmoor Steering Group covering the period January 2007 to May 2008, submitted September 2008.

5. To meet this requirement, a Sustainable Military Training on Dartmoor (SMTOD) project was established by MOD. This project instigated two military needs papers, an audit of the Environmental Monitoring System (EMS), a socio-economic study, and a bird and National Vegetation Classification (NVC) study. The two military needs papers confirmed the requirement for continued live firing and dry training at currently permitted levels within existing boundaries and showed that a replacement training area the size of DTA (assuming no public access and other constraints pertaining to nature conservation) is unavailable within the UK. The EMS audit, which involved all stakeholders, concluded that MOD was managing the area in an environmentally sustainable manner. MOD then embarked upon a non-statutory Environmental Appraisal (EA) of the effects of the continuation of military training at currently permitted levels. The terms of reference for the EA were set out in a Scoping Study which was subject to a wide consultation exercise. The EA concluded that, with the exception of live firing which had a significant impact on public access for limited periods of the year, MOD's presence on Dartmoor did not have an adverse environmental impact.

6. The DSG was kept fully briefed on the progress of the SMTOD exercise and discussed it at both the 2008 and 2009 meetings. While the DSG was not in a position either to endorse or reject the MOD's conclusion that the case for continued training on Dartmoor at current levels had been made, the Group unanimously agreed to continue to work (including throughout any future licence period) to reconcile divergent opinions so that it could achieve the maximum possible consensus. Two important outcomes of the DSG's consideration of the SMTOD process were agreements at the October 2008 DSG meeting that a list of outstanding issues and aspirations would be drawn up, and that Ministers would be recommended to establish an agreed consultation process in advance of any future licence renewal exercise.

7. With regard to issues and aspirations, this work was taken forward within the DWP and emerged as the Issues and Aspirations Work Plan. This document is a comprehensive, tabulated overview of action required or taken in relation to all the more important issues arising from the current licence process. It was intended to be a live document with items added, amended or deleted as required, and the subject of regular debate within the DWP or within specially created task groups of the DWP. One of the more stimulating issues covered by this document was that of local procurement. In order to examine to what extent Dartmoor farmers might be able to supply products to the MOD, a presentation was arranged by the Defence Food Services Group and was attended by a wide range of Dartmoor stakeholders. The presentation was judged useful in giving both sides a better understanding of their respective processes and capabilities, and while no immediate progress was forthcoming, it became clear through discussion that any substantial progress would only come from political influence on government guidelines.

8. The establishment of an agreed consultation process in advance of any future licence renewal exercise was recognised as a matter requiring careful deliberation (in that it must address issues which are likely still to be relevant in 20 years' time) but also immediate work to ensure that lessons from the current process are not lost. At the October 2009 Meeting a draft Lessons Learned Paper was outlined. The intention

being to develop this paper further before presenting a final draft to DSG after the licence renegotiation process has concluded.

9. The nature of the renegotiated licence was discussed both in the Dartmoor Working Party and at the October 2009 Meeting of the Dartmoor Steering Group when the Duchy of Cornwall's representative set out their approach. It was explained that while any new licence would follow the previous licence's format in many ways, it was different in two important respects: there would be a private Part One and there would be a public Part Two. Part One would contain commercial information, Part Two would set out obligations for MOD to follow, and would require a Management Plan to be developed. Work has commenced on the Management Plan to be required under Part Two of the licence (in advance of a new licence being agreed/signed). Stakeholders will be involved in this process and the intention is to build on the existing Integrated Rural Management Plan framework. The National Park Authority advocated that the Management Plan should 'seek to further national park purposes wherever possible' but it was agreed that the Plan should follow current Government guidance and 'have regard to' National Park purposes. In practice, all parties agree that the Plan should take forward relevant goals and aspirations within the Dartmoor National Park Management Plan 2007 - 2012 (and as revised) where possible. It was hoped where appropriate to incorporate the requests of commoners, farmers and military conservation group members. The intention is that the Plan should be a comprehensive document picking up the aspirations, undertakings and commitments accepted by MOD over recent years, and providing a framework for future pro-active management of the DTA in line, where possible, with National Park purposes. The intention is that the Management Plan and the Licence will be concluded during 2010.

10. In January 2009 MOD and Defra Ministers agreed that the two conditions set had been met, and that formal renegotiation of the licence could begin between MOD and the Duchy of Cornwall. They further stated that there should be a mid-point stocktake built in to the eventual agreement.

Conservation

11. A considerable amount of conservation work in terms of both variety and cost was planned for and conducted or completed by MOD within the period 2008/9. This included work or funding for the Dartmoor Vision, Wader Project, Peat re-Wetting Project, Biodiversity Action Plan and a contingent contribution towards use of a helicopter as part of the Forest Fire Fighting Plan. Further funding plans for 2009/10, however, were frozen or delayed for a time due to the emergence of a funding crisis within MOD as the maintenance of the training estate came under increasing financial pressure. This caused some concern that other contributors to some of these projects might take this as a lead from MOD for them to delay contributions as well. Fortunately, by December 2009 virtually all this funding had been restored.

Access and Recreation

12. The Military Heritage Open Days have continued to be held over a weekend in September at Okehampton Camp, attracting over four thousand members of the public.

13. A new booklet entitled 'The Military and Dartmoor – Information for Walkers and Riders' was launched by Huw Irranca-Davies, MP during a visit to Dartmoor on 30 July 2009. It was welcomed by the DSG and well received by the public.

14. The long delayed fire prevention training for Landmarc staff was undertaken by Northumberland Fire and Rescue in November 2009.

15. While the pressure of operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere has placed a premium on the availability of Explosive Ordnance Clearance (EOC) personnel, work continues on Row Tor and Steeperton Tor, while a magnetometer trial survey's report is awaited.

16. The Intervisibility Study which uses computerised mapping technology to examine current and alternative locations of warning signals and range lookout posts was completed and passed to the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) for examination. Subject to planning consent, it is hoped that this work will enable a reduction in the total number of lookout huts on the Moor, while at the same time ensuring continued safety for the public.

17. The Duchy of Cornwall undertook a wide-ranging consultation exercise in relation to the future of the Okehampton Loop Road. As expected there was a range of views on the desirability or not of public vehicular access. The Duchy decided to create two 'closure points' near each end of the good tarmac section, preventing access to the southern part of the road except for military and farming vehicles.

Management and Training

18. The much-delayed project to replace the visually intrusive Holming Beam Hut Training Area Control Building fell victim to funding difficulties and was delayed indefinitely.

Ten Tors

19. In response to concerns over use of the North Moor by teams in the training phase of Ten Tors, from February to May, restrictions were imposed. This meant that teams were only permitted to train on the North Moor for 2 weekends each, and had to train elsewhere at all other times. This policy was strictly policed with a monitoring team from Headquarters 43 (Wessex) Brigade present on the North Moor each weekend in order to support DNPA, and support the Police in the event of an incident. The reduction in use of the North Moor has been welcomed by DNPA, although the weekends closest to the main Event had attracted many teams.

20. Following a death during training in 2007, a review of all aspects of the Event took place. In particular the review focused on the minimum standards of experience and leadership required by the adult Team Managers. New standards were set and linked to the entry conditions with guidance on competency and the principles of team selection. A Sponsor's Declaration signed by the Head of Establishment personally endorsing Team Managers and group leaders is part of the application process. The

attendance of a representative of every participating organisation at the annual Ten Tors Briefing Day is mandatory.

21. The Ten Tors events in 2008 and 2009 were a success. This was particularly the case with 2009 when the event was blessed by good weather, and 394 of some 400 participating teams successfully completed the event. In 2009 a tracker system was trialled and it is anticipated that this will be rolled out to all teams in 2010, allowing the exact position of teams to be known at all times by the exercise controllers.

22. In order to provide the best possible feedback, an additional meeting of the DWP has been arranged to occur soon after the end of each Ten Tors event. At this meeting a total of four members of the DCC were eligible to attend and to pass on to the exercise co-ordinator their observations, concerns and suggestions for improvement. Following the 2009 event this process was useful in helping to resolve issues over team insurance.

Conclusion

23. This has been a busy period with steadily rising activity levels in relation to SMTOD and Ten Tors, and manifesting itself in additional DWP meetings with yet further meetings of task groups beyond that. This has, in my opinion, underscored the utility of the DSG, and I can confirm that all parties involved continue to regard it as a valuable and effective body, and contribute substantially and constructively to its work.

Richard Thomas

Chairman

Lt Col James Porter
Comd DTE SW

Dr Kevin Bishop
Chief Executive (NPO) DNPA

Joint Secretaries

Dated: 19th May 2010