

**From the Chairman of the Dartmoor Steering Group**

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Parliamentary Under Secretary of  
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Dear Ministers

**Dartmoor Steering Group**

As the Independent Chairman of the Dartmoor Steering Group, I have pleasure in submitting this Annual Review letter.

It is established that this letter is a public document and the Joint Secretaries to the Steering Group will be placing a copy on the website of the Dartmoor National Park Authority.

I would also request that you kindly arrange for a copy to be placed on the gov.uk website, together with the Minutes of the Steering Group.

I am very pleased to report that all the members of the Steering Group continue to view the existence of the Group as a crucial, cost effective, mechanism to help reconcile different interests and facilitate effective partnership working on issues that arise from the military use of Dartmoor National Park.

Below I have set out the substantive issues that the steering Group has considered that I believe warrant your attention.

**1 Mid Term Review**

When the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Ministry of Defence authorised licence renegotiation they agreed that the Ministry of Defence would provide a report at the mid-point of the new licence, that would be a stock take of the training area's environmental management system, which includes environmental management tools and monitoring, usage data and public access (Hansard 27 January 2009).

The Steering Group has been clear in its view that the mid-term stock take will need to be able to report time series data and that it would be of benefit if there was consultation on the data to be collected/reported and method for collection. I am pleased to report that a draft monitoring framework was reported to the Steering Group meeting in November 2016. However, it was noted that archaeological monitoring is behind schedule and the proposed breeding bird survey,

which was due for resurvey in 2011, has not taken place. There was some concern that budget constraints may have contributed to the lack of monitoring to-date. I believe it is important that the Ministry of Defence recognise the commitment that they entered into regarding the mid-term stock take, and stewardship of the training area, and provide adequate resources for this to take place.

## **2 Review of MOD Byelaws**

In previous correspondence I have expressed concerns about the time delay in the review of byelaws and the implications this has on the ability to manage the area with regard to National Park purposes by improving the aesthetic qualities of the landscape. My concerns remain and I would hope that the Ministers will give this issue serious consideration. I would highlight my concern by reference to the Inter-Visibility Study. This was a commitment made under the Licence process and required a review of the range infrastructure (look-outs, flags etc) to ascertain whether this infrastructure is in an appropriate location in terms of public safety (ie the public can see it as they approach the Range Danger Areas, and look outs can see the public approaching) and associated landscape impact. Partners (Ministry of Defence, Duchy of Cornwall and National Park Authority) committed staff resource to this process. The review was completed and, whilst the MOD has concluded that the existing infrastructure is sufficient to provide a safe place, the study led to the identification of some potential aesthetic improvements, including: relocation/removal of some flags, relocation of some lookouts to improve the view along the boundaries which also has the benefit of removing them from skylines.

We are now informed that potential aesthetic improvements cannot be progressed because there is no capacity in the MOD byelaw review team to consider the required changes to the byelaws – Dartmoor is not listed in the top fifty for review, with nuclear sites, US visitor sites and other, more secure sites, a higher priority. Whilst I can understand the top priorities in terms of national safety and security, I would hope that the Ministry of Defence could find a pragmatic way forward – perhaps commission external support for the review/consideration of the Dartmoor byelaws?

## **3. Ten Tors**

I am pleased to report that the 2016 edition of this prestigious event was a resounding success. 2017 will mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jubilee Challenge, which is a challenge event designed specifically for young people with special needs, both physical and educational. I appreciate that there is considerable pressure on the your calendars, but I would encourage you to join us for the ten Tors and Jubilee Challenge events – they are excellent examples of official organisations working with volunteers to support young people.

Yours sincerely



**Chairman, Dartmoor Steering Group**