



## **DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK FORUM BRIEFING NOTE**

July 2025

### **E-news from the National Park**

We produce a number of different e-news updates from the National Park, from activities and events to press releases, and getting more involved in our work through consultations, such as the Management Plan Review and the Local Plan Review.

Email updates 'Activities, Events and Volunteering' are sent out regularly and you can sign up for this and our other e-newsletters on our website.

<https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/keep-in-touch>

If you prefer real time news you can follow us on LinkedIn (Dartmoor National Park Authority), Facebook (enjoydartmoor1), Instagram (lovedartmoor) and X (@dartmoornpa)

## **NATIONAL POLICY, GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING**

### **Changes to Membership of the National Park Authority**

Philip Sanders, James McInnes, Jerry Brook and Lois Samuel all left the Authority following the recent Devon County Council elections. We would like to thank them for their service to the Authority and the National Park.

We welcome the following new Members:

Michael Fyfe-Cook (appointed by Devon County Council)  
Richard Keeling (appointed by Devon County Council)  
Stuart Rogers (appointed by Devon County Council)  
Jack Major (appointed by Teignbridge District Council)

Sally Morgan was appointed to the Authority by Teignbridge District Council but is now appointed by Devon County Council.

Defra is currently in the process of recruiting a new Secretary of State member to represent the 'national interest'.

## **New Chair**

Following the Annual meeting of the Authority held on 27 June 2025, Will Dracup was elected as Chair of the Authority. Will works on his family's beef and sheep hill farm and manages East Shallowford Farm for the Shallowford Trust.

The other changes include:

Mark Renders elected as Deputy Chair

Caroline Mott elected as Chair of Development Management

Guy Pannell elected as Deputy Chair of Development Management

Sally Morgan elected as Chair of Audit and Governance Committee

Mary Seddon elected as Deputy Chair of Audit and Governance Committee

## **Financial Matters**

A consistent theme in our briefings since 2010/11 has been the financial pressures faced by the Authority. For 2025/26, the Authority's core revenue funding has been reduced by more than 13% compared to 2024/25—an even steeper decline than during the Austerity period.

As part of the funding agreement from Defra, the Authority was allocated £1.4 million in Capital funding, which must be spent by end of March 2026, and is strictly designated for capital expenditure. The Authority has developed a number of proposals for the use of these funds; however, decisions on allocation are pending.

The recent Spending Review has confirmed Defra's three-year settlement for 2026/27 to 2028/29. At this stage, the Authority has not received confirmation of how this funding will be distributed across Defra's departments—details that are critical to determining our future financial settlement.

Our Medium-Term Financial Plan projects a revenue shortfall exceeding £450,000 in 2026/27. While we continue to secure external grant funding, these grants are typically earmarked for specific projects and do not support core services. We regularly evaluate our asset portfolio to identify potential for income generation, but the reality remains that we possess limited assets with the capacity to deliver substantial financial returns.

## **Supreme Court Judgment in the case of Darwalls vs Dartmoor National Park Authority**

The Supreme Court ruled that the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 (section 10(1)) does provide a legal right to backpack camp on certain common land within the National Park providing that you are following the 'Camping Code' and are camping within the permitted area.

The judgment means that the money raised via the Dartmoor Preservation Association's crowd funding initiative can now be used to support access projects in the National Park.

## **Dartmoor Marshals 2025 Season**

For the sixth summer, marshals are being deployed across Dartmoor to support the work of the National Park's Rangers.

The Dartmoor Marshals have proved to be an invaluable resource for the busier months, providing high-visibility patrols to reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour. They will also play a vital role in engaging with visitors so people feel safe and have a great time.

Marshals were first introduced in summer 2020 and have proved to be invaluable in supporting the Dartmoor Ranger team as they go about their duties. As in previous years, Marshals will support that important work particularly in the evenings. They're on patrol from now until mid September.

The additional boots on the ground is funded through a partnership project bringing together the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall Alison Hernandez, the National Trust, Forestry England, Duchy of Cornwall, South West Lakes Trust, Dartmoor Common Owners Association and private landowners.

### **Engagement Volunteers**

We have once again asked our excellent volunteers to help us engage with the public at key honeypot locations over the summer weekends. We are incredibly grateful to the dozen who give up their time to support the Ranger team at weekends and Bank Holidays. The initiative runs between May and September.

### **An improved Access for All offer – a Tramper for Dartmoor National Park**

DNPA has been able to take delivery of a Tramper (off-road mobility scooter) through part of its bid to Defra's Access for All Fund.

The Tramper is based at (and can be hired from) Postbridge Visitor Centre. The Tramper is hired through the well-established and highly respected Countryside Mobility Scheme.

A specific way-marked, audited route allows a 3-kilometre (circular route through Bellever Forest. The Access for All fund has also allowed us to improve path surfaces in some of the previously rougher sections.

Staff at PBVC have been trained by Countryside Mobility in the hiring out and basic maintenance of the Tramper.

It is intended to be fully available to the public in time for the summer holidays. A great step forward in a more inclusive access offer for Dartmoor National Park and Forestry England.

### **Walkham Valley Landscape Recovery**

The Walkham Valley Landscape Recovery (WVLR) scheme is a landowner, farmer and community led initiative on a tributary of the Tamar within Dartmoor National Park. Landscape Recovery is one of Defra's three environmental land management schemes, providing the opportunity to co-design bespoke agreements that produce environmental and climate goods across landscape scale projects.

The WVLR scheme has been gaining momentum since January, following the establishment of a full project team. Initial 'farm kitchen table' meetings were held in February to introduce the team to land managers, outline the ambitions of the scheme, and gather ideas. Following these meetings, a series of three thematic groups have been set up to drive forward land management planning; Woody Habitats, Water, and Grasslands & Soils.

Land management advisors have been attending site visits and discussing potential plans with land managers, alongside involvement with Arm's Length Bodies (ALB's) such as Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission. A newsletter has also been developed which shares updates and news with land managers and a website is underway.

Throughout the two-year development phase Landscape Recovery schemes must undertake environmental, social and economic baselining. WVLR scheme appointed Devon Biodiversity Records Centre to undertake broad habitat surveys across the catchment which are currently being carried out. Planning and discussions are underway to progress other baselines that must be completed within the development phase and the WVLR team are making sure to liaise with ALB's throughout this process.

### **Archaeology**

A major focus of the last six months or so for the archaeology team has been the post excavation program of the excavation on Cut Hill cist grave which was undertaken last August. This work recovered a log coffin, currently thought to contain a cremation and date to around 1800 BC. During this process the log coffin was moved to York where investigation of the coffin will be completed and the wood of which it is composed conserved.

Further research on Dartmoor has continued in the form of the PhD being undertaken by Emma Stockley in partnership with DNPA and the University of Leicester. This work, focussing on the scatters of stone tools and the waste from their manufacture left by the hunter-gatherers who were Dartmoor first inhabitants, is in its final year and will be completed in September. DNPA and the University of Leicester have also been successful in bidding for funding to sponsor further PhD research, this time focussed on applying cutting edge survey and geological techniques to the investigation of some of the Parks stone monuments. This will commence in September 2025. The archaeology team has also been engaged in its usual day-to-day conservation activities working with the Conservation Works Team, volunteers and the Youth Rangers to undertake tasks such as vegetation clearance and repair of threatened archaeological features – an example is the clearance of the Powder Mills leat.

Another significant activity has been the provision of advice to landscape scale non-archaeological conservation efforts. This has included peatlands restoration on sites at Tavy Head, Tor Riyal and Gant's Head, led by Martin Gillard the SWPP archaeologist, but also extends to the Natural Flood Management works funded by the Environment Agency and the three Landscape Recovery Schemes within the Park: East Dartmoor, Central Dartmoor and the Walkham Valley. The objective of all these efforts has been to promote a holistic and sustainable view of the environment in which Dartmoor's cultural heritage is considered and protected at all stages of these projects while any synergies are identified and exploited to the fullest extent possible.

### **Green Skills Week**

In 2024, Dartmoor National Park Authority secured £7,000 in funding from AMEX through the National Parks Partnership to launch Dartmoor Future Skills—a residential work experience programme aimed at engaging 16–17-year-olds in green skills development. This initiative combined elements from two successful youth programmes, Dartmoor Youth Rangers and Nights Under the Stars, and was designed to address the lack of accessible work experience opportunities in environmental sectors.

Hosted at Dartmoor Activity Centre, the February half-term programme brought together 19 enthusiastic young participants and a wide range of “skills experts” from environmental organisations, offering practical, hands-on experiences in land management, conservation, archaeology, and communications. The immersive format also included activities like bushcraft, mindfulness, and team building, to enhance personal growth and build connections among participants.

The programme proved to be highly impactful, providing a rare and meaningful opportunity for young people to explore green careers in a supportive and inspiring environment. Participants not only gained technical skills and knowledge but also grew in confidence and personal resilience, forming strong bonds through shared challenges and a common passion for the landscape. Feedback from both the young people and the professionals involved was overwhelmingly positive, with many noting a significant increase in awareness and interest in environmental careers. Going forward, DNPA aims to continue supporting these young people with mentoring and further development opportunities, including mock interviews and application support. Dartmoor Future Skills has clearly demonstrated the value of targeted, immersive experiences in shaping the next generation of environmental leaders.



### Girls Do Dartmoor

Launched in 2023, Girls Do Dartmoor is an initiative to encourage confidence, exploration, and resilience in young women whilst they reap the wellbeing benefits of being active in the outdoors. The programme is led by an experienced Community Engagement Ranger from the Dartmoor National Park Authority, supported by colleagues, partners, and volunteers.

Girls Do Dartmoor is a safe and nurturing space for female students from years 8 and 9 to experience the special qualities of Dartmoor National Park. The guided sessions within the inspirational landscape will help build their confidence in accessing and experiencing the outdoors, allow the participants to connect to and benefit from the natural world, form a peer support group, and experience a sense of freedom.

This programme provides an opportunity to enjoy the special qualities of Dartmoor for those that may not see other schemes in the outdoors such as Ten Tors/DofE as programmes which are for them.

This pioneering initiative was shortlisted for a Campaign for National Park's 2024 National Park Protector Award. In December 2024 staff from DNPA and past programme participants from Okehampton College attended an awards ceremony at the House of Lords, where they accepted a double win for the New Perspectives Award and the People's Choice public vote.



## Ten Tors



At the 2025 Ten Tors event, DNPA officers had opportunity to meet and interview renowned adventurer and instructor Ray Mears, who is a Ten Tors Ambassador.

Ray shared his experiences of the great outdoors and why he thinks access to nature is so important for young people. Ray also told the team which is his favorite National Park. The answer needs no guessing, but we recommend everyone watches the YouTube video to find out exactly what he said:

[https://youtu.be/rJEsN\\_tIHxI?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/rJEsN_tIHxI?feature=shared)

A big thank you is extended by officers to Dartmoor National Park Authority Member Peter Harper for the introduction to Ray Mears, and to the Ten Tors team at Okehampton Army Camp for facilitating the filming.

### Dartmoor Headwaters

Over 2,000 trees have been planted on Harford Moor in the Erme catchment, where tree planting has been targeted on flow pathways to help increase soil water infiltration and surface roughness whilst helping to connect the woodland habitat between King Wood and Piles Copse. Nearby in the Yealm catchment, 17 stone dams and 16 wooden leaky log dams have been installed at Watercombe on Stall Moor to reduce the speed of surface water runoff and prevent further erosion. At Mardle Head, the commoners have constructed a total of 28 dams in a gully to help slow the flow of water from the main tributary. In addition, large boulders and logs have been used in-channel to slow flows between dams, and the lower mire habitat has benefitted from improvements to hold more water.

### South West Peatland Partnership

Another busy season of peatland restoration on Dartmoor with over 250 hectares of restoration works completed across a variety of sites from Tavy Head, Cranmere, Tor Royal, and Great Gnats Head and Langcombe. Works at Cranmere were covered by the BBC Countryfile team over the winter, to capture the team delivering restoration works on the ground, and highlighting the use of local wood sourced from the Woodland Trust.

### Dartmoor Partnership Plan review

The Dartmoor Partnership Plan is undergoing a review. In this briefing note, we explain what the plan is, how it works and encourage you to shape the next iteration of the plan by taking part in opinion research.

Dartmoor National Park is special and unique, as defined by its [Special Qualities](#). Designated a National Park in 1951, it is a living, working landscape that supports a rich mosaic of habitats and species, and is enjoyed by millions of people every year.

As part of their legal responsibilities, all National Park Authorities are required to produce a Management Plan – we call ours the Partnership Plan because we believe it captures the core ethos in a better way.

This is a strategic document. It reflects National Park Purposes and Duty and is updated every five years to keep it ambitious, relevant, and forward-looking.

Dartmoor's Partnership Plan is important for many reasons. It sets out a vision of this special landscape in the future, guides major decisions and sets out an ambitious plan of action.

Crucially, the plan is for Dartmoor the place, not one single organisation. All stakeholders – from landowners to charities and commoners to recreation groups – have a stake in it. The Partnership Plan is the framework that encourages all those with interests in Dartmoor to work together to maintain its Special Qualities and support the purposes and duty.

For that reason, a new Partnership Plan Board has been established. Representatives from a range of organisations sit on the board and will be responsible for leading this review.

Since the Authority is legally required to create the plan, its Chair will also lead the Partnership Board.

The Board is supported by Jen Manning, Dartmoor National Park Authority's Partnership Plan and Climate Officer and Dartmoor National Park Authority's Communications and PR Officer Emma Percy, alongside officers and experts from within their own organisations.

As part of the review, we will be seeking the input of many. Public consultation and engagement will be key and one of the first steps is a public opinion research survey which is due to begin later this summer.

And this is where the National Park Forum comes in – we want to hear from you!

Do you have an idea for how we can engage with your community or with certain groups? Do you have suggestions for how local communities should be represented on the Partnership Board? Or perhaps you're interested in sharing information about the plan, its purpose and why it's important?

Jen and Emma would like to hear from you. Please email any initial thoughts to [partnershipplan@dartmoor.gov.uk](mailto:partnershipplan@dartmoor.gov.uk) Alternatively, do bring your ideas to the National Park Forum so we can discuss them in more detail.

### **More information**

- Visit [Your Dartmoor](#) for information about the current plan.
- Read the [press release](#) for information on who sits on the Partnership Board
- Stay in touch by signing up for [National Park newsletters](#).

### **Planning Updates for Dartmoor**

This year has been a busy one for planning, with the government updating the National Planning Policy Framework and consulting on several big changes to the planning system.

These include how local plans are created, how development site sizes are defined, the way planning committees operate, and changes to Biodiversity Net Gain.

While not all of these changes will apply to Dartmoor National Park; for example, proposals for a National Scheme of Delegation (which would decide which applications go to committee) and fixed committee sizes won't apply here, some could have a real impact.

The two most significant proposals are:

1. A new "medium" category for housing developments of 10–49 homes. At the moment, developments are classed as either *minor* (9 homes or fewer) or *major* (50 or more). If adopted, this new middle ground would mean most applications in Dartmoor would be considered either minor or medium development and may be subject to different validation and consultee requirements.
2. Proposals for changes to Biodiversity Net Gain, including expanding the scope of applications which are exempt, simplifying the rules and allowing more biodiversity net gain to be delivered off site. As the National Park has smaller development sites this would disproportionately affect Biodiversity Net Gain within Dartmoor.

We're working closely with other National Parks and other Local Planning Authorities in Devon to provide a joint response to these proposed changes to make our voice heard.

Our Local Plan continues to guide development decisions and remains fully in effect. It plays a vital role in delivering the objectives of [Dartmoor's Partnership Plan](#) (also known as the management plan).

#### What's Changing and How You Can Get Involved

In July, we'll be asking for your views as part of a public consultation on two important planning documents:

1. **Local Validation List** – This sets out what information must be included when submitting a planning application. We're reviewing this list to help ensure applications can be processed efficiently.
2. **Statement of Community Involvement** – This outlines how we involve local people in planning decisions. In line with other planning authorities, we're proposing to focus on site notices to publicise planning applications and no longer send letters to adjacent neighbouring properties.

More details will be available on our website at: [www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/planning](http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/planning). We'd really appreciate your support in spreading the word about the upcoming consultation in your community.