

Chairman's Report

Summary

The last 2-3 years the Board has been focused on achieving financial stability whilst still maintaining core services to members. But undoubtedly during this period we have not done as much as we would have liked constrained both by finances and also bandwidth of staff to undertake some of the work.

However FY2024/2025 has been much more stable and progress has been made in a number of areas. I would like to thank both the Board and Operations Team for their support as well as the members. In particular;

- Ken Edwards who has offered considerable advice on a number of initiatives as well as being a key contributor to the NHLF workshop.
- Clare Stanton who has been a constant source of advice.
- Sam Handfield-Jones who offered his services to the Board and Operations Team focusing on Bellever HLS agreements and government grants.
- Rachel Stephenson who stepped in to take over running of Volunteers.
- Sue Martin and Margaret Rogers who picked up an action from the last AGM to provide advice on pony sales.
- Malcolm Snelgrove who has continued to provide photographic support, advice and continuity in decision making.
- Cherry Ashworth who has organised both walks, guides and contributed to the NHLF work around Stage 2 Education.

I would like to pick out Dominic Sheldon, who has been a Trustee for a number of years and retires at this AGM. He has been of enormous help, support, advice and drive. Dominic has been critical in driving forward the work on Bellever and with Plymouth University. He has added gravitas, knowledge and credibility to the work we have undertaken, presentations made and lobbying completed. His loss will be greatly felt, however due to serious ill health he will be stepping aside post this AGM.

Financial Summary

As reported last year we made a number of changes to how the DPHT was run which made a positive impact. The first was the departure from Parke which did result in significant savings which we started to realise at the end of last year and into this year. The other was appointing our previous CEO as a dedicated fundraiser/grant applications which resulted in the submission of over 30 applications and secured grants totalling £58,100. These included:

- National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of which £29,100 was received in the year. The purpose of this grant is to examine the income generated by the Charity and to facilitate the improvement of future income streams.

- A second major grant of £20,000 was secured from the Martin Wills Fund, this is for conservation purposes and will be used for the ongoing management of Bellever and is instrumental in the preparation of the new land management plan for the site.
- Other grants secured were £6,000 from the Adrian Swire Trust and £3,000 from the Wheeler Mill Fund.

Total expenditure in FY24/25 was £107k compared to FY23/24 of £132.5k. The figure for FY24/25 includes for a substantial period the cost of Parke.

Total income for FY24/25 was £92.5k compared to FY23/24 of £37.5k which reflected fund raising efforts.

Our reserves at end of FY24/25 are £148k compared to FY23/24 of £162.5k. Whilst there has been an erosion of the reserves, recent legacy donations in the current FY has improved our position significantly.

Going into FY25/26 with reduced running costs and our reserves stabilised we can now focus on more core activities.

Working with the DPS and DHPA

A priority this year has been to establish stronger and more collaborative working relationships with the other two pony charities on the Moor.

DPS

The main discussions have been around creating a register for Dartmoor Heritage Ponies. Many of you will recall that the DPS used to be able to issue Heritage Passports but with changes of legislation for PIOs this was no longer feasible. This had two impacts; we lost the main means to differentiate the Heritage Ponies from other ponies which helped to add value and secondly as a Charity we were no longer able to track what Heritage Ponies were on the Moor and this impacted our ability to administer support and direct grants in line with the Charity's objective.

The DPS have been very supportive of our position and have agreed to:

- Maintain a register of Dartmoor Heritage Ponies
- Provide judges to assess true to type unregistered ponies to go onto the register
- Provide a DPS insert to the new and existing passports stating provenance as a Heritage Pony
- Ponies with the legacy Heritage Pony passport issued by the DPS will be unaffected

We hope the above will help to add value to ponies, promote their use as conservation ponies, encourage breeding of quality ponies and facilitate and encourage participation in the Newtake Scheme.

The DPHT will pay for the assessments, passports, chipping and a small one-off payment for each herd that takes part in the scheme.

This initiative has been discussed with the DHPA and they are aware and are supportive.

We hope to commence this work before the end of 2025.

DHPA

The Chairman now has quarterly meetings with the DHPA. We both recognise the contribution all ponies make to maintaining the Moor. We both recognise that we should support all pony keepers and help them add value/gain value from their ponies. Whilst the DHPA looks after Heritage Ponies, the DHPA looks after all unregistered ponies on the Moor with the exception of those that are supported by us.

Looking ahead we are identifying campaigns and issues where it would be beneficial to have two voices speaking as one.

Change of Objective - For Discussion

You will have read the separate note on a proposal for discussion on changing our objective. Note this is not a resolution being put to the membership but a consultation. Whilst this may seem like a significant event, in reality it is bringing the language in our objective up to date with modern understanding of equine terminology and practice. There is no impact on beneficiaries or the work the DPHT is undertaking. We are considering changing two words:

- Species to Population
- Native to Heritage

The new Objective would read:

*“The objects are to protect and preserve as a **population** for the benefit of the public the **Dartmoor Heritage ponies** native to Dartmoor and to promote such other charitable purposes as the Trustees from time to time think fit.”*

Heritage pony is defined as true to type but unregistered as a pure bred pony. This would include support for SR ponies being not fully pedigree.

Trustees

You will have seen from last year's report that there was an urgent need for additional Trustees. As Chair I was reluctant to publicly advertise the posts until I was confident of our long term stability - which I now am. We are in the process of interviewing 16 applicants with a range of experience from farming, accountancy, vet, HR and legal specialists.

The process involves a one to one call with the Chair, submission of a personal statement and then a meeting with the Board and Operations Team. This will be completed by the end of September.

As per our AoA, you will be asked to vote for the Trustees recommended by the Board at the next AGM.

The current Trustees are:

- Michael Lithgow - proposed for re-election at the AGM
- Dominic Sheldon - retires at end of 2025
- Paul Pearce

Academic Studies

Malcolm Snelgrove and Clare Stanton have provided advice and the history of the long standing relationship with the University of Plymouth which culminated in the 2019 report that has been hugely influential and widely used. Studies have continued but have been limited in scope. After discussions with the University of Plymouth in order to continue with peer reviewed studies we will need to find additional sites to compare and contrast. We are endeavouring to contact the Duchy to ascertain if they would like to partner with us in taking forward this work.

Operations

Key activities undertaken by Operations and approved by the Board were:

- Provision of direct grants which were capped
- Supply of reflective collars to some of our keepers who requested support
- Support for castrations
- Limited handling. This has been restricted due to the illness of the Head of Operations. This is an area we would like to provide greater support in the coming year. To increase capacity we are planning to provide a list of handlers that use passive methods and happy to travel
- Many of you will recall Tracey Lears' pony, Pan, that lived on Believer from foal and was found a forever home and is training to drive
- Conservation grazing has slowed right down this year as many of the organisations we supply and support are losing funding. However we are still getting private conservation enquiries but again getting the uptake is slow. This being said, the general interest in conservation ponies and their uses is increasing as people become more aware of the environment and conservation.

Believer ponies are thriving. We have purposely kept numbers to a minimum this year due to extensive planned felling by Euro felling. Those that have followed the felling saga will know that it has not gone well and may well be halted.

We are planning an extension to the catch pen, this will enable easier handling for our increased numbers.

We are thankful for the number of volunteers enrolled this year and we have been teaching pony checking and getting checkers to shadow the Ops Manager.

Conservation Grazing

This was touched on above. Partly due to a lack of capacity, we have not driven this as hard as we should have done. Believer and the academic studies, plus facilitating the provision of high quality and well handled Heritage Ponies combined with a flexible purchase agreement with through life support places us in a unique position in a competitive market.

This will be a focus in the coming year. We will need to understand from the Pony Keepers what support is required from the DPHT and this is likely to be different depending on the number of ponies being requested. Where there is a long standing arrangement between Pony Keeper and a conservation site our role is probably minimal, limited where required to handling. Where the ask is for a larger number which will require ponies from multiple keepers it is likely we will need to provide greater support.

Whilst this is a stretch target the aim for the next 12 months is to identify opportunities for a total of 30 Heritage Ponies. We will need to invest some money in marketing to make this happen.

Volunteers

Rachel Stephenson who is a volunteer heads up our recruitment and care of volunteers.

Rachel joined DPHT in June 2024 as a Pony Checker and just before Christmas 2024 took on the role of Head of Volunteers. She works full time for the National Trust in the South West Regional Business Services team for two Assistant Directors.

In her newly appointed role at DPHT she is the first point of contact for volunteer enquiries. She maintains an updated list of active volunteers and coordinated a Volunteers Day in April 2025; following which we recruited 5 new volunteers to the team.

A Whatsapp group for the volunteers and committee members has been established whereby we can put out a call for help and set up working parties where help is needed.

Plans going forward include:

- Update contact details and medical records for each volunteer
- Volunteer day for Francis Clark (10 people) in September
- Organise second Volunteers Day to recruit more pony checkers
- Continue to keep volunteers engaged

The number of regular (employed) staff of the DPHT is small and Volunteers are extremely important in running the charity. What is more important than numbers of volunteers is a commitment - no matter how small - to undertaking work.

National Lottery Heritage Trust

Purpose

The DPHT have been awarded a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund of £58,200. The purpose of the grant is to assist the DPHT in creating a more sustainable and stable charity to enable it to continue to provide core services and support to its beneficiaries - Dartmoor Heritage Ponies - for the longer term. The NHLF Grant is a 'restricted' grant, that is the funding can only be spent on approved project activities that are laid down in the grant agreement. The DPHT provides two detailed reports to the NHLF, one at the mid-way point and the other at the end of the project. One of the work-streams of the project is the employment of an evaluator who will benchmark where the charity is at the commencement of the project and its tangible achievements/progress at the conclusion.

Project Organisation

Project Manager reports to the Board of Trustees. The PM is employed for 12 months for 2 days per week. Accountable for management of the work streams and delivering the output required from the project.

Project Evaluation Specialist reports to the Board of Trustees and a dotted line to the PM. The person appointed will use an approved methodology for evaluation of the project, including determining data to be collected.

Communications and PR Specialist reports to the PM. Arrange and conduct a stakeholder workshop to consult on, develop and agree a 'Message House' diagram to ensure consistent and clear messaging in all DPHT Communications. Outputs are:

- Stakeholder Workshop
- Message House Diagram
- New Media Web Page
- Draft and deliver 3 media releases, 9 FB, Twitter and Instagram posts

Fundraising Specialist reports to the PM. The Fundraising Specialist will supervise the Additional Sources of Income Specialist. The selected individual will develop fund raising plan linked to the Message House. Signposts potential sources of funding to establish a pipeline of future funding approaches. Consult with DPHT members to develop an effective approach to legacy promotion. Outputs are:

- Secure one new founder for charity's work
- Develop a fundraising strategy
- Develop a legacy strategy
- Draft legacy promotion on website

Additional Sources of Income Specialist reports to the Fundraising Specialist. This is a subset of Fundraising but focuses on reviewing the activities in the DPHT's Business Plan to investigate potential sources of income through delivery of services including: Bellever conservation grazing

site, brokering sales and pony handling. The output of this activity feeds into the Fundraising Strategy. Specific deliverables are:

- Consultation with previous clients to confirm both demand and pricing
- Recommendations on potential income from delivery of DPHT services or sources of funding for DPHT services

Education Specialist reports to the PM. This is a key role in the project. The selected individual will be required to develop, test and refine new online education material for pupils up to Key Stage 2 on subjects relevant to the National Curriculum utilising examples from the Dartmoor Heritage Pony and their role on the moor, its landscape, biodiversity, archeology and heritage. The Educational Specialist is to work with DPHT school partners, staff and Trustees both in school and at Believer. Deliverables are:

- Online Educational material
- Trial and evaluation with 2 pilot schools
- Revised walk material for Dartmoor Guides

ELMS Expert reports to the PM. The individual will work with DPHT Trustees and staff to identify the implications for the future of Dartmoor Heritage Ponies of the Government's response to the Independent Review of Dartmoor's Protected Land Management, formation of Dartmoor Land Management Group, formation of Farm Clusters on Dartmoor and delivery of Nature Recovery Projects. Outputs are:

- Hold DPHT Members Meeting to explain implications for the future of the Dartmoor Heritage Pony of the above.
- Deliver DPHT presentation to LUMG to underline the potential role of Dartmoor Heritage Ponies in sustainable management of Dartmoor for increased biodiversity and to tackle invasive plant species.

Community Outreach and Engagement Specialist reports to the PM. The individual will work with the PM, DPHT Head of Operations, Head of Volunteers and Communications Consultant to arrange 3 community engagement and consultation events with local communities to determine what people value about the DPHT and how they would like to be involved in the charity.

Deliverables are:

- 3 Community workshops
- Report on feedback from each event
- Development of an online community engagement strategy for the DPHT

Website Design Specialist. Review current DPHT website and identify changes needed to communicate new Message House effectively. Ensure website is simple to navigate and for users to engage with towards achieving the charity's operational objectives. Deliverables are:

- Re-platform website to ensure that DPHT Staff are able to easily access, update and modify
- Ensure website meets accessibility standards
- Provides website administrator training and documentation to reduce reliance on website host to make modifications

- With assistance of Communications and PR Specialist, Education Specialist, Fundraising Specialist and Community Outreach and Engagement Specialist ensure online material are published and easily navigated and messages are in line with Message House

Timing

The project is funded for a 12 month period. The official start date is February 2025. Some preparatory work commenced in January to replatform the DPHT Website to enable updates to be published as required together with early findings to facilitate comment and feedback.