

29th August 202 DPHT AGM - Minutes of Meeting, Record of Decisions and Actions - DRAFT

Attendance:

Board and Operations Team

Chair - M Lithgow

Trustee - P Pearse

Hon Treasurer - T Jenkins

General Manager - Sam Handfield-Jones

Operations Manager - C Anderson

Admin Support - E Polley

Members and Attendees

Anne-Marie Howley

Alison Green

Ralph Human

Pam Human

Andy Taylor

Joy Taylor

Sue Greenaway

Tracey Lear

Ken Edwards

Patricia Pooley

Colin Pooley

Caroline Belam

Tracey Elliot-Reep

Jenny Whitehorn

Apologies

Trustee - D Sheldon

NLHF Project Manager - A Blight

Sue Martin

Michele Brusey

Verity Nicholls

Sally Joyce

Margaret Rogers

Item 1 - Opening Remarks - Chair

The Chair thanked the members who had voted on-line and those that were attending in person today for their support. The DPHT is a membership driven organisation and views from the membership are both welcomed and needed to ensure that the DPHT continues to travel in the right direction and is responsive to the needs of the Heritage Pony and their keepers.

Item 2 - Actions Arising from Previous AGM - Chair

- ☐ DPHT agreed to organise a spring event. This was undertaken but the turn-out was low - 3 people - and was cancelled. **Complete.**
- ☐ DPHT Operations Manager was asked to visit Pony Keepers to discuss Grazing Agreement. This was completed via informal visits, discussions and email. **Complete.**
- ☐ S Martin and M Rogers agreed to host a meeting to discuss marketing of DPHT Ponies. This has been completed. A summary of the discussion was forwarded to the DPHT. **Complete.**
- ☐ DPHT Operations Manager was asked to communicate with Pony Keepers on the direct grant process. This was completed via discussions and email. **Complete.**
- ☐ DPHT Chair, A Taylor and S Greenaway were tasked with reviewing the benefits of re-introducing the Foster Scheme for Heritage Pony foals. It was agreed that whilst the scheme had some benefit, the take up from fosterers had previously been low, it created significant work in ensuring the right homes were found and the need to provide follow up checks and advice. The cost and work load was not matched by the benefit gained. It was decided not to proceed. **Complete.**
- ☐ DPHT Ambassador for Fundraising was asked to investigate submitting a request for grants from the King's Fund. This was completed but the DPHT were not eligible. **Complete.**
- ☐ The Board was asked to review the Legacy offering and its marketing. This action is ongoing and is part of the Fundraising Workstream of the NHLF project. **Still open.**
- ☐ The Chair was asked to make available to the membership the Articles of Association of the DPHT. AoAs are now published on the website and a link was also sent out with the calling notice for this AGM. **Complete.**

Item 3 - Chair's Report - Chair

The Chair stated that the report had been circulated as part of the calling notice information pack. Much of the detail of the report would be covered in the individual reports from the Board and Operations Team during the AGM. The key points the Chair highlighted were:

- The financial position of the DPHT is now on much firmer footing as a result of both grants and legacies. There is never room for complacency and there remains a need to constantly seek ways of raising funds for projects and operational running costs.
- A major effort has been made in the last 12 months to build stronger relationships with the DPS, DHPA, Commoners Council and the Duchy.

- The Chair wished to publicly thank the DPS for their support during the past 12 months which has resulted in the re-introduction of the Heritage Passport - which will be covered later in the AGM.
- The grant from the NHLF has enabled a significant amount of progress to be made in a number of key areas:
 - Re-focusing the DPHT on its core objectives through workshop and discussions.
 - Reinvigorating the education programme with pilots being undertaken with two schools to embed Bellever into Key Stage 2 education. This does not get around the issue of funding for school visits but helps schools build internal business cases for field trips.
 - Greater effort into making use of social media and PR
 - Development and start of implementation of a new Land Management Plan for Bellever which underpins our marketing of Heritage Ponies for conservation grazing.
 - Development of a more focused fundraising strategy
 - Examination of support to marketing of Heritage Ponies and how it is funded
 - Lease for Bellever is nearing completion. This has taken nearly 4 years to negotiate and has at times been painful. It is hoped that this will be signed in the next 3 months. The DPHT will have extended access and lease of the whole of Bellever amounting to 1,000 acres. This has necessitated detailed discussions with FE solicitors to ensure that we are not burdened with additional costs. The lease is no longer a Farm Business Tenancy but a Conservation Grazing Tenancy.

The Chair acknowledges that there were some areas where insufficient progress had been made:

- The amount of handling undertaken had dropped significantly. This was partly due to unavailability and illness of key personnel. The Operations manager will cover this in greater detail in their report.
- Sales of Heritage Ponies.
 - Private Sales - Whilst attempts were made to reinvigorate sales, there appeared to be a shortage of ponies to advertise and the Sales page has been temporarily suspended.
 - Conservation grazing sales have not grown this year. The intent of the Board is to create a minimum of 30 Heritage ponies conservation sales/leases in the next 12 months (September 25-August 26).

The Chair went on to acknowledge that the number of Trustees on the Board was less than was desirable. The Board consisted of 3 Trustees:

- Michael Lithgow
- Paul Pearse
- Dominic Sheldon

D Sheldon was ill and would no longer be able to continue and would resign at the end of August. The Chair had approached several members all of whom had commitments which prevented them from undertaking Trustee duties. A recruitment campaign had been undertaken and 16 individuals were contacted. Of this 4 have been interviewed and a further 4 are due to be interviewed. There are a range of skills from legal, fundraising, small holders, environmental science. It is expected that by the beginning of September one new Trustee will join the Board to ensure a minimum of 3 are registered with Companies House and the Charity Commission and by the end of September a further 4-6 will join the Board.

Item 4 - Honorary Treasures Report - Hon Treasurer

In the year ending 31st March 2025 the DPHT has continued to focus on its core activities that underpin its mission and objectives to support and sustain the Dartmoor Heritage Pony.

The total incoming funds for the year were £92,659, last year's total funds were £37,598, an increase of £55,061. The total income of £92,659 consisted of grants designated to Bellever of £33,859, general grants of £23,308 and the restricted fund from the NLHF of £29,100. Other income sources in the year were fundraising and donations of £3,261 and bank interest of £3,131.

The total costs this year were £106,964. Last year's costs were £132,522, the decrease of £25,558 mainly due to the closure of Parke at the end of September 2024. The DPHT has also supported pony keepers and breeders by providing direct grants totaling £8,225 for handling, castrations and to support breeding mares. This support helps to ensure that both multi-generational herds and those being taking on or establishing new herds receive help and assistance.

The net movement in funds this year was a deficit of £14,305 as opposed to last year which resulted in a deficit of £94,924. The DPHT are still in deficit but this is much reduced due to the closure of Parke and the success of the fundraising team in securing additional grants totaling £58,100. The Honorary Treasurer highlighted that the DPHT has been the beneficiary of a number of legacies during the 2025/26 financial year and this has resulted in the Charity being in a stronger financial position.

The DPHT continues to review expenditure and look for sustainable sources of funds. The National Lottery Heritage Fund Project is helping us to achieve this the approved purposes of this fund are to:

- Set up a members focus group
- Develop a fundraising strategy to build income streams
- Arrange community engagement and consultation events
- Review activities and services in the business plan to identify potential sources of income
- Develop a campaign strategy and calls to action to secure the future of the heritage Dartmoor pony.

- Develop and produce legacy promotion materials.
- Design and launch a new website.
- Work with local primary schools.
- Develop a more detailed business plan.

Looking ahead at the coming FY, the Board will need to continue to constrain cost but in a manner that does not impact core activities. The objective remains to generate income and enable the DPHT to rebuild its reserves. Our reserves were £148,197 on 01/04/2025 and by 31/08/2025 they were £154,057. The DPHT are predicting that they will be above £230,000 at the end of March 2026. These results are thanks to the continued efforts of the board of trustees and the dedicated staff and volunteers of the DPHT.

Question Raised by Member

Q. With healthy reserves does the Board have an investment strategy to optimise returns?

R. The Chair noted that this was a good suggestion and stated that the Board did not have as yet an investment strategy for funds that it does not require for the next 2 years. The Chair undertook to place this on the Board agenda.

- ☐ Action. Board to review its financial investment strategy and report back to the membership.

Item 5 - Election of Reporting Accountants - Chair

The Chair recommended that MTD Accountants were reappointed as Reporting Accountants.

The vote in the room was:

- For 4
- Against 0
- Abstain 1

The voting on line was

- For 9
- Against 0
- Abstain 3

With a total of 13 votes for and 4 abstentions, MTD Accounting was reappointed as Reporting Accountants.

Item 6 - Operations Report - Operations Manager and Bellever Warden

The Operations Manager provided an overview of the year's activities.

Handling

With the loss of Parke handling had taken a step back. The Operations Manager had also been ill and there had been an increase in workload partially due to a reduction in active volunteers. The Operations Manager had developed a plan for this year to increase the number of ponies handled:

- Where convenient to pony keepers the Operations Manager would come out to farms to handle a small group
- The Operations Manager would make available their own facilities for handling and assured the membership that they had the requisite insurance cover.
- Two assistants were being brought on board to increase capacity

A letter would be coming out shortly detailing the new procedures.

- ☐ Action - Operations Manager to communicate with Pony Keepers revised arrangements for handling and to assess demand.

Bellever

The number of ponies grazing on Bellever was not as high as in previous years due to the extended felling taking place on Bellever. Felling was still ongoing but the DPHT planned to increase the number of ponies on Bellever to 40 in summer and 30 in winter.

To manage the herd it was intended to acquire a vasectomized pony which it was hoped would create a more cohesive herd.

Passports

The operations manager re-affirmed the 'colour' schemes for the DPS issued Passports:

- Green - registered/pedigree pony
- Blue - supplementary ponies
- Purple - inspected Heritage ponies
- Pink - for ponies that were not registered, supplementary or approved as Heritage Ponies.

Questions Raised by Member

Q. With a vasectomized pony would Pony Keepers be able to place geldings on Bellever.

R. The Operations Manager stated that on a case by case basis they would be eligible. However they would be restricted both in numbers and with a preference for young geldings.

The Bellever Ranger provided an overview of work being undertaken on site.

Handling Facilities

A new race was being constructed which would ease handling and stress on the ponies when rounded up..

Maintenance

There was a considerable amount of fencing on Bellever which required constant attention. A management plan was being drawn up to schedule inspections and repairs.

Salt licks were being re-established and would form part of the Land Management Plan to improve the eco-system on Bellever.

There had been recent problems with cows on site which had broken through fencing.

There had also been problems with wild camping and with off road motorbikes. The DPHT is discussing the issues with the National Park and with Forestry England. It is expected that these problems will be ongoing.

Item 7 - Bellever Land Management Plan - General Manager

The Chair introduced the newly appointed General Manager who would be working 2 days per week with responsibilities for the Bellever Land Management Plan, grants, liaison with academic institutions and Duchy plus conservation grazing programmes.

Overview

The GM highlighted the importance of continuing to apply for grants to fund specific projects. It was also important to re-focus on legacies and growing the DPHT's membership. The GM was updating the LMP which expired this year. It was timely as the new lease was shortly to be signed with FE. The GM was also working closely with Plymouth University to expand upon the seminal 2019 study. To do this necessitated multi-site comparisons and the Duchy was being approached to see if they would support.

HLS

The HLS grant was being increased from approximately £11k to £14k. It was awarded for:

- Grazing and support for rare breeds
- Restoration of moorland
- Management of heather and gorse

The HLS recognised the global significance of uplands with 75% in Europe being in the UK.

The focus of the DPHT policy for Bellever would continue to be based on:

- Providing a safe haven for Heritage ponies
- Research
- Show case for conservation grazing with ponies

Bellever was developing into a diverse landscape and the DPHT had set targets to:

- Increase the number of dwarf shrubs including pioneer shrubs - should form 25% of the landscape
- Reduction in molinia grass
- Improve and support establishment of birch and willow trees
- Improve bio-diversity

Paths, salt-licks and creation of glades would support the above. But there was a major task to control the spread of conifers outside of the FE boundaries.

The DPHT was looking at Corporate Days as a means of education, funding and additional help to manage the site plus expanding the number of active volunteers.

The GM highlighted that 'measurement' was an important aspect of assessing the success of the Land Management Plan as well as providing evidence of compliance with HLS agreement.

The use of technology was being examined to undertake surveys and to assess the viability of zonal grazing. Grants were being sought to fund this technology and the DPHT were working with Plymouth University and the Devenon and Cornwall Wildlife Trust to look at potential technology solutions.

The Home Office had approved planning permission to construct a mast on Bellever as part of the rural network expansion project. Whilst this was not ideal it would enable the DPHT to make use of better communications for technology based solutions and to improve safety for lone workers on Bellever.

Item 8 - Direct Grants - Chair and Operations Manager

The Chair stated that now there were 3 charities on Dartmoor - DPS, DHPA and the DPHT - there was a requirement to ensure that the DPHT if challenged could demonstrate that it was providing grants/support to those that were eligible under its Charitable Objective. Ponies eligible for funding were true to type Dartmoor Ponies on Dartmoor that were unregistered, this included those in the Newtake Scheme. These ponies would need to hold a DPS passport. The DPHT would continue, where funding was available, to provide hardship payments to keepers of registered ponies where the DPS were unable so to do.

The Chair stated that the Board sets aside a set amount of funding each year for direct grants. The number of applications determines the percentage of each grant application that can be paid. This will differ each year depending on the size and number of requests.

Operations Manager

The Operations Manager covered direct grants for the current financial year and the following year.

For FY25/26, grants would be accepted from Pony Keepers with Green, Purple, Blue and Pink passports issued by the DPS.

For FY26/27 grants would be prioritised to Pony Keepers with Blue and Purple Passports.

Grants would be provided for hardship payments, handling and castrations.

Questions Raised by Members

Q. A number of members raised concern over the withdrawal of support or lowering the priority of grants to pony keepers with Green passports. It was felt that for a small number of members this would put at risk their ability to keep the ponies and risk the loss of rare bloodlines.

R. The Chair acknowledged the concern raised. The Chair stated there was a need for the Board to justify any expenditure in line with its charitable objectives which was the support of the Heritage Pony. There was a Charity that did support Registered Ponies but recognised that the funding they had available might be limited. The Chair undertook:

- To continue to support, where there was an urgent need, to pony keepers with Green Passports.
- Discuss with the DPS grant funding and overlap where there was hardship or support was required to sustain rare bloodlines of registered ponies.
- ☐ The Chair would raise the issue of support to Green Passport ponies on the Moor with the DPS.

Item 9 - Reintroduction of Heritage Passport - Chair

The Chair outlined the activities over the last 12 months to gain agreement for the re-introduction of the Heritage Passport. This had involved one to one discussions with the Chair of the DPS, technical discussions with the DPS Passport Office, briefing of DPS Judges and a DPS Council discussion and decision. The Chair thanked Ken Edwards and Neil Cole for their input and review of the proposed scheme.

The driver behind this initiative was to:

- Give recognition to the Pony Keepers for the quality of ponies produced, assisting in differentiating them in the market.
- To support marketing of Heritage Ponies for both private and conservation grazing sales.

This scheme does not make existing Heritage passports invalid - they remain valid documents.

Only ponies with a DPS passport or no passport are eligible.

The scheme being offered by the DPHT is voluntary.

If pony keepers wish to obtain a Heritage Passport:

- The ponies will be inspected by 2 DPS judges - four have volunteered (Jo Green, Andrew Belcher, Heather Banbury and Jacky Newbury)
- If they have an existing Pink DPS Passport that is not a Heritage Passport then it will be upgraded
- If they have no passport a Heritage Passport will be issued

The DPHT will cover the cost of judges, upgrading of passports and issue of new passports including vet and chipping.

To make this efficient for all parties, ponies will either be inspected by groups or herds at an agreed time and place for the Pony Keepers.

A one off payment, made once only, will be made to each pony keeper for assessment of their ponies to recognise the effort and time required to make them available.

Questions Raised by Members

Q1. A member expressed disquiet that the judges appointed had not all worked on the Moor or with Heritage ponies to any great extent and may not have as great experience as those judges that had traditionally undertaken the inspections. There was also a feeling that the previous judges had not been consulted or informed that they were no longer required to undertake assessment of Heritage Ponies. The Chair was asked if he would be prepared to raise these concerns with the DPS.

R1. The Chair stated that the appointment of judges was without the authority of the DPHT as they were beholden to the DPS for the provision of judges and creating the register. However the Chair did agree to raise the issue with the DPS.

- ☐ Chair to raise the issue of judging of Heritage ponies with the DPS and convey the disquiet of some of the previous judges.

Q2. A member raised the question of timing for the inspection of herds. The most appropriate time for many was during the drifts. Would the DPHT be ready to undertake the assessment and issue of Heritage passports during this year's drift.

R2. The Chair acknowledged the observation from the member. The Chair, GM and Operations Manager would look at the feasibility of undertaking inspections during this year's drifts.

- ☐ Operations Manager and GM tasked with looking at the art of the possible for this year's drift.

Item 10 - Change of Objective Wording

The chair highlighted earlier comments made in the AGM that with 3 charities operating on Dartmoor it was felt to be important that the DPHT were able to distinguish themselves. It was recognised explicitly that all the charities do good on the moor but each had different aims and objectives. The focus of the DPHT was on the Heritage Pony - true to type unregistered Dartmoor ponies including those in the Newtake Scheme.

The current objective is:

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

The DPHT's activities are described as:

"Established in response to widespread concern about the viability and long-term survival of the traditional Dartmoor Heritage pony on Dartmoor. We provide: direct grants to breeders and keepers, grazing on Bellever, organisation of multi-year scientific studies, educational walks and

talks on Heritage Ponies, advocacy of Heritage Ponies breeders. In addition we promote the sale of Heritage Ponies.”

Since the DPHT was formed words and wording have taken on greater significance. In particular the use of the word native when used as a prefix to a type of horse or pony.

In order to create greater clarity for the public and to remove a cause of some irritation to other organisations it is proposed that the DPHT sends out a special resolution to change the wording to:

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

Note this is a discussion point at this stage and the Board is looking for comments and input from members before it raises a special resolution.

Discussion

The membership agreed that a special resolution should be raised and it was important for the DPHT to differentiate itself from other charities on the moor as well as make clearer to the public its focus and purpose.

A number of variations were put forward on the wording proposed and the Chair was asked when sending out the special resolution to provide 2-3 options for the membership to consider.

- ☐ The Chair undertook to write the special resolution and include a choice of alternative wording.

The GM observed that neither the Objective nor the description of activities on the Charity COMmission site highlighted the important work undertaken by the DPHT to support conservation grazing and restoration of eco-systems. The Chair acknowledged this and stated that he would work with the GM to review.

- ☐ Chair and GM to re-examine the description of activities logged with the Charity Commission.

Item 11 Vote on Special Resolution - Chair

The Chair asked for a vote on whether the DPHT should raise a Special Resolution to change the wording in the objective. The voting in the room was:

- For 4
- Against 0
- Abstain 1

The voting on line was:

- For 11
- Against 0
- Abstain 1

The membership agreed that the DPHT should raise a Special resolution to ask members to formally vote on the change of wording of the DPHT objective.

Item 12 - Vote on Re-Appointment of Trustee - Trustee Paul Pearse

Paul Pearse highlighted that under the guidelines under rule 4.6 of the Articles of Association, Trustees are appointed or elected for terms of three years and a Trustee who has served their term must retire at the next AGM that occurs nearest to the expiry of their term of the Articles of Association he is required to either stand-down following the AGM or put himself forward for re-election.

Under rule 4.8 a retiring Trustee who remains eligible may be reelected for a maximum of two consecutive terms of office including their initial term.

Under rule 4.6, Michael Lithgow who has completed 3 years as a Trustee and Director of the DPHT is required to stand-down. He is putting himself forward for re-election for a further term under rule 4.6. To be re-elected he requires a majority vote by the membership.

Michael Lithgow served for 18 months as a Trustee and for the last 18 months as Chair of the Board of Trustees. He lives in Oxford but regularly commutes to Dartmoor where he also heads up the Operations Team. His focus as Chair has been to place the DPHT on a more secure financial footing which did result in the closure of Parke and developing stronger links with the DPS, DHPA, Forestry England and National Trust. He is presently intimately involved in the National Lottery Heritage Fund Project.

Michael Lithgow has undertaken, if not re-elected, to remain on the Board until the end of October to ensure an orderly handover.

Paul Pearse asked for a show of hands for the re-appointment of M Lithgow as a Trustee.

Votes in the room were:

- For 4
- Against 0
- Abstain 1

The votes on line were:

- For 11
- Against 0
- Abstain 1

Michael Lithgow was re-elected as a Trustee of the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust for a 2nd term of office.

Item 13 - Open Forum - Chair

Q. The Chair stated that one question had been received. The member had asked if it was the intent to rekindle school visits post Covid which they felt was an important aspect of the DPHT's work and provided significant benefit for children.

R. The Chair outlined that the main problem schools were hit with post Covid was the lack of funding available to the schools to run field trips. The teacher to pupil ratio also added to their problems. Sue Greenaway had developed a list of around 100 schools, many were approached and the DPHT received the same response - lack of funding.

The DPHT first tried to solve this by bidding for funds from grants organisations in order to raise money to pay for transport, lunches and additional help if required. These were not successful.

The DPHT now has a worksteam embedded in the National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop and pilot walks linked to key stage 2 syllabus on Bellever. There are two pilot schools on board and they have visited Bellever with Dartmoor guides to develop the syllabus and walk talk-track. Once this is done the DPHT feel that they can provide schools with a stronger business case to undertake the walks. The DPHT are continuing to look for grant money to help them offset the costs.

There are walks being undertaken so they have not completely stopped but they are much fewer than pre-covid.

The school's walks are an important part of supporting the DPHT's objective - educate and influence the next generation of custodians of the moor.

Discussion

It was suggested that the DPHT investigate organisations that had funds specifically for School trips:

- Farm Buddies - <https://www.farmbuddies.org.uk/>
- Drake's Farm which hosts school visits
- ☐ The GM undertook to follow up

Item 14 - AOB

The Operations Manager spoke on behalf of the Board and the Operations team and thanked the Honorary Treasurer and the Chair for the work and commitment they had made this year. The Operations Manager also thanks them for the support to the staff and membership over the last couple of challenging years. Each was presented with a small gift in recognition of their support.

The Chair ended the meeting thanking the Board, Operations Team and the membership for their continued support, advice, counsel and assistance. The Chair also thanked those members who were not present for their help throughout the last 24 months.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Lithgow', with a stylized, cursive script.

Micheal Lithgow CBE FIET CEng
Chair - DPHT
12th September 2025