

Haresdown and Knowstone Moors Management Association

Report prepared for the Annual Parish Meeting 23.05.24

The Haresdown and Knowstone Moors Management Association was constituted at an inaugural meeting held on 16th February 1993. A constitution was approved at the meeting, and committee members were elected. To obtain funds from government schemes, it is a requirement to have an Association.

During the last 12 months the Association has held three committee meetings to which commoners with rights to the moors were invited. These ancient rights are linked to certain households in the parish and allow those households to exercise rights on the commonland; namely to take turbarry (e.g. peat) and / or to graze stock. Being part of a Stewardship scheme means that these rights are curtailed so currently the commoners are recompensed for their inability to exercise their rights through whichever scheme the Association has joined.

Mr. John Stanbury was re-elected as Chairman of the Association at the AGM held in December 2023, James Siggs was re-elected as treasurer and has been working with Mitchells Accountants to manage all financial matters and Wendy Vigus remained as Secretary of the Association. The Association includes representatives from Knowstone Parish Council and the Devon Wildlife Trust both of whom own part of the moors (KPC owns Haresdown and DWT owns Inner and Outer Knowstone Moors) and there is also a private landowner of a smaller section of the moors. In terms of the KPC, this ownership arose after the link road was created in the late eighties and no previous ownership could be proved.

On-going maintenance of the moors continues, all of which is necessary to meet the requirements of the Environmental Higher Level Stewardship scheme into which the moors are entered (a scheme which is run by the Rural Payments Agency and Natural England). The gorse has been cut back on agreed sites. However, due to the dreadful wet weather the controlled burn did not take place this year. Later in the summer the Devon Wildlife Trust will be reducing the bracken on certain sites on the moor. They will use a machine called a bracken bruiser to do this. Natural England has approved which sites need to be addressed as we have to avoid affecting the habitat of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly which can be found in bracken and on our moors. Rotten wooden posts will be replaced by Devon Wildlife Trust later this summer.

As Haresdown and Knowstone Inner and Outer moors are Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI's) no vehicles should be on the moors unless to check stock or to cut the gorse. Also, horse riding for leisure purposes is prohibited on the moors as part of the Stewardship agreement. We'd also ask that dogs are kept under control to avoid disturbance of ground nesting birds. Dog fouling remains an issue, especially as it can cause neosporosis (primarily abortions) in grazing cattle. We note that many people enjoy walking the moors (and in particular the Two Moors Ways) but unfortunately we have had to put up a sign on one gate as we'd seen an increase in vehicles blocking an access route for stock and horses.

It is a key requirement of the Higher Level Stewardship scheme that cattle are grazed on the moors from May to late September and sometimes into October if the weather conditions permit. The Association would remind pedestrians and vehicle drivers to take care when passing the cattle on the road or walking on the moors. The cattle owner will endeavour that the cattle stay on the moor but they are free to roam and

can do so up to all the cattle grids even those outside the perimeter of the moor. Issues have been encountered with the gates alongside the cattle grids being left open. It is important that they are shut to prevent cattle straying and therefore if you notice any being left open then please do close them. It is also important to note that the Association cannot fence the moor and it is the responsibility of the landowner adjacent to the moors to fence their land to prevent cattle from wandering in or out.

The Moors are entered into Stewardship scheme until 2028 but in the meantime is also looking at the many new environmental schemes, one of which is the Landscape Recovery scheme (which could potentially last for up to 25 years). Natural England are presenting more information on Landscape Recovery to the Association, rights holders and landowners in the parish on Wednesday 12th June. Invitations have been sent out but we are open to others attending. Just let me know prior to the event if you wish to do so.

Finally, we hope that you continue to enjoy the moors and the difference they make to our parish landscape.

Thank you.

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