

UK, Dartmoor – innovation example 5 DARTMOOR COMMONERS' COUNCIL

- **Location:** Dartmoor, UK
- **HNV system:** Extensive grazing, cattle, sheep and ponies on rough upland pastures
- **Scale of operation:** 36,000 ha.
- **Timespan:** Established in 1986, ongoing
- **Keys to success:** Governance with legal powers that is farmer led and elected from the local farming community.

Problem being addressed:

A Dartmoor Commons Association was formed in 1954, a federation of 32 local common's associations. The Dartmoor Commons Association lacked enforcement powers and remit to ensure the number of grazing animals did not exceed an individual's common rights, correct animal husbandry on the commons and the appropriate management of the common land. Specific issues included damage from winter feeding, erosion and over burning.

Story in a nutshell:

The old Dartmoor Commons Association worked with the DNPA and Devon County Council (who largely funded the work) to secure new legislation - the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985. This legislation enabled the formation in 1986 of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council with enforceable powers (the Regulations) to manage the commons. The Council is composed of <28 members, 20 of which are elected from the local farming community, 2 from the National Park Authority, one from the Duchy of Cornwall, two co-opted members and a veterinary surgeon. A chairman is elected from the within the Council who is responsible for ensuring the Council's business is undertaken correctly. A member of staff (secretary) is employed to ensure the register of rights is updated and correct together with supporting the commoners with issues relating to their rights. The Council's Regulations address animal husbandry (health, condition and no bulls or rams), timing of grazing (reduced winter grazing) and the burning of the vegetation.

All farmers wishing to activate his/her rights and graze animals on the common land must pay an annual fee to the Council. The revenue so raised enables the register to be maintained and the functions of Council to be fulfilled. The number of registered grazing rights on Dartmoor is impressive; totalling some 95,745 livestock units that can be used for sheep, cattle or ponies (most rights state which animal they refer to). In practice the numbers actually grazed today are much smaller, and although 915 farmers register their rights to graze (78,985) many farmers choose not to activate their grazing.

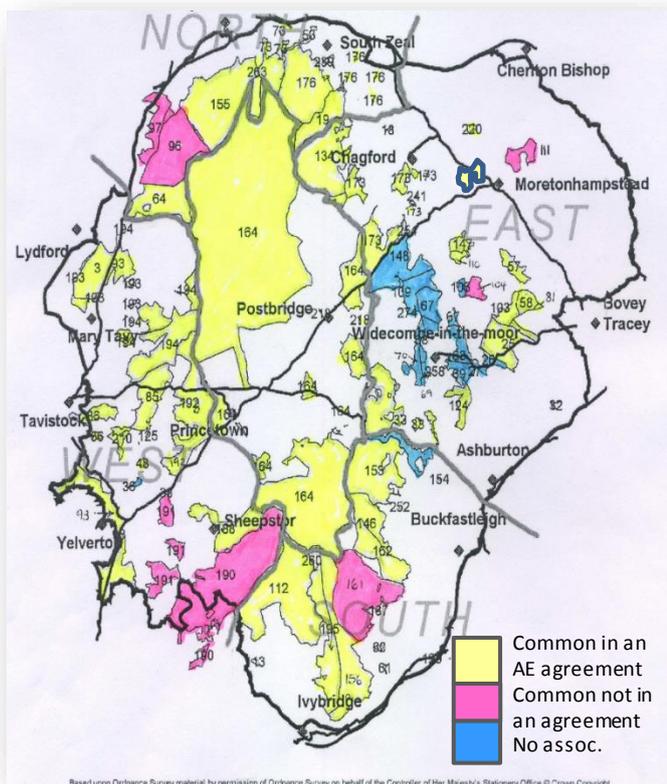


Figure 1

Council has imposed regulations that require all graziers to remove their stock (except ponies) for “clear days” to ensure all stock are properly marked, in good health and are grazing within their permitted area. Farmers failing to register their rights and found to be grazing stock can be fined as can any grazier who fails to abide by the Council’s Regulations can be taken to court and fined and their animals removed from the common. In practice these powers are rarely used (3x in 30 years) but act as a deterrent for poor behaviour.

For 30 years the Dartmoor Commoners’ Council was unique as a Council in Britain. The 2006 Commons Act enabled other councils to be established. 2 other Councils are being established with a third group of commoners considering applying

What does Dartmoor Commoners’ Council achieve for HNV farming?

- Council can regulate stocking rate and timing of stock on the commons
- Numbers of feral ponies controlled
- Improved health of grazing animals
- Negotiated improved TB Regulations and equine movement regulations

Achievements

An up to date register of rights, ensuring grazing animals do not exceed rights. Prior to the Council become established in 1986 the commons were considered (by many observers including some commoners) to be over stocked resulting in damage to the condition of the HNV vegetation (particularly blanket bog and heaths), the moorland was burnt too frequently and the areas burnt were too large and the livestock were in poor condition. There was also some abuse of grazing rights with farmers grazing more animals than their rights permitted.

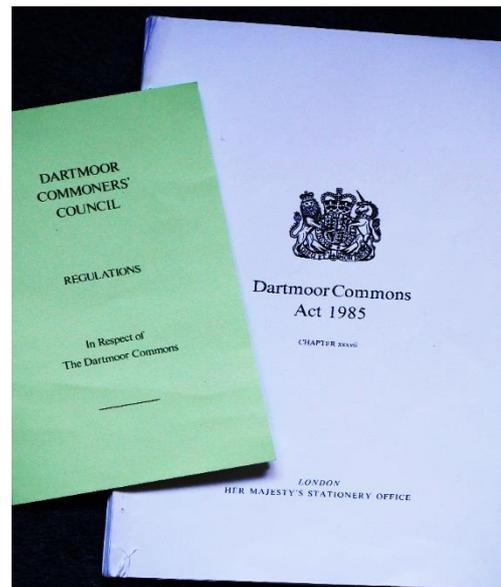


Figure 2

Council’s Regulation and subsequent enforcement have addressed:

- Good husbandry of all livestock on commons; grazing animals shefted/leered, animals properly marked, diseased animals removed from the common and restrictions on stallions, bulls and rams.
- Ensure commons not over stocked; introduction of clear days, counts and checks.
- The conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the commons, HNV farming by controlling burning, prohibiting motor vehicles and stock prohibition periods.

How does Dartmoor Commoners' Council respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?

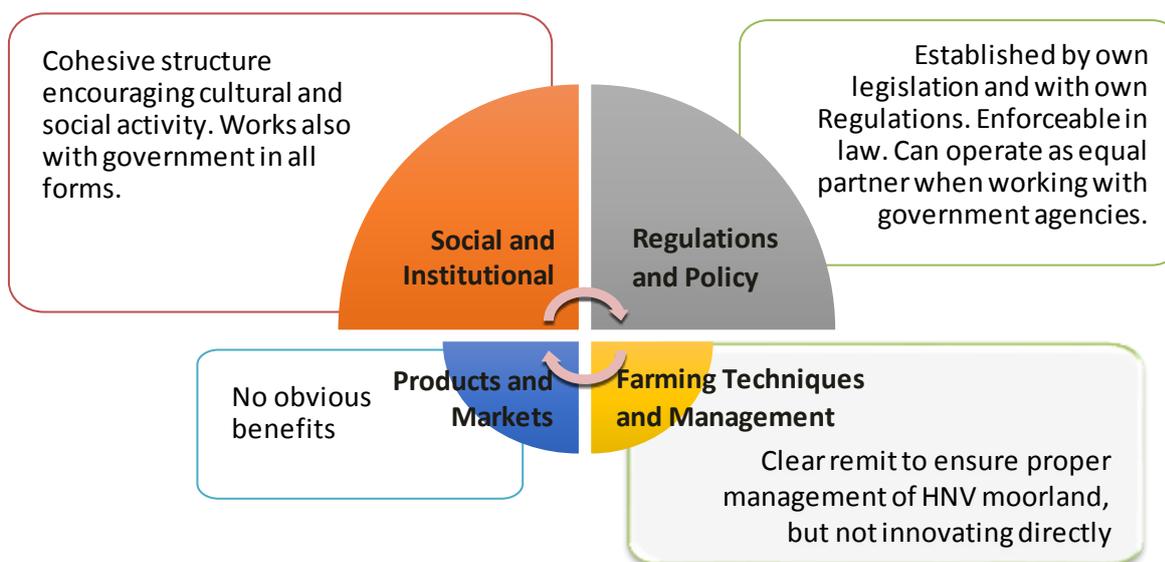


Figure 3 Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.

- **Social and institutional:** The Council acts as a voice and sounding board for all issues. Encourages social cohesion and ensures cultural issues are not neglected and recognised as important drivers for wider Dartmoor management including HNV farmland. Ensures commons are better understood.
- **Regulations and Policy:** Council is established by Act of Parliament and can enforce powers through its own Regulations. Initially this was essential to ensure respect for enforcement, though by now, conformity has become normalised. A statutory function enables dialogue with policy, political and government officials.
- **Products and Markets:** No direct links.
- **Farming Techniques and Management:** The Council's Regulations require good land management, good animal husbandry and the continued functioning of the commons; regulating grazing to ensure HNV farmland is maintained and enhanced.

The process that made it happen and critical factors for success

- Influential leaders from within commoning community
- Support from local authority (Devon County Council) providing expertise and funding
- Self funding from levy on rights
- Council comprised of farmers from all parts of Dartmoor, elected by their fellow commoners.
- Addressed issues of concern (damage from winter feeding, over burning, erosion related to horses and over grazing).
- Fortunate in having a series of committed, well-respected chairpersons and excellent administrative staff.

The large number of commoners (850) and the large number of rights of grazing (145,000 for sheep, 33,000 for cattle, 5450 for ponies and 12,330 for non specified animals), even though not all of these are active/used, provide the critical mass necessary – through the payment of grazing fees - to deliver the capacity to provide regulation and enforcement, including an annually -updated register of rights.

The emergence of leaders from within the farming community has been a vital part of the Council's ability to command respect, but the role of it's paid staff and its unpaid chairpersons is also key; failure to find appropriate people would be a severe blow to the Council's work and the unpaid nature of the onerous role of chair makes it a potential Achilles' heel.



Figure 4



Figure 5

Lessons learnt from this innovation example, and its potential replication

- The model of DaCC is successful securing better management and less abuse of grazing rights.
- New legislation in 2006 enable Commons Councils to be created. So far 2 have been established.
- The model is applicable for different scale of common land, on Exmoor for 1 common and on Dartmoor for 32 separate associations.
- Establishment of a Council requires commitment from the commoners, new legislation and funding for legal fees and facilitation. Once established a Council can be self-financing.
- There has to be sufficient income to provide the necessary staff and reward work undertaken on behalf of the Council by its members and officers.

The benefits of a Commons Council

Those common associations considering establishing a commons council have identified a number of potential benefits:

- Regulation in respect of stock numbers and land management.
- A mechanism to overcome disputes and resolve long standing obstacles associated with land management and funding.
- Providing a consistent approach to divisive issues across a number of associations and commons. Such issues include the process of dealing with the number of rights held by individuals on a number of commons, clarifying the role of active and non graziers and reaching agreement with the land owners.
- A means of addressing disease control, bio-security and stock welfare.
- Removing the power of veto through the introduction of majority voting.
- The preparation and maintenance of a record of grazing rights (i.e. a live register).
- Empowering commoners and providing a stronger single voice.

Potential issues

Capacity to fund and steer the establishment process; sufficient members (commoners with an interest) to raise sufficient income; plenty of time to secure agreement and participation, inclusive for all commoners; availability of good support staff etc. and an awareness that funds need to be set aside to pay for them

Replication

The Dartmoor Commoners' Council model was used to inform new legislation, the 2006 Commons Act, that enables the creation of new councils for common land throughout England and Wales. To date only two areas of common have successfully applied for Council status and both still wait for Government approval of their regulations before they can become active. The process has proved expensive (Government has funded some of the process), complex and very slow, the capacity of Defra to respond and support is very poor. A third group of commoners (Cumbria Federation of Commoners) has agreed to apply for Council status but the expense and slow progress is acting as a deterrent.

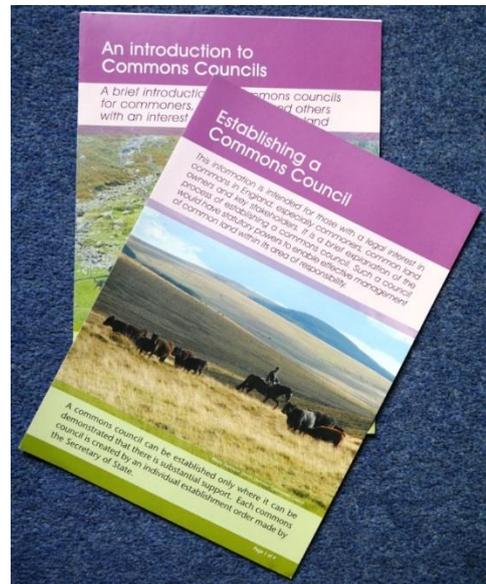


Figure 6

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