The reduction to 40mph on all unfenced roads within the National Park and immediate surrounding area.

Notes from the Meeting held on the 15th March in Princetown Community Centre from 15.30 – 17.30

Atendees
Cllr Gregg Manning – DFPC and Speedwatch Co-ordinator
Isobel Parris – Campaign Founder and Petition instigator.
Cllr Philip Sanders – Speedwatch Cllr Ric Cheadle – Buckland Monochorum
Cllr Annabel Roberts – WDBC Ally Kohler – DNPA
Tom Stratton – Duchy of Cornwall Neil Cole – Farmer
Julia Sanders – Speewatch & Commoners
Marion Saunders – Chair of Darmoor Livestock Protection Society
Karla Mckechnie – DLPO and Dartmoor Commoners Council
Philip Hackett – BHS County Access
John Fewings – DCC Highways Richard Martin - PCC
Cllr Graham Palmer – Chairman of Burrator Parish Council

Apologies – Rt Hon Geoffrey Cox MP

Subject of the meeting was to discuss the reduction of the speed limit from 60mph to 40mph on all unfenced roads on Dartmoor where there are free roaming animals.

The meeting was attended by 15 People from what has been identified as some of the main stakeholders. It was noticed that there was no representation from Devon and Cornwall Police, despite being promised that there would be someone attending. At my request this was not meant to be someone who was on duty to avoid them being called away.

The meeting began with me reading a statement from Geoffrey Cox MP, in which he clearly stated his support for our cause and said he was willing to help with further representations to DCC, DNPA and the Police.

I started with a bit of theatre suggesting that if the recorded deaths last year had happened in one night with the animals being bludgeoned to death with a blunt instrument the story would have featured in Local News, National News and International News, I created an article in the New York Times for effect. I also suggested it might even be discussed in the House by Theresa May. The fact that these animals were killed over a period of 12 months by a blunt instrument, namely cars, vans and lorries should have no less an effect on us. After many such meetings to discuss animal deaths I was hoping that this imagined scenario and picture may create a memory and bring home to the attendees the magnitude of the problem.
I presented evidence that Karla and Marion had produced for me which I had highlighted to show three things, Deaths on 60mph roads, Deaths on 40mph and Deaths on those roads currently monitored by Speedwatch.

Both Marion and Isobel mentioned the inconsistency across parts of the moors and suggested a greater uniformity might help the situation. Isobel stated as an example Beatland corner, Wotter and LeeMill having three different speed limits in a very short length of road.

At this point we stopped for comments, John Fewings from Highways pointed out that he had been involved in the initial work to create the 40mph roads using the special Roundels; which the Department of Transport had given DNPA special dispensation to use, rather than the customary signage. He told us that it is a long process involving a lot of work and potentially a lot of expense, as each stretch of road would require it's own submission. We would face many objections during the consultation and the Department of Transport would need to be convinced. Although we have now got quite a lot of evidence which we have not had in the past, we would need much more such as volume of traffic, total length of roads in question in order to see the percentage of the total.

Isobel Parris pointed out how much support her online petition had on this issue with the numbers of online and paper breaking the 10,000 barrier. Clearly this shows the general support of the public. She also gave a FEW of the reasons that people gave when signing the petitions both online and hard copy e.g.

1. Never wishing to visit again. The impact on tourism and how heavily reliant our economy is on this.
2. The new build housing adjacent to the moor which will increase traffic numbers. Philip Sanders also mentioned the new builds in Tavistock.
3. Some locals stating that they avoid the moor if there is an alternative route.
4. New Forest is now 40, so why aren’t all National Parks 40 this would enforce consistency.
5. Many comments requesting Traffic Calming.

She suggested that the attendees perhaps read the comments in the online version as the reasons are many and varied. It was also mentioned by some that the sight of a dead animal might put them off visiting. Some locals stating that they avoid the moor if there is an alternative route.

The issue of the New Forest was mentioned, the fact that the whole of the New Forest is 40 mph is very important as it has set a precedent for all National Parks. This fact is incredibly important as it shows it can be done, let Dartmoor be the second after N F.

One very important fact that was pointed out by Neil Cole was that Karla’s RTA statistics make grim reading at a time when there are fewer animals grazing the Moor than there have ever been. Once the Natural England agreements end and commoners are able to stock the moor more heavily, it is likely that the number of RTAs will rise substantially. The anticipated increase in visitor numbers by 1 million over the next 20 years will also adversely affect the livestock.
I stated that Isobel had actually been into schools and Julia stated that they at SP had involved the school. Isobel commented that the lack of Rural policing had certainly hampered her school visits because one must be accompanied by a member of the force. Therefore the education opportunities are limited and sporadic (Speed Watch volunteers are a cost free resource why do they need a chaperone bearing in mind that we are police checked)

Annabel Roberts briefly touched on having a Toll and also having the moor fenced. There was negativity regarding the suggestions. Many cited the time scale of getting Blackdown and Roborough Down fenced as well as the cost.

Cllr Sanders pointed out that he is not in favour of speed restrictions in general as he believes education is key to this problem. I believe that was generally accepted around the table but that is long term and with what was said by Neil Cole, we need to get this speed down before we release more animals.

Philip Hackett from the British Horse Society made references to the devastation that can occur when a horse and a vehicle come together. Of course, in these cases you also have the rider to consider who is very vulnerable.

References were made by several people regarding other problems that we have on the moors such as trespass, criminal damage, raves and general bad behaviour. We are all aware of these issues and agree they need to be tackled but fell outside of the remit of this meeting.

I brought the meeting back on track by asking if anyone had any good reason for not supporting our request. It was again pointed out by John fewings and Ally Kohler how difficult it was going to be but in principle they did support it. I told the meeting that I was a volunteer and did not have the necessary knowledge to lead this. It was then suggested that the DNPA was the obvious choice and Ally seemed to accept this stating she would try and get it included within the Dartmoor National Plan. She told the meeting that there is a meeting being held next week with other bodies including the police and she would ensure this was brought up. I myself am attending that meeting so will be able to monitor that it does get some attention.

It was pointed out by Cllr Sanders that although Geoffrey Cox MP had been invited there were other MP’s that need to be involved. I personally feel that this now needs to be handled at a different level and though happy to support the Park with the provision of data etc the Park should now lead on this to bring this to fruition. With regards to the resources needed both Isobel and myself have volunteered to help raise any funds needed through Crowdfunding and other means, we felt that this partly removed at least one area of objection which has always been we do not have the money.

The meeting came to a close and I felt it had gone well and we achieved what we set out to do namely agreement in principle to a reduction in the limit on unfenced roads.

Meeting closed at 17.30
No one can deny that we have a very real problem with RTAs and Karla’s statistics together with the campaign for a blanket 40 mph on all unfenced moorland roads is at last putting the problem firmly on everyone’s agenda. The poor mare at Leedon Tor Bends, killed early on Saturday, was followed by another mare on Monday morning at Haytor with a shattered hock. This amount of animal suffering on Dartmoor is a total disgrace.