

Member update – for you to share with parish/community magazines

Wild/backpack camping: latest news



Dartmoor National Park Authority have agreed key decisions on backpack camping.

Following the High Court judgment in the case of Darwall vs Dartmoor National Park Authority, Members have agreed to:

- Seek permission to appeal the High Court judgment
- Endorse the new permissive system, agreed in principle with the Dartmoor Commons' Owners Association
- Investigate which areas of common land owned by the Authority could be opened up to backpack camping
- Pause work on the byelaw review so the implications of High Court judgment can be fully considered.

Backpack camping on Dartmoor commons

Within days of the High Court judgment, a permissive approach to backpack/wild camping has been agreed in principle with the Dartmoor Commons Owners' Association.

The new system enables people to continue backpack/wild camping on identified common land without needing to secure landowner permission first. It has also provided much-needed reassurance to the schools and young people preparing for Ten Tors/Duke of Edinburgh.

The system involves landowners entering into a legal agreement with DNPA with up to £300 paid annually to landowners who opt-in. The fee acts as a 'seal' for the agreement. Landowners are able to retain the fee, but several have already indicated that they may donate it back to the National Park via the Donate for Dartmoor fund, helping to support the vital conservation work that keeps Dartmoor special for everyone.

Areas where people can backpack/wild camp are publicly available on the National Park Authority's website (dartmoor.gov.uk). People planning to backpack/wild camp should check the map before they head off and leave no trace of their visit.

Appealing the High Court judgment

Once the High Court has issued a decision there's limited time to appeal which is why the Authority acted quickly and convened its meeting on 27 January. First, the Authority appealed for permission directly to the Chancellor of the High Court. This application was declined on 13 January 2023.

The next step involves filing an appeal notice to the Court of Appeal. This has to be done by 3 February. The court will then decide to grant permission to appeal or refuse permission to appeal.

Because Authority Members were considering information relating to legal proceedings, local government laws allow for certain matters to be discussed privately. For this reason, the item was discussed in the 'exempt information' section of the meeting.

In reaching their decision, Members are aware of the resources and costs involved but agreed there was merit in the grounds for filing an appeal notice.

Long-serving DNPA planner takes up new national role with Natural England

A DNPA planning officer with nearly 20 years' experience of working for Dartmoor has left to accept a new role with Natural England.

Dan Janota, the Head of Forward Planning and Economy, left at the end of December and paid tribute to moorland communities for their 'energy, enthusiasm and ability to mobilise' and make Dartmoor an even better place.

Dan, who grew up in Moretonhampstead, had a taste of working for the National Park in 1996 when he did work experience with then Ranger Sally Perryman.

In July 2004, shortly after completing university, he got a job as Community Technician in the Authority's Forward Planning team. He was appointed to lead the Authority's Forward Planning and Economy team in 2014 and played a key role in the implementation of Dartmoor Local Plan which guides what development can and cannot happen in the National Park and where.

Dan said: "My favourite times have been sitting down with communities, landowners and affordable housing teams trying to work out how we can bring forward housing which helps Dartmoor people stay in their Dartmoor village.

"Very early on in my career, I learned never to underestimate a Dartmoor community's energy and enthusiasm or ability to mobilise, understand and respond to whatever tricky issue or challenge was before them. Over the years the challenges of Dartmoor have found me on BBC news, radio; being clipped around the ear by an elderly lady for referring to her town as a village; I've received poems about sewage systems and planning objections combined with song lyrics.

"Wherever I go I'll always be a champion for National Parks – particularly Dartmoor (the best one!)"

Honour for former DNPA director

DNPA's former Director of Conservation and Communities Alison Kohler was awarded a British Empire Medal in the 2023 New Year Honours. Ally, who retired in 2021 after 33 years working there, was given the award in recognition of her achievements for the National Park and Devon more widely.

Dr Kevin Bishop, Chief Executive said: "I am delighted that Ally's dedication to Dartmoor National Park has been recognised in the New Year Honours. Ally has left a legacy of practical achievement that has helped shape lives, improved Dartmoor's environment and supported local communities. An inspiration for those who worked with her."

Discover National Parks during school holidays

Join DNPA in celebrating protected landscapes during National Parks Fortnight, from 4 to 17 April.

A number of activities and events will be held over the two weeks, with something for everyone and all ages.

As spring gets closer, more events will be announced. For all the latest information drop into one of the three visitor centres or go to the events page on DNPA's website (dartmoor.gov.uk) for more information and visitor centre opening hours.