



Report from the 'Grazing for the Future' Event
25th-26th September 2018

This event was in two parts and took place on successive days at Molland, on Exmoor, and on Clinton Devon Estates, in East Devon. Further details of the event are in Appendix 1 and a summary of the discussion that took place is in Appendix 2.

At the end of the first day, a panel discussion took place in the village hall at Molland, that was facilitated by Naomi Oakley of Natural England. The discussion was summarised into five principles, which are set out below:

1. People need to have an active interest and a sense of ownership in the land to manage it effectively.
2. We all, land managers, NGOs and government, need to be bold in our ideas and practices, embracing risk and challenges.
3. We need to allow small-scale dynamic change to engender wider, landscape-scale change to happen in time (small-scale burns, heavy stocking, tree planting, tree removal etc.).
4. Long term commitments are required to allow businesses to restructure to support change in the wider rural economy. This will support third party land management activities such as contractors, hedge layers, foresters, flying shepherds etc. Long term commitments will also help to keep many people working in the rural economy that will provide more connection between people and the land.
5. Farmers and foresters have a long-term connection, respect and knowledge of the land; this must be considered and engaged in any future decision making. Place based solutions are key.

This report, which captures stakeholder views, will be circulated widely and submitted to government with a view to emphasising the importance of grazing in the current review of agricultural support. The conclusions will also be used to enhance the final report from the Graze the Moor project, which will be prepared at the end of March, next year.

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Graze the Moor Project

26th November 2018

Background

Outline of the Event

The two related events were held with a focus on grazing management of moorland and heathland. The aim was to compare how similar issues are being addressed on Exmoor and in East Devon and to consider how management might need to change in the uncertain future. Although each event was separate, delegates were invited to attend both events to get full value from the comparison exercise.

Graze the Moor Project

Graze the Moor is a five-year project that is being supported by the Molland Estate, Luckworthy Farm, a range of partners and the Exmoor National Park Authority's Partnership Fund. The project is taking place on Molland Moor; it started in April 2014 and runs until March 2019.

The starting point for the project was to introduce changes to the grazing management of Molland Moor using Galloway cattle, in summer and winter, and to monitor the impact of these changes. Other management activity is taking place and this includes: habitat monitoring, a Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* control trial, stock health monitoring and an economic performance comparison between outdoor and housed cattle.

The Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust

The East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust is a charity that employs full time wardens to look after a network of seven commons and one moor, which at 2,800 acres, is one of the largest remaining areas of lowland heath in England. The Trust implements a Heathland Management Plan that has been developed in conjunction with Natural England with support from Clinton Devon Estates and Defra.

On part of the area covered by the Trust, grazing has been reintroduced using rare breed cattle, such as Devon Reds, and Dartmoor Ponies. Their presence helps to improve the habitat for some rare European protected species.

Statutory Designation of the Land

This report sets out the issues that were discussed during the two related events. Some of the points during the discussion were made from a narrow perspective. Comments have been added to the report to highlight statements that do not take account of the sensitive nature of Exmoor and the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths and the associated designations under EU and national legislation.



EXMOOR
NATIONAL PARK
Partnership Fund



CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

Notes from Discussion

1 Molland Estate - 25th September 2018

1.1 General Points

- The moor should be seen as an asset not a liability.
- Nothing happens in isolation. All the management activity has an impact on many different features of the moor.

1.2 People

- Greater engagement by all people and ownership of the work taking place will produce dividends.
- To develop plans for the management of the moor, the extensive amount of local knowledge and experience that is available should be used alongside the findings of research.
- The moor is a cultural landscape, and it needs people to maintain it.
- Farmers and land managers must be trusted.
- The special connections that farmers have to nature should be acknowledged and respected.
- The next generation of farmers requires an incentive to get involved with the management of the moor.

1.3 Are we being bold enough?

- There is a concern that all the current effort on Molland is doing little more than slowing the rate of change.
- Are we making progress towards a better outcome, or are we just holding the line against the spread of undesirable species such as Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*?

1.4 Stock Numbers

- Are there the right number of animals on the moor at the right time of year? If not, what changes are required?
- The stocking regime in the 1970-80s on Molland had been similar to that in use currently, except that several thousand sheep were turned out in August.
- Is short-term stocking with relatively large numbers of animals (mob stocking) a tool that should be considered?
- Would there be any benefit from the use of electric fencing to hold stock in a small area, or exclude them from sensitive areas?

1.5 Sheep Ticks

- The impact of sheep ticks should not be underestimated.
- Sheep ticks can carry nine different diseases that can have an impact on humans, livestock and wildlife.
- Treating livestock against tick can be expensive, especially if the extra gathering costs are included.

1.6 Habitat Management

- The previous policy of leaving ‘old growth’ heather has proved to be disastrous.
- This policy has led to the loss of heather in many parts of the moor and the expansion of the coverage of Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.
- On dry heath, rejuvenation of heather by layering does not take place and leaving the stands of old heather disrupts the swaling regime.

Comment:

- Some ‘old growth’ heather is valuable. Mossy, wet, old-growth heather could sustain itself through layering and it also has biodiversity interest.
- As mossy dominated areas, with ‘old growth’ heather, are becoming rarer they should be retained.
- The expansion of Purple moor-grass is linked to a multitude of different issues, and in particular climate change and nitrogen disposition.

1.7 The Graze the Moor project

- The project was reported to be experimenting and learning all the time.
- It was suggested that the benefits of strong teamwork were being demonstrated through flexibility and the ability to introduce changes to management prescriptions quickly, when required.

1.8 Financial

- The Economic Comparison being carried out for the Graze the Moor project assessed the gross margin for the cattle and sheep enterprises as ‘low’ to ‘average’, when compared with farms in the Farm Business Survey¹.
- Overview of the moorland enterprise:
 - The gross margins were marginally lower than a typical hill farm enterprise,
 - Lower input costs offset lower sales revenue,
 - The enterprise should be viewed as part of a whole hill farming system.
- As for most hill farms, there is a reliance on subsidy.
- More data is needed to understand the effect on the moorland sheep system.

1.9 Education & Promotion

- There is a need to educate people about the moor and improve the explanation of the value of what it contains.
- Education should start with schools.

1.10 Cooperation is required:

- To consider establishing a brand to market output from Exmoor more effectively.
- To achieve the benefits of land management at a larger scale.

¹ The Farm Business Survey (FBS) provides information on the financial position and physical and economic performance of farm businesses in England - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/farm-business-survey-technical-notes-and-guidance>

2 Clinton Devon Estates (CDE) – 26th September 2018

1.1 Source of grazing animals.

- Currently, stock are bought in for the summer months, but consideration is being given to a return to an in-hand enterprise.
- This might open up opportunities for marketing of output.

2.1 Currently, grazing takes place in summer only.

- No benefit is seen from winter grazing.
- It was noted that one of the targets of winter grazing on Molland was to control the gorse – the coverage of gorse is thought to be expanding on CDE.

Comment:

- Control of gorse through winter grazing is proving inconclusive and the impact minimal.
- The main target for winter grazing is to assess the general impact of cattle and sheep, and in particular the impact on Purple moor-grass.
- Much of the gorse on CDE is Western gorse, which is an important part of the Lowland heath habitat. European Gorse is at good levels and beneficial to the Dartford Warbler.

2.2 Electric loop fencing is working well.

- This might be something to be considered at Molland, as a means of focusing the grazing impact of stock and/or keeping stock out of sensitive areas.
- Could invisible fencing have a role to play?

2.3 Bicton Common

- There has been no recent grazing history on this common.
- CDE is assessing the impact of different grazing levels in fenced plots against a control plot with no grazing.
- The project has been running for two years.
- The University of Plymouth is providing input to this work.

2.4 Communication

- Could more use be made of social media to spread the word about the importance of appropriate management of moorland?
- As it is important to avoid any duplication, could links be established to existing communications activity.
- Could the Uplands Alliance have a role to play?

2.5 Success of the partnership approach

- There might be benefit from continuing liaison beyond this event.
- This would allow the sharing of knowledge and experience to continue.
- Consideration could be given to establishing an informal relationship between other farms and estates, where similar work is taking place.
- The partnership approach is allowing flexibility to be introduced into management prescriptions and is building trust.