

Meeting of the Castlemorton Common Co-ordinating Committee

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 17th May 2017 8.00pm

Present: Lionel Bartlett, Ann Brennan, Mick Davies (arrived at 8:30pm), Matt Gardner, Roger Gillard, Peter Hancock, Chris Rouse, David Smallwood, Dermot Weaver, Barbara Wilkes, Sue Windle.

In attendance: From Malvern Hills Trust: CEO, Conservation Manager, Community and Conservation Officer.

1. Apologies for Absence

In the absence of Mr Taylor (Chair), David Smallwood was appointed to chair the meeting.

Apologies were received from Susan Satchell, Med Snookes & Julian Taylor.

2. To receive the report of the meeting held on 9 November 2017

On the proposal of Mr Bartlett, seconded by Mrs Wilkes, the report of the meeting held on 9 November 2016 was approved by the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

The Conservation Manager reported that MHT's "Good Neighbour" leaflet had been prepared in draft and would be circulated to 4C's members and MHT Board members for comment. Mr Smallwood, Mr Hancock, Mr Gillard and Mr Bartlett offered to assist with the distribution of the leaflet.

The CEO reported that the car park meter at Swinyard car park had been replaced. Stobs would be put around the entrance to the car park and on the opposite verge in the next 3-4 weeks to restrict parking on the roadside.

Mr Gillard said that Birtsmorton Parish Council were concerned about livestock casualties on the B4208 and had suggested that there should be some more prominent signage on the road. The Conservation Manager had worked with Highways to install standard livestock warning triangles on every entrance to the Common. There was a discussion about alternative and more inventive signage but this would have to be approved by WCC Highways and any other relevant permissions sought.

Surface repairs had been carried out on the adopted part of Hancock's Lane.

The section of road from the triangle island by Strawbyn Kennels to the B4208

was not public highway. The CEO reported that repairs would be made to the 'shoulder' of the private road by the bend corner in the coming weeks. He had asked Highways to consider adoption of this section. Mr Bartlett thought this section had been tarmaced by the Malvern Hills Conservators between 1990 and 1993.

Mr Smallwood asked about Out of Hours contact with the Trust. The CEO replied that overnight and at weekends, calls were transferred to the wardens or to himself. Subject to mobiles reception, staff would answer a call or reply to a message and attend if appropriate.

Mr Smallwood understood that West Mercia Police had put in an application to adopt a number of phone boxes, including the one opposite the Plume of Feathers pub. Subject to all necessary permissions, West Mercia Police hoped to install a defibrillator, police information and a possible interactive information point.

4. 4C's website

The 4C's website (hosted by V8Media) was hosted on an old server. The website was a static site which could not be altered or updated. 4C's minutes were published on MHT's website. V8Media had offered to move the 4C's site onto a new server at no cost. The Committee agreed that the website should be moved.

There was a discussion about reviewing the website and its content. Revising the web site would potentially come at a cost. Ms Brennan agreed to look at the existing content and report back to the next meeting. The Committee could then decide whether they wished to create a new website. Mr Smallwood pointed out that it was possible to have some limited information on the web at low or no cost by using a blog.

The Conservation Manager said that the website could potentially be a good platform for alerting people to issues including livestock incidents and securing grazing provided someone was prepared to keep it updated. He also said that a small website might be something that the Malvern Hills AONB would consider for grant funding.

5. Report from Malvern Hills Trust CEO

Adoption of new working name

Malvern Hills Conservators had adopted a new working name, Malvern Hills Trust, which had been registered with the Charity Commission. This was part of a rebranding exercise. The changes took place from 6th April but it would take some time for all of the Trusts' signage to be replaced.

The CEO explained in response to a question, that replacement of vehicles was part of the Board's vehicle replacement policy and not part of the rebranding exercise.

New job titles

At the same time there had been some changes to two job titles (Director to CEO and Conservation Officer to Conservation Manager).

Charity Commission Scheme

The CEO reported that the MHT Board were proceeding with a Charity Commission Scheme to change and update the way the organisation operated in some areas. This would avoid the complications and cost of a new Act. Examples of changes might be to set up a subsidiary company for raising funds through the selling of merchandise, ensuring that there were adequate powers to secure the commons to encourage grazing, and changes to the structure of the Board. Mr Weaver thought there could be local opposition to fencing off the commons. The CEO said that the details had not yet been worked through but the Trust would not be seeking to subdivide the grazing and the aim was to keep the commons as open and easy to graze as possible. The ability of stock to leave the common was currently a deterrent to people putting stock out. There would be full consultation on the final proposals with relevant organisations and partners and with the public in due course. It was not intended that the Scheme should override the provisions of the Commons Act.

Swinyard car park

Reported in agenda item 3.

6. Report from MHT Conservation Manager

Securing commons grazing

The Conservation Manager reported that he was building a case for the Securing the Commons project including keeping a record of all press coverage of livestock related incidents. MHT was also part funding dog training classes to train dogs to ignore livestock.

The Conservation Manager was also seeking evidence of the decline in grazing of the commons. He encouraged members of the Committee to submit their recollections and records. Ms Brennan agreed to contact Mr Snookes. Roy Shail had produced a list of graziers and livestock numbers grazing the commons in the 1960's and 1970's. The Conservation Manager agreed to circulate the information from Mr Shail for comment.

Mr Rouse suggested that George Smith may be able to provide information relating to grazing in the 1940's and 1950's. There was a general discussion about who else might be able to provide information and Mr Smallwood suggested that the Castlemorton/Birtsmorton/Hollybush History Club may be able to help. The Conservation Manager asked for statements from users of the common, detailing the changes to the common over the years. Mr Smallwood suggested that this could be built into the History Club project and offered Mary Watts' contact details.

The Conservation Manager had had an initial meeting with WCC Highways and was progressing the project with them.

Stock numbers and grazing

The Conservation Manager reported that stock numbers had been stable since the last meeting – around with 500 sheep, 55 cattle and 3 equines grazing the Common.

Update on mowing and scrub clearance

The Conservation Manager reported that since the last meeting in November, 0.1 ha of gorse has been cleared near Brambles Living Farm, 0.2 ha near Berrow Down and some scrub near Mount Pleasant. It was likely that additional work would be carried out in this area in autumn.

The Conservation Manager had received reports that the gate in Hancocks Lane was broken. The gate was Highways' responsibility and MHT had reported the issue to them. Minor repairs could be made by MHT staff. Mr Gardner reported damage to the triangular cattle warning sign and that the gate was being left open. Ms Brennan suggested including closing gates in the Good Neighbours' leaflet. Posters were also being placed over the "Keep Shut" sign.

The Conservation Manager also informed the meeting that work would be done this winter to remove an invasive weed (*crassula helmsii*) from the ponds near Swinyard car park. This work would involve fencing out stock and possibly covering the ponds for a few of years. Nigel Hand would be supervising the work to ensure newts and other species were protected.

7. Incidents/byelaw breaches

The CEO reported that there had been a number of incidents of driving on the Commons. The Police had also sent 4 drivers anti-social behaviour warning letters for driving in a way to cause distress and disturbance to the local community. He highlighted the importance of reporting these problems to the police as well as to MHT, as numerous reports would result in the matter being given increased priority.

There had been a number of incidents of drones being used on the Common and staff were approaching users whenever they were seen. Reports of drones should be made to the office and staff would attend wherever possible.

Ms Brennan reported seeing a car for sale parked on the Common. The owners were contacted and the vehicle was removed.

8. Stock visibility/casualties

Mr Gardner reported that since Christmas, 12 sheep had been killed on the roads in the area and 4 killed by dogs. The dogs involved in one of the most recent attacks belonged to a local resident and the incident was being followed up. One incident involving cattle had been reported.

Mr Gardner's cattle had been contained during the darkest months of the year, but one animal had been hit on the main road between Hancocks Lane and the Plume of Feathers in daylight.

9. Report from CCA

Ms Brennan reported that CCA would like to undertake some educational and practical management work on the Common, in liaison with MHT, and asked about the need for public liability insurance. The CEO confirmed that independent groups must have public liability insurance if organising an event or activity on land under the jurisdiction of MHT.

10. Reports from other represented bodies

Castlemorton Parish Council

Mrs Wilkes reported that the Council had been approached by the Malvern Hills AONB to discuss verge management and grass mowing. The CEO explained that the AONB were working to establish a 2 cut management regime, where wildflowers could be left to grow. Mrs Wilkes was concerned this would tempt sheep off the common.

Welland Parish Council

Mr Hancock reported that Welland Parish Council had also been approached by the AONB. Mr Davies said that the AONB were in discussions with Highways but there were some areas where the regime was being trialled. It was similar to the cutting regime for the orchids and wildflowers on Welland Green.

Birtsmorton Parish Council

Mr Gillard reiterated the need for better signage to warn of the presence of stock. They were also in discussions about cutting the verges, particularly around Rye Cross.

Mrs Windle provided an update from Coombegreen Common. Advice had been sought from Worcestershire County Council Archaeology Service about clearing the mediaeval pits. They recommended mechanical clearance (where possible) followed by herbicide treatment. She hoped that the thistles could be topped twice over the summer. Some fund raising events were planned.

Mrs Windle said that a new footpath sign had been installed on the common which was surprising as it was open access. The CEO suggested contacting the Public Rights of Way Officer at WCC.

11. Information and Any Other Business

The CEO reported that a revised Hunting Policy had been approved by the Land Management Committee and would be considered at the next Board meeting on 8th June. A revised policy on underground services was also being considered.

Mr Weaver reported a water leak near Mr Chamings' property. MHT agreed to contact Severn Trent to report the issue.

Mr Hancock raised the condition of the surface of the informal car park on the western side of the main road immediately outside Welland. He also reported that a nearby pond was flooding the path in wet weather. The CEO would look at the site. He also asked for the footbridge by Hancock's Lane gate to be inspected.

Mr Weaver asked for clarification on the dates of the graziers' payment and requested the forms for providing stock numbers. The CEO suggested the matter be dealt with outside the meeting and agreed to review the circumstances surrounding the payments last December and ensure that there was clarity going forward.

12. Date of next meeting

8 November 2017, 8pm.

The meeting closed at 10pm