

**Meeting of the Castlemorton Commons
Co-ordinating Committee**

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 28 August 2019 8.00pm

Present: Lionel Bartlett, Phil Birley, Ann Brennan, Matthew Gardner, Peter Hancock, Christina Leake, Julie Moore, Jenny Phelps (Chair), Chris Rouse, Keith Stevens, Barbara Wilkes, Sue Windle.

In attendance:

From Malvern Hills Trust (MHT): CEO, Secretary to the Board, Conservation Manager.

14 members of the public, Charlotte Marshall (Gloucestershire FWAG).

1. Election of Chair

In Mr Davies' absence, Jenny Phelps was appointed to chair the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Don Lupton, Mick Davies.

3. Report of meeting 15 May 2019

The report of the meeting was agreed and signed as such by the Chair.

4. Matters Arising

British Camp Reservoir – Nothing further to report.

Parking by Swinyards car park – The Trust was investigating measures to prevent parking on the verges and the location of underground services.

DB

Footpath on the boundary with Welland – The Trust were intending to put some stepping stones down this autumn.

DB

Conservation of earthworks near Hunters' Hall – The Trust had contacted Worcestershire Archaeology. The origin of the feature was not beyond doubt but they had confirmed that light grazing was the best method of management.

Estovers – The Trust had circulated a brief note on rights of estover.

Jenny Phelps confirmed that anyone who wanted to discuss their rights

should contact the Trust because the land was under a Stewardship agreement and part was an SSSI, both of which might affect the way in which any rights were exercised. Ann Brennan asked to set up a working group including someone from the Birtsmorton Castlemorton and Hollybush Archive to discuss the exercise of rights of estover. Chris Milne said that someone had provided information which indicated the Trust note was not factually correct. The Common Association was asked to set up the working group and Jenny Phelps suggested terms of reference should include:

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- understanding who has estovers,
- what those estovers were,
- how they fitted in with the Stewardship Agreement to which the land was subject
- to make sure there was dialogue to ensure the rights were exercised within the terms of the Agreement.
- how the rights might be exercised under the terms of any future agreement.

Representative of Natural England on the Committee – Katey Stephen was keen to work with local commoners to shape a new Stewardship agreement. She could not, because of time constraints, sit on the committee but would be happy to attend meetings when needed. The Conservation Manager said that he intended to hold an open session, probably in January 2020, for people (not limited to those with rights of common) to look at the proposed Stewardship application.

Signage on the common – Highways were not willing to consider additional signage on the common and would not consider painted signs on the road (although these were used in Gloucestershire). Barbara Wilkes suggested adding “for the next 4 miles” to the existing signs so that drivers were not surprised to find stock in the road off the open common. The Conservation Manager suggested the Trust might do this on their own initiative.

JB

Jenny Phelps suggested asking councillors to persuade Highways Officers to change their restrictions on what signage they would permit. It was agreed that temporary signs and signs that were different had more impact.

Sue Windle had provided the CEO with pictures of signs she had seen which warned dog owners about livestock worrying. She asked if the Trust would be considering using something similar.

Problems with the road by Hancocks Lane gate – Lionel Bartlett said there had been erosion of the stream bank by Gate Cottage. The CEO reported erosion under the bridge by Strawbyn Kennels. Remedial work was required to the headwall where the stream passed under the road and this

would have to take priority.

DB

The gate on Hancocks Lane was Highways responsibility and Ann Brennan asked if it would be possible to have a horse rider latch fitted.

JB

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5. Report from Malvern Hills Trust

The CEO reported that the Trust's consultation about the proposed Charity Commission Scheme would start on 2 September. The consultation document and the link to a questionnaire were on the Trust's web site. The Trust would provide paper copies for those not able to access the internet.

6. Report from MHT Conservation Manager:

Mowing and scrub clearance – The Conservation Manager reported on the current work programme. He thanked local people for their suggestions for scrub clearance, but said that more work had been suggested than could be done over one season. Another volunteer working party would be arranged at Castlemorton to which all were invited. He confirmed there was no Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) funding for work on the common this winter.

Securing the future of Castlemorton and Hollybed Commons – This was on hold as a power to enable the Trust to carry out such work was one of the proposals for inclusion in the Charity Commission Scheme. Any work carried out on a public road would have to be with the agreement of Highways. Jenny Phelps emphasized that this was an enabling power - plans for actual works would come at a later stage and would require the consent of the Secretary of State.

Stock numbers and grazing – there were about 70 cattle and over 500 sheep on the commons.

Southern Hills and Castlemorton – replacement for HLS Scheme – The current Scheme expired in March 2020. Because of Brexit, the future remained uncertain. The deadline for applications for Countryside Stewardship Schemes was May 2020 and the new Schemes were intended to come into effect in January 2021. There was therefore a 9 month unfunded period and the Trust would be considering using the reserves from the HLS Scheme to keep the grazing going over that period. The options for Countryside Stewardship higher tier were available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/countryside-stewardship-higher-tier-manual>

It looked as if there would be less money available under the new Scheme. All of the capital works had to be undertaken in the first 2 years and there were no longer payments for native breeds at risk.

The Conservation Manager confirmed that Cheltenham Motor Club had applied to Highways to run a motor sport event on 7th September. They had subsequently asked the Trust for permission to put up safety barriers, signage and the use of Swinyard car park.

7. Stock visibility/casualties

Matthew Gardner said he was aware that of 2 of Mr Shale's sheep had been hit by vehicles. Mrs Wilkes said one of her lambs had been killed on the track to her property. Phil Burley asked whether stock casualties could be publicised.

8. Reports from CCA

Mr Bartlett gave the dates of various CCA events.

9. Reports from other represented bodies

Sue Windle reported on the restoration work which had been carried out on Coombe Green Common. The "Slow" signs which had been put up on the roadside were very successful over the spring and summer. She reported that scrub by Hollybush Church was obscuring animals which were about to cross the road. She asked if the scrub could be cut back in order that motorists had a clear view of the animals. The Secretary to the Board asked people to report any concerns of this sort directly to the office as soon as they were identified.

10. Other Information

The Conservation Manager confirmed that the Conservation Officer had lead a walk to inform local people about the work that was planned to restore some of the ponds on the common. This had been an extremely useful way of getting input from local people in relation to the planned work. He confirmed that a water bowser would be provided for stock whilst the pond by Mount Pleasant was partially drained. He would ask the Conservation Officer to make sure Mrs Weaver had the details of the way the work would be carried out. **JB**

Jenny Phelps suggested making public a method statement so that everyone was clear what would happen.

Lionel Bartlett said large refuse vehicles were now being used along Hancocks Lane and asked the CEO to see if they could revert to using smaller wagons. **DB**

11. Date of next meeting

27 November 2019

The meeting closed at 9.45pm

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