

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

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 20 March 2024 at 8.00pm

Present: Mike Wilkinson (Chair), Phil Birley, Peter Hancock, Janet Hughes, Rosemary Powell, Chris Rouse, Andy Sayers, Keith Stevens, Barbara Wilkes, Susan Windle, Simon Yates.

In attendance:

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

1. Welcome

Mr Wilkinson welcomed everyone to the meeting, including the new MHT Secretary to the Board, who was attending her first meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Matthew Gardner.

3. Committee membership changes

Janet Hughes had replaced Ann Brennan whilst the latter was indisposed.

4. Report of meeting of 29 November 2023

The report of the meeting of 29 November 2023 was approved unanimously and signed by the Chair.

5. Public Questions

There were none.

6. Matters Arising

There were none.

7. Update on Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Castlemorton

The Conservation Manager reported that this was still going well. It was noted that Nicky Merrick had indicated that she might join the group, being the only commoner to date who hadn't, but although she'd been invited to a meeting to discuss this it had come to nothing. The Conservation Manager noted that payment from the RPA remained outstanding and might not be received until the end of June.

8. Report from Malvern Hills Trust

Mr Wilkinson reported that the MHT Board had resolved to pursue a new Act of Parliament. The Board had agreed to engage a Parliamentary Agent to prepare the process, help draw up the Bill and lodge it with Parliament by November 2024. It would be a Private Bill, as the previous Malvern Hills Acts had been, and would be a consolidation of those Acts in modern language. The new Bill would *not* change what the Trust did. The most significant change would be a reduction in the number of Board members. The Acts currently provided for 29 members (the Trust presently had 24), and this was more than twice the size of the average board. There would be a public consultation exercise where anyone interested would be able to make representations. There had been a consultation previously, and it was expected that this one would be on similar lines.

The new MHT CEO, Deborah Fox, had taken up her post. She had a background in local government and environment improvement, and already knew the Hills well. She was keen to engage with stakeholders straightaway. Committee members hoped that she might be able to join them for the summer outdoor meeting.

9. Report from the MHT Conservation Manager

The Conservation Manager (CM) reported that some works planned for the winter had been completed, but staff had been hampered by the wet weather:

- Four ponds had been restored.
- Four black poplars (nationally scarce) had been planted.
- Various minor drainage works had been carried out, but some remained outstanding (e.g. Hollybed Street). The Trust sometimes received reports of problems that were not on Trust land. Where possible, the Trust would advise who the correct landowner was. The Trust would advise easement users who failed to fulfil their responsibilities to maintain easement surfaces and drainage from culverts. In answer to a question on to what extent the Trust would deal with flooding from boundary ditches onto their land, the CM confirmed that staff would follow it up if it affected the Trust and public access, otherwise they would probably report the problem to Highways.
- Scrub works by both field staff and contractors were very behind due to the weather (in Castlemorton, only about a quarter of the planned works had been possible). There had been two volunteer days on Hurst Bank and two

near the ford on Hancock's Lane. Since bird breeding season was now in progress, all further works were on hold until September. In answer to a question about whether it was possible to catch up, the CM said that there was a finite amount of money and staff time and the Trust simply had to prioritise. Mr Hancock praised the standard of work done on path drainage.

The CM reported that there was a good number of animals grazing. Temporary fencing (28 days) had been erected to assist Mr Shail with his lambs. Public access was still permitted; signs were there to remind people to shut the gates.

The CM was pleased to note that Kew Gardens staff had contacted the Trust to collect seeds for the Millennium Seed Bank from the population of Slender Hare's Ear on Hollybed Common. This was a nationally scarce plant that MHT was careful to maintain through open habitat management. There were now thousands of these seeds frozen in the Kew Gardens seedbank.

10. Requests to MHT for clearance of specific areas of the Commons

- *Hurst Bank*
Mr Rouse said there was lots to clear. The CM said it was done every year, usually with volunteers, and confirmed that the Bank would be in next year's programme
- *Sunnyside Path*
Mr Hancock said he had been asked by Mr Smallwood for an update on the priority of clearing the path. The CM said the path was not a public right of way and was very low priority for the Trust. However, it was noted that the path was promoted as a walking route on the MHT's own walking and cycling guide and that perhaps this needed to be amended when the guide was next revised. The CM said that if Trust staff were to clear the path, they would have to maintain it and the Trust did not have sufficient resources for this. Mrs Hughes said that the path had been on the CCA list for four to five years, and that it used to be clear, with vehicle access. The CM said that if there were no other access route it would increase in priority, but there was other access, and the path was of no benefit to graziers. He added that the path from Hawkshill to the footbridge was a priority, but staff hadn't been able to get to it because of the wet weather.
- *Welland Car Park*
It was noted that the car park required resurfacing, but no action was currently possible, because it was under water, and a drainage solution was required.
- *Overgrowth near Hartspool*
Dr Powell reported that Castlemorton PC had requested that the overgrowth near Hartspool be cut back to expose the ditches, as there had been reports of vehicles stuck in them. The CM was surprised to learn that

there were cars driving there anyway, given that there was a track towards Coombe Green where they could turn. He said that if vegetation were cut back it would keep coming back. There were lots of bumps to get stuck in and cutting back the vegetation would not help people driving at night. He agreed to visit the location. It was pointed out that some drivers had been directed that way by SatNav and that it would be a good idea to erect a 'residents only access' sign to deter drivers

- *Scrub works*

Mr Rouse wanted to try putting half a load of slag on the scrub to encourage regrowth and asked about plans for a survey, but the CM said that the stewardship schemes would not allow the use of slag and the survey was unaffordable. Mr Wilkinson stated that the general principle was that it was not in the MHT management plan to carry out such procedures.

11. Stock casualties

One lamb and three cows had been killed, one of the cows by a hit-and-run driver.

12. Reports from Castlemorton Common Association (CCA)

The AGM had taken place. Mr Wilkinson asked what had happened to the goalposts that the Parish Council had funded. It was confirmed that they had been delivered but not yet erected due to the weather.

13. Reports from other represented bodies

- Castlemorton Parish Council

The Parish Council had been contacted about a proposed 'closed road' car rally being organised by the Cheltenham Motor Club which would use roads on part of Castlemorton Common - thought to be around Eight Oaks. The Hills Ford Stages Car Rally was being organised for 14-15 September 2024. It was reported that the promoters had begun to leaflet residents who might be affected, although it appeared that not all affected residents had so far been contacted. The CM reported that the Trust had not been contacted, that it would need to give permission and that he was pursuing further information from the organisers.

- Welland Parish Council

- Mr Hancock reported that part of Hancock's Lane that served as a passing place was being used for parking, and he asked for the Trust's opinion on its designation. The CM said that the Trust didn't define it as either parking area or passing space, and he added that this would need to be looked at in the context of a wider project on where people might access the common with vehicles and where they might not.

- Mr Hancock asked whether the Trust had investigated a drainage problem round the car park and down the road towards Barbary Cottage. The CM confirmed that the Operations Manager had done so and was aware that work was needed.
 - Mr Wilkinson reported that a planning application for the development of 56 houses adjoining the Common at Welland had been refused. It was noted that the Welland Neighbourhood Plan had been passed in a referendum and submitted to the District Council.
-
- Coombe Green
 - Mrs Windle reported that an oak tree had been planted in December to commemorate the coronation.
 - No works had been possible here due to the weather.

14. Dates of next meetings

Tuesday 9 July 2024 – summer outdoor meeting

Wednesday 27 November 2024

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm