

Westleton Common Advisory Group

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 11th August 2021 at 7-30 pm in the foyer of Westleton Village Hall

Present: Nick Shearme (NS), David Rous (DR), Roy Jones (RJ), Julian Alexander (JA), Joyce Burtenshaw (JBU), John Bebbington (JBe).

1 – *Apologies.*

Andrew Turner (AT), Amanda Freeman (AF), Chris Freeman (CF).

2 - *Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 2nd June 2021.*

Agreed to be correct.

3 - *Matters Arising not on this agenda.*

JBe made an embarrassed apology (he did write the minutes!). He had left himself off the list of people present at the 2nd June meeting.

DR asked JA about ordering a first aid box and replacement saws for the working parties, which are due to start again shortly. The first aid box should be suitable for 15 people and 10 of 21" saws are required. JA will organise an order with Ian Haines.

DR also reminded the group that we now have no first aider with the working parties. It is not a legal requirement to have a first aider, but it is advisable. Westleton Parish Council had spent money in the past of first-aider training but the people who were trained are no longer available.

4 – *Membership of the Advisory Group.*

NS welcomed Joyce Burtenshaw as a member of the group.

Arlette Smith has resigned from the group. NS and JBe have thanked her for her invaluable help over the last several years. Westleton Parish Council is aware of her resignation and has suggested that there is no immediate need to replace her. The Working Party does not dissent from this view.

5 – *Emergency access onto Common.*

NS reported that this had been discussed by Westleton Parish Council at its meeting of 28th June 2021. The following is an extract from the minutes of that meeting (which are publicly available);

21/73 Common

Cllr N Shearme reported on the minutes of the Common Advisory Group held on 2/6/21 containing details of a proposal being looked at which could see the eventual opening up a second access point for emergency vehicles to be able to use. The minutes from the meeting on 2/6/21 had provided a detailed breakdown surrounding the discussion which had taken place and what were seen as the merits involved as well as the case for leaving the area as it is. It was noted that, at this stage, there had been no formal recommendation or vote taken on the measure by the Advisory Group and as well as an apparent degree of divided opinion from within, there was also already the emergence of opposition from local residents to be aware of – see communications received under minute 21/80 below.

Cllr Shearme stated that it was his intention, in the first instance, to make an approach to the various Governments agencies (DEFRA, Natural England & the Suffolk Wildlife Trust) to obtain their views on the viability. Only if a positive response is received will this then be discussed further by the Common Advisory Group. It should be noted that a wider consultation exercise involving parishioners would also have to take place prior to any further discussion to obtain the consent/authority of the full Parish Council. It was also evident that the exact details of what is being proposed and indeed the purpose really needed to be better communicated.

Cllr Shearme undertook to take on board these observations and refer back to the next meeting of the Advisory Group which is scheduled for 11/8/21.

NS has contacted Suffolk Wildlife Trust but has had no response to date. Covid and “working from home” seem to be making it difficult to contact the appropriate people. NS will keep trying SWT and is still trying to contact Natural England and DEFRA. As NS has not been able to get in touch with any of the relevant advisors very little progress has been made.

AT, who could not attend this meeting, sent his comments for consideration. They follow;

As I mentioned previously, I am away next week so cannot attend the Common's Group meeting. When there is a discussion about the access to the Common, could you please share these comments/thoughts with the Group?

My understanding is:

The primary reason for the proposed new access with 2 drop-down posts is to allow another access for emergency services.

This caused concern among some residents as they foresee an access wide enough for a fire engine/ambulance to be cut through the existing single-track access thereby changing the nature of the entrance to the Common (as it has been in recent years)

Secondary reason is because the access was there previously.

Concerns about the new access being very wide (for emergency vehicle access) have been allayed - Julian has said that the ground would not be cleared and the drop-down posts would be installed into the existing undergrowth – hence no change to visual aspect, no threat to wildlife.

FRS have said the access would be welcome but is not essential.

Ambulance service has not yet been consulted.

Environmental organisations still need to be consulted.

My comments/questions:

Some clearing would presumably have to happen to install the posts – is the intention to then let it grow back around the posts?

Could a visual presentation of the expected result be provided? This might further allay concerns. A visual representation will anyway probably be necessary for the explanations to the other environmental consultees of the proposed action.

If the other environmental consultees say it is ok to install the drop-down posts in the undergrowth, then we need to ask:

- The Ambulance service: is it essential and would they try to drive over/through the undergrowth in the event of an emergency to gain access to the Common.*
- FRS (have already said it is not essential): would they try to drive over/through the undergrowth in the event of an emergency to gain access to the Common.*

If the ambulance service says it is essential and they (and the FRS) would drive through/over the undergrowth to access the Common in an emergency, then the drop-down posts should be installed into the undergrowth.

However, if both have said it is not essential and they would not drive over/through the undergrowth to access the Common, I do not see why we would go to the trouble of installing posts which would serve no purpose.

Thanks and kind regards,

Andrew

The group agreed that a clear plan of what is proposed is needed.

JBe argued that this plan would be best drawn up by someone who believed this to be necessary rather than himself, who was doubtful of the value of what is proposed.

JBe will contact the Ambulance Service **(Done 17/08/2021)**.

NS believes we need to discuss this with Natural England, Suffolk Wildlife Trust before we draw up plans. **(JBe - SWT contacted on 17/08/2021 and NE on 18/08/2021, both by email.)**

JBe will contact Ian Haines to see if he has a contact at DEFRA/RPA **(Done 16/08/2021. Information received 17/08/2021)**

JBe will write to DEFRA and include a request for advice on levelling the hump from the concrete pad onto the rest of the common. **(Done 18/08/2021)**

6 – Outstanding work to be done.

The Working Parties will work through the programme of outstanding work (reported in the minutes of the meeting of the meeting held on 2 June 2021) as practical. We also need clarification from the Probation Service on what help, if any, the Community Payback teams will be able offer.

We may well have to use contractors for some of the outstanding work.

NS had received an email from Barry Osborn pointing out that the Black Slough Steps were overgrown. This has been cleared.

7 – Help from the Community Pay-Back scheme.

We have provisionally booked the Community Payback team for 5 days from Monday 4 October to Friday 8 October. However, Paul Tong of the Probation Service is unable to make any commitments at this stage. They were transferred back to the unified Probation Service recently and their roles, and how they can continue supporting local Communities, are yet to be defined.

JBe to contact Paul Tong to see if the situation is any clearer. **(Done 17/08/2021)**.

8 - Safety audit 2021.

DR has checked the faulty seat. He feels this will not be easy to fix, NS and JA will investigate.

Suffolk Highways will only cut the grass verge between the Reckford Road layby and the gate to the Common twice a year, as is their normal practice for roads of this type. We are free to do this ourselves if we feel it is appropriate.

NS has reported fly tipping in the layby to Ian Haines, who has, in turn, reported this to East Suffolk Norse. No response to date. Westleton Parish Council will put up a sign warning that CCTV is in place to discourage fly tipping.

DR suggested that we trim a wide area round the bottle banks to discourage the leaving of litter. **(Done by NS 17/08/2021)**

9 – Funding/Management Plan from April 2023.

DR is sure we will need to reapply for the HLS Grant and that we will need to present an updated Management Plan to support the application.

JBe will write to Suffolk Wildlife Trust asking for advice on how we proceed with updating the management plan. We are aware we need to do wildlife surveys. **(Done 17/08/2021)**

10 – Piri-piri bur.

JBu had reported a contaminate area. Piri-piri bur must be destroyed when it is found.

11 – AOB.

NS reported that hedge cutting had been done in February 2021 (overlooked at last meeting).

In response to a question from JA, NS reported that the owl box had been installed. NS has been in touch with Sheena Robertson about the beehives. Sue Brett will take over the care of them when Sheena finally leaves Westleton.

12 - Date of next meeting.

Probably early October 2021.

Possible Dates;

Evenings of Monday 4, Wednesday 6, Thursday 7 October

Evenings of Monday 11, Wednesday 13, Thursday 14 October
