

Westleton Common Advisory Group

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 20th October 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), Andrew Turner (AT), Amanda Freeman (AF), Chris Freeman (CF).

1 – *Apologies.* None.

2 - *Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 11th August 2021.* Agreed to be correct.

3 - *Matters arising not on this agenda.* In the Safety Audit conducted in May 2021 a seat in compartment 14 that is set in sand adjacent to the path overlooking Reckford Road was reported as being unstable as one of the posts needs resetting. Both NS and CF reported that the leg had been repacked with sand and pieces of wood and was now stable.

4 – *Emergency access onto common.* Various agencies had been contacted for advice on this proposed project.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust have appointed a new conservation advisor who will contact us when he or she has settled in. No contact has yet been made.

DEFRA/RPA have offered their advice. In summary their advice is that we should submit a minor and temporary adjustment (MTA) form. If the widening of the path or the levelling of the hump at the rear of the concrete pad do not impede management under the Environmental Stewardship obligations, then this work can go ahead.

Our previous contact at Natural England is no longer working with the Suffolk team. He has passed our message on to his former Suffolk team colleague who has yet to respond.

The East of England Ambulance Service have yet to respond.

JA suggested that all we need to do is replace the two wooden posts with secure drop-down posts in the same position. There is no need to clear any vegetation or widen the path. In the event of an emergency the posts can be opened either with a key or by cutting the locks and the emergency vehicle can drive through the undergrowth onto the common. It would be necessary to ensure that the vegetation did not become so dense as to inhibit the emergency access; this would be done as part of normal maintenance in line with the management plan.

The advantages of this approach are;

Existing width restriction is maintained.

No disturbance of habitat.

No interference with existing management plan.

Access by large vehicles would only be required in an emergency so non-emergency access is inhibited.

As all we are proposing is to change two existing posts with others effectively doing the same job then the outside agencies should have no problem.

As well as changing the two posts we will also advise Westleton PC to level the hump leading from the rear of the concrete pad onto the path leading to Black Slough in line with the advice from Suffolk Fire and Rescue. All soils resulting from this levelling should be redistributed on the common so that the seed bank can rejuvenate.

All agreed that this was a sensible approach, that we should recommend it to Westleton Parish Council and that it should address any concerns in the wider community.

JBe to draft advisory letter to Westleton Parish Council and notify Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Natural England, East of England Ambulance Service and DEFRA/FPA of these proposals and obtain and complete the MTA form for DEFRA. The MTA form must come from Westleton PC so Ian Haines will be involved.

5 – *Outstanding work to be done.* It seems very unlikely that help from the Community Payback Scheme will be available in the foreseeable future. So, we need to appoint outside contractors to do the management work required.

DR advised that the priority should be the clearance of all vegetation and the removal the tree stumps in the areas in compartments 9, 13 and 15 bounding Ralphs Mill and the neighbouring cottage. It is not clear where the boundaries are so we must get in touch with the owner(s) of these properties and discuss our plans with them and obtain agreement.

JBe to ask Ian Haines to write to the owner(s) to set up a meeting.

DR also advises that if doing the above work is not practical then clearing all vegetation and tree stumps on the Noddle would be the second option.

A third option would be to clear all the vegetation in compartments 1 and 2 on the “old football pitch” leading to the path adjacent to the beehives.

Five possible contractors have been identified;

www.conservationworks.org.uk (thanks to JBU)

www.collinsfarmingandforestry.co.uk (thanks to NS)

Jim’s Mowing

Chris’s Tree Services

Holmes Contracting

JBe and **NS** (Collins Farming and Forestry) to contact each of the above and invite them to meet with us.

(Comment JBe; I don’t think we decided which of us should meet with the contractors. It seems to me that DR and NS are essential, and JA and CF would also be very helpful. I’m not sure I could add anything useful to such a meeting unless a note taker is needed, but anyone can do that.)

5a – *Progress with Maintenance Assessment of Saturday 28th May 2021.* No additional discussion. All covered above.

6 – *Help from the Community Pay-Back scheme.* It is very doubtful if this will be available in the foreseeable future. See discussion under 5, above.

7 – *Beehives on common.* As safety is paramount, there is some concern that these will not be looked after adequately. There is a suggestion that one Westleton resident has agreed to offer some help, but it is not clear if this will be sufficient. NS will talk to this potential helper and clarify what support will be available. We feel it is important that someone with expertise in beehive management is involved.

8 – *Funding/Management Plan from April 2023.* DEFRA/RPA have indicated that it may be too early to apply for funding yet. But we do need to update our management plan. DR is confident that all that is needed is a few straightforward adjustments to

the current plan but that we should get the advice of Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England.

JBe to ask SWT and NE for their advice.

9 – First aid box and saws. DR confirmed that these were now available.

10 – Annual Report. The group agreed that **JBe** should lead on the annual report this year. All are asked for their contributions and **JBe** will write to the usual contributors requesting their input. (DASH Astro have already send a report.)

There was some discussion about the value of a more frequent periodic newsletter. This would be useful as it would update people on activity more frequently than an annual report. No-one at this stage agreed to lead on this.

11 – AOB.

We have received and circulated a report from GeoSuffolk on the geology of the common. **JBe** will read the report in detail (in the hope that others will as well!) and identify anything that needs to be done. **JBe** has asked GeoSuffolk if it is in order to circulate the report more widely. Unless he hears to the contrary, he will include it in the 2021 annual report and put it on the Common section of the Westleton website. DR reminded us that Pam and Alan Hargreaves should be reimbursed for the costs of providing refreshments for the common working parties. He will ask them how much they need.

12 - Date of next meeting. Aim for Monday 15 November 2021.