

Westleton Common Advisory Group

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 9th January 2024 at 7-30 pm in the foyer of Westleton Village Hall

Present Nick Shearme (NS), David Rous (DR), John Bebbington (JBe), Joyce Burtenshaw (JBU), Barry Banks (BB), Ian Webber (IW), Chris Freeman (CF).

1 – *Apologies.* John French, Amanda Freeman, Julian Alexander.

2 - *Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 14 September 2023.* Agreed correct with 1 correction required; under item 5 “CR” should read “CF” (for Chris Freeman).

3 - *Matters arising not on this agenda.* NS will inspect and advise on the two faulty seats in compartments 3 and 10.

4 – *Installation of drop-down posts.* The existing posts have now been modified with hinges so they can now be dropped when required by emergency vehicles. CF was reminded to submit his claim to Ian Haines for payment by Westleton Parish Council. CF will set the same code on each of the two locks and advise NS and JBe and give them the instructions on how to change the codes. JBe will send the code to the emergency services.

5 – *Wetland area in compartment 11.* NS reported that this area is now very wet. The work has not been finished; the remaining marked trees will be cut down soon (probably at the next Saturday working party). Cut material will be moved to the edge and left as “habitat” to open up the central area.

6 – *Excess growth of birch in compartment 1 near the beehives.* Some debate as to the best way to deal with this problem. The extensive root system will mean that removing the trees may not be successful as they will regrow. (*See discussion under item 9*) NS will seek the advice of contractors to see if using heavy plant to clear them is a realistic option. But there is a risk that even using plant will still allow regrowth. The best approach will probably be to cut them and treat the stumps chemically (NS can do the chemical treatment). This work could be done in stages by the Saturday working parties in late February and again in the autumn over a couple of years. This work can be started this February on a limited area to test this approach.

(After the meeting NS and IW, quite by chance, met near the beehives the following day. IW reports that “On inspection, the birch trees, though numerous, are very small. Easy to cut back, far less easy to paint with glyphosate. We could leave them to grow to facilitate killing but then the cutting would be harder. A machine would destroy the area. Recommendation, for the time being, is to cut back every couple years - easy work for the Common Working Party or Suffolk Coast and Heaths”. Comment JB – We can start this in February as suggested above and continue discussion in March.)

7 – *Suffolk Coast and Heath working parties.* On 19 September 2023 they cleared much of the gorse on the cliffs in compartment 13 to encourage sand martins. They also visited on 24 October when the plan was to continue clearing the sand martin cliffs. Due to heavy rain this was considered unsafe, so they cleared gorse and other vegetation in compartment 8. If they visit again in Autumn 2024 we will possibly get them to help with the birch clearance in compartment 1.

8 – *Location of fire warning signs in 2024.* Not discussed in detail but we do need to replace a post that has been removed.

9 – *Management plan – identifying major projects.* We have received a donation of £10k for conservation work on the common. Surface repairs are needed to the car parking area in compartment 5 and the “unofficial” car park off Bakers Lane and to the Black Slough steps. It would not be appropriate to fund this work from this donation. *(After the meeting NS received a quotation for material to “fill” the car parking areas of “Type 1 for car park £340.00 + vat Per 10 ton”.*

This donation would allow us to employ contractors to;

A - reprofile the sand martin cliff in compartment 13 (this would also, coincidentally, allow us to expose the underlying geology as advised by GeoSuffolk in their survey of 2021.

B - clear and reestablish the pond in compartment 1.

C – clear gorse in compartment 13 on the bank between the sand martin cliffs and Black Slough in autumn 2024.

NS will approach the usual contractors to advise on and quote for this work.

JBe to let GeoSuffolk know what we propose and to send a copy of these minutes to the financial donors (via Ian Haines).

Using contractors for this work will free up the Saturday working teams and Suffolk Coast and Heath volunteers for other maintenance work.

10 – *Annual Report 2023.* JBe is making slow progress with this and needs a few weeks yet to complete it. He also reminded other members of the group to send him information they have for inclusion. *(Thanks to those colleagues – most of what was needed arrived next morning!)*

11 – *AOB*

DR mentioned incursion over the boundary near Kings Farm.

NS reported that UK Power Networks will be coming to lop an oak tree that could potentially foul power lines and trim any branches close to the lines. This work will be done before nesting starts and they will let NS know when they will be coming.

JBu mentioned that vegetation on the path leading to her house needed “topping”. NS and CF will clear the bonfire site. *(After the meeting NS “had a final burn at the bonfire today all that is left is ash and nails”).*

£1770.00 received on 04/12/2023 from Rural Payments Agency towards the ESS Higher Level Stewardship grant.

12 – *Date of next meeting.* Sometime in March 2024