

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

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 24 November 2021 8.00pm

Present: Phil Birley, Ann Brennan, Mick Davies (Chair), David Fellows, Matthew Gardner, Peter Hancock, Keith Stevens, Mike Wilkinson, Susan Windle.

In attendance:

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

2 members of the public

1. Election of Chair

Mick Davies was appointed as Chair for this meeting but suggested the matter could be reviewed at the next meeting when hopefully all committee members would be present.

2. Apologies for Absence

Julie Moore, Barbara Wilkes.

3. Report of meeting 27 November 2019

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

4. Public Questions

There were none.

5. Matters Arising

There were none.

6. Report from Malvern Hills Trust

The CEO reported that the Board of MHT had agreed to take the next step to progress its proposed governance reforms, which was to make an application to the Charity Commission for consent under s74 Charities Act 2011 to spend charity funds on pursuing a Private Bill.

The Board had agreed to suspend the issuing of licenses permitting trail hunting on Trust land. Hunts were still able to cross MHT land using highways, bridleways and easements to access other property.

The Trust's Annual Review had been published and was available on the website.

7. Report from MHT Conservation Manager:

Mowing and scrub clearance – The Trust had topped the grass adjacent to the roads in July in order to make stock more visible.

Part of the winter scrub work on Castlemorton Common had been carried out and would be completed in the coming months. Volunteers had cleared scrub on Hurst Bank. Clearance work between The Poplars and Woodlands was scheduled for January/February.

Time and resources were currently focused on tackling Ash Dieback

Stock numbers and grazing – Grazing was going well. One of the graziers was reducing his flock, so there would be less sheep on the common. This should have the benefit of lessen the need for supplementary feeding.

Securing the commons – this was on hold, awaiting the governance changes.

Southern Hills and Castlemorton Stewardship schemes – The Scheme for the Southern Hills (which extended to Foxhall/Pink Cottage and which was run in partnership with the Eastnor Estate), started in January. The Trust had applied again for a scheme for Castlemorton to start 1 January 2022 and feedback was awaited on the application. There was currently no external grant funding for grazing Castlemorton Common but the Trust had used some of its reserves to offer some limited funding for all the active commoners.

Pond restoration – The plastic sheeting had been removed from 2 of the ponds. It would not be known for certain whether the technique had been successful in killing the *crassula helmsii* (an invasive non-native plant) until spring.

Projects – The Trust had given permission for 2 studies – one to research what birds were using the common at night and Bumblebee Conservation Trust were researching whether they could use a drone to evaluate bumblebee habitat.

The Trust had also been invited to take part in a trial, run in conjunction with the Foundation for Common Land and DEFRA to ascertain how the new ELM (Environmental Land Management) scheme would work on common land. The Malvern Hills and the New Forest were to be the trial sites for lowland commons. Very little detail was available at present.

The AONB had new funding available for all landowners in and adjoining the AONB called “Farming in Protected Landscapes”. More information was available in an article published in “All about the Hills”¹ or on the AONB website.

¹ Also see the AONB website

8. Stock visibility/casualties

Matthew Gardner said he was aware of 2 accidents involving stock over the summer.

9. Reports from CCA

Ann Brennan paid tribute to Lionel Bartlett who had died in May and who had been on the Committee for many years.

The Association had run a number of social events, including the Shindig on Castlemorton Common (for the first time for 4 years). The money made from the event had been donated to Herefordshire MIND, St Richard's Hospice and the St Gregory's building fund.

CCA were considering replacing the goal posts on the common.

They also hoped to replace the oak tree which had split on the boundary between the common and Fair Oaks Farm. This was a marker of the boundary between the common and the King's Third. They had not succeeded in opening up a conversation with the owner of the adjoining land. Matt Gardner said here were a number of old oaks along that boundary and a long term succession plan was needed. The AONB had offered to help with funding. The CCA AGM would be held on 13 January 2022.

10. Reports from other represented bodies

Matt Gardner reported that some hedge and bramble had been removed on the boundary of the field on the southeast side of Welland, meaning it was no longer stock-proof. No one was aware of this having been requested by either Parish Council.

Sue Windle reported that some scrub clearance had been carried out on Coombe Green.

11. Other Information

The CEO confirmed that Western Power were still monitoring the site on Swinyard Hill where there had been a contamination incident in the autumn. He believed Severn Trent had again shelved any plans for British Camp Reservoir for the time being. The Conservation Manager invited people to get in touch if they considered any particular areas of scrub needed clearing or trees pollarding.

The CEO said that a review by the Trust of parking charges had been shelved because of visiting patterns having been affected by the pandemic. It was still intended to carry out that review.

It was suggested that the Trust inspect the edges of Hancocks Lane where some preventative maintenance might be useful. **DB**

Peter Hancock said he would monitor the stepping stones by the car park at the Welland end of the common. **PH**

Phil Birley thought he might have seen hunting dogs on the common in the early morning. The CEO confirmed that coursing was illegal and against the byelaws. This would be a matter both for the police and the Trust.

4. Date of next meeting

16 March 2022.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

DRAFT