

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

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 15 March 2023 8.00pm

Present: Phil Birley, Ann Brennan, Mick Davies (Chair), Chris Rouse, Matthew Gardner, Andy Sayers, Keith Stevens, Barbara Wilkes, Mike Wilkinson.

In attendance:

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

3 members of the public

Mr Davies welcomed everyone to the meeting

1. Apologies for Absence

Peter Hancock, Julie Moore, Susan Windle.

2. Report of meeting 30 November 2022

On the proposal Mr Stevens, seconded by Mr Wilkinson, the report of the meeting held on 30 November 2022 was agreed and signed as such by the Chair.

3. Public Questions

Questions had been sent in by Mr and Mrs Milne.

There was a discussion about what action could be taken to improve the safety of animals on the roads, following the death of 4 sheep in an accident on the B4208. The following points were made:

- Signage from the Welland direction only warned of animals for three quarters of a mile. This would lead people to assume that once they were off the common there would be no stock. Signage from Rye Cross direction was better. The CEO said he would investigate, take up this issue with Highways and see what action the County Council would take.
- The ideal solution was cattle grids at Welland and Rye Cross – this alerted motorists to the possible presence of animals.
- Could signage be put on adjoining land if Highways were not going to improve signage?
- The Trust had pressed for better and more distinctive signage in the past. Highways refused to consider signs painted on the road.

- Was there not also a risk to life when these collisions occurred?

Mick Davies had spoken to Tom Wells. Mr Wells reported that he had had a number of people contact him about the safety of stock on the road. Mr Davies would coordinate the efforts of the represented organisations to try to pressure Highways into taking further action.

A second question related to off road driving on the common. The Trust were aware of activity in a new area on Hollybed common.

The third question related to grazing by Mr Shail. Mr Shail had retired from the Countryside Stewardship Delivery group but he had commoners' rights so he could continue to graze. His stock numbers had been significantly reduced.

4. Matters Arising

There were none.

5. Report from Countryside Stewardship Scheme delivery group

Mr Gardner said the Scheme had been running for a year. The first year's payment had been made by the RPA. The group had discussed how to take up the shortfall of grazing following Mr Shail's retirement. The situation would continue to be reviewed, but some parts of the common would benefit from being rested in the short term because of the accumulated worm burden. Some vegetation had not yet fully recovered following the drought over the summer.

6. Report from Malvern Hills Trust

Mr Chamings said he had experience of two different types of unwanted off road driving - drivers "doughnutting" and also people coming onto the common with 4 x4s and lamps at night. He thought action to prevent damage caused by the problem drivers had to be carefully weighed against impacting people who peacefully enjoyed the common for picnicking etc.

The CEO said there was further "doughnutting" activity about 2 weeks ago including a group of 10 cars on one occasion. The police had been called by local residents but no action was taken. The Trust recorded all incidents but it was difficult to catch drivers as the events were erratic.

The Conservation Manager had surveyed all measures which currently existed along the Highway and the larger easements which stopped vehicles leaving the road. There was about 20,500m of road edge and two thirds of these verges had no measures in place to prevent a normal vehicle driving onto the common. People were prevented from driving off road by natural topography along about 19% of verges and by ditches or banks along about 8%. Both these measures were unobtrusive in the landscape.

The damaged areas had also been assessed and categorized into moderate damage (tyre tracks, soils compacted) and severe (serious compaction, rutting,

turf ripped up etc). About 8 % of the verges fell into the moderate damage category and a further 3 % into the severe category. Over half of the serious damage was within the SSSI.

Once the vegetation had recovered in the summer, the Trust would commission a flora survey to see if the important plant communities were being destroyed where the doughnutting was taking place.

The Conservation Manager confirmed the Trust wanted to gauge local views and those of the relevant statutory bodies before any further action was considered. There was no intention to shut out the public from the common. This activity caused multiple problems for the common and for the residents but it would not be helpful to restrict access to one area and push the problem elsewhere. A holistic approach was required.

Mr Sayers asked for a copy of the statistics which the Conservation Manager had collected. There was a discussion about the use of static cameras - the Trust had found in practice it was extremely difficult to get shots of number plates in the dark. Mr Stephens asked if it would be possible to put ditches across the affected areas? The CEO said he would look into whether the Trust could share any car registration numbers with residents. Residents could certainly pass any registration numbers to the Trust.

The CEO reported that Highways had put cobbled edging to the Chandler's Cross triangle. No barrier had been put in place to prevent people from driving over the triangle, and protection would be needed to enable the grass to re-grow.

The CEO confirmed no other work was planned by the Trust along the easement at the North West end of Hollybed Common. The Trust would maintain the ditch that it had dug there.

7. Report from MHT Conservation Manager:

Planned scrub clearance on the common had been completed. The Conservation Manager confirmed that stock numbers were below normal but were fine for the time of year. Over the last year there had been no sign of *crassula* on the ponds which had been covered but monitoring would continue. Mr Sayers confirmed that any damage to the common caused by his building works would be remedied once the works were completed. Severn Trent had also damaged the common whilst trying to carrying out repairs and the wardens were monitoring.

8. Stock casualties

None known besides the 4 sheep as reported earlier in the meeting.

9. Reports from CCA

There was a Social Supper on 25 March 2023. Ms Brennan had mentioned in the Association newsletter about the problems with people driving on the

common and invited comments. The Association was pleased to have planted trees in memory of Med Snookes in Snookes Croft.

10. Reports from other represented bodies

There were none.

11. Other Information

There was none.

12. Date of next meeting

Outdoor meeting 12 July 2023. Members were asked to contact the Trust if there were any particular places they would like to visit.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm

Signed..... M Wilkinson (Chair)
29 November 2023