

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

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 29 November 2023 8.00pm

Present: Phil Birley, Chris Rouse, Matthew Gardner, Peter Hancock, Rosemary Powell, Andy Sayers, Keith Stevens, Barbara Wilkes, Mike Wilkinson (Chair), Susan Windle, Simon Yates.

In attendance:

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

1. Election of Chair

Mike Wilkinson was appointed unopposed.

2. Apologies for Absence

Ann Brennan.

3. Committee membership changes

Mike Wilkinson had been nominated by MHT to replace Mr Davies.

Rosemary Powell and Keith Stevens were now the nominees from Castlemorton Parish Council.

Simon Yates had been nominated by Birtsmorton Parish Council.

4. Report of meeting of 15 March 2023

On the proposal of Mr Sayers, seconded by Mr Stevens the report of the meeting of 15 March 2023 was approved by the meeting and signed as such by the Chair.

5. Public Questions

There were none.

6. Matters Arising

There were none.

7. Update on Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Castlemorton

The Conservation Manager reported that this was going well.

The capital works had been completed and the costs claimed (this was mainly scrub work). The Stewardship Group were due to meet to consider payments to be made to graziers in December.

Roy Shale (who was not a member of the group) was still grazing around 80/90 sheep on the common and the Stewardship Group were monitoring what impact this was having. It was planned to carry out some mechanical cutting of grass if there were insufficient grazing. There was a concern that brambles would start to encroach further.

Mr Sayers asked if the brambles could be cut back where they were hiding stock which were approaching the roads. It was noted that it would also be helpful to create more space where there could be unexpected interactions between walkers and cattle. Mr Gardner explained that he considered this as part of his risk assessment and had already noted constrictions in the area between the informal car park at the edge of Welland and Boulter's Farm. Mrs Powell said some walkers had reported feeling anxious about interaction with the cattle.

Mr Wilkinson summarized that there were 2 issues – this was a working common and people should be aware of how to behave around the stock, but if there were particular pinch points, committee members were asked to pass locations on to the Trust so they could consider cutting back the vegetation.

Mr Sayers reported there had been some instances of stock worrying where walkers, when tackled about their dog's behaviour, had said there were no signs saying they had to put their dog on a lead. Whilst recognising that a proliferation of signs was undesirable, it might be worth putting up some notices, for example around parking areas, as it would be helpful to be able to refer dog owners to them? The Conservation Manager took note of the suggestion but pointed out that there was a legal requirement to keep dogs under control around livestock.

8. Report from Malvern Hills Trust and the Conservation Manager

The Conservation Manager reported that joy riding on the common had reduced during the dry weather but had now re-started. Two local residents were reporting incidents to MHT and to the police. Signs and posts had not proved an effective deterrent and the Trust had looked at using remote cameras. However, there was nowhere suitable for equipment requiring mains power and equipment also needed to be hidden to avoid vandalism. Mr Sayers asked if the Trust had considered installing a battery-operated camera. Mr Hancock asked if the police collected statistics on the antisocial activities on the common?

The Trust was working on project to tackle vehicles driving on the common. Two surveys had been carried out to look at the impact on the soils and vegetation. Both surveys had found significant impacts from cars. The Secretary of State's consent

would be required for certain work to prevent driving on the common and these reports would provide useful supporting evidence in any application. During the Committee's site visit during the summer, the Conservation Manager had drawn attention to a natural feature along the Gullet Road, where there was a slight step down from the road onto the common. This was effective in deterring drivers from leaving the road, but which was unobtrusive and not restrictive for other users of the common. Other controls could be scrub, fencing (not likely), tree planting or gentle topographic features. The Trust considered it appropriate to select some areas where limited access for vehicles could be allowed for the purpose of parking and picnicking etc.

The next step was to produce a map showing the proposals.

The Conservation Manager confirmed that in law, cars could not be driven onto the common, but the Trust recognised that historically this had happened, and a limited amount of parking could be tolerated.

The Secretary to the Board updated the meeting on the Trust's proposed Governance changes. The Trust had been considering updating its governing Acts for many years. The only option was to do this by way of a private Bill and the Trust now had the necessary consent from the Charity Commission to go ahead. There had been a further delay as a result of the re-appointment of the Board in November and getting those new Board members inducted. The plan was now to try to deposit the Bill in November 2024. It would take at least a further two years for the Bill to become law. There would be another public consultation on the content of the Bill before it was finalised.

The road signage for traffic leaving Welland was misleading as it implied the presence of stock for only $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. This had been reported to Highways. The Trust had also asked for the signage to be clearer about the fact the animals would be on the carriageway. Highways were not currently supportive of cattle grids. It was suggested that a bit of political pressure from residents might be helpful.

The Trust planned winter scrub work:

- On Hurst Bank
- Next to track from Hancock's Lane ford
- On Hollybed Common
- Between Hunter's Hall and Strawbyn Bridge
- On Berrow Down
- Opposite Hawkes Hill

The Conservation Manager asked the committee to let him know if there were other areas they would like clearing.

9. Stock numbers

The numbers of cattle would reduce temporarily when the youngstock were taken off the common.

10. Stock casualties

There had been no casualty animals since the last meeting although a motorcyclist had been involved in a collision.

11. Reports from Castlemorton Common Association (CCA)

Mr Sayers that the Shindig had raised just over £2,000. The CCA AGM would be held in February and the Social Support in March. CCA were planning to replace the goalpost in Golden Valley.

12. Reports from other represented bodies

Mrs Windle reported that the reduction in Mr Shale’s sheep numbers had affected Coombe Green Common. Simon Howells would be doing some scrub clearance kindly funded by an event at the Farmers’ Arms. There was a plan to manually re-clear the archaeology on Coombe Green in due course.

Mr Hancock said that Welland Parish Council were planning upgrade the surface on some pedestrian walking routes. One was the footpath which came out onto the common by Marlbrook Farm. The Council’s application for s 106 funding to support this was under consideration. Another route which the Council thought might benefit from work was the track from the car park at the village boundary to Barbury Cottage. He asked if vegetation could be cut back including giving sufficient headroom for horse riders and asked for some thought to be given to reducing the erosion of the path surface from flowing water. The Conservation Manager suggested drainage works might be incorporated with work on the car park surface. The SttB confirmed she had raised the issue of the car park surface with the Operations Manager who had indicated that drainage issue was more complicated than it appeared (although the Trust had not looked at drainage issues nearer the bridge). The Trust would be putting more stone down in the car park once the weather dried up. Mr Hancock said he would be happy to walk the route with someone.

13. Other Information

Mr Rouse commented that there was a pothole in Hancock’s Lane and suggested use of a rotovator for improving tracks including the one to the Mill Pond.

14. Date of next meeting

20 March 2024.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Signed.....M Wilkinson (Chair)
20 March 2024