

Meeting of the Castlemorton Commons Co-ordinating Committee

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 14 November 2018 8.00pm

Present: Lionel Bartlett, Phil Birley, Ann Brennan (standing in for Med Snookes), Mick Davies (Chair), Matt Gardner, Peter Hancock, Don Lupton, Julie Moore, Chris Rouse, Keith Stevens, Barbara Wilkes, Sue Windle.

In attendance:

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

1. Election of Chair

The Secretary to the Board took the chair. On the proposal of Mr Hancock, seconded by Mr Lupton, Mick Davies was appointed Chair unopposed.

2. Apologies for Absence

Mr Davies took the chair. Apologies had been received from Med Snookes.

3. To receive the report of the meeting held on 9 May 2018

The minutes were approved by the meeting and signed as such by the Chair.

4. Committee membership

Roger Gillard had resigned. Birtsmorton Parish Council had nominated Ms Julie Moore to take his place and Mr Davies welcomed her to the meeting. Mr Davies recorded a vote of thanks to Mr Gillard for his work on the Committee.

5. Improving Communications

Stella Bunn told the meeting about a Facebook page she had set up to improve communications in the Castlemorton area. It was intended for everyone to use. There was also a separate group (members had to be identified Castlemorton residents). It was agreed that this was a helpful idea and suggested that it should be named "Castlemorton Community Group".

6. Matters Arising

Update British Camp Reservoir

The CEO said that Severn Trent had been in contact with MHT. They had changed their engineering consultants and it appeared they were starting the

design and planning phase again. MHT had given them copies of the Malvern Water Acts and reminded them of the commitments to maintain a minimum flow to the stream. Mr Bartlett asked for a contact name for Severn Trent. The CEO said he would check this with Severn Trent and forward the contact details if they were happy that they should be shared. **DB**

Mr Davies asked if the Committee could have a copy of any communication which Mr Bartlett sent. The CEO said that the Committee should be reassured that Severn Trent's plans would have to go through the planning process, so everyone would be able to have an input at that stage.

7. Report from Malvern Hills Trust

The CEO reported:

Charity Commission Scheme:

Draft proposals had been given to the Charity Commission. The public consultation had been delayed. In response to a question, the CEO confirmed that no further details would be circulated for consultation until the Charity Commission's views had been obtained. Mr Lupton said Castlemorton Parish Council thought they ought to have been involved at an earlier stage. The CEO said that there had to be a framework which was acceptable to the Charity Commission on which people could comment.

Fires and fire breaks:

There had been a significant fire during the summer at West of England Quarry, started by a barbeque. 10 fire appliances attended. There had also been a number of smaller fires on Castlemorton Common around Eight Oaks, one outside The Poplars, a smaller one near the Eight Oaks turning off the Gullet Road and another on the bank above Eight Oaks Cottage. There was a suspicion that this fire might have been started deliberately.

MHT had contacted its insurers and the Fire Brigade about cutting fire breaks. Both had advised that fire breaks should not be cut during hot weather.

Interventions such as this could increase the level of risk.

It was pointed out by Mrs Hughes that the problem stemmed from scrub encroachment over the years. The CEO said that this was a result of lower levels of grazing. MHT would be carrying out some scrub clearance work over the winter and stock needed to be introduced after clearance to keep the vegetation down. He asked for suggestion for areas to be targeted.

8. Report from MHT Conservation Manager

The Good Neighbours' Guide had been delivered to around 20,000 people in the area. If anyone had not received a copy, please let MHT know.

Scrub clearance had started on 1 September. About 5ha had been cleared so far on Hollybed and Castlemorton Commons.

Stock numbers had been fairly consistent. Mr Gardner said that 1 cow had been killed on the road, and another had been hit. There had been a

significant number of dog attacks on the spine of the Hills over the summer. In one incident, a husky-cross dog had attacked a number of sheep and chased the flock onto Mr Weaver's property where the dog was shot. The police had been involved. Two other sheep had been killed, and a number of others attacked.

Castlemorton Commoners Association (CCA) had submitted a number of questions. Ms Brennan said that one of the stated purposes of the committee in the 4 Cs' constitution referred to monitoring capital works carried out under the HLS Scheme and stocking levels.

The Conservation Manager explained that the Castlemorton Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement ran from 2010 to March 2020. Every year, payments were made for the same management tasks to be carried out, the majority of which were achieved by grazing. About £50,000 worth of management was delivered by grazing and MHT had in place management agreements with local people who received payments according to how many animals they grazed. Other forms of management were delivered by MHT. In relation to funding capital work: for the first 3 years, additional money for capital works (predominantly scrub clearance) was secured, after that MHT had to compete with others for a share of a limited budget. This year, Natural England confirmed that they had no extra funds to pay for capital works, so this year's scrub clearance had been funded by MHT (partly from the reserve MHT had kept back within the HLS budget). Ms Brennan said that a lot of residents were concerned about scrub encroachment and it was useful to understand what work the Trust was carrying out and how it was funded. This was not something which was reported at every meeting and she wondered if a template could be provided with the details updated at each meeting. The Conservation Manager was happy to provide a map of the planned works every November.

JB

In relation to stocking levels, the CEO said that the Trust was the land owner for the purpose of the HLS Scheme and the Trust monitored whether the graziers were complying with their agreements. The HLS Scheme specified desired outcomes, and it was up to the Trust to arrange for those outcomes to be delivered.

Ms Brennan referred to the setting up of the Committee as a "box being ticked". The Conservation Manager said that where there was an HLS Scheme involving common land, it was necessary to involve other interested parties, in some way. Ultimately, it was Natural England's role to monitor delivery of the agreement, but stakeholders, through the committee, could contribute to a dialogue about delivery of the Scheme.

Ms Brennan asked how the work linked to the Five Year Plan. The Commoners felt they would like to contribute when the plan was reviewed at the end of its current term. Mrs Wilkes thought a lot of people did not know much about the

HLS Scheme. In response to another question, the Conservation Manager said that there were no grants for the SSSI as such. Their management was part of the HLS Scheme. He offered to run a walk for Castlemorton Commoners Association and the 4 Cs' members.

It was not clear what would happen in relation to the grant schemes after Brexit. Some information about the Basic Payment Scheme was contained in the Agriculture Bill but nothing about HLS.

Mr Davies said figures relating to the grant schemes were contained in MHT's annual accounts (although not detail about the individual contracts) and the Conservation Manager agreed to provide the figures for the HLS Scheme again when he ran the walk.

JB

Ms Brennan and the Conservation Manager to agree a date.

AB

Securing the Future of the Commons was tied in with the Charity Commission Scheme. There would be a separate consultation in due course in relation to this, but the project could not go forward at present.

There was a separate HLS Scheme for the Southern Hills which also expired in March 2020.

9. Improving 4 Cs' meetings

Mr Davies said that the discussion so far seemed to be a good basis for improvement. Mr Lupton said the talk arranged by CCA by Jenny Phelps (Foundation for Common Land) envisaged landowners and graziers working together towards a common aim. He was also surprised about some of the comments which had been made about the 4 Cs at that meeting.

Mr Lupton thought the 4 Cs' constitution needed changing. Ms Brennan said that the same issues cropped up in the minutes year after year. She was anxious to ensure that agreed suggestions were actioned.

Mr Rouse suggested that Facebook might be a way of passing information on between meetings. Ms Brennan asked if the 4 Cs' minutes could go onto the web site as a draft.

The CEO suggested everyone should re-read the constitution with a view to discussing it at the next meeting. It was agreed to set up a working party to look at the constitution and make some recommendations. The group could also give some thought to ways of reporting back after meetings.

Mr Davies said he would be happy to participate and would put forward some dates for a meeting. Other offers were received from:

Ann Brennan

Barbara Wilkes

Sue Windle

Don Lupton

Mr Smallwood said he thought that only people on the committee should sit around the main table during the meeting. He also asked about non-committee members speaking. Mr Davies said that taking comments from members of the public not on the committee was at the discretion of the Chair. Mr Howick commented that as the 4 Cs had no resources, it was up to the bodies which formed the committee to take the actions and report back in a way that was visible.

10. Commons Register

Miss Brennan had inspected the Commons Register held by Worcestershire County Council. It was not being updated. The Secretary to the Board said that keeping the register was a statutory responsibility of the County Council and anyone who wanted to update the details relating to their holding should contact them. The rights of common attach to the land.

However it was clear that when properties changed hands, the County Council was not always being notified. Ms Brennan said that she would pursue the matter with WCC.

AB

11. Incidents/byelaw breaches

The CEO said there were continuing problems with groups of young men in cars causing damage to the Common off the Gullett Road. He asked everyone to report any ongoing incidents to 101. Upton police had been helpful in the past about coming out in response to reports. He asked if people could also notify MHT of any incidents which had been notified to the police. The Conservation Manager said that one of the individuals had been given a formal warning. There was a discussion about whether there was a way the Trust could create a barrier to prevent cars driving onto the Common. The Committee did not consider the problem sufficiently serious to warrant taking any action. Review at next meeting.

12. Stock visibility/casualties

This had already been mentioned. Mr Rouse pointed out that when the grass was cut by the road, the regrowth attracted the stock.

13. Reports from CCA

CCA membership had increased following the talk by Jenny Phelps. The AGM would be held in January. Ms Brennan said the CCA hoped to keep the interest going and she thought there would be a group of volunteers willing to work on the Common.

14. Reports from other represented bodies

Castlemorton Parish Council had formed a working party to review the proposals in the Charity Commission Scheme. Mrs Windle reported that clearance of scrub on Coombe Green Common had started, both mechanical and by hand, and the plan for 2019 was to keep on top of the regrowth.

15. Information and Any Other Business

The Conservation Manager said that MHT had demolished the building on the 4 acres of land (which was not part of the common) purchased by MHT at Golden Valley. The field would be re-fenced, and a water trough might be installed. The graziers would be consulted to see how it could be best used. MHT would consider putting up a small replacement building which would be constrained by planning guidelines.

Mr Davies had received some additional questions from a resident:

In relation to installation of cattle grids:

Has anyone dug out and re read the notes and will [MHT] tell us how they are going to overcome these objections this time around? The CEO responded that consideration had been given to what could be learnt from the last attempt to install cattle grids and the Trust was in contact with those who were involved last time around.

Why does it take over 7 months to publish their financial accounts? The CEO assumed this referred to the Trust. The year end was 31 March and the audit process took a couple of months. The audited accounts were considered by the Finance Committee in August. They were then approved at the November AGM in accordance with the Commissioners Clauses Act. The draft accounts were in the public domain from August.

The last question was about putting telephone wires underground at Huntsbridge and Flapgate Lane. The CEO said that was not a matter within MHT's powers. MHT had asked the AONB to put sites forward to get lines put underground, but the utility companies' budget for doing this was small and applied to all protected landscapes, so there was a great deal of competition.

The CEO agreed to write to the AONB and raise the matter again. **DB**

Mr Hancock had asked about the footpath at the end of the Common by Welland where a pond overflowed in wet weather. The CEO had inspected and would take action to try to remedy the problem. **DB**

16. Date of next meeting

15 May 2019

The meeting closed at 10.03pm