

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

Castlemorton Parish Hall

Wednesday 27 November 2024 at 8.00 pm

Present: Andy Sayers (Acting Chair), Peter Hancock, Matthew Gardner, Keith Stevens, Barbara Wilkes, Susan Windle, Simon Yates.

In attendance:

From Malvern Hills Trust (MHT): CEO (arrived 8.15), Secretary to the Board, Conservation Manager, Governance Change Officer.
3 members of the public

1. Election of Chair

On the proposal of Simon Yates, seconded by Keith Stevens, Mike Wilkinson was unanimously elected as Chair for 2024-25. Since he was unable to attend this evening, Andy Sayers was nominated as Acting Chair for this meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Phil Birley, Jeremy Hubbard, Janet Hughes, Chris Rouse, Mike Wilkinson.

3. Committee membership changes

Jeremy Hubbard had replaced Rosemary Powell as the representative for Castlemorton Parish Council.

4. Report of meeting of 20 March 2024

On the proposal of Peter Hancock, seconded by Keith Stevens, the report of the meeting of 20 March 2024 was approved unanimously.

5. Public Questions

There were none.

6. Matters Arising

The goalposts funded by Castlemorton Parish Council had been erected; the Committee recorded its thanks to Simon Howells.

7. Update on Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Castlemorton

The Conservation Manager (CM) reported all was working well. The Delivery Group had met a couple of weeks prior to this meeting to discuss how things were going. The Government had recently increased the payment rates to this scheme nationally and the Group was pleased to see the efforts of graziers and MHT on Castlemorton Common more adequately supported.

Matthew Gardner said that the Castlemorton Common Association (CCA) had had recent discussions about the responsibilities of residents and landowners of properties surrounding the common. The Association was going to write to them to remind residents that it was their responsibility to maintain their boundaries and not that of graziers, and that the residents would be responsible for any injury to livestock that resulted from them not doing so. The GCO said that she had recently spoken with a solicitor regarding the Bill who might be able to come up with a form of words for this communication. She advised that fencing against the common was a matter of local custom and practice.

Mr Gardner queried whether all scrub capital works had been completed, since he had learned that Defra had just temporarily suspended projects involving capital works. The CM confirmed that the works had indeed been completed.

8. Report from Malvern Hills Trust

The Governance Change Officer (GCO) reported that following the public consultation on the MHT Private Bill during the summer, the Board had held a series of workshops and Special Board meetings to consider the responses. Around 500 pieces of feedback had been received, including from organisations, and the Trust wished to thank all those who had contributed. The Board had voted on 17 October, with 17 in favour and two against, to lodge the Bill with Parliament, and this had happened on the day of this meeting, 27 November. The Bill would be published online the following day, with hard copies being available for purchase at the Trust's offices from 4 December. The Trust would continue conversations to resolve any questions or queries from stakeholders; the Chair of the Board was happy to meet with individuals or groups. The Bill might pass through Parliament in as little as 12 months, but it was more likely to take 2-3 years. It was not yet known whether the Bill would go first to the Commons or the Lords; if there were petitions, it was likely that it would have to go to Select Committee.

The CEO arrived at 8.15, having attended a reception for MHT volunteers, and was introduced to committee members, this being her first meeting.

Andy Sayers asked whether there had been any major changes to the draft Bill following the consultation. It was confirmed that these were:

- a proposal to fence for animal health reasons had been dropped, since it had not been supported by commoners;
- Named trustees would be appointed to act as liaison points with levy-paying areas;
- The drafting of the proposed General Power had been improved, clarifying how and when it might be used;
- the proposal for a membership scheme had been dropped and replaced by the idea of a supporters' group; this would not be part of the Trust governance;
- there would be a six-month break after temporary fencing had been used;
- language had been strengthened to reflect concern about licensing activities.

Barbara Wilkes referred to the reference to 'language around licensing' and asked whether this meant licensing as in grazing. The GCO thought that there was no reference to 'active graziers' in the Bill – there was reference in the byelaws to anyone interfering with the animals that were legitimately on the common – but she said she would check.

9. Report from the MHT Conservation Manager

- Vegetation levels across the commons were looking fairly good for the time of year; this year's condition assessment was overdue. Grass cutting works delayed from last winter had now been completed; this was the cutting of the large, coarse, unpalatable *Deschampsia* grasses. Scrub works had been intermittent so far this winter, dodging the periods of heavy rains. Scrub work so far had taken place at: Berrow Downs, the junction of Gullet Road and Gloucester Road, the mire off Hancocks Lane, and beside the car park adjacent to Welland, ahead of resurfacing works here.
- Tree safety works were due to start soon. The CM advised that local people might see contractors taking down trees, mainly ash, at Pink Cottage and Hollybush Roughts.
- Hollybed Common – on 10 October contractors had harvested maize in fields belonging to Fair Oaks Farm. Unfortunately, this had taken place at night and during wet conditions causing damage to the common and tracks and distress to local people. The police did attend. Subsequently, the CM had taken legal advice on these accesses and met with the farm owner who had agreed to undertake repairs to the common. Both parties were

searching for any paperwork on any access rights over the common to Fair Oaks Farm. The farmer had stated that he wished to move to a less intensive use of his fields and so the occurrence of large machinery being used in autumn/winter would hopefully become a thing of the past. The CM had directed him to Malvern Landscapes staff who might be able to help with that transition.

The Governance Change Officer and a member of the public left the meeting at 8.45 pm

10. Stock casualties

Two sheep were known to have been killed on the common in the last two months.

11. Report from Castlemorton Common Association (CCA)

- CCA had provided input on commoners' rights to the MHT Private Bill consultation.
- A social supper had taken place in early autumn and had been much enjoyed by all.
- The Association's AGM was due to take place in January and would be advertised in the usual way.

12. Reports from other represented bodies

- **Welland Parish Council**

Peter Hancock updated the Committee on the progress of the path project at the car park at the edge of Welland, along the common and across the bridge towards Barbary Cottage. The work, which did not seem unduly challenging, was out to tender. It was likely to be done in two stages, because some of the funding was only available during the current financial year. There was a further footpath project improving access to the common from Rosebud Meadow; the Parish Council was waiting for Malvern Hills District Council to approve Section 106 funding. It was hoped to progress this project within the next few months.

Recent scrub clearance carried out by the Trust had been very helpful. It would be useful to have clearance on the other side between the bridge and Barbary Cottage, perhaps in a couple of months. The CEO added that on a recent Trust walkabout extra water bubbling up had been discovered, perhaps due to a spring or a burst pipe. This had been reported to both Severn Trent and the Environment Agency, but neither had been interested.

- **Coombe Green**

Susan Windle reported that Simon Howells had been able to get onto Coombe Green during the autumn; this had been funded by local fundraising and the Parish Council. It was hoped that he could do the same next year. A few sheep had returned to the common, which was very welcome. A volunteer group had started up and had done two days' work, with 10 volunteers attending on the second occasion; this was helping to manage brambles.

14. Information and Any Other Business

Barbara Wilkes advised that there would be orienteering taking place at Coombe Green and Hollybed on the day after this meeting from 5-7 pm. Matthew Gardner said he would advise graziers via their WhatsApp group.

15. Dates of next meetings

Wednesday 19 March 2025

Wednesday 9 July 2025⁴ – summer outdoor meeting

Wednesday 26 November 2025

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Signed..... Mike Wilkinson, Chair
19 March 2025