

Westleton Common Advisory Group

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 15th October 2024 at 7-30 pm in the foyer of Westleton Village Hall

Present; David Rous (DR), Julian Alexander (JA), John Bebbington (JBe), Nick Shearme (NS), Joyce Burtenshaw (JBU), Amanda Freeman (AF), Ian Webber (IW), John French (JF), Barry Banks (BB).

1 – Apologies.

Chris Freeman (CF).

2 - Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 22nd July 2024.

Agreed correct.

3 - Matters arising not on this agenda.

NS confirmed that UK Power Networks had cleared the “high-rise” vegetation on the common below the power lines.

4 - Replacement of Secretary

Ian Webber will take over the secretary role from 1 January 2025, JBe will stand down on 31 December 2024. They will meet shortly to begin the handover (which will be quite straightforward). JBe will edit the 2024 Annual Report.

5 – Membership of group.

JBe suggested that the group should seek a replacement member of the group when he stands down at the end of the year. There are no formal restrictions on membership but JBe argued that there is a strong case for replacing him with someone who is not a member of Westleton Parish Council. He believes it is helpful to maintain a reasonable balance between parish council members and the wider community. Group members will consider options over the next couple of months.

6 – Community and Conservation Fund - grant application.

Suffolk and Essex Coast and Heaths National Landscape have offered a grant of £700 from the Community and Conservation Fund 2024-25. This will help cover the cost of clearing the cliff in compartment 13. This will allow nesting sand martins to return and expose underlying geology considered important by GeoSuffolk.

JBe will ask Ian Haines to formally accept the offer on behalf of Westleton PC. JBe will also report on progress to Suffolk and Essex Coast and Heaths and arrange for the payment of the grant.

7 – Collins clearance work.

DR reported that the contractors had completed the clearance work on the “sand martin” cliff and the bank on the right of the path leading up to Black Slough. A lot of cleared vegetation had been left on the top of the latter bank. The digger used was too heavy to access the top of the bank safely.

It could be left in place, but this could pose a fire risk in the summer. As the material broke down it would also over-enrich the underlying soil. So, it would be best to remove the cut material. There is a working party on the coming Saturday (19th October) when DR, NS and others will assess the problem.

There were also a couple of reports that access to the Black Slough steps was now inconvenient from the common. It is not clear how serious a problem this is so the situation will be kept under review.

8 – Car park repair.

NS and CF have spread the granite chips on the Mill Street/Bakers Lane car park. NS will order a further 10 tons of chips to repair the surface of the “container” car park.

9 – Seating bid.

Suffolk and Essex Coast and Heaths National Landscape are looking to “*replace existing/install new seating at key location(s) to give people support and encouragement to explore and enjoy the National Landscape*”. We have been invited to apply and have done so. We have not yet heard if our bid has been successful.

JBe had to submit the bid fairly quickly without full consultation with the group.

However, the group confirmed that it was happy with the seats he had requested.

The three seats requested were;

Replace the damaged perch seat adjacent to the main path in compartment 1 (North Common).

Install a new rustic bench adjacent to the path near the entrance to the North Common in compartment 3.

Install a new perch seat near the GeoSuffolk board in compartment 13. This would give a view of the newly exposed sand martin cliff.

10 - Suffolk Naturalist Meeting.

This meeting was held in Westleton Village Hall and on the common on Saturday 21st September 2024. JBu is a member of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society and attended the meeting. The society members were very pleased with their day and were impressed with the common and with the facilities available in the hall. They thought there could be 100 species of lichen on the common. As she attends more meetings of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society JBu will see if they can offer more help with surveys of the common.

11 - Suffolk & Essex C&H working parties Oct to Dec 2024.

These working parties will be held on Tuesday 29th October and Tuesday 3rd December 2024. NS will ask Ian Haynes to order portable lavatories. JBu will arrange the refreshments on 29th October and JBe on 3rd December. We will be asking them to clear more gorse. DR and NS agreed that the areas to concentrate on are in compartment 7 and 8 focussing on the track leading from the lower to higher sections.

12 – AOB

JBe will not be able to attend the working party on Saturday 19th October. He asked if others could make a note of the work done and numbers attending and, if possible, take a few “before” and “after” photos. JBu and others agreed to help.

DR and NS will remove the fire warning signs in early November.

NS pointed out that this will be JBe’s last meeting of the advisory group. He first joined the group in 2014 and became secretary about a year later. NS thanked him for all he has done. In reply JBe thanked NS for his kind words; he had enjoyed working with the group, but it was now time to call it a day.

13 – Date of next meeting

To be held in March 2025.