

## **Background to the Purchase of Westleton Common.**

Barbara Caines who was Chair of Westleton Parish Council at the time of its purchase, and who incidentally did much of the hard work in securing the funding for the purchase, has provided some notes about the background to the purchase.

In January 2002 Ready Mixed Concrete (RMC) advertised that the Common in Westleton was for sale. The land had been used during the last war for the extraction of gravel, many of the runways on the airfields in this part of East Anglia were constructed using this material. More recently gravel extraction had ceased and the Common had been left to mother nature to repair the damage caused by the extraction.

Rumours began to circulate in the village about potential purchasers, the strongest of which was one that the area could be purchased for recreational purposes such as motor bike scrambling, which would have been detrimental to the wildlife of the area. The Parish Council were very concerned and called a Public Meeting at which many views were given, the meeting ended with agreement that the Parish Council should try and seek ways of purchasing the Common to safeguard its future.

The Parish Council offered RMC through their Agents Fenn Wright the sum of £75,000 for the purchase. After a time the offer was accepted and the Council then set about the task of trying to obtain funding for the purchase through the Heritage Lottery Fund. This involved a tremendous amount of form filling and verbal negotiations with the Funds offices in Cambridge, helped by the services of Mr D Turner from Birketts solicitors of Ipswich. After about 18 months the Council was informed that the application had been successful.

Before the negotiations and completion of purchase, a further complication arose in that it was necessary to renew the Countryside Stewardship agreement with Defra, if we had waited until the purchase was complete we would have lost the Stewardship payments. Mr John Davis from Suffolk Coastal District Council who with help from Suffolk Wildlife Trust had been managing the Common, drew up a new management plan that was accepted by Defra.

In August 2003 a further public meeting was organised where initial arrangements were made so that people could be involved with helping to manage and maintain "their Common". A Steering Committee was formed and work began on the Common on 29 November 2003. Since then regular work parties have been held and several local people and other experts from Suffolk have helped us to improve our knowledge of what is on the Common.

The following Press release was issued in summer 2003:

After many years of hoping that Westleton Common would one day belong to the village, thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund this dream has now come true. Westleton Common consists of 49 acres of gorse and heather and is a natural habitat for much wildlife, and is home to one of the largest colonies of silver studded blue butterflies in the country. The Parish Council with the help of Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the RSPB, both of whom are very keen to assist, will help with the improvement of the Common, which in recent years has been very neglected. Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Coastal District Council have been most supportive in offering financial help to cover any shortfall and have also promised to assist in the management.

During the last war thousands of tons of gravel were extracted from the Common to build runways for the many airfields in the area. It is hoped, in the years ahead to enhance the Common with footpaths, a car park, and possibly a picnic area, but much work will need to be done to clear overgrown bushes etc., with we hope volunteer labour, to encourage which, we will request the parishioners to give their ideas to improve the Common.