

## Westleton Common Advisory Group

### Minutes of meeting held on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at 7-30 pm in the foyer of Westleton Village Hall

Present: Nick Shearme (NS), David Rous (DR), Roy Jones (RJ), Julian Alexander (JA), Joyce Burtenshaw (JBU), John Bebbington (JBe).

1 – *Apologies.* Andrew Turner (AT), Amanda Freeman (AF), Chris Freeman (CF).

2 - *Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021.*

Agreed correct.

3 - *Matters arising not on this agenda.*

In response to a question from DR JBe replied that he had had copies of emails confirming that Pam and Alan Hargreaves had received a “top-up” payment to cover the cost of refreshments for the Saturday morning working parties.

4 – *Emergency access onto common.*

4a – *feedback from Westleton Parish Council.*

At their meeting on 25 October 2021 Westleton Parish Council accepted the advice of the Advisory Group:

***Extracted from unapproved minutes of WPC meeting on 25 October 2021  
21/134 Common***

*The draft notes from the Common Advisory Group on 20/10/21 had been circulated together with a communication\* from John Bebbington (acting as the Secretary) relating specifically to a proposal originally looking at providing a possible second access onto the Common. **\*In the interests of openness this letter is reproduced here at Appendix A to these minutes for public consumption.***

*It was noted that the Common Group had come down in favour of replacing the existing two wooden posts on site with secure lockable drop-down posts in the same position so as, if need be, to provide access for emergency vehicles. However, the vegetation adjacent to the path would not be cut back nor any widening carried out of the path.*

*A vote on this recommendation was then taken from around the table and it was **unanimously agreed** that this approach should be adopted. At the same time, support was given to carry out works to level the bund leading from the rear of the concrete pad onto the path connecting with Black Slough – this being in line with advice given by Suffolk Fire & Rescue to facilitate access to the rest of the Common by emergency vehicles. These measures will now be put in place on the basis that entry from the Reckford Road (adjacent to the layby) will be retained as being the main recognised emergency entry point.*

4b – *Meeting with Suffolk Wildlife Trust (Sam Hanks and Graham Hart) on 22 Nov 2021.*

*This meeting has been arranged. The only comment we have in advance of the meeting is advice about the material generated when the bund leading from the concrete pad is levelled; “My only comment on the below would be to be careful of where the bund material is spread (so not to adversely enrich soils in sensitive areas) and to be cautious of the risk of disturbing reptiles when doing this. ....  
Sam Hanks, Wilder Landscapes Manager”.*

(See **appendix 2** for the notes of the meeting with Suffolk Wildlife Trust)

Other feedback.

Email from Natural England.

Dear John,

Thank you for sending such detailed information relating to the emergency access to Westleton Common.

I have forwarded the information to Ed Boyle who is the RO in relation to the SSSI (as cc'd above) and we can both confirm that the proposed works have no impact on either the SSSI or the current HLS agreement.

With regards

Kim Pearce

Agri Environment Senior Adviser

Natural England

As we see it NE has no problem with our proposals and further discussion is not needed.

JBe wrote to East of England Ambulance Service and has had no reply. Our proposals do not make things worse than they are and offer some improvement, so we see no need to pursue this.

DEFRA/Environmental Stewardship Operations – York have commented;

*“Thank you for your email on 27th August. In your email you enquired if the widening of a path outlined and illustrated as 'access B' along with lockable drop-down posts is accepted. You also asked if it's acceptable to level off a concrete pad area.*

*In response I refer to page 154 of the 4th ELS Environmental Stewardship Handbook which states under point 5.5.3 Public Right of Way: "As a condition of joining the scheme, you must maintain existing public rights of way on your land and abide by the relevant legislation. Further information on public rights of way, including the duties of landowners and occupiers of land can be found at [www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/rightsofway/default.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/rightsofway/default.aspx)."*

*From this, if the path maintains this access, then it won't impact on the ES agreement. From the information you have provided, there is interest in widening the path for emergency service access. This would be in the interests of rights of way. In addition to this information, if the widening of the path affects any HLS options / management of the land, then that may impact the delivery of the scheme, thus could be at risk of being reduced in area & recovered on. If the widening of the path does not impede management of ES options, then this will be fine. This answer also relates to your 2nd question regarding the concrete pad. If this levelling doesn't impede the management of the ES options on the land, then this would be acceptable.”*

Summary;

None of the interested conservation and advisory bodies has raised any objections to these proposals.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue have previously said that, whilst additional access would be helpful it is not essential. At our meeting with them in 2020 it was agreed that *“If it is not practical to provide two routes on to the Common then one route would be acceptable. That single route could be the Reckford Road track. There is sufficient circulation and manoeuvring space on the concrete pad and adjacent clear areas to ensure that congestion is minimal.”* These proposals do offer a second route onto the common, albeit one that will require them to open the two locked drop-down

posts and drive through undergrowth that we must manage to permit this emergency access.

East of England Ambulance Service have not commented but what we propose does not make the current situation worse and does offer some improvement.

JBe asked if further consultation with the Westleton Community was required. The consensus among the advisory group was that these proposals had been fully explained on the Westleton website in both the minutes of this group and of Westleton Parish Council and had been put on the Parish Council notice board. These minutes will also be published. The group felt that this was sufficient public consultation and that the equipment required should now be ordered.

JBe also reminded the group that we had planned to make the key to the gate from Reckford Road available in a secure key box. This is now not considered necessary as, in reality, the emergency services can cut through the existing lock which would probably be quicker and easier than using a digital code which may not be available in the first vehicle to arrive on the scene.

*5 – Outstanding work to be done.*

*5a – Report of any meetings with contractors.*

NS, JA and DR have met with Holmes Contracting (DR and NS) and Collins Farming and Forestry (JA and NS), a meeting with Conservation Works has been arranged for Wednesday 17/11/2021 (*meeting took place as arranged and was attended by DR and NS*). They have outlined or will outline the work required, clear birch and gorse and grub out to bare earth, and the areas to be worked on – near Ralphs Mill and on the Noddle. Photographs of the areas affected have been sent to all 3 potential contractors (**appendix 1**). JBe will also send the photos to Ian Haines for Westleton Parish Council and make sure all members have copies. (Done 17/11/2021)

On the Noddle this will improve sight lines and make access to the seat easier (possible!).

*5b – JB conflict of interest and self-removal from appointment process.*

As noted previously, JBe will not take part in the process of identifying and appointing contractors to avoid any difficulties when he does the Westleton Parish Council audit for this financial year.

When he receives the quotations NS will pass them on the Ian Haines; this is a decision for Westleton Parish Council. JBe suggested that NS, JA and DR should have an input to the decision-making process as they have met the contractors and can assess suitability as well as costs. NS and JA will be involved anyway as they are councillors.

*5c – Meeting with owners of Ralph's Mill and Ralph's Mill Cottage.*

NS and DR have met with the owners of both houses on this site. They have explained what is proposed and identified the boundaries. A strip of vegetation will be left on the boundaries to prevent vehicles accessing the cleared area. These strips will be cut back when the vegetation on the cleared areas has started to regenerate. Both sets of owners are happy with what is proposed, we should notify them when the work is due to start.

*6 – Beehives on common.*

NS has discussed this issue with the people who will help with the managing of the beehives. We are sure everything will be satisfactory, but we will monitor the situation when the hives have reactivated next spring. It has been suggested that the

hives could be turned to face the open fields rather than the common to redirect the bees. This will be considered next spring.

*7 – Management Plan from April 2023.*

The Rural Payments Agency have implied that it is too early for them to make any judgements about 2023. We do need to start work on this after we have had advice from Natural England and Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

*7a – feedback from SWT/NE*

We will begin discussions with Suffolk Wildlife Trust when we meet them on 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

Natural England have commented “*Hi John, Thanks for getting in touch and great to hear you are looking into future management of the common. I am copying in Kim who is our Agri-environment senior adviser. She will be able to advise you on your next steps and put you in touch with an adviser from our team if needed. All the best with your application/extension. Hannah*” JBe will contact “Kim” for advice after we discuss this with SWT.

*8 – Maintenance work advised by GeoSuffolk – see note below (you have the photos referred to).* The report of the Survey by GeoSuffolk is available on the Westleton website see [News » Westleton \(onesuffolk.net\)](https://www.onesuffolk.net/news/2021/11/16/geo-suffolk-report/) click on the link to the GeoSuffolk report under Suffolk County Geodiversity Sites (CGS) Condition Monitoring. The photos referred to are photos 2, 3 and 4 in the report.

The objective of this clearance work is to enable people to see the features referred to more easily. This work is seen as relatively straightforward. DR suggests that it could be done on one of the Saturday working parties or he could pop down and do it himself.

*9 – AOB.*

RJ asked if it was possible to identify the site of the wartime searchlights on the common. DR commented that there is no record available. JBe will try and contact local historians to see if they can help.

DR asked if one safety audit a year was sufficient. We think one is sufficient, but we will ask SWT advice when we meet them

*10 - Date of next meeting.*

DR suggested that unless anything crops up, we do not need to meet again till March 2022. We probably do not need a full meeting to discuss any issues with awarding the contract.

Next meeting to be arranged for March 2022.

**Appendix 1** – see item 5a.

Photographs of areas to be cleared sent to 3 potential contractors.



**Appendix 2** – see item 4b.

Meeting with Graham Hart and Sam Hanks of Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Date of meeting 22/11/2021 on Westleton Common.

Attending for Westleton Common Advisory Group; Nick Shearme (NS), Julian Alexander (JA), Joyce Burtenshaw (JBU), John Bebbington (JBe).

NS and JA explained the plans for improved emergency access. They emphasised that when the two wooden posts are replaced with drop-down posts there will be no visual difference from now, the path will not be widened, apart from tidying up of the edges when necessary, so there will be no loss of habitat. In the event of an emergency vehicles can drive through the undergrowth. We recognise that we will need to ensure that developing trees do not prevent vehicles passing through the undergrowth.

NS and JA also explained the proposal to level the bund leading from the concrete pad to the rest of the common beyond compartment 10. This would essentially involve widening and levelling an existing footpath to a width of about 3 metres.

Graham Hart and Sam Hanks were quite comfortable with these proposals and saw no difficulty. They did ask us to ensure that we did no damage to reptiles and other wildlife in the vegetation that would be cleared when the bund was levelled.

The group then walked most of the rest of the common.

Points from discussion were;

We should report all wildlife observations to the Suffolk Bio-Diversity Service. These do not need to be part of a formal survey – *ad-hoc* observations are welcome.

We need to set up a system to do this.

We are warned to expect a reduction in the amount of HLS grant available and that the grant will be offered over a shorter time period than in the past.

The clearance work planned for this winter, and for which tenders are under consideration, on the Noddle and near Ralph's Mill was discussed – no difficulties were raised.

Areas and paths that need clearing, such the bank in compartment 14 facing Ralph's Mill and overgrown areas in compartment 8 and the maintenance of the site of the pond in sector 1 will be included in the updated management plan. We should also aim to keep the central grass area in compartment 7 clear whilst maintaining the peripheral bramble and gorse which forms invaluable habitat.

We hope to meet with Graham Hart in December 2021/January 2022 to begin the discussion on the Management Plan. We also need to raise one issue we overlooked – the frequency of safety audits; is one a year enough or should we do more?