

Westleton Common Advisory Group

To Ian Haines
Clerk to Westleton Parish Council

From John Bebbington
Westleton Common Advisory Group

By email
24/10/2021

Dear Ian

Emergency Access to Westleton Common

At our meeting on Wednesday 20/10/2021 the Westleton Common Advisory Group agreed to offer this advice to Westleton Parish Council.

The two wooden posts on the footpath leading from the storage container and parking area on Mill Street onto the Common should be replaced with secure drop-down posts in the same position. These posts should be lockable with the access key kept in a secure cabinet mounted at the entrance to the path. The code to the key cabinet should be issued to the emergency services only (Suffolk Fire and Rescue and East of England Ambulance Service). This code should not be available to the general public. The locks on the posts should be of a design that can be cut with bolt cutters if the first emergency vehicle on site does not have access to the code to the key cabinet.

The vegetation adjacent to the path should not be cut back and the path should not be widened.

In the event of an emergency the posts can be opened either with a key or by cutting the locks and the emergency vehicle can drive through the undergrowth onto the common.

It will be necessary to ensure that the vegetation does not become so dense as to inhibit the emergency access; this would be done as part of normal maintenance in line with the management plan.

The advantages of this approach are;

Existing width restriction is maintained.

No disturbance of habitat.

No interference with exiting management plan.

Access by large vehicles would only be required in an emergency so non-emergency access is inhibited.

The bund leading from the rear of the concrete pad onto the path leading to Black Slough should be levelled in line with the advice from Suffolk Fire and Rescue to facilitate access to the rest of the Common by emergency vehicles. All soils resulting from this levelling should be redistributed on the common so that the seed bank can rejuvenate.

All that is proposed is that two existing posts are replaced with others effectively doing the same job in the same location and that a soil bund is levelled and the resultant soil redistributed on the common. We should notify Natural England, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Rural Payments Agency of these proposals before the work is commenced. In our view they are unlikely to find them unacceptable.

Previous proposals to widen this path to facilitate easier emergency access have caused significant concerns and distress among many people who live in Westleton and who value the Common. In our view these proposals do not significantly alter the path and will not make unauthorised access more likely but will be of value in the event of an emergency. Nevertheless, it is important to consult the wider community before any work is undertaken.

Regards

John

John Bebbington

Westleton Common Advisory Group