

# Assley, Hareley, Inglestone and Hawkesbury Commons Management Group Meeting

**Date:** Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2019

**Location:** Badminton Road, Room 2020

## 1. Welcome and Apologies

Attendees:

South Gloucestershire Council - Caroline Gaze, HLS Delivery Officer  
- Matthew Lipton, Commons Officer  
- Tina Rainey, Management & Maintenance Manager  
Badminton Estates - Jonathon Bury  
Natural England - David Collingbourne  
Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust - Tim Bevan  
Hawkesbury Parish Council - Sue Hope and Chris Harding  
Ward Councillor - Pat Trull  
Stroud District Council - Rozelle Jachowicz

## 2. Actions from previous meeting

**Action 1:** Carried forward. ML to locate black poplar, north of Lance Coppice and record on NBN Atlas.

Other actions complete by CG:

Asked graziers for their contact details and displayed these details on the common.

Contacted Wood Cottage regarding volunteering.

Sent newsletters to Hillesley as well as Hawkesbury Parish Council. No success with Wickwar Parish Council.

**Action 2:** CG to pass news to PT who will communicate with Wickwar Parish Council.

Shared South Gloucestershire public rights of way contact details with TB

Shared biodiversity survey records with RJ

## 3. HLS Update 2019:

CG thought that the commons were looking much better, definitely an improvement in some areas and great to see the cattle out. Majority of comments from locals regarding the cattle were positive.

- Scrub work

Small areas of scrub clearance by volunteers is going well and will be continued this winter. A budget is set aside to do more scrub clearance this winter continuing with the [Scrub Management Plan](#). SH queried who organises the volunteer scrub works. CG confirmed it is her. PT queried how people volunteer.

**Action 3:** CG will write an article regarding volunteering for PT, Hillesley and Hawkesbury Parish Councils.

- Grazing

In 2019 there were 2 graziers. Confirmed that all cattle are off the common 18/11/2019.

**Action 4:** CG to review the Bovine Tuberculosis plan that graziers sign before putting cattle out and update with welfare policy where required.

CG looked at installing cattle grid to separate commons and relieve issues of TB but cost prohibitive.

Everyone in agreement that cattle have done a great job.

- Maintenance

CG has carried out maintenance to fencing next to cattle grids.

Orange End cattle grid has been an issue because it has filled up with debris washed from the steep hill and cattle walked over. CG has had it cleaned by Streetcare and put it on the schedule for 4 clear outs per year.

- Weed control

CG has done control works to the thistles in summer 2019. Ragwort not been a major issue this year but likely to need some control next year. CH mentioned that thistles have been an issue, highlighting an email from a resident regarding creeping thistle seeds. TB mentioned that the creeping thistle seeds were not likely to be viable therefore the resident needn't worry too much about thistles growing in their garden.

TB recommended cutting twice a year, in July and September. DC thought that 20% could be cut under the HLS. SH mentioned that a few years ago residents complained about weeds and graziers had their money cut by DEFRA. JB highlighted that residents were living against a common in the countryside and issues such as seeds could be expected. ML expressed concerns that some residents expect an amenity mown common but that is not how common land should be managed. CG confirmed that she has had negative feedback about thistle control as the thistles are very good food source for some birds. TR commented that communication regarding what we are doing and why is key.

**Action 5:** CG will look into thistle control again next year. Timing of cutting is essential.

PT queried whether cattle eat brambles and thistles. TR commented they do eat the young. DC commented that the numbers of grazing animals is important, trampling is an important part of scrub control and TB confirmed that trampling is important for *Ranunculus Ophioglossifolius* (*Ran Oph*).

- Wildflower enhancement

CG mentioned that the wildflower works had gone well this year. 5ha enhanced but it is a long term project, we may not see results for 5 or more years. Seed was collected from Yarely Meadows providing cost effectiveness and local provenance. CG confirmed rolling was the plan for autumn but the ground was too wet and it would cause damage. Rolling is planned for the spring. Another option is to scarify instead of power harrow which is less aggressive. TB suggested that sheep are great for re-seeding. General consensus that the common is too wet for sheep. RJ mentioned that Cotswold AONB have a brush harvester.

CG discussed the temporary fencing to keep cattle off Assley and Hareley for the summer. Fencing was removed in October allowing cattle to graze. This is an experiment to assess the impact of cut and collect with aftermath grazing. SH raised concern about the fencing setting a bad example when other people who have installed fencing have been enforced against. ML confirmed this fencing is within the law. CH confirmed one resident was concerned mentioning that the west fencing has been removed but the east side and the pedestrian gate has not been removed. Perception is that this is a permanent fence. SH queried whether the value of this fencing been evaluated. CG confirmed it is a long term and needs evaluating over years.

**Action 6:** CG to improve signage on fencing next summer.

**Action 7:** CG to assess the fencing and remove the east length of fencing if it causes an issue.

- Monitoring update

CG updated that wildflower monitoring has been completed this summer. Avon Wildlife Trust have been in touch offering a group of volunteers to do biodiversity monitoring. This is very positive news and CG will continue to liaise with them. CG confirmed that Richard Lansdown has done *Ran Oph* surveys showing a good germination and some fruiting bodies present. *Tolypella intricata* did very well, particularly in the pools along the track to the Lodge. TB queried if the benefit was due to cattle trampling and is very keen for more cattle down there. DC queried whether there were recent records of fairy shrimp presence.

**Action 8:** CG to query fairy shrimp records with Richard Lansdown.

#### **4. Communications**

CG has written monthly articles for Hawkesbury and Hillesley parish magazines, put posters onsite, sent letters to neighbours and rights holders when relevant and updated the out of date website [Hawkesburycommon.co.uk](http://Hawkesburycommon.co.uk). CH queried website, not sure many people know about it. CG confirmed about 200 unique users each week and the contact form has been well used.

**Action 9:** CG to promote the [Hawkesburycommon.co.uk](http://Hawkesburycommon.co.uk) website through parish magazines.

CH mentioned that he would like as much notice as possible about works. RJ said that communication is a great but is very time consuming, resources are stretched and it can be difficult to reach everybody.

#### **5. Byelaws**

CG mentioned that she is in the very early stages of looking at updating the byelaws, principally to update the charges. SH queried the consultation process. ML confirmed there is a very set process that involves consultations and community involvement.

#### **6. Update from Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust:**

Network Rail funding is helping to enable the long term project of woodland improvement at Stoney Bridge Wood, removing western red cedar. Restocking will be via natural regeneration. Weeds will be controlled and it will be deer fenced. SH is pleased that the grant is coming through now.

- Ash dieback

There is 70 % canopy cover of ash here with ash dieback prevalent. Initially targeting 1 tree lengths worth from roadsides, car parks, houses first, then public rights of way. Some wood is removed, some will have to be left on site. Action is being taken early before the ash becomes too dangerous to fell. TB confirmed the rare single leaf ash has got ash dieback. There will be some benefits for the rides to be widened as they would have been historically. ML asked about communications. TB confirmed they have signs up but will put news in the parish magazine. CH confirmed deadline for articles is 15<sup>th</sup> of each month.

#### **7. Queries from Parish Council:**

- Commons Gate removal.

CH confirmed that it used to happen to mark the end of the grazing. CG is looking into costs for installing a catch to hold the gates open if this is more practical and cost effective. SH confirmed this is a good idea.

- SGC Communication to commons residents of management intentions.

CH feels it needs to be in the Parish Council news with plenty of notice. CG confirmed there is a brief article in the news with more detail on the website. SH suggested information could be put on the Parish website.

- Removal of the temporary fence to Assley Common.

See earlier minutes.

- Temporary armoured cable laid across the common by Openreach.

CG followed up with the SGC's Project Officer who said that it currently wasn't a council issue. CH confirmed there is temporary armoured cable across the common, laid 3.5 months ago. There are problems due to new safety regulations and additional poles are needed. CH just making the group aware of the issue. JB pointed out the need to ensure communications with the landowner.

- Update on the GWT land swap at the lodge.

Land swap of the area of nursery and timber yard with north Lower Wetmore. TB has contacted the Open Space Society for their advice. There has been an informal consultation and there is a formal consultation process to go through. Hard copy of details is going to be displayed in Hawkesbury Upton shop.

#### **8. Encroachments – M Lipton**

None to report

PT asked about the car park at lower woods being a breach as this is within designated common. ML confirmed that is now being regularised as part of the land swap that GWT are doing.

#### **9. Commons post HLS:**

- Stakeholders' priorities for future management of the commons, post HLS.

PT queried why is the funding going to stop? CG explained that HLS is a 10 year funding project covering CG's position and the work on the common and it will end in March 2021. All maintenance, improvements, monitoring and running costs are funded from the HLS. There is currently no other income.

CH questioned whether some management of the commons was SGC's legal obligation. CG explained that SGC have the Scheme of Management which means that SGC have to '*maintain and keep the open space...in a good and decent state.*' (Open Space Act 1906). This was discussed with SH, JB, TR and CH. TR agreed with CH that this is a very vague, open to interpretation. The purpose of these meetings is to drive forward the vision for the future. TR explained that the climate change emergency announcement may be of benefit, to open other funds. The development of the Green Spaces Strategy may help raise awareness of the commons. DC highlighted that SGC have a legal obligation to manage the SSSI.

**Action 10:** CG to update the post HLS scenario document to ensure that management of the SSSI is highlighted as a legal obligation for SGC.

JB queried whether HLS could be extended. DC explained it is unlikely to be extended. DC explained that there will be a gap between HLS and Countryside Stewardship funding. There will also be a lot less money if we are successful with a Countryside Stewardship grant so there will be a big funding gap going forward. JB queried whether there is an agreement between the land owner and council historically.

**Action 11:** CG to investigate council's records for historic agreements between landowner and SGC.

CH and SH mentioned that a lot more people are using the common now than 10 years ago due to increased development in Wickwar. There is potential to reach out to this community for help. TB pointed out that all the graziers can claim Basic Payment Scheme payments even if they don't graze the common. The common needs to be maintained or they will all be impacted financially. Those claiming payments have an obligation to help maintain the common.

**Action 12:** all to respond to CG by **13<sup>th</sup> December** stating their preferred scenario post HLS. Please respond with details for how you would like the common to be managed and views regarding how to achieve this.

**Action 13:** CG will record each of the stakeholders' responses and cost the scenarios.

#### **10. AOB - All**

CH raised that a resident has put their foot through a plank on a footpath bridge over the stream at the north of Inglestone Common. Query about footpaths bridge and whose responsibility.

**Action 14:** ML to get details of the broken bridge and pass on to SGC public rights of way officer.

#### **11. Date of Next Meeting**

Likely to be Spring 2020.

**Action 15:** CG to send round date of next meeting nearer the time.