

# Bringsty Common Manorial Court

## Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017 at Whitbourne Village Hall

### Present:

Allan Corder (chairman), Tom Fisher (vice-chairman), Mike Harrison (treasurer), Sue Long, Paul Friend (Brockhampton PC), Carol Friend, Anne Evans (Whitbourne PC), Cllr. Nigel Shaw (ward councillor), Jenny Creek (clerk)

### 1. Apologies for absence

Tim Phillips, Peter Hall, Claire Hall

### 2. Chairman's report

Brackenburn will be coming soon to assess the common with regard to this year's crop of bracken. Allan will be away so Paul will stand in for him. We want them to harvest as much as possible.

All other matters are to be discussed under New Business later in the meeting.

### 3. Treasurer's report

A cheque for £10000 was sent to add to our interest bearing deposit account. This was returned because that particular type of account is now closed for further deposits. If we want to deposit further amounts we will have to open yet another account but most are offering insignificant amounts of interest.

We received £3909.10 from the RPA in December but apparently this is for the first half of 2016. In June we should receive a similar payment. We then have a total of £6704 still to be paid in two instalments possibly in December this year and May next year. As far as we know, there are no further funds due.

Looking at last year's figures and, to be prudent, allowing for Dave Manton's work to be paid for, we need around £8500 per year to pay everyone. This assumes that only one cut per year will be made and there is no significant rise in costs. It also does not include maintenance work on Drover's Pond. There is still £2469.82 left in the maintenance fund. One further assumption is that the bracken removal remains free of charge.

We are continuing to get late invoices from our contractors. Hugh Davis has just been paid for cutting the football pitch for the last time in 2016.

Spreadsheet accurate (including cheques not cashed) as of 23/01/2017 statement.

It was noted that Dave Manton has not submitted invoices for the last two years.

#### **4. Official Business**

None

#### **5. Parish Reports**

##### **a. Ward Councillor - Nigel Shaw**

All issues are covered by agenda items

##### **b. Brockhampton - Paul Friend**

The parish council have finally succeeded in appointing a clerk. This has been a lengthy process.

##### **c. Whitbourne – Anne Evans**

Whitbourne parish council have also recruited a new clerk.

Anne also informed us of a concert to be given by Bromyard Choral Society at 3.30 p.m. on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2017 in the village hall.

#### **6. Public Questions**

None

#### **7. Matters Arising from Minutes of last meeting**

##### **a) constitution**

We have been trying to draft a new constitution for some time. A final draft was sent to Herefordshire County Council (HCC) for comment. Eventually they responded with a generalised template for all commons. The sub-committee was reconvened and decided that our draft was preferable. This was conveyed to HCC in November. Having received no response to this Allan contacted George Thompson in late December. Apparently it had been overlooked but would be progressed. Nothing more has been heard. We will issue a deadline on the understanding that if they do not respond then our version will be deemed to be final. We need to have a valid constitution in place for our negotiations with Natural England (NE). Allan asked for the committee's approval for this approach. This was given.

**Action: Allan to write to HCC again.**

##### **b) Website**

This is still work-in-progress but is progressing well. The BCMC section of the site already contains The Commoner and it is possible to upload meeting agendas and Minutes. The back page of The Commoner contains contact details for the committee. Allan considered that these should not be available in the public domain. This was agreed. Tom said he would ensure that the back page was not uploaded.

### **c) Scrapes/splashes management**

Allan and Jenny attended the training day organised by the Pooling Together project. The basic message was to leave nature to take its course but, should any maintenance be required, this should be done in the autumn.

### **d) Gospel Oak**

*i)* display board

This has been completed

*ii)* lack of communication from HCC

This is mainly a case of poor internal communication within the council and Allan felt that this is not an issue for us.

### **e) Mowing**

*i)* budget

Mike estimated that our total annual spend is approximately £8,500 per year. Given the uncertainty of future funding, Allan felt that we should maintain the status quo at present. We have discussed double mowing and ride cutting but we do not think it is a good time to change the current situation. Nigel wondered if the rides are wide enough, the consensus was that they are. Allan questioned the need for as many rides as we currently have and asked the committee to think about this for future discussion. Allan suggested that in the absence of Peter Hall, we should acknowledge the suggestions he has made on this subject but which must be held in abeyance until circumstances change.

*ii)* approach to contractors

Allan was actioned to approach our contractors in order to make formal plans for their forthcoming work. He has not done this with either Dave Manton and Hugh Davies as we have not yet made a formal decision on what we want to do with the cut grass (see next item).

### **f) hay disposal – possible incineration**

Nigel said that the soft opening of the waste-to-energy plant is scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> March. It is being managed by a separate contractor working on behalf of both HCC and WCC. He will talk to them at that time to see if they can be persuaded to take our hay. Allan asked Nigel to inform us of the outcome of this. There do not seem to be any other options because of the costs of collecting and baling. Bromyard Downs have a similar problem. This item is ongoing.

**Action: Nigel to report on outcome of meeting with contractor**

### **g) Drover's pond maintenance**

We had previously agreed to consider improving the water depth a bit and removing some of the excess growth. Tom invited John Poyner to quote for doing a bit of further excavation on part of the pond. He has accepted the job and his quote is reasonable so it has been agreed that he will do the work in late August/September for least impact on wildlife and surrounding vegetation.

#### **h) Scrub work**

Paul has spoken to Ashley who has agreed to do the work next week in various areas of the common.

**Action: Paul to report on results at next meeting**

#### **i) Replacement trees on Jubilee**

Three small-leaved limes have been planted. One adverse comment has been received to the effect that they are too close to the existing trees, but Allan said they were intended to replace the felled chestnuts so were planted in the same area. They appear to be thriving. Mike proposed a vote of thanks to Allan who donated the saplings and arranged the planting.

#### **j) Dormouse project**

Claire being absent, Paul reported that they are trying to get booked on a course so that they can get their handling licences, and that he has made 50 nest boxes. He said that we might be able to claim the cost of the boxes from Natural England, who pay £10 per box, which is the normal purchase price if bought ready made. We have made successful claims in the past for similar projects. This is not dependant on any existing agreement we have with NE. Allan agreed to contact Charlotte Morgan to see if we can claim this grant.

Tom asked where they will be sited. That is up to us but Rob Hemming will come and help choose the best places.

**Action: Allan to contact Charlotte**

#### **k) Owl boxes**

A representative of the Hawk & Owl Trust is coming to discuss this. In Peter's absence (on business) Paul has agreed to meet her.

**Action: Paul to report at next meeting**

#### **l) Hedgehogs**

Nigel has spoken to Sacha Norris of the Hereford Wildlife Rescue who has agreed to re-home one animal with us. We will have to supply a hog house which will need to be sited in deep scrub to prevent attacks from badgers. Nigel has suggested the scrub below the Live & Let Live. Nigel also suggested that she might be a suitable guest speaker for our AGM. This met with approval. Nigel will set up a date for the release which is likely to be in May. Paul has offered to make the housing.

**Action: Nigel  
Paul to make the hog house**

### **8. New Business**

#### **a) Dogs and dog fouling**

There have been a couple of complaints about dog fouling. Allan has talked with George and with other people as to what can be done about it and has come to the conclusion that there is no real solution to this. HCC will not deal with dog poo bins. Tom proposed putting notices in the Commoner/Off The Record/on the website. This was approved. Nigel

suggested a survey of the most affected areas (i.e. near the car parks) to get an idea of whether there really is a problem. He volunteered to do this, and Tom offered to assist.

**Action: Nigel and Tom to do the initial survey and report at the next meeting  
Tom to arrange for a notice in the Commoner and Off the Record**

#### **b) Woodland Management scheme**

We have been encouraged by NE to apply for a grant. This has to be done through a Forestry agent who draws up an action plan which is then presented for consideration. There is a grant available for the cost of the action plan, amounting to approximately £1000. If the application is successful, this could result in a further grant of around £1000 p.a. for 10 years for 10 hectares of woodland. Allan is uncertain about the value of going through this process. If the application were to come from HCC it would be more cost effective as they could reclaim the VAT, which we cannot do. However, George seemed disinclined to pursue this idea. Various opinions were expressed about the merits or otherwise of making an application. Paul felt that we should be concentrating our efforts on applying for HLS grants. However, having an official plan will show that we are giving it some thought. It was suggested that we should apply for the grant for the management plan and, if successful, we will look at the proposed actions to decide whether to proceed further. This was agreed.

**Action: Allan to convey our decision to Dan Wenzek (Forestry agent)**

#### **c) Speed limit on A44**

Requests for changes to speed limits have to come from parish councils. The list of applications for speed assessments is very long so not much is likely to happen soon, unless there is a fatality. We have had an offer of help with publicity from The Open Spaces Society, who support a 40 mph limit, which is apparently a national recommendation for all roads across common land. The chairman felt that we have nothing to lose by trying. Nigel will put in a request for a speed survey to be done. He has also written to the Safer Roads Partnership in West Mercia who are the enforcers of speed limits in the region. Tom offered to write a press release for the local press. This was accepted. Allan asked what involvement could be expected from the parish councils. Anne said that it will be considered at the next Whitbourne parish meeting but will not necessarily be accepted. Paul says he will put it to Brockhampton council but their priority is their application for a speed limit outside the school. The results will be reported at our next meeting in May.

**Action: Tom to write a press release**

#### **d) Enforcement issues**

*i) pub drainage*

HCC has been discussing action with the landlord

*ii) Primrose fencing and abandoned car*

There have been several comments about these. George has been informed and has written to both parties. These issues are now in the hands of HCC. We will support the council on any action they may decide to take.

### **e) New Stewardship scheme**

This is a very complex matter and there was a long discussion about all the various aspects of our upcoming application for future funding. NE have given us some advice about which grants to apply for but they are largely related to grassland management and grazing, which is really not practical. Tom thinks we should concentrate on managing the Common as we have been doing. Green hay is also not practical as the ground has to have been disturbed in some way, either by animals or ploughing. A concern was raised that we would not get any grant if we did not do it. There are other grants we could apply for but there is such a long list to choose from. We need an up-to-date map of the areas of grassland. The Rural Payments agency produces these but it is very difficult to obtain a copy. Charlotte Morgan (NE) has said she will try and get us a copy of the latest survey. We are relying on Charlotte to keep us up-to-date with the application process, which does not yet appear to have been finalised.

Nigel suggested a sub-committee to look at and decide which grants we think we should apply for. The sub-committee would consist of Allan, who would chair, Tom, Paul, Nigel and Peter Hall. They will meet soon. This was agreed.

**Action: Allan to apportion the work to the sub-committee.**

### **f) Possible moves to sell the Common**

There have been rumours about this possibility but we have been assured by a member of the council that he is not aware of any such policy decision.

## **9. AOB**

Jenny reminded the committee of the change of date for the AGM. This will now take place on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

Anne gave her apologies to the committee that she will be unable to attend the next meeting due to a clash with Whitbourne parish council. Nigel might also be absent.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was then closed.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held in the small room of Whitbourne village hall on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017 at 7.30 p.m.