

# Minutes of the Bromyard Downs Common Association

## General Meeting

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017

7:30 - 9:30 Falcon Hotel Bromyard

### Committee Attendees

James Hawkins (Chair)	Lauren Smith (Secretary)	Ben Hiley (Vice Chair)
Clive Brazier (Treasurer)	David Boddington	David Grant
Nicki Howard	Gill Churchill	Hannah Welsh
Nigel Shaw	Karen Rock	Ray Pullen
George Thompson	Nic Hinchcliffe	Jo Stoddart

### 1. Welcome & Apologies for absence;

Jan Densham

Graham Cooper

*\*The Chair stated that due to the interest from interested parties in attendance, regarding the proposal of fixed fencing, the agenda would be flexible to ensure everyone would have time to put forward any thoughts and points.*

### 2. Action points ongoing from previous meetings

- 2.1 **Bi-Annual meeting of interested groups** next meeting to be arranged in the spring ensure we have a clear agenda and plan communicated to all groups to discuss areas of management and how best to accommodate all user group needs. – Meeting has been arranged for 5 April 2017 – **Action closed**
- 2.2 **Management Plan focus group** – A second meeting took place on 8 December to complete the review of the management plan  
Attendees Hannah, James H, Lauren, Nicki and Jan, Ben & Karen  
The management cards have now been fully reviewed. Hannah will now complete the cards with plans for the coming year and distribute to the committee and volunteer group. **Action closed.**
- 2.3 **Interpretation Boards** – Nic to take forward the design of the board to be placed in Warren wood on NT land to advertise the WWII bunker - **Ongoing**
- 2.4 **School poetry and art competition** – James has made initial contact with the schools; the competition is scheduled for the spring – **Ongoing**
- 2.5 **Wheelchair access to Downs** – Stones by Brockhampton School are to be moved to allow a wider access for wheelchairs – Hannah and Karen to take this forward
- 2.6 **Check to see where Parish council minutes are lodged for reference** – Karen confirmed the minutes are placed on the council website – **Action Closed**
- 2.7 **Sculpture trail** – see project update
- 2.8 **Interpretation Board Quotes** – See project update.
- 2.9 **Exit Strategy** – Roles and Responsibilities added to project update

## **Minutes of the last meeting approved**

### **3. Finance Update**

Current Balance = £10,420 credit – Clive confirmed the caravan wayleaves amounting to £1294.71 has been received.

### **4. Parish Council Update**

- It is hopeful that a new clerk to the Parish Council will be appointed shortly
- Parish Council minutes are posted on the Parish Council Website

Note – To allow members of the public to ask questions prior to the vote on taking forward the proposal to look into using permanent fencing as a management tool on the Downs Public member's questions has been brought forward before committee discussion

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

*My apologies if I have not captured all the questions posed accurately or noted names, please feel free to forward any further questions to the Chair, Secretary or Project Manager.*

**Q** - Alison Dobbs - BTC – What are the legal grounds for enclosure of the common?

**A** - The proposal for permanent fencing, in no way encloses the common in any sense, full rights of access for all will still be maintained - Due process will be followed and if agreed a proposal will be set before the Secretary of State (SoS) for permanent fencing to allow safe conservation grazing on the common for management purposes

**Q** – David Hendry – Commons Resident – Are enough people aware of the proposal and what we are intending to do? -

- Would like to see a motion put to the people of Bromyard
- Feels there is confusion over the proposal and would like to see further clarity as to exactly which area we are considering fencing
- What are Hereford Councils thoughts on the proposal?

**A** – There is a set process to applying for fixed fencing which will include permission from Hereford Council followed by a full public consultation or interested parties and groups. Details of the consultation process can be obtained from Hannah if anyone would like a copy.

**Q** – At what point will know which area we are proposing to fence?

**A** – Maps showing the areas we are considering were made available at the initial information evening but currently there is no firm plan or timescale; the current project will end on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

**Q** – The 1951 Scheme of Management should be the overriding guide to the management of the Downs, how does this sit with the current proposal?

**A** – All current guidelines will be followed. An application to permanently fence a common is a legal process and it will be up to the SoS to make the ultimate decision. If sufficient objections are raised the SoS could refuse consent.

**Q** – Bob - The steering group minutes are not currently published, can they be made available and if so where could they be found?

**A** – Not sure if we can publish but, as it is discussing public money they probably should be available. **Action;** Hannah see if the minutes can be published, and if so place on a separate page on the Bromyard Downs Website.

**Q** – Phil - Commons Rights Holder – Will Commons rights holders still get first access to graze flocks on the Downs?

**A** – Commons Rights Holders will always have first access to the Downs, any conservation graziers will only be allowed to graze in agreement and by borrowing current Commons grazing rights.

**Q** – Nigel Shaw - There will need to be careful management as there could be more graziers interested, Summer grazing will be more intensive and we should be take care to get the balance right between the grazing for scrub clearance and management of the Orchids

**A** – There will be management sheets for the different areas and types of grazing to make sure that grazing is only carried out at the optimum time to ensure good management of the existing flora and fauna on the Downs. It should also be noted that conservation grazing is a very low density grazing against normal grazing per hectare.

**Q** – Fred Clark Town Councillor – Will the Town Council be consulted?

**A** – All local councils and groups will be part of the consultation process.

**Q** – Costs of £60,000 have been quoted does this cover the maintenance of the fencing over the coming years. The BDCA will be taking on an enormous responsibility to maintain the fencing in the future beyond the current project with only limited funding.

**A** – There should be limited maintenance once the initial fence has been erected which we would look to last for the next 25 years, our original costings have only come to around £30,000 and if the proposal is accepted we would look to outside grants and funding to cover the costs of the project.

**Q** – Why are we looking to fence? is there a real need and will it attract graziers?

**A** - Grazing is the best way of managing the common going forward;

- Grazing creates a far more diverse natural mosaic of habitats than mechanical cutting ever could, and with the best efforts of the volunteers they are only have limited time and a day's work clearance on average only covers about ½ an acre.
- Hay cutting has become more difficult with people not wanting the hay which due to the locality of walkers and dogs is not of a good quality
- If we don't take action, we are looking at increasing costs to maintain the common with volunteers and contractors to try and keep the encroaching scrub at bay. If we just left the common, we would soon be looking at more scrub and less areas for people to be able to access and walk the common.
- We would also soon lose the orchids and fauna which visitors so enjoy if we did not actively manage the common.

- The Downs has become more and more populated with trees and scrub over the last 20 years if we don't act now this trend will continue.

**Q** – Several questions on the emphasis that the BDCA along with the Hereford Wildlife Trust appears to actively promote the Downs for wildlife and commons rights over users and recreational use of the Downs?

**A** – We can only reiterate that grazing is beneficial to the common and that it is the open spaces and diversity of the Downs wildlife that people come to see and walk;

- Unless there is active management the common will become over grown and people will be unable to walk or even access parts of the Downs.
- We are not trying to stop visitors using the Downs we realise that locals and visitors from out of town like to use the Downs and fencing will not stop access to the Downs there will be gates and access points at various points. It may mean that people will have to walk a 30/40 more metres but the Downs will still be fully open, access land for all visitors to enjoy safely.
- Noted that the National Trust the second biggest land owner in England's is actively managed by tenant farmers for the good of wildlife, livestock and recreational use; the three go hand in hand.
- We all have to give and take so we can utilise the valuable grazing tool to achieve a viable management plan for the ongoing management of the Downs

Dr Boddington noted how the active management of Stockings meadow by the Wildlife trust has become a haven for wildlife and fauna and consequently more attractive for visitors who are encouraged to enjoy the diversity of the area.

**Q** – If the fencing were to go ahead how far from the road would it be? – Noted that at one time there was a 15-yard area at the edge which could be utilised by travellers for overnight parking?

**A** –The BDCA were not aware of the 15-yard rule and would check the byelaws for the legality of the ruling;

- As to the positioning of the fencing it agreed it would be away from the road and where possible follow the natural bracken line along the edge of the current ditches hidden as far as possible within the bracken so as not to be too noticeable.

**Q** – It was asked what the BDCA would do if the application for permanent fencing was turned down.

**A** – Continue as before utilising, mechanical cutting and temporary fencing.

*\*Public question time was closed to allow the committee to discuss the proposal*

## **5 General Downs Management**

### **5.3 Fixed Fencing Proposal**

- 5.3.1 Karen posed the question as to why we were not proposing to fence the lower slopes but were concentration on the larger area on the top Downs which leant itself better to mechanical cutting?

The lower slopes have far more residential properties which makes it much more difficult to fence. Whilst we have been using temporary fencing on the top Downs it is proving labour intensive. The fixed Fence option once erected would be low labour intensive and a cheaper long term solution

- 5.3.2 We have already broached graziers but to date have had no takers. Should we ensure we have a viable number of graziers willing to graze once the fencing is completed before we commit to the expense of fixed fencing?

This is up for discussion and will be taken forward as part of the process.

- 5.3.3 Will there be a further breakdown of compartments within the perimeter fencing?

Again, this will be up for discussion as the process evolves as will be the access points and types of access gates and cattle grids

- 5.3.4 Possibly defer the proposal for 6/7 months so we can fully answer the following points

- How long will the fencing last 15-25 years?
- Will the BDCA be responsible grazier's sheep if we fence?
- Will the BDCA be responsible for maintenance of the fence?
- Nature is always evolving maybe we should allow the Downs to change?
- What will be the exact costs Capital and Maintenance?

Gill Churchill proposed that we defer the vote for 6 months until we can answer all questions posed, confirmed the legality of the process and held a further public meeting;

**Proposer** – Gill Churchill

**Seconded** – Karen Rock

Proposal - **Not carried 3 in favour 7 against**

Noted that if we were to proceed with the proposal, all these questions would be addressed prior to submission of the plan to the SoS.

- 5.3.5 Hannah confirmed "I am acting on behalf of Herefordshire Wildlife Trust"
- 5.3.6 Question asked re stocking levels and the risk that the fenced areas would be over stocked. James confirmed that stocking would be on a pro rata basis to the area fenced.
- 5.3.7 Proposal; to take forward some sort of fixed fencing as a tool for management

**Proposer** – James Hawkins

**Seconded** – Ben Hiley

Proposal to take forward a proposal for fixed fencing as a management tool for Bromyard Downs – **Carried by 7 votes to 3 against**

*Note - Two non-attendees with eligibility to vote had also voted in favour of the proposal.*

**Action** - Next steps will be to inform Hereford Council of the decision and start the planning and consultation rounds.

*\*Chair gave time for general public to exit the meeting if they didn't want to stay for the remaining items*

## 5.1 **Project Update**

- Publicity and Promotion Hannah has sent around the final draft for the new interpretation board to the committee for consideration prior to printing
- The new roof and structure should replicate the old carpark structure initial quote is for £1,500 – Nic has offered to supply timber for the construction from the National Trust, and noted that we should approach a local craftsman to quote for the construction
- Hannah needs help with identifying landmarks for the toposcope view from Warren Wood – Roger has offered to look with Hannah
- Still need ideas for the sculpture trail, Sheep tended to be the favourite
- There is a felled tree by Shepherds cottage and members asked whether this could be utilised for the sculptures in situ – Nic to ask permission as this is a NT tree
- Hannah is taking forward the plaque for the coronation tree
- Add tree planting for the Sapphire Jubilee to the next Agenda – **Action Lauren**
- Management plan cards have been updated for this year and distributed to committee members and volunteers for info
- A Coppice Hurdle making course has been scheduled
- History Society launch for the Downs is opening on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 11-1pm
- Final Project evening has scheduled for Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May between 6 and 9pm at the conquest Theatre and will be highlighting the work and achievements of the project alongside photographs and films

### **Exit Strategy**

- We need to consider the roles and responsibilities which Hannah currently completes, that will need taking forward once the project has ended;
  - Hannah to circulate roles list and where there are gaps against the role can members please contact Hannah to discuss the role and whether you would be interested in taking this forward.
  - Identify current members who may be interested in taking forward the Roles
  - Identify the areas of responsibility which may need some further training

## 5.2 **General Management**

- The pond incorrectly sited in Golf Lane had now been moved

- Probation workers have made a good job of maintaining the main car park and trimming around benches
- Noted that Hugh Davis has made a good job of removing branches and making safe the oak tree.
- Ditching clearance work along Buckingham Drive will amount to around £700. Must ensure the stumps are treated to stop grow back, but will need to check if spraying that this will not affect the water course.
- Noted that 'Ash Die back' has reached the Downs, this should not make any difference to the removal of ash trees if they are in the wrong place i.e. blocking a ditch.
- There were a lot of positive comments from walkers who were pleased to see sheep grazing on the common although there were also a few against. A grazing plan will be taken forward from next spring.
- The grazing areas for the whole Downs will be mapped and used on a rotational basis. With current grazing areas advertised on the web site and notice boards.
- Feedback was generally positive although it was noted that the current gates were too small for horses to access the areas; This will be addressed next time with access larger gates.

## 7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Question raised as to who is responsible for the white railings across the top Downs as it would be good to spruce them up with a coat of paint

**Action** – James to have a word with Balfour Beatty and establish responsibility

A big Thank you was extended to James from the committee, for all his time he puts into the Downs and the storage facility he allows on his farm.

### Date of next ordinary meeting

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017** – Falcon Hotel Bromyard 7:30 – 9:30

### Meeting Close

Lauren Smith  
 BDCA Secretary  
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<mailto:laurenc@smithaam.plus.com>

<b>BDCA Meeting Schedule for the coming Year</b>	
<b>15<sup>th</sup> March 2017</b>	<b><i>All meetings currently scheduled to meet at the Falcon Hotel Bromyard From at 7:30 to 9:30</i></b>
<b>AGM – Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May</b>	
<b>28<sup>th</sup> June 2017</b>	