

# Minutes of the Bromyard Downs Common Association

## General Meeting

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2016

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	Jan Densham	Hannah Welsh
Nigel Shaw	Karen Rock	Ray Pullen

### Public Attendees

Alan Grantham      Kath Morgan      Ian Raven      Andrew Symonds

#### 1. Welcome & Apologies for absence;

George Thompson	Gill Churchill	Graham Cooper
Nic Hinchcliffe	Jo Stoddart	

#### 2. Action points ongoing from previous meetings

2.1 **Bi-Annual meeting of interested groups** – Meeting took place on 18<sup>th</sup> October as an initial meeting to bring together the main Downs user groups to discuss issues and forward ideas on future management.

The meeting was contentious with a few attendees misinterpreting what the meeting was trying to achieve, focusing on specific issues such as fencing/grazing and dog issues.

**Action** - 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.

2.2 **Management Plan focus group** – An initial meeting took place on 9 November to review the management plan and map out further areas of work needed to complete this year and plan for next year;

Attendees Hannah, James H, Lauren, Nicki and Jan,  
Apologies Ben and Gill

The meeting did take longer than thought with only 50% of the management cards fully reviewed.

**Action** - Hannah to arrange a further meeting with the group ASAP and to include Karen R as a member of the focus group. Hannah circulated a list of jobs still to be carried out –copy attached

2.3 **Parish Council letter re quarry site** visit not yet received. However, the council do not currently have a clerk which may have delayed the action – **Action ongoing - monitor receipt**

- 2.4 **Proposal for BDCA to purchase and graze a flock** – After discussion it was agreed that at this time the proposal is not feasible although, we could look again in the future – **Action closed**
- 2.5 **Purchase of Tractor and Flail** – Completed Tractor and flail is now fully insured and taxed and is being stored at Warren Farm – Thanks were extended to Ben for his hard work in researching and finally purchasing the equipment – A tractor driving course will be arranged for interested volunteers – **Action closed**
- 2.6 **Interpretation Boards** – proposal to NT to ask if we could mount a board to show where the WW II bunkers are situated either in or just outside Warren wood – NT are considering – **Action ongoing**
- 2.7 **Schools Poetry competition** – James has spoken with both Brockhampton and St Peters schools who are both keen to take part. As the winter term is so busy suggest that this initiative is taken forward in the spring – **Action ongoing**
- 2.8 **University of Worcester and Malvern College volunteer days** – Graham Cooper has completed the necessary Risk assessments and health and safety requirements, and has already organised and completed a day with the college – **Action closed**
- 2.9 **Wheelchair access to Downs** – Hannah spoke with the footpaths officer who was less than helpful, basically saying we would need to flatten the Downs, Obviously not feasible.  
Karen who has experience in wheelchair use on the Downs explained it wasn't the Downs that was the problem but the ease for users being able to negotiate a safe passage onto the Downs.  
**Action** Karen and Ben to look at the access points and see what work is needed to improve access points to enable free access onto the Downs for less able users.
- 2.10 **Mechanical Cutting and Scraping of Bracken** to reseed with Heather –The deployment at Park Head of a remote control Robocut through the bracken was a great success leaving thick mulch, which was raked and cleared by volunteers. The resulting bare ground will be reseeded with heather in the spring. **Action closed**

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

### **3. Finance Update**

Current Balance = £9,762 credit – Clive confirmed the balance is already committed to planned work for the project.

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

- Currently the Parish Council do not have a permanent Clerk and the vice chair is also indisposed.
- The Parish Council would still like to visit the quarry prior to any decision on helping towards the insurance costs.
- An initial heavy duty notice board has been purchased and will probably be installed at the school to check how robust the construction is prior to purchasing further replacements for the remaining notice boards.

- James noted we are no longer included in the distribution of the minutes of the Parish meetings – Karen was under the impression that the minutes were posted on line on the parish website

## 5. Downs Management

### Project Update

- 5.1 Hannah has taken forward the purchase of a 'Toposcope' to be placed on the top Downs one of the high points; this will be commissioned in stainless steel and be placed on a stone plinth. Hannah has taken a photo of the view and has asked that someone point out all the landmarks ready to be etched in to the finished 'Toposcope'
- 5.2 The owl sculpture has been a great success with some visitors mistaking it for a real bird. We would now like to commission further sculptures to be placed either by the school or by Warren wood; Ideas put forward included sheep or badgers

**Action** - Hannah to select 3 or 4 possible sculptures, and identify positions, to circulate to the committee to consider.

- 5.3 Suggestions have been raised for a marker by the coronation tree plaque by Brockhampton School and markers to point out the racecourse. All to be linked to the main notice board plan. All agreed the plaque for the Coronation oak by the school was a good idea.

Concern was raised that the main notice board at the official carpark is not very secure as its too top heavy on the stand. As we have money left over to purchase further interpretation boards it was proposed that we purchase a new board for the main carpark and re-site the existing board securely at the school carpark.

**Action** - Hannah to research quotes for a new notice board for the next meeting.

## 5.4 Training

- A Tractor driving course for interested volunteers to be arranged in January
- The livestock checkers course has been postponed until next spring
- Risk assessment training planned towards the end of the project

- 5.5 **Permanent fencing application** – An initial consultation meeting had been arranged for the 22 November, but because of concerns raised that this was not enough notice for interested parties to engage, the meeting has been rescheduled for **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> December.**

To ensure the meeting is well organised and fully prepared to answer residents' concerns the following suggestions were noted:-

- Prepare a list of clear proposals with differing mapped options
- Present photographs of commons with fencing to be so all residents are completely sighted on what the proposals are and the options available
- Types of fencing available
- Options to prioritise and restrict areas to be fenced
- Possible timings and review fencing after a set period
- A list of the criteria and process which must be followed

- Reasons why the BDCA is considering the option
- The benefits to the Downs in reintroducing grazing
- Ensure both the Town and Parish council are fully sighted and aware of the proposals

Hannah and James pointed out that there are strict protocols to follow in making the section 38 application and all due process would be followed.

The BDCA undertakes to be honest and open with all residents and commons users in pursuing this action

5.6 Exit Strategy – To be added as an agenda item at the January meeting

**Action - Lauren**

### **General Management**

5.7 We are still waiting for further ditch clearance work to commence on the Downs. The work completed on muddy lane is working well

Other proposed sites for ditch maintenance work includes behind 'the Fox' and gullies beside the race course

Proposal put forward to apply to the parish council to clear the roadside ditches under the Lengthmens scheme. However, Karen noted that unfortunately the Parish council had missed out in applying for the grant (around £3,000) so no money will be available this year. James noted we would still make a request for help from the council.

5.8 James is meeting up with the Ponds Project manager to discuss closing the pond in Golf lane which was wrongly sited and have the old pond re-dug in the correct area.

Residents noted that this year has been particularly dry with areas which are usually wet drying out, which may be why some of the new ponds have still not collected water.

5.9 Quarry update – lease at £1 per year from Herefordshire Council and public liability insurance at approx. £ is now in place.

Local residents to the quarry are concerned regarding our future plans for the quarry. The current access track is the right of way of the local residents to their properties, they pay for and maintain the track; there is no other vehicular access to the quarry and the residents are concerned that this track should not be used for general vehicular access. Further questions were also raised as to why the BDCA took on the lease and for what purpose.

The quarry was taken on to maintain the area as part of the main Downs and ensure that no commercial business would take on the area. The lease covers a 3 year rolling year which either party (HC or BDCA) can pull out of after each year, giving one months' notice, preserving the quarry from commercial use for the next 3 years. Ideas have been voiced for its use for local groups i.e. Guides, Brownies but no proposals have been made and the groups mentioned have not been approached.

Other ideas have been; as a store for our equipment or a log store for the wood cut on the Downs.

Nigel Shaw as a councillor noted that the quarry was an orphan asset of Herefordshire council and the council had every right to lease or sell off the quarry to get the best price without consultation with local residents, and as owners of both the Downs and the quarry could easily install an access track for vehicles if they needed to. So the BDCA taking on the quarry has safeguarded the quarry for at least the next 3 years

The BDCA fully understand the local residents' apprehension and undertake to ensure they are fully consulted on any proposal for the quarries future use whilst the BDCA retain the lease.

- 5.10 There have been concerns over the current site for the electric fence erected for conservation grazing, mainly due to the access points not being adequate for some users.

The BDCA take on-board all feedback and will be looking at ways to improve the access points in future i.e. widen the existing gates, add further access points and ensure underfoot does not get too muddy to become a hazard to users.

We also need to ensure there are adequate warning signs to advertise the electric fence on the common to avoid any shocks to users and to ensure local communication avenues are used to advertise proposed fencing areas and timings.

One question was raised as to the conflict of interest by James Hawkins as Chair of the BDCA and currently as the only grazier to take advantage of the grazing on offer

When it was decided to try and re-establish grazing on the common we advertised for graziers to take up the opportunity, but received no takers. To kick start the project James donated some of his own flock as a trial which was initially set up as unobtrusively as possible behind the Malvern road houses. The success of the initial grazing trial has now been extended to the current area and we are hoping other graziers will now come forward to take up the opportunity to graze. Hannah confirmed that James makes no profit from the grazing and it was only with his support we were able to restart introducing sheep on the common, which prior to the last 'Foot and Mouth' outbreak was always a common sight on the Downs.

The BDCA would also note there are over 80 commons rights holders, of which James is one, who have the right to graze their sheep at any time on the Downs. In fact if all commons rights holders exercised their rights over 2,000 sheep could graze the common at any one time.

## **6 Public Member Questions**

It was brought to the BDCA attention that there are some residents who still do not see or receive updates about the project.

Hannah sends out quarterly newsletters to all residents and interested parties either via the registered e-mail list of contacts or by mail to those who have not registered an e-mail.

There has been no intention to miss anyone off, we have to the best of our ability added to and amended the e-mail list as we are informed of changes.

If anyone knows of anyone who has not received updates please let the Hannah or the secretary know and we will ensure they are included in future mailings.

## **7. Any Other Business**

- 7.1 Karen voiced concerns over the process used by the project steering group to feedback to the main BDCA committee –

The project steering group consists of the following regular members

James Hawkins – Chair	Lauren Smith Secretary
Hannah Welsh – Project Manager	Nicolas Hinchcliffe (National Trust Rep)
Evan Bowen Jones (HWT)	Ben Hiley – (Volunteer group Lead)
Graham Cooper (Area Rep)	Andrew Nixon (HWT)

There main objective is to steer the project as set out and agreed by the Heritage Lottery Trust. Any discussions which need BDCA approval are fed back to the BDCA at one of the regular meetings via Hannah or James. The Steering Group will take decisions within the Management plan but these will already be part of the agreed plan with the Heritage Lottery. It is not always possible within meetings to ensure all actions are fully agreed with the main committee we need to trust our Project manager who has been employed to manage the project to the satisfaction of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

There is no intention to push any major plans through without full consultation and disclosure to all main and interested parties.

If any member of the committee or a resident has any concerns or questions about the project or general management of the Downs they are very welcome to write to the BDCA via the secretary or contact the committee members direct.

- 7.2 To be aware, George Thompson has been in touch with James to apprise him that Welsh Water will be carrying out mains water works on the Malvern road. They do not need permission to work on the Downs and will probably be starting in December.
- 7.3 Reminder that our Christmas get together for volunteers and residents is scheduled for Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December at 7pm at the Falcon Hotel.

### **Date of next ordinary meeting**

**Tuesday 17 January 2017 – Falcon Hotel Bromyard 7:30 – 9:30**

## Meeting Close

Lauren Smith  
BDCA Secretary  
01885 488223  
<mailto:laurenc@smithaam.plus.com>

<b>BDCA Meeting Schedule for the coming Year</b>	
<b>17<sup>th</sup> January 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>15<sup>th</sup> March 2017</b>	
<b>AGM – Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May</b>	
<b>28<sup>th</sup> June 2017</b>	