

BLAXHALL COMMONS AND OPEN SPACES CHARITABLE TRUST

Minutes of Trustees' meeting

Saturday 29 January 2022, 2 Ship Cottages

Attendance

Andrew Derrick
Rosy Thornton
Mike Livesey
Karen Baker
Mark Oakley
Eve Rossor

1. Apologies: None received.
2. Minutes of last meeting: The minutes of the meeting of 11 December 2021 were agreed as correct.
3. Matters arising

NFU have insured Stone Common as part of the same policy as for Jasper's Pightle, with no increase in cost. The Trust needs to inform them when the Allotment Committee's insurance is due for renewal (September 2022). There is no reduction in premium for removal of the asbestos at JP.

Re Hon Secretary post - No approaches have yet been made to possible people who might take on part of the work of the hon. Secretary.

Charity Commission registration - Rosy has begun to complete the online registration form. The trustees present signed the required Trustee Eligibility Declaration.

Actions:

- **Eve to provide the original copy of the Trust Deed, with trustees' signatures, to Rosy.**
- **Rosy to scan these documents for attachment to the application.**

4. Stone Common update

Hedge planting. Three sessions had taken place, on December 4th and 27th and January 3rd. The application by Joy Shaw, Suzy Pearce, Rosy and Eve for the Tree Council's Branching Out Jubilee Planting scheme had been successful. Joy had obtained the trees from Swann's and planting is scheduled for 5th March at 1pm. Joy and Suzy will seek to involve local children and young people. The Trust will be paying upfront for the trees, posts and rabbit-protectors, and then recover the costs from the Tree Council.

Actions:

- **Eve to notify supporters of the date and encourage children and young people to join in.**
- **Eve to complete the costs form provided by the Tree Council.**

Management Plan. The Management Plan for Stone Common needs to be agreed by September (in line with the expiry of allotment holders' current licence agreements and the change in insurance cover for the allotment land). It was noted that in 2016 the Trust had commissioned SWT to survey and make recommendations for all the commons and the pit at the playing field, using a grant from Suffolk Coastal Council. It was agreed that the content of this SWT report in relation to Stone Common would form a useful basis for the Trust's Management Plan. The SWT report had been uploaded on the Trust's old website; however, this is no longer accessible.

Actions:

- **All Trustees to look to see if they have a copy of the SWT report.**
- **Rosy to ask Steve Smedley if he has access to a copy of the report.**
- **Rodney to be asked whether he would like to put together the first draft of a Management Plan, or would prefer merely to contribute to it.**
- **The Trustees will need to progress the plan in the near future: it should be a major agenda item for our next meeting.**

Allotments.

Sophie Martin, Secretary of the Allotment Committee, then joined the Trustees to discuss the future management structure the Stone Common allotments. It had been agreed that the licence fees paid by allotment holders should, from the next renewal date in September 2022, come to the Trust rather than going to the Parish Council. The question still to be determined was whether the Allotment Committee should continue to have a role in relation to all allotments after September, or whether its role should be limited to the Mill Common allotments, with the Trust managing the Stone Common allotments directly. There were arguments in favour of direct management by the Trust, especially if some broader uses of allotments are to be permitted at Stone Common (e.g. grazing; re-wilding), but it was felt that Stone Common allotment holders should not be deprived of the democratic representation of the Allotment Committee without their agreement. A letter should therefore be sent to all Stone Common allotment holders to ascertain their views. It was agreed to be desirable that fees for allotments at Mill Common and Stone Common should continue to be aligned. It was noted that the Allotment Committee needs to meet its insurance costs from the licence fees, and that the loss of licence fee income from the Stone Common allotments could mean that fees at Mill Common might have to rise slightly. If so, a matching rise in licence fees would be applied at Stone Common.

It was agreed that licence agreements can be renewed in September (possibly using a slightly revised form of licence to reflect the Management Plan, once this is agreed) for all currently worked allotments, but that allotments do need to be actively cultivated or (with permission) grazed. Tree planting or rewilding may be considered in other areas, again in accordance with the Management Plan. Non-compliance with the agreed use of an allotment should result in termination of the licence agreement.

Actions:

- **BCOS to write to the Stone Common allotment holders about the above management proposals, seeking their views in particular about the role of the Allotment Committee. Eve to produce a first draft, to be circulated amongst the Trustees for comment.**
- **Once these views have been ascertained, a letter to be written to the Allotment Committee, and also to the Parish Council, setting out what is proposed, together with a timescale.**
- **Eve formally to ask Sophie for Stone Common allotment holders' email addresses.**

5. Jasper's Pightle update

Management Plan: This was adopted by the Trustees (with thanks to Rodney and Andrew for their work on the final draft) and will be put on the website. It will be a standing item on the agenda, to check that recommended actions are being taken as appropriate.

Improvement work: Karen revisited the offer that had been made by a friend of Eve's to make a bench for the Pightle. Eve will follow this up.

Karen also suggested the creation of a covered area to provide shelter for volunteers working on the land, using the surviving wooden framework adjoining the concrete hard standing. Following a discussion, however, it was noted that the intention as set out in the Management Plan was to re-wild the area; it was agreed that the wooden framework, which is not sturdy enough to support a roof without substantial work, should be left to become overgrown with brambles.

Karen reported that she has uncovered privet hedging which she and Jasper planted along the road years ago. It was agreed that the Trustees should look to plant hedging in the gap which had been created to access for the asbestos removal, and at other places along the road if hedging plants are available. It was noted that Rodney may have some saplings available and it was agreed to contact him and enquire about this.

Action: Rosy to contact Rodney about possible hedging plants.

Work Party: A work party was scheduled for Sunday 13th February, from 2:00pm onwards, with the aim of removing wire from the area near the pig styes where the bracken remains uncut, and also the barbed wire from the north fence, and anywhere else it may remain. Bolt cutters or strong wire cutters and digging equipment need to be brought as the wire is partly embedded in the ground. It was agreed that the wire, once removed, can be cut into short lengths and stacked on the concrete for removal to the Recycling Centre. Hedge planting can take place on the same day, if plants are available.

6. UK Power Networks/National Grid: Wayleaves and easements

Rosy had applied some time ago to UK Power Networks to request that a wayleave or easement be formalised in relation to the electrical poles and wires along the road at the Pightle; she is currently chasing the matter up.

Rosy is also in communication with the National Grid about a wayleave or easement for the pylon on Stone Common. She reported that there is at present a wayleave agreement

in place, under which the National Grid are paying £500 annually; the next payment is due to come to the Trust in September 2022. The Trustees agreed that Rosy should find out how much the national grid would offer by way of a one-off capital sum for the grant of an easement to replace the current wayleave. This would be instead of the present annual payment. The Trustees agreed they would then consider what the best way forward would be.

Action: Rosy to contact National Grid about easement at Stone Common.

7. End of year Finance Report

The completed accounts for the financial year ending 31 December 2021 were presented by Mike, and formally approved by the Trustees. Rosy noted that Charity Commission will only require the Trust's accounts to be subject to independent auditing of accounts if the annual income exceeds £25,000.

8. Any other business

Mark reported back from the Parish Council meeting that Graham Bowles, the Chairman, had been approached by Mr Pugh, owner of the land at Mill Common. Previous attempts to build houses had been rejected or withdrawn, and Mr Pugh was keen to establish whether there was any development value in the land. He has suggested two new houses on the allotment land on School Hill and one on the former allotment land alongside Mark's house (where a previous application had been withdrawn). If he could realise these developments, Mr Pugh would donate the rest of the land to the village. Mark reported that Graham Bowles and another parish councillor would be meeting with planners at East Suffolk Council soon to discuss the likelihood of planning permission being granted, given the planning history and the village's countryside status.

The value of the land would very much depend on the scope for redevelopment. A report commissioned by BCOST from Savills in 2016 had assumed that there was no 'hope value' and estimated the value of Stone Common in its entirety as £35-45,000.

Mark suggested that the possible capital sum for the grant of an easement to the National Grid in respect of the Stone Common pylon might possibly be applied to give Mr Pugh return on his assets, instead of his seeking a profit from development of three houses on School Hill and Mill Common. The Trustees agreed that, if this were a possibility, acquiring the Mill Common allotments and the common land at Mill Common would be an appropriate use of the Trust's funds, and specifically of any capital sum for an easement in respect of the pylon. It was agreed to await the outcome of Graham's discussion with planners, as well as information from National Grid about the likely capital sum arising from the grant of an easement. It was noted that Mr Pugh's proposal is due to be discussed at the next Parish Council meeting on 2 March 2022, at 7:30 pm.

Action: Eve to circulate details of the 2016 valuation to Trustees.

Date of next meeting

Saturday 5th March at 4.30 pm at 2 Ship Cottages