

Fittleworth Parish Council

Subcommittee Meeting Minutes of the Parish Council Hesworth Common Management Committee
Held in the Bradley Williams Room, Fittleworth Village Hall on Monday 11th March 2024 at 2pm

Present

Clive Murray (CM)
Wade Houlden (WH)
Kevin Mackenzie (KM)
Hazel Barkworth (HB)
Tom Garriock (TG)
Dominic Sunderland (DS)

Members of the Public

Keith Laker (KL)

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for absence** – Mike Allin (MA) (Chair of Birchwalk Wood Management Working Group)
- 2. The Minutes of the last meeting** – this is the inaugural meeting of the Hesworth Common Management Committee in its' current format and terms of reference.

3. Public Questions

KL asked about:

(a) Bracken Control

It was highlighted that in light of the ban on the use of spraying to control bracken from 2024, alternative methods were required to control bracken on Hesworth Common, including bracken “whacking” (3x/pa by volunteers) as well as mechanical control (tractor cutting and collection and scraping to remove bracken litter to expose the sandy soil by contractors).

(b) Tree Loss

KL asked whether it could be confirmed how many trees were planned for removal as part of the implementation of the Countryside Stewardship Agreement (CSA). It was confirmed by the HCMC that given we are at an early stage of the 3-year CSA capital works and until a detailed annual management plan and budget was prepared and signed off by the full Fittleworth Parish Council, the number of trees planned for removal could not be confirmed. It was highlighted however, that tree loss would be restricted to a minimum, focused on Silver Birch and targeted towards areas where tree growth, shade and leaf litter would restrict the ability to extend the identified areas of heather. HCMC also confirmed its policy of 1:1 replacement of mature Silver Birch trees with native trees.

(c) CO2

KL asked whether bracken was more likely to absorb more CO2 than heather. TG confirmed that he thought that this was unlikely, but that there was also an ecological benefit to removing bracken in favour of retaining and expanding heather for enhanced biodiversity benefits.

- 4. Birchwalk Woods Management Working Group** – regrettably the Chair of the BWMWG was unable to attend and present an update on collaborative work completed or planned for both Birchwalk Woods and Hesworth Common. TG did however highlight that the SDNPA were willing to offer advice to the BWMWG, in a goal to enhance biodiversity opportunities as well as an improved age diversity of trees within Birchwalk Woods and develop a management plan.

- 5. Declarations by Council Members of personal or prejudicial interest in any of the agenda items listed below** – None

6. Appointment of Vice Chair, Hesworth Common Management Committee

KM was proposed by CM and seconded by WH as Vice-Chair of the HCMC

7. Countryside Stewardship Agreement (CSA)

- (a) It was agreed that CM would replace MA, as the nominated HCMC Councillor, as Rural Payment Agency account holder, jointly with the FPC clerk.
- (b) CSA Terms & Conditions – it was noted that the 2024 rates would be applied by the RPA when the annual maintenance revenue was received by FPC (in lieu of the 2023 CSA rates).
- (c) Contractor contract – TG agreed to share framework contract templates for contractors.

8. Proposed Work for 2024

- (a) Plan for 2024 – CM presented the Proposed Ground Works and Other Expenditure Plan and Budget for 2024 to the HCMC. It was proposed that the Plan and Budget be finalised and presented to the Fittleworth Parish full Council meeting for approval on Monday 18th March. Further management details to be considered include:
 - The opportunity to include scouts and young volunteers in assisting on bracken whacking.
 - Whether the opportunity to “hire a goat” from Sussex Wildlife Trust to assist in maintaining the common has any “legs”?
 - Bat surveys – purpose and methodology of survey to be prepared and agreed. SDNPA have offered the opportunity to provide static monitors to assist in undertaking surveys. Opportunity to consider using local resident expertise (CM and WH to ask).
 - Signage – opportunity to ask Fittleworth Village School whether they would be willing to provide artwork to promote enhanced signage around Hesworth. Brief to be provided including subject matter, text, size, material and numbers of signs. (WH to ask FVS whether they would be willing to participate). Scouts may also be willing to assist (KM).
- (b) Working party dates - SDNPA Rangers
 - Wednesday 12th June (10am start from Lower Street car park)
 - Tuesday 25th June (10am start from Lower Street car park)
 - Wednesday 17th July (10am start from Lower Street car park)
- (c) Working Party dates - Fittleworth resident & Worthing Conservation volunteer dates still TBC.
- (d) Communications – WhatsApp, Village magazine, FPC website, social media. It was agreed that the dates for ALL proposed volunteer days be provided to the editor of the Fittleworth Parish Magazine in a timely manner, as well as to the FPC clerk for uploading onto the FPC web site.
- (e) TG advised that the NPA contribution may not extend beyond FY24/25 but that the contributions in kind, in the form of specialist advice and ranger/volunteer time, will continue. To include a possible Ranger Day, training rangers whilst carrying out work required on Hesworth, in Q4 of 2024.

9. Update on Management Plan

10. Health and Safety

- Benches – urgent review required to Trig Point and Barkworth benches to ascertain whether they can be repaired or should be replaced. To keep records of all inspections. Annual review of Contour, Lower and Worthing benches.
- Risk Assessment for Volunteer Days to be progressed in readiness for first volunteer day.

11. Village Exhibition Feedback

- The feedback to the Village Exhibition held on Friday 8th March seemed positive, although it was noted by HB that few local residents knew about the exhibition taking place, as there wasn't a specific standalone advert highlighting the event.
- It is hoped that the survey can be included within the April edition of the Parish Magazine, with a request that the surveys are returned by 12th April, where it will be helpful to ascertain resident feedback to the exhibition, the CSA and how residents use Hesworth Common.

12. Date of next meetings

- Friday 26th April at 10.00 (Bradley Williams Room, Fittleworth Village Hall)
- Friday 14th June at 10.00 (Bradley Williams Room, Fittleworth Village Hall)