

## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **29 April 2016**

## **THE FUTURE OF CASTLEMORTON COMMONS**

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### **Management Plan Policies**

1. The following AONB Management Plan policies are relevant to this work:
  - a) LP2 – Restore distinctive landscapes that have been significantly degraded.
  - b) LP3 – Identify and promote opportunities for positive landscape change to landowners.....
  - c) BP2 – Restore the condition of degraded habitats in line with local and national biodiversity priorities.
  - d) HP1 – Conserve and enhance the historic and cultural environment of the AONB in accordance with key documents.

### **Background**

2. It was reported to the JAC on 20 November 2015 that the AONB staff unit had been contracted, together with Footprint Ecology, to take a look at the options for reversing the decline in grazing over the Castlemorton Commons. That report has now been completed and is under consideration by the Malvern Hills Conservators.
3. One anomaly in the process of improving grazing, where the AONB unit can play a useful part, is at Coombgreen Common. Part of the same common land unit as the rest of the Castlemorton Commons, it is owned by Birtsmorton Court; the rest of the common is owned by the Conservators. Restricted to work on their own land, staff at the Conservators are not free to help the residents, parish council and owner to join in, what must be a collective effort, to benefit the whole common.
4. So AONB unit staff have been to negotiate with the owner and the Parish Council, about the future of the common. Turning to the parishioners, for their opinions was the next obvious step. A public meeting was arranged and carefully formatted so as to allow the softer, and often more supportive voices, to be heard. This meant avoiding a public 'question and answer session' and instead, after a short introduction, allowing issues to be raised with a series of 'listeners' around the room. Those 'listeners' included staff from the Malvern Hills Conservators, and Janet Lomas who had written the draft management plan for the common.
5. The draft management plan has within it, ideas about how to contain livestock on the common by using roadside fences and off-highway cattlegrids. These ideas came from addressing concerns of graziers about roadkill, and the time taken to recover stock that had wandered off the common. These ideas were introduced to the public at the meeting.
6. From the meeting's gathered comments will come a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' about the common, which will aim to make sure that everybody has the

same basic level of knowledge about the natural processes, and management of the Common. It's hoped that once armed with this knowledge, some obvious conclusions will emerge. What is clear is that no conclusion will be completely right for everyone, and there is great deal of uncertainty in the air with the possible change to agricultural grants following a Brexit, and the future of a current principle grazier. Any coherent plan for Coombegreen Common will also have to involve the neighbouring and linked commons, and that too depends upon the neighbouring landowners.

7. This year it is hoped to help bring everyone up to speed on the management of the common and its natural processes by holding some public events themed upon such things.

## **Recommendation**

8. **The Committee is recommended to:**

- a) **Note and comment on the report,**
- b) **Support continued attempts to secure a sustainable approach to the management of the Castlemorton Commons, and**
- c) **Support attempts to engage with the Highway Authority to find a solution to livestock containment on all the commons.**

## **Contact Points**

### County Council Contact Points

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### Specific Contact Points for this report

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