

Minutes of the Bromyard Downs Common Association

Meeting Tuesday 10th January 2023 7:30 Falcon Hotel, Bromyard

Committee Attendees

James Hawkins - Chair

Clive Brazier

Jenny Hartwright

Jo Stoddart - Vice Chair

Andrew McClean (Mac) -
Treasurer

Nicki Howard

David Grant

Paul Symons

Non-Committee Member attendees

Pete Stoddart

Roger Lowery

Nigel Shaw

Steve Scott

Bromyard Town Council Rep -

1. Welcome & Apologies for absence.

None

Welcome and a Happy New Year from the Chair to Committee and Members of the Public and thanks for attending. Apologies for late cancelation of meeting scheduled for 13th December 2022.

2. Action points from the last general meeting

• Website Discussion

At the close of meeting the new website at www.bromyarddowns.org.uk was shown by Pete Stoddart. The design and content were discussed. The general feeling was that it was appropriate for the needs, with a few concerns re consent for photos of volunteers, actual naming of volunteer site and the main background colour choice and sizing of some of the photos. A link to how donations can be given to be added. All issues that can be easily addressed. Committee and public attendees asked to forward any ideas/comments by the end of January to Pete at pandjstoddart@yahoo.co.uk with the idea being that the old website could then be closed down. **Action - All**

• Volunteer Update

Work undertaken over the last 3 months includes; Widening parts of the lower racecourse, clearing piles of brash and firewood deliveries, clearing the end of Muddy Lane as part of Stewardship scheme (roots to be attended to in order to prevent regrowth) and thinning of saplings in the Coppice above the main carpark. New Flail purchased and has been used when weather permits on the lower Downs. Responses that it has made a huge difference and highlights the necessity of its purchase made.

Mac expressed the Volunteers thanks to the Brockhampton Group of Parish Councils for funding the purchase of hardcore in order that they could fill potholes in the main carpark.

Comments from those present and also on social media, very positive on the work done to maintain the historical features of the Downs.

Chair expressed his thanks to all Volunteers giving up their time and efforts for the Downs.

- **Quarry Update**

Helen Beale is still to respond to Chair re BDCA taking back the Quarry for use as storage, as she needs to go through the legal sides. The Quarry was not used previously by BDCA when they rented it. Written confirmation was sent to Hereford Council (HC) to inform them that the BDCA no longer wished to continue doing so and were cancelling the annual rent. There appears to have been no acknowledgement that this was received by HC and their records amended. Pete Henry (residing close to the Quarry and using it as a wood store) has no formal agreement with Hereford Council and no objections to its change of use.

The logistics of moving the storage container and machinery from Warren Farm to the Quarry has been discussed and may need to be done soon as James has plans submitted for a new barn on the site currently used by the volunteers.

Fortunately, he has an alternative temporary site available. Although not ideal for a two stage move to be undertaken, it may be necessary if there continues to be delayed Council response.

The area inside the Quarry needs to be prepared but will need to wait approval of its use. The outside preparation could be started, but the inclement weather may put a hold on this being attempted any time soon.

Comment that 4x4s have been seen driving in the Quarry area and other Downs' areas in recent weeks and the possibility of installing wooden barriers to deter this was made by Jenny.

Training

David Grant has been informed of 3 Medical Training Organisations by Sarah from The Wildlife Trust and researched these. One of these appears to provide suitable training of First Aid for outdoor needs and activities such as those carried out by the Downs volunteers. They hold two-day public training sessions for First Aid at a cost of £134 per person. This is a certified course lasting 3 years.(refreshers should be done before this time expires.) David was awaiting confirmation of dates and timings at the time of the meeting.

Action – Agreed that 2 people needed to attend as soon as possible. (in order to comply with insurances provided by Herefordshire Council)

Question asked as to whether there should always be a qualified First Aider on Downs days? Not answered.

Update to training dates obtained after meeting, 21st/22nd January in Malvern and 15th/16th February in Abergavenny. Nicki available to attend January dates.

Newsletter

Production of a newsletter out on hold until there is sufficient articles and information updates. Potentially the newsletter should be done electronically in future. Three

articles received about the Ponds, the Volunteers and their request for more people to join them and an update on Education opportunities on the Downs have been put on the new website.

An article was written for the November edition of the Bromyard info magazine and recommendations made to post regularly on Bromyard info Facebook site made.

3 Community Asset Transfer

James outlined once more the details and benefits of a Community Transfer Asset. The BDCA would need to have charitable status and the Committee and Volunteers would be accountable to a board of Trustees, not necessarily residents of the Downs. This would hopefully give the BDCA more control and cut down on time wasted awaiting decisions to be made by Herefordshire Council(HC). The final decision to do this is a long way off but could be started by having an initial Expression of Interest meeting with HC. Discussion included:

- How many other Commons have done this?- Numbers unknown and potentially not such a large area has been taken over.
- What are benefits?- Public liability Insurance should not be too expensive as it is an open public area and not a park.
- The bye laws could be better adhered to. Parking Charges could be initiated to help funding.
- There would be less “red tape”, but major decisions would still have to go through the Secretary of State.
- Payments obtained for new Easements (access to properties on the Downs) could be included as income instead of going to HC.
- Council ownership sometimes blocks funding applications.
- The Stewardship funding is changing and it may be more available if the BDCA was a registered charity.
- Who is going to continue this project in 15 to 20 years time? A succession plan would need to be in place.
- How would Campers and squatters be evicted, presumably insurances would cover this?
- Concerns that some other body e.g. The Wildlife Trust could come along and take on a Community Asset Transfer, thus removing the management of the Downs from those people that live on it and other regular users

Vote taken by all present to see whether this is the way forward. All those present and eligible to vote agreed to an Initial Expression of Interest meeting with HC.

Action- James agreed to put together a list of what is required to register initial interest and co-ordinate this.

4 Financial Report

See attached report at end of minutes. **Action - Mac**

5 HLS and Downs Management

James and some Volunteers walked the Downs in December to do initial planning for 2023.

- More opening up of Lower Downs.
 - Opening up of Malvern Road area behind the housing.
- Claims have been made to the HLS for 11 School/Educational visits to the Downs.
Awaiting payment of £290 for work done on Muddy Lane.
There are increased payments to be made for cattle grids and this may be something that should be reconsidered (now £2800 per grid)
There are more changes in the HLS to come including possible increased funding for bracken clearance.
Action- James to keep Committee informed.

6. Public Member Questions

- Nigel Shaw announced that after 8 years he is not going to stand again in the local elections in May as the Ward Councillor covering the BDCA area. He introduced Peter Stoddart who is going to stand as the Conservative nominee in May. A vote of thanks was given to Nigel for all his hard work in the past and the assistance and prompt attention he has given to the BDCA.

- Question by Steve Scott re the public liability in an accident case where, as has recently happened elsewhere, a child was killed by a fallen tree. Who would be held accountable? Nigel responded that ,as it is not a public park, it could be classed as an Act of God.

The volunteers are regularly assessing trees, shrubs and branches and will remove any that could cause danger whenever possible. A reminder given that any checks/removals for these purposes should be written down as future Evidence. (A written record and photographic evidence of all Downs work is already completed after each Downs Day)

- Suggestion made by Jo that, in order to increase funding for the Downs, a bar coded poster could be put up in the Carparks and along the road parking spaces to encourage users of the Downs to donate towards the upkeep. **Action-** Muted as a good idea but no one volunteered to action this idea.

7. Any Other Business

-Pete Stoddart wished to express thanks to all the work that has been carried out on the Downs by the Volunteers, especially the paths along the Lower downs and thought the whole of the Downs looked exceptional.

Date of next meeting – Wednesday 15th March 2023 at 7.30pm in The Falcon Hotel, Bromyard.

Meeting Closed at 8.45pm

Minutes recorded and written up by Jo Stoddart on behalf of

Lauren Smith

BDCA Secretary <mailto:bromyardbdca@gmail.com>

Future BDCA Meetings - 7:30 Falcon Hotel Bromyard
possible Zoom meetings can be considered if meeting restrictions are imposed

Wednesday 15 th March 2023	
Tuesday 13 th June 2023-AGM	Wednesday 13 th September 2023

Treasurer's Report 10/01/2023

Since the last meeting (14 Sept 2022) the income and outgoings are:

Income

RBS interest £75.96

Donations £735.00

RPA capital claim payment £10,426.35

Wayleaves £753.91

Total £11,991.22

Outgoings

Insurance £1,006.25

Contractors £5,755.50

Fuel £564.30

Materials £9.10

Other (room hire) £55.00

Capital expenditure £8,057.90 (Flail £3,500.00, Trailer £1,662.00, Fencing £2,895.90)

Total £15,448.05

At 10 Jan 2023 account balances are:

Current account £1,849.59

Reserve account £41,004.76, consisting of:

Capital reserve (HLS monies) £18,394.50

Tractor replacement fund £15,610.26

Machinery replacement fund £7,000.00

Total £42,854.35