

Commons Report for Parish Council Meeting – 27th March 2019

1. Volunteer Group Tasks

Volunteer tasks undertaken by Norfolk Conservation Corps (NCC) and Norwich Environmental Weekenders (NEWS).

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Volunteer Group</u>	<u>Task Completed</u>
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Tasks Completed (since last report)

27/01/19	Alderford	NCC	Pulling blackthorn from grassland
03/03/19	Alderford	NEWS	Scrub clearance from around edge of grassland

Tasks Planned (exact dates and tasks to be confirmed)

24/03/19	Uppgate	NCC	Clearance under power rides and Beck
April/May	Alderford	NCC	Bracken topping/fence repair - tbc
02/06/19	Uppgate	NEWS	Bracken topping/fence repair - tbc

2. Management Plans

Draft plans completed except for maps. Plans based around existing management requirements associated with extension of current HLS agreements. Draft sent to Natural England for initial comments before wider consultation.

3. HLS Agreements

See Finance report for financial transactions.

Correspondence received regarding delay in payments that the RPA hope to catch up with over time.

Applications for extension to the existing HLS Agreements for an additional year have been approved, so current management objectives and funding are maintained until May 2020. There is likely to be opportunity to further extend depending upon what happens with Brexit.

4. Uppgate Common

All ok with the Ponies at Uppgate. Could still do with additional volunteer pony checkers to cover certain week days.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust have put a proposal forward to temporarily move the ponies to Booton for a couple of months over the Summer (June to September) to give the common a rest and prevent over grazing. Potential associated costs of moving ponies would be offset by reduction in general grazing costs (currently £1636 estimated to reduce to £1488).

Contractor George Taylor engaged to clear the majority of remaining birch scrub on Deadman's Hill and transition areas, leaving a small stand to provide cover for nesting birds etc as agreed with Natural England. Cost of £575 covering 4 days work plus consumables. He will come back for half a day later in the year to spray off any regrowth at the same time as treating any regrowth of Japanese Knotweed at Alderford.

Task on Sunday 24/03/19 will involve clearing up under the power line rides and along the Beck, replacing a couple of broken boards on the boardwalk and removal of a tree that has fallen on the fenceline. Tree safety audit to be completed on 03/04/19. Any further work will then cease over the spring breeding season before recommencing in the summer mainly concentrating on Bracken and Himalayan Balsam control and some pond maintenance. A few fence posts will also need replacing in the summer (cost to be assessed) with replacement likely undertaken during a volunteer task.

5. Alderford Common

A couple of tasks completed by NCC and NEWS focussing on removal of blackthorn and scattered scrub from the fenced grassland and cutting back scrub encroachment from the grassland edges. Fallen tree also removed from fenceline.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust have made a proposal to allow grazing of the grassland by cattle early in the new year (Jan to March) utilising 4 British White cows from the Buxton herd. Estimated costs associated with moving cattle and grazing costs in the order of £560, meaning an overall increase in grazing costs across both sites (Uppgate and Alderford) in the order of £412 which would be covered by the existing HLS payments. Additional cost in the order of £250 could be incurred if need to install a pasture pump (which could be used at either site).

A few fence posts will need replacing in the summer prior to any grazing (cost to be assessed) with replacement likely undertaken during a volunteer task.

On-going management will continue to focus on the fenced area, ponds and also increasing the level of scrub management to create a more diverse age range and structure as discussed with Natural England. Management of bracken and non-native invasive species (Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Crassula) will also need to be addressed.

Steve Williams – March 2019

Swannington with Alderford and Little Witchingham Parish Council