Commons Report for Parish Council Meeting – 19th July 2023

1. Volunteer Group Tasks
Volunteer tasks undertaken by Norfolk Conservation Corps (NCC) and Norwich Environmental Weekenders (NEWS) unless otherwise stated.
Date Location Volunteer Group Task Completed
Tasks Completed (since last report)
16/07/23 Upgate NCC Bracken clearance under power lines, adjacent Bottomless Pond and on Deadman's Hill plus some pulling of scattered Himalayan Balsam
Tasks Planned *(exact dates and tasks to be confirmed)*
20/08/23 Upgate NEWS tbc
September Alderford NCC tbc
Management Plans
No change.
2. HLS Agreements

Discussion required regarding parking at Upgate as currently there is a potential breach of the HLS agreement associated with parking on the grassland and cutting the grass outside of the permitted dates.
One of the general conditions for HLS agreement land states "Do not allow your agreement land to be ….used by motor vehicles or machinery (except where necessary for the management of the land), if this likely to cause long-term damage from rutting or compaction of the soil, or otherwise damage areas being managed under the scheme."
The specific management prescriptions relating to the grassland includes "Do not top, roll or harrow between 1 October and 30 June" ie only cut in July, August or September.
Consideration could be given to applying to take all, or part, of the area of grassland that lies outside of the SSSI boundary (grassland to the north of the access track) out of the agreement to ensure compliance and allow greater flexibility on ongoing management. Potential impact on income < £100 per annum. Main agenda item.
3. Upgate Common

Parking at Upgate to be discussed as main agenda item (see above).
Some clearance of fallen trees adjacent to Upgate Barn was carried out on 10/06/23 but this was halted due to nesting bird activity and will need completing at a later date.
A number of dead trees (mainly Ash trees suffering from Ash Dieback) potentially affecting safety to footpath users and the power lines were noted and a contractor (George Taylor) asked to safely remove them. Trees felled on 23/06/23. Cost of £240.
NCC volunteer group attended on the 16/07/23 and bracken was cut and raked off from the glades under the powerlines and adjacent to Bottomless Pond and also on Deadman's Hill. Himalayan Balsam was also pulled form an area adjacent to the footbridge over the Beck and in a few other scattered places, although very little present compared to previous years.
Decision to be made on replacement of the information board. Ongoing.
The grassland will need cutting in August or September. Next volunteer task on 20/08/23 could involve raking up cut grass from the grassland if cut prior to this date. Alternatively to be raked at the next task in September (date tbc).
4. Alderford Common

A new support for the information board in the car park is still required if the board is to be re-erected. Ongoing.
The damaged kissing gate at the southeastern corner is functional but still needs to be replaced which will need to be undertaken by a contractor. Ongoing.

The area between the road and car park was cut to maintain visibility and discourage unsociable activity in the car park.
A team from Natural England attended site on 29/06/23 to undertake an overdue condition survey of the SSSI grassland within the fenced area. Report to be issued to PC for comment prior to publication.
Steve Williams – July 2023
Swannington with Alderford and Little Witchingham Parish Council