Commons Report for Parish Council Meeting – 15th May 2024

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)

None.

Tasks Planned *(exact dates and tasks to be confirmed)*

26/05/24 Alderford NCC tbc

30/06/24 Upgate NEWS tbc

1. **Management Plans**

No change.

1. **HLS Agreements**

Claim forms for 1st January to 31st December 2024 submitted to the Rural Payments Agency by email on 08/05/24.

1. **Upgate Common**

Conservation management tasks have been paused for the bird nesting season but a volunteer task at Upgate has been arranged with NEWS for 30/06/24 – possible task to involve Himalayan Balsam removal and/or bracken control.

The two Dartmoor ponies were removed by NWT and taken to Cawston on 15/04/24 to facilitate the vet and farrier visit and it was agreed for them to remain there for a couple of months to give Upgate a rest from grazing during the spring to allow plants in the more heavily grazed areas to recover and set seed. Ponies will be returned to site in the summer (provisionally in July). Current thoughts are to bring more ponies to site than have been there in the past (at least 4) and then to possibly remove them over the winter on an ongoing basis to prevent overgrazing of heather on the lowland heath areas. This potential change to the grazing regime will be reviewed based on ongoing assessment of outcomes.

Repair/replacement of the information board - ongoing. The map adjacent to the noticeboard fell down and has kindly been temporarily re-erected utilising the footpath sign by a parishioner.

There have been requests from Swannington in Bloom to utilise part of the area north of the access track (outside of the SSSI) for temporary parking on 30th June and also a request to consider allowing a drainage contractor to set up a small temporary storage compound in the area (date and duration tbc) for use when installing new sewage treatment plants in various properties in Upgate – for discussion.

1. **Alderford Common**

Conservation management tasks have been paused for the bird nesting season but a volunteer task at Alderford has been arranged with NCC for 26/05/24 – possible task to involve gate repair or bracken control.

A consultant engaged by Natural England has started nesting bird surveys with three visits completed and a further four to be carried out in May/June.

The Freshwater Habitats Trust have returned to undertake the annual eDNA Great Crested Newt surveys at the common (the 10th year). Last year all of the ponds had positive results again and they have asked if the common can be included as a case study in their report to Natural England as one of the few success stories for what's been happening to newts at a national level.

The information board in the car park has kindly been repaired and re-erected by a parishioner – cost of materials £73.20.

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 or possibly by a volunteer group - ongoing.

Discussions have been held with NWT regarding grazing at Alderford and hopefully this can resume later in the year.

Steve Williams – May 2024

Swannington with Alderford and Little Witchingham Parish Council