Stockland Parish Council

Minutes of the Turbaries Management Committee, held on Tuesday, 7th May 2024, at the Victory Hall.

1) Public Participation Time:

A member of the public reported that skunk cabbage *(Lysichiton americanus*), an invasive species in the UK, had been observed growing in the Shore Bottom turbary. Another member of the public offered to remove it; this offer was gratefully accepted.

It was reported that on the blind corner of the road in Shore Bottom, a number of trees growing on turbary land are overhanging the road (including Armenian oak *Quercus pontica*), thereby exacerbating the hazard for vehicles and pedestrians. A member of the public offered to prune back the offending trees; this offer was gratefully accepted.

It was reported that Japanese Knotweed had been observed growing on turbary land, just below Whitehayes.

2) Resolve to exclude members of the press and public:

No reasons stated.

3) Record of those present / apologies for absence:

Present: Cllr Peter Derryman (Chair), Cllr Anna Trott, Cllr Bryan Drew, Cllr Richard Switzer, Geoff Pearce, Robin Gundry, Rebecca Chance, Gemma Sparks (Managing Agent; Blackdown Consulting), Toby Taylor (RSPB), Jane Robertson (Blackdown Hills Protected Landscape)
Apologies: David Allen,

Cllr Derryman introduced Jane Robertson, Farming in Protected Landscapes Project Officer for Blackdown Hills Protected Landscape.

4) Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (s31 & 33 of the Localism Act 2011) or Personal/Prejudicial Interests (Code of Conduct, 2012):

None stated.

5) Turbaries Management Committee Minutes:

Minutes of the minutes from the Wednesday 6th March 2024 were approved by the committee and signed.

6) Action Review Summary:

a) Managing Agent's activities:

The Managing Agent reported that despite the agreement at the March 2024 meeting that the Clerk would forward all documents and emails relating to finances (payments in, invoices etc), nothing had been received. There are some key questions relating to payments that remain unanswered.

The Managing Agent reported that claims for funding had been submitted from both Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship.

b) Funding sources and grants (including SFI and ELMS):

Jane Robertson has accompanied Cllr Derryman to look at fencelines and suggested that SPC would be eligible for funding to replace fencelines in a state of disrepair. It was noted that the fencelines were originally constructed in 1999. A considerable amount of preparation would be needed for fence replacement, including the removal of bramble and laurel.
The Managing Agent and Jane Roberston agreed to connect, to ensure that funding is in line with existing grants, with no duplication.
It was suggested that up to £14,000 might be potentially available from a FiPL grant.
Jane Robertson will follow up with the AONB panel to ascertain if a bid is likely to be acceptable.
Toby Taylor suggested the use of Clippex metal fence posts – more long-lasting and efficient to install. He noted that removing the old wooden posts would be a challenging and laborious process, so installing the metal Clippex posts beside the old wooden posts would be much more efficient. The committee felt this could be a valuable new installation method.
Toby Taylor offered to assess costs for Quantock, which was gratefully accepted. It was noted that pedestrian gates would be useful at Quantock to facilitate pony lookering.
It was noted that quotes were not needed up front for a FiPL grant application, but SPC would need to get in touch with contractors to find out what their cost estimates would be. Any remaining funds unclaimed from the grant can potentially be used for habitat management purposes - the control of birch scrub at Bucehayes is a potential example.
Cllr Switzer agreed to ascertain that the proposed works are in line with SPC's Financial Regulations. It was noted that the potential grant would paid once work has been completed, not before. Therefore an application could be submitted, but any payments would need to be approved according to guidelines. This submission was unanimously approved.
Jane Robertson offered to submit an application on behalf of SPC by 29th May, which was gratefully accepted.

It was noted that the HLS / woodland Management Scheme has one more year to run.

c) Recent meetings, those planned and potentially needed:
Nothing to report.

d) Work carried out, planned and potentially needed;
   i) Bucehayes (AG00287440):
   Rebecca Chance has met with a potential contractor, Tom Purling, to look at fences at Bucehayes and Shortmoor. Tom Purling has compiled a list of what parts of the fenceline needs to be replaced.
   Toby Taylor noted that the RSPB would be willing to provide assistance / contractual services for the installation of fence posts.
   It was noted that repairs to the fenceline need to start before the upcoming pony season, representing a tight timeline.
   Toby Taylor also offered to inspect the fencelines on site, while noting the importance that birds' nest should not be disturbed / impacted during works.
   Rebecca Chance offered to follow up with Tom Purling regarding short-term repairs of fences at Bucehayes and Shortmoor to make them pony-proof for the upcoming season.

The pot of money to be used for these short-term repairs would be from last year's revenue for the grazing of rare native breeds, not the proposed new FiPL grant. The Managing Agent offered to check how much is left in that pot.

ii) Quantock (AG00287502);
See above, regarding fencing.

Japanese Knotweed has been reported at Lower Brimpit, at the concrete path leading to Fearherlake. It was noted that it needs to be verified if this is on turbary land.

iii) Horner Hill (AG00291818);
The issue of fencing replacement at Horner turbary was raised, and it was agreed to revisit this topic at a subsequent meeting.

Robin Gundry offered to cut Horner woodland meadow in early June, after liaising with David Allen for botanical advice; in line with his usual role as a contractor, this was gratefully accepted.

iv) Shortmoor (AG00305847);
See above, regarding fencing.

v) Huntshayes (BPS);
It was reported that Japanese Knotweed is growing on turbary land in the lane leading to Huntshayes. Japanese Knotweed also reported on turbary land near Whitehayes.
Cllr Trott offered to get in touch with two potential contractors to investigate their capabilities for tackling the knotweed; this was gratefully accepted.

vi) Shore Bottom (BPS):
It was noted that the proposed removal of the oak tree impacting the road had not yet occurred, due to the railings being in the way.
Cllr Derryman offered to follow up with contractors to get potential quotes for the removal/replacement of the railing, to facilitate the tree removal; this was gratefully accepted.

7) **Discussion of the composition of the committee**
Cllr Switzer noted that it would be beneficial to review and agree on the composition of the Turbaries Management, defining roles, responsibilities and ability to vote. This would also help to minimise the potential for conflicts of interests when contracts were awarded.

It was agreed that the Turbaries Committee would consist of the follow members and roles:
Voting
Chair: Cllr Peter Derryman.
Other representatives of the Stockland Parish Council: Cllr Anna Trott, Cllr Bryan Drew, Cllr Richard Switzer.
Stockland Parish community members: David Allen, Robin Gundry, Rebecca Chance.
Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society (DBWPS): Geoff Pearce.
Blackdown Hills Protected Landscape (formerly AONB): Jane Robertson.

Non-voting

Managing Agent: Gemma Sparks (Blackdown Consulting)
Technical Consultant: Toby Taylor (RSPB),

There will be no representative from Natural England for the near-future.

8) **Correspondence and Communications**
It was reported that a member of the public had been in touch with details relating to Open Spaces Society's proposal to list some of the turbary land. Comments included that listing would likely provide greater protection from attempts to settle by members of the traveller community, as well as greater possibilities for funding.

9) **Items of Future Business** for the next agenda:
Fencing replacement at Horner.
Path from Lillington Farm to Shorelake.
Election of additional community members.

Richard Switzer
Chair, Stockland Parish Council,
4th July 2024