

Federation of Cumbria Commoners

Mike Innerdale
The Hollens
Grasmere,
Cumbria. LA22 9QZ

7th September 2016

By e-mail

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your letter to stakeholders dated 2nd September 2016. We do recognise that the National Trust has a distinguished history and the Federation has empathy with many of its principal aims. However, we cannot agree with the Trust's "renewed focus" on the environment and flood mitigation, if this reduces your commitment to fell farming and its associated cultural heritage.

We have seen James Rebanks' response to your letter and we agree with his position and endorse the points he makes. We do not plan to restate his arguments in this letter, rather set out a series of short and medium term practical measures the Trust needs to consider if you wish to improve trust between the fell farming community and yourselves.

1. We understand that you have a meeting planned with the HSBA and possibly other representatives of the farming community. If the Trust wants to make sure that this meeting is more than a token gesture then people with decision making powers from the Trust should attend, including the Regional Director and ideally a member of the Board of Trustees. Given the high media profile engendered by the purchase of the land at Thorneythwaite we suspect those who uphold the governance of the National Trust may want to see and hear for themselves what is going on in the Lake District.
2. The management of the land and the flock: it is simply not good enough to offer a one-year contract to manage the flock/ land unless the Trust acknowledges that this is an interim measure while it works up a longer-term tenancy package that is economically sustainable for a farmer to take on. We suggest you seek a local farmer (with no interest in the land/flock) to help you develop this. If the Trust does not plan to manage the land in a way that is recognisable to the farming community then be honest and make this clear from the outset.
3. The article in the Times on Saturday (3/09/2016) mentions there is a "bigger undisclosed plan for the Lake District". If this is true, now is the time to disclose it. Lack of transparency and a reluctance to communicate does not engender trust and confidence. Good conservation takes people with it. Conservation without consultation of the people who will be affected by it, is not good conservation.

Administrator (part time)
Viv Lewis, 5 Burnbanks, Bampton, Penrith, Cumbria, CA10 2RW
e-mail: viv@cumbriacommoners.org.uk www.cumbriacommoners.org.uk

4. In a similar vein to point 3 above, the Trust signed up to the “Charter for Collaborative Action on Natural Flood Management”, but “undisclosed plans” for flood management in the Borrowdale valley totally contravenes the spirit of the Charter. To be credible the Trust should now develop an action plan outlining how it intends to implement, monitor and evaluate its contribution to the Charter. This should be shared with all the signatories of the Charter. Equally the other signatories should do the same. It would be good to see the Trust take the lead on this.
5. A substantial way for the Trust to implement the Charter would be to work with local farmers to develop a new model that is compatible with your historic responsibilities to the cultural landscape and supports fell farmers to farm and deliver increased biodiversity and natural flood management. Successful projects like Burren Life and PontBren have led the way in Ireland and Wales. It would be fantastic if Lake District farmers collaborating with the Trust could do the same in England.
6. Your tenants tell us that they believe the Trust is increasingly out of touch with the reality of fell farming, this is reiterated in James Rebanks’ letter. We are convinced that the Trust doesn’t understand Herdwick sheep or the cultural system that surrounds them, despite many knowledgeable people trying for many years to educate the Trust about this including the Foundation for Common Land’s Hill Farming Training package. We would like to see the Trust work with FCL to develop bespoke training packages for senior managers and relevant Board members, local and regional staff, and indeed any member of staff who interfaces with the local farming community.
7. We have heard from your farm tenants that the Tenant meetings are not working. They note that little of any substance is discussed at these meetings as they are light on content and information about your plans for the valleys. We would like to see the Trust review the purpose and content of these meeting with its tenants and jointly agree ways to improve them. This will go some way to reducing the gap in understanding between your staff and tenants.
8. We suggest you consider setting up a farming advisory panel, like the one proposed for LDNP Partnership to enhance understanding, communication and engagement between tenants, the local farming community and the Trust.
9. The UNESCO Evaluation Mission will be in Cumbria soon to evaluate the Lakes District World Heritage bid. We urge you to make a public commitment to pastoral commoning as this is one of the key reasons why the Lake District has been nominated as a World Heritage Site

A good and effective organisation brings its people along with it. The Trust has a duty to be truthful with your tenants about your land management plans and be a good neighbour to the farming community as a whole. Actions speak louder than words. Therefore we urge you to seriously consider the measures outlined above (many of which have also been suggested by HSBA) and find ways to implement them.

The Federation is generally very patient and our preference is to work in partnership. But we need to see commitments being delivered for a partnership to work. We sincerely hope that the Trust can do this.

Yours sincerely,

Viv Lewis