

**Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the Federation of Cumbria Commoners at 7.30 pm on Tuesday  
16<sup>th</sup> September, Threlkeld Village Hall**

Present: Dave Smith, Carl Walters, Joe Relph, Julia Aglionby, John Rowland, William Steele, Pauline Blair, Jim Campbell, : Ernest Coulthard, Ian Gorst, Duncan Ellwood and Viv Lewis (Administrator)

Apologies Charles Raine, Andrew Humphries, Harry Hutchinson

1. Previous Minutes: the minutes were agreed.
2. Matters arising:
  - a. Grasmere Common has not gone into an AE scheme and the owner's (Jim Lowther) position has not changed. He is only prepared to sign a HLS scheme with reduction in sheep numbers grazing the common. We need to encourage Defra to make sure that AES consent forms do not allow any one person (commoners or land owners) to veto entry into a scheme. There have been some unhelpful repercussions with some commoners wanting to tar all owners of common land with the same brush. *Action: next newsletter will include a case study where the landowner(s) are well working with commoners – John Turner will help Viv with case study*  
Julia has taken part in filming at Grasmere for BBC Inside Out programmer on re-wilding to be shown in early October
  - b. Lowther Estates have submitted a planning application to create a 'welcome hub' and car park at White Moss Common between Rydal and Grasmere. FoLD and Open Spaces have objected – awaiting decision.
  - c. Sale of Blencathra - there have been 3 serious bids including the community bid. Currently working through due diligence starting with the highest bidder
3. Chairman's update - working on Naddle/ Swindale issues see Item 6. Joe reported he had a heated telephone discussion with Lee Schofield
4. Administrator's update - received a request to give presentation and attend a gathering of hill farmers from the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership in December. Agreed to send a delegate(s), most likely Dave Smith, William Steel or Ernest Coulthard if they can make the date. Also to give presentation on the work of FCC.

Viv has been invited to attend a Moorland grazing workshop organized by Natural England. The want to develop an experimental project about livestock management tools and how they can be used to improve the effectiveness of grazing on moorland. Agreed Viv will attend (if she can make the date) and circulate information to all.

5. Finance report - £35,663.75 in bank. Reminders have been sent out to commoners' associations membership fees still due.
6. RSPB Naddle and Swindale –at the end of August we sent letters to the CEOs of UU and RSPB and Steve Ratcliffe LDNP expressing our concerns about the potential negative impact of RSPB's decisions on neighbouring commoners, also a request to meet them individually to explore these issues further. RSPB and UU have replied and are prepared to meet with us.

We then discussed our strategy, position and next steps. Main points:

- Hold unilateral meetings with Bryan Holman, UU and RSPB preferably Martin Harper and Mike Clarke. Joe, Julia, Carl, Andrew and Viv to attend, if available
- Main points to discuss: the science i.e. is there scientific evidence to link deteriorating water quality and sheep grazing on the catchment; previous and actual stocking rates at Naddle/ Swindale, plus comparative stocking rates at St Johns and Whelpside; does UU have baseline data on DOC at Haweswater and what do they monitor; specifically for UU - tax payers money and farmer delivery of UELS/HLS contribute to improving water quality, as public funding decreases UU will have to work

more closely with their tenants and other landowners/farmers. This will be more effective (costs and impact) if they have farmers' good will and buy-in to delivering environmental gains through livestock grazing.

- Should FCC commission scientific research into links between livestock grazing and water quality. Perhaps co-commission research with North Lakes Deer Group who are experiencing same pressure. UU want drastic reduction in deer numbers and have called for a complete review of deer management. Talk to Eden Rivers Trust about how to test water quality issues. We would need to consult the membership before we committed much money to research
- What is NE's position on the very low stocking rates set in the Mardale/ Swindale HLS agreements? But have to tread carefully as we do not want any UELS/HLS money to be withheld from neighbouring commoners.
- World Heritage Site – get discussion on hefting and RSPB's actions on to the agenda of the next LDNP Farming and Forestry Task Force meeting, include our letter
- Circulate letter to Douglas Phillips National Centre for the Uplands

#### **Actions:**

*Viv to arrange meetings with UU (scheduled first) then RSPB*

*Viv to obtain previous sheep numbers from Eddie Eastham,*

*Julia to obtain the current stocking rate figures*

*Julia to talk to Eden Rivers Trust*

*Viv to send copies of letters to James Cross CEO NE*

*Joe/ Carl to get issue onto the agenda of Farming and Forestry Task force*

*John R to provide a copy of the letter to Douglas Phillips*

#### 7. Brief updates

- a. **Implementation Part 1 of Commons Act 2006** - roll out of Part 1 in Cumbria and N Yorks has been delayed by a few weeks as the requisite regulation has not yet been laid before parliament. Plan is to hold information meetings with Chairs of Commoners' Associations when we know more.
  - b. **New basic payments on commons** – challenge by Minchinhapton Common Gloucestershire as they only get paid on 4% of common, rest is naked hectares. Defra feel they cannot release details on how notional area will be determined until that challenge is resolved. This matter was raised at the upland stakeholder forum and Mike Rowe, deputy director Defra, is well aware of the time constraints as people are meant to be firming up very tenancy agreements with regard to entitlements by 25 September this year.
  - c. **NELMS** – consultation has been poor. In effect, payment rates will be around 2/3 of previous UELS/ HLS as UELS element will no longer exist. Will be called Priority Sites (formerly upper tier) and Priority Areas (formerly mid-tier). Commons in HLS likely to be eligible for Priority Site, others unlikely to be able apply for Priority Area and commons may fall out of schemes. No FEPS will be required, so as yet unclear how stocking levels will be worked out. Need to keep up the pressure on the design of technical guidance.  
Uniform 1<sup>st</sup> Jan start date and upcoming changes to payments for HLS agreements will have a considerable impact on some agreements with delayed payments and cash flow implications. We need to make members aware of this  
*Action: Viv to write an article for the next newsletter on this issue.*  
FOI on consents on SSSI - Viv to circulate document received from Natural England.
  - d. Gillerthwaite – Forestry Commission have begun to enclose the common, will take 2 men 2 years to complete.
8. Commons Council – report sent to Grant McPhee end of May. Received feedback that the section on public benefits needs strengthening. Viv asked NE for up-to-date information on delivery of AES schemes on commons in Cumbria and received some information this week. Target is to complete the report within 4 weeks
  9. AOB - increasing number of dog poo bags are being left on fences. Will make LDNP aware of this. Viv to contact them.
  10. Date of next meeting; December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014