

Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the Federation of Cumbria Commoners at 7.00 pm on Tuesday 2nd December 2014, Threlkeld Village Hall

Present: Joe Relph (Chairman) Dave Smith, Carl Walters, Charles Raine, John Rowland, William Steele, Ernest Coulthard, Ian Gorst, Duncan Ellwood, Andrew Humphries and Viv Lewis (Administrator)
Apologies, Harry Hutchinson, Julia Aglionby, Pauline Blair, Jim Campbell, Robert Benson

- 1) Previous Minutes: the minutes were agreed.
- 2) Matters arising:
 - a) Lowther Estates planning application to create a 'welcome hub' and car park at White Moss Common between Rydal and Grasmere was rejected.
 - b) Sale of Blencathra – no news
- 3) Administrator's update – Attended a Moorland grazing workshop organized by Natural England in October. Provided comments on NE Targeting Statements. Still planning to attend and give a presentation about FCC to a gathering of hill farmers from the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership. The date has been put back to February. Other committee members will attend if available.
- 4) Finance report - £34,663.75 in bank. £1,425.00 is owed in membership fees. Reminders have been sent out to commoners' associations. Carl agreed to help with reminders. It was noted that while FCC has a healthy bank balance, it will be making a loss this year. Committee needs to be mindful about how to earn extra income in future years
- 5) RSPB Naddle and Swindale – Two meetings have been held since the last committee meeting.
 - a) Meeting with UU on 23/10/14: Attendees: Bryan Homan Head of Catchment Operations, Caroline Holden land agent; John Gorst; Joe, Carl, Julia, Andrew and Viv. It was a useful first meeting, especially as UU had sent a senior member of staff to attend. Bryan Homan appeared to understand the need for maintaining pastoral commoning; and as a landlord UU should be prepared to engage more actively with their tenant RSPB and to question what they are doing when their actions can affect neighbouring farmers.
 - b) Meeting with RSPB on 19/11/14: Attendees: Shaun Thomas, Operations Director; Peter Robertson Regional Director Northern England; Pat Thompson Senior Uplands Policy Manager; Bill Kenmir Cumbria Reserves Area Manager; Joe; Carl; Julia and Andrew. Likewise a useful first meeting with Senior RSPB staff. The sheep from the Waters heft are now away wintering and have not been sold.

Next steps: UU and RSPB are to meet before Christmas, with a tri-lateral meeting between FCC, UU and RSPB early in the New Year.

John Turner commented that there are some similarities between the situation of hill farming and deer management. The North Lakes Red Deer Group have found that the balance between deer and their habitat has been altered as a consequence of HLS and previous agri-environment schemes on commons. Reduced sheep numbers on commons have meant that the deer population has multiplied with increasing tensions with new woodland establishment - normally a requisite to gain an HLS agreement.

- 6) Implementation of Part 1, 2006 Commons Act – will commence in Cumbria on Dec 15th. It was agreed that FCC will organise roadshows (mostly like in the north, south, east and west of the county) to inform members of what they should do. These meetings should be very practical with examples of forms etc. and a case study with worked examples. The timing of the roadshows will depend on when all the information is available. Tim Cartmell has offered to help.

Action: Viv and Julia to develop a plan and budget for the roadshows and circulate.

- 7) WARCOP - the MoD are applying to Cumbria County Council to de-register their firing range land at Warcop as common land. Viv had been in touch with Alyssia Ashurst, Cumbria Country Council Commons Registration who will inform us of the process to make an objection.

Actions: it was agreed that FCC will:

- *collaborate with FoLD and OSS in objecting to the MODs proposal*
- *Seek the views of local commoners by attending Hilton and Murton Commoners' Association AGM. Dave Smith to attend, if possible*
- *Ernest Coulthard is a member of the MOD's Conservation Group and will ask the MOD to explain their reasoning for wanting to deregister the land at their next meeting on Jan 9th*
- *Viv to write to Rory Stewart, Chair of the Defence Select Committee setting out our objections*

- 8) CAP reform

- a) Commons Mapping – We had sight of letters that RPA are planning to send out individual commoners with maps giving them a 14 day deadline (deadline date Christmas Day) to check whether the maps are accurate. The consensus was that this is a totally unrealistic timescale and a recipe for chaos as commoners are unlikely to be able to meet within 14 days and agree overall accuracy of the maps. RPA needs to consider a different process. A National Common Land Stakeholder Meeting is being held the next day (3rd December). Julia will be attending to put these points across. Viv will phone in to make FCC's views known.
- b) Countryside Stewardship – new introductory leaflet to Countryside Stewardship has just been published. First impressions is that Countryside Stewardship appears so focused on biodiversity leaving little room for financially supporting the delivery of any other outcomes. Landscape, cultural heritage and access are the very poor relations in this current round of CAP. This is not good news for commons that are coming out of UELS as there will be few options for them. FCC extremely disappointed with Defra/NE non-consultation process.

- 9) AGM- date will be either 6th March (preferable) or 27th February to be held at Newton Rigg. Panel Format with Q & A; Themes: either a) discuss the evidence for stocking rates on commons with NE specialist and Robin Pakeman; or b) cultural heritage and WHS bid

Action: Viv to take forward with ideas/support from the committee.

- 10) Membership of LDNP Farming and Forestry Task Force - a couple of days previous to this meeting, Carl our rep on the Task Force told Andrew Herbert that the FCC committee would be discussing FCC's future involvement with the task force, given LDNP's failure to respond to our letter dated 21st August concerning the situation at Naddle farm with the RSPB wanting to remove a heft of sheep. We received a reply from Richard Leafe to our letter on the day of this meeting. Disappointingly the timing of the letter and its content does nothing to convince us that LDNP wholeheartedly backs commoning and pastoral farming systems, even though they are cited as one of the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage Site in the LDNP's bid.

After some discussion we agreed that on balance it is better to continue to be a member of the F&FT Task force but we will keep this under review. Also we will provide an input to the Consultation on the Partnership plan

Action: Carl to report back to Andrew Herbert; Viv to ask Andrew Herbert to explain what the F&FT Task Force has delivered to date and the outline any positive change this group achieved for farmers to date.; Andrew to lead on FCC response to the consultation.

- 11) AOB – Pauline would like to discuss the National Trust's policy on letting farms and LDNP's planning policy. These will go on the agenda for the next meeting. Harry Hutchinson mentioned that NFU Appleby were campaigning about sheep thefts from commons. Viv will try to find out more.

- 12) Date of next meeting; Tuesday February 3rd 2015