

BLINDLEY HEATH LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

LIAISON GROUP – CHAIRMAN’S ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

1. The Liaison Group was established in 2012 by the District Council of Tandridge and the Parish Council of Godstone [the owners of the Common].
2. The Common covers 30.4 hectares of which 25.6 hectares is a Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI], referred to as “the Red Land,” and constitutes a Local Nature Reserve.
3. Godstone Parish Council contracted Surrey Wildlife Trust to manage the Common “in an appropriate manner and in compliance with the present Higher Level Stewardship Scheme [HLS] and any other agreements that might be put in place in order to meet the present and future obligations arising out of the Common’s status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.”
4. Surrey Wildlife Trust is paid an annual management fee by Godstone Parish Council and receives all the payments released through the HLS scheme and any other schemes.
5. The contract with Surrey Wildlife Trust runs to 2037 with a break point in 2026.
6. The role of the Liaison Group is to receive all reports and records concerning the management of “the Red Land”, monitor compliance with the approved general management policy, facilitate and review the overall management including any plan required by a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme or subsequent schemes.
7. This Report is for the year ended 31 March 2020 during which the Group had two formal meetings [in May 2019 and February 2020].
8. At the meeting on 15 May 2019 Paul Newdick stood down as Chair due to his impending move away from the area and I was elected as his successor. Paul’s contribution to the Common over many years was immense, firstly as an Officer of Tandridge District Council and subsequently as the Croup’s Chair.
9. During the year, Gwyneth Fookes also resigned. She was involved with the Common for over 20 years and had represented Surrey Wildlife Trust as well as using her professional skills as a botanist and carrying out surveys of flora on the Common.
10. At the Group’s meetings, Surrey Wildlife Trust gave oral reports - the main items were:
 - 10.1 In May 2020 an application was made to participate in a Higher Tier Countryside Scheme for a ten-year period and was expected to be approved by June 2020.
 - 10.2 Although many features were likely to be similar to the previous scheme, there would be changes to the prescription for grazing as that would not be allowed from 1 May to 31 July.
 - 10.3 Other prescriptions were [a] by 2021 there should be no more than 60 per cent of mature scrub, and [b] livestock grazing required to maintain areas of shorter sward interspersed with taller tussocks on 50 per cent of the area. The grazier is concerned that this may not be feasible within the new restricted grazing periods.
 - 10.4 It was reported that due to changes at the Surrey County Council site, the Trust would - from 1 April 2020 – have more resources for managing the habitat at other locations including Blindley Heath.

10.5 During December 2019 and January 2020 scrub clearance was done by volunteers under the Trust's direction. The Trust will meet Godstone Parish Council to consider actions to attract more volunteers for the Common.

10.6 Statutory notices for the fencing of the Ray Brook boundary [needed to allow safe grazing of the norther section] were issued on 29 January 2020

11. During the year grazing was limited, to meet the Trust's requirements, to a period of three months from 2 August 2019 when 15 Dexter cattle were in the southern section.
12. The Group reviewed access to the Common within the context of it being both a Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest – the latter requiring stringent rules. This, together with related items, is being further examined.
13. The Group is concerned about non-attendance by some members of the Group – the approved composition is attached. Without representation or written reports, the Group is not in full possession of all the data and advice that it requires. This will be further reviewed at the next meeting.

This Report was approved by the Liaison Group at the meeting on 15 September 2021.

John Mills