

SH&DCRA Chairman's Report 24th September 2021

It has been more than two years since we have been able to have an AGM or open committee meetings. However, the work of the committee on behalf of common rightholders has continued at quite a pace. I will not give details here as they are covered in the Committee Report below. In order to try to keep as many common rightholders informed as possible, the Facebook page has been used and all those who have provided an email address have received communications from time to time. The website facility provided free by BT has been transferred to a private organisation which was quite costly. The SH&DCRA website was allowed to lapse and a new, free, website is being developed.

You will see from the Treasurers Report that the Association finances have remained fairly static over the last two years. There have been quite large donations from common rightholders and the licences (for now) continue to add to income. Would all common rightholders keep in mind that donations were always received at the AGM and there is a collection container at the back of the hall? Expenditure is generally confined to ink, paper and postage; note that this meeting alone costs over £400 with all of the printing done by the committee. The committee give of their time and travel etc. freely. Other expenditure has been on legal advice from time to time and recently a return to insuring the committee and trustees. The Association continues to subscribe to the Open Spaces Society and has also subscribed to Community Action Norfolk who have been very helpful with the setting up of Trustees. More on Trustees below.

I would like to thank all of the committee for their work over the last two years. It has not been easy trying to meet the demands of the Association Constitution which commits us all to defending the commons and common rights. As you will see from the Committee Report, the commons and common rights continue to be placed under serious threat from a number of organisations and individuals. Anybody contemplating committee work must keep in mind that the protection of common rights on over 4,000 acres of common land cannot be taken on lightly.

Thank you.

Chris Cotton AGM Acting Chairman.

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In no order of importance:

- Brancaster Parish Council – Beach Road car park matters: research has shown that the parish council has collected money, on behalf of the common rightholders, for the use of the common from the Royal West Norfolk Golf Club. Legal advice and advice from the council's auditors show that this money should have been held in trust for common rightholders. Unfortunately, rather than have open and honest discussions with SH&DCRA, the council have decided to become combative. The council's external auditors have received objections to the accounts from SH&DCRA.
- Royal West Norfolk Golf Club – curtilage car park matters: with Open Spaces Society intervention on behalf of SH&DCRA, the common land used as overspill curtilage car parking by the golf club was rescued from becoming deregistered. However, this has not stopped the golf club from continuing to use that part of the common as their car park.
- National Trust – Brancaster Commons Committee – Brancaster fairways Committee: The role of common rightholders is being questioned quite seriously at the moment by the NT. SH&DCRA has raised questions concerning the licensing of activities on the common. Major changes to the constitutions of the Brancaster Commons Committee and the Brancaster Fairways Committee have been discussed at length by the Association committee and in talks with the NT. No conclusions have yet been reached.
- Burnham Overy Staithe - marsh 77 acres and half of the island: Burnham Overy Staithe Parish Council have refused to accept ownership of this area of common CL65. All information is with the Land Registry. The Land Registry has agreed to keep the Association informed of any developments with the marsh as well as the attempts by Holkham Estate to register unregistered creeks in their name. Natural England have earmarked the marsh as a no-go area for the general public.
- Appointment of Trustees - transfer of common right to the Association: The committee have, in line with the Constitution and advice from Community Action Norfolk, now appointed four Trustees to hold property for SH&DCRA. The first matter for the Trustees will be to claim the common right left to the Association by Noel Linge.
- Community Action Norfolk – Association insurance and legal advice: the Association is now a member.
- Natural England – unlawful wildfowling – BONWA – Brancaster Gun Club. Both of the gun clubs gave donations to SH&DCRA to assist with legal representation to NCC concerning sale of rights to Kent Wildfowlers and East Coast Sporting. Natural England have assured the Association that they are working to find a legal solution that will stop unauthorised wildfowling on the commons. No solutions so far.
- Split rights: Many common rightholders have been in consultation with NCC concerning the original Register and the splitting of rights. The matter is with NCC legal department at the moment.