

ST JUST TOWN COUNCIL

Items relating to local moorland



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MINUTES of the TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

29 September 2008

<http://www.stjust.org/minutes/2008-sept-29-mins.pdf>

k) Heath Project – consideration of – as result of recent meeting

The Council discussed this item in considerable detail following a meeting with the Save Penwith Moors Group and Natural England (The Heath Project). Concerns were expressed on the proposed fencing, possible danger of cattle to public, lack of monitoring of the project, further consideration be given to more traditional methods of controlling gorse and bracken.

On a proposal by Councillor McClary seconded by Councillor S Angove the Council resolved – Whilst acknowledging the need for some form of management of Kenidjack Common, the Town Council feels that the proposals as put forward by the Heath Project, particularly regarding the erection of fencing, stiles and gates, will have an adverse effect on access and tourism. (8 in favour, 2 against, 1 abstention).

The Clerk to inform the following of the above decision: A George, M.P., Rt. Hon. Hilary Benn – Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Mr I McNeil Cooke and Mr C Wetherill (Save Penwith Moors Group,) The Heath Project – Natural England, Mr J Brookes, National Trust.

MINUTES of the TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

Monday 18 May 2009

<http://www.stjust.org/minutes/2009-may-18-minutes.pdf>

TC.16: APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

The Town Council considered the appointment of representatives to the Heathlands Forum and the St Just and District Liaison Group.

The Town Clerk reported that John Waldon had been appointed as a “link” officer by Natural England to provide an overview as to why the open areas of Penwith Moors were so important and that he was willing to attend a meeting of the Town Council to respond to Councillors questions. The next meeting of the Heathlands Forum was due to be held on 7 July 2009.

RESOLVED - that

- (1) Councillor K McFadden be appointed as the Town Council's representative on the Heathlands Forum for this Municipal Year;
- (2) That the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, together with all members of the Town Council be invited to attend meetings of the St Just and District Liaison Group; and
- (3) That John Waldon be invited to a future meeting of the Town Council.

MINUTES of the PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday 29 June 2009

<http://www.stjust.org/minutes/2009-june-29-mins.pdf>

PC.2 WEST PENWITH MOORS

John Waldon, explained that he had been employed by Natural England as an Independent Consultant to undertake work on their behalf which had come about due to concerns regarding activities on the moors and downs arising from the Heathlands Restoration Project.

The work involved looking at grazing on the moors from an historical perspective, how it had been managed in the past and bringing forward options for future land management to overcome the recent problems. The final report, for Natural England, was due to be completed by the end of July 2009 and would be based on the views obtained from various groups and organisations such as Save Penwith Moors, the Town Council and the local farming community. He envisaged that the report would also be available to the general public.

Members of the Town Council expressed concern that the views of the Town Council and various other organisations had hitherto been largely ignored by Natural England and welcomed this positive step. Mr Waldon acknowledged that problems had arisen. Communication had been poor and he hoped that through the work he was undertaking similar problems could be avoided in the future. This was an emotive subject as local people felt passionate about the moors which were an intrinsic part of the local environment.

The issue of the grazing of cattle on the moors was raised and the recent tragic incidents. The Town Council felt that a more sensible approach would have been for Natural England to have carried out experimental grazing and burning trials to determine the effect on the

landscape and evaluate impact. Also the detrimental impact that barbed wire fences were having on the local environment was also referred to.

Mr Waldon said that he was looking at the results of trials which had been undertaken by PAROW and stated that the messages coming out regarding the use of barbed wire fencing were confusing. Additional damage had certainly been caused and a number of fences had recently been removed and hedges reinstated.

The Town Council also expressed its concern at the lack of consultation on the installation of the cattle grids on the St Just to St Ives Road which it suggested had blighted the rural landscape. It was due to this lack of consultation that had resulted in the Town Council's previous decision not to support the Heathland Project.

Mr Walden explained that he was currently looking at health and safety issues with regard to the grazing of cattle, but commented that many farmers did not believe that they needed to undertake safety assessments to graze cattle and therefore no none had been undertaken whether needed or not. It was imperative that the right communication channels and decision-making processes were put in place and he commented that from the questions that had been raised by the Town Council the indication was that this had not happened.

In response to a question Mr Waldon agreed to inform the Town Clerk when the Coastal Path which had been closed due to the recent flooding would be reopened.

The Town Council thanked Mr Waldon for attending the meeting.

In response to SPM request to St Just Town Council to host a public meeting in the town so that residents might have the opportunity, at last, of hearing **BOTH SIDES** of the controversy surrounding the fencing and grazing of local moorland, SPM co-ordinator was given 15 minutes to make a presentation to St Just Town Council at their meeting held on Monday 9th November. The necessarily brief talk outlined failures of the HEATH Project with particular reference to Carnyorth moors, and concluded with some possible solutions. The meeting was also attended by representatives of Cornwall Council – Natural England was, apparently, unable to send anyone to attend. Draw your own conclusions: we are not afraid to engage with the public even if NE are too bashful, or scared, to do so.

After the presentation councillors debated the issue in private whether to host a public meeting but decided to defer making this decision until they had an opportunity to consider

the contents of John Waldon's report [which was supposed to have been made available to the public weeks ago]. [For this report go to CONTENTS – A vision for the Moors etc]

MINUTES of the TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

14 September 2009

<http://www.stjust.org/minutes/2009-sept-14-mins.pdf>

TC.86 HEATHLAND FORUM

Councillor Kevin McFadden reported back on his attendance at the meeting of the Heathland Forum held on 2 September 2009. He explained that the main issues discussed related to the fencing of the moors and the grazing of cattle. It appeared that Natural England were in favour of disbanding the forum which he felt would be unhelpful as the forum undertook an important monitoring role. He commented that "Save Penwith Moors" had requested that a public meeting be arranged but in view of the fact that works had been completed there seemed little benefit in holding a public meeting.

The Town Council welcomed the report and there was unanimous agreement that Councillor McFadden should continue as the Town Council's representative on the forum.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Kevin McFadden be re-affirmed as the Town Council's representative on the Heathland Forum.

MINUTES of the TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

9 November 2009

<http://www.stjust.org/minutes/2009-nov-09-mins.pdf>

PRESENT: Mayor, Deputy Mayor, 10 councillors and the Town Clerk. Also in attendance: Councillor Chris Goninan, Cornwall Councillor, Rob Poole, Cornwall Council, Steve Crummay, Cornwall Council, Adrian Bigg, PAROW, Ian Cooke, Save Penwith Moors

TC.143 PENWITH MOORS (EXEMPT PARAGRAPH 3)

The Town Council received a presentation from Ian Cooke, Save Penwith Moors concerning its request for the Town Council to hold a public meeting on the issue of fencing and grazing of moorland in West Penwith, with specific reference to Carnyorth Moor.

Mr Cooke gave an overview of the Heath Project which aimed to reverse the spread of bracken and gorse on the moorland via the introduction of the grazing of cattle and thereby improve public access to the moors. He stated that the group's main concerns related to the areas of Carnyorth Moor, the two National Trust properties of Watch Croft and Carn Galva, the two crofts on Lanyon Farm – Men-an-Tol and Lanyon Quoit and referred to the report produced by John Waldon, Natural England's consultant which had acknowledged that there had been a lack of communication with local residents on the detail of the project.

The group maintained that as a result of the project and the introduction of cattle and gates the moors were becoming less frequented by visitors / walkers and horse riders.

Save Penwith Moors agreed that the moors needed to be conserved and managed but felt that this should be achieved by unobtrusive minimal maintenance by mechanical means, use of herbicides and the controlled burning of areas which would not deter access to the moors by the public.

Ian Cooke urged the Town Council to support the group's request for a public meeting on the issues.

There then followed a question and answer session on the issues raised at which officers from Cornwall Council and the Chairman of PAROW participated.

At the conclusion of the debate the invited guests left the meeting and the Town Council considered the formal request by Save Penwith Moors.

For full text of Save Penwith Moors presentation see below

ST JUST TOWN COUNCIL 9 NOVEMBER 2009

SAVE PENWITH MOORS PRESENTATION

OVERVIEW OF HEATH PROJECT

First of all I would like to point out that SPM campaigns against the fencing and grazing of very specific relatively small areas – compared with Bodmin and Dartmoor – that we consider are prime popular locations for easy public access; are safe (or have been until recently); and represent the heart of West Penwith’s ‘wild wilderness’ moorland, so popular with locals and visitors alike, and which is promoted through tourist publicity.

Our specific areas are Carnyorth Moors, the two NT properties of Watch Croft and Carn Galva, and the two crofts on Lanyon Farm – Men-an-Tol and Lanyon Quoit.

It seems perverse that Natural England has chosen the very locations most frequented for public leisure, while leaving untouched broadly similar environments where almost no one ever goes.

The Natural England HEATH Project (an acronym for Heathland – Environment – Agriculture – Tourism – Heritage) was launched throughout West Penwith with an almost total lack of communication with residents even though it had been planned years before work actually began – a fact now acknowledged by Natural England (Peter Bowden) and their independent consultant, John Waldon, who spoke to this council in June 2009 and whose report was somewhat critical of his ‘pay-masters’.

In his talk, JW “envisaged that his report would be available to the general public”: have members of this council received this report yet?

The HEATH project stated aim of reversing the perceived spread of bracken and gorse, while improving biodiversity, is part of a blanket solution to moorland management by stock proofing these areas and grazing them with cattle – it is a case of one size fits all.

But, as all users of the moors are well aware, these moorland areas are all completely different in their environmental make-up – Carnyorth is totally unlike Watch Croft which is totally unlike Lanyon Quoit Croft and so on; a fact again acknowledged by John Waldon.

Natural England lives in the past and wants to turn the clock back a century: it has taken scant account of changing social patterns unknown when the moors may occasionally have been grazed in the past. Today, increased leisure time, annual holidays, better air, rail and public transport facilities, and ownership of private cars are all factors enabling large numbers of people from UK and abroad to visit West Penwith for its historic environment and wonderful landscape.

To achieve the HEATH objective, landowners and tenant farmers have been offered a generous financial ‘carrot’ in the form of public grants – few of us in business would refuse such an incentive. It is the government agencies that we blame – not local farmers who are now left by Natural England to sort out any problems.

Natural England has consistently refused to consider any alternatives to their own terms of management and pressed on regardless, even once they knew that there was so much concern and opposition – and even completely ignoring the overwhelming vote by this council last September against fencing Carnyorth moors when, provocatively, they began work a few weeks afterwards.

Once started, it soon became apparent that HEATH Project management was seriously inept, and this has now been partially acknowledged by Cornwall Council and Natural England. This is especially true with regard to the National Trust (a sub-partner of Natural England HEATH) in their works on Carn Galva and Watch Croft that were reported in *The Cornishman* last winter.

There were two unlawful breaches of the Highways Act (a cattle grid across a public bridleway on Watch Croft that was ‘unlawful’ and a new drain pipe that flooded three public rights of way on Carn Galva – both had to be removed) as well as breaches of the ESA rules in digging a long deep ditch along an ancient boundary hedge that then had to be filled in.

In addition, once removed, the Watch Croft cattle grid was said in a letter from NE to one of their main fund providers (Interreg IIIB in Europe) to have been reused on Carn Galva when it was still lying by the side of the track since removal months before – and we have photographic evidence of this. Thus proving that the agencies responsible for HEATH are not

averse to being dishonest when trying to prove public money has not been wasted. Are they telling us truthfully about the supposed benefits of grazing the moors?

All this incompetence, secrecy, waste of public money, and dishonesty does not bode well for the satisfactory implementation of their stated aims for biodiversity and moorland management.

CARNYORTH MOORS

I will now turn specifically to Carnyorth moors.

The HEATH Project trumpeted one of its major aims as being improvement of access to moorland. Yet they expected to achieve this by the bizarre method of erecting barbed wire fences and numerous gates to enclose fierce looking cattle. It is a concept that could only be dreamed up by people totally oblivious to the aesthetic beauty of our uncluttered open moorland and the respect and, indeed, affection, which so many of us have for it – both locals and tourists.

While HEATH project work was still going on last winter and spring, there was a total lack of footpath clearance to improve access, even though they managed to have the time and money to erect two wooden stiles at public footpath access points where the paths are still totally inaccessible, not having been cleared for decades. At the same time they did not bother to provide any public access at two other public rights of way crossing into the moors that have also been inaccessible for at least 30 years and probably a lot longer. It is now confirmed by Cornwall Council that the cattle grid by Hectors House is an unlawful obstruction of a public footpath: negotiations are in hand to have it removed.

Since the project began last May we have consistent reports that this open access land is becoming a ghost moor with far fewer walkers and horse riders than previously. There have been at least three very nasty accidents involving horse riders as a direct result of the HEATH project, and riders are still having serious problems in using the bridle gates and mounting blocks despite complaints made to Natural England many months ago.

It is also pertinent to point out that the longhorns on Carnyorth Moor did not trample down bracken within and close to Tregeseal Stone Circle, and that this had to be done by hand to alleviate cattle pressure on this scheduled monument, several stones of which became very loose through use as cattle rubbing stones – these later had to be stabilised by the Historic

Environment Service. Natural England has spectacularly failed to keep to its stated aim of preserving archaeology.

As previously mentioned the longhorns, and the warning signs on access gates, have intimidated many people from going onto this moor – far fewer groups of school children from Carnyorth Outdoor Centre now seem to be taken onto the moor – but, unknown to the public, these cattle have spent much of their time during the summer in back-up fields where there is nice fresh grass and their only source of drinking water: the two planned water troughs out on the moor have never been installed.

A lot of public money has been, and still is, being spent for no positive public benefit – just the opposite in fact.

CONCLUSION

I will finish by outlining our solutions to the problems I have previously mentioned.

We are in complete agreement with Natural England that the moors do need some kind of conservation management – but we strongly disagree how this should be done. We want to see farmers fully compensated by being paid to carry out unobtrusive minimal maintenance by manual, mechanical, herbicide and controlled burning of small areas that, we think, will have far less permanent overall impact on the visual beauty of the moors, and will not deter the public from continuing to use the moors as they have done for generations.

That our chosen areas are kept for public recreation is now of the utmost importance, especially as long sections of the coastal path and many smaller inland areas are being fenced and grazed. There are now few cattle-free areas left.

We want to see the moors given a unified identity that can be used to promote the area, and consider that the Tinnars Way from St Just to St Ives is an almost ready-made means for this, but it needs legal definitive status along its complete route as well as regular maintenance to keep it clear of vegetation and flooding. Proper consideration of this would also relieve visitor pressure on the coastal path.

We also hope – within our remit concerning fences and grazing – to co-operate with Cornwall Council in improving access to and on the moors – both footpaths and bridleways.

As part of our initiative to find solutions we have asked our MP to lobby the Minister of Marine and Natural Environment at DEFRA to introduce a grazing exemption for our areas, so that all new fencing, gates and cattle grids then become redundant and can be removed.

NE have never made any effort, on their own, to communicate face-to-face with the public. This lack of engagement with residents and their elected representatives was partially addressed through the Heathlands Forum set up last February by Penwith District Council, although originally initiated through SPM having the issue put before Penwith Council the previous autumn. The future of this forum is now in doubt.

In an effort to rectify the continuing lack of public information on the HEATH Project we would like to see this council support our call to host a public meeting in the town, so that residents can, at last, be informed of what is going on and be allowed to hear both sides of the argument, and to discuss its merits and draw backs.

All we are asking for is that a few relatively small areas of open access ‘wilderness’ are left for the public to continue being able to enjoy in safety and tranquillity.

Thank you.

Ian McNeil Cooke
Co-ordinator Save Penwith Moors

28th NOVEMBER 2009

TOWN COUNCIL DECISION

At a recent meeting of St Just Town Council that considered SPM request for hosting a public meeting in the town it was resolved:

1. “That the Town Council fully supports the continuation of the Heathland Forum as the mechanism for continued dialogue between all the relevant parties and therefore feels that it would be inappropriate to hold a public meeting at this time.”
2. “That a letter be sent to Cornwall Council and Natural England expressing the Town Council’s concern at the mismanagement of the scheme by Natural England and urging Natural England to continue dialogue via the Heathland Forum.”

SPM Comments

1. It is disappointing that the residents of St Just will still be kept in the dark about the ‘whys and wherefores’ of fencing and grazing Carnyorth Moor but SPM will continue the struggle to overturn this unpopular scheme and attend the Forum.

2. This confirms our opinion of NE management but we also point out that Natural England has not been represented at the Forum meetings of July and November despite their stated aim of engaging with Save Penwith Moors.