

Minutes of the meeting between Huntercombe Golf Club and South Oxford District Council

Held at Huntercombe Golf Club on Friday 25 May 2018

Attendees

South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC)

Matt Gulliford (MG) Forestry Officer
Dominic Lamb (DL) Countryside Officer

Huntercombe Golf Club (HGC)

Muir Parker (MP) Chair of Green
Janet Dawson (JD) Secretary
Grant Stewart (GS) Course Manager
Matt Hicks (MH) Deputy Course Manager

On arrival GS and MH from HGC and MG and DL from SODC went on a course walk to look at specific areas which had been highlighted by Nuffield Parish Council (NPC) as concerns.

On the course

- **Clearance on Timbers Lane next to the 6th tee**

GS explained that scrub removal had been carried out down the side of the 6th tee for health & safety reasons, following a risk assessment by Xact (Independent Health & Safety experts). SODC said there was nothing wrong with the work that had been carried out and understood the health and safety precautions being taken by HGC to reduce the risk. However DL stated that as the countryside officer responsible for overseeing the management of the common, he should have been consulted before the work was carried out due to its extent and visual effect. GS committed to such consultation in the future.

ACTION: GS

- **Tree felling work & undergrowth clearance - Winter 2017/18 - 12th, 13th & 10th holes**

SODC were happy with the tree felling and clearance work that has been carried out but identified some limbs which had been removed using poor sawing technique. SODC recommended further training for the green staff on limbing up techniques. GS accepted the comment. Again SODC stated that the work should have been discussed and agreed with MG prior to its execution. GS again committed to such consultation in the future.

ACTION: GS & MH

- **Recycling areas on the course**

The disposal and recycling of course products such as grass clippings and natural general waste was discussed in detail. Traditionally these products have been discarded in the woodland with no attempt at recycling. GS explained that designated recycling areas have been established in the woodland which have been tidied up and organised. SODC were pleased with the change of working practice and said it was a good improvement from what had previously been happening. These recycle areas have all been previously used by HGC. SODC repeated that they should be informed in advance about any improvements and changes of working practices going forward.

ACTION: GS

- **Tree felling work & undergrowth clearance winter of 2015/16 at the back of the 14th hole**

SODC were impressed with the tree felling and re-planting that has taken place on the 14th hole. This area had been the subject of discussion with SODC in 2015 prior to the work being done. HGC are going to look at the re-stocking of trees in that area to ensure there are the correct amounts.

ACTION: GS & MH

Recycling areas on the course & storage areas

The storage area at the back of the 14th green where contractors had containers and a skip was inspected. This was a bit of a mess when NPC looked at it in April when the contractors were still using the area. SODC said that HGC was in its rights to use this area for a temporary structure so long as it was reinstated properly. HGC can continue to use the area for the storage of materials in the future.

- **Tree felling work & undergrowth clearance winter of 2016/17. 18th hole, 17th hole, 5th hole**

SODC were happy with the felling work that had been carried out but advised that it would be good practice to include wild flower seed in some of the cleared areas. HGC will in future incorporate this in to its management plan. Prior discussion was again emphasised.

ACTION: GS & MH

- **Gorse and thorn clearance**

GS showed SODC an area between the 2nd and 5th holes where there was some gorse and thorn clearance done this winter. It was advised by the BBOWT that this area should be maintained as a meadow. It was agreed between HGC and SODC that this area will be used for heather regeneration.

SODC confirmed that the gorse management practices being carried out are the correct way to manage gorse.

SODC also confirmed that it was acceptable management to have contained fires in specific areas where work is being carried out, as long as the ashes are being removed on completion of the work.

Following the course walk a meeting took place in the clubhouse between all of the attendees to discuss the above points and the way forward.

DL opened the meeting by stating that SODC had a statutory responsibility to oversee the management of the commons which HGC performs on a day to day basis, and that he required HGC to obtain his approval prior to any major work programme being undertaken on common land. HGC confirmed that a summary of the proposed winter works had been sent to MG each year, but accepted that his approval had not been sought, and that details of individual work items had not been provided. HGC apologised for this omission and undertook to discuss any proposals of major work or impact with SODC prior to commencement.

Notwithstanding the above, DL and MG both stated that significant progress had been made in all aspects of the common management since their last visit and encouraged HGC to take more care to publicise the work which is being done to protect the environment of the common such as the introduction of bee hives, bird boxes, hedgehog areas and protected areas for particular flora.

The effect of undergrowth clearance and the recycling areas on the population of bluebells and other wild flowers was discussed in detail. DL confirmed that the flora was not being compromised and the clearance of thorn, nettle and general rubbish on the edges of fairways was acceptable. However, he suggested that the use of wild flower seed when overseeding the cleared areas would be welcome. HGC agreed to this.

MG confirmed that he was pleased with the progress on the woodland programme and was happy with the involvement of John Morris in its preparation and monitoring. MG emphasised the importance of regarding the programme as a long term living project which needs to be constantly updated to reflect the fact that the trees and under storey have their own life cycle.

DL considered that although he supported the work which HGC had completed, he felt that the communication between HGC, SODC and NPC left a lot to be desired and indeed the lack of information had caused a great deal of resentment and distrust with some villagers. He recommended a more formal approach for the future and suggested that he and MG meet formally with the club annually in the autumn to review the planned work for the coming winter. The agreed work plan can then be shared with NPC and the local community.

DL stated that it would be helpful to have an agreed document which outlines the general objectives and principles of the management system for the commons. The existing woodland management programme should be extended to 25 years and a new document should be developed which addresses other areas such as the flora and fauna. HGC agreed to lead this project and SODC agreed to comment on submitted drafts. Target for final document 2 years.

ACTION: Led by: GS & MP and supported by: JD, DL & MG