Proposal to fence Iping & Trotton Commons

Not sure if you have been sent these minutes of the meeting held at Iping Common Carpark to consider this fencing

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Summary of points raised in the meeting with horse riders and Sussex Wildlife Trust representatives 8 February 2014

Present:
Jane Willmott (SWT)
Michael Blencowe (SWT)
Catherine Myers
Louisa Uloth
The Hon Daphne Lakin
Pat Blunt
William Petrie
Lucy Petrie
Nicky Herrtage
Jeremy Herrtage
Janice Reucroft
Sam Hill
Joyce
Angela Church
Nicky Webster
Tricia Butcher (BHS)
Charlotte Watson
Jane Ling
Elizabeth Griffiths
Katie Griffiths
Joy Dayborne
Pam Robertson
man from Crowshole
couple from Trotton

• A woman who had ridden on Blackdown and Stedham Common without encountering any problems with cattle or gates.

• Riders who like to ride in a fenced area have the choice of Stedham or Blackdown or fields, but those not liking cattle or who experience difficulty with gates would have no other option in our area.

• A rider who had had the cattle chased towards her, by boys, on Stedham Common which resulted in her horse being frightened of the cattle permanently. SWT rep said they could not take boys action into consideration when planning a fence because youths could do many acts of vandalism including burning cars.
• The issue of children and gates was raised as an accident waiting to happen, particularly as the A272 runs alongside the commons.

• Many people present had ridden on Iping & Trotton Commons for many years, without having a problem with ponies escaping on to the A272.

• The option of grazing ponies was unanimously seen as completely unacceptable.

• SWT were asked who owned the commons. They replied that apart from a small section where Iping Car Park is (which is owned by the Leconfield Estate, leased by them to Sussex Country Council, who lease it on to SWT), they own, by gift or purchase the majority of the commons. Leconfield Estate has not yet told SWT if they are in favour of the fencing.

• The impossibility of leading ponies through self closing gates was discussed. Several people there regularly ride and lead 2 ponies. SWT did not have a solution to this.

• The removal of a place where children can ride and adventure was raised. They would have to be taken to a riding school if access to this area was removed by the fence and gates (self–closing gates being impossible for children), which is something local children have always previously enjoyed.

• Those present felt they were country people and that the SWT had no comprehension of the feelings of those present, as they came from an urban perspective.

• The distance the SWT is from this locality and the imposition of an unpopular fence on locals was felt to be insensitive, and unworkable.

• Several times people raised the feeling that the SWT did not seem to understand or be willing to listen to the views presented which were clearly not in line with hers.

• The management of Stedham Common was considered. Those who live adjacent pointed out that over the last 15 years cattle are not always there and more than 12 months may pass with no cattle at all. The SWT rep said the point of cattle was the way they graze on patches of heather, with their tongues. However alongside the cattle the birch re-growth is being tackled by
mechanical chopping and using volunteers. The cattle eat the birch once it has been chopped down. It was pointed out to the SWT rep that the cattle also have to be fed hay as they are hungry and there is not enough to feed them on Stedham Common. The SWT rep was asked that as cattle represent about 15% of the management input, the majority coming from mechanical chopping etc why the cattle could not be left out of this equation in the light of the major disadvantage a fence would have on so many local people. The SWT did not consider this was possible

- The issue of environmental organisations lack of consideration of local communities, the needs of bugs being considered more important than those who live and work in close proximity to the commons. People’s concerns less important than their narrow view of heath land. Comparisons to the EA’s action in Somerset. Environmental organisations should look at themselves to see if similar mistakes are being made. The current mess at Graffham was mentioned. SWT are proud of Graffham.

- SWT said their programme was to encourage rarer birds, tree felling was allowed even though the 1000’s of passerines now did not visit the common, but SWT considered these unimportant when compared to the rarer species. Issue of chopping old gorse (habitat of Dartford Warbler) was raised. Issue of noticeable decline in Nightjars on Stedham Common was raised. SWT said there were more bugs on Stedham Common than Iping, but no comparable survey appears to have been done before the fence was erected.

- The cost was raised. SWT rep said the cost to SWT of the consultants etc before planning application was made was approx £9,000. The issue of allocation of resources considering the state of the bottom car park where SWT have chosen not to pay to repair was raised. The fence would be paid for by DEFRA.

- SWT encouraged people to write in. They were asked if they acknowledged that a letter had been sent to them objecting to the fence with 144 names on. They replied that they hadn’t seen the signatures. Unsure if this means that letter is considered by SWT or not. Every one there had already written to the SWT with their own views, some had not been acknowledged by SWT. People said they felt that they were not being listened to.

- SWT were asked who decided to proceed or not, to ask for planning permission. After the consultation the SWT employees will recommend to the trustees that planning permission should be sought. Whether to do so is decided at a Trustees meeting. Several people asked why the Trustees had not come today. The planning permission is then sent to the planning inspectorate
in Bristol. The SWT will not send down the letters of objection they have received to the planning inspectorate.

- The SWT rep was asked if she had a compromise position.