

VILLAGES OF HUNWORTH AND STODY

Minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting Monday 19th May 2025, 6:30pm in Hunworth & Stody Village Hall.

The Annual Parish Meeting is an opportunity for residents and electors in the villages of Stody and Hunworth to raise any matters of concern to them that relate to their local community.

Present: Cllr Karl Carter (Chair of the Parish Council), Kerry Harris (Parish Clerk)

11 Residents

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed all to the Meeting. There were no apologies.

The format of the meeting will be the Chair of the Parish Council report for the year followed by a report from Angus who will report on the work he and the volunteers have undertaken on the Common. He thanked them for all the work they have done.

2. Annual Report from the Chair of the Parish Council – Karl Carter

The year has been dominated by the closure of the Hunny Bell pub and the plans to develop the pub and the adjacent farmyard.

The first proposal to convert the Hunny Bell into a wet led pub was so far off the mark in the meeting, with 80 people in the room, not one person thought that would work.

That followed by a full planning application for the pub and 10 houses, 4 of which are on the pub car park. That reduction in car parking spaces for a destination pub was again seen by everybody as the death knell for the pub.

We await to see the result of the planning application and I do think we have done our best to advise NNDC of the views of those who have been at meetings and written to us. I would also like to thank Councillors for their unanimous decision to reject the present proposal.

But none of this has got the pub open and it has been almost a year since the closure. The pub now looks derelict and will need significant money before it could open, but this pub is a special place to many and personally I would like to see it in the hands of the community rather than leave it in the hands of Stody Estate. I should probably note that well over 1000 people have signed a petition as they feel the same way.

We have applied to Anglian Water for a main sewer for Hunworth but we are still waiting to hear the outcome of that application. Changes to who pays for the cost of connection from properties to that sewer made by the Regulator may well prevent residents making the connection even if that sewer is installed.

I was hoping to hear in April but we are still waiting. The Assessment was positive, particularly with properties on the Green backing on to the river. If given the go-ahead we are probably looking at 2035.

We have managed to get the footbridge at Beck farm changed to allow bikes and pushchairs to cross safely (when first done it was not usable) but it still remains looking like something from the first world war trenches.

My final point is to thank both Charlotte and Kerry specifically for their support and guidance and to thank Alan for his hard work on the greens and Angus Beaton for his support on the Common.

3. Other Reports

Angus Beaton - Conservation activities on Hunworth Common Spring 2024 - Spring 2025

Aim - For volunteer work parties to continue the work begun in 2020 to manage and maintain Hunworth Common in a sensitive and sustainable manner.

Volunteers and working 2024/25

The volunteer team has three or four regular contributors reinforced with support of visiting friends or family who have joined occasional sessions. The group is open to anyone whether residents of Stody, Hunworth or the surrounding area. The work parties are very informal and anyone interested is encouraged to contact the PC who can in turn pass details on to the Conservation Group.

All that is needed is time and a passion for nature, conservation and caring for the Common. The group continues to benefit from the knowledge and experience of a former forestry officer and tree expert along with a trained tree surgeon.

Additional support has also come with five visits by (x7) students from the Sixth Form of Gresham's school whose community outreach students do environmental projects during winter and spring terms.

Over 136 hours of conservation work were carried on the Common between April 2024 and April 2025 – this was in no small part due to the sterling contribution of the team from Gresham's 6th Form.

Coppicing

Coppicing of Hazel, Sycamore, Bird Cherry and Willow has continued of selected trees or stands, this work is done in a way to create a staggered rotation of new growth across the common.

Tree management

Work has continued to manage the area of ash trees planted in 1980 (known as the Queen Mother's plantation). The team has felled and sectioned-up ailing trees (particularly ash) affected by disease or damaged in high winds creating both ground and standing habitat.

There is a small number of these trees and one or two other ash on the Common that appear to have not yet succumbed to ash dieback which is a good sign and the group continues to monitor.

In addition to planned works the group reacts to clear hanging and fallen trees brought down by high winds or other causes.

Control of bracken, bramble and pendulous sedge

The challenge of managing bracken and bramble continues with the intent of controlling (rather than eradicating) its dominance in certain areas to encourage the return of ground flora that has over the decades been smothered by their overwhelming advance.

Cutting and clearing work has yielded a number of areas where regrowth of ground flora is evident with the layers of undergrowth from blackthorn and birch seedlings to foxgloves, several grasses and other flora reported in previous years becoming more established.

Unfortunately, despite the success so far, due to the reduced volunteer pool the work to control the bracken is being kept to a limited number of specific sites to optimise the impact of clearing and regeneration.

Where identified, pendulous sedge is pulled or dug-up and removed as it is not believed to be native to the Common and can become overwhelming if allowed to become established.

Planting

A further 250 trees (gifted by BTCV) were used to increase stock and replace those lost from the plantings of previous seasons. It is calculated that there has been little more than 10% loss across the whole planting which is a very good rate of survival. The group continues to monitor.

Trees planted this season included;

Common Alder, Blackthorn, Dogwood, Dog Rose, Silver Birch, Downy Birch, Field Maple, Hawthorn, Hazel, Hornbeam, Rowan, Spindle, Sweet Chestnut.

As in previous plantings the trees are guarded to primarily protect them from deer, the guards will stay until the trees are 2 - 3 years old when guards will be removed and disposed of responsibly.

Bird boxes and other works

Several of the small bird-nesting boxes placed around the common have been in use but as yet there have been no takers for the barn owl box gifted by the Hawk and Owl Trust (Dec 2023) in the west of the common.

After a number of requests from users of the common a new bench has been constructed using fallen beech and oak from the common and is located on the northern side of the central high-ground overlooking the Queen Mother's plantation.

Using coppiced hazel stock the group provided a number of replacement staves to the Holt Ridge Morris side. Several members of the side were given a guided walk around the common when they came to collect the staves.

Surveys and wildlife recording

In July of 2024 a licensed specialist from the Norfolk and Norwich bat group (NNBG) used a number of audio sensors to detect and record bat activity around the Common – the results from the recordings resulted in her returning in mid-September with the group to trap and physically identify species – bats captured and identified were; Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-Eared, and Barbastelle.

A look forward and future work

It is hoped that the PC, residents and visitors to the Common appreciate the impact of the group's work and will continue to support us in what is a long-term process.

The group will continue its work on the Common including monitoring the newly planted saplings, older trees, healthy or ailing, where appropriate sensitively thin or coppice hazel and sycamore, keep paths clear and continue the work to manage bracken and bramble spread along with surveying and observing areas worked on.

More volunteers would be welcome both to spread the workload and to bring more people onto the Common and to get to know this rare and very special place better.

Constructive and helpful comment either directly when we are working, or via the PC will always be welcome as the team is very aware the Common is cherished by many and some may have wisdom or guidance that could aid us to be more effective in our work.

The group awaits word from the Felbeck Trust who had hoped to assist in carrying out a 'bioblitz' (an intensive environmental / conservation / species survey performed over a period by experts in a number of fields from flora to invertebrates, birds to bats).

NNBG have expressed a desire to return for a further trapping session this summer.

In June the Greening Holt and eco church group are visiting the common led by the well-known botanist and wild life expert Tony Leech.

A resident congratulated the Group on the work they undertake and asked how it was funded. Angus stated that funds were not needed, just time and confirmed that the Bench had been made from a Beech and Oak trees that had fallen on the Common.

He stated that Greshams get in touch with him in the Autumn and a volunteering schedule is arranged.

4. Open Forum

Adrian Springett informed the meeting that he had been to the District Council Offices with the intention of looking at the Planning file for the Hunny Bell , but this is no longer available to members of the public who now have to request which parts of the file they want to see. He intends to request to see the Financial reports which are not on the website as they have to be independently assessed, which he will circulate to all those who wish to see them.

Angus said that he would like to thank Karl for his Chairmanship and sensitive handling of a difficult subject.

5. Close Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting and the meeting closed at 7.02pm