

Commons Coordinater Report

Andrew Colchester

September 2017

2017 has been a very good year for hay making because of the hot dry weather we experienced in June, traditionally the month for hay making. The little green is in a Stewardship scheme which dictates that we are not allowed to cut hay until after the 15th July. Unfortunately since 15th July this year we have had rain every week. Therefore the hay cut this year has been extremely late. This is not ideal and several parishioners have expressed concern. The hay has now been cut and the contractor has done a good job accessing the very difficult areas of the green. He will bale the hay as soon as possible.

Mr Ling has erected a short piece of fence next to the bund to hold his cattle on the marsh. As we predicted the foot drain that feeds the scrape has been poached by the cattle, preventing water from getting into the scrape. When the likelihood of this occurring was brought to David Whiting's attention previously he advised us to re-dig the foot drain should this happen.

The area to the west of the scrape has now become unattractive to the cattle due to the abundance of brambles, common nettle, spear thistle, creeping thistle, ragwort etc. Therefore this area of the marsh has not been grazed. This has resulted in the area being colonised by young trees, mostly willow and ash. If we allow this to continue un-checked it will change the environment of the marsh that we are committed to maintain within our stewardship agreement. Under the rules of the agreement we have to control undesirable species so that they cover less than 5% of the marsh. Goff and I did point out the number of thistles to David Whiting when we met with him in June 2015 to discuss the details of the HLS agreement. At the time David advised us that he was not concerned. The area of undesirable species has increases a great deal since then. My suggestion would be that the area should be topped to encourage the cattle to graze in the future. This is allowed under HK10 – Maintenance of wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl, within our agreement. We would need to agree this with our Natural England adviser in writing. This operation has to be carried out before 1st of October as we are advised not to allow birds to be disturbed between 1st October and 31st March under the rules of the agreement.