

## **Report on maintenance of Alcombe Common**

### **Background**

Minehead Town Council owns a large area of Common Land on Wooton Ridge, located within Exmoor National Park and designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). MTC has a stewardship agreement with the Rural Payments Agency, receiving an annual grant of up to £11,000 to maintain the area appropriately. This Common contains public rights of way and is valued by various user groups. Maintenance must consider user needs and preserve views across the Bristol Channel, while also protecting rare species like the Heath Fritillary butterfly, Dartford warbler, and Nightjar, which inhabit the area.

Given the specific habitat requirements for the Heath Fritillary and the restrictions around maintaining an SSSI site, a specialised maintenance programme is necessary. In 2023-2024, the Butterfly Conservation Society brought together landowners, including MTC, to engage an ecology company to produce a comprehensive management plan for the entire ridge. This plan, funded by a Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant, outlines a specific maintenance programme for each site, ensuring habitat continuity for rare species. MTC and other landowners engage a local specialist contractor to undertake maintenance works as per the plan.

### **Needs**

With the new management plan in place, maintaining the Alcombe Common site is more straightforward and easier to schedule. However, since the site is difficult to access and certain works can only be done during specific times of the year, delegating authority to the Clerk to spend a set amount from the Stewardship Agreement Grant would ensure the site is appropriately maintained and reduce the risk of missed contractor availability. At the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June, Councillors recommended that delegating authority to the Clerk to spend up to £8,000 from the Stewardship Agreement without needing to report back to Council for approval would be a proportionate response, ensuring the allocated budget is not overspent.

### **Finance**

MTC receives up to £11,000 annually to maintain the Alcombe Common land. This funding can only be spent on the Common and a specific programme of works must be evidenced.

### **Recommendation**

To delegate the Clerk with the authority to spend up to £8,000 from the Higher Tier Stewardship Agreement with the Rural Payments Agency for maintenance works at Alcombe Common.

Ben Parker

Town Clerk

June 2024