Dedication of Higher Rights at Cavenham Heath National Nature Reserve

On 2 July 2014, myself and David Falk met with Sarah Haigh from Natural England’s Statutory Access Team and two other NE officers at Cavenham Heath to explore the possibilities of NE dedicating new routes for use by horse riders and cyclists which would link into the U6208 which passes diagonally through the NNR.

Within the NNR heading due south from Temple Bridge is Cavenham Byway 4 which is a cul-de-sac right of way. It was suggested to NE that by dedicating a new bridleway along the southern boundary of the reserve and then using an existing track linking back to the U6208 a circular route for higher right users could be implemented. The on-site response was not very positive because of the possible disturbance to nesting woodlark on this part of the heath. Possible ways to overcome this were put to NE such as if the extension of the route was made permissive it could be closed at crucial times of the year. Sarah Haigh did agree to take the suggestion back to discuss with other colleagues.
The second suggested route was on the western edge of the NNR where a permissive track for walkers headed due north from the U6208, about halfway along its length another cul-de-sac route, Tuddenham Restricted Byway 1, reached the western boundary of the NNR. Dedication of higher rights on this track would allow a circular route to be created. There was a more positive response to this suggestion although it was acknowledged that improvement works would be needed to be carried out by both Natural England and the County Council to bring the route into use.

The formal response to these suggestions made on behalf of the County Council and the Suffolk Access Forum has now been received. The heathland route has been turned down on the basis of increased disturbance to ground-nesting woodlark and possible damage to heathland vegetation but they are willing to go ahead with the second route and work will be put in hand to improve the route within the NNR whilst the County Council will ensure the Restricted Byway is linked into the reserve.

Whilst it would have meant greater access for all if both suggestions had been accepted it would seem that once again access loses out to conservation.

End

Barry Hall/SLAF
October 2014

Postscript:

Natural England has advised “they will be dedicating CROW access rights on foot across all our freehold land at Cavenham Heath NNR (this excludes the area of land owned by Cavenham Poor Trust). Where there are no existing CROW rights, these will go live 6 months after the dedication instrument is signed off. The latest batch of NNRs proposed for dedication, including Cavenham Heath, is with our Board, pending their approval; I will let you know when we have approval.”

Following the request by SCC and SLAF and subsequent site visit, part of the Woodland Trail, which links the minor road running east to west through the NNR with the bridleway joining the western boundary of the NNR, has been assessed with the Responsible Officer and the Senior Reserve Manager, and Natural England is content to permit access for horse and bike use. Appropriate works are now being implemented by the NNR and the council to make this route accessible.

Regarding the Heathland Trail, NE considers that additional access and potential damage from horse and bike use on this compartment of heathland would create another stress on sensitive species and have decided not to permit additional access for horse and bike use along this part of the at this time.

Natural England has drafted a leaflet which is attached as Appendix 1.