

BACTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Village Greens Policy for Bacton Parish Council

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Village Greens are an integral part of our village community, and as such, should provide our residents with a focal point on which to live a peaceful and friendly existence. The following policy is designed to improve awareness of the tight rules and practices that we all need to follow, by making reference to the legislation that covers this often misunderstood area.

The existence and preservation of these greens as an entity contributes greatly to the visual aspect of Bacton.

1. Definition of the Village Greens.

This is defined in the COMMONS REGISTRATION ACT 1965 as amended by THE COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000, as land which has been allotted by or under any Act for the exercise or recreation of the inhabitants of any locality; or on which the inhabitants of any locality have a customary right to indulge in lawful sport and pastimes; or which falls within subsection (1a) of this section.

1a. Land falls within this subsection if it is land on which for not less than twenty years a significant number of inhabitants of any locality, or of any neighbourhood within a locality, have indulged in lawful sports and pastimes as of right, and either –

(a) Continue to do so, or

(b) Have ceased to do so for not more than such a period as may be prescribed, or determined in accordance with prescribed provisions.

The term 'pastimes' in the view of the Parish Council includes the quiet enjoyment of grass areas.

2. Registration.

The Village Greens are registered with the COMMONS REGISTRATION AUTHORITY (Suffolk County Council) and concern Cow Green, Tailors Green and Shop Green.

3. Legislation.

The following is a list of the most common legislation that exists for the protection and rights that cover Village Greens;

- The Enclosure Act 1845/57
- The Commons Act 1876/99 & 2006
- The Open Spaces Act 1906
- The Acquisition of Land Act 1981
- The Law of Property Act 1925
- The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 ❖ Local Government Acts

4. Responsibilities.

Bacton Parish Council are owners and custodians of the Greens within the Parish and is obliged and bound to protect the condition of the Greens for the wider public enjoyment. The Council are responsible for the maintenance, protection and upkeep and all matters relating to Village Greens should be referred (in the first instance) to the Parish Council for consideration. Any rulings or actions will be made by them in accordance with present legislation, or referred to other authorities if deemed necessary. It is the responsibility of the owners of property fronting directly onto a Village Green to check their Deeds as to the boundary of their property to ensure that no flowerbeds, shrubs or hedges extend beyond it.

As custodians The Parish Council must ensure that the Greens are protected against encroachment, damage, and uses other than those consistent with normal enjoyment of the Greens. Parking on the grass is not allowed.

Protection of grassed areas may involve the placing of stones, or erection of posts or bollards to prevent vehicular access. This must be agreed by the Parish Council.

All instances of maintenance and repairs will be carried out by the Parish Council, or by contractors that the Council appoints to carry out such works.

5. Lawful Uses.

Whilst not exhaustive, the following is a list of lawful and prohibited uses of a Village Green. Lawful uses would include: -

- Walking across it with or without a dog.
- Village fetes.
- Playing sports and games.
- Public gatherings for entertainment.
- Use of existing paths for access/egress on foot.
- Use of existing rights of access that cross the Green with a vehicle (only those existing prior to registration or specifically approved by the Parish council since that time.)

Prohibited uses include:-

- Any physical alterations to the Green.
- Fencing of the Green or otherwise making it inaccessible to the public.
- Wilful damage (i.e. when a person was aware of the risk of damage) e.g. by vehicles, bicycles and horses.
- Parking of a vehicle on the grass.
- Planting of trees except by the Parish Council.
- The building or introduction of any structure (this includes even small things such as steps, bollards, posts) except by the Parish Council.
- The driving of a vehicle across grassed areas. Existing tracks and access ways are often permitted routes but if in doubt contact the Parish Council.
- The pruning or cutting down of trees except by the Parish Council.
- Parking of a vehicle on the grass unless with permission from the Parish Council.

The following extract is from "THE PARISH COUNCILLORS GUIDE" published by Shaw & Sons Ltd. August 1970.

"A Parish Council must not allow a Village Green which it owns to be encroached upon or to be misused. A degree of common sense must prevail in the possibilities of the Greens use. However, the overriding factor must be Greens protection against damage and change of use. The Parish Council will be pleased to advise any residents on the Green's use."

6. Enforcement

Where a party or parties are proved to have misused the Green, creating damage or alteration to its original fabric the Parish Council will deem those persons responsible for unlawful damage and take action for the Green's repair or reinstatement.

Those responsible will be expected to pay all subsequent costs in relation to a Green's repair/reinstatement, and works will be subject to timescales laid down by the Parish Council. In some circumstances damage or encroachment may result in criminal proceedings being taken by the Parish Council.

Should the Council have to carry out its own works in relation to repairs/reinstatement or employ a contractor/individual all costs incurred will be automatically charged to those individuals responsible for the damage or alteration.

Please contact the Parish Clerk, or attend one of the monthly meetings if you require advice or facts on any issues relating to the Village Greens, before you engage in any form of activity that does not fall within the detail listed in this policy (see note 5 – Lawful Uses).

7. Maintenance.

The Parish Council is legally responsible for the maintenance of all parts of the Village Greens, whether partially grassed or surfaced.

Whilst grassed areas are regularly cut and seeded, other areas may be subject to repair or replacement from time to time dependent on the degree of erosion they have received.

All decisions relating to the Greens' maintenance and repair will be taken by the Parish Council in the first instance, before any works are planned or carried out.

8. Replacing Hard Surfaces Policy

1. Any residents wishing to have a hard surfaced area replaced must put a request in writing to the Parish Council.
2. If the Parish Council gives permission for the works a competitive quotation will be obtained by the Parish Council which will provide exact particulars of the proposed works and include specific details in the materials to be used.
3. If the area in question is for the sole use of their property the residents will be expected to cover the cost of the works required but such a request will not give any rights, implied or otherwise, or any rights of title to the area concerned.
4. Under no circumstances will any grassed areas of the Village Green be lost due to any works.

9. Inspections

The Parish Council will inspect all the Village Greens annually to determine their condition and any works that may be required. Other inspections may be carried out ad hoc. The result of such inspections will be formally recorded.

10. Rights of Access

There is a distinction here between old and new rights. In the past, where owners already had the right (i.e. there had been an access way used by vehicles for many years), Parish Council's gave consent (in a formal document, not just a letter) to owners selling their properties. This was not a legal right as such rights – condoning the criminal offence of taking vehicles on to Greens – could not be created. It was just consent to the use so that the Parish Council could not take action in future against the owner. The onus is on the owner of a property to take the procedure forward with the Parish Council, who will then advise or seek advice as to how they should proceed. It goes without saying that any access way should have been in use and already constructed in such a case. Where there is no long term user there is not even the expectation that a right of way could exist for such use (i.e.

vehicles) and it cannot be created by the Parish Council. Use on foot only is a different matter – this use is already part of the public right to use the Greens and so does not need to be created. Creating a surface for foot use only – e.g. to stop mud being carried into a house, could be contemplated if the Parish Council was satisfied that there was no encroachment, i.e. no interference with the right of the public to use the surface as part of the Greens. There could be no exclusion of the public from this path and the Parish Council would, in effect, only be giving licence to use the path subject to it being properly maintained by those benefitting from it.

11. Protection of Trees

All trees that are planted within the Village Greens are protected and must not be pruned or cut down without obtaining permission from the relevant bodies. This means the Parish Council and in the case of trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order also means Mid Suffolk District Council. The Parish Council has the right to take decisions on the moving and replanting of trees and other plants on the Village Greens.

You should contact the Parish Clerk or attend one of the monthly Parish Council meetings if you have any questions or queries in relation to the planting of trees and other plants on the Village Greens. The Council will endeavour to provide you with the relevant information or help you with your query.

12. Alterations or change of use

Any requests to alter or a new use of the Greens should first be referred to the Parish Council. The request will then receive consideration for the type of action that will be deemed necessary taking into account all of the legislation that currently exists. The Parish Council has limited rights and may only sanction minor alterations. Major changes of use and significant alterations have to be submitted to the Secretary of State and this may only be done by the Parish Council or Local Authority.

It is possible to change the use of the Village Greens in certain circumstances given that the equivalent piece of land in proportion is exchanged for the intended area of Village Green concerned, i.e. access to a new development. The procedure is lengthy, complicated and costly.

In general terms it would not be possible to obtain permission to alter or change the use of the Village Greens given that Greens are heavily protected by legislation. It is therefore highly improbable and unlikely that any permission to change the use of a Village Green or part of a Green would be granted.

13. Availability

This document will be published on the Village Website and copies may be obtained on application to the Clerk.

14. Summary

Village Greens are part of our English heritage and should be protected and enjoyed by everyone as much as possible. We should all be proud of our Village Greens and feel

honoured to live and be a part of a community that has the good fortune to have them –
“cherished by residents and admired by visitors”.