

# BLAXHALL COMMONS AND OPEN SPACES CHARITABLE TRUST

## ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26

1. This report covers the period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
2. Trustees

Current BCOST trustees are:

Appointed Trustees -

Eve Rossor (Hon Secretary)  
Toby Bushill (Hon Treasurer)  
Andrew Derrick  
Michelle Flowers  
Rosy Thornton

Parish Council nominated Trustees -

Karen Baker  
[Vacancy]

Our gratitude is due to Mark Oakley, who has recently stepped down as a Parish Council nominated Trustee. Mark has served as a Trustee of BCOST since 2015 and over that time we have benefitted greatly from his generosity, his prudent input and his expertise, particularly in the areas of law and governance. We await the Parish Council's nomination of Mark's successor.

It was with great sorrow that we heard of the death on 13 February of our former Trustee, Rodney West. Rodney became a Trustee of BCOST in 2017, a year after it was first established as a charity in 2016. Even before his formal appointment as Trustee, he was centrally involved in the work of BCOST and of its informal predecessor, the 'Friends of the Blaxhall Commons'. Not only was Rodney a cheerful, positive and energetic colleague, but he brought particular expertise both on the flora and fauna of our green spaces and on the history of the Blaxhall 'common yards'. His legacy lives on in the form of the Management Plans he created for the curation of Jasper's Pightle and the public access land at Stone Common, and of the small woodland at Stone Common with its spring bulbs which he helped to create along with his partner, Maggie Grenham. Rodney was loved and will be greatly missed.

### 3. Stone Common

Renewed annual allotment or grazing licence agreements were signed with effect from 1 September 2025 for all the plots in current use, and all licence fees have been duly paid. Since last spring, Allotments nos. 18-20 (beyond the woodland, under and around the electricity pylon) have been licensed; from having been overgrown with bracken, it is good to see this area now in active cultivation following a long period of disuse.

In February, we were delighted to receive a grant of £750 from East Suffolk Council's Enabling Communities fund, which has allowed us to purchase a set of hurdles to be kept at Stone Common. The hurdles are of great help for enclosing, and moving around, the sheep which are used periodically for conservation grazing on the public access land there, keeping the bracken at bay and the sward in good condition; having our own hurdles saves moving hurdles to and from the churchyard where the sheep also graze. Many thanks to East Suffolk Council and to our district councillor, Tim Wilson, for his support of our grant application. We are also grateful to Miranda Barclay for loan of the sheep, to Joy Shaw for helping with the acquisition of the hurdles and for all her hard work as primary shepherd, as well as to other volunteers who have helped from time to time with moving hurdles and sheep.

Stone Common work parties over the year 2025/26 have again primarily focused on management of the land to the west of Prevost's Path, in accordance with the Management Plan adopted in 2022. Activities during the year have once again primarily included:

- Maintenance of the hedging along the southern, western and northern boundaries of the land. This work has involved clearing long grass, brambles and bracken from around the hedge, and adding mulch. We were again able to fill any gaps and to thicken up the planting using new hedging stock obtained by Blaxhall Tree Warden, Joy Shaw.
- Continuing the work of removing broken and redundant fencing and other structures. In particular, we have chopped up and removed for recycling the old wire and other waste metal left from fences removed in earlier winters. Waste timber which was unsuitable for re-use was burned at our Bonfire Night and January Wassail bonfires.

We are grateful to all the volunteers who joined our work parties in 2025/26, and especially to Stone Common residents who have taken independent initiative in regular maintenance tasks.

#### 4. Jasper's Pightle

We have continued with the regular maintenance of the Trust's land at Jasper's Pightle in accordance with the Management Plan. Activities taking place during 2025/26 have included:

- Continuing bracken control: the bracken was cut mechanically by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust (with thanks to Ben Calvesbert), followed by hand-raking by volunteers.
- Maintenance work to the boundary hedge which was planted along the road in winter 2022/23. This involved volunteers clearing bracken and other vegetation from around the hedge and chopping the cleared bracken to apply as mulch.
- Completion of the removal of redundant barbed wire fencing from along the north walk.

#### 5. Other activities

We conducted our regular twice-yearly litter picks around the village, on behalf of the Parish Council, in November 2025 and March 2026.

BCOST volunteers helped Joy Shaw with the planting of more daffodil bulbs at the village playing field, to add to those planted in previous years.

We have received a donation from the Suffolk Bird Group of a number of nesting boxes for redstarts, a summer visitor which favours woodland edge habitats, particularly the edges of birch woods. The nesting boxes are being put up in suitable locations at Stone Common and on Jasper's Pightle.

A bonfire party was held at Stone Common in November 2025. This was an opportunity both to burn waste timber cleared from the site and to thank our volunteers for their contribution to our work parties with mulled cider, hot dogs and jacket potatoes. The event was free of charge, but we were delighted to receive almost £100 in donations on the night. Thanks to all who attended and donated so generously.

In January 2026 we held, as last year, a 'wassail' In celebration of the fruit trees at the village playing field and at Stone Common. The custom of apple wassailing, which goes back many centuries, involves 'wassailing' the trees by pouring cider on the roots, and laying cider-soaked bread or toast among the branches, and singing or reciting traditional wassail rhymes to encourage a good crop. We greeted the trees at the playing field before processing, with chanting and banging of pans, to Stone Common to greet the trees there. The event ended with a celebratory bonfire and refreshments – the

bonfire being an opportunity to help dispose of clippings from winter pruning work at the Village Hall.

As usual, BCOST had a presence, with display boards, at the Blaxhall Festival in June 2025 and again at the Blaxhall Village Fete in August 2025. In order to keep the community informed of our activities, we have contributed regular updates about our activities to the Blaxhall village newsletter as well as posting on the news page of our own website and advertising work parties and other events on the Blaxhall Facebook group page.

For details of all BCOST activities, please visit our website: [www.blaxhallcommons.com](http://www.blaxhallcommons.com)

## 6. Finance and fundraising

We were again grateful to Blaxhall Parish Council for a grant of £200 in 2025, as a contribution, which we hope will be renewed annually, to our costs in maintaining the publicly accessible green spaces at Stone Common and Jasper's Pightle.

This invaluable support from the Parish Council, together with allotment and grazing licence fees, annual wayleave payments from National Grid and UK Power Networks for electricity installations at Stone Common and Jasper's Pightle, and donations at the bonfire party gave us an annual income in the financial year January-December 2025 sufficient to meet our regular budgeted expenditure.

Our basic financial position is therefore secure, but additional activities will need to be paid for by fundraising. This year, as noted above, the grant of £750 from East Suffolk Council's Enabling Communities fund enabled us to purchase sheep hurdles for use at Stone Common. We are currently preparing an application to the Sizewell C Community Fund to finance resurfacing of the track at Stone Common to improve accessibility, and the purchase and installation of a picnic bench on the public access land there.

As at 31 March 2025, the Trust held £4,119 in the bank plus £79 in cash, making a total balance of £4,198.