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26 May 2021

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your letter of 6 May enquiring about the impact of lockdown in 2020 on Cleeve Common as part of the Cotswold AONB.

As I am sure you are aware, Cleeve Common is primarily a conservation site and is designated as a SSSI for its geology, habitats and botany and also contains a wealth of archaeological interest. But its 1000 acres of open grassland also represent a major resource to the local community for outdoor recreation. Over 100,000 people per year come to the Common to walk, run, play golf, picnic, cycle, toboggan, ride horses, fly kites and participate in other outdoor pursuits.

The pandemic really brought to the fore the immense value of the site, not only for physical health but, perhaps even more importantly, for mental well-being. Perversely, as soon as lockdown was introduced in March 2020, the number of visitors to the Common increased significantly as people took advantage of this large open space for their daily activity. The Common itself coped pretty well with the increased number of visitors and there was little impact on our conservation efforts. Inevitably the increase in usage led to pressure on parking (outside the Common boundary), litter including dog mess and complaints about irresponsible cyclists or horse riders, but these are matters we have to deal with in any year.

It is important to add that the setting of Cleeve Common in the surrounding AONB is important, not only to wildlife that may depend on surrounding woodland and pasture, but also to visitor enjoyment to preserve the rural views and pleasure of the access routes.

Your sincerely,

Michael K Bates

Michael Bates, Clerk to the Board, Cleeve Common Trust

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