

MINUTES OF THE EMBLETON QUARRY WORKING GROUP

held on Tuesday 6th December 2022 at 7.00pm in the Creighton Hall

Present: Terry Howells (TJH) - Chair, Kevin Redgrave (KR), Margaret Watchorn (MW), Andrew Hindle (AH), John Young (JY), Clive Middlebrook (CM), Andrew Chillingsworth (AC)

1. Apologies: Raymond Carss (RC), Ian Brown (IB), Kevin Redgrave (KR), Denise Metcalfe (DM)

Members confirmed that nobody intended to record the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest: None.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 1st November were accepted as a true record by all; proposed AH, seconded JY and signed by MW as the leader of that meeting.

4. Matters arising:

4.1 Signs: KR will order appropriate signs; a source has been suggested by a previous group member, and the Fire Service may be able to provide a relevant sign concerning fires. All signs will be temporary and will relate to current concerns. Members agreed to a suggestion by JY that photos of the signs be taken, to be used on social media when necessary. The possibility was raised of erecting a noticeboard for current issues, events and to raise awareness of points of interest. This will be discussed at the next meeting. KR

4.2 Camera traps funding: MW reported that no further response has been received.

4.3 Tree planting: An allocation has been made. KR is the contact person for the project and will advise on forming a working party to assist with planting when the trees arrive. KR

5. Quarry House:

5.1 Stabilisation and future work: The Chair reported that payment for stabilisation has been made and confirmed that there is no need for Building Control involvement; this has been discussed and understood by EPC. He also confirmed that the QWG will remain an advisory group to EPC. EPC are briefed at each meeting on matters pertaining to the quarry, but it may be helpful to make a more formal presentation when specific projects are to be addressed. Concerning future access to Quarry House, GW reminded members of the advice given after NCC's Building Inspector's visit. To avoid problems with anti-social behaviour whilst allowing viewing and/or partial access to the building for the public, a fence 2m away from the building (and further at the gable ends) is recommended. This could be brought in at one or two points to allow views to the interior. Doors could be sealed or replaced and broad mesh window coverings installed.

JY suggested a schedule should be kept, with a monthly check and photographs taken. This was agreed and details of putting this in place will be discussed at the next meeting. Professional advice is needed to assess liabilities and protection of species whilst allowing some public access; AC suggested the latter could take the form of 'hard hat' tours in exchange for a donation. The Chair has already contacted a previous surveyor but they are unable to provide the necessary assessment. MW agreed to contact English Heritage and the National Trust to see if they can provide this service. MW

5.2 Match funding: GW reported that £7,500 AONB funding is still available from the last bid; proposed work includes an accessible path to Quarry House, interpretation boards and groundworks. All works should be carried out by the end of March. A site meeting is required to formulate plans for what to do and a scope of work will be drawn up before work commences. The Chair suggested it would be sensible to use the new format provided by AC for planning and executing work, and to present it to EPC. CM asked if surplus soil/spoil could be moved temporarily to an area near the container. JY pointed out that the quote given may not be suitable for screening/dumping. He will meet with GW to discuss details before any formal plans are made. GW/JY

The installation of a donations box and/or a QR code was raised. It was agreed to discuss this at a future meeting

5.3 Ponies: No response has been received yet regarding the use of cattle in the front field. MW reported that the Creighton Hall would not raise a charge for 1.5 cubic metres of water used during the ponies' occupancy of the field.

6. Events:

6.1 Proposed open evening: Members agreed that a Friday in early April would be appropriate. GW agreed to ask a representative from AONB to attend. The Chair suggested a maximum of five speakers, the aim of the event being to show what has been achieved. Subjects could include Dark Skies, species, and Quarry House. MW will check hall availability. MW

6.2 Alnwick Wildlife Group: MW reported that no date has been suggested yet.

6.3 Midsummer Fire walk: JY outlined plans for a fire walk on Thursday 22 June 2023, linked to an instructors' course and raising funds for the quarry. He will publicise and run the evening. MW commented that the previous event had been very well organised and professional. GW pointed out that if anyone queries a fire in the quarry, the difference can be explained between a professionally run and monitored event and unauthorised fires. All present were in favour of the fire walk. JY

7. Projects:

7.1 Pond overflow: In the absence of KR, AH and CM agreed to monitor the overflow and deal with any unexpected issues. AH/CM

7.2 Dark Skies: GW reported that events have been provisionally arranged for January 28 and March 18 – themes may be moon and general Dark Skies based. The hall is available if it is needed, but GW's intention is that the quarry will be the centre of events. MW commented that the Aurora WhatsApp group is much appreciated and has attracted over 30 people.

7.3 Species updates: MW reported that the species database is up to date and now has over 800 species listed.

8. Working parties: It was agreed to move and stack piles of bricks for possible repairs at Quarry House in one location (possibly the small back room). This will take place in the first weeks of January – date TBC. JY agreed to provide and move pallets and offered to purchase or make a donation for any unwanted bricks. AH and AD reported that one more session on the shale bank should enable most invasive plants to be cleared. KR has requested further trimming of brambles and gravelling of wet sections of paths. JY

9. AOB:

Accessibility: JY has contacted a disability correspondent from the BBC to see if they wish to visit in the summer. MW confirmed that she has contacted seven groups, asking if they will visit and make comments to help us plan future accessibility work – no responses have been received. GW suggested more work needs to be done on some muddy areas. The path to the pond has naturalised well within a short space of time.

10. Date of next meeting: It was agreed to hold a January meeting. This will be on Tuesday 3rd January at 7.00pm in the Creighton Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm.