

MINUTES OF THE EMBLETON QUARRY WORKING GROUP

held on Tuesday 1st November 2022 at 7.00pm in the Creighton Hall

Present: Raymond Carss (RC), Kevin Redgrave (KR), Margaret Watchorn (MW), Andrew Hindle (AH), John Young (JY), Clive Middlebrook (CM)

In the absence of the Chair, the meeting was led by MW.

1. Apologies: Terry Howells (TJH), Andrew Chillingsworth (AC), Ian Brown (IB)

Members confirmed that nobody intended to record the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest: None.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 4th October were accepted as a true record by all; proposed KR, seconded AH and signed by RC as a representative of Embleton Parish Council.

4. Matters arising:

4.1 Signs: KR has discovered that appropriate signs (no litter; no fires) are not available 'off the shelf'. Other than one incidence, the fire problem appears to have ceased and there has been no significant problem with litter. It was agreed that signs be erected for spring/summer. KR agreed to contact the Fire Service to see if they can supply suitable fire signs. KR

4.2 Fires in the quarry: CM pointed out that small fires had been responsibly managed with small stones surrounding the immediate area but all agreed that the principle of unnotified fires is unsafe. Members of the group were encouraged to keep a 'watching eye'.

4.3 Camera traps funding: MW reported that there has been no progress so far through ERIC NE.

5. Quarry House:

5.1 Stabilisation: AC supplied an invoice for reference and has agreed to sign off the work as having been completed according to the scope of work. KR reported that the building company has made a good job of all specified tasks. Two additional lintels have been replaced; the cost of these has replaced that for dismantling an internal wall which had already been dealt with. AD and KR had cleared part of the base of the interior, allowing the builder to reach the full height of the gable. Chimneys were not included in the original schedule and have not been tackled as the contractor felt these exceeded height restrictions for work. However, he reported that there are no loose bricks or mortar. Stones on the top may require attention at some future point. Work to be done by volunteers now includes tidying up and removing rubbish.

The staircase is outside the remit of this stage of the project. JY and KR recommended treating or replacing the base of the uprights. Members agreed ensuring that it is not usable or accessible. This could be achieved by maintaining the Heras fencing on three sides of the staircase, bolted to the walls, with 'Keep Out' signs clearly displayed. KR recommended that we should

know what a safe baseline is; CM suggested that whoever signs off the work could advise on the staircase and whether the Heras fencing is safe for insurance purposes. It was agreed that MW ask the Chair to approach someone to sign off the project and advise on the staircase, perhaps the person who conducted the original survey of Quarry House. MW/TJH

KR suggested that further future work concentrates on replacing doors and windows for security and for wildlife, either with mesh to allow visibility into the building, or in the case of doors, by installing copies of originals. MW suggested that she and the Chair could investigate funding from an industrial archaeology grant source if this were to go ahead. MW/TJH

A motion was proposed that since all work has been approved as complete by AC, the building contractor should be paid by EPC. Proposed KR, seconded JY; all in favour.

5.2 Match funding: A local bird club has confirmed the necessary £2,500 match funding to supplement the AONB funding.

MW reported that a bid for £20,750 to Northumbria Water's Priority Habitat fund has been submitted. Two elements of this would further the landscape work around Quarry House by removing unwanted spoil to restore species rich grassland and removing more spoil to reveal some whinstone faces behind the building. Another element focusses on the re-creation of a sand martin nest site on the east side of the reserve. KR clarified that scrub would be removed and that the top of the bank would need to be protected as much as possible from predators. Work would not begin until autumn 2023, though JY pointed out that some work on riddling and sorting stone/soil/spoil on site, ready for removal, could be carried out before March if funding were to be forthcoming. No work will begin without an agreed scope of work which will be drawn up if the bid is successful.

5.3 Ponies: KR reported that the ponies have returned to the quarry. MW has forwarded a new contract, signed by the Chair, to the ponies' owner. RC asked if any grazing was to take place in the front field once the bonfire is over. KR suggested that EPC should decide on wintering policy and that he would add another strand of wire to the fence. RC agreed to talk to a neighbouring farmer about the possibility of Highland cattle or other stock grazing the field when appropriate. EPC
RC

KR confirmed that a reading of the water meter had been taken. MW will forward this to the Parish Clerk. MW

6. Events:

6.1 Proposed open evening: It was agreed to hold this in March. MW will check the availability of the hall. MW

6.2 Alnwick Wildlife Group: MW has responded and awaits a reply from the committee with a proposed date for our talk. JY offered to help.

7. Projects:

7.1 Pond overflow: KR continues to monitor the overflow and has raked out some vegetation. The water has reached normal levels and is beginning to trickle out. The grid is clear and stones are holding back green matter.

7.2 Dark Skies: GW has contacted NCC concerning other work to improve light levels; he intends comparing current levels with an existing baseline. *(Additional notes: A social media Aurora WhatsApp group for the community and was promoted in the Whinstone Times – so far there have been three requests to join the group)*

7.3 Species updates: KR reported 30+ whooper swans recently; a pallid swift was spotted by GW and a great egret by KR. MW reported on a fungi survey of the quarry which revealed nearly 40 unrecorded species, including two rarities, one of which is thought to be a first record for the county. JY suggested that a fungi expert could be invited to the Open Evening to emphasise the importance of the quarry as a site.

8. Working parties: KR reported that work will continue on tidying Quarry House, sorting bricks and stone. Coast Care will be working in the reserve on Thursdays in November and will focus on brush-cutting and grass cutting.

9. AOB:

9.1 Midsummer firewalk: JY asked if he could hold a firewalk in the quarry on Thursday 22 June at the end of a certification course. He would promote the event and sell tickets, generating income for the quarry. KR commented that the previous event had been successful but queried if it would contradict the 'no fires' signs that would be erected. It was agreed that this should be an agenda item for the next meeting.

9.2 Quarry House future work: Further to item 5, KR asked what has to be done next for Quarry House, if anything. CM suggested that once inspected, the building should either be deemed safe for partial access or remain completely fenced off as it is. MW referred to the four options outlined as a result of the survey undertaken by the Chair in June 2021. Option 2 had been followed, which consisted of stabilising the property in line with the recent scope of work. It was agreed to discuss further ideas at the next meeting.

11. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 6th December at 7.00pm in the Creighton Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm.