

MINUTES OF THE EMBLETON QUARRY WORKING GROUP

held on Tuesday 4th October 2022 at 7.00pm in the Creighton Hall

Present: Terry Howells (TJH) – Chair, Raymond Carss (RC), Kevin Redgrave (KR), Margaret Watchorn (MW), Andrew Hindle (AH), Andrew Chillingsworth (AC), Ian Brown (IB), John Young (JY), Andy Davis (AD), Clive Middlebrook (CM), Gary Woodburn (GW)

1. Apologies: Denise Metcalfe (DM)

2. Declarations of Interest: None

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 8th September were accepted as a true record by all; proposed IB, seconded AH and signed by the Chair.

4. Matters arising:

4.1 Dogs/waste in the quarry: We await an appointment with the dog warden. KR reported particular problems near the entrance gate. In the absence of CCTV, the Chair suggested signage at each entrance, reinforcing the need to pick up all dog waste.

4.2 Fires in the quarry: Problems continue with small fires being lit in the NE corner. The Chair has spoken to local police. A member of the public had noted the lack of signs stating that unauthorised fires must not be lit; it was agreed to display a sign at the entrance, along with the dog waste sign and a 'no litter' sign. KR will organise this. GW offered to use social media asking people to be careful and vigilant. A suggestion to install a fire pit in the classroom area was discussed; however, this idea was rejected as it could legitimise unauthorised fires in the quarry.

KR
GW

4.3 Camera traps funding: MW has contacted ERIC NE to see if they will provide funding; a formal reply is awaited.

5. Quarry House:

5.1 Stabilisation: AC reported that work began last week and is progressing well, beginning at the west end. Oak lintels have been replaced and the porch has been removed. JY commented that the quality of work is excellent; GW pointed out that habitats for bats and birds are being conserved and created in line with the scope of work. The Chair reported that the tops of chimneys are too high to be reached using a platform, and KR pointed out that this is not within the contractor's remit. Although the chimney stacks seem sound at present, it was agreed by all to ask the contractor if he will deal with the chimneys if we hire a cherry-picker. AC will ask.

AC

JY highlighted the need to consider public safety once work is complete. The building will need to be assessed by an independent expert (possibly the person who conducted the initial survey of Quarry House) to limit danger/risk and sign off the building as safe, and a monthly check plus an annual independent inspection would stand us in good stead for insurance purposes. GW suggested that limited visitor access would protect sensitive areas.

The external staircase is in need of attention. AC reported that it should be removed or protected from public access. All agreed that it should be preserved as part of the building's heritage. JY has examined the staircase; although one post on the wall side is slack, the rest is sound. He suggested that the base could be exposed and creosoted, that elements could be mortared into the wall and that three additional timbers could be fitted in. The staircase could be made climb-proof but aesthetically pleasing by erecting a surrounding wooden fence with gaps to see through it. Work could be carried out by volunteers. AC suggested that a 'No access' sign be erected too. All approved this course of action.

5.2 Match funding: MW has contacted Northumberland Estates Community Fund. They do not fund Parish Councils and therefore have said that they cannot support us. GW awaits a response this week from two sources of funding.

MW reported on possible eligibility for Northumbria Water's Priority Habitat fund which supports grants for work over £10,000 to restore open mosaic habitat on previously developed land. A project could be drawn up, focussed on removing unwanted spoil and landscaping around Quarry House to restore whin grassland and open up whin faces. AC reminded the group of the need for a scope of work for the project. The deadline for applications is October 30th; MW, GW and KR agreed to draft a scope of work and an application.

MW/GW/KR

5.3 Ponies: KR reported that the ponies will return next week; he will erect wire or slotted fencing to ensure they are safe during ongoing work. AC has informed the contractor. MW has prepared a new contract to send to the ponies' owner.

MW

5.4 AONB letter and agreement: AC has signed the acceptance and has received an acknowledgement.

6. Events:

6.1 Bat/moth evening: A small but enthusiastic group attended the recent event, including holidaymakers. A local moth expert and KR had given informative talks and five new records of species were made.

6.2 Proposed open evening: It was agreed to postpone this until Feb/Mar 2023. Members discussed the possibility of a guest speaker or 3-4 short talks based on various aspects of the quarry and ongoing work. JY suggested it may be a good opportunity to enlist volunteers. MW will find out when the hall is available.

MW

6.3 Alnwick Wildlife Group: MW reported that this group has requested a talk about the quarry. It was agreed to offer a slot after May 2023: TJH, JY, KR and MW are all willing to attend. MW will respond to the request.

MW

7. Projects:

7.1 Pond overflow: KR continues to monitor the overflow; the water level remains below it.

7.2 Dark Skies: GW reported on difficulties in contacting a previous guest speaker from NASTRO but will pursue his enquiries. The signs will be completed during the winter. Low lumen lights installed by NCC are an improvement but lights by the layby and lack of shields still affects the sky

GW

quality. GW will contact NCC and the Chair will pursue the matter again if necessary. IB will forward contacts for Kielder Observatory to GW. Following recent social media postings and in response to a request from MW, GW agreed to set up a social media Aurora WhatsApp group for the community. **7.3 Species updates:** Bat/moth night produced new records of Daubenton's bat, woodlouse spider and three moths.

GW
IB
GW

8. Working parties: KR reported that Coast Care will be working in the reserve on November 3, 10 and 17. Wednesday afternoon volunteer work will continue: this includes tidying around Quarry House, cutting brambles, facing up the overflow, cleaning round and planting trees. RC offered several self-set oaks; KR will liaise with him about this.

KR

9. Finance update: £45 was raised in donations from the bat/moth evening.

10. AOB:

10.1 Cat waste: GW reported a problem with cat waste in front of the Whinstone View sign; members will try to suggest a solution.

10.2 Whinstone Times: The editors have requested an article for the next issue. MW agreed to write one, focussing on Quarry House work, the Bioblitz, bat detectors and the new Aurora WhatsApp group.

MW

10.3 Gifts: A member of the public has offered a Celestron telescope and a wheelbarrow. IB will care for the former; KR will collect the latter.

KR

11. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 1st November at 7.00pm in the Creighton Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm.