



Lindow Moss - realising the potential

The current peat working area lies at the centre of what was once a very extensive peatland landscape. That landscape was shaped by medieval peat cutting and so what happens here, at the heart of this historic landscape, will define how future generations will view the whole. This is how Transition Wilmslow envisages the restored landscape:

We would like to see a restored landscape close to that which nature intended. This would be a rain nourished landscape with carpets of green and gold Sphagnum moss, once again capturing and locking away carbon from the atmosphere. The regenerating mire would be interspersed by heathland and fen, with the whole surrounded by fringing woodlands of birch, rowan and oak. On a summer's day dragonflies would be hawking for insects over the white heads of cotton grasses, and they in turn would be hunted by the agile hobby, Britain's smallest falcon.

But this would also be a landscape for people. Visitors would enjoy the tranquillity and biological richness of the scene. They would stand in awe close to the spot where Lindow Man was sacrificed and entombed in an earlier Sphagnum mire. They would marvel at the huge pine stumps anchored in peat, relics of the Mesolithic forest that preceded him. They would reflect on the passage of time and the changing relationship between humankind and nature, and think about the challenges that lie ahead in a new era of rapid climate change.

That is what we in Transition Wilmslow believe Lindow Moss could and should become. The current restoration proposals, for the first time, offer the possibility that this potential might be realised. However, there are potential barriers in the way of realising this vision. We set them out below and in the process point up some of the opportunities:

- 1) The site owner decides to enact the current planning condition which requires backfill with inert waste and restoration to agriculture over much of the site.**

The desire to prevent this is a key reason for us supporting in principle the related housing development on the Peat Farm site, despite our concerns about Green Belt and the loss of this site as the obvious place for future visitor access and interpretation of the Moss.

- 2) The site owner receives the benefit from uplift in value of the Peat Farm site from planning consent for housing, but does not carry through the restoration plan.**

The two planning consents, for the housing development and restoration of the Moss will no doubt be linked by a legally binding planning agreement. However, the Planning Authority does not seem to have engaged well with the site operator and enforced current planning conditions. That is why we have proposed that there should be a Minerals Planning Bond, which would be drawn down as the restoration proceeds.

- 3) The implementation of the Restoration Scheme continues to be delayed and peat extraction continues to the point where restoration to a functioning peat bog (a rain nourished mire) becomes impossible.**

The restoration plan emphasises that a layer of undisturbed peat must be left within each restoration compartment to restrict vertical drainage of water through the system. Peat extraction has continued apace since the restoration plan was submitted in December, 2014. To the south of the central access track (in compartment 5), excavation has gone below the peat in places to expose the lacustrine silt below. In the adjoining area on the north side of the access track (compartment 6B) there has been very extensive peat extraction and regrading, exposing underlying sand at the eastern end of the site where the peat naturally grades out towards its margin. We need to know whether this is a peat winning operation or a prelude to restoration, with regrading now close to the finished levels?

- 4) The outfall to the Sugar Brook at the western end of the site is uncontrolled and the main drain exits the site at the lowest possible level. This accelerates the dewatering and dessication of peat on the restoration site and has potential impacts beyond that, into the wider landscape.**

The most reliable way to control the water level in the system is to have a sluice at the exit point where the invert level can be set, This is a requirement of the current planning conditions but the Planning Authorities have not enforced it.

- 5) The restoration scheme is focused on maximising ‘priority habitat’ without regard to landscape character or the value of existing habitats.**

The initial restoration plan was modified at the request of Natural England and Cheshire East Council with a view to maximising ‘priority habitat’. That would involve clearance of most of the secondary woodland to the east of Rotherwood Road (Compartment 10), and on the sand island (Compartment 2). The wet heath to the west of the public footpath (Compartment 1) would be excavated in an attempt to re-establish a mire. The woodland clearance would threaten the sense of enclosure, so important to the ‘sense of place’ on Lindow Moss, and the ‘priority habitat’ approach will reduce the overall diversity of the habitat mosaic. **The remit of the ‘Advisory Group’ to the restoration scheme needs to be broadened to take on board wider considerations such as landscape character, heritage and community interests. Its membership should be enhanced to reflect that.**

- 6) The compartment with the Lindow Man find site should be retained pretty much as it is (so as to help people understand how he came to be found) and a board walk constructed to take visitors close to the find spot.**

As Rick Turner has pointed out this is one of only two places in northern Europe where the findspot of an Iron Age bog body is precisely known. It deserves to be respected and properly marked.

- 7) The sub-fossil pine is clearly an impediment to peat extraction and is being treated as a waste product. However, it has intrinsic value for science, environmental interpretation and art.**

There has already been some scientific work by Dr Jonathan Lageard on the sub-fossil pine. There is a strong case for carrying out a proper inventory while this is still possible and some of the finest examples deserve to be left in situ to aid site interpretation. Elsewhere, in Ireland, the wood excavated from peat bogs has been used creatively by sculptors and other artists – why not here also? **We enjoy close links with the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and Manchester Museum where there is a strong interest in engaging with all aspects of the research, teaching and wider educational potential of Lindow Moss.**

- 8) The need to retain public access and the informal character of the site during and after restoration.**

Elsewhere, on the wider Lindow Moss landscape we have recently seen a proliferation of barbed wire and ‘keep out’ signs. Part of the ‘charm’ of the peat working area is the informality. We dread the prospect of fences, warning signs and plastic hazard tape and trust that the ‘Health and Safety’ brigade can be kept at bay. We greatly welcome the proposal to provide ‘concessionary footpaths’ along the northern boundary and through the centre of the site, along the main east/west access track.

9) The restoration plan should be complemented by an interpretive strategy.

Given the site's cultural and historic importance it requires a properly conceived interpretive plan to complement the restoration plan. We would be pleased to help with this on a pro bono basis. **The very effective work of Natural England in interpreting Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses National Nature Reserve in Shropshire provides an indication of what could be achieved here.**

10) Longer term management.

In the longer term we would like to see land ownership transfer to an appropriate body such as Cheshire Wildlife Trust. This will open up new sources of funding, only available to charitable organisations, and help to sustain long-term habitat management and ensure that the full potential of Lindow Moss for educational and visitor use is realised.

**The Lindow Moss Planning Applications: a position statement by
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