

Lindow Moss Community Forum

Contact us via savelindowmoss@gmail.com

Transition Wilmslow has launched the Lindow Moss Community Forum to give local people a voice in the implementation of the upcoming restoration of the Moss.

Important:

1. Please let us know if you would like to be a Lindow Moss Community Forum Representative on the Liaison Committee (if the liaison committee organisers agree) or if you know someone who might like to do this.
2. Please VOTE! Should the liaison Committee be set up before the restoration starts or should we wait?

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/9T5B5ZH>.

Feel free to forward this survey request to anyone you think might be interested. Anyone/everyone is eligible to have a vote.

Meeting 22nd September 2020

Thirty-two people joined the meeting chaired by Matthew Fox.

Transition Wilmslow has undertaken a number of activities over the last eight years to raise awareness of the ecological, archaeological and historical importance of Lindow Moss amongst the local community including guided walks, a Wilmslow Guild Day School, a workshop and exhibitions and lectures. Our vision of a restored Moss is as a place of beauty and biodiversity, supporting our mental and physical health and acting as the vital carbon sink that we need to combat climate change. We know from our recent Lindow Moss Survey that a great many local people share this vision. However, we (in common with the owners of houses on the fringes of the Moss which are suffering subsidence) have become increasingly concerned about the drying out of the peat, with unchecked discharge of water directly into Sugar Brook. Our attempts to engage the local council (CEC) in discussions about this have been unsuccessful. The greatest threat to the Moss, though, is that until the

2003 Planning Consent (that requires the land in Wilmslow to be land -filled and “returned to agriculture” after peat cutting has ceased) is rescinded (by the formal notification from the owners (Croghan Peat) to CEC that the restoration process (detailed in the 2018 Planning Consent) has started, the threat of land-fill remains. This would be an ecological disaster.

What is the Lindow Moss Community Forum?

- Who will be on the forum?
 - § Forum membership is open to everyone who is happy to have their name on the save lindow moss mailing list.
 - § We would like as diverse a membership as possible; forum members are encouraged to circulate details to anyone who may be interested.
- How will it give members a say?
 - § The establishment of a Lindow Moss Liaison Committee is part of the 2018 planning consent for the Moss restoration ‘to ensure that the local community are fully engaged and informed of activities associated with this planning permission’. The Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Group has proposed terms of reference and membership which includes representatives from local groups including the Lindow Moss Community Forum. It is proposed that two members of the Community Forum should have seats on the Committee, and that meetings would not be quorate without at least one Community Forum member present to ensure proper community representation. The Liaison Committee has not as yet been established.
- What will the Forum do?
 - § Discuss the implementation of the restoration plans for each compartment, ideally feeding these into the Liaison Committee discussions.
 - Respond to members’ questions and concerns, organise specialist/academic talks if appropriate.
- How will concerns of Forum members be recorded and passed on?
 - § Votes. At the end of each meeting, any forum member may propose an issue to be voted on, and the votes will be carried out via email with a 7-day window.

§ Questions. Any questions that we want answers to can be forwarded to the Liaison Committee.

- How will forum representatives be selected, and what will they do?

§ We will ask for self nominations for representatives, and hope to set up a panel of around 4 people, two of whom can attend Liaison Committee meetings and feed back to the Community Forum.

The Restoration Plans:

These relate to the following planning applications which can be found on the Cheshire East Planning website: 15/0064M Restoration and 15/0016M Housing development

The peat working area and the peat processing (Peat Farm site) at Lindow Moss was acquired in 1997 by Messrs Bond and Rowland, with links to E.J. Godwin (Peat Industries Ltd) based at Meare, Glastonbury, Somerset. They set up Croghan Peat Industries Ltd as a management company for Lindow Moss. The new owners inherited a number of planning consents for peat working dating from 1959 to 1967 which permitted peat working to 2042, and required that on the western half of the site (which is in Wilmslow), following peat extraction, the land should be backfilled with inert waste and 'restored' to agriculture. Under the Review of Old Mineral Planning consents (known as the ROMP) Croghan Peat were immediately required to submit a new set of planning conditions. These were eventually approved by Cheshire County Council in 2003. Despite these new conditions the company was still permitted to continue peat extraction to 2042 and to restore the land in Wilmslow to agriculture. Since 2009 this planning consent has been overseen by Cheshire East Council, the Minerals Planning Authority.

In December 2014, Messrs Bond and Rowland, through Axis Planning Consultants, submitted 2 interlinked planning applications for residential development (14 houses) on the peat processing site adjoining Moor Lane (Application No. 15/0016M) and a comprehensive plan for ecological restoration of the cut-over peat bog (Application No. 15/0064M).

Both applications were approved by Cheshire East Council in December 2018 and the Decision Notice with its attendant planning conditions was issued in February, 2019, together with a legal agreement (Section 106) tying the two applications together and making implementation of residential development contingent on an end to commercial peat extraction and restoration of the cut-over peat bog.

The approved restoration plan (dated August, 2018) with supporting maps can be viewed on the Cheshire East Planning website. Transition Wilmslow's detailed assessment of the restoration scheme can be viewed at <https://transitionwilmslow.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/september-2020-transition-wilmslow-assessment-of-lindow-moss-restoration-scheme-september-2020.pdf>

Planning condition 33 of the restoration scheme requires that a liaison committee should be established '*to ensure the local community are fully engaged and informed of activities associated with this planning permission*'. The Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan supports the principle of facilitating mossland restoration through limited housing development. Brian Donohue who chairs the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Group has written to the operators and to CEC, suggesting terms of reference and membership of the Lindow Moss Liaison committee.

Questions from the floor:

1. Who will pay for restoration?

John Handley: In July 2020 the owners of Lindow Moss announced agreement on the sale of the peat farm site with permission for 14 homes to local developer Bowdon Homes. Capital comes from the sale of the land for housing, and a Minerals Planning Bond for aftercare. TW had suggested during consultation and at the planning meeting in 2018 that there should be a MPB for the restoration itself (to ensure that the restoration scheme is fully implemented) but this idea was not accepted by CEC.

2. Once the main peat cutting area has been rewetted, what is the potential for rewetting the wider Moss landscape?

JH: The wider Moss landscape covers a large area including parts of Mobberley, Chorley and Great Warford. The Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan proposes the formation of a Lindow Moss Partnership to conserve, restore and interpret the wider Lindow Moss landscape, and this could provide eventually a unified water management system. If we can make a success of the restoration of the cut over peat bog area, then this could help us get it right for the wider landscape area.

Brian Donohue: The NP Implementation Group are meeting with Cllrs from the relevant areas to discuss; JH has produced useful summary papers to support this.

3. Could Croghan Peat just drop out and say they had run out of money at some point?

JH: In theory yes; but we have had an encouraging level of contact with Ben Malin at Terraqueous (who are leading on the restoration with the owners) and they surely would want to get this right. A successful restoration of Lindow Moss would provide a high-profile demonstration of the capability of Terraqueous and the owners of the Moss. If we can make this work, with local people feeling engaged with the project, this could be an exemplar of community engagement in environmental projects.

BD: We need to recognise the commercial realities of the project and be careful not to overstate what can be achieved.

4. Many people (including in our survey) mentioned the need for vigilance during the restoration. What does this mean?

BD: This will be via the Liaison Committee. It will all be down to developing a good working relationship with the restoration team.

5. Can the liaison Committee not be set up now?

6. Can we encourage Croghan Peat and CEC to establish the Liaison Committee very soon so that the local community do not get cross with contractors? When the contractors started clearing dried peat in June they were shouted at etc by residents who thought that peat digging had restarted. This could be avoided in the future by starting the Liaison Ctee before Christmas.

BD: Croghan Peat have not yet responded to Brian's letter about the liaison committee suggesting terms of reference and membership. The NP Implementation Group is a working group set up by Wilmslow Town Council so can't act independently without their support. Brian will write again in a few weeks and hopes they will respond positively. Very important not to antagonise anyone.

7. What is CEC's role in all this?

Cllr Iain Macfarlane: sits on the Northern Planning Committee so meets with the planners regularly and sees his role as a conduit between CEC and the Community. Has been in touch with senior planning officers at CEC who state that progress cannot be made until certain conditions are met.

8. Could National Trust not be involved?

JH: NT are taking a new approach, looking at the wider landscape around their properties. It would be very appropriate for the Moss eventually to go into public/charitable ownership and NT would be a potential player.

9. What if any is the relationship between the peat bog and Saltersley Hall Farm?

JH: The north side of the Moss is bounded by the lake at Rossmere and on the west side by Saltersley Hall Farm. The latter forms a common border with NW corner of Lindow Moss. The work on this site has been a real concern for local residents. The initial planning consent for landfill was given by CEC under delegated authority with limited consultation, and the second phase (planning application 20/1586M on the CEC Planning website) is awaiting a hearing (currently deferred to 14 October). TW response to the application is here: <https://transitionwilmslow.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/transition-wilmslow-response-to-saltersley-moss-planning.pdf>

TW were concerned about the prospect of landfill on the Moss and wrote in July to Terraqueous to ask about their connections with Saltersley Hall Farm and were told that there were none

<https://transitionwilmslow.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/lindow-moss-restoration-q-a-with-ecologist-31.7.20.pdf>

10. Has there been no regular water monitoring?

11. Since water levels are going to be critical and yet there is not any reliable monitoring data, how can we be confident of achieving the desired results? Changes to the surroundings may also influence water flow across the moss.

JH: The 2003 planning consent required a monitoring scheme for the water table which is still in place. Dipwells are present around the periphery of the site. Planning conditions will require a continuation of the monitoring scheme, with supplementary monthly measurements within specified compartments during the restoration itself. TW are concerned about long-term water table drawdown within the peat aquifer and have commissioned a hydrogeology assessment from Enzygo, report awaited.

12. What about the pace here? Climate change is an emergency and yet we are allowing the Moss to continue to degrade every year. We are missing opportunities to reduce GHG emissions from this degraded Moss.

BD: The restoration plan has to be signed off by CEC before the restoration can start on a compartment by compartment basis.

JH: Our main worry is that without any input from local people, the planners may approve woodland clearance in compartments 2 and 10.

BD: We need to make contact with the Minerals Planning Officer at CEC and work with her so she is aware of these concerns. BD will make contact.

13. Don't the council need to consult with the Environment Agency, at least on the hydrogeological aspects?

JH: CEC did consult the Environment Agency on the planning applications. They required quite a bit of additional work on the housing application but had less to say about the restoration scheme. They did suggest a properly engineered sluice on the outfall to the Sugar Brook but CEC ignored that and, since this is not 'main river', CEC themselves are the drainage authority. When it becomes available, we should consider sending the Enzygo report on hydrogeology to the Environment Agency and invite their comments on that.

The Environment Agency did show real interest in water quality and water management in the wider Lindow Moss landscape when we held a Lindow Moss Workshop some years ago. They are potentially a key member of the Lindow Moss Partnership.

14. Surely there must be some environmental considerations re clearing the trees, namely the impact on the wildlife living there - it must support many birds, insects and small to medium sized mammals.

The main argument in favour of clearing the woodland is to do with Natural England's doctrine of 'priority habitat' i.e. heathland is preferred to woodland in compartment 2 and mossland to woodland in Compartment 10. This is understandable on Lindow Common SSSI but we think it's completely out of place here. TW have set out our counterarguments to woodland clearance in our assessment of the Restoration scheme (<https://transitionwilmslow.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/september-2020-transition-wilmslow-assessment-of-lindow-moss-restoration-scheme-september-2020.pdf>). We agree that both Compartments have intrinsic biological interest as woodland, especially Compartment 10 (the woodland east of Rotherwood Road) which is ideal habitat for the scarce Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit. This woodland has a very rich flora of mosses and liverworts which we propose to investigate and provides a valuable exemplar of what a cut-over peat bog can become if not actively managed towards a raised bog habitat. Aerial photographs show that in 1973 Compartment 10 was also a cut-over peat bog with no trees!

Important:

Please let us know if you would like to be a Lindow Moss Community Forum Representative on the Liaison Committee (if the liaison committee organisers agree) or if you know someone who might like to do this.

Please VOTE! Should the liaison Committee be set up before the restoration starts or should we wait?

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/9T5B5ZH>.

Date of next Meeting:

Tuesday 8th December 7.30pm

Zoom link will be circulated nearer the time. Please let us know if you there are any particular issues you would like us to discuss.

