

Progress Report for the Beckford Nature Reserve



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Purchase

After almost three years of varying rates of progress and a huge effort on the part of the Grant Application and Fundraising Teams, the purchase of the site by Beckford Nature Reserve was finalised on March 3rd 2008. We have achieved this thanks to the patience of Huntsmans Quarries Ltd, the generous donations by several local and national charitable trusts and the people of Beckford.

Tasks Ahead

During the process of the purchase the trustees of the Nature Reserve held several meetings with local environmental experts in order to establish our short and medium term strategies for the site. These meetings will establish a 5 to 10 years plan for the site concerning the environmental management of the site. We should have these plans by May 2008. Emphasis has always been to preserve the site as a conservation area with the minimum of intervention – allowing the wild life and flora to develop as naturally as possible.

Although we have no specific conditions placed on us by the various grantors, we made some promises as to what we intend doing with the site in local ownership. Two important promises made include a limited increase in publicity for the Nature Reserve to encourage the local residents to gain full advantage from the amenity and to improve access for disabled people (to include not only wheel chair access but also to those who have mobility difficulties but not confined to a wheel chair).

The preliminary meetings have indicated a number of areas to be addressed. This report attempts to highlight some of these areas.

Notice Boards

As part of the requirement for increased visibility of the Nature Reserve, information and progress will be sent to the local press and media. On a more local scale it has been decided to place small notice



Court Farm Lane Entrance



Main Entrance in Rabbit Lane

boards at two or three of the entrances to the site. The most frequently used entrance is via the public footpath from Court Farm Lane, which has been earmarked for one of the notice boards. What might be classed as the main entrance from the Ashton Road (Rabbit

Lane) is also an important site for a notice board, especially as this will be the location of any wheelchair access.

The information to be displayed on the notice board will include:

- How the Reserve has been funded
- Footpath information, with request to keep to paths to preserve fauna and flora. This will also indicate which paths are public rights of way and which are 'permissive' paths.
- Dogs to be kept under control (use the dog waste bins)
- What you might see in the reserve
- Website

Disabled access

This will mean that we will allow limited wheelchair access. However, some more discussions are required to decide how to provide this access without allowing mountain bikes to enter the site.

Wheelchair access will be via the main gated entrance and will enable access to part of the wide grassy area adjacent to the gate and to the peninsula, where it may be possible to construct a small viewing shelter.

Identified special areas

Initial assessment of the site has identified about 10 different areas, each with its own particular suitability for special habitats. These include some wooded banks, grassy areas containing some very old ant hills and a south facing steep bank, which will need some clearing and modifications.



Old Ant Hills



South Facing Bank



Primrose Bank

Maintenance of the SSSI

The Nature Reserve contains a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which Beckford Nature Reserve (as new owners of the site) is required to maintain. Any changes to this area will require permission from Natural England before work can begin. The sand bank that forms the basis of the SSSI is becoming unstable and needs some clearing at the base to prevent ground animals from disturbing any birds that may nest in the bank (for example Sand Martins and Little Owls).



Sand Cliff - SSSI

One end of the sand banks has suffered land slip and may possibly need clearing to extend the visible bank. This operation in particular will need permission from Natural England.



Landslip, which has overgrown

The Hide

The hide located on the southern shore of the lake provides an ideal viewing point to observe the water birds on the lake. Although it is substantially in good order, some areas need attention, including the door locks and internal notice boards.



Trees obstructing Hide



Shrubs blocking side viewing port

Over the years vegetation has grown up around the viewing ports and this will require careful pruning to allow better viewing without disturbing the overall appearance from other locations within the Nature Reserve.

Steep footpaths

Over the past ten years, when the local residents have enjoyed access to the reserve, several footpaths have developed in addition to the designated public footpath that runs through the southern side of the site. These footpaths have enabled visitors to make a complete circuit of the lake and also to enter the site through some 'unofficial' gaps in the fencing. We do not intend to restrict any of these paths as they would almost certainly re-appear at a later date. However, we do wish to keep control of these paths as they are an integral part of the Reserve. Therefore we will designate these footpaths as 'permissive' paths to prevent them from becoming rights of way. Some additional investigation into the legal aspects of this decision will be necessary.



Steep path on the northern side of the Reserve

Therefore we intend to make the existing paths a little more obvious, to encourage people to stay on the paths rather than wander aimlessly around the site and disturb the wildlife and flora. Some of these paths have been created up steep banks, which under wet conditions can become slippery. In the interests of public safety we therefore intend to create some steps to prevent slipping and to preserve the landscape. These steps would be constructed from the logs felled from the site during coppicing and would blend in well with the surrounding land.



Signs of people slipping on path



Steep path branching from public footpath

Boggy footpaths

On the western side of the lake the footpath becomes very boggy in wet weather when the lake level rises. We hope to resolve the issue with drainage from the lake so that the water levels are not so high in the lake. If this does not solve the problem, then it is proposed to lay additional wood chippings on this section of path to prevent visitors damaging the path and also to keep their feet dry.



Path running close to lakeside (western side)



Standing water on path

Safety

With the public having access to the site, Beckford Nature Reserve has taken out public liability insurance. However we still need to make sure we are doing all we possibly can to ensure the safety of any visitors. We have inherited two lifebuoy stations for water safety and intend to have an inspection of these stations and make sure they are up to current standards and also located in suitable positions.

One of the lifebuoys in particular is currently located in a position that is difficult to reach and almost impossible to throw into the water. A rescuer is very likely to fall in as well!



Lifebuoy on the southern lakeside



Wrongly sited Lifebuoy

Fencing

With the purchase of the land we have become aware of the real boundaries to the property, and also who is responsible for the surrounding fences. Many of the fences are in need of repair. We will need to negotiate with the owners of the fences and repair any of the fences that belong to the Nature Reserve. We would also like to change the access point to the Reserve, with a suitable stile or gate that

would make the current circular route official. This access would be in the damaged fence to the south of the property as shown in the picture.

To the south east of the reserve there is a section of fencing that has completely disappeared. This will need replacing – it is also a possible location for an additional entrance to the site (see next section).



Damaged fence on the southern border



Missing boundary fence

New entrances

To the north west of the site an unofficial entrance has developed and become a very popular access point for dog walkers and people returning from a walk up Bredon Hill. We will need to decide whether we need to leave this entrance as it is now or create a more official looking entrance. We currently have no plans to close this entrance.



Unofficial entrance to the Reserve



Possible site for new entrance

Summary

This report contains most of the points that have been discussed at some time during the purchase process. However, with the limited funds available after the purchase, all this proposed work will require further discussion with the local experts and in any case will not take place immediately. The overwhelming theme to our Nature Reserve is to preserve it as a natural habitat, with as much variety as possible in the available space, but at the same time allow access to the local residents and visitors so that they can enjoy their recent acquisition.