

Ordinary Meeting of the Board

Background – Gullett Quarry

11 June 2020

Background

Gullet Quarry is an old quarry under the jurisdiction of the Malvern Hills Trust. Worked until the 1970's, the quarry has been the site of a number of incidents over the years including a number of accidental drownings. The most recent were two drownings in July 2013.

Following that last pair of incidents an independent report on the site was undertaken by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, with a number of options for improving safety at the site considered and recommendations put forward.

Since then the site boundary fencing has been upgraded, additional signage installed, and vegetation growth encouraged to reduce accessibility within the site. In addition, public awareness media campaigns and on-site education visits by West Mercia Police and the Hereford and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Service has been undertaken each spring / early summer.

An attempt in 2019 to have the Local Authority put in place a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for the quarry was unsuccessful due in part to public consultation responses and limited options to improve wider community safety at Gullet under the order. Recent rock falls (winter 2019/20) within the fenced area have further increased the risk to anyone contravening the signs and entering the fenced area.

It is a breach of the Trust's byelaws either to enter an area fenced off for public safety or to swim in water bodies on Trust land. The site is checked daily by the wardens to ensure fences and signs remain in place and to check for people inside the fencing

Current situation

Despite all the fencing, signage and local publicity, there have been ongoing cases of people entering the site to swim in the quarry in hot spring and summer weather. After a period of several years of gradual decrease of this activity, in the past 5 weeks there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers breaching the boundaries. This upsurge is due to the combination of sustained hot weather and changes in the Covid restrictions so that people can travel any distance to exercise in the countryside. Combined with the continued restrictions on other social activities during the COVID-19 outbreak, the site is attracting groups who are coordinating their meetings there through social media.

As well as swimming, barbeques and significant volumes of litter being left behind, these groups are frequently drinking alcohol, abusing substances (nitrous oxide) and there has been evidence of controlled drugs being used on site. Swimming while under the influence of alcohol or drugs greatly increased the risks of drowning.

Up to Wednesday 3rd June, (when the hot weather ended) MHT staff, Police and Fire services had been attending site frequently (sometimes several times a day) to remove

people from the Quarry; However, the groups continued on an almost daily basis, sometimes in large numbers - up to a reported 300 on one occasion – stretching the resources of all organisations responding.

Review of options to limit incursions on to site

The table below lays out those ideas and suggestions (put forward previously or new) that are being currently considered to help manage the present problems at Gullet.

Action Class / Type		Options	Consents required			Notes on feasibility.
			Planning	NE - SSSI consent Geology Wildlife		
Education Signage	Current	No Swimming, no entry signs. Danger Quarry signs at regular intervals. Regular public information messaging and media				In Place Ongoing
	Options	Amend and increase signage				Feasible but signage appears to be no deterrent to those intent on entering
		Install memorials to raise awareness of risks.				Feasible but signage appears to be no deterrent to those intent on entering
Access Prevention Fencing Physical structure	Current	4' fence with barbed wire topped				Current
	Options	New 7' metal fence to full exterior	Required	Required	Poss required	Requires planning and NE consents. High visual impact reduced probability of consent and may take months to get permissions.
		New 7' metal fence to ramp only Anti-climb paint to existing fence.	Required	Required	Required	More deliverable than above in short / medium term. Lower landscape impact. Easily overcome by towel or material over fence / direct destruction of top rail or wall.
	Options	Place rocks / spoil to all banks	Required	Required	Required	Medium scale engineering works needed. Access issues and temporary bare ground created in process
		Place rocks / spoil to ramp.	Poss required	Required	Required	Medium scale engineering works needed. Other issues as above
		Remove the ramp	Required	Required	Required	Large scale machinery and engineering works.
		Remove part of west wall to quarry to drain permanently.	Required	Required	Required	Large scale machinery and engineering works.
	Remove / remodel western banks	Required	Required	Required	Medium scale engineering.	

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		Remove access path below southern boundary wall	Poss required	Poss required	Minor change that requires little machine impact. Feasible.	
		Vegetate ramp area			Soil sparsity and continued erosion make probability of plants getting established low. Would work better with fencing to ramp in place	
		Install barbed wire over all of ramp area.		Poss required	Feasible, but needs maintenance. If wire removed and thrown into water it would add to risk of drowning and inhibit rescue.	
Reduce appeal Water area	Current Options	None				
		Dye water black	Poss required	Required	Impact expected to have limited duration - ie 1-2 weeks. There is spring inflow and drainage outflow to/ from quarry.	
		Reduce water level permanently - borehole drain and valve	Poss required	Required	Feasible but would require consents. Medium engineering works. Ground levels are undetermined at this time.	
		Reduce water through temporary seasonal pumping out	Poss required	Required	Feasible but effect may last only a few weeks due to spring feed	
Remove all water hazards		Full infill of quarry	Required	Required	Required	Probability of consents granted for this option is very low. High impact.
		Partial infill quarry to leave 2-3ft depth water unsuitable for swimming	Required	Required	Required	Large scale engineering works. Higher probability but long application / consultation anticipated. Large scale machinery and engineering works. Reduced drowning risk.
Alternate approaches		Licence water body to outdoor swimming club to regulate numbers and lifeguard. Do not restrict access.				Does not overcome dangerous / falling rocks risk. Would not stop unlawful non-swimming groups outside hours. Would encourage greater use. Greatly increased risks from drowning and rock fall.

Meeting with other Agencies – June 3rd.

On Wednesday 3rd June a meeting was held (using Covid precautions), attended by the CEO and CCO of the Trust and representatives of Police, Fire Brigade and MHDC to discuss the current situation. Of the practical options in the table above, the following were identified by those parties as the most practical/effective solutions or those that were worth considering to trial.

Immediate/Short term

- Anti-climb paint
- Additional signage with emotive stories
- Dye

(Additionally, stones had already been placed on one side of the road outside the car park the previous day by MHT staff to prevent congestion on the bend of the road at Swinyard car park).

Medium term solutions

- Vegetation planting at north of site – quick to plant but takes years to establish
- Minor landscaping of open areas, eastern boundary and ramp
- Additional fencing to top of north ramp – reduce accessibility to public, but needs to have access for MHT staff / emergency services. Could encourage public to swim across to ramp.
- Double yellow lines along road to deter large numbers parking there

Long term solutions

- Additional fencing along entire boundary – access for services and MHT staff to ramp would be reduced.
- Larger engineering works e.g. boreholes/drainage

Some of the suggested actions above would require capital expenditure by the Trust. The meeting felt it important that the organisations whose consent would be required (including NE) should be contacted as soon as possible with a view to starting formal applications for consent. If possible, work should be carried out ready for next year's summer season.

It was agreed that in the meantime all parties would increase public information including:

- Coordinated joint agency education day at quarry
- Develop awareness plan for Drowning Prevention week
- Identify service personnel and share stories of body recover
- Newer and clear signage
- Gather stats for awareness raising
- Contact Police and Crime Commissioner for potential funding
- Removal of 'beauty spot' language from websites etc to reduce visitors
- Contact local MP to raise awareness of issues

The meeting also considered enforcement actions against those entering the site. It was recognised that Trust officers have no powers to collect personal data from members of the public, but the police do. Police have sent anti-social behaviour letters to some individuals they have removed from the site. The next step is to take forward one or more prosecutions under the byelaws. While individual prosecutions are unlikely to make significant difference to those intent on visiting the site regardless of all signs and measures, it would send clear signal to public.

The cost of the Trust taking out a prosecution could be costly (several thousand pounds even if relatively straightforward) and MHT are seeking legal advice and also clarification from the police on data sharing and who would act as lead prosecutors.

We understand that there are concerns regarding priority of cases for Crown Prosecution Service whilst COVID delays are occurring.

D Bridges
CEO
08/06/20