

### **Item 13 – Damage by Motorcyclists in Elnup Wood**

Please accept my apologies for the lack of direct reply in response to your original enquiry. We have been in contact – and updated several residents as to our plans for Elnup woods – following concerns raised by you regarding the unauthorised mountain bike activity and the condition of some of the structures within the woods. Unfortunately my team appear to have omitted you from their replies – which was an oversight and not a purposeful intention to ignore your request. Again – please accept my apologies.

I thought it may be useful to outline some of the background, our current thinking re: Elnup Woods, the issues associated with the woods, and what we plan to do in the longer term.

Firstly, to provide some context. The woods were sold to the Trust for a peppercorn by the National Coal Board back in the late 1980s. The sale also placed a covenant on the Trust requiring us to retain the woods as a community woodland in perpetuity. Unfortunately, the agreement didn't include any form of endowment funding for the management and maintenance of the woods – the liability of which all falls on the Trust.

Over the years the way in which the Trust generates income to support its work has changed a lot. Austerity has seen the end of considerable unrestricted grant funding from central and local government – with the majority of our income now restricted to fund specific projects linked to tackling inequalities and regenerating deprived communities. Combined, this means we have very limited resources to invest in Elnup.

That said – we are concerned about the deteriorating condition of some on the infrastructure and have embarked on a small programme of work to remove damaged or failing infrastructure, and to replace with more robust replacements.

With regards the evidence of unauthorised cycle track construction, my team has met on site with Nick Forshaw (Neighbourhood Policing Sergeant for Shevington) and Simon Calderbank (Wigan Council Env Planner). This activity is primarily taking place on land within the woods that is not owned by Groundwork CLM - with access off Spelding Drive and on the open land to the south of the woodland. This land is privately owned – part of the land that was sold to develop the housing estate - and Nick has offered to engage with the owners. There are some signs of dirt bike tracks in our woodland but this is very limited – but it is developing and is starting to encroach.

We have taken the decision to appoint a new Community Engagement Officer and are currently recruiting. The officer will work to seek to build up local community interest in the woods – and to re-build the Friends of Elnup Woods Group – with the short term aim of improving the management of the woods with volunteer help – and the longer term aim of transferring the ownership of woods to the community if practical. Your generous offer to help with this is most welcome. I would also like to ask the Parish Council if it has any funds it would consider investing in the management of this important local asset?

The officer will also work to improve the situation with regards the unauthorised MTB activity which will involve further liaison with the police, local residents, other users of the woods, planning experts, MTB experts, and hopefully the young people themselves. Nick has offered to support us with this process. We are keen to find a cost effective solution that can accommodate the needs of the wide range of user groups that regularly utilise Elnup Woods.

This will take some time. We had intended to close the unauthorised tracks and install signage explaining that unauthorised activity of this kind is not permitted. However, as we don't technically own the land we have been advised against this. Depending on whether the landowner can be found may well mean that we will need Wigan MBC to play a more active role to support us.

I will endeavour to keep you updated as we progress.

Regards,

Andrew Darron

Executive Director

CLM Groundwork Trust