

HARRISON'S ROCKS MANAGEMENT GROUP (HRMG)
Tuesday 29th September 2020
Minutes

Present:- Sarah Cullen (Chair), Bob Moulton, Daimon Beail, Emma Harrington, Adrian, Paisey, Mark Brewster, Michael Phelan, Rob Dyer, Kate Harris, Chris Stone, Tim Skinner

1) Welcome & Apologies

SC welcomed everyone to the online meeting.

2) Minutes of the meeting on 26/5/2020

Nothing to report

3) Matters arising not covered below

Matt Tullis

HRMG would like to send their condolences to Chris Tullis, former member of the HRMG and warden of Harrison's Rocks, on learning of the death of his son, Matt who had been battling with Leukemia for some time.

Action SC

Access at the north end of Harrison's Rocks

AP gave the group an update on access from the north end of Harrison's Rocks.

Firstly, there have been general challenges with the huge influx of visitors since the end of lock-down, whilst the indoor climbing walls were shut, and this has been compounded by Google Maps because the nearest road to the rocks is at this footpath, and vehicles have attempting to drive in over the railway crossing. AP reported that this situation seems to have settled down now as the rocks are much quieter in general.

Secondly, following some signs that the have been put up by our neighbours on our gate and 'squeeze' post, who had contacted the BMC to challenge the right of access into the Rocks from the footpath, AP reported that the signs imply that it is us that are suggesting permissive access to our land, which is not the case. AP said that there is a historical precedence and that we need to work out what the next steps will be to either challenge their position or to formalise access. On Martin Wragg's advice, he and BM had surveyed the boundary in response to MW's questions, and were planning a meeting with MW for his legal advice on how we move forward. BM

suggested that RD, SC and TS could also join the meeting and RD will set up the meeting.

Action RD

Access to the Isolated Buttress

Following a refusal decision for the planning application for the bridge back in July and a discussion at the recent LMG meeting, RD had approached Rural Solutions, a planning consultant company who specialise in AONB work, to help us decide how to move forward. We have had advice from John Diver that we have two options, 1) Appeal the decision based on current scheme, 2) Resubmit a second application with a revised design that addresses the Council's concerns. We can resubmit the application at no cost within six months of refusal. If we either appeal the decision or resubmit, we need advice on whether or not it would be viable in terms of probability of success weighed up against the cost. SC agreed to forward copies of the decision notice, which gives the reasons for the refusal to HRMG members, although this is already publicly available on the WDC website. In summary WDC stated that "The proposed new footbridge to access the isolated stone buttress in the detailed manner proposed, would introduce a visible and prominent man made structure to the location and be harmful to the natural landscape character. The new bridge would urbanise and erode the very sensitive visual and rural amenities of the area, together with the landscape character of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty." RD said that safety reasons had not been considered in the decision and BM pointed out that main reason for the rejection was the comments from the statutory consultees, the ANOB and the Parish Council. Deadline for appeal would be January 2021, although we can re-apply at any time.

Action RD

Whilst talking about bridges, SC thanked MB for his and his teams' efforts on re-building the bridge at the bottom of the rocks, near Spider Wall, which looks fit to last for a long time.

4) Harrison's Rocks Work Report

a) Resin Work

SC reported that Graham Adcock, with the help of Cess is doing a great job with the resin work at Harrison's. There was a discussion on whether the shellac or wood hardener, PVA, or perhaps super-glue (on smaller areas) are best for the job, and the conclusion was that what we are doing with the shellac currently works well and although it leaves a bit of an initial shine or 'polish', this soon wears in and becomes unnoticeable. MP confirmed this from his work at Stone Farm.

b) Anchors

DB reported that he now has the PPE required to carry out the work and will be putting in new anchors at Harrison's and Stone Farm when convenient between

now and next summer. AP asked if DB would look at some of the existing anchors that have movement and fix these and he agreed to audit the bolts with TS – they will organize a date between them. DB said he would take a picture of the Hilti resin kit he has (resin guns etc.) and email it to RD to see if it's any use in the general BMC bolting kit. It's kit that he doesn't use any more and if it's no use to anyone he'll dispose of it

c) Ground Erosion Maintenance & Woodland Management

Reuben has done some footpath strimming for us although it was so busy at the time he could only manage some of it, SC will try and get someone in to finish it off and clear the overgrown paths. The main path from the bottom of the rocks up to the crag near the Root Routes has collapsed and we hope to get this fixed on the volunteer days in November, all being well.

SC will get some quotes in for the next section of tree felling, which will be in compartment 'I', which goes from the Isolated Buttress along to the start of the Unclimbed Wall section. This is to be carried out in the last week of November if possible.

RD will check that volunteer days count as an organised activity and that we can have up to 30 people present in keeping with the current Covid-19 regulations. We may also need to put some procedures in place for recording who is present as well as have a contingency plan for smaller groups should lock-down rules come into force nearer the time.

Action RD

The group discussed some areas that needed volunteer work every year, namely drainage in the area under The Vice as well as St. Gotthard, and suggestions were made to try to have someone available on the workdays who has experience in this kind of work to help guide the rest of the volunteers.

TS with MB agreed to draw up a list of jobs that need doing prior to the work days to give guidance on where to direct people.

Action TS, MB

Further discussion on how to reduce the bracken was had and the options are to either flatten it, whip and roll it, or spray it with Asulox. KH said that she has also heard of a company that use steam to deal with bracken and will look into it for us, and provide contact details for contractors used for the various procedures for bracken. The bracken is dying down now in any case so solutions should be discussed at the May meeting ready to action from late July onward. MB said

that he was planning on digging up an area approx one metre in diameter around the 6ft-high saplings that he would be getting for planting.

Action KH

d) Signs & Code of Conduct

Nothing to report on signs at the present time, which are on hold pending resolutions of the access from Forge Farm, although when we do decide to print the new signs, RD would like the measurements of the current ones so that they fit the same posts.

Action SC

The Land Management Group had agreed to provide the money from the L&P Trust to get someone to arrange dedicating Harrison's as open access land and this now needs to be approved by the BMC's board of directors before it can move forward. This is something, if approved, that will be added to the new signs.

There had been some wild camping at the top of Dark Chimney, although the group felt this was inevitable at the moment, particularly given that the campsite is closed. There have also been some fires at the top of the rocks and in the woods. KH has been working hard throughout the site to put up notices reminding people that 'it only takes one match'.

5) Health and Safety

Nothing reported

6) Financial Report

BM asked what the group felt about removing the 'ring fence' around the Harrison's fund and incorporating this fund into the main Land and Property Trust accounts on the basis that at some point the Harrison's money will run out and that if anything needs doing, the BMC will pay for it in any case, the idea being that for accounting purposes this would make it less complicated and have no effect on money that is available to Harrison's. The group agreed that this seems a sensible way forward. BM also provided the group with up to date accounts for 2019 and 2020 to date to which there were no discussion points.

Action BM

7) Stone Farm Rocks Works Report

a) Woodland Management and Ground Erosion Work

MP reported that the current plan for Stone Farm is up to date.

b) Resin Work

There is some resin work to do.

Action MP

c) Anchors

Anchors covered in 4b above.

d) Signs

It was agreed to take signs off the agenda for the time being.

e) The burnt-out motorbike at the foot of the Rocks

MP reported that it was now up to us to arrange to get the burnt out motorbike up to the bridleway. He was organising a small group to do this. There was some damage to the low-level boulders but none to the climbs, but some cleaning up of the ground would be needed. He had a good quote for removal and disposal from the bridleway for approx, £60, which RD gave him the go-ahead for.

8) AOB

Bouldering

Bouldering seems to have become a bit of a problem recently with excess amounts of chalk and holds being 'doctored' and Graham Adcock had raised this at the Open Meeting. HRMG discussed whether or not restrictions should be placed on bouldering. It was generally felt that bouldering that has had a detrimental effect on Harrison's should be monitored rather than restricted, given that we have had some extraordinary circumstances this year with the knock-on effect of extreme numbers of visitors post the pandemic lockdown.

Brushes and mats

DB suggested that the BMC may be able to sell branded brushes and mats appropriate for sandstone climbing in an effort to promote good practice. RD said that he would talk to Hannah who runs the BMC shop to see what she can do. A discussion was also had about educating good setups at the BMC festival and SC reported that she and CS had factored this in to the festival plans at a low cost to the attendee, funded partly by the BMC. Discussions were also had on offering courses to people who were likely to be visiting the rocks already and that after the mass numbers this year, to keep the PR for the festival low-key to minimise any danger of increasing the numbers.

Action RD

Campsite

KH reported that due to Covid-19 the campsite at the car park will not be open this year and that the gate closure of 10pm will revert to 5pm when the clocks change in October. Parking charges will be increasing slightly to £1.10 for an hour, £2.20 for two hours, £3.30 for three hours and £5 for a full day, with the Discovery Passes increasing to £30 per year. KH also reported on some criticism that she had received for the campsite being closed, but the group felt that this was entirely unwarranted.

9) Date and Venue for the next meeting

Tuesday 19th January, for another online meeting, RD will send everyone a link.

Action RD

