

405 – East, West & Parbold Quarries – 24 February 2021

A Report on the Meeting Between Parish Councillors and Some Residents of Appley Bridge & Dalton – 10 February 2021

Four residents of Appley Bridge and two residents of Dalton had requested a meeting with members of the Parish Council to discuss concerns relating to the plans for the future of East, West and Parbold quarries, which are all owned by the same company – Maybrook Investments Ltd.

Cllrs Jess Higham, Chris Horridge, John Whiteley and Mike Grimes were the elected members present. They were joined by the Clerk.

The residents had approached the Parish Council because the Council had been extremely supportive of their campaigns against the plans for Parbold Hill landfill tip and the on-going problems with Easy Quarry, Appley Bridge.

News had recently been received that the Environment Agency had granted a Water Abstraction Licence to Maybrook Investments to drain 70% of the water in East Quarry. This is a three-month temporary permit, but is valid for just over seven years. If the owner wishes to remove the remainder, he will have to apply for a full permanent licence. The owner's reason for wishing to partially drain the quarry is connected to the seasonal anti-social behaviour that occurs in hot weather.

The residents' concerns include the following:

- Partial drainage of the water will provide opportunities for a different type of anti-social behaviour. An amphitheatre will be created in which raves could potentially take place.
- The remaining 30% of water will harbour deposits which could potentially release hydrogen sulphide – a highly toxic gas. There could also be other lethal contaminants, dating back to its use as a quarry, present in the water.
- Machinery that was abandoned in the quarry when it was closed will be exposed. It will have deteriorated over the years and will pose a danger to life.
- There would be crumbling cliff faces 60-70 feet high in some places which would draw some people in to the area.

Inadequate fencing is a major issue at present. Up-grading the fencing would improve matters considerably. The residents are of the view that preserving the quarry with its full quota of water and developing it as a wildlife reserve would be the best solution for the area. They gave examples of other similar locations in Lancashire which had been turned into safe visitor attractions in this way. Many residents would welcome such a development.

However, it has become increasingly apparent that the current owner is not interested in such a solution. It is highly likely that his ultimate aim is to completely empty the quarry, fill it with inert waste and, once full, build on it.

The EA has delegated the responsibility of testing water samples to the owner. Residents have concerns that the water could be contaminated to such an extent that it was unsuitable for introduction into the River Douglas. They do not trust the owner's integrity with respect to the provision of genuine test results.

The timeframe which the owner has to work within to pump the water out is limited to a window of 91 days. Whether he will face sanctions if he does not complete the work within that period is not clear.

Options for transporting inert waste to fill in East Quarry are also limited. It was observed that there was a school of thought that Maybrook Investments may not be permitted to use large wagons, as the approach roads to the quarry were mainly designated as C-roads. This only left the rail transport option, which involves use of the currently unused rail pad at West Quarry. Some reconstruction might be necessary here, if that were to come to fruition.

The impact that draining the quarry might have on the water table of the surrounding area is also a matter for concern.

There is evidence that the owner has introduced changes in the vicinity of the quarry. These changes have often ignored EA stipulations.

The general consensus is that all this developer is interested in is making as much money as possible from his property. It will, potentially, take about 10 years to fill East Quarry with inert waste.

The developer has been gradually unveiling his proposals for development, but this has not been disseminated very widely and many residents of local communities are not really aware of the proposals and the impact they (and the work of filling the quarry) will have on them and their communities. Many residents believe that the draining of the quarry is intended purely to solve the anti-social behaviour.

One of the residents of Dalton explained that he had spent 18 months working on this project – dealing with the Environment Agency, West Lancashire Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, various parish councils and other agencies.

The legislation that is being used to obtain a de-watering licence to partially empty the quarry is the same legislation that would be used to pump water out of a temporarily flooded area of land. The resident was of the opinion that this legislation was never intended to be applied for the purpose of emptying water from a quarry.

However, Maybrook's lawyers have also used obscure legislation to exert pressure on LCC to grant planning permission for Parbold Hill Landfill to be increased in size. Moreover, there has recently been further distressing news in that Railtrack have provided Maybrook with the outline costings involved in the re-opening of West Quarry rail pad.

Residents were concerned about the noise involved and nuisance factor relating to deliveries of inert waste to the rail pad, particularly as it will be at night.

A parish councillor asked the residents if they had considered disseminating information and raising awareness about their campaigns to local residents via a leaflet drop. This led to a discussion and a suggestion from the councillor that perhaps a link to the campaign group's website could be included on the Parish Council's website. The inclusion of an article in the newsletter was suggested.

Wigan Council had granted Maybrook Investments a licence to pump water from the quarry into a manhole across the road from the flood defence system in Mill Lane. The Wigan Council have granted Maybrook Investments permission to transfer water from the quarry into a manhole located across the road from the flood defence system at The Slacks. The rate at which water would be introduced and its impact on the watercourses were discussed.

It was confirmed by the group that they had undertaken legal action as part of their campaign and were in debt as a campaign. £1,700 still need to be raised.

Since the meeting a methane exposure at West Quarry has been reported by one of the residents to the HSE. The email sent has been shared with the Parish Council and is enclosed.

There are several things that members are asked to consider in relation to these matters. Some have been deferred from previous meetings.

- (a) The inclusion of an article on the issues in the next newsletter.
- (b) The introduction of a link on the Parish Council's website to the campaign group's website.
- (c) Making a donation from the Chairman's Allowance towards the group's legal fund. A virement will be required to cover this.
- (d) Whether a complaint about the EA should be lodged with the Parliamentary Ombudsman via the MP.