

Conservation & Access Report CSCC Zoom Meeting 20 November 2020

The item numbers below refer to items on the agenda. Where agenda items have been missed out there is nothing to report and the item is pending.

It has not been mentioned under specific items but should be noted that BCA C&A Committee approval was given for all the items that required funding.

6.1 Cheddar Cave Access

After the last meeting we received notification from Longleat that all the caves on their property at Cheddar were closed and that access was denied for the time being. Notification was issued to the caving community in general and to the digging teams active in Spider Hole and Goughs, as well as the CDG and the administration for Reservoir Hole access.

The reason given for the closure was that CSCC had not entered into the formal access agreement which Longleat had requested in 2017. Longleat were of the opinion that everything had been agreed and that they had been waiting for over a year for the signed agreement to be returned. There is clearly considerable confusion as to the exact position, in that we believed we were waiting for feedback on a revised draft that we had sent to them. The person initially dealing with the matter at Longleat moved on sometime ago and they are investigating further and reviewing their position, however irrespective of this, access will not be reinstated until an agreement has been finalised. Longleat have clearly stated that they would like to see access for cavers but it has to be on their terms.

We are in continual contact with Longleat and are working toward resolving this matter as soon as possible, however Longleat have said they have done nothing since notifying us of the closure as most of the staff in their Estates Department are furloughed. Normally they have ten people in the department but are currently operating with only two, and they cannot guarantee being able to make any progress until things get back to normal. In the meantime they have said they would like their own locks fitted to the gated caves and this is being discussed with them

I would like to thank Butch for all the work he did previously trying to sort this out and to him and Linda for providing me with all the information they have available.

6.5 Ubley Warren Reserve

The bat survey will be organised this winter subject to any Covid restrictions. An inspection of the entrances has been carried out and one lock replaced where Somerset Trust had found the entrance open and put on one of their own locks as a temporary measure. A further four locked shafts were located which will be fitted with CSCC locks when it is possible to remove the existing locks, which may not be easy.

6.10 Thrupe Lane

Atlas have been provided with a CSCC lock for fitting to Thrupe Lane entrance.

6.11 Manor Farm Entrance

I have been liaising with the landowner regarding accessibility and his requirements for the building works, and am waiting for his response.

Initially volunteers are needed to dig a trench and lay a foundation. More significantly we need someone with the appropriate skill to construct the block/stonework around the existing blockhouse, to a reasonable standard. This cannot be normal 'caver' building work. Please contact me if you can help.

6.12. CSCC Locks

A further supply of locks is required at an approximate cost of £350.

6.14 Stoke Lane Slocker

As reported at the last meeting I had a look at the entrance and found no evidence of any issues that had been reported by a dog walker, however some weeks later I received a report from the Parish Council that a dangerous hole had opened in the streambed upstream of the entrance. They also noted that the 'grill' from the cave entrance was missing. They wanted the new hole and the entrance made safe and asked if we could deal with it or if not, then did we have contact details for the landowner and they would approach him. I had a look at the collapse which was approximately 3m across and 1.5m deep and taking the entire stream, which was considerable. I discussed this with the other CSCC Officers and we agreed that we needed to take quick action so fencing materials were purchased and the Cerberus digging team spent a couple of evenings fencing and making the collapse inaccessible. This is not to say 'safe' as the stream was undercutting the sides of the hole and there is a wall and concrete structure overhanging the hole which has been temporarily supported with an Acrow.

The Parish Council have expressed their gratitude for this being dealt with quickly. They have asked when we will be able to replace the 'grill' on the cave entrance which went missing sometime ago, as it is highly visible and close to a footpath. I have told the PC that we will look into getting this done. So far £380 has been spent on fencing materials. A replacement gate would cost up to £600. If it is necessary to lock the entrance a standard CSCC padlock will be fitted.

6.15 Manor Farm Barn

I have been asked about progress on this a few times. The current situation is that it is not sensible to proceed with the floor until the roof is repaired. This is being dealt with by the farmer who hopes to get someone to look at it when the current lockdown ends. In the meantime it is important to stress the need to take care with the existing floor in line with the notices I posted on site.

As mentioned at the last meeting, various people have volunteered to help with the work, but again it would be nice to see one club that perhaps uses the barn regularly take this on, providing they have the necessary skills.

6.18 Caves on Access Land

No doubt Linda will report more on this, but BCA failed to win their case under the judicial review and have now agreed to take it to appeal. The notice on the BCA web site concerning the results of the court case has disappeared and the link to the Press Release doesn't work.

Initial work on preparing a list of possibly affected caves in our area has been started. Large scale maps showing the designated areas would be helpful and Natural England have agreed to supply some, but nothing has turned up yet.

Graham Price
Conservation & Access Officer
November 2020