**Norley Wildlife Meeting about Breech Moss**

**28th November 2017 at**

**Norley C of E Primary School**.

There were 29 people present including local residents, members of the Wildlife Group, Katie Piercy from Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Andrew James from Cheshire West and Chester, Ralph Oultram (our councilor for Cheshire West and Chester) and parish councilors.

The meeting had been convened at the request of Norley Wildlife Group to discuss Breech Moss, which is on Common Land in the village. The designation of the area is a Local Wildlife Site but is not an SSSI.

Katie is the project manager for Cheshire’s Lost Mosses project and handed out a plan of the area highlighting management recommendations relating to the area which include dealing with fly and garden rubbish tipping, and areas of invasive species including Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and rhododendron

The original designation of the area was as a sphagnum moss but it has dried out and deteriorated over the past 20 years. Consideration to be given to restore the area to moss land, which would include removal of invasive plant species and some trees, repair to drainage, control of pollution and removal of some of the rubbish.

If nothing is done on Breech Moss it will completely dry out and become woodland, and fly tipping of rubbish would continue.

Concerns about ‘run off’ of water into peoples gardens and potential flooding if the area became a moss again, was expressed by some people who own homes and gardens which surround Breech Moss. Katie explained that the area is a ‘basin’ and that moss is like a sponge and holds a large volume of water – much more than the soil and trees as it currently is. The water table in the centre of the moss can be higher than the surrounds as it is in Flaxmere. Returning the area to moss should help prevent any flooding.

Some concern expressed that more people would visit the area if became moss again. This was felt very unlikely, as there are currently very few visitors to Flaxmere and other moss areas.

The drainage ditch area is currently blocked and the sewer has collapsed. This has resulted in sewage and flooding of some neighbouring gardens.

The area has been used for fly and garden tipping. Some of the rubbish items are large, including a car, fridges etc. Some of the terrain is very steep and it would be very difficult and potentially dangerous to remove some of the items from the area. Removal of the larger items could destabilise the land. It is not thought there are any toxins or asbestos on the land.

There are areas of invasive species including rhododendron, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed. Removal of Japanese knotweed has commenced and the NWG have started spraying and removal of rhododendron. The removal of Himalayan balsam has to be carried out from May to mid July and this has been done over the last two years

By returning the area to moss the NWG envisage there will be an increase in the amount of wildlife and rare species that live there. Genetic pools benefit from small sites. Their aim is to return it to be an area of high conservation value.

Overall it was felt that the concerns of the residents and the return of the moss area are not mutually exclusive. The development of the moss would assist as the moss and peat retain large amounts of water. The surface water would be directed into the centre of Breech Moss rather than run off into gardens.

**Priorities:**

A hydrological assessment should first be carried out to establish the most effective way to restore the moss while ensuring flood concerns are minimized. The cost of this assessment is unknown.

It would also be necessary to clear trees and shrubs, initially in the area where sphagnum moss is still present. There is no intention or need for tree clearance around the edge of the area or to impact on the views of surrounding houses.

Likely future work would depend on the hydrological assessment but might include clearing the drainage ditch and dealing with the water flow. This would allow the water flow to be directed into the centre of the area in Breech Moss and to where moss is currently present. This would assist with conditions to allow the moss to flourish and grow.

Sewer pipes to be repaired to ensure flow into main sewer.

Rubbish to be removed from the area. Andrew will have a look at types of rubbish present and consider best options for removal and disposal.

Andrew can assist with the invasive species, utilising specialist contractors. He said the Japanese knotweed is easier to deal with than the Himalayan balsam. The seeds from the Himalayan balsam can remain dormant for up to 14 years. Andrew said that these species will be controlled as the removal and eradication of them is virtually impossible.

Phil Gifford has attended a Pesticide Course and is able legally spray and deal with invasive species.

CW&C to assist with removal of rubbish and invasive species.

Consideration to be given for Katie to arrange a walk over Flaxmere Moss so people can see the work carried out there, how it looks and how it is managed.