



Jeff Robinson – Director of Highway Services,
Department of Infrastructure (DOI),
Ellerslie Depot,
Old Church Road,
Crosby,
Isle of Man. IM4 2HA

7th August 2020

Dear Jeff,

Re: Work on the Heritage Trail from St Johns to Kirk Michael in 2020 - an open letter to the DOI

Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) are conscious that we are closely associated with the clearance/development work being carried out by the Department of Infrastructure (DOI) on the Heritage Trail from St Johns to Kirk Michael. MWT were approached and contracted by DOI to carry out some of the ecological work relating to the project, but surprisingly and disappointingly, we were not asked to do anything prior to most of the work to date being carried out. Over recent weeks MWT have received comments/complaints/queries about the work being done, and we have engaged with the Isle of Man (IOM) Government, both DOI and Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) about this. We believe we need to record in writing (made available to the public) our views on, and our involvement with, the project to date.

MWT believe the Heritage Trail is an important place for people to engage with and enjoy Manx Nature, and planned improvements will add value to our UNESCO Biosphere status and to our tourist/visitor offer. Having an improved and fully functioning Heritage Trail will encourage more people to exercise and contribute to the improved health and wellbeing of people in the IOM. Development of the Heritage Trail was necessary, including cutting back lots of the gorse, maintaining the paths, etc. In principle we support the work being carried out. NB: I had personally walked this stretch of path on occasions this year and was disappointed to have to leave the footpath in several places to go around overgrown and boggy areas and go across roads.

There are, however, issues with the Heritage Trail work this year that we have concerns with. MWT believe the timing of much of the work was questionable (i.e. in respect to nesting birds) and we would have wanted to review other aspects, such as the footpath specifications, before work commenced. We contacted the DOI/DEFA to ask why this work was happening before we had seen construction plans or carried out an ecological appraisal? Specifically, if nesting birds had been considered?

We were assured by DEFA that checks were in place with the contractors, that steps to protect wildlife were being enforced, and that the Wildlife Act had not been broken. MWT latterly identified areas where birds were nesting and protected orchids were growing, and we were pleased that on being informed of this by MWT the DOI agreed to not carry out clearance work in these areas.

MWT are keen to support the IOM Government in its work and it remains unfortunate, therefore, that MWT were not involved before the clearing work commenced. We believe that collectively the Island learnt things this year that will enable future work to be done in a better way. MWT (or perhaps another ecological/conservation organisation) must ideally be involved far earlier and more intrinsically in the design process, to ensure wildlife issues are appropriately dealt with. We reiterate the value of an improved Heritage Trail and are enthusiastic about the future phases of interpretation and encouraging more people to use it.

Yours sincerely,

Leigh Morris
Chief Executive Officer

