



## Statement from Northumberland Wildlife Trust with regard to social media comments regarding East Chevington Nature Reserve

It has been brought to our attention that comments have been made on social media with regard to the Catch My Drift project at our East Chevington Nature Reserve. As is common with social media, these comments are personal opinions and the information they contain is not necessarily based on fact. The statement below seeks to clarify a number of inaccuracies reported through this medium.

Northumberland Wildlife Trust received a £90,000 stage 1 grant from National Lottery Heritage Fund in Feb 2019 for the Catch My Drift project at East Chevington Nature Reserve. As with all lottery grants, this first stage funding is to develop a clearer understanding of the site and develop detailed plans to improve it for the benefit of natural heritage. As there are many different people, with many different opinions on how the site should be managed, we employed an independent consultancy to carry out an ecological and hydrological assessment of the site and this has enabled us to develop a clear plan on what we want to achieve on the site for the benefit of all wildlife. Members of the public have been given the opportunity to provide comments throughout this process, either through on site encounters, consultation events or scheduled meetings. All comments have been taken into consideration in the development of the plans for the site.

No practical conservation works can be carried out using this first stage grant. An application will be submitted in March 2020 for a £416,000.00 grant to deliver the aspirations identified within the plan. A decision on this application is expected in the summer and if successful, work would only commence once National Lottery Heritage Fund are satisfied that all permissions are in place (a process that can take a few months to complete).

A dedicated member of staff and team of volunteers have supported the consultants by undertaking ecological survey work throughout the first stage. So far we have collectively identified 387 species on the site, with 276 new species that have never been recorded on this site before. This has created a detailed picture of what already exists on the site to ensure that any plans we develop take into consideration all existing wildlife. East Chevington is a fabulous reserve for wildlife but we understand that there are things we need to change, in order for it to stay this way, and further things we could do to improve it. That is why we have developed the Catch My Drift project, to seek the funding required to bring about these changes.

As an organisation, when carrying out ecological surveys we follow best practice guidelines, the advice of independent experts and our own professional judgement. In the past few weeks our staff and volunteers have been using trail cameras to record small mammal presence within the site and will continue to do so until the end of February.

Members of the staff team were fortunate enough to be able to visit Norfolk Wildlife Trust in January. We undertook this visit to specifically gather information from people within the Wildlife Trust movement who not only have vast experience of reedbed development and management but who also understand the financial and staffing constraints we face as a charity. They were quick to point out that



establishing reedbed takes a good 20 years, which is the age our site is now reaching, and that any new work we undertake will take a long time to be visible. They were able to demonstrate this by showing us different sites at different stages of development. There were many discussions about visitor perception on what the right water levels are for reedbed and how they manage these, all too often, conflicting opinions.

Biotope UK were contracted to develop designs for both existing and new hides within East Chevington. A planning application has been submitted to Northumberland County Council seeking approval for these changes. Biotope have not worked with us on any of our other sites.

As an organisation we try to reuse as much material as possible rather than disposing of it as waste. At times this means it has to be stockpiled for future use. This often leads to creation of temporary hibernacula for Great Crested Newt, which is a species that is found frequently throughout the Bay. As Great Crested Newts have been found within these stockpiles then material will be moved during the newt breeding season to avoid disturbance. If we knowingly move them now we could be committing an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

East Chevington Nature Reserve is there for people to be able to enjoy wildlife. We would like to remind members of the public to stay on the public access paths and not enter private areas within the reserve. Please be polite and treat members of staff and volunteers with respect whilst they carry out their duties. If you have any concerns, then please approach us as an organisation through official channels. We are happy to discuss any issues in a professional manner.

We are extremely grateful to all the people who have proactively given up their time to support us in the development of this project through volunteering, sharing information and providing feedback (both positive and negative) and we very much hope that our bid to lottery is successful so that we can collectively deliver our aspirations for the site.

Elaine More  
Development Manager  
On behalf of Northumberland Wildlife Trust