

Update on Gayle Mill, Hawes, North Yorkshire, May 2018

Gayle Mill is now decommissioned, enabling NECT to begin the process of preparing for Phase 4. This includes works that could not be undertaken while the site was operational, which would have compromised GMT's ability to run the mill and could have compromised GMT's responsibilities to volunteers and to safely run courses and open to the public. At various times the site will be occupied by contractors and it is not compatible in practical or insurance terms to try to operate and have the public on site under those circumstances unless there under a contractor's supervision, such as organised site visits, or as trainees or volunteers assisting under contractor supervision.

The works will include repairs to the leat that previously were not possible, rebuilding the launder, upgrading the water power systems, upgrading and improving facilities, and stabilisation works to the mill pond which was not included in earlier phases. This means all areas of the property at some stage will be subject to surveys, engineering or construction works, each of which must conform to safe working practices. Decommissioning the mill and closing it to the public was an essential precondition of this.

Not knowing if GMT would comply with the legal process meant NECT could not make progress with funding bids or planning works on site; the process of preparing for and implementing Phase 4 was therefore delayed by almost five months from when the licence to occupy ended and when GMT actually vacated the mill. Certainty on the legal position, unrestricted access, compliance with insurance requirements and deliverability now enable NECT to plan effectively. This could only commence properly from April, and so fundraising is now in hand. The delay could have other implications on when works can be undertaken; some works in watercourses can only be done in seasons and at times that limit ecological risks, especially to habitats of protected species. Nevertheless, NECT is still anticipating all works will be completed for re-opening at Easter 2019.

Gayle Mill in being a nationally significant heritage asset, and having been brought back into use by NECT as a water-powered mill, has multiple levels of legislation for which NECT must seek consents and compliance. This includes invasive surveys such as ground investigation to determine the scope of work to the leat, and to plan safe removal of vegetation from the mill pond, for which Scheduled Monument Consent will be required, and probably also an Environment Agency licence for working in the water course. During surveys, preparations and implementation of Phase 4, NECT will be working closely with statutory authorities.

Though closure of the mill and the uncertainties surrounding GMT have raised concerns about the role of volunteers in the life of the mill, NECT's commitment to volunteers began at the outset of its involvement in the mill in 1996 and continues to be an important part of all aspects of the Trust's charitable work across the country. During occupancy of the mill over recent years by GMT, opportunities for volunteering naturally were devolved to GMT. During Phase 4, opportunities will arise in which it is hoped volunteers will play their part, keeping their hand in for when the mill reopens. NECT's director met representatives of the Friends of Gayle Mill on 23 May to discuss this in advance of their AGM. NECT has invited the Friends to continue their support for the mill during the period of works on site through specially arranged site visits and opportunities for volunteering; NECT hopes at the AGM that Friends will take up this invitation in the interests of the mill.

NECT extends the same invitation to all volunteers and supporters, who should contact NECT directly so that they can be kept informed of opportunities.

At the meeting with the Friends NECT countered recent local rumours by categorically confirming that NECT would not be selling the mill for conversion to housing. The director explained that this would run totally counter to everything NECT stood for, and what the public funding was provided for. Moreover, the Heritage Lottery Fund has a charge on the mill which means it cannot be mortgaged or sold without their consent. Since it was first outlined to GMT early in 2016, Phase 4 has always been seen as an essential but temporary closure and that the mill would resume life in operation once the work was complete. That position has not changed.

NECT has tried to respond to all direct personal approaches for information. In addition, NECT will issue updates on our website to keep people informed of developments, giving priority to informing those directly involved and local people, as well as issuing press releases when appropriate. The Trust will also keep funders and other agencies informed. In addition, enquiries can be directed to the NECT office, details of which are given above.