

## Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 20 April 2018, - 10.00 am

### Minutes

#### Present:

Mrs G Rees (Chairman), Dr K A Pollock (Vice Chairman), Mr T Baker, Mr J Bisset, Prof D Bryant, Mr J Burgin, Mr J Fryman, Mr J Hervey-Bathurst, Mr A Lee, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr C Williams and Mr R Williams

#### Also attended:

Mr D Armitage, Mr P Esrich and Mrs K Griffiths

#### 642 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies were received from Wayne Barnes, Duncan Bridges, Rachel Datlen, Dawn Griffiths, Chris O'Donnell and Neil Rimmington.

#### 643 Declaration of Interests

None

#### 644 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 17 November 2017 were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

It was agreed that the minutes relating to the previous JAC meeting would, in future, be circulated with the agenda and papers for the next meeting.

#### 645 The Ridges and Ditches of the Northern Malvern Hills

The Committee received a presentation from George Demidowicz, an historical geographer who now resides in West Malvern and had previously been head of Coventry City's Conservation and Archaeology Team.

George had discovered that that the banks and ditches which were still visible in places on the northern Malvern Hills showed where the Hills had been separated into 'Thirds'. He explained that King Charles I had acquired additional income by relinquishing his rights to 'venison and vert' (deer and greenery) over Malvern Chase and selling or leasing a third of the area to then be enclosed. It was these enclosure boundaries which were still visible. The remaining two thirds remained the property of local lords and was left open for the commoners to be able to graze their stock.

Once George had located the physical signs on the hills, he went to known archives to find further evidence, including the Berrington Collection, which has a map of

the Kings Thirds in 1632-1633. There was a clear correlation between this map and the physical evidence on the ground. None of the texts noted that the boundaries could still be seen on the Hills today.

A leaflet on these banks and ditches had been produced by the Malvern Hills Trust with support from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

**646 AONB Budget and Work Programme 2018/19**

The AONB budget had increased slightly due to an inflationary increase in grant from Defra. The remainder of the 'core' funding would be provided by Local Authorities. News of whether any Parish Councils wished to give contributions was awaited. Staff salaries were expected to increase by 2% for the year. An extension of the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project had been approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the project would conclude at the end of December 2018.

Cllr. Tuthill thanked the AONB Unit for input to a consultation on a goods vehicle operator's license in Suckley. Cllr Pollock explained that Worcestershire was to become a testbed for 5G technology with an application currently in for a new 25m mast at the Science Park in Malvern. Whilst the mast site was not within the AONB it would be visible from the Malvern Hills and the AONB Unit would be considering how the effects on views could be mitigated. It was considered that good coverage would be even more important in the future as emergency services were set to move their communications to mobile phone signals and currently areas of the Malvern Hills had some of the lowest speeds in the County.

**RESOLVED: that the Committee**

- a) **Noted the budget for 2018/19,**
- b) **Commented on the overall direction and work priorities for the year ahead.**

**647 The Review of the Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan (2014-19)**

Paul Esrich explained that Local Authorities had a statutory duty to prepare and publish a management plan for their AONB and once produced it must be reviewed at least every five years. Usually the plan was re-issued as a 'new' plan every five years as that helped to raise the profile of AONB and its management. Local Authorities had agreed that the AONB Partnership would carry out the review on their behalf (and with their involvement). Since no new guidance had been published the non-statutory guidance produced in 2012 and the formal guidance which predated it would be followed.

Paul explained that the context against which the review was to be conducted was changing dramatically. A significant increase in house building, the review of the National Planning Policy Framework, consultation of new agricultural policy and other Brexit related changes were all likely to be highly significant. At least the new 25 year Environment Plan had been published which provided some important pointers.

Over the next few years Government was expected to undertake pilots for new environmental land management schemes and it looked likely that there would be a reduction in regulations for farmers. It was possible that Defra would be looking to AONB Management Plans to help target the Government's future financial support.

The State of the AONB report should also be considered in the review. Paul Esrich explained that data was being collected earlier than usual this time around to ensure that this could better inform the review process.

In the ensuing discussion members raised the following points:

- As a lot of change was expected, the plan needed to be responsive, reactive and able to change,
- It was suggested that there may be merit in not focusing on certain issues which were currently unclear e.g. planning and agriculture and reviewing the plan again once more clarity existed,
- It was felt that the next plan should not quickly become out of date/overtaken by other events and changes,
- The plan could be written with the aim of influencing Defra by highlighting the important areas which needed the most investment,
- It was clarified that there was no indication that Defra wished to remove the support or protection it gave to AONBs. It was possible that protected areas may become a focus for grant schemes in the future,
- Uncertainty would continue to prevail for some time and it would be important to keep an eye on change during this period which may see much diversification,
- Natural Capital was becoming better recognised and it was suggested that this concept should be embedded into the Management Plan,
- The conflict between protecting landscapes as 'playgrounds' and supporting people who worked

the area commercially was recognised. Farming needed to be profitable but that profit may come from different sources,

- Increased tourism brought both positives and negatives to the area and increased 'gentrification' could also bring about undesirable change,
- The National Association for AONBs was described as having the ear of Defra, aided by the fact that AONB Partnerships were now funded directly by Government,
- It was felt that the existing plan had useful headings and content which could be used. It was explained that the review would take the existing Plan text as its starting point, with amendments and additions being made as required. Other important issues which should be considered were the effects of tree disease such as Ash die back, especially with regard to what plans could be put in place to help the landscape recover,
- It would be important to keep elected members up to speed with the review,
- Workshops with partners would happen in the next few weeks and a revised document would be produced for consultation in the Autumn, ready for endorsing at the November JAC meeting.

**RESOLVED that the Committee**

- a) Noted and commented on the contents of the paper, and**
- b) Contributed to the review process by debating key issues, including those raised at appendix 4.**

**648 Sustainable Development Fund**

David Armitage summarised the Sustainable Development Fund activity in 2017/18. Projects supported included a local history group who had produced their own website and publication, maintenance of geosites, crayfish extermination and a baby feeding and changing tent for the National Childbirth Trust.

Interest continued in the dog poo digester which powers a lamp and a further contribution was given for poo bags and labels. The story had been picked up by media outlets from around the world.

The Chairman thanked David and the team for the work he and the team did with the fund and the support they gave to the applicants.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

**649 Information Items**

- a) **Noted and commented on the report,**
- b) **Should contact David Armitage with any projects that might be suitable for the fund and**
- c) **Should consider whether Local Authorities should make more enquiries of this fund.**

Paul Esrich highlighted various information items:

- Landscape improvement grants were helping to support wildlife,
- A project to collect data on rare species in the north of the AONB was progressing well,
- The Highways Verges Management Pilot had received additional grant funding via the European Structural Investment Fund and invitations to tender for this work would soon be issued. This project fitted well with the fact that Worcestershire had been designated a pollinator friendly County,
- A bid to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund had been successful for an area of land to the west of the Malvern Hills. The project would be landowner led and would work to improve the natural environment.

**RESOLVED that the Committee noted the information report and should contact the AONB Unit if they wished to be involved in any consultations or receive further information on any of the items.**

**650 Verbal Reports from Partners**

James Hervey-Bathurst reported that the amended plans for the café at Eastnor Castle were going ahead. He also thanked the Partnership for funding towards traditional orchard planting.

Richard Williams - The CPRE were sponsoring a talk at the Courtyard by Jem Waygood and Carly Tinkler about Valued Landscapes in a Time of Change. A small number of tickets were still available.

Dick Bryant – Natural England had helped to pay for the clearance/ management of some geosites in areas which could not be managed by volunteers.

David Armitage – The AONB and the Malvern Hills Trust had jointly funded a book 'The Nature of the Malverns' it would be launched on 24 May. Guidance on where one is and is not allowed to cycle had recently been released by the Malvern Hills Trust.

Jim Burgin – Malvern Hills District Council were looking for resources to review Malvern Wells conservation area.

**651      Dates of Future Meetings**

There would then be a consultation on the proposals.

James Bisset – Herefordshire Council were about to recruit a new Landscape Officer and ½ a new ecologist post. A new tree disease information pack for landowners would be released shortly.

Arthur Lee - Herefordshire's 15<sup>th</sup> Walking Festival would be taking place later in the year. Two walks were taking place in the Malvern area.

Ken Pollock – Worcestershire County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership had been successful in its bid for Government funding to test and explore 5G. There was a new Minerals Policy and a revised Local Transport Plan. £6million had also been allocated to improve footways.

The next meeting would take place on 9 November 2018 at 10.00am.

A study tour was being planned for 21 September with an agriculture and farming theme. More details would be provided closer to the time.

The meeting ended at 11.55am

Chairman .....