

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Friday, 11 April 2014, Council Chamber, Malvern – 10.00am.

Minutes

Present:

Prof J W Raine (Chairman), Mr P Bettington (Vice Chairman), Mr W Barnes, Prof R Bryant, Mr C Cheeseman, Mr J Fryman, Ms D Griffiths, Mr J Hervey-Bathurst, Mr F Hill, Mr A Lee, Dr K A Pollock and Mr P A Tuthill

Also attended:

Mr D Armitage, Mr J Bisset, Mr C Blundel, Mr P Esrich, Ms S Hughes and Ms K Humphries.

Available papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 November 2013.

554 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies were received from Nicky Carless, Sarah Faulkner, Andy Maginnis, Gwyneth Rees and Roger Yeates. John Mills attended for Nicky Carless. Neil Rimmington attended for Ian George.

555 Declaration of Interests

James Hervey-Bathurst declared an interest in that he was a land owner and farmed on land that was within the AONB.

556 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

557 State of the AONB

From 1 April 2014 the AONB had started its new five year Management Plan. The Plan and its companion document The State of the AONB report were now available on the website. The 'State' report monitored changes in the condition of the AONB and thus had a number of uses, for example, providing an early warning of problems.

Paul Esrich explained that a number of different national and local data sets had been used to compile the report. The usual health warning should be applied to the use of data. For example, there had been changes in the way in which some data sets had been compiled. This made like-for-like comparisons difficult.

The indicators used in the report were developed in 2006 with the help of the University of Worcester. Fixed point photos were taken in different areas showing the 10 sorts of landscape characters which made up the AONB. These landscape characters were then sub-divided into 30 landscape description units. Photos taken in 2009 were retaken in 2014 and any changes, whether positive or negative were recorded. Other data was also assessed:

- Data suggested a loss of permanent pasture and an increase in cropped land since 2007. The amount of farmed woodland and rough grazing had also reduced. 45% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) were currently assessed as being in good condition; 55% were judged as in unfavourable recovering condition. There had been a decline in the condition of local geological sites compared with 2009 but it was unclear why this had happened,
- There were 8 Scheduled Monuments in the AONB. 5 years ago only 5 had been judged to be in satisfactory condition. Now all 8 were in a satisfactory condition. The overall condition of listed buildings was similar to that of 5 years ago. This could be considered a good result in the light of very difficult economic times since 2008. It showed that generally people had been looking after their listed buildings. Of the registered parks in the AONB, Eastnor was deemed to be in good condition, Loudon was assessed as vulnerable due to fragmented ownership and incoherent management. There was no up-to-date information available for Bromsberrow. 77% of a sample of rights of way were found to be easy to use, compared to 73% 5 years ago.

In discussion the following points were made:

- In some areas it would be difficult for the AONB Partnership to influence landowners to make improvements which would benefit the area. It was suggested that the 'State' document should be produced before the management plan as it would help inform the future work of the AONB Partnership. It was explained that attempts were made to produce the two documents in tandem, so that the new management plan could be informed by data collected for the 'State report.

Also, objectives and policies in the management plan were often broad enough to provide a 'hook' for more specific activities if information in the State of the AONB report suggested it was needed,

- Traditional farming methods were in danger of being lost but it was agreed that it was difficult to see how a strategy could be put in place to protect traditional farming methods within the AONB,
- The increase in cropped area was a concern, as was the decrease in grazing land. It was noted that there were likely to be limits on the amount of permanent pasture which could be ploughed up and converted to arable, as part of EU rules,
- The presented figures on woodland only apply to farm woodlands, not to all woodlands in the AONB,
- Whilst the SSSI network was deemed to be in reasonably good condition it was important to help to conserve biodiversity across the AONB, not just in the designated sites,
- PE thanked those who had participated in the collection and compilation of data which had informed the 'State' report.

RESOLVED that this report be noted and the State of the AONB report be recognised as a useful tool for monitoring AONB condition and providing information to the AONB Partnership.

**558 Three Counties
Traditional
Orchard Project**

Karen Humphries, Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project Development Officer, explained the background to the project. Traditional orchards had been disappearing quickly, especially since the 1950s. Around 36% of the Country's remaining traditional orchards were in the 3 Counties area making the issue especially important in this area. She explained that various partners such as local authorities and Natural England, led by the AONB Unit, had come together to apply for Heritage Lottery Funding in order to start the Traditional Orchard Project. Initial development phase funding was awarded by HLF. This had paid for her post and for work to consult widely at orchard events, discover orchard hotspots, talk to potential orchard owners and develop project details.

Orchard hotspots had been identified at Garway, Whitbourne, Alfrick, Tenbury, Evesham, Ross, and Stroud. Three main skills hubs were due to be used (one for each county): Gloucestershire Orchard Trust, Vale

Landscape Heritage Trust and Colwall Orchard Group.

The project aimed to match orchards in need of renovation with local people who were willing to help manage them. A Project Officer would be employed who would be a first point of contact and to help organise support and activities and funding would be used to enable the orchards to become sustainable. The project would work to restore orchards, up-skill people, plant new trees, support local heritage projects and discover people to champion future work.

A Stage 2 to the HLF was currently being assembled and was due to be submitted by 23 June 2014. HLF would report on whether the application had been successful in September 2014. If it was, a three year project should commence thereafter.

RESOLVED that Karen Humphries be thanked for her update and that the JAC endorse the Stage 2 bid to the HLF and the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project.

559 Update on Planning Issues

Colin Blundel updated members on recent planning considerations. He explained that whilst Local Plans were still being developed, Government policy to increase housing was putting increasing pressure on greenfield land in and around the AONB.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 with the aim of boosting the number of houses permitted through the planning system. It had started taking priority over local plans unless they were up to date.

The NPPF stated that housing policies should not be considered up to date unless the local planning authority can demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. Malvern Hills cannot currently demonstrate a five year supply so national policy takes precedence which required applications to be approved unless the environmental harm clearly outweighed the social and economic benefits.

Section 115 and 116 of the NPPF relate to AONBs and require great weight to be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty and for major developments not to be allowed except in exceptional circumstances. However there was some debate over what constituted a major development. This was to be left to the local decision

taker and would depend on the local context.

An update on the current planning situation was given:

Members discussed and agreed that the AONB Partnership was not against all development but that development needed to be appropriate in character and suitable for the area. Also, that other sites outside the AONB should be considered.

Other points discussed were as follows:

- The South Worcestershire Development Plan was likely to see a 22% increase in the housing allocation for the area, as part of the Inspection process,
- The AONB Building Design Guide needed to be used in the area,
- Certificates of lawfulness can be a problem with people using them as a way of avoiding consultation and the planning process,
- It was possible that some local authorities may be more likely to approve certain applications rather than run the risk of incurring appeal costs,
- 259 houses had been built in Welland inside the AONB since AONB designation, but pre the NPPF,
- The 5 year land supply was all important but it was hoped that in one year's time this should be sorted.

RESOLVED that

- a) **The current developments in national planning policy and guidance be noted,**
- b) **The progress in relation to strategic planning in Herefordshire, Forest of Dean and South Worcestershire be noted,**
- c) **The recent planning applications relating to the AONB be noted, and that**

560 Ancient Woodland Restoration in Herefordshire and West Worcestershire

d) Colin Blundel be thanked for his update.

Ancient woodland was land that had been wooded since at least AD 1600. After WWII there was a fear about the supply of wood and large scale coniferisation occurred, including on ancient woodland sites. However specialist species can be encouraged to recover by removing shading conifers and allowing light to penetrate.

The Woodland Trust had received funding from The Heritage Lottery Fund for a four year project to restore ancient woodlands around the UK. One of the ten areas selected was Herefordshire and West Worcestershire which includes the AONB. The aim was to work with a wide range of landowners and organisations to establish good management and restoration techniques for ancient woodland.

A project officer – Jeremy Evans - had been appointed for this area, to liaise with landowners, carry out surveys and provide advice and support for woodland management. He was based at the Forestry Commission's Worcester Office, (FC is supporting the project). It was hoped that financial support for restoration work would come from the New Environment Land management Schemes (NELMS). Staff in the AONB Unit would be working with Jeremy to try to ensure that the project delivers in the AONB. WB commented that the project relates to broadleaved as well as conifer plantations.

RESOLVED: that

- a) The report on the ancient woodland restoration project be noted, and that**

- b) Members would help to identify possible woodlands and owners who might be interested in receiving further information about the project.**

561 Making Space for Nature in the Malvern Hills AONB - A

There had been a shift in Government policy away from focussing on nature reserves and SSSIs and towards a more integrated landscape scale approach to biodiversity conservation. AONBs had been confirmed as having Category V status and as such Defra expected them to

**project to
conserve and
enhance
Biodiversity at a
Landscape
Scale**

be at the vanguard of biodiversity conservation at a landscape scale.

The Malvern Hills AONB was working in partnership with others to develop a landscape scale biodiversity project, the aim of which was “to improve in a selective and targeted manner, the connectivity, buffering and management of a mosaic of habitats in a pre-defined ‘landscape scale’ area, in order to benefit a range of locally characteristic and significant species”.

The project had 2 stages

1. Data gathering
2. Discussing with landowners and other bodies about funding biodiversity or landscape enhancements

Members commented that care needed to be taken to ensure that by improving the habitat of one species the habitat was not made worse for others. The foraging areas of bats was discussed and it was pointed out that roosting areas also needed to be improved, not just feeding habitats.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the project be supported. Members were asked to consider any other partners who may be interested in taking part in the project.

**562 Sustainable
Development
Fund**

David Armitage gave his usual update about the SDF. He highlighted that Brian Wilce had been given a loan to help buy a bottling line for cider and juice. Support had also been extended to the Doo-up company which produces a handheld machine to pick up dog poo. Eastnor Estate received a grant to help with the restoration of the mill leat at Clenchers Mill which would be open to the public on the morning of 10 May 2014.

RESOLVED that this report be noted.

**563 Verbal Reports
from Partners**

Herefordshire Council

Phil Bettington reported that the grass cutting contract with Balfour Beatty had been reduced from 7 a year to 3. James Bisset reported the dissolution of the Herefordshire Parks and Countryside service but stated that support to the AONB had been flagged as a statutory requirement so should receive some future support. He

invited members to look on the Hereford Action for Mammals website for information on the survey being carried out by the bat group.

Campaign to Protect Rural England

Frank Hill reported that there were a large number of planning applications currently being lodged across the whole of Worcestershire and this was a difficult time.

Herefordshire Local Access Forum.

Herefordshire Ramblers had agreed terms with Balfour Beatty to work together on practical footpath work. It was expected that there would be an update at the next LAF meeting.

Country Landowners and Business Association (Eastnor Estate)

HLS work continues and a circular walk leaflet had been produced in conjunction with the Malvern Hills AONB Unit.

Forestry Commission.

Discussions were currently taking place with Natural England and the Rural payments Agency with regards to new models of interaction in delivering NELMS.

English Heritage

Malvern Hills Conservators had completed repair works on the Shire Ditch under a management agreement with EH. The Stewardship of works on Midsummer Hill would be going ahead under the auspices of the National Trust.

Natural England.

Natural England had just been reorganised but the representative on the JAC would remain the same.

Worcestershire Association of Local Councils

Some planning applicants were avoiding holding consultations by gaining a certificate of lawfulness.

Earth Heritage Trust

The annual geofest would start in a couple of months. A programme of walks and talks had been arranged.

564 Dates of Future Meetings

The Study Tour will take place on **Friday 26 September 2014.**

The next meeting will be held on **21 November 2014** at the Council Chamber, Malvern.

565 Members Issues

Two additional reports were circulated to members.

1. The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty had produced a report to give information about what they had achieved in 2013/14. Paul Esrich reminded members that each AONB Partnership provided financial support to the work of the Association.
2. A report on the AONB Budget and work programme was also distributed. The amount of money available to the AONB Partnership had been reduced again in 2014/15 with the SDF taking the brunt of this latest cut. Four Parish Councils had been written to about the possibility of providing some voluntary financial support to the AONB Partnership and three had agreed to do so thus far.

RESOLVED that:

- a) **The report from the NAAONB and the budget report be noted and**
- b) **it was agreed that other Parish Councils should be approached to request a financial contribution towards the AONB Partnership.**

The meeting ended at 12.45pm

Chairman