

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 8 November 2019, 10.00am

Present:

Minutes

Mrs G Rees (Chairman), Dr K A Pollock (Vice Chairman), Mr W Barnes, Mr S Bosley, Prof R Bryant, Mr J Fryman, Mr F Hill, Mrs H l'Anson, Prof J W Raine, Mr N Rimmington, Mr P A Tuthill and Ms J Wood

Also attended:

David Armitage, James Bisset, Duncan Bridges, Paul Esrich and Kate Griffiths

Available papers

The members had before them the Agenda papers and the Minutes of the previous meeting (previously circulated).

675 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies had been received from James Hervey-Bathurst and Hazel McDowall.

Neil Rimmington attended for Ian George.

676 Declaration of Interests

None

677 To elect a Chairman

Ken Pollock nominated Gwyneth Rees. This was seconded by John Raine; there were no further nominations.

RESOLVED that Gwyneth Rees be duly elected as Chairman of the Malvern Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee.

678 To appoint a Vice Chairman

Paul Tuthill nominated Ken Pollock. John Raine seconded the nomination.

There were no further nominations.

RESOLVED that Ken Pollock be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee.

679 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2019 were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

680 Community

Chris Kirk from Malvern and District Community Action

Transport Project

attended the meeting to say thank you for the money that had been received from the Sustainable Development Fund and to talk about the work which had been done with it to enable people to gain access to the AONB and its surrounds. The money given had contributed towards three trips; to Holloways, to Ralph Court Gardens and to Alfrick Show.

Chris also explained the wider work of the group which aimed to decrease the isolation felt by people over the age of 60 or who were disabled. They had helped around 15,000 people and had between 70 and 80 volunteers. The charity had three mini buses, two of which were wheelchair friendly. The group's bus routes and car service helped people attend hospital appointments and go shopping. As well as helping with transport, Community Action held Tea Clubs every second Sunday and were about to start a new project called Men's Sheds which would enable men to come together at a work bench.

Members of the Committee were interested in whether the volunteer drivers had trouble parking at Worcestershire Hospital. They were reassured that the drivers were able to drop people off outside the hospital and then move the vehicle once the individual was inside.

In response to further questions it was clarified that the group did hire out their mini buses but it had become necessary to assess the contract under which this was done. The area covered was up to the boundary of other groups which provided car services such as Worcestershire Wheels and Upton Community Care.

Members of the Committee thanked Chris and Community Action for the work that they did for the Community.

681 A summary of the Landscapes Review

In celebration of the 70th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which paved the way for the creation of 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Poet Laureate Simon Armitage had been commissioned to write the poem 'Fugitives'. A hard copy of the poem was given to each member of the Committee. A reading of the poem by Simon Armitage over footage of a 'National Moments' campaign organised by the National Association for AONBs (including footage of the Malvern Hills AONB) is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKDjTPnDdjU>

Following a year-long review during which all National Parks and AONBs had been visited, The Landscapes Review was published on 21 September 2019 to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. Paul Esrich summarised some key points of the Review report which included:

1. Landscapes alive for nature and beauty: more should be done for biodiversity and conservation and AONB Management Plans should be clearer on how this would be achieved.
2. Landscapes for everyone: Significant sections of society feel that AONB's were irrelevant to them. Management Boards tend to be unrepresentative of society at large. The benefits gained from nature in the form of physical and mental well-being were great and should be increased. If there were to be a conflict between conservation and recreation, conservation should be the priority in AONBs as well as National Parks. It was recommended that there be more Rangers and more volunteering.
3. Living in Landscapes: people living and working in National Parks and AONBs may face additional challenges such as higher housing costs, lack of job opportunities and poor public transport. Economic vitality should be encouraged. It was proposed that AONBs become statutory consultees for planning.
4. More special places: the process for becoming a designated landscape or for reviewing designated landscape boundaries should be reviewed and streamlined.
5. New ways of working: AONBs should be renamed National Landscapes, new powers should be introduced and funding should be doubled with a review of the existing funding formula to follow.

In the discussion the following points were considered:

- It may be difficult to engage young people in AONB governance through direct representation on the JAC; sixth formers could be asked to become members of the JAC but some members felt that although the individual may benefit personally, there may be less benefit for the committee since knowledge and experience were often key to successful participation.

- Some believed that the document was unrealistic because to increase footfall would be incompatible with wildlife whilst increasing the use of the area with organised events like music festivals and triathlons could deter existing users. It is not always possible to engage different communities and sectors of society because they may have different interests.
- By contrast many members of the committee welcomed the report and found it well written and accessible. It was thought to fit well with the Environment Bill. The suggestion of increased funding was particularly welcome and the ambition to engage with more people and reflect and respond to society's changing needs should be embraced.
- The proposed change of name to National Landscape was generally not favoured. It was felt that it did not successfully define the area which it would be describing. A change of name may be a good idea but not to National Landscape.
- It was suggested that a new Landscapes Service may be a good thing as it could create a stronger voice for what protected landscapes could offer.
- It was cautioned that following the Forestry Review, Government only adopted a small amount of the recommendations made, so it was not sure how much difference the review would make.
- The issue of more affordable housing in the AONB could be thought to be at odds with protecting the environment but it was accepted that affordable housing was needed so the opportunity to have a say on where and how sites were developed should be encouraged.
- The discrepancy between Government resources received by National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships was noted and members were pleased to see this addressed in the report. It was explained that targeted and more efficient efforts to access alternative funding streams perhaps from philanthropic or entrepreneurial streams/areas was encouraged in the Review document.
- Many Members felt that more could and should be done to raise awareness of the Malvern Hills AONB, for example, through signage to promote the area and what visitors could see and experience around them.
- The concept of 'recovery' of nature was queried as it was unclear what time should be gone back

682 Environment and Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

to. It was agreed monitoring and action was important but it was not always possible or even desirable to 'restore or recover'.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) **Noted the publication of the Landscapes Review report;**
- b) **Raised and discussed any issues pertinent to the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership and to its work moving forward, including in the short and longer terms; and**
- c) **Agreed that a letter from the Malvern Hills AONB JAC be sent to Government welcoming the review and the potential it affords to empower delivery and change.**

Most local Councils with land designated as AONB had declared a climate emergency and aimed to become carbon neutral by 2050 or before. The paper asks what the AONB Partnership could do to help to help achieve this aim. There were three main areas:

1. Nature Recovery – many people believe there is a strong link between climate change and the loss of biodiversity. It is expected that AONBs would produce Nature Recovery Strategies.
2. Agriculture – This sector accounts for 10% of greenhouse gases and the NFU have ambitions to become carbon neutral.
3. Development, tourism, energy etc – Renewable energy needed to be considered but also the effect projects such as windfarms may have on landscapes. Some years ago the AONB Partnership tried to encourage companies to sign up to green tourism but very few were interested. Natural Capital is central to the 25-year Environment Plan and could be better utilised in planning and development.

The Committee discussed whether action was already happening in this area and what could be done:

- Malvern Hills District Council had declared a climate emergency and a paper had been presented to their Management Board. Their Environment Policy Panel were considering a budget proposal of £250,000 towards meeting key targets. Nature recovery was being considered within this work.
- It was reported that Chris Stark from the Committee on Climate Change had highlighted

the difficulties involved in even bringing forward targets to become carbon neutral by just 5 years (to 2045).

- It was suggested that things were changing and needed to be reviewed constantly. Action rather than fixating on specific targets was most important.
- It was suggested that Councils should look to their own estates first and then encourage communities to go with them.
- Any actions by District Councils needed to be taken in partnership and support would be required from the wider AONB Partnership and Parish Councils etc.
- Worcestershire County Council has supported entrepreneurs who used technology to improve their businesses in an environmentally friendly way.
- An alternative view was that the public were being misled by people who claimed there was a climate emergency. It's important to note that much had been done to remove many people from poverty in recent years.
- One committee member felt that the zero-carbon report was disappointing as it was a political report and should not be accepted.
- A biodiversity recovery programme had achieved some positive outcomes but had not achieved its ambitious aims as more resources were required.
- A planning idea was mentioned which used redundant building – <https://www.lionandlambcohousing.co.uk/>

It was suggested that if Committee Members had further suggestions about possible Partnership working linked to addressing declared environment and climate change emergencies, they should contact the AONB Unit. Paul Esrich stressed the need for the Partnership to work effectively through, for example, Committee Members helping to make connections between members of staff and projects happening in their own organisations and staff working in the AONB Unit.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Commented on and discussed the three central themes identified;**
- b) Participated in a discussion to identify good practice, recommendations to partner bodies and priority actions; and**
- c) Agreed that any further ideas for Partnership**

**683 Development
and Land Use
Change in the
setting of the
Malvern Hills
AONB**

working should be sent to Paul Esrich.

The draft position statement was designed to provide guidance around the development of land surrounding the AONB. In a recent visitor survey 48% of respondents said they particularly liked the beautiful/great views in and around the AONB. National planning Practice Guidance now referred to development within the setting of National Parks and AONBs for the first time (as of July 2019).

There were a number of ways in which developments could adversely affect the setting of the AONB, but measures could be taken to reduce their impact. For example, policies could be introduced in statutory plans and landscape sensitivity and capacity assessments could be carried out to inform selection of future development sites and to ensure developments avoid excess lighting and were of good quality design and build.

Within the last two weeks a major development application on the edge of Ledbury had been dismissed on appeal with a Planning Inspector having cited effects on the setting of the Malvern Hills AONB as part of the reason for refusal.

Members of the Committee made the following comments:

- There were not enough Conservation Offices to get involved in the number of planning applications and issues in local authorities.
- The shortage of a 5-year housing land supply is a concern and local plans may need to be re-visited.
- It was recognised that land was needed for development around existing settlements, but tools and techniques should be used to ensure development went to the least sensitive locations and further minimised impact through following best practice in siting, design etc.
- Parish Councils within and adjoining the AONB were grateful for the help of the AONB Unit in planning matters.
- Legislation and policy to protect heritage assets now has 'setting' as a key consideration. Why shouldn't the setting of protected landscapes also be a consideration?

RESOLVED that the Committee endorsed the proposed Position Statement, subject to final amendments made by the AONB Unit in consultation

684 Sustainable Development Fund

with LPA Landscape Officers.

David Armitage asked the Committee to let him know of any ideas for projects which could be supported by the Sustainable Development Fund in future. He highlighted various projects which were being supported this year:

- Blind Walks – A guide leading walks on the Hills.
- Crayfish control – in order to help the native local variety to survive and thrive.
- Charcutier – who was planning to prepare and market venison and thus lessen the damage to local trees.
- Poetry events had taken place in various locations.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) **Noted and commented on the report; and**
- b) **Should contact David Armitage with any projects for the current or next financial year.**

685 Information Items

Paul Esrich highlighted that the AONB Unit were working with a local photographer to produce a series of postcards and cards which would mark the 60th anniversary of the designation of the Malvern Hills AONB.

To celebrate the designation of the first two Dark Sky Discovery Sites in the Malvern Hills AONB, there is to be a presentation at Castlemorton Village Hall on 29 November by Will Gater.

RESOLVED that the information items were noted.

686 Verbal Reports from Partners

Neil Rimmington explained that the AONB was now part of Historic England’s Midlands Region rather being in the West Midlands – the result of two regions being merged.

687 Dates of Future Meetings

Meeting dates for 2020

- 24 April 2020 at 10.00am
- 6 November 2020 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 12.30pm

Chairman