

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 20 November 2015,

		Minutes
Present:		Prof J W Raine (Chairman), Mr W Barnes, Mr S Bosley, Prof. R Bryant, Ms D Griffiths, Mr J Hervey-Bathurst, Ms E Holton, Mrs G Rees and Mr C Williams and Mr R Williams
Also attended:		Mr D Armitage, Mr J Burgin, Mr P Esrich, Mrs K Griffiths and Mr A Maginnis.
Available papers		The members had before them: A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated); B. The Minutes of the meeting of the meeting held on 1 May (previously circulated).
582	Apologies and Substitutes	Apologies were received from Mike Ashton, James Bissett, Jerry Fryman, Arthur Lee, Ken Pollock and Neil Rimmington.
583	Declaration of Interests	James Hervey-Bathurst declared that he had an interest in that he lived, worked and owned property within the AONB.
584	To elect a Chairman	Richard Williams nominated John Raine for the position of Chairman. This was seconded by Gwyneth Rees. There were no other nominations so John Raine was re-elected as Chairman. RESOLVED that John Raine be duly elected as Chairman of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee for a further year.
585	To appoint a Vice-Chairman	Dick Bryant nominated Gwyneth Rees as Vice Chairman. This was seconded by John Raine. RESOLVED that Gwyneth Rees be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee.
586	Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting	The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

587 Woodland Management in the Malvern Hills AONB

Wayne Barnes explained that the Government had a target of bringing 66% of existing woods into management by 2018. There was a need to raise awareness amongst some woodland owners that managed woods were diverse, attractive and productive and could boost income from their land.

The Forestry Commission had launched a communications toolkit to support staff with the 'Making Woodlands Work' campaign. The toolkit included leaflets and on-line resources with a webpage and a facebook page. Forest Services offered web based support, case studies, advice from the Forestry Advisory Consortium England, demonstration sites which were recognised for their good work, as well as workshops. They also held the National Woodfuel Conferences and helped with grants and license applications such as Countryside stewardships.

The Forestry Commission had identified some 'clusters' of woodland where better management could deliver multiple benefits. An area including the Suckley Hills in the north of the AONB had been chosen because large areas of its woodland were undermanaged and there were already strong partnerships in that area.

Forest Services wanted to work with the co-operation of the AONB Partnership and owners within the area. A joint introductory event to Woodland Management would be held in the AONB cluster in the new year and a survey would be undertaken to find out owners requirements and what they wanted from their woodlands. Key tools to be promoted were felling licenses and Woodland Management Plans.

In the ensuing discussion members made the following comments:

- There did not have to be a conflict between using woodland for shooting and conservation. The Forestry Commission had produced a leaflet to show that in the long term both could be achieved.
- There can be problems with felling trees as part of woodland management or disease control because the public may perceive the loss of any trees as a negative thing, so it was important to educate them as to why certain work was being done. Forestry Officers did not have the resources to inform the public personally but they did offer support. The AONB Unit welcomed working with the Forestry Commission and

**588 The future of
the
Castlemorton
Commons**

already had links with partners such as the Wildlife Trust which had 3 nature reserves in the cluster area. However it was recognised that there were some difficulties with managing the woodland in the AONB – for example the amount of woodland on steep slopes.

- It was suggested that the Forestry Commission should take woodland education into schools or to take on apprentices so that the next generation was aware of woodland management. Wayne agreed to take the suggestion back to his Head Office.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted this update on Woodland Management and would help to spread the positive message about Woodland Management Plans.

David Armitage explained that the AONB Unit had been commissioned by the Malvern Hills Conservators to look at ways to secure grazing on Castlemorton Common. There were increasing concerns about the area becoming overgrown because of the lack of grazing and this was leading to a decline in the condition of the SSSI. There were now fewer graziers due to problems with containing stock and the younger generation not being as keen to continue this tradition.

Potential solutions to the problem have a number of challenges such as legal difficulties with fencing the commons, the County Council highways department now having fewer resources and different landowners of Castlemorton and Coombegreen Commons.

During the ensuing discussion various points were discussed:

- Moveable electric fences were a possible solution but were seen as a temporary solution as significant resources were needed to move the fences and the fences could be stolen.
- As less and less people were prepared to graze, the Conservators had purchased their own animals.
- One possible solution involved cattle wearing collars which stopped them crossing cables which were buried in the ground. This was expensive and relied on graziers having some technical skills. It also did not work with sheep.
- There was currently a demand for good grazing land.

- The AONB Partnership would have to think carefully about balancing the wildlife benefits of facilitating better grazing with the landscape impacts associated with certain solutions, e.g. use of fencing. In some cases it was not possible to remove the scrub mechanically as it was not allowed under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. The area was a SSSI so had to be managed through grazing to maintain the complex eco system.
- Possible solutions included fences which could be below the level of the road in places, with hedging, or post and wire fences which would be less obvious than the hedges. Cattle-grids may be an option in places but these also had their detractors.
- The report into future management options for Castlemorton Common would be prepared by mid-February 2016 and a draft plan for Coombegreen Common was ready to go to the Parish Council.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Noted the Partnership approach to landscape management across multiple ownerships;**
- b) Supported writing a letter of support for the principles of the project to the Malvern Hills Conservators; and**
- c) Gave its support to the continued attempts to engage with Worcestershire County Council Highways Department and their design consultants.**

589 The Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project - one year in

Karen Humphries, Project Officer for the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project gave a presentation. The Project had completed the first year of the three year project. The project was important as a third of the country's traditional orchards were in the Three Counties, however very many have been lost (e.g. 90% in Worcestershire). The biggest problem was neglect and part of the solution was to work with volunteers.

The Project had a target to restore 25 orchards and produce management plans for 39, in the process people would be helped to understand and enjoy orchards and they would be improved for wildlife. Central to project delivery were the three county based development skills hubs: Colwall Orchard Group, Herefordshire Orchard Trust and one in Worcestershire which was originally the Vale Landscape Heritage Trust and was now

Worcestershire County Council Countryside Service. It was felt to be important to support these hubs which in turn could help to provide longer term support for new orchard groups.

More than the planned 13 orchards had been recruited in the first year due to word of mouth about the benefits of the project. It had already been necessary to say no to some interested orchard owners. Around 150 volunteers had been recruited so far and different groups had been set up for those with an interest in other aspects, e.g. the historical importance of orchards.

Each orchard would be surveyed to identify the varieties of fruit and the wildlife which was present. An orchard management plan would be produced which considered the needs of the owners and the particular site. The project had been fortunate in having retired experts who were able to carry some work voluntarily.

Some orchards needed replacement trees and the Natural England Innovation Fund had funded the growing of 300 rare trees from Walcot Organic Nursery. It was hoped that the People's Trust for Endangered Species would provide funding for a further 300.

In future years the Project was hoping to establish 'interpretation in the traditional orchard' at the three counties showground to help continue to spread expertise and share good practice. The Project Officer had also been speaking to Garden Organic about the possibility of developing a Master Orchardist course which would have national recognition.

Members made the following points:

- The majority of orchards did not have any protection under planning regulations and were vulnerable to development. Orchards had been left behind somewhat in being recognised and protected as special habitats but moves were afoot to address this.
- Karen explained that the project was constrained in providing practical support to owners within identified focus areas. However outside these areas, attempts were being made to signpost people to relevant information.
- It may be an idea for Parish Councils to consider including protection for traditional orchards in their Neighbourhood Plans.

590 Sustainable Development Fund

RESOLVED that the Committee note this update on the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project.

David Armitage explained that there was still some money left in the fund for 2015/16 so if anyone wished to apply they should contact him.

Details of various projects that had already received some funding and some that were under consideration were listed in the agenda.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) **Noted and commented on the report, and**
- b) **Agreed to contact David Armitage with any projects that might be suitable for this fund.**

591 Information Items

Paul Esrich highlighted some projects that the AONB Unit had been involved with, including:

Landscape Management Plan – The Three Counties Showground had agreed to pay for colour assessment work which would be useful when they considered new buildings or re-cladding or repainting existing buildings.

South Worcestershire Development Plan – Following a hearing which had been attended by Unit staff the Inspector had agreed to remove the Malvern Wells site from the plan.

Shared Use Route - Early discussions have taken place around the possibility of developing a shared-use route between Malvern and the Three Counties Showground using the old railway line. Paul Esrich asked that members did not promote this work because discussions were at a sensitive stage.

592 Verbal Reports from Partners

Forestry Commission – The local administration hub was closing and admin work in the future would be done from Exeter. The technical advice and Forestry Officers were staying in the local areas.

Campaign to Protect Rural England - Herefordshire Core Strategy had been adopted in October. CPRE was concerned about the impacts arising from large-scale agricultural operations such as poultry sheds, especially with regards phosphate run off. He left some copies of the Herefordshire CPRE annual report for members to look at.

Natural England – SSSI re-notification was on hold due to lack of resources. The request to consider a review of

the AONB Boundary will be considered in due course.

Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils – Now that the two District councils had shared management arrangements and a shared Head of Planning, Jim Burgin from Wychavon reported that he was attending the JAC meeting to represent Malvern Hills DC. In future he may attend the meetings or send a Built Environment Officer or Ecologist colleague, depending on the agenda being discussed.

Malvern Hills Conservators – From the end of January 2016 there would be a new Director.

Herefordshire Association of Local Councils – Within the Core Strategy the word "settlement" had been changed to "Parish" which could mean that villages could have to accept a larger percentage increase in the amount of new houses.

AONB – The Unit may have to cope with increased funding cuts dependent on Defra funding arrangements associated with the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. Details of funding would be given at the next meeting.

593 Dates of Future Meetings

Meeting Dates for 2016

Friday 29 April 2016

Friday 18 November 2016.

The meeting ended at 12.20.

Chairman