

## **Minutes of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory**

### **Committee**

#### **Malvern Hills District Council Chamber**

**Friday, 10 November 2023, 10.00 am**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr John Raine (Chairman), Wayne Barnes, Sven Bosley, Prof Richard Bryant, Cllr Pam Cumming, Cllr Liz Harvey, Frank Hill, Georgie Hyde, Cllr Malcolm Victory and Mike Wilkinson

#### **Also attended:**

David Armitage, Josh Bailey, James Bisset, Rachel Datlen Paul Esrich, and Kate Griffiths

#### **759 Apologies and Substitutes**

Apologies had been received from Scott Richardson-Brown, Hazel McDowall, James Hervey-Bathurst and Neil Rimmington.

Graeme Ker attended for the Eastnor Estate.

#### **760 Declaration of Interests**

None

#### **761 To elect a Chairman**

John Raine was nominated to continue in the role as Chairman for the upcoming year. The proposal was seconded.

No other proposals were made.

John Raine was duly appointed as Chairman.

#### **762 To appoint a Vice-Chairman**

Mike Wilkinson was nominated and seconded to become the Vice-Chairman.

There were no other nominations, so Mike Wilkinson duly became the Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year.

## **763 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2023 were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

## **764 Rebranding of AONBs to National Landscapes**

David Armitage, Assistant AONB Partnership Manager gave a presentation regarding the Malvern Hills AONB becoming the Malvern Hills National Landscape on 22 November. National Landscape branding was about creating an identity and came about following the Landscapes Review on the future of National Parks and AONBs.

The aim of the re-branding exercise was to help ensure that people were welcomed in all areas designated as a National Landscape and for these areas to be recognised as part of a larger 'family'. Landscapes shape people and people shape landscapes was a key motto. The re-branding, was being funded by Defra with an additional amount of £3,000 provided to each AONB partnership to help with changes to local websites etc. New logos had been designed using specific colour palettes. Advice was being given on typeface and the use of language etc to ensure consistency. The Malvern Hills National Landscape (NL) logo showed British Camp and the Obelisk, the latter within Eastnor Estate.

The re-branding was not compulsory but was being widely accepted as a development that may help to benefit these areas and their funding and management in the future.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- Some Committee members felt that the title AONB was more evocative than National Landscape and that the new term did not represent the special, distinctive character of each separate AONB.
- One member felt that British Camp on the logo was not recognisable and would have preferred the profile of the hills. It was explained that this would have been difficult in the square format of the logo and that a profile of the hills version had been developed but had been considered too similar to imagery used by the Malvern Hills Trust. Another Member thought it was a good logo.
- When asked what improved outcomes would be seen following the re-brand, it was explained that the Landscapes Review had been clear about the need for a package of new purposes, powers and resources, not just a rebrand. Defra had already made some new funding available in recent years, including the Access for All and Farming in Protected Landscapes projects.
- It was clarified that there were no timescales with regard to when the various elements of the branding had to be implemented but it was pointed out that Malvern Hills AONB was in a better position than many other areas as there were no extant gateway signs to update,

- It was explained that people would be made aware of the new branding at events (e.g. the webinar with Parish Councils on 28/11/23) but there were no plans for a local launch of the new branding. There will be a press release locally and this will be shared with comms staff in local authorities etc.
- Some members felt that rebranding and closer working together as National Landscapes could be positive if it meant that more funding or a higher profile could be achieved, but it was hoped that more resources would be received too.
- It was mentioned that public health departments may provide funding and promote the health benefits of people exercising outside or gaining mental health benefits from the countryside.
- It was pointed out that lots of people had trouble with the acronym AONB and frequently put the letters in the wrong order.

**RESOLVED that the Committee noted the updated branding that would be implemented after 22 November.**

## **765 Position Statements on housing and landscape-led development in the Malvern Hills AONB**

Josh Bailey, AONB Planning Officer, explained that the position statements helped articulate the position of the AONB Partnership on key issues and helped show how the AONB designation could be better conserved and enhanced.

The Housing and Landscape Led Position Statements had already been endorsed for consultation at the previous meeting (in April 2023). Key principles were that housing should be based on clear evidence of local need in the AONB and that all development should be landscape led. The position statements had now been consulted on and the responses considered, which had led to some minor amendments.

Committee members had various queries:

- It was felt to be weak to state that grade 1 and 2 agricultural land should only be protected 'where possible' (in the recommendations in paragraph 6.3.7). It was agreed that these two words should be removed. It was also felt that it was impractical to expect builders to make affordable housing indistinguishable from open market housing. It was pointed out that the statement suggested that buildings should be suitable in character and design and that the key thing was for all new development to fit with its sense of place. This would be amended for clarity in the final version.
- It was felt to be a good time to introduce the position statements as various local authorities were reviewing their Local Plans,
- It was cautioned that Herefordshire's moratorium on building in the Lugg area may put the Council's five-year land supply at risk and consequently impact on the area towards the AONB boundary.
- It was queried whether the statement could help to push back on traffic re-routing, for example where this may give rise to damage to verges. It

was confirmed that some development was argued against due to issues with traffic and the aim to maintain tranquility, including when it occurred on the edge of the AONB.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) **Noted the public consultation undertaken by the Malvern Hills AONB Unit on the 'Housing in the Malvern Hills AONB and its Setting' Position Statement, and the 'Landscape-led' Position Statement, which took place between 8 June and 4 August 2023, along with subsequent changes made by Malvern Hills AONB Unit Staff following consultation feedback;**
- b) **Endorsed the 'Housing in the Malvern Hills AONB and its Setting' Position Statement, along with its associated Appendices subject to the suggested amendments; and**
- c) **Endorsed the 'Landscape-led Development' Position Statement, along with its associated Appendices.**

**766 Position statement on renewable energy in the Malvern Hills AONB and its setting**

Josh Bailey explained that the committee was being asked to endorse the Position statement on renewable energy in the Malvern Hills AONB and its setting as a consultation draft.

Climate change was a big threat, including to biodiversity, and renewable energy would play an important role in mitigating its effects. The position statement was supportive of all renewable energy on a micro level as long as landscape and visual considerations were taken into account.

Committee members made the following comments:

- An environmental impact assessment would not be expected for woody biomass, unless the site was more than 2 hectares.
- The National Farmers Union would produce a response to the consultation.
- The CPRE representative was pleased that the suggested confinement of solar panels to industrial and agricultural buildings was in accordance with the CPRE policy. Panels which were sited in fields for years would be likely to affect the quality of the land.
- It was queried why the wording was that all renewable energy projects should 'seek' to protect rather than just protect. It was explained that the position statement was supplementary to the management plan and could not introduce a new policy. However, the AONB Management Plan would be reviewed in 2024 and this would provide an opportunity to look again at all policies.
- It was queried whether it was acceptable to accept lower thresholds or standards from community projects compared to those from national suppliers and what would the practical implications of such a policy be. It was suggested that there would be benefit in keeping energy

production and consumption local. The wording on this point would be considered again, whilst local might be favoured, all must stick to the suggested criteria.

- There were concerns about some properties not being energy efficient and the problems that external cladding could have on the look of the building. The comment was made that in some conservation areas homeowners would not be allowed to use such insulation. It was agreed that policies on this could be considered when the management plan was being reviewed, as one of the first steps in energy efficiency should be insulating existing properties.
- It was mentioned that air source heat generators often produced a noticeable hum, especially as they got older and that may have an effect on planning permission with regard to tranquility issues. It was pointed out that technology in this area was improving.

The AONB Partnership Manager thanked Josh Bailey and Sue Haywood for their work on all the Position Statements.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) Discussed, amended (if necessary) and endorsed the ‘Renewable Energy in the Malvern Hills AONB and its Setting’ Position Statement, as a consultation draft;**
- b) Agreed that if future amendments are required, as necessary, that these can be made by Malvern Hills AONB Unit staff, unless materially significant in which case they would be brought back to the Committee for further consideration; and**
- c) Agreed a formal review date of the position statement to take place every five years unless otherwise agreed.**

**767 AONB Guidance documents on lighting and horse related development**

The AONB Partnership Manager explained that the AONB Unit had produced guidance on various subjects in the past, in order to help implement the Management Plan. The guidance documents had been promoted within the AONB and some planning authorities were making use of them outside of the AONB too, see for example, Herefordshire Council’s Agricultural Planning SPD (November 2022).

The AONB Lighting guidance document had been produced in 2019, but that document lacked technical content, so it has been improved and boosted with more detail and with reference to different zones to help protect dark sky areas.

The existing ‘Keeping horses’ AONB guidance had previously been a mix of planning issues along with content on how to keep horses to help conserve and enhance the landscape. The new guidance only deals with planning and development issues.

These two guidance documents along with the position statements would be the first documents to be issued using the new National Landscapes branding.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) **Noted the new guidance documents produced by the AONB Partnership; and**
- b) **Agreed to promote the new guidance.**

## **768 Levelling up and Regeneration Bill - An Amendment**

The Defra Secretary of State had issued a Written Ministerial Statement which set out a package of measures to support nature recovery in Protected Landscapes. It also placed a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to National Park and AONB Management Plans.

Government was increasingly looking to National Parks and AONBs to contribute to the delivery of national targets. An Outcomes Framework would be published which would confirm the contribution which each National Landscape would make towards achieving the national targets.

Following the Written Statement, a round table meeting had been held for the Chairs of AONBs and National Parks. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act changes the duty on relevant authorities who must now use their best endeavours to further the purposes of conserving and enhancing the AONB.

Secondary legislation would be drafted in due course to help the relevant authorities to comply with the new duty.

The following comments were made:

- In response to whether the AONB could contribute to the Outcomes Framework, it was explained that the Framework had been expected in the Spring 2023 and that targets would be for National Landscapes as a whole rather than for individual National Landscape/AONB Teams or other partners.
- It was expected that Defra wanted climate change mitigation targets to be part of each area's Management Plan, as well as a climate change adaptation plan.

**RESOLVED that the Committee noted the Government's amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (now passed) to enhance AONB and National Park Management Plans.**

## **769 AONB Partnership Terms of Reference**

The AONB terms of reference had been updated.

The Glover Report had made 27 proposals and number 26 was to review governance. The suggestion for the Committee was that the existing MHAONB Terms of Reference should simply be updated and very lightly modified at

present, pending a more thorough review as and when government decides on one.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) **Noted the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference;**
- b) **Were given the opportunity to provide and discuss any comments;**  
and
- c) **Accepted the revised wording.**

## **770 Farming in Protected Landscapes - Update**

Paul Esrich explained that the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) project had supported 31 projects over the past 2 years. Funding had now been given for an extra year. An overview was given of the projects which had been supported such as:

- Hedging laying and planting
- Orchard planting and pruning
- Tree planting and woodland management
- Ponds maintained and one pond created
- Meadow restoration
- Volunteer engagement and development
- A Parkland Management plan being developed
- Disabled toilet
- Malvern walks App
- Donkey Shed refurbishment

The total budget for the project for year 3, (2023/4) was £317,130 with £360,266 allocated for 2024/25. The Government had also just announced a £5million fund nationally for the restoration of rural historic buildings.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) **Noted the report; and**
- b) **Had the opportunity to raise and discuss any issues.**

## **771 Community Projects Update - Summary of 2023/24 Projects**

David Armitage brought the Community Projects update to the Committee's attention. He particularly mentioned that one way to get more people into the Countryside was to set up arts projects. Various smaller projects were underway and would provide evidence to inform future funding bids for larger projects.

Projects highlighted were.

- On a Bare Hill was a graduate theatre group who were working with community groups to create a theatre piece about the hills.
- The Land Art project was providing workshops for less able people on the hills and in community settings.
- Grounded conversations involves a photographer and social historian recording pictures and conversations from visitors to the AONB.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) Noted and comment on the report; and
- b) Agreed to bring further project ideas to the AONB unit for 2023/24 and for 2024/2.

## **772 Information Items**

Paul Esrich highlighted the main points detailed as information items:

- The Management Plan Review would start early in the new year (or before) and would need to be signed off by the JAC in November 2024. The Natural England Management Plan review guidance had been circulated for consultation but had not yet been revised and issued as a final document.
- The AONB Partnership had held Landowner events on water quality, soils and regenerative agriculture. A deer management event was scheduled for late November. It was confirmed that the Forestry Commission's Deer Officer was aware of this and Georgie Hyde also said that she has experience of this activity.
- A training session for Parish Councils was being organised to raise awareness of the work of the AONB and update Councils on the re-branding.
- Access funding from Defra had been unexpectedly received to help with accessibility work in the AONB this year.

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

## **773 Verbal Reports from Partners**

Wayne Barnes gave an update that the number of staff in the North West and West Midlands area of the Forestry Commission had increased from 22 to 57, and now included a Nature Recovery Strategy Officer (Alan Reed).

James Bissett explained that Herefordshire Council had completed its Core Strategy Evidence Base for the natural environment. He also explained that The Cider Museum was hosting an Art Project exhibition about 'The Apple' with 146 models of Apples from an 1886 Exhibition being displayed for the first time outside London.

Dick Bryant gave an update that the Earth Heritage Trust continued to manage Local Geological Sites around the AONB including the clearance of three quarry areas this autumn. However, there were now too many to keep them all up to date and conversations are being held with the AONB Unit on this subject.



Graeme Ker updated the committee that the Eastnor Estate had submitted a planning application for a play area at the Woodshed, they had planted more trees and had also submitted an application for disabled access gates. A small-scale solar array in the castle grounds was also being considered.

## **774      Dates of Future Meetings**

### **Dates for 2024**

- 26 April 2024
- 15 November 2024

The meeting ended at 12.15pm.

Chairman .....