

MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

17 NOVEMBER 2017

INFORMATION ITEMS

Management Plan ref.
(abridged)

LP2 Restore distinctive landscapes and landscape features that have been significantly degraded.

BP5 Undertake survey and research to provide decision-makers with accurate and appropriate data.

Project

Landscape Improvement Grants

These small grants are aimed at encouraging small landowners, or those outside other grant scheme to do environmental good. Currently we have seven proposals for hedge planting, tree planting, pond restructuring that amount to a total of c.£5,000.

Route to the Hills

The AONB Units sits on the board and has also been actively involved in the project management group of this £482,000 project run by Malvern Hills District Council. It aims to provide a route from Gt Malvern Station to Rose Bank Gardens in Malvern and thus onto the hills. Along the route there will be various installations to tell of the glories of Malvern. After a long run-up, some of the information boards, themed benches, guide books and sign posts have been produced. Meanwhile, the community programme is gathering pace: a community play about the history of Malvern was held in the summer and other events are planned. For more details, see <http://www.routetothehills.co.uk/>

Malvern's Commons – keeping them grazed

The past experience of the Unit on securing grazing for the commons at Castlemorton has been lent on, in the current efforts. Much of this has involved visiting other commons, where successful schemes have been implemented, to gather evidence.

Finding Rare Species in the Malverns

Early in 2017 the AONB Unit commissioned the preparation of a grant application to the HLF Our Heritage programme. The project proposal centred on working with volunteers and landowners in the north of the AONB to help collect data on some of our rarest and most iconic species, including Lesser Horseshoe bats and Dormice. The bid for £60k was successful and a two year project has now begun, being taken forward by a part time Project Officer - Lucy Grove. Lucy is being managed by the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre but the AONB Partnership is providing some match-funding and this is a project that is of much interest to us. As such the AONB Unit will be closely involved and requests that all support is given to Lucy in her work.

BP3 – Enhance the wildlife value of the countryside and achieve greater connectivity between key habitats within the AONB and between the AONB and the countryside beyond

FP1 – Encourage the take-up of grant options and management practices that benefit the distinctive natural and historic environment of the AONB.

BDO1 The distinctive character and natural beauty of the AONB will be fully reflected in planning policy and guidance and in decision-making.

Highways Verges Management Pilot Project

This pilot project - to improve the value of highway verges for plants and pollinators in the Worcestershire part of the AONB - has now commenced. Early in October 2017 Ringway staff cut back the wider highway verge throughout the project area. They were followed by staff working for a company called Biosphere who collected the cut material from some of the wider verges in the area. This vegetation was transported to the Pendock green waste facility to be composted. This is the first year of a project which – subject to funding- could last for up to 5 years. Further management works to be explored include further removing the nutrient content of certain verges and strewing them with green hay from species-rich grasslands nearby.

Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund

The AONB Unit is compiling a draft bid to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund for an area of land west of the Malvern Hills. This is a government supported fund to support people and organisations that bring farmers, foresters, and other land managers together to improve the local natural environment at a landscape scale. Discussions with a number of landowners have been taking place to ascertain levels of interest locally. The scheme is expected to be highly competitive so even if a Malvern Hills AONB application is submitted there is no guarantee of success.

Development Management

As usual the Unit has commented on a number of development management applications. Of particular interest to the area is Severn Trent Water's application to discontinue the British Camp Reservoir, with one scenario being complete removal and landscaping over of the site. Severn Trent has asked Malvern Hills District Council for a Screening Opinion as to whether this work would constitute Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development. Severn Trent believes it does not. The AONB Unit and a number of other partners have argued that the importance of the landscape and the possible significance of the reservoir means that EIA would be appropriate. The Council has not yet made its decision.

Leaflet for new owners

An AONB leaflet to be sent to new purchasers of land and property in the AONB has been produced. This has been developed in conjunction with local estate agents, with the intention that it will be provided to (prospective) new purchasers through those agents. We also intend to circulate the new publication to local solicitors as another delivery route. The purpose of the leaflet is to welcome people to the AONB, to give them a 'heads-up' on what is different in the AONB and to encourage them to make contact with the AONB Partnership whilst considering change.

HP1 Conserve and enhance the historic and cultural environment of the AONB.

Gas Lamps and their Electric Mimics

The Unit has had a strong association with Malvern's gas lamps, having funded their re-design through SDF grants. There are 3 lamp projects in the wings: to refurbish and supply around 8 lamps on the Route to the Hills project; put lamps in front of Malvern Library; and grant-seeking to replace 11 missing gas lamps in Malvern Wells. The AONB Unit is involved to varying degrees in these projects.

Recommendation

Members of the JAC are requested to note this information report and contact the AONB Unit if they wish to be involved in any consultations or to receive further information on any of these agenda items.

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

Email: worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk

Specific Contact Points for this report

Paul Esrich, Manager, Malvern Hills AONB Partnership

Tel: 01684 560616

Email: pesrich@worcestershire.gov.uk

Website: www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk
