

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 18 November 2016, - 10.00 am

Minutes

Present:

Mrs G Rees (Chairman), Mr S Bosley, Prof R Bryant, Ms S Faulkner, Ms D Griffiths, Mr M Hammond, Mr J Hervey-Bathurst, Mr A Lee, Mr J O'Donnell, Dr K A Pollock, Mr N Rimmington, Mr P A Tuthill and Mr C Williams and Mr R Williams.

Also attended:

Mr D Armitage, Mr J Bisset, Mr P Esrich, Mrs K Griffiths and Ms S Jones

606 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies had been received from John Raine, Rachel Datlen, Jerry Fryman and Chris O'Donnell.

James O'Donnell attended for Chris O'Donnell.

607 Declaration of Interests

James Hervey-Bathurst declared that he was a member of the County Landowners Association and lived and owned land within the AONB.

608 To elect a Chairman

John Raine had decided to step down as Chairman. Members of the Committee were asked to nominate candidates for the position of Chairman.

Gwyneth Rees was nominated and seconded. There were no further nominations so she was duly elected to the position of Chairman.

Gwyneth Rees took the Chair.

609 To appoint a Vice-Chairman

The position of Vice Chairman had become vacant with the election of the new Chairman so nominations for that position were sought.

Ken Pollock was nominated and seconded and was appointed to the position of Vice Chairman.

610 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2016 were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

611 Health and Well-being in the

David Armitage reminded members that local Councils now have some responsibilities for Health and Well-being. He also explained that the AONB and the AONB

Malvern Hills AONB

Partnership had a lot to offer to improve well-being in the local population as well as for visitors. One example is the Trumper or Mobility Scooter which can be hired from the Malvern Hills Geocentre and which allows people who have reduced mobility to access the hills. A further project was organised by the National Childbirth Trust (NCT).

Hannah Cooper, Volunteer Co-ordinator for the local NCT explained that they now organise walks for new mothers and fathers on Monday mornings. The Malvern Hills Conservators had identified 5 good walking routes and between 18 and 25 people regularly attended the walks. The walks are proving popular, attracting people from as far as Hereford and Bromsgrove, and appeared to be having a positive impact on feelings of well-being. For example, 89% of attendees reported feeling more energised and 75% felt the walk was a positive start to the week. In addition, a recent survey found that 8% of participants had never been on to the Malvern Hills before. Two of the new mothers who attended the walks were GPs who were advising their practices of the benefits of the walks to encourage other new mothers to attend.

The most deprived areas in the locality were being targeted and information about the walks were being distributed from Pickersleigh baby club and Malvern foodbanks. To ensure finance did not stop people attending, the Malvern Hill Conservators had arranged free parking passes for the walkers. Baby slings were also available to walkers on long term loans. The AONB SDF had contributed to the cost of the slings which had cost between £70 and £130 each. 3 standard sizes and 1 toddler size were available.

In the following discussion the following points were clarified:

- The walks were also advertised on facebook and in anti-natal classes.
- £586 was provided by the AONB SDF for baby slings and further money had been spent on leaflets and identity vests for the walk leaders.
- Efforts were being made to contact hard to reach groups by distributing leaflets in Pickersleigh, at nearly new sales and at foodbanks. Leaflets and posters had also been sent to GPs surgeries and Children's centres.
- Although the County Council had increased spending on footways alongside roads, which may help increase walking, spending on footpaths

612 A pilot approach to the management of grass verges

which were not connected to roads had decreased.

- The walks were also spreading the word more generally about the AONB and AONB Partnership and the benefits it could bring in terms of well-being.
- Other NCT groups had been told of the project and had taken up the idea.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Noted and commented on the report,**
- 2. Should pass on details of the project to people who may benefit; and**
- 3. Should consider if there were other opportunities through which the Partnership could engage with the Health and well-being sector.**

An area to the East of the Malvern Hills had been identified as being one which might benefit from a landscape scale approach to conservation. Highway verges were important natural habitats and also acted as corridors connecting areas of nature conservation importance and allowing wildlife to move from one site to another. They were also likely to be important areas for supporting pollinating insects.

Paul Esrich explained that the AONB Unit had been liaising with the Worcestershire Highway Authority about a pilot scheme to manage verges differently in one part of the AONB. This was about adopting a simple routine which could be applied uniformly while ensuring the safety of road users.

The pilot scheme could run for 3-5 years and might involve one annual cut in early autumn at the end of the growing season and clearing arisings to give less robust species a chance to grow. The intention was also to control undesirable species such as ragwort and other problem weeds.

There was still work to be done on how costs would be managed. Extra costs would be involved in collecting arisings, although savings should be made from only having one cut. Evidence regarding whether the pilot had been successful would be needed. For this reason the AONB Unit had commissioned a survey of verges which had taken place over the summer.

Members of the Committee made the following

comments:

- 5 different agencies managed verges around Malvern – the Malvern Hills Conservators, the District Council, the County Council, the Town Council and Fortis. It was suggested that the County Council were very stretched and that it might be useful to liaise with the Malvern Hills Conservators and the Town Council who had more staff and capacity. Opportunities for sharing equipment and coordinating activities should be sought,
- The County Council sub-contracts verge cutting to other agencies who work out their own timetables, it would be important to ensure that a pilot regime was adhered to,
- Landowners with Higher Level Stewardship schemes were sometimes being asked to leave cutting verges on their land as late as possible,
- It would be necessary to consider litter picking before the verges were cut,
- Dog fouling could also be a problem.
- Flail heads were available that would cut and collect in one go.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. **Noted and commented on the report,**
2. **Would not broadcast the information in the report prior to allowing discussions with the relevant parish councils to take place,**
3. **Recognised that this was a pilot project based in a nationally important landscape and operation in conjunction with the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, which could not be rolled out to other parts of the county at this time.**

613 Ash Dieback disease in the Malvern Hills AONB

James Bisset explained that he was now a Countryside Officer with responsibility for Ecology and Arboriculture working in Planning Services.

Chalara dieback of Ash Trees, often know as Ash dieback was thought to have arrived in the UK after spreading across continental Europe in the early 1990s. The disease had up to a 98% mortality rate for common Ash trees which were the native ash tree in the UK. It was unknown how many Ash trees were within the AONB. In more recent woods or copses Ash may make up to 80% of trees, and around 30% - 40% of trees in more established woodlands.

Chalara was a fungus which spreads to the canopies of trees during the growing season. It weakens the tree and allows other diseases to take hold. The impact of Chalara from a landscape perspective may be greater along highways and non-wooded areas, where the visual impact of tree loss may be more obvious.

Action in respect of the disease by many local councils had been fairly slow but plans were beginning to be put into place. An Action Plan was being prepared for Herefordshire Council.

The AONB Unit had carried out a short, car-based survey within the AONB to scope the extent of Ash in the area outside of woods. The proportion of young, mature and veteran trees has been estimated in different areas and a judgement made on the visual impact that would occur if Ash dieback caused the death of the trees.

Recovery phase planning was important and should involve conversations with landowners, identification of desirable replacement trees and the development of grant assistance packages.

Paul Esrich thanked Karen Humphries and Rebecca Lashley from Worcestershire County Council for their work in carrying out the survey.

During the ensuing discussions the following points were made:

- There had not been any imports of Ash trees since 2012,
- Ash wood could still be used for timber or fire wood as the fungus was present in the leaves of the tree but as the disease takes hold the economic value of the tree reduces. The leaves should not be composted as the spores would not be killed,
- Current advice was not to rush around felling Ash trees. It was important that tolerant and resilient trees are allowed to emerge. Monitoring of affected trees was necessary as they became brittle when dying and can be dangerous to those felling them, as well as to others,
- The John Innes Institute was conducting research into the disease and suitable substitutes,
- Walnut and sycamore may be substitutes for Ash but it would also be necessary to consider other options since plant pathogens appear to be increasing and may affect other species in the future.

614 Conservation management on the Suckley Brook and other water courses

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Noted and commented on the report,**
- 2. Discussed the merits and scope of a recovery plan, and**
- 3. Should consider identifying landowners who might be interested in early work on establishing a replacement for Ash in the landscape.**

The Suckley Brook and other watercourses in the AONB were currently failing a number of Water Framework Directive parameters. The Severn Rivers Trust was aiming to deliver a lottery funded project entitled the 'Springs of Rivers' to bring partners together within the Teme Catchment, with the objectives of habitat enhancement, water quality improvements and flood alleviation.

Recent actions which were helping to address conservation objectives in the AONB Management Plan included the Severn Rivers Trust project to monitor and control Signal Crayfish in the Suckley Brook. This non-native species was out-competing the native White Clawed Crayfish which was now classed as endangered. Monitoring equipment for work had been part funded by a grant from the AONB SDF.

The AONB Partnership had also worked with the Severn Rivers Trust and a local landowner to improve water quality in part of the Suckley Brook where cattle have been eroding the banks causing sedimentation and increasing the nutrient load. Bank side vegetation had been cleared and hard standing and fences put in.

Members made the following comments:

- It was important to liaise closely with Suckley Parish Council about the work on the brook,
- The removal of vegetation along banks should be done carefully as the removal of too much can add to sedimentation and to potential flooding issues. Dr Maddock at the University of Worcester has carried out research in this area.
- Signal Crayfish burrow and so can undermine banks and contribute to sedimentation.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1) Noted and commented on the report,**
- 2) Would pass on details of any locations within**

the lower Teme Catchment, in or adjoining the AONB, where the objectives of the Springs of Rivers project could be met with the support of willing landowners; to the AONB office, and;

- 3) Would pass on details of existing volunteer groups which may be interested in receiving training and/or working alongside the Severn Rivers Trust on the Springs of Rivers project ; to the AONB office.

615 Sustainable Development Fund

Details of the SDF grants given in 2016/17 were provided in the agenda. David Armitage highlighted the grant to Site Designs which was given to make biodigester modifications and complete an analysis of the digestate. It was found that the biodigester did not reach a high enough temperature to kill all the bacteria so it was not possible to sell the resulting digestate.

The Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project had bought Orchard Insect Suits which had proved popular with children and had generated good publicity.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Noted and commented on the reports, and;
2. Were encouraged to contact David Armitage with any projects that might be suitable for this fund.

616 Information Items

Some additional points were made about the information items as listed in the agenda:

- Route to the Hills – Information Boards were being installed along the route from the station to Rose Bank Gardens. The Boards did not have an interactive component. Members suggested that brail could be retrofitted to the boards,
- Orchard planting would be going ahead this winter in the AONB following grants from Natural England,
- A report on Landscape change in the AONB was being finalised. Photographs taken at 30 different points over 10 years had been analysed. Paul Esrich would circulate a link to this report to members when complete. It was important that the Partnership reflected on this work.
- The AONB colour guidance to help inform

**617 Verbal Reports
from Partners**

development was now available on the AONB website. The Landscape Institute and other AONBs have shown interest in the guidance,

- The AONB photography competition had closed at the end of August with some excellent photos being submitted. Prizes had been awarded with some entries on display in Exhibition Walk in Malvern. Paul Esrich explained that entries were available for use by AONB partners. He also thanked Sarah Jones for her work in organising and administering the competition.

James Hervey-Bathurst explained that planning permission had been given for development of a Visitor Centre at the entrance to Eastnor Deer Park and that a funding grant had been awarded. Unfortunately the planning conditions were described as onerous and that scheme won't now be developed. However, a smaller development is expected to come forward.

Visit Herefordshire / Destination Worcestershire – Mike Ashton was retiring so Martyn Hammond would be the new representative on the JAC.

Natural England – A new Conservation Strategy is in place. Dawn Griffiths reminded members that the Malvern Hills AONB is one of Natural England's 10 focus areas in South Mercia. The organization was supporting landscape scale work and the creation of resilient landscapes, as well as putting people at the heart of their work. It was also looking at how certain species are affected by climate change and how adaptations might help them. Information sheets are being produced on this subject.

Historic England were working with the Malvern Hills Conservators and assessing the impact of mountain biking in the area. The Conservators would like to recommend specific cycle routes which would be less damaging.

Herefordshire LAF - Herefordshire Ramblers had volunteers who were willing to work on footpaths but are frustrated with the lack of funding. He reminded members that Local Councils have statutory duties for rights of way.

CPRE – The national office of the CPRE had produced a useful paper on opportunities for the British countryside

618 Dates of Future Meetings

arising from Brexit.

James Bissett promoted the work of the Herefordshire Tree Warden network which was now back up and running. He encouraged parishes to appoint wardens. Worcestershire also has a Tree Warden network.

In 2017 meetings would be held on:

- Friday 7 April
- Friday 17 November

At 10.00am in Malvern Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 11.55 am

Chairman