

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 7 April 2017, Malvern - 10.00 am

Minutes

Present:

Mrs G Rees (Chairman), Mr S Bosley, Prof R Bryant, Mr J Fryman, Mr M Hammond, Mr P Houlbrook, Mrs C O'Donnell, Dr K A Pollock (Vice Chairman), Prof J W Raine, Mr P A Tuthill and Mr R Williams

Also attended:

Mr D Armitage, Mr D Bridges, Mr J Burgin, Ms R Datlen, Mr P Esrich, Mr N Evans and Mrs K Griffiths

619 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies were received from James Bissett, Dawn Griffiths, James Hervey-Bathurst and Emma Holton.

620 Declaration of Interests

None

621 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2017 were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

622 10 Years of Landscape Change in the Malvern Hills AONB

Professor Nick Evans from the University of Worcester gave a presentation on the results of a recently concluded project monitoring landscape change in the AONB. His presentation covered a number of points including:

- The potential use of condition monitoring data to assess the effectiveness of the current AONB Management Plan and to inform discussion about the direction of the next plan,
- The methodology employed in the monitoring work, which was based around fixed point photography,
- The frequency of the monitoring work which allowed both subtle and cumulative changes to be discerned,
- The strengths and limitations of the approach, the latter including the incomplete coverage of the AONB which it provides,
- The typology of change which had been developed and which allows statistics to be drawn about the positive/neutral/negative direction of change across the AONB landscape units,

- Suggestions on possible approaches to monitoring landscape change in the future.

During the discussion members commented on and discussed the following:

- The impact that polytunnels had on the AONB and on its setting, and the need for farmers to use modern management techniques,
- The fact that hedgerow degradation was more evident in the photographs than hedgerow removal,
- It should be possible for drones to be used to assist condition monitoring but these come with licence and cost issues. In addition, they give a different perspective to change,
- The longer the monitoring continues the greater the benefit of the work since more change is likely to be evident,
- Consideration could be given to quantifying change highlighted in the images, e.g. % increase in loss of tree cover,
- There could be more tie-ins with other monitoring systems – for example the Earth Heritage Trust has an app which shows images of the countryside and which is regularly updated,
- It is not always easy to identify a change which is positive from one which is negative,
- It is clear change is not always a constant improvement or decline but sometimes a series of shifts in both directions,
- It was felt that photographs every 5 years would be sufficient to show changes from now on, especially given resource constraints.

RESOLVED that the Committee thank Nick Evans for his presentation and noted that the results of the Landscape Change report would be useful in informing future AONB Management Plans.

623 Mid-term review of the AONB Mangement Plan 2014-19

Paul Esrich explained that a mid-term review of the management plan was useful in highlighting where progress had been made on policies and to illustrate the fit between the AONB management plan and the priorities of Partners. The review commissioned had been desk-based so as not to add to the workload of Partners.

No action had been taken on 29% of policies. Members felt that the statistic could be read as a positive one as

624 AONB Budget and Work Programme 2017/18

71% had been actioned to some degree. It was suggested that future management plans might benefit from having fewer policies. It was also acknowledged that if 100% of policies had been actioned than the Partnership could be accused of not having been ambitious enough. The list of policies should perhaps be seen as a statement of intent and/or belief rather than expecting actions to occur for each policy.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Considered the report and**
- b) Provided observations on progress thus far and on implementation of the plan over the next two years.**

Paul Esrich explained that the budget and work programme had previously been discussed and approved by the Steering Group. The AONB was in the second year of a small budget increase from Defra which is set to last for four years in total. The funding received from local councils had remained static, which in the current climate could be considered positive.

Key tasks on the work programme included delivering the final year of the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project; the pilot to manage highways verges and liaising with the Severn Rivers Trust to help implement their Springs of Rivers (HLF) project in the AONB.

Members requested that the AONB Unit write to Local Authorities (County, District and Unitary Authorities) pointing out that funding to the AONB Partnership had actually reduced in real terms and highlighting the achievements of the Unit. They also suggested that all of the Parish Councils that were largely in the AONB could receive a letter inviting them to consider a voluntary contribution to the work of the Partnership. It was suggested that these letters could be sent in Autumn as authorities consider their budgets for the following year. Information highlighting the work of the AONB could also be placed in CALC newsletters.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Noted the budget for 2017/18,**
- b) Agreed that Local Authorities and Parish Councils should be approached regarding funding, and**
- c) Commented on the overall direction and work priorities for the year ahead.**

625 Review of the Partnership Terms of Reference and JAC Constitution

The Partnership Terms of Reference and JAC Constitution were overdue for review and changes had been suggested to bring them up to date.

Members agreed with the proposed changes. Particular points discussed were as follows:

- Members felt that the Membership Accord was not required and it was not necessary to enforce the rule that if a member failed to attend three consecutive meetings their organisation should formally be asked to nominate another representative. However, it was felt that an informal discussion between the Partnership Manager and certain bodies may sometimes be appropriate in relation to attendance,
- Members recognised that the AONB Unit responded to planning applications on behalf of the Unit and not from all JAC partners, although this did not rule out the possibility of bringing applications for major/very significant development to the Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Considered the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference,**
- b) Considered the proposed changes to the Constitution, and**
- c) Sanctioned the AONB Unit to make changes identified and any additional changes that might need to be made.**

626 Sustainable Development Fund

David Armitage gave a brief update of the Sustainable Development Fund. He pointed out that all applicants who received money from the SDF contributed at least the equivalent money to the projects themselves.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

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

627 Information

Paul Esrich highlighted:

Items

- Orchard Planting - and thanked Natural England for £3,000 given for planting and re-stocking
- A lottery application had been made for funding for a two year project to engage local people in wildlife survey in the northern part of the AONB. A well-attended event was recently held for landowners in the north of the AONB. Attendees had received presentations from advisors from different bodies and then had the opportunity to speak to them about individual issues.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the information report and should contact the AONB Unit if they wished to be involved in any consultations or receive further information on any of the information items.

628 Verbal Reports from Partners

Malvern Hills Conservators / Trust

Duncan Bridges explained that the new trading name for the Malvern Hills Conservators was the Malvern Hills Trust. The new name had been accepted by the Board to refresh its image and help improve communication with the public.

Herefordshire Association of Local Councils

Sven Bosley reported that the Inspector of the Bosbury and Coddington Neighbourhood Development Plan had thrown the plan out as it had included less housing than was required.

Wychavon/ Malvern Hills District Council

Jim Burgin stated that the joint heritage service was now fully staffed

Earth Heritage Trust

Dick Bryant thanked the AONB Unit and the Conservators for their support in maintaining geological sites in the area. The Open University Geological Society is visiting the area next year to see what had been achieved.

629 Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting would be held on Friday 17 November 2017 in the Council Chamber at Malvern Hills District Council.

A study tour would be organised before then and a date for it would be circulated to members.

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The meeting ended at 11.55am.

Chairman