

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 7 December 2018, Malvern Council Chamber - 10.00 am

Present:

Minutes

Mrs G Rees (Chairman), Prof R Bryant, Ms H McDowall, Mr K Pollock, Prof J Raine, Mr P A Tuthill, and Dr R Williams

Also attended:

Mr J Bisset, Herefordshire Council Ecology and Arboriculture Officer
Mr D Bridges, Malvern Hills Trust
Mr J Burgin, Heritage Services Manager
Mr P Esrich and Mr D Armitage, AONB Unit
Kate Griffiths, Committee Officer
Liz Etheridge for Item 6

652 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies were received from Rachel Datlen, Jerry Fryman, James Hervey-Bathurst and Sharon Smith.

653 Declaration of Interests

None

654 To Elect a Chairman

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

655 To Appoint a Vice Chairman

Ken Pollock was nominated and seconded for the position of Vice-Chairman. As there were no other nominations he was duly appointed to the position of Vice-Chairman.

656 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2018 were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

657 Finding Rare Species in the Malverns

The Committee received a presentation from Liz Etheridge, from the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre, on a project to collect data on rare species in the northern part of the Malvern Hills.

This two year project had a value of c£60,000, with the AONB Partnership contributing £6,000 and the remaining funding coming from the Heritage Lottery fund. The first

year of the project had been completed.

The Worcestershire Biological Records Centre was the repository for all wildlife records in the county. The Finding Rare Species project was initiated because there was a dearth of records for key species in this part of the AONB, despite the fact that the area had many important habitats which should support many species.

The project worked with local landowners, local people and species experts. The aim was to train local people in wildlife survey and recording skills and then to use this knowledge to collect data on wildlife in the area especially in areas where no records exist. 14 biological recording workshops had been held to date, involving 70 participants.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were clarified:

- There was a concentration of wildlife records on some land holdings in the area, for example nature reserves, but very little in the wider countryside
- The purpose of the project was not simply to collect data for its own sake but as a means to an end, specifically to help the AONB Partnership better support land management and wildlife. For example, slight changes in management such as planting honeysuckle in certain woodland areas could help bolster the population of White Admiral butterflies
- To constitute a wildlife record certain information needed to be collected including who recorded the find, what was seen, preferably with photos and where the sighting was made. Smart phones could record grid references or GPS coordinates of sightings
- Flora was also recorded by the Biological Records Centre, which could be helpful in assessing suitable habitats for other species
- The Worcestershire Biological Records Centre was an independent charity based at Lower Smite Farm. Funds for its work were principally derived from data searches carried out prior to planning applications being submitted
- Project officers were sensitive to the concerns of landowners but had found them to be genuinely curious about the species on their land
- The crime of reckless or intentional disturbance to protected wildlife meant that ignorance of the presence of a protected species was not a

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Plan Review**

defence if harm or disturbance had been caused. With this in mind landowners may feel that it would be useful to be forewarned about what species of interest exist on a landholding.

A member of the public wished to put a question to the Committee which was relevant to the AONB Management Plan Review.

"What were the conservation objectives of grazing on the Malvern Hills? How does the AONB get involved in setting the objectives and measuring the biodiversity outcomes?"

In response it was explained that the AONB did not set the objectives for the area since, being an SSSI, objectives were set by Natural England who then worked with the Malvern Hills Trust as landowners to achieve favourable condition status. It was noted that no one form of management was going to be optimal for all species but the objectives were there to conserve a variety of habitats with the main one in that area being acid grassland. Grazing was a key component of management of that grassland interest and it was recognised that there was an element of flexibility around that management. It was agreed that Hazel McDowall would be able to provide further information outside the meeting.

Management Plan Review

Paul Esrich talked to the paper which outlined the steps that had been taken in conducting the review, including two periods of consultation. The various responses which had been received on the recent public consultation draft had now been considered and these were reflected in the version of the Management Plan at Appendix 4 that the committee was being asked to consider and endorse. All the consultation comments which had been received would be posted on the website in due course.

Paul Esrich recognised that there was some repetition in the Management Plan but explained that this was because the plan had been structured to allow people to dip in and out of it (rather than having to read it through cover to cover). He also explained that the length of the document was partly down to a desire to clearly set out key issues and to justify policies.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Natural England had already considered the draft and given their comments. This meant that they were less likely to raise significant issues when asked for formal observations (the next stage of consultation)
- Cllr John Raine commented that this was the third Management Plan he had been involved with and he felt this was the best one so far
- It was suggested that more could be said on the issue of badgers and TB. The Committee recognised that it was an important issue but also one in which there were differing views, interpretations and opinions. Paul Esrich offered to look at this text again but since the Management Plan had to speak on behalf of the Partnership as a whole it was felt that there was merit in not pushing this subject too far. The current text allows for people to explore further information elsewhere
- The list of examples of natural capital should include rocks
- The failing market for hardwood referred to in the report was queried but it was felt that this was correct due to the current low cost of imported wood, high transport costs, an unsuitable road network and many woodlands and forests not being managed to supply construction timber, leading to an abundance of firewood
- The appearance of fields covered in white fleece or plastic in November/December should be referred to since this would impact on views and visual amenity over a longer period of the year, including when the landscape was at its most exposed.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Noted the progress made with conducting the review (Appendix 1);**
- b) Noted and commented on the consultation undertaken and its reach (see Appendix 2);**
- c) Discussed the summary of key comments made in relation to the consultation draft text and the AONB Unit's response to them. (Appendix 3)**
- d) Discussed and endorsed (subject to comments recorded above) the text for the next AONB management plan (Appendix 4). NB The committee recognised that further changes may still need to be made to the**

659 The national review of National Parks and AONBs - a call for evidence

document following formal observations from Natural England and, possible, final comments from Local Authorities,

- e) Noted and commented on work undertaken as part of preparing and consulting on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); and
- f) Noted and commented on work undertaken as part of the State of the AONB report preparation.

The Government had made a commitment to review National Parks and AONBs as part of the 25 year Environment Plan that was launched at the start of the year. An independent panel led by the journalist Julian Glover had been set up to carry out the review. In response to its call for evidence a response on behalf of the JAC had been drafted and the Committee was being asked for its comments on this draft.

Paul Esrich summarised some of the main points in the proposed response from the JAC including:

- concerns about insufficient weight being given to the AONB in decision making, which had led to a request for AONB Partnerships to have statutory consultee status for planning matters and for the current duty of regard on public bodies to be raised to a duty of due regard
- The importance of stable funding arrangements, allied to a clear assessment of statutory purposes and expectations
- The need for core purposes of AONBs to be aligned to those of National Parks, since both designations conserve natural beauty and cultural heritage as well as providing areas for recreation and access.

In the ensuing discussion the following issues were raised:

- Name – it was agreed that the acronym AONB was often mis-quoted and the public were not clear what an AONB was. Committee members suggested that the profile of AONBs needed to be raised to increase public understanding
- Boundary reviews – a possible extension of the AONB to the north was mentioned. It was recognised that the process for designating new

AONBs was a long and arduous one and that this could do with being simplified and properly resourced. Linked to this was the matter of size of the area and whether a small AONB was more susceptible to damage from outside, including from adjacent populations

- Funding – it was suggested that the government should consider the issue of local contributions to AONB Partnerships, for example, should existing contributions be linked to inflation and should Parish Councils be expected to contribute?

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) **Discussed the draft text provided at Appendix 1 and agreed the amendments or additions needed, and**
- b) **Agreed that any further changes be actioned by the AONB Partnership Manager prior to the text being submitted to Defra.**

660 Sustainable Development Fund

The Committee noted the report on the Sustainable Development Fund. David Armitage highlighted the poetry in the Malverns project and that a radio programme would be recorded in January for the Clare Balding Ramblings series.

Resolved that the Committee noted and commented on the report.

661 Information Items

The Committee noted the report. Paul Esrich highlighted:

- That the first gathering of the AONB Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund had taken place and so a start to this important initiative had now been made
- the Malvern Hills Environs Study which would form part of the evidence base to help inform the next South Worcestershire development plan
- The invitation to tender for the Highways verges management pilot project had been re-issued following a lack of responses when it was initially issued in the summer.

RESOLVED that Members of the JAC noted the information report and agreed to contact the AONB Unit if they wished to be involved in any consultation or to receive further information on any of these agenda items.

662 Verbal Reports from Partners

Ken Pollock – Worcestershire County Council was currently considering its Minerals Plan. There was a lack of hard rock in the county and a time may come when more attention needed to be given to deposits in the AONB, in the national interest.

Jim Burgin – Malvern Wells conservation area review was on-going and a report to the Council was expected in the New Year. There was a hope that this may dovetail in some way with the Malvern Wells Neighbourhood plan.

Hazel McDonald – a number of Natural England staff had moved to Defra to handle Brexit related work. Marian Spain was the new Interim Chief Executive for Natural England. The organisation would also be getting a new Chairman in the New Year as Andrew Sells was due to retire.

James Bissett – A number of Neighbourhood Development Plans in Herefordshire were coming up to two years old so would need to be reviewed in light of housing commitments etc.

Duncan Bridges – The Malvern Hills Trust's anticipated public consultation on its Charity Commission proposals had been delayed until the New Year. This delay had had an impact on a number of other projects.

663 Dates of Future Meetings

Dates for 2019:

- **5 April 2019** The Elgar Room, Malvern Hills District Council **(PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE AND VENUE)**
- **8 November 2019** Council Chamber, Malvern Hills District Council

The meeting ended at 12.25pm

Chairman