

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Friday, 21 November 2014, 10.00 am, Council Chamber,
Malvern

Present:

Minutes

Prof J W Raine (Chairman), Mr P Bettington (Vice Chairman), Mr S Bosley, Prof R Bryant, Mr J Fryman, Ms D Griffiths, Mr J Hervey-Bathurst, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs G Rees, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms C Greener and Mr N Rimmington

Also attended:

Mr J Bisset, Mr P Esrich, Mr D Armitage, Mr A Maginnis and Mr C Blundell

**566 To elect a
Chairman**

John Raine was proposed and seconded as Chairman. There were no further nominations and no objections so John Raine was declared Chairman of the Committee for the next year.

**567 To appoint a
Vice-Chairman**

Philip Bettington was proposed and seconded as Vice-Chairman. There were no further nominations and no objections so Philip Bettington was appointed as Vice-Chairman for a further year.

**568 Apologies and
Substitutes**

Apologies had been received from Arthur Lee and Richard Williams.
Clare Greener attended on behalf of NFU.

Sven Bosley from Bosbury and Coddington Parish Council was welcomed as a new member of the Committee to represent Herefordshire Association of Local Councils.

Since the last meeting of the Committee, Chris Cheeseman had sadly passed away. The Committee wished to record their appreciation for the work he had done during his time as a Committee Member.

A successful study visit had taken place in conjunction with Wye Valley AONB JAC that had been very informative.

**569 Declaration of
Interests**

James Hervey-Bathurst declared an interest in that he lived and owned land in the AONB and had a farming arrangement with the Houlbrookes who were taking part in public participation, although the arrangement did not include the current planning application with regard to the

570 Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting of 11 April 2014

broiler units.

Gwyneth Rees declared that she was a member of Colwall Parish Council which was considering the broiler units application.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be an accurate record of the previous meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

571 Public Participation

There were two public participants:

Tracy Elgar, represented the Colwall Action Group, which had been formed to oppose the planning application for broiler units at Chances Pitch, Colwall. She made the following main points:

- Residents were not formally notified or consulted about the planning application,
- Objections were on two fronts, site selection and detrimental impact on the AONB,
- There was not enough analysis on alternative sites,
- There would be substantial visual impact and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment was inadequate,
- Policy LA1 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan) needed to be considered,
- If the application was approved it would set a precedent for more to follow.

Philip Houlbrook showed the Committee two photographs and made the point that the first picture which had appeared in the local paper suggested a much larger site than was actually the case as shown in the second picture.

He asked whether Paul Esrich would be able to visit a modern chicken unit and see that they are clean and do not smell.

The Chairman thanked the participants for their contributions and explained that the AONB Unit would be working on a response to the planning application.

572 Update on Planning Issues

Colin Blundell explained that the Herefordshire Local Plan consultation had been published in May 2014. The AONB submitted a joint response with Wye Valley AONB

Unit. Although the AONB Units were pleased that the protection and enhancement of AONBs was included in the list of key issues they would have preferred a separate AONB policy. They agreed with the general approach of allowing limited development in villages provided building design guidance was used.

The latest consultation relating to the South Worcestershire Development Plan and the Forest of Dean Local Development Framework did not require a response from the AONB Unit.

Work was ongoing for Neighbourhood Development Plans for Colwall, Ledbury and Cradley Parish Councils.

The five year land supply issue continued to encourage speculative applications as detailed below:

- The application for 43 houses to the south of Hanley Road had yet to be determined. The decision could depend on whether the Council considered it to be a major application under the National Planning Policy Framework. The AONB had argued that the site was in a prominent location, the development unsustainable and therefore contrary to policy,
- 95 houses at Upper Welland were likely to be considered a major development and the Unit had prepared a response that the application was unsustainable,
- A single house at Upper Welland was refused due to concerns about the scale and design and being in a Conservation Area,
- A response was being drafted to an application for 150 houses at Hayslan Fields which would be considered a major development and would result in a loss of greenspace,
- The application for 4 broiler units at Chances Pitch had been the subject of the public participation. The sheds would be dark green, non-reflective material. The Unit felt the first Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment was insufficient and there had not yet been time to consider the updated version. They had until 18 December to provide a response,
- The AONB Unit was concerned about the cumulative impact of a number of applications around Welland,
- Further evidence was awaited from the developer regarding a wind turbine at Acton Green, to determine the likely impacts on the views from

the Hills,

- A solar farm was proposed at Defford but it was unlikely to be very visible from the Hills,

Training had been held for planning and landscape officers at Herefordshire Council as had previously occurred with Malvern Hills District Council. A second liaison meeting had been held with Malvern Hills District Council planning officers to discuss current applications and it was hoped these meetings would take place around every 6 months.

Various points were made in the ensuing discussion:

- Clare Greener made a general comment relating to applications for broiler units. The demand for poultry had increased and people were keen that supplies came from the UK. Farms were businesses which needed to develop if they wanted to survive and as farms may not be able to gain more land many had to intensify. She also clarified that modern chicken broilers were not overcrowded or smelly. Hereford had one of the biggest processing plants in the country which helped to provide jobs and a sustainable community.
- The point was made that the SWDP would not provide a solution to the issue of speculative applications if a 5 year land supply could not be demonstrated.
- It was suggested that new, interesting designs could be a positive thing in the AONB landscape. In response it was explained that national policy did allow for cutting edge designs and that the AONB Unit is not always opposed to them. However, designs also have to be balanced against the site's position and impact on the surrounding area.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Noted the progress in relation to strategic planning in Herefordshire, Forest of Dean and South Worcestershire, and**
- b) Noted the recent planning applications relating to the AONB.**

573 New Environmental Land Management Scheme

Dawn Griffiths explained that the New Countryside Stewardship Scheme was being introduced as a result of Common Agricultural Policy reforms and to help address continuing biodiversity decline. For example there had been a general decline in recent years in sea, farm and woodland birds.

Around £900 million funding would be available once money to fund existing schemes had been allocated. This was a substantial decrease in the money available for new management schemes compared to what was available under the Environmental Stewardship system. Natural England will be working in partnership with other organisations to make a greater impact and perhaps attract other funding.

There would be a single application window each year from July to September with new schemes to start the following January. Payments would either be made annually or bi-annually. Applicants would need to demonstrate how schemes would contribute to ecological connectivity. Buffering with areas of SSSI would also be important.

Targeting statements were still being finalised but should be finished by Christmas 2014. Funding could then be targeted to where it was most needed by using mapping techniques.

The Government was looking to National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships to help deliver biodiversity and environmental improvements at a landscape scale, whilst working with the constraints of farming and economic sustainability.

Various points were made in the ensuing discussion:

- There was a need for a joined-up approach, so that landowners were not contacted by multiple agencies or organisations,
- Issues connected to water pollution were discussed. It was explained that there were concerns about diffuse pollution from run-off from slurry and fertiliser applications as well as sedimentation caused by cattle around water courses. The Water Framework Directive would impose significant fines if water bodies and the wildlife they supported were not in decent condition. It was reported that the Catchment Sensitive Farming scheme has been generally well-received.

574 Malvern Hills and Castlemorton Common Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Resolved that the Committee thanked Dawn Griffiths for her introduction to the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme and noted the aims of the scheme and the importance of working in partnership with farmers and other organisations.

Dawn Griffiths explained that Natural England had recognised that some areas of the AONB in the vicinity of the Hills and Commons were likely to be of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) quality but were not part of the current SSSI designation. This included Poolbrook Common and an area of Castlemorton.

The technical process of re-notifying the SSSI to expand the areas of SSSI would begin next spring and would happen in two stages. Evidence would be presented to the national team and then a four month consultation would take place. At present the process was at an early stage and landowners were in the process of being contacted.

It was noted that the Malvern Hills were designated as a SSSI as much for its geology as for its biodiversity. It was hoped that the Earth Heritage Trust would be included in the consultation.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the possible re-notification of the Malvern Hills and Commons SSSIs within the AONB.

575 Route to the Hills

David Armitage explained that the AONB Unit was working in partnership with others on a project to link the hills to Great Malvern. A large number of visitors came to the hills but did not necessarily get as far the town so the project led by Malvern Hills District Council was working on ways to encourage visitors to include the shops and attractions of Great Malvern in their visit. A stage two funding application had been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the outcome of which would be known on 12 December.

Members of the Committee felt the name of the project should be Route from the Hills rather than Route to the Hills. It was agreed that members would be contacted once a decision on the stage 2 application was known.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Discussed the 'Route to the Hills' concept and

576 The Maintenance of Local Geological Sites

project, and

- b) Expressed its support for the project and the continued engagement of the Malvern Hills AONB Unit in it, should the request for delivery funding be successful**

Dick Bryant explained that geological sites needed management if they were to attain and remain in good condition. There was no dedicated resource available for such work and the AONB management plan 2014-19 stated that very few Local Geological Sites (LGS) were managed effectively. The State of the AONB report 2014 suggested that there had been an overall deterioration in the condition of LGS since 2008.

A recent Earth Heritage Trust (EHT) initiative supported by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund had been valuable but the LGS needed a rolling programme of conservation so each site was maintained on a 5-6 year cycle. Such a programme would require a small, ongoing, annual investment for provisions, supervision and tools.

Various points were made in the ensuing discussion:

It was ascertained that preventative work was difficult. For example, chemical applications and fencing-off certain sites was often impractical and/or inappropriate.

The Earth Heritage Trust had worked alongside the Malvern Hills Conservators and the Worcestershire Wardens in the past and recognised that more could be achieved by working in partnership. The Conservators would be approached (by EHT) to enquire whether they could contribute to a rolling programme of maintenance on LGS on their land.

It was suggested that maintenance of LGS should be considered favourably by the AONB Steering Group at each annual funding round.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Considered the merits and issues involved in providing a regular contribution towards volunteers for geosite management, possibly on an annual basis, and**
- b) Identified and discussed alternative options for keeping geosites in good condition.**

577 Sustainable Development Fund

The £24,000 budget for the Sustainable Development Fund had been spent and a list of projects was given in the agenda. The Composting loo created by Colwall Orchard Group at Colwall Village Gardens was highlighted, along with the Dog poo digester from Site Designs who were looking at dealing with dog fouling on the hills by fermenting it and generating gas.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

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

578 Information Items

The Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project had been awarded a Stage two Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £332,000. Following a recruitment process, Karen Humphries had been appointed as the Project Officer for the 3 year project and would commence work shortly.

Paul Esrich had heard from the Abberley Hills Preservation Society who had registered interest in having the AONB extended to the North. Members agreed that they would like a presentation on this subject and would then need to give the matter due consideration before deciding whether to support the idea. Paul Esrich explained that many protected landscape bodies had expressed an interest in boundary extensions to AONBs and National Parks and that resources to scrutinise and progress such requests were limited.

Dick Bryant explained that the Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark did not have European Geopark Status. Those that did may be considered for World Heritage Status and on this basis it may be worth exploring the idea of connecting the Geopark to an expanded AONB boundary in the Malvern Hills area.

The Malvern Hills AONB website would be updated in terms of editing technologies and there was now a facebook page.

579 Verbal Reports from Partners

None

580 Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting would take place on 1 May at Mathon Village Hall.
20 November 2015 at Malvern Council Chamber.

581 **Members Issues** | None

The meeting ended at 12.20pm

Chairman