

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee



Agenda

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**Friday, 21 November 2014, 10.00 am
Council Chamber, Malvern**

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

Members

Elected Members:

Prof J W Raine (Chairman)	Malvern Hills District Council
Philip Bettington (Vice Chairman)	Herefordshire County Council
Mr S Bosley	Herefordshire Association of Local Councils
Mr J Fryman	Worcestershire Association of Local Councils
Mr A Johnson	Herefordshire County Council
Dr K A Pollock	Worcestershire County Council
Mrs G Rees	Malvern Hills Conservators
Mr P A Tuthill	Worcestershire County Council
Mr R Yeates	Forest of Dean District Council

Non-Elected members:

Mike Ashton	Visit Herefordshire/Destination Worcestershire
Wayne Barnes	Forestry Commission
Prof Richard Bryant	Hereford & Worcester Earth Heritage Trust
Ms S Faulkner	NFU West Midlands
Mr I George	English Heritage (Midlands)
Ms D Griffiths	Natural England
Mr J Hervey-Bathurst	County Land & Business Association
Dr Richard Williams	Campaign to Protect Rural England

Co-Opted Members:

Mr A Lee	Herefordshire Local Access Forum
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Agenda

Item No	Subject	Page No
1	Apologies and Substitutes	
2	Declaration of Interests	
3	To elect a Chairman	

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All the above reports and supporting information can be accessed via the Council's website.

Date of Issue: Thursday, 6 November 2014

Item No	Subject	Page No
4	To appoint a Vice-Chairman	
5	Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting of 11 April 2014	
6	New Environmental Land Management Scheme To receive a presentation from Dawn Griffiths, Senior Adviser, Natural England and Wayne Barnes, Woodland Officer, Forestry Commission.	
7	Malvern Hills and Castlemorton Common Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) To receive a presentation from Katey Stephen, Lead Adviser (Herefordshire) Natural England.	
8	Update on Planning Issues To receive a report from Colin Blundel of The Planning Company on planning matters affecting the AONB.	1 - 6
9	Route to the Hills To receive a report from David Armitage, AONB Partnership Assistant Manager.	7 - 8
10	The Maintenance of Local Geological Sites To receive a report from Professor Dick Bryant, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust.	9 - 10
11	Sustainable Development Fund To receive a report from David Armitage, AONB Partnership Assistant Manager.	11 - 12
12	Information Items To note the items for information.	13 - 14
13	Verbal Reports from Partners	
14	Dates of Future Meetings 1 May 2015 – Mathon Village Hall 20 November 2015 – Council Chamber Malvern	
15	Members Issues If you have any other contributions that you would like to bring to the meeting, please contact Paul Esrich tel: (01684) 560616.	

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8. UPDATE ON PLANNING ISSUES

Background

1. The AONB Unit continues to input to consultations on planning matters on behalf of the AONB Partnership. As well as responding to consultations on Local Plans and other 'strategic' plans, the AONB Unit looks at the weekly lists covering some 200 planning applications per year in the AONB and its setting.

Local Planning Policy

Herefordshire Local Plan

2. Herefordshire County Council published a pre-submission draft of the Herefordshire Local Plan – Core Strategy 2011 – 2031 in May 2014. The AONB Unit submitted a joint response with the Wye Valley AONB Unit.
3. The AONB Units were pleased to see that the protection and enhancement of AONBs is included in the list of key issues to be addressed in the Local Plan.
4. On the Spatial Strategy, the AONB Units submitted the following, *“The strategic objectives are well balanced between social, economic and environmental issues. However, there is no specific reference to protection and enhancement of the landscape. One of the environmental objectives could be amended to include reference to protecting and enhancing landscape character and ensuring the visual appearance of new developments is considered in making planning decisions.”*
5. Whilst we would still prefer a separate AONB policy, we were pleased that AONBs had been specifically protected through policy SS6 and that there is a reference to the fact that management plans for nationally important areas are material to future development proposals. This should ensure that the AONB management plans play a role in future development in the area.
6. The Plan still includes proposals for significant new housing development in Ledbury, including the Viaduct Site which is adjacent to the AONB. The design of new houses and associated green infrastructure in this area will be particularly important and should take account of

the AONB Unit's Landscape Guidelines.

7. The AONB Unit agreed with the general approach to allow limited development in villages, stressing that developments would need to be well designed, using the Design Guide, and be locally appropriate / distinctive.

South Worcestershire Development Plan

8. The South Worcestershire Development Plan has been submitted to the Secretary of State and is now at the Examination stage. At the Examination in October 2013, the Inspector asked the three Councils to reconsider their housing numbers with a view to adding a further 5000 houses to the plan. A call for sites in March 2014 resulted in 550 sites being proposed. The Councils are now consulting on Proposed Modifications to the Plan. These include only seven new sites in Malvern Hills District and none within the AONB.
9. The next stage of the Examination is likely to be in March 2015 and will consider all the sites in the original Submission Draft and the new sites from the Proposed Modifications. The only site within the AONB is still the proposal for 35 houses at Green Lane, Malvern Wells. The AONB objected to this site at the pre-submission stage on the grounds of soundness. These representations are still to be considered by the Inspector when he issues his final report later next year.

Forest of Dean Local Development Framework

10. The Forest of Dean Core Strategy was adopted in February 2012. An Allocations Plan was consulted on in August and September 2014 but there were no sites within the AONB, so no comments were required.

Neighbourhood Development Plans

11. The AONB Unit continues to work with Colwall Parish Council in the production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan. Policies are now being drafted and the Neighbourhood Planning Team Leader in Herefordshire Council has commented on an early version. It is hoped the proposed changes to the Settlement Boundary will be ready for community consultation shortly.
12. Work is ongoing on a Neighbourhood Plan for Ledbury. This will include some land on the western edge of the AONB.

Planning Applications in the AONB

13. The AONB Unit is likely to be supporting Cradley Parish Council in the development of a Neighbourhood Development Plan. Early work may involve a Landscape Capacity Assessment, similar to that completed in Colwall
14. The five year land supply issue continues to encourage speculative applications in and around the AONB. Some of the main recent applications are summarised below -
15. Hanley Road North and South - The site for 184 houses to the north of Hanley Road (13/00283/OUT) is no longer being progressed. The application for 43 houses on former playing fields to the south of Hanley Road (14/00262/FUL), submitted in February 2014, is yet to be determined. This is the same site we objected to under the SWDP. The Council may consider it to be a major application under section 116 of the NPPF and its decision may come down to whether the applicant can demonstrate exceptional circumstances for allowing the development and whether it would be in the public interest when weighed against harm to the AONB. We argued that the site is in a prominent location where it will impact on views both to and from the Hills and contribute significantly to the coalescence of development towards the Showground. The applicants have, in our view, given insufficient weight to AONB issues and the development is unsustainable and therefore contrary to policy. A decision is likely around the end of this year or early next year.
16. 95 houses at Upper Welland (14/01333/OUT) – This is a speculative application for a site that is not proposed for allocation in the SWDP. The Unit has prepared a response based on landscape and planning considerations. It is highly likely that this will be considered to be a ‘major’ application and therefore the more stringent test from Section 116 of the NPPF will need to be applied.
17. Single house at Upper Welland Road, Upper Welland (14/00890/FUL) – The AONB Unit expressed a number of concerns about the scale and design of this house and its layout within the site. It is also adjacent to an existing gap in the development. The application was refused, with the AONB and Conservation Area being key reasons for refusal.
18. 150 house at Hayslan Fields, Malvern (14/01301/OUT) – This is a major development on existing greenspace in Malvern, which could have impacts on views to and from the AONB. A response is being drafted.

Training for Local Planning Authorities

Recommendation

19. 4 broiler units at Chances Pitch (P143028/F) – a major development of 4 large chicken sheds is proposed at Chances Pitch, Colwall. The AONB Unit will be seeking landscape advice and reviewing the planning justification for this scheme.
20. Developments at Welland – The AONB Unit is concerned about the cumulative impact of a number of planning permissions and applications around Welland. There are 6 sites that we are aware of and 2 already have permission. In total there could be a total of nearly 200 new houses around the village, although the largest sites are located outside the AONB. Whilst some of the sites outside the AONB, on their own, may not have a significant impact on views to and from the AONB, when they are all added together the impact could become more significant.
21. Acton Green wind turbine (P142059/F) – A large wind turbine (77m) is proposed on high ground less than 4km to the west of the AONB. The AONB Unit was concerned that the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment had not considered a sufficient number of viewpoints within the AONB. These would determine the likely impacts on views from the Hills, and particularly whether the turbine would break the skyline. Further evidence is awaited from the developer.
22. A Solar Farm is proposed on 104ha of land at Defford Airfield in Wychavon District (W/14/01244/PN). It is unlikely that it would be very visible from the Hills due to its distance away. There was some concern over glint and glare impacting on users of the Hills, but this was not thought to be significant.
23. In August 2014 a workshop was organised with planning officers and landscape officers from Herefordshire Council. This followed a similar format to a previous meeting with Malvern Hills District Council.
24. A second liaison meeting was held with Malvern Hills District Council planning officers in October 2014 to discuss current planning applications. It is hoped that these will take place at around 6-month intervals.
25. **The Committee is recommended to:**
 - a) **Note the progress in relation to strategic planning in Herefordshire, Forest of Dean and South Worcestershire.**

- b) **Note the recent planning applications relating to the AONB and discuss any matters arising.**

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9. ROUTE TO THE HILLS

Background

1. 'Route to the Hills' is the name given to the project that seeks to create a route between Great Malvern and the Hills. It has long been known that, though the Malvern Hills attract many visitors, few of them make it to the town itself. Increasing the number that do so is likely to benefit local businesses. In 2001 the Malvern Hills AONB Unit ran a project entitled 'Realising the Value of the Hills', which tried to address this issue. It resulted in sign boards at the railway stations showing the route to the hills, a visitor newspaper and an improved Hills Hopper bus service. The missing component was the route through the town to the hills which 'Route to the Hills' addresses.

Summary

2. Malvern Hills District Council successfully led a partnership of local interest groups that applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a development grant for the project in 2013. The subsequent request for the delivery grant of c. £482,000 was submitted this summer and HLF's decision will be known in early December 2014.

3. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit has been involved with this project from the start and has provided some matched funding (£2,000) and staff time on the Project Management Board. Should the request for a delivery grant be successful, it is intended that more staff time will be allocated to the Project Board.

4. The details of the project will be available at <http://www.malvern hills.gov.uk/route-to-the-hills>. In summary, the project will:

- Last for 3 years.
- Employ a Learning and Community Engagement Officer.
- 'Create' and promote a route from Great Malvern railway station to above Belle Vue Terrace.
- Tell the story of Great Malvern through the use of panels, audio and street art and architecture.
- Produce town trails for young people, educational resources for local schools and run regular talks and tours of the route.

Recommendation

5. **The Committee is recommended to:**

- a) **Discuss the 'Route to the Hills' concept and project.**
- b) **Express support for the project and the continued engagement of the Malvern Hills AONB Unit in it, should the request for delivery funding be successful.**

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10. THE MAINTENANCE OF LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE MALVERN HILLS AONB

Background

1. The varied and distinctive geology of the Malvern Hills AONB is one of the defining features of the area, giving rise to its distinctive scenery and providing interest and enjoyment to many people. Within the AONB, a quarter of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest are designated in part, because of their geology. 47 Local Geological Sites have also been designated in the area and each of these has an interesting story to tell.
2. In common with almost all the other features which contribute to the natural beauty of the AONB, geological sites need management if they are to attain and then remain in good condition. Often, this management involves 'keeping nature at bay' by preventing exposures of rock from becoming over-grown and obscured by vegetation. Unfortunately, there is no dedicated resource available for such work, especially outside of the SSSI network. For this reason, the AONB management plan (2014-19) states that very few Local Geological Sites are managed effectively. This point is made evident by data in the State of the AONB report (2014) which suggests that there has been an overall deterioration in the condition of LGS within the AONB since 2008.

Summary

3. The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust (H&WEHT) is at the fore front of efforts to care for the distinctive geology of the area. For example, its 'Champions' project – initiated in 2008 and funded until 2011 by the Heritage Lottery Fund - set out to equip local volunteers to understand and care for their local geological sites. Under this project volunteers carried out a variety of management works at 6 Champions sites within the AONB.
4. The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership assists H&WEHT in its geodiversity conservation work where and when it can. In 2014, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund provided a one-off grant to the Heritage Trust to restore up to 6 sites with a group of volunteers. The volunteers were supplied with tools and provisions, and supervised carefully by Dr John Payne. Despite the tough tasks involved in restoring geosites, the volunteers remain keen to do more; and there is much more to be done.

Recommendation

5. As valuable and worthy as these discrete projects are, effective care of the many geological assets in the area would be best achieved by a moderate amount of ongoing effort by a team, rather than by stop-start project activity by one or two individuals. Policy VP1 in the AONB management plan is to 'Support effective voluntary activity, in all its shapes and forms, that helps deliver the AONB management plan', whilst Policy VP3 is to 'Develop and support networks of volunteers able to assist in specialist activities.' Objective GO1 in the plan is to 'Protect important geological and geomorphological sites'.
6. Therefore, it would be consistent with the Management Plan if the restoration and management of important geological sites took place under the steam of volunteers, and on a more regular basis. This could require a small amount of annual investment (£1,000 - £1,500) in the volunteers for provisions, supervision and tools.
7. **The Committee is recommended to:**
 - a) **Consider the merits and issues involved in providing a regular contribution towards volunteers for geosite management, possibly on an annual basis.**
 - b) **Identify and discuss alternative options for keeping geosites in good condition.**

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11. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND 2014/5 – UPDATE REPORT

Background

1. The table below shows the Sustainable Development Fund's grants for the financial year 2014/15. The budget is £24,000. Taking out of that a 10% administration charge, plus the current commitments of £18,735; there remains c. £3,000 uncommitted.

Summary

Applicant	Project	Grant Allocated
Colwall Orchard Group	Composting loo – a 'long drop' on stilts that lets schools visit Colwall Village Gardens. Completed.	£1000
Malvern Hills District Council	Malvern Munch – Local Food Walk around the Malverns - Completed	£2,000
Colwall Club	Provision of a second hand car into West Malvern. Completed	£2,235
Malvern Community Forest	Creation of green exercise space.	£2,000
Malvern Hills Conservators	Hill Bat Survey – provision of detectors for volunteers, and survey of bats. Completed.	£2,000
Eastnor Estate	Restoration of Clencher's Mill.	£5,500
Site Designs	Dog poo digester – a new look at how to deal with dog fouling on the hills by generating gas from fermenting it.	£2,000
Colwall Village Society	Colwall Past and Present Booklet	£500
H&W Earth Heritage Trust	Conservation by volunteers of geosites within the AONB. Completed.	£1,500
Total committed		£18,735

Applicant	Project	Grant Allocated

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) Note and comment on the report.**
- 2) Contact David Armitage with any projects that might be suitable for this fund.**

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12. INFORMATION ITEMS

Management Plan ref. (abridged)

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

CO2 – Develop an enhanced sense of ownership...among local communities...through opportunities for involvement in consultation activities

DP1 – The distinctive character and natural beauty of the AONB will be fully reflected in consistent statutory land use policy and guidance across the AONB

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

Project

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project – Following the submission of a Stage 2 funding application in June 2014 we have been awarded £332,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards this 3 year project. Recruitment of a Project Officer is underway.

Making Space for Nature – survey work on birds, butterflies, bees and bats was undertaken in the landscape scale project area during the summer months. A more complete picture of species presence and distribution can now be assembled. Next steps are to interrogate existing habitat data sets and to see how these relate to species distribution.

Neighbourhood Plans – the AONB Unit continues to work with members of Colwall Parish Council to support the development of a Neighbourhood Plan. A landscape capacity and sensitivity study of Colwall's settlement boundary has now been completed and presented to the local community. ...

AONB Guidance on Building Design – evidence is emerging that this guidance is being used and referenced in a small number of planning applications. Thanks are due to LA Planning Officers who are promoting the guidance.

Burying overhead electricity cable – Work is currently underway on 15 sites ranging from securing the wayleaves to trenching for the cables. Work is progressing slowly but kilometres of cable are being buried on Eastnor Estate at the time of writing. The current spending review, during which all the projects must be completed, ends in April 2015. Western Power Distribution, with whom rests the operational management,

Further Information on the subject of this report is available from from Paul Esrich
☎: on 01684 560616

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seem confident that all will be done in time. If JAC members know of any lengths of overhead cable they think might be candidates for the scheme, do contact David Armitage. They could be included in the next programme.

Landscape Improvement Grants - these small grants are aimed at landowners who fall outside the ambit of larger grant systems. c.£1,200 has been committed to projects such as hedge and orchard planting. Further projects are sought.

Three Counties Showground Landscape Enhancements – the Operations Manager has planned a series of works to be carried out this season. These include work gapping up an old hedge line, restocking a traditional orchard and removing leylandii.

Giving Veteran Trees Breathing/Breeding Space

The unit continues to work with the Woodland Trust to identify veteran trees in woodlands that have become swamped by more vigorous species. Once it was acceptable silvicultural practice to overplant existing ancient woodlands with fast growing timber trees; in many cases the relict veteran trees remain, but only just. The aim is to identify such trees and 'halo thin' around them, giving space for the trees to breath and light for their seeds to germinate. Uptake of this project is slow – any members with knowledge of such swamped veteran trees or ancient woods should contact David Armitage.

IP5 – Raising awareness of 'being in the Malvern Hills' as a special place to encourage sustainable activity.

Revamping the Electronic Communications

The Malvern Hills AONB website needs to be brought up to date; less in terms of design, more in terms of the editing technologies. It is hoped to migrate the current website to a php platform, that will enable Unit staff to edit the site much more successfully and thereby keep it up to date, and interesting.

And to keep up with modern trends, and ways of communicating less formally with people, the Malvern Hills AONB now has a Facebook page. Twitter has also been used, but current thought is that, with its swift response times, it interrupts more considered work. It would be interesting to know whether JAC members use any of these media.

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