

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 6 November 2020, Online

Present:

Minutes

Mrs G Rees (Chairman), Mrs B Behan, Prof R Bryant, Ms S Faulkner, Mr J Fryman, Mr J Hervey-Bathurst, Mrs H l'Anson, Ms H McDowell, Prof J W Raine and Mr P A Tuthill

Also attended:

Mr D Armitage, Mr D Bridges, Mr J Burgin, Rachel Datlen Mr P Esrich and Mrs K Humphries

688 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies had been received from Ken Pollock, Roger Yeates and Wayne Barnes.

689 Declaration of Interests

James Hervey-Bathurst declared that he farmed and owned land at the south end of the AONB.

690 To Elect a Chairman

Richard Bryant proposed Gwyneth Rees as Chairman, seconded by Jerry Fryman. There were no further nominations so Gwyneth Rees was duly elected Chairman of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

RESOLVED that Gwyneth Rees be duly elected as Chairman of the Malvern Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee for the next year.

691 To Appoint a Vice-Chairman

Paul Tuthill proposed John Raine for the position as Vice-Chairman. Seconded by Helen l'Anson. There were no other nominations so John Raine was duly appointed Vice Chairman of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

The Chairman wished to thank Ken Pollock for his time as Vice Chairman and state that he had been very helpful to her over the past years.

RESOLVED that John Raine be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee.

692 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2019 were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and would be signed by the Chairman.

meeting

693 **The History and Heritage of Barton Court**

David Armitage explained that the history of Barton Court was being studied by George Demidowicz (a local landscape historian) and it was intended that a book on the subject would also be published. It had been hoped that a video about the history and heritage would be available for the meeting but unfortunately during the course of preparing for the video David had sustained an injury and was unable to complete the filming of the video.

It was suggested that in future more short videos could be produced about the work of the AONB Partnership. Members of the JAC thought that short videos were a useful and effective medium to highlight projects and work taking place in the area and they supported the idea of further videos in future.

694 **A Prospectus for the English AONBs**

The National Landscapes review had been published in September 2019 and a response from Government was awaited. The NAAONB had been asked by Defra to provide supporting information about AONB work and spending to the recent Government spending review. The prospectus sets out some bold ideas with indicative figures.

The Committee had a discussion around the issue of whether AONBs would be required to change their names. There had not been a formal response from Government on this subject, but Paul Esrich reported that there did seem to be some interest in a name change. At the last JAC meeting it had been noted that a proposed change of name to National Landscape was not favoured. One Member pointed out that if some of the good suggestions in the report were implemented, a change of name would be acceptable. It was noted that the Cotswolds AONB was already calling itself the Cotswolds National Landscape.

It was felt this prospectus needed to be joined up with what Defra were doing for farmers with the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) as a lot of work done by AONBs at a local level would be implemented by farmers. It was feared that actions to help with Climate Change at a local level could be difficult to implement for example, solar panels and polytunnels to help the environment could be at odds with retaining local character.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

695 AONB Budget and Work Programme 2020/21

- a) Noted the content of this national prospectus; and**
- b) Provided comments.**

Paul Esrich reported that there had been no major changes to the budget this year. The size of the Sustainable Development Fund had reduced by half compared to the previous year but there had been an increase in the number of small grants given for biodiversity and landscape enhancement schemes. This change had come about partly because Defra's funding letter for the year requested that some money be set aside for biodiversity related work. The work programme for the year had been adjusted to reflect Covid related priorities and possibilities.

Members were pleased that there had been a general increase in voluntary contributions over the years. It was hoped that contributions from Parish Councils would continue but it was pointed out that they were voluntary. The total voluntary contributions received for 2020/21 would be reported in the next budget report in 2021. Requests for support were sent to Parish Councils along with the Annual Report, which kept them informed of the work of the AONB Unit.

The Chair agreed that her Parish Council had been grateful for help given by the AONB Team.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Noted the budget for 2020/21; and**
- b) Commented on the overall direction and work priorities for the year ahead.**

696 Planning Matters and the Malvern Hills AONB

Karen Humphries gave an update on planning issues.

Five different authorities were responsible for planning applications within the AONB and it was reminded that planners should refer to the AONB management plan when making decisions as this was a material consideration in planning within the AONB.

The AONB Unit contributes to the local planning process by:

- Assisting in preparing Local Plans
- Providing specialist advice
- Developing guidance, and
- Supporting the preparation of Local Neighbourhood Plans

The AONB Unit also contributed to national planning

issues via the National Association for AONBs.

During the discussion various points were made:

The AONB Partnership bodies were not statutory consultees but the National Landscapes review report recommended that they should be. However, at present the Malvern Hills AONB Unit did not have the resources available to be able to respond to all the applications if it became a statutory consultee. One Committee Member said contributions by the AONB Unit were very useful, including consideration of key views.

An officer from Malvern Hills District Council felt that the AONB unit should not underestimate the value of their contribution in the pre-application advice they give to Local Planning Authorities and applicants. It was recognised that getting involved in planning at the pre-application stage could be very helpful and prevent delays and problems at a later stage. However, it was also recognised that additional resources would be needed if the AONB Unit was to scale up its involvement at this early point in the planning process.

Concerns were raised about new buildings which were unsuitable or uncharacteristic in a particular area. It was explained that the Planning White Paper appeared to place more focus on local design guides. In the Malvern Hills AONB a number of guidance documents already existed and were freely available to use.

It was noted that the AONB Unit had responded to more applications than in the previous year but the proportion of comments which had successfully affected decisions had fallen. Often responses were comments in regard to small applications in a bid to limit the overall impact of developments on the character of an area. If there were high turnovers of planning officers, then the AONB Unit had more work to do to ensure the concerns of the AONB were understood and it was recognised that dialogue with planning staff was important as the Unit could only act in an advisory function. It was felt that annual planning reports were useful to show trends and see why certain applications were accepted and others not.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Noted the report; and**
- b) Raised and discussed issues arising.**

Biodiversity was in decline and the Government's 25-year Environment Plan highlighted the need for nature

for the Malvern Hills AONB

recovery. One key proposal in the plan was the establishment of a Nature Recovery Network (NRN). It was clear that such a network was about benefitting people as well as wildlife, through such things as cleaner air, access to the countryside, improving mental health and dealing with flooding. Delivery of an NRN would require action at local levels by many stakeholders including landowners and Local Authorities. Biodiversity gains would be required to be considered within planning applications.

A commitment had been made that Nature Recovery Plans (NRPs) would be produced for all AONBs. There were broadly two phases to this work. Phase 1 involved mapping and assessment, which was currently being done in the Malvern Hills AONB; and Phase 2 which involved stakeholder engagement and developing an agreed way forward.

Paul Esrich stressed the importance of achieving consistency of approach with others who were involved in nature recovery in and around the AONB, so that all could work to meet agreed objectives and targets.

Members made a number of comments:

- There was uncertainty for farmers regarding ELMS as it was unclear what the Defra offer would be and whether it would be sustainable. Farmers made use of precision technology and the information that they had access to could be used to feed into a NRP. How farms could achieve net zero was also being considered, for example, how woods and fields could be used to store carbon
- There were various potential income streams for farms, from food production and ELMS to carbon markets and biodiversity grants but it was difficult to accurately assess what farmers would receive. It was suggested that there may be some conflict between different competing objectives in the future. It was clarified that Defra had given additional money for ELMS advocacy work to all National Parks and AONBs this year.
- It was difficult to see how leaving the EU would impact protected species, although it was recognised that some legislation was being carried over
- NRNs linked well to the Malvern Hills Destination Zero plan and the development of NRN was very important. Hereford Council had discussed a notice of motion regarding protecting hedgehogs

which had been well-received.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- a) Noted the report; and**
- b) Discussed the issues arising.**

698 Sustainable Development Fund

David Armitage gave an update on the Sustainable Development Fund. There had been a reduced budget and consequently fewer applications but tribute was paid to volunteers including those for the Earth Heritage Trust and the Colwall Orchard Group for the work they carried out in the AONB.

Various projects were highlighted:

- The Malvern Lost Fritillary Project improved the habitat for Fritillary butterflies, making it possible to introduce the species to the area again
- Collars to contain livestock to specific areas. A virtual line could be drawn so that when cattle tried to move over it, first an auditory warning would arise and then if that did not work, a shock was given to the animal. This system could lead to the possibility of land being grazed without using fences or cattle grids
- Birtsmorton, Hollybush and Castlemorton History Group have mapped out historical walks which will be written up and published. A further book would be made available next year.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

699 Information Items

Paul Esrich gave a brief update on various information items:

- The Unit received advice from a land management advisor through a call off contract. This had proved a positive addition to the Unit's support function for landowners and managers and had helped get two land owners into mid-tier Countryside Stewardship schemes this year
- Thanks were given to James Hervey-Bathurst and 6 other land owners who allowed a botanist to carry out a survey of grasslands on their land in the summer. The results would help to inform land management
- The highways verges management pilot had been completed this year with cut grass being collected and not left on the verges to add nutrient to the soil. The wet winter and dry spring had caused problems so it was likely to be the next growing season before the effect of the pilot could be fully assessed

**700 Verbal Reports
from Partners**

- The Chairman had visited the Images of the AONB exhibition and had been impressed. It was hoped the photographer would provide images for the AONB website.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

Verbal updates were given by partners:

Jerry Fryman – Worcestershire Association of Local Councils.

Some Tramper users had found some footpaths were difficult to access. It was hoped that the Countryside Heritage Team would be able to change the gates in Castlemorton to make the path more accessible.

Dick Bryant – The Earth Heritage Trust

Volunteer groups had been affected by lockdown but the Trust had carried out some conservation work at Dales quarry before the current lockdown was imposed.

The Trust would be bidding for a contract to carry out condition monitoring work.

The Earth Heritage Trust had created a new website and JAC Members were encouraged to look at it.

James Hervey-Bathurst – The Eastnor Estate

The Estate had completed its Higher-Level Stewardship Scheme and it looked likely to be extended. It was working with the AONB Unit to explore a Natural Capital Assessment and the issue of car parking around the estate was being addressed.

Jim Burgin – Malvern Hills District Council

Sarah Jones, who previously worked for the AONB Unit was now a Conservation Officer for the District Council. There were interviews coming up for the other vacant Conservation posts.

The Council's 5 Year Plan and Destination Zero plan complemented the work of the AONB.

Sarah Faulkner – NFU West Midlands

Farmers had concerns with the developing Environmental Land Management Scheme and Brexit. There were specific concerns about access to labour for next year. The weather had also caused problems with flooding earlier in the year and then a very dry spring and summer.

The NFU had received an increase in queries about people taking more access which was positive but raised questions about how it should be managed.

John Raine – Malvern Hills District Council

The Destination Zero project was progressing although there had been some disruption from Covid.
A Carbon Reduction Officer for Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils (a joint post) was due to start shortly.

Rachel Datlen – Worcestershire County Council

St Wulstan's Nature Reserve had completed its Higher Level Stewardship and had been invited to extend the Scheme for a further year.

Hazel McDowall – Natural England

There had been a natural England and partners Nature Recovery Network launch the previous day.
Natural England were monitoring visitor numbers and completing a People in Nature survey which reported monthly.

Duncan Bridges – Malvern Hills Conservators

There had been an increase in visitors on the hills and commons during this year, at times 2-3 times more than normal and even in October there had been a 40% increase compared with previous years.

It was good that people were re-discovering the hills but there were pressures with wear and tear on paths and an increase in litter. Some volunteer parties had been operating in groups of 6 but had now stopped with the most recent restrictions.

The annual tree survey had shown that Ash die back had accelerated due to the weather. If there were further periods of dry weather this could cause a significant impact on the landscape.

701 Dates of Future Meetings

Dates 2021

23 April 2021
5 November 2021

Both at 10.00am. Venues to be notified.

The meeting ended at 11.35am

Chairman