

## Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Friday, 1 May 2015, Mathon Village Hall - 10.00 am

### Present:

### Minutes

Prof J W Raine (Chairman), Mr P Bettington (Vice Chairman), Mr W Barnes, Prof. D Bryant, Ms D Griffiths, Mr J Hervey-Bathurst, Mr A Lee, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs G Rees, Mr N Rimmington, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms N Wardroper and Mr R Williams.

### Also attended:

Mr D Armitage, Mr P Esrich, Ms L Walker and Ms S Crabbe.

#### 1 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies were received from Mike Ashton, James Bisset, Jerry Fryman and Andy Maginnis.

Neil Rimmington attended for Ian George.

#### 2 Declaration of Interests

James Harvey-Bathurst declared that he lived, worked and owned land within the AONB.

#### 3 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting on 21 November 2014.

#### 4 An extension to the Malvern Hills AONB?

The Chairman welcomed Lisa Walker and Sarah Crabbe, from the Abberley Hills Preservation Society to the meeting.

Lisa thanked the Committee for giving her the opportunity to open a discussion on the potential to extend the Malvern Hills AONB to include the Abberley Hills. Lisa gave a presentation detailing why the Society felt the area should be included in the AONB. In support of her proposal she mentioned:

- A £50,000 lottery grant had been received for the project Medieval Abberley Revealed,
- The Abberley Hills were part of the Geopark which also included the Teme Valley and the AONB. A revised Geopark boundary which was contiguous with an AONB boundary could help it achieve European Geopark status,
- Natural England wrote in their National Character Area Profile that "the woodlands of Abberley

connect with the Malvern Hills"

- Geology - The area should be considered as part of an AONB because there was little industrialisation, there were interesting geological areas such as Tufa Springs and an un-recorded dolerite sill.
- Architecture – The area contained the sites of ancient settlements, churches, castles, mills, hop kilns and timber framed buildings,
- Archaeology – Neolithic finds had been made, along with evidence of early settlements,
- Ecology – The River Teme is a designated SSSI.

In order for Natural England to consider a boundary extension for the AONB the Abberley Hills Preservation Society was having to make a case by completing a Natural England questionnaire. The preservation society wished to work with the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership and keep them informed of their progress.

The Chairman thanked Lisa for the presentation and for informing the Committee of their proposal. Members made some comments about the idea:

- It was possible to make a coherent geological argument for a northwards extension to the AONB boundary,
- The Geopark had previously been a member of the European Geopark Network but there had been problems of ownership and the membership had only lasted two years,
- Other areas may also be able to muster similar arguments about having an interesting history and showing little sign of detrimental human influence. The Preservation Society needed to look for the area's unique selling point,
- Would there be advantage to the Malvern Hills AONB of extending the area? Funding for AONBs was currently reducing and it might be detrimental to have a larger AONB if this did not come with additional resources. When questioned about the perceived benefits of being part of an AONB Lisa replied that they would expect a greater degree of protection from development and would be able to better promote the area, for example the Worcestershire Way and encouraging local businesses,
- It was suggested that it might be useful for a list of 'pros' and 'cons' to be produced, to assist with any future consultation. Having more say over

planning proposals could also be achieved by producing a Neighbourhood Plan,

- It was pointed out that Natural England's resources for re-designating areas were allocated until 2018/19 so the proposal would not have a quick resolution.

**RESOLVED that Lisa Walker be thanked for her presentation and encouraged to keep the AONB Unit informed of progress.**

**5 AONB Budget and Work Programme 2015/16**

Paul Esrich explained that a flat settlement had been received from DEFRA, a good result which had been due to the lobbying work carried out by the National Association of AONBs. The Unit remained borderline viable with staff numbers remaining at 2.5 but they had been able to continue to distribute a small amount in grants.

A small number of Parish Councils had made a voluntary donation to the Partnership in recognition of the value of the AONB and staff Unit in areas such as development control and Neighbourhood Plan management.

Appendix 3 listed work undertaken which helped towards areas of work in the Management Plan. The chairman suggested that for the next report all Management Plan policies be listed, this would highlight the areas where less work was being undertaken.

**RESOLVED that the Budget for 2015/16 be noted.**

**6 A Summary of Planning and Strategy Work in 2014/15**

Paul Esrich explained that the AONB Unit had been involved in strategic planning work as well as on the ground planning work. At present various Local Plans were being examined. Members felt that it would be useful for the AONB Unit to speak directly to the examiner of the South Worcestershire Development Plan regarding the proposed allocation site in the AONB off Hanley Road.

Overall there had not been an increase in the number of planning applications over the year but the scale and nature of some of the developments had changed.

Since 1 April 2015 Officers at Worcestershire County Council were now acting as advisors to the AONB Unit on planning issues. The AONB Unit had been very pleased with the support given by The Planning Company but the new arrangement was expected to save money. The new arrangement had commenced on

a pilot basis for one year.

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1) **The summary of planning activity in 2014/15 be noted,**
- 2) **The change in arrangements for providing planning advice to the AONB be noted,**
- 3) **A letter be written to Colin Blundell, Director of the Planning Company in Worcester, to thank him for his advice over the last 8 years.**

**7 Neighbourhood Development Plans in the Malvern Hills AONB - A Landscape based approach.**

Paul Esrich presented the paper. The AONB Unit was helping three parishes within the AONB with their Neighbourhood Plans. A fourth parish had also made enquiries about help. The AONB Unit was keen to support local communities and was able to ensure the Neighbourhood Plans were landscape led.

It was acknowledged that it was difficult to find the staff time to help with Neighbourhood Plans but it was felt that this was important work. Neighbourhood Plans would, following referenda, be part of the statutory planning framework.

**RESOLVED that having a landscape assessment led approach to Neighbourhood Planning seemed to be very useful. Consideration was also given to whether other parishes within the AONB might be interested in the approach.**

**8 Sustainable Development Fund**

David Armitage gave an update on the Sustainable Development Fund  
Not all the available money for the current financial year had been allocated so members were encouraged to contact David with details of suitable projects.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- 1) **Noted and commented on the report, and should**
- 2) **Contact David Armitage with any projects that might be suitable for this fund.**

**9 Information Items**

Details of on-going projects were detailed against the Management Plan section they fell under, in the agenda.

David Armitage showed some before and after pictures of low voltage power cables that had been buried at six sites in the AONB. Further money may be available to

**10 Verbal Reports from Partners**

bury cables in future years and members were encouraged to contact David with suitable sites.

James Hervey-Bathurst expressed his thanks for the undergrounding work that had taken place at Eastnor and said that he would be writing to Western Power Distribution to record this.

Malvern Hills Conservators – Gwyneth Rees explained that a public meeting had been held about the proposal for a cable car on the Malvern Hills and that the Conservators were clear that this cannot be progressed under the Acts of Parliament. Victorian drainage and various areas of footpath had been restored and a planning application had been made to refurbish St Anne's Well.

Historic England – Neil Rimmington explained that some areas under Stewardships such as the West side of British Camp had been cleared of scrub and brambles. Funding had been provided to the Malvern Hills Conservators to help manage the Shire Ditch and to encourage walkers on to the top of the ridge.

Forestry Commission – Wayne Barnes - Forest Services was being re-shaped and losing its local administration hub. Wayne would continue as the Local Woodland Officer and would continue to attend AONB JAC meetings. Defra is looking to see an increase in the area of woodland being managed in the AONB.

**11 Dates of Future Meetings**

The Study Tour would take place on Friday 25 September 2015.  
The next JAC meeting would take place on Friday 20 November 2015.

The meeting ended at 12.25 pm

Chairman .....