

Minutes of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory

Committee

Malvern Hills District Council Offices

Friday, 8 April 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

John Raine (Chairman), Chris Atkins, Bronwen Behan, Sven Bosley, James Hervey-Bathurst, Frank Hill and Helen l'Anson

Also attended:

James Bisset, Duncan Bridges Paul Esrich and Kate Griffiths

724 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies had been received from Wayne Barnes, Prof. Dick Bryant, Sarah Faulkner, Rachel Datlen, Jerry Fryman, Hazel McDowall and Neil Rimmington.

725 Declaration of Interests

James Hervey-Bathurst declared an interest in that he lives works and owns land within the AONB.

Chris Atkins declared an interest in that he is a Commoner on Castlemorton Common with grazing rights; he rents buildings and manages cattle on Bromesberrow Estate on Chase Hill; he manages orchards in Colwall (Ballards), the Three Counties Showground, the Bromesberrow Estate and at Castlemorton and surroundings.

726 Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2021

The minutes of the last meeting held on 5 November 2022 were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and would be signed by the Chairman.

727 Government response to the National Landscapes Review

The Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee were asked for their comments on the draft JAC response to the Government's proposals following the Landscape Review, published in September 2019.

Various comments and suggestions were made by Members including:

- It was thought that the suggestion that all AONB's be re-named as National Landscapes was a bit odd as the whole Country was a National Landscape, but it was decided that the possible re-name was not a serious issue, especially as 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' could be used as a strap line;
- With regard to the Strategic Direction and the Unified Mission it was important that Natural England had sufficient funding for a new role and that AONBs had 'greater' (rather than equitable) powers and resources;
- It was felt that it was justified for AONBs to work with landowners just outside their boundary as nature does not recognise a boundary line;
- The State of the AONB report is compiled by the AONB Team every 5 years but extra funding would be needed if Government expects more monitoring to be delivered;
- It was unclear how the new environmental land management schemes (ELM) would work and whether they would be linked to increased access. It was pointed out that the more access that was granted to the countryside might mean that it would be harder for nature to flourish. The concerns noted by the Audit Office in relation to ELM schemes, for example, that they lacked strong objectives; had short timeframes; and should be delivered in a cost-effective way, should be added to the response,
- It was felt that visitors to the Malvern Hills AONB were more diverse than those to some other protected landscapes but actions to address any inequalities would continue. However, one Member suggested the AONB should not feel coerced into further opening up the AONB and that more emphasis should be placed on maintaining and protecting geological interests. It was suggested that the term 'lack of diversity' should be used rather than 'inequality',
- Planning and affordable housing were discussed and it was agreed that the AONB design guide should be promoted to local planning departments and planning applicants;
- Sustainable financing was necessary as, although the current year's funding settlement had been increased, funding levels would actually be flat when inflation was taken into account over the next 3 years.

The Chairman thanked the AONB Partnership Manager for a great piece of work.

The minor amendments suggested by Members would be made to the document before submission to Defra in line with the deadline.

728 A Nature Recovery Plan for the Malvern Hills AONB

The Committee was updated on progress with the Nature Recovery Plan. Following the formal consultation in January and February 2022 some revisions had been made and the final version is now available and can be

distributed. When the Management Plan is revised in 2023 there will be an attempt to assimilate the Nature Recovery Plan within it.

Publicity for the plan was discussed and it was suggested that the Communications Teams at each of the County Councils should be asked to help.

729 The Malvern Hills Facilitation Fund

The Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund Group had initially been a three- year project until March 2021. The project had been extended for a further year, and Charlotte Vincent was contracted to assist with the management of the Group during that period.

Originally the group had 6 members but had expanded to 22, with the aim of ‘advising and assisting farmers and landowners to enhance their land for the benefit of nature and the special landscape features notable in the area’. The funding which had been received from the Rural Payments Agency had now ended.

Despite the success of the group, it had been decided not to apply for a further round of facilitation group funding as the administration of the fund by the facilitator and requirements on members can be onerous. Instead, it was hoped that core AONB funds could be used to maintain landowner liaison and support work.

The Chairman commented that he would like to write a letter of thanks to Charlotte for her facilitation work and hoped she would continue to be involved.

730 Farming in Protected Landscapes

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme was launched in July 2021, with £90,000 being spent in the first year. An update was given on eight completed or partially completed projects:

- Malvern Hills Foothill connections – new hedgerows, the restoration of a pond and replacing trees,
- Colwall Orchard Group, Traditional Orchards for the Future – 6 orchards ‘gapped up’,
- Colwall Orchard Group, for improving equipment and facilities,
- Re-generative grazing – Moving cattle on a daily basis, re-purposing a stable block for over wintering and new hedges,
- Restoring an old orchard,
- Hope End Management Plan to bring the six owners of the park together,
- Orchard Maintenance, and
- A brush seed harvester purchased for use by partners in the Malvern Hills AONB.

731 Statement of Commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action

The Chairman explained that some of the AONB Chairs had met and drawn up a statement on climate action. Feedback on the draft statement of commitment was requested.

When asked what additional data could be collected for the aim of ‘developing a greater, data-based understanding of climate change’, it was explained that, rather than collecting additional data, the aim was to gain a better understanding of what the existing data was saying and what it meant for the Malvern Hills AONB and other key landscape areas.

There was praise that the statement was concise enough to get the message across to members of the public, and it was suggested that the statement should be highlighted to Councils so the message could be shared.

732 Information Items

The Committee noted the items for information and acknowledged that there had been additional pressure on landowners and the AONB over the last 2 years, with more people accessing the countryside.

733 Verbal Reports from Partners

The Malvern Hills Trust

- Tree and hedge planting was on-going;
- Work dealing with Ash Dieback would continue for possibly the next 5 years. The National Trust were carrying out Ash Dieback work at Midsummer Hill, which would affect the look of the area;
- Visitor numbers had jumped in the last 2 years leading to more erosion caused by foot, cycle and car, which needed repair work. It was encouraging that there had been a greater diversity of visitors.

Herefordshire Council

- A Tree Action Plan Guidance Toolkit for England would soon be available. The importance of traditional orchards and hedgerows was emphasised;
- The Ash Dieback Toolkit had been updated and will be launched shortly;
- Natural England had made a new dataset available on-line about 18 priority habitats. A Living England map showing the extent and distribution of habitats in England has also just been launched. There was also information regarding land use and designated habitats in the River Severn.

Eastnor Estate

- The Woodshed Café and availability of free parking were bringing in new visitors,

- A gas beacon on Herefordshire Beacon will be lit on 2 June for the Queen's platinum Jubilee.

734 Dates of Future Meetings

It was hoped that a study tour could be arranged for September. Date to be confirmed by the AONB Team.

The next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee would take place on 4 November in the Council Chamber at Malvern Hills District Council.

The meeting ended at 11.55 am

Chairman