

## **Minutes of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory**

### **Committee, Mathon Parish Hall**

**Friday, 28 April 2023, 10.00 am**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr John Raine (Chairman), Chris Atkins, Sven Bosley, Dick Bryant, Frank Hill, Georgie Hyde, Graeme Ker, Cllr Helen I'Anson, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown and Mike Wilkinson

#### **Also attended:**

Josh Bailey, AONB Planning Officer  
James Bisset, HC Ecology and Arboriculture Officer  
Duncan Bridges, Director of Malvern Hills Trust  
Sarah Crabbe, Abberley Preservation Society  
Rachel Datlen WCC Countryside Greenspace Manager  
Paul Esrich, AONB Partnership Manager  
Karen Humphries, AONB Partnership Assistant Manager  
Lisa Walker, Abberley Preservation Society

#### **747 Apologies and Substitutes**

Apologies for absence had been received from Hazel McDowall and James Hervey-Bathurst.  
Graeme Ker attended on behalf of Mr Hervey-Bathurst and would represent the Eastnor Estate.

#### **748 Declaration of Interests**

None

#### **749 Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 November 2022, were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

#### **750 A proposal to extend the Malvern Hills AONB Boundary**

Members of the Abberley Hills Preservation Society (AHPS), Lisa Walker and Sarah Crabbe, attended the meeting to explain why they believed that the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be extended to the north, to include the area of the Abberley Hills. They were asking the AONB Partnership to support them as the applicant for the proposal.

This proposal was first raised at a meeting of the JAC in 2015. It was then raised again in 2021, at which time it was felt that the Partnership should await the Government's response to the Glover report. That response has now been made. Lisa Walker explained that the AHPS had commissioned work which showed how the proposed area meets Natural England's Protected Landscape Natural beauty criteria. The criteria which can be met by the Abberley Hills include:

- Landscape with some important geological sites
- Architecture such as dig sites and early settlements
- History – Owain Glyndwr and Henry IV camped on Woodbury Hill
- Ancient trees and woodland
- Ecology such as falcons, orchids and rare butterflies.

Lisa said that the All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Tool produced by Natural England in 2022 also showed a good fit between the area being proposed and the natural beauty criteria. She suggested it would be more environmentally cohesive to extend the area of outstanding natural beauty and a co-ordinated approach would benefit the whole area. This would also appear to be in line with the Government's Environmental Plan to protect 30% of the land to support the recovery of nature. A consultation now needed to take place and details had already gone to interested local groups and organisations, MPs, Councillors and the Campaign to Protect Rural England. After discussion, many local Parishes had indicated that they were supportive and with the pressure due to development the protection gained with AONB status would help to protect the area for future generations.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- It was acknowledged that members of the Committee were minded to support the proposal in the past but wanted to wait for the outcome of the Glover Review and now that it had happened it was easier to support protected landscapes.
- From a geological point of view it was logical that the Abberley Hills were included in the Malvern Hills AONB. The Earth Heritage Trust representative thought that the Joint Advisory Committee should support the proposal.
- The representative from Herefordshire Association of Local Councils supported the proposal but pointed out that if successful, the area may become busier with increased tourism and an increased rate of wear and tear on the countryside. Lisa Walker acknowledged that this consequence had been considered but it was believed that such an area of beauty should be shared.
- The support of the local community was a strong argument in support of the plan.
- The representative from the National Farmers Union could not support the proposal at this time, explaining that NFU members in the area

would need to be consulted. She felt that AONB designation could lead to restrictions on development rights which might make it harder for landowners and farmers to diversify. In response it was mentioned that some grants may be available to farmers within an AONB that were not available to others (e.g. the current Farming in Protected Landscape Grant) and that a large area of the land being considered was wooded, steeply sloped or permanent pasture. It was also said that the AONB Partnership was not anti-development, but was focussed on trying to deliver good development in the right place.

- The CPRE would welcome additional protection and would strongly support the proposal. He reminded members that until 2005 much of the area being proposed did have protections in place as an Area of Great Landscape Value.
- It was queried whether the amount of resources/funding would increase if the size of the AONB increased and clarification was requested on this point. Paul Esrich said that he knew of one recent AONB boundary extension where resources from Defra had been increased as a result, and he expected that national resources would be made available when AONBs were expanded. At this point in time, it is unknown whether resources from local authorities covering an expanded AONB would be increased in accordance with the existing funding formula. It was pointed out that the proposal could be seen as unreasonable if the proposal could not be afforded but it was clarified that the discussion at the meeting at this time was about whether the proposal should be supported in principle.
- It was queried whether there were other areas around the current or proposed boundary of the AONB which should be included in the proposal to extend the AONB.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) Discussed the proposal to extend the AONB; and**
- b) Considered whether the AONB Partnership should support this work going forward as the applicant and apart from the National Farmers Union who wanted to consult with members (see above), all other representatives supported the proposal.**

## **751 Housing and landscape-led development in the Malvern Hills AONB**

Josh Bailey, AONB Planning Officer, explained that the Position Statements aimed to help conserve and enhance the AONB. The housing position statement pushed for development to be based on need from within the AONB area rather than the local authority boundary. The Landscape led position statement argued that development should be informed by the landscape, not to stop new development, but to ensure it was developed in a way that contributed to the purpose of the AONB designation.

Both position statements would be published for wider consultation with stakeholders and if further amendments were needed, they would be updated. Thanks were given to Sue Hayward, a local volunteer, who helped develop the

position statements, as well as Karen Humphries who had helped with AONB planning issues before Josh Bailey took up his post.

A question was asked about the number of current developments in the AONB which did not meet local (AONB) need, and what impact the position statements might have on future development in the wider area. It was explained that recent developments had been examined and that some new development in the AONB had come from local needs surveys which included parishes well beyond the AONB boundary. Paul Esrich said that the AONB Unit had been and was in discussion with local planning authorities about their Local Plan reviews and that the work on Position Statements would be part of that conversation. He mentioned that Herefordshire Council has recently consulted on a policy for less development within AONBs in the county (as part of its own Local Plan review).

**RESOLVED that the Committee**

- a) **Discussed, amended (if necessary) and endorsed the ‘Housing Position Statement’ and its associated Appendices as a consultation draft;**
- b) **Discussed, amended (if necessary) and endorsed the ‘Landscape-led Development Position Statement’ and its associated Appendices as a consultation draft;**
- c) **Agreed that if future amendments were required, as necessary, that these can be made by Malvern Hills AONB Unit Staff, unless materially significant in which case they would be brought back to the Committee for further consideration; and**
- d) **Agreed a formal review date of both position statements to take place every five years unless otherwise amended.**

**752 AONB Budget and Work Programme 2023/24**

Paul Esrich introduced the report which stated the budget for 2023/24 and the priorities for work in the new financial year. Funding from the local authorities remained unchanged but Defra had provided more core grant, although the increase was not at the level of the Glover review recommendations. Parish Council contributions had been received and in 2022/23 were at a higher level than in previous years.

Staffing was now a Partnership Manager, a job share for Assistant Manager (Karen Humphries and David Armitage), Josh Bailey, the part time Planning Officer and Sash Warden looking after the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. There had not been a support post since 2020 but financial support was being provided by the Worcestershire County Council Greenspace team.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) **Noted the budget for 2023/24; and**
- b) **Commented on the overall direction and work priorities for the year ahead.**

## **753 AONB Nature Recovery Plan – Update**

The Nature Recovery Plan had been produced a year previously, a task which had been driven by the Colchester Declaration and the commitment of the AONB family to help deliver Government plans. Various actions had taken place against the Delivery Action Plan and were detailed in the paper.

National guidance on the subject of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) had been produced before Easter but this was described as being very brief and it was felt that LNRs would not contain as much detail as was in the AONB plan.

Details of some of the work being carried out on nature recovery by the AONB Partnership was posted on the AONB Facebook page and on the AONB Website (which was being redeveloped at present). The AONB Partnership Annual Review was being completed quickly this year and this would be circulated shortly. It was suggested that more could be done to promote achievements, e.g. via press releases.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) Noted progress made with implementing the Nature Recovery Plan, and**
- b) Identified actions which partners beyond the AONB Unit may have taken to deliver the plan/promote nature recovery in the 22/23 financial year.**

## **754 Farming in Protected Landscapes - Update**

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme had been extended by a year and would now run until March 2025. The programme was only running in National Parks and AONBs. For particular tasks, FiPL funding must match Countryside Stewardship rates, so when Countryside Stewardship rates increased FiPL funding had to be increased to match them, with Defra providing the additional funding.

Around 20 projects have been supported to date, with orchard work, meadows created, hedgerows laid and ponds created or restored etc.

Some farmers find it difficult to get the Countryside Stewardship schemes to pay for certain works so the FiPL programme was described as being very important.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:**

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

## 755 Sustainable Development Fund - Summary of 2022/23 projects

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) had a small budget but had a big effect. The fund had allowed relationships with landowners and ordinary people to be developed as well as allowing £26,000 of volunteer hours to be utilised.

It was noted that in the paper Wellington Heath Churchyard was called a Local Nature Reserve, this was an error and was corrected to 'Local Wildlife Site'.

An example of one of the projects supported was St James the Great Church in Colwall which was using its churchyard as a nature reserve with a group of volunteers working with local schools and the Colwall Orchard Group to lay hedges and create a wild flower area. The SDF had paid for tools which were now also used by other local groups. Other Parish Councils were going to visit to see what could be achieved.

The Committee agreed, that the fund change its name to Community Projects Grant as that explained more clearly what it was.

### **RESOLVED that the Committee:**

- a) **Noted and commented on the report;**
- b) **Considered and agreed to changing the name of the grant fund to 'MHAONB Community Grants', bringing us into line with most other AONBs and simplifying the name for would-be applicants. The aims of the grant scheme would remain the same; and**
- c) **Bring project ideas to the AONB unit for 2023/24.**

## 756 Information Items

A sample of the items for information were highlighted:

- One of the registered parks in the AONB was owned by 6 landowners and therefore was not easy to manage under Countryside Stewardship. A Parkland Management Plan had been developed using a FiPL grant and the same programme was being used to help implement recommendations in the plan.
- Five Woodland Management Plans had been developed.
- Demographics Research was being carried out to fully understand where visitors were coming from and how to attract a wider range of visitors.
- Paul Esrich explained that national level work was progressing to rebrand AONBs as National Landscapes. Logos and rebranding guidelines would be available shortly and there would be an opportunity to tweak the logo. This prompted a concern that the name was close to National Park and that members of the public may think that they had a right of access, which was not the case. It was agreed that there needed to be raised public awareness as part of rebranding. It was

likely that 'area of outstanding natural beauty' may remain as a strapline and that legally these areas would continue to be AONBs. Lots of the Glover Report recommendations had not been implemented yet and the family of AONBs was pushing for the proposed changes to purposes, powers and resources to be implemented as well as rebranding.

**Resolved that the Committee noted the information report and would contact the AONB Unit if they wished to be involved in any consultations or receive further information on any of these items.**

## **757 Verbal Reports from Partners**

James Bissett – Herefordshire Council

- Week commencing 8 May is National Hedgerow week. It was now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year and webinars were being organised and available on the Hedgeline website.
- Bats in Churches were launching advice in the Autumn about the impact of bats on churches regarding how to protect the bats and the buildings.
- Biodiversity Net Gain was launching in November; guidance had been made available but was not in much detail yet.
- A project was taking place in Herefordshire (Verging on Wild) to only cut certain verges once and parishes were being asked to opt in.
- Tree planting was taking place to celebrate 25 years of Hereford Council.
- Tree Wardens were running training events to mark 50 years since the Plant a Tree in 73 project.

Dick Bryant – Earth Heritage Trust

- With support from the Sustainable Development Fund the Earth Heritage Trust had completed maintenance work in a number of quarries. Some money had also been received from the Malvern Hills Trust.

Rachel Datlen – Worcestershire County Council

- Five new green spaces were being developed around the County, with 50,000 trees being planted to help the climate, biodiversity and wellbeing.

Georgie Hyde – National Farmers Union

- Local Nature Recovery, Biodiversity Net Gain etc – Events for farmers were being organised.

Duncan Bridges – Malvern Hills Trust

- Following high numbers of visitors to the hills, erosion control works were underway in a number of areas.
- Ash Die Back work was ongoing, though some trees did not appear to look as bad this year.
- A Defra funded trial has been underway regarding the Environmental Land Management Scheme in the area.
- Purchases of local land had been made.

Frank Hill – Campaign to Protect Rural England

- Frank had been appointed as the new President of Worcestershire CPRE.

Graham Kerr – Eastnor Estate

- Tasks were ongoing such as work on their Woodland Management Plan, planting trees, sorting out a Trumper for visitors and work being completed on the Woodshed.

## **758 Dates of Future Meetings**

29 September 2023 - The AONB Partnership tour to visit various projects in the area.

10 November 2023 – The next Joint Advisory Committee meeting.

Chairman .....