

MALVERN HILLS CONSERVATORS LAND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**Manor House, Grange Road, Malvern
Thursday 9 July 2015, 4:00 pm**

Present: Mr D Baldwin, Mr R Chamings, Mr A Golightly, Mr R Hall-Jones, Mr D Hawkins, Mrs C O'Donnell, Mrs G Rees, Mr C Rouse (Chairman), Mrs H Stace.

In attendance: Secretary to the Board, Conservation Officer, Deputy Conservation Officer, Operation's Manager, Mr M Gardner (Grazier), Mr R Morton, Mr P Watson.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr Rouse welcomed everyone to the meeting. There was one minute silence in memory of John Tretheway, who had been a member the committee. Apologies were received from Simon Freeman, Sheila Young, Tom Yapp, Roger Cousins, the Director and the Community and Conservation Officer.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Rouse declared an interest in matters relating to the HLS scheme.

3. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

Visit to Brecon Beacons: Mr Rouse said that some members of the Board had visited the Brecon Beacons, and it had been interesting to compare their problems with those of MHC.

Date for Old Hills walk: It was agreed to hold a walk on the Old Hills for all Board members on Tuesday 25 August.

Resignation of Vice Chairman of the Board: Ms Stace said that Roger Cousins had resigned as vice-chairman of the Board.

Katey Stephen: Some Board members, at the invitation of Mr Rouse, had had a meeting with Katey Stephen on Castlemorton Common to talk about management constraints and what Natural England envisaged for the site. Mrs Rees said that they were told Natural England was working to the scenario that existed in 1950s. Ms Stace commented that the impetus for the meeting should have come through the Committee or the staff, and if anyone had anything they wanted investigating they should tell the chairman of the relevant committee or a staff member. Members should not unilaterally set up meetings in their capacity of Conservators with external partners. Mr Golightly said that he intended to talk to Katey Stephen whenever he wanted to and Ms Stephen had offered derogations in order to undertake mid-season topping.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF 9 APRIL 2015

There were no updates on matters contained in the previous minutes that would not be covered under other items on the agenda. Mr Watson asked why the issue he raised about the wording of the easement policy was not on the agenda. The Secretary

to the Board said that policy review would be discussed at the Governance Committee meeting. Ms Stace said that the point Mr Watson raised was discussed when the policy was approved.

5. MEMORIALS POLICY

The Conservation Officer took the Committee through the Memorial's Policy paper prepared by the Community and Conservation Officer (CCO). MHC did not have the capacity to accept any more requests for benches or trees. The Deputy Conservation Officer confirmed that there were already about 360 benches on the Hills. The policy would be revisited after a planned survey in 2025.

There was the option for members of the public to give a financial gift towards conservation work. It was intended to revive the Giving and Donations leaflet. Mrs Rees suggested that a short paragraph about giving should be included on all the MHC leaflets. Ms Stace proposed a change in the wording in relation to spreading ashes. "The spreading of ashes on Malvern Hills ground is not encouraged." She also suggested that the wording on the web site should be amended to reflect this. Mr Watson suggested that the sections in the policy should be re-arranged so that it started by saying that donations were welcomed, and then went on to say why MHC no longer accepted memorial benches and trees. This would be more encouraging.

On the proposal of Ms Stace, seconded by Mrs O'Donnell it was unanimously **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Board that they should approve the draft policy subject to the amendments set out above.

6. REVIEW OF RISK ASSESSMENT

The Secretary to the Board went through the Director's paper. She explained that the schedule was for comment at present as approval would be dealt with by the Governance Committee and then the Board. Mr Rouse raised the issue of path inspection and the Mill Pond. With reference to 5.5, Ms Stace said that the Land Management Plan should identify what was required to comply with any grant conditions on a site specific basis and this should be added to the Required Controls column. 4.8 Loss of grazing – the wording should be amended to read "Decrease in grazing animals" or "Loss of graziers". Mr Hall-Jones suggested adding in 1.2 "lacks relevant skills, knowledge or commitment or ability to attract new members" (although he thought it would be difficult to do anything about it). David Hawkins said that he was a qualified surveyor and valuer and had worked for 25 years in WCC planning department but felt that his skills were not being utilised.

7. GAS LAMP PROJECT – MALVERN COMMON

Mrs O'Donnell declared an interest. The Secretary to the Board went through the Director's paper. Malvern Wells Parish Council had identified two gaps in the row of gas lamps on the edge of the common. They hoped to secure funding to replace the missing lamps and sought the Conservator's consent to do this. The existing lamps had been in situ for a long time without the Conservators raising objection. Mrs O'Donnell

was not aware that any remnant of the missing lamps was apparent. The Secretary to the Board did not believe that the Parish Council had a power to compel the installation of lighting on Conservator's land. On the proposal of Mr Hall-Jones, seconded by Mrs Rees, it was **RESOLVED** (Mrs O'Donnell abstaining) that the Committee recommend to the Board that in principle the Board should not raise objection to the installation of two replacement gas lamps on MHC land adjacent to Wells Road – subject to (a) MWPC obtaining all other necessary consents (b) approval of detailed proposals when these are available (c) an appropriate fee being paid for any new easements required (d) MWPC agreeing to pay our costs for any legal agreements required and (e) MHC having no liability for maintenance of the lamps.

8. CYCLE ROUTE PROPOSAL

Some members of the Committee had attended a site visit to Peachfield Common to look at a proposed cycle route to the Three Counties Showground which would cross the common. This had been suggested by the AONB. At present the AONB wished to investigate whether any of the land owners affected were likely to raise objections. It was acknowledged that the cycle way might create additional parking in the area. The Conservation Officer pointed out that the paper should say that the AONB would seek funding for the route, and not that they would fund it. On the proposal of Mrs Rees, seconded by Mrs O'Donnell it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend to the Board that the Board should agree in principle to support the project at this stage – but that future support would be dependent on (a) the AONB obtaining all other necessary consents (b) approval of detailed proposals when these are available (c) the AONB agreeing to pay our costs for any legal agreements required and (d) MHC having no liability for maintenance of the route.

9. CYCLING ON THE HILLS

The CCO had prepared a paper updating the Committee on the actions carried out to further the implementation of the cycling plan. It was hoped to create a core group from the cycling community who would, with MHC, take forward all of the cycling work. Mr Morton drew attention to the videos of people cycling on the Hills on YouTube. Mr Watson suggested putting up signs saying “Walkers Only, thank you”.

10. GRAZIER'S REPORT

Mr Gardner said that the MHC cattle were out on the common. There were 56 cattle in the electric fence compartment. He had received no complaints about the fencing.

11. CONSERVATION OFFICER'S REPORT

The Conservation Officer reported on the following:

Boundary Mapping: 6 volunteers had been recruited to carry out a survey of MHC boundaries. After training, they were walking all the boundaries, and recording where they were not stock proof.

Grazing Project: Tenders had been invited from 6 organisations to advise how best to secure Castlemorton and Hollybed Commons. It had been decided to jointly award the contract to Footprint (who had been successfully involved in 8 similar exercises) and the AONB (who took the lead in the 2001 attempt, knew the history and had local knowledge). Both had agreed to this and understood that they would charge for work done at an hourly rate and that they would not be expected to reach their tender prices as each will carry out less work than originally envisaged and also the boundary mapping would already be done. On the proposal of Ms Stace, seconded by Mrs Rees, it was **RESOLVED** by a majority of 7 to 1, with 1 abstention to recommend to the Board increasing the budget for the options exercise to £10,000. There would be further costs entailed in carrying out the recommended works.

Dissertation: A student had completed a dissertation on “Appropriate stocking levels for soil and water quality on the Malvern Hills.” Her conclusion was that an intermediate level of grazing was beneficial to both soil and water quality. The Conservation Officer was happy to forward the document to anyone who was interested.

Butterfly Conservation: This organisation had made a proposal to undertake tree felling and scrub clearance to improve the habitat on the north eastern hills for the grayling butterfly. They intend to apply for funding to carry out the work. The Conservation Officer had stressed to them the importance of maintaining the sites after the work was done. The Committee agreed in principle on the basis that the detailed proposals would have to comply with the Land Management Plan.

Proportional Payments: These had to be used with one of the graziers, because of low stocking levels over a period of six months. Stock counts were continuing for the next 6 months. If members wished to volunteer to help, they should let the Conservation Officer or Deputy Conservation Officer know.

Old Hills: In 2013 MHC entered Old Hills into the HLS scheme. Cut and collect was carried out last year on the north east section and that would be repeated for the next few years. The grassland with ant hills would have to be managed by seasonal grazing. The Deputy Conservation Officer met with local residents who seemed very supportive of the proposals. She had produced a grazing brief and was looking for someone to graze about 4ha for a couple of months in late summer, in return for payment. Another local farmer made hay in the meadow, and it was hoped to extend some of the restored area to hay meadow. Horse riding on the Old Hills would be kept under review as this was reported as a problem. Mr Watson suggested that the paths should be opened out as the horse riders were confined to a narrow strip.

Work done since last meeting:

Follow up on winter scrub work

Topping regrowth

Topping thistles

Mowing of amenity areas and paths

Path repair works about St Ann's Well over to Westminster Bank

Plank bridge replaced on Castlemorton Common

Bracken rolling

Repair section of Shire Ditch Perseverance Hill

Install 10 benches

Work to be done:

Scrub clearance work

Mowing

Hacketts building work (by contractors)

Fencing repair on British Camp (Traffic control will be required)

Land for sale: This was addressed in the closed part of the meeting

12. LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

Part I and II had been consulted on and amendments made. Part 3 would set out objectives for important activities and areas, and their monitoring requirements. The final part would set out details of the management units. This section outlined special features, management issues, a map and a work schedule outlining the work required, when it should be carried out and who was responsible for it. Approximate costs would be provided for each work schedule. Each unit would be given a priority level (low, medium, high). The Conservation Officer would be advertising sessions at different sites and inviting Board members to attend.

13. HLS BUDGET

The Conservation Officer had prepared a schedule for each of the agreements, setting out what sums were received and who received the payments.

14. MATTERS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

Mr Rouse said that David Armitage would attend the next meeting and Mr Golightly will prepare a report on grass. Mr Hawkins again raised the issue of using the legacy which MHC had received to prevent erosion on the Hills. This suggestion had been taken up and the paths officer from Brecon Beacons was to visit to give advice. The Chairman thought that a survey of the state of the paths was to be undertaken by volunteers. Mr Chamings and Mrs O'Donnell left the meeting.

15. RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC

On the proposal of Mr Hall-Jones, seconded by Mrs Rees it was unanimously **RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the discussion of item 14 on the agenda on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the exempt or confidential nature of the business to be transacted. The Secretary to the Board asked that the matter to be discussed be kept confidential. The Committee invited Mr Gardener to remain.

16. PURCHASE OF LAND

10 acres of land with buildings was for sale by auction on 23 July. The land was off Hollybed Street at Castlemorton, close to although not adjoining the common. The MHC land acquisition policy was mainly directed at acquiring pieces of the Hills, but this would be a strategic purchase. Acquisition of the land would increase MHC's capacity to manage the common. MHC had no in-by land in that area. It would be a facility to which stock could be moved, if it was necessary to take them off the common. It would be available for storage of cut material and machinery. Land adjacent to the common did not come up for sale very often and usually sold for a premium for residential use. The purchaser would be required to sign an overage deed to cover any later development. Some of the buildings would have to be replaced. The Conservation Officer had requested a formal valuation.

Mr Gardner said that to have 10 acres adjoining the common with buildings and handling facilities, together with the common potentially being enclosed, would totally change the dynamic of finding people to graze the common. Those 2 things were the overriding issues. It would open up the possibility, for example, for overwintering sheep from Wales. The Operations Manager said that it would be a good base for MHC as well. It was agreed that a ceiling should be set on the price to be paid. It might be possible to obtain some grant funding to replace the buildings. The Committee agreed unanimously to recommend purchase of the land to the Board.

The meeting closed at 6.15pm.