

Malvern Hills Trust
Covid-19 Contingency Committee
By telephone/video conference call
Meeting 15 May 2020 4.00pm

Present: Mr R Bartholomew, Dr S Braim, Mr M Cordey, Mr M Davies, Mrs C Palmer, Prof J Raine (joined during item 5), Mrs G Rees (joined during item 5), Ms S Rouse
In attendance: CEO, Finance and Administration Manager, Conservation Manager, Secretary to the Board

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence**

There were none.

2. **Declarations of interest**

There were none.

3. **Chair's announcements**

Communications had been received from John Watts and Graeme Crisp (both circulated to trustees).

4. **To approve the minutes of the last meeting**

On the proposal of Mrs Palmer, seconded by Mr Bartholomew, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2020.

5. **CEO's summary of actions taken in the last week and car parks (item 7 on agenda)**

The CEO reported that the car parks had been re-opened on Wednesday. The demographic of the visitors appeared younger than was usual prior to lockdown. The Hills had been busy but manageable. There had been issues with groups meeting up, particularly in the evenings.

He had taken part in 2 radio interviews.

Advice on using the Hills in the current circumstances had been put on the Trust website.

There had been a huge increase in the number of phone calls to the office and a temporary member of staff had started work on 14 May. It was anticipated that her contract would continue until 19 June. A few members of the public had turned up at the office and this had been dealt with by asking them to phone from the car park.

Inaparc had been called back to make further changes to the car park machine settings as the current payment option would not accommodate people who used their phones to pay. The CEO was expecting larger numbers of visitors over the weekend. There were still no toilet facilities available. He had contacted Herefordshire Council (who serviced the facilities) to ask when they would be re-opening the toilets, but had not been given a date. The cleaning of the toilets was

subcontracted to Balfour Beatty and they had reportedly furloughed or re-deployed the relevant staff.

The wardens had been asked to adopt a precautionary approach when dealing with transgressions of the byelaws by members of the public. If in doubt, they had been told not get into close proximity and to call for support if necessary.

Some practical issues had come to light – it had become extremely difficult to contact the police on 101 and he was concerned that at the British Camp car park, where the phone signal was not always adequate, queues for the ticket machine might form. It might be necessary to revert to accepting cash at this machine.

The Finance and Administration Manager reported that quote for setting up the website to take payment for passes online was £3,000 and the Trust had been told that the work would not be finished for 3 – 4 weeks. Pass sales would be past their peak by that stage and it was agreed that this was not worth doing. There was an option available on the website for people to pay by BACS and to complete a form which they could E-mail in. It was anticipated that there would be a very concentrated period of pass sales over the next few weeks as residents' passes were renewed. The renewal date for residents' passes henceforth would be 31 May.

6. Financial update

The Finance and Administration Manager reported that there was nothing to add in relation to the JRS. The Trust's application for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grant had been turned down as the Trust did not meet the criteria.

The Finance and Administration Manager went through the paper.

The CEO reported that no one had tendered for the work on the sewage treatment plant at British Camp. He had contacted two of the prospective firms and both said they had been unable to tender as they were understaffed. He intended to re-issue tender documents with a new deadline.

7. Any other matters for discussion (item 8 on the agenda)

In relation to Dr Crisp's letter, the Committee acknowledged that it should have made sure other trustees were given notice of the intention to re-open of the car parks. It was suggested that a standing agenda item be added "any urgent communications" as a reminder should any such an issue arise again. Press releases could be copied to the trustees. Otherwise the Committee felt there was nothing to add to the responses which the letter had generated from fellow trustees.

In response to Mr Watts' letter, the Committee wished to make clear that the contents of the letter were Mr Watts' personal views and asked for a copy to be circulated to all trustees with that caveat.

Mr Davies said that the Trust was neither mandated nor resourced to police public compliance with the Coronavirus Regulations on the Hills. The CEO added that it was impossible for the Trust to do so.

It was agreed that it was not appropriate or lawful to discriminate against sections of the public who wanted to visit the Hills. The Government advice was quite clear that people could now travel any distance take exercise.

It was agreed that the CEO would update the Schedule of Risk and circulate it to trustees for comment. It would then be amended to reflect those comments where appropriate and put to a future Board meeting for approval. Clearly it would not be possible to gather comments at committee meetings as had been the normal practice.

The CEO said that the Trust subscribed to a Health and Safety bulletin. The current advice was that first aiders at work should not be put in a position of risk without appropriate medical grade PPE. It needed to be made clear to first aiders that staff with appropriate PPE could be administer first aid to staff members or volunteers. However, he would advise them in writing that they should not be administering first aid to members of the public.

Ms Rouse left the meeting.

The Conservation Manager reported some consequence of the actions which the Trust had needed to take in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Of all parts of the Trust workforce, the conservation team had been hit hardest by a reduction in man hours. The Conservation Officer had been furloughed and had now been asked to return to carry out Wardening duties. The Community and Conservation Officer (CCO) had been engaged with PR and administrative matters, in particular in connection with updating of the web site. The Conservation Officer should have been carrying out a woodland condition assessment in April and the CCO had been unable to finish identifying the most dangerous or damaging mountain bike trails and closing them off. Cost cutting had also hit the preparation of the revised Land Management Plan. A full vegetation survey had been scheduled (at a cost of about £8,000), which had not been commissioned due to cost cutting and it would now be too late in the year to carry that out. Third party work to collect data had been stopped. This data was important in order to assess whether existing land management practices had been successful and should be continued, or whether they should be changed in some way. He estimated there would be about 75 % of the information available that was required to evaluate the effectiveness of the old plan and to inform the preparation of the new one.

Much of the data received so far presented a positive picture of the work of the past 5 years. The Conservation Manager hoped that the missing survey work could be carried out next year.

The Committee thanked the Conservation Manager for his report.

The Finance and Administration manager said she was drafting the trustees' report to accompany the 2019/20 accounts. This needed to include a section on how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on the Trust's charitable activities. This draft report would be circulated to trustees for their comments once it was finished.

The Secretary to the Board said she would be running trials of StarLeaf, a video conferencing platform, with the help of Dr Braim, with other Board members.

8. Date of next meeting

Next meeting 22 May 2020 at 4.00pm (by telephone conference).

The meeting closed at 17.15pm

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Minutes Released

9. Update on staff and furlough scheme (agenda item 10)

The Conservation Officer had been called back off furlough to help with wardening duties and the Administrative Assistant had also been brought back to deal with public queries and the sale of passes. Two members of staff were still shielding (and on furlough), and the member of staff who was off sick had been signed off by his consultant for another 2 weeks. The CEO reported that he was considering with the Operations Manager whether the member of the field staff currently on furlough needed to be recalled. Robin Hill had been brought off furlough but was owed holiday and time off in lieu and would not be returning to work while he was serving his period of notice. The warden post had been advertised in the local papers, on the Trust's website and would be on Environment Jobs and Conservation Jobs web sites. The deadline for applications was 8 June with interviews expected to take place on 17 June.