

Malvern Hills Trust

Land Management Committee

By Video/telephone conference

Thursday 08 October 2020 7.00pm

Present: Mr C Atkins, Mr D Baldwin, Dr S Braim, Dr G Crisp, Mr M Davies (non-voting), Mr M Dyde, Mrs C Palmer, Dr T Parsons, Mrs G Rees (Chair), Mr C Rouse, Ms H Stace, Mr T Yapp.

In attendance: Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Conservation Manager, Secretary to the Board, Warden (Mr R Vale), Mr M Gardner, Ms M Alexander (joined during item 6).

Mrs Rees welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Mr Bartholomew, Mr Fowler, Ms Rouse.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mr Rouse had grazing rights over MHT land.

Mr Atkins lived close to some of the areas which would be covered in item 6.

Mr Yapp and Dr Crisp were mowing MHT land outside their homes.

3. Chairman's Communications

Mrs Rees welcomed Ms Alexander as a new Board member.

She thanked the Community and Conservation Officer for conducting a tour of the Community Woodland for Board members.

4. Public Comments

See Schedule.

5. Matters Arising from the meeting of 5 December 2019

South Worcestershire Development Plan – The CEO reported that to date there had been no further approaches in relation to the sites identified in the Preferred Options document which might need easements to enable development. He understood the SWDP process had been extended for a year as a result of the pandemic.

6. Winter works

The Conservation Manager went through the paper and answered questions.

There were no plans to lay the hedges on the in-bye land at Castlemorton. The

Conservation Manager confirmed that the work at Swinyard Hill would include

clearing up to the ridgeline, although old quarries could inhibit where work could

safely take place. It was also suggested the Trust should keep on top of the scrub

below Clutters Cave.

The CEO confirmed that volunteer working parties would be re-started shortly, in groups of no more than 6 to comply with Covid-19 regulations.

7. Land Management Plan (LMP) update – Consultation results

The responses from the public consultation had now been compiled, and the summary would be made available on the trustee section of the website.

The draft Part 1 of the LMP had been published to trustees and the following comments were made:

- Page 8 – new summary should include a reference to nature conservation or biodiversity.
- Heather was now much more extensive than it was – “small patches” was no longer an accurate description.
- The section on bats could be expanded as the Trust had learnt more about bats since the last LMP was prepared.
- It was good to see the reference to climate change and wider biodiversity issues, and to set the Malvern Hills LMP in the wider context.

Dr Crisp asked to see the legal advice that lay behind the changes on page 5 and queried the reference to the Trust’s objects.

8. Countryside Stewardship application update

A paper had been circulated. The Conservation Manager understood that Natural England had prepared their final document for submission to the RPA, who would be responsible for making an offer. This was not likely to arrive until the New Year. This delay had been factored into both the planning for the winter scrub work and the temporary arrangements with the graziers.

A summary of the offer would be presented to the Committee in due course.

The Conservation Manager confirmed management work could be started “at risk” after 1 January 2021. If the offer was going to be delayed beyond the end of March (3 months after the Scheme was due to start on 1 January) the Trust would have to decide what alternative arrangements it would make for the graziers during the funding gap. The Conservation Manager thought the offer under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Castlemorton was likely to be around £51/52,000 per year compared with around £64,000 under HLS.

Ms Stace commented that one of the reasons behind the delays might be that MHT had lost their long standing contact officer at Natural England, Katey Steven and she suggested writing to Natural England bemoaning the loss of such an experienced officer. The CEO confirmed that there had been 6 different case officers involved over the last two years and he would write as suggested.

9. Unauthorised mowing of MHT land

The committee considered whether those who had declared a personal interest in this item should remain in the meeting and agreed that they might remain.

The Conservation Manager went through the paper.

There was a discussion with the Warden present about whether the guidelines were a reasonable compromise. The Warden thought it would be difficult to get people who had been mowing for years to change their ways, but easier with new residents. Guidelines would make it easier to approach them. There were no active disputes although quite a bit of mowing was going unchallenged. The Conservation Manager confirmed that there had been complaints about excessive mowing from members of the public and a parish council. Unauthorised mowing was not limited to urban areas. The CEO agreed that all people mowing MHT land should receive a letter confirming that they were mowing land under MHT ownership.

The following points were made:

- There was unnecessary and inappropriate mowing. It was not appropriate to delay action for 12 months in relation to some of the worst offenders.
- The database on easements would provide a useful historical record
- Some of the mowing was to enable vehicles to be parked on Trust land, which was not acceptable.
- Challenging mowing might ruffle some feathers so the response needed to be proportionate.
- It was now more common to see verges uncut and there were campaigns to stop councils cutting on a cycle. The Trust could take advantage of this and the public desire to let wildlife flourish. There was never going to be an easy time to make a change and it would upset some people. The Trust needed to explain why they were taking action. Signs could be used to explain to the public that it was Trust land and the reasons why it was being left uncut.
- There would be an opportunity to use positive publicity in conjunction with other similar campaigns promoting “No Mow” and allowing areas to grow up for wildlife.
- It was important the wardens should have some guidelines
- The wardens would adopt a friendly approach and explain why residents were being asked to make changes.
- Should the Trust’s mowing policy be on the web site?

The CEO suggested bullet 7 of the guidelines should be amended to say that unusual scenarios should be discussed with the Conservation Manager as well as the CEO.

On the proposal of Mr Baldwin, seconded by Mr Atkins, it was **RESOLVED** (with 3 abstentions) to recommend to the Board that the mowing guidelines set out in the paper should be adopted with the CEO’s suggested amendment.

10. Project progress update

Mrs Rees thanked the staff for managing to complete so many projects notwithstanding the restrictions caused by Covid-19.

The CEO went through the paper.

In addition to the items outlined in the report, some additional path works had been carried out at Black Hill. The repairs which had been carried out at British Camp seemed to be holding up well. Monitoring and some repair work had been undertaken at the ponds which were being managed for the eradication of *crassula* at Castlemorton – the plastic sheets were susceptible to damage. The Conservation Manager said in relation to planned hedgelaying, the amount of hedge which would be laid depended on the quotes received and he hoped the contractor would allow some volunteers to attend and teach them some basic hedgelaying techniques.

11. Graziers' report

Mrs Rees thanked Mr Gardner for attending the meeting.

Mr Gardner thanked the Trust for installing water supplies on the in-bye land. This land was being used at present by one of the graziers for tugging. The numbers of visitors this year had been challenging. Considering the number of visitors, stock worrying could have been worse, although Mr Chance had had a few issues. There had also been a drought at the start of the summer which made grazing quite tight. The Jacob sheep on Castlemorton Common had settled in well.

Mr Atkins drew attention to the National Sheep Association campaign "Your dog – your responsibility". Mr Gardner thought that taking up a national campaign might be helpful.

12. Conservation Manager's Report

The Conservation Manager had received some written questions from a trustee. Whenever MHT received queries from the public, the staff endeavoured to reply within a reasonable timescale, particularly in answer to questions.

If the Trust became aware of stock affected by a disease (whether notifiable or not) it would write to all those that may be affected. This had been the case when there was an outbreak of sheep scab on the Hills. It was then up to the registered keepers to undertake any necessary treatment.

The Dangerous Weeds Act and Ragwort Code put the onus on landowners to assess the risk from common ragwort (common ragwort was the only ragwort species to which the regulations applied) and to take action where it was deemed to be high risk. This was generally plants within 50m of sensitive targets. This was included in the Trusts Injurious Weeds Policy. Every year the Trust worked with local landowners to assess the situation. Where there was low risk, the plant was left because of its role in the ecosystem.

The Conservation Manager offered to take board members to see the impact of ash dieback.

Consideration was yet to be given to replacing the building on the in-bye land at Castlemorton – this was likely to be undertaken next year.

A bid had been submitted to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, but this had been heavily over-subscribed.

Mr Rouse said there were certain limits on how much stock could be kept in one place. He thought that should be looked into.

13. Urgent business

There was none.

Mrs Rees thanked the Staff and Mr Gardner.

14. Date of next meeting

3 December 2020

The meeting closed at 9.05pm

Schedule

George Strelczuk

In the past Conservators thanked residents for maintaining the land outside their properties. However, residents in Guarlford Road received a letter dated 3rd January 2019 which in an aggressive manner accused residents of fly tipping and cutting grass which was in breach of bylaws. The grass outside the properties had been mown by residents for many years, and indeed a number have continued to do so.

I would welcome clarification as to the confusion created by the letter in 2019

Letter referred to 3 January 2019

Dear Resident,

Grass cuttings beneath avenue trees

Malvern Hills Trust owns and manages the Hills and Commons including the verges at Guarlford Road. As part of this management we have an arboriculturalist undertake a tree survey every 3 years.

This year's report has highlighted to us the issue of grass cuttings and leaves being dumped at the base of trees along Guarlford Road. This is harming the health of the trees by causing a heating of the soil and a reduction in the amount of nitrogen available. As a key feature of the areas we are very keen to maintain these trees in the best of health.

On the recommendation of the arboriculturalist, we must request that residents refrain from fly-tipping grass cuttings from the Common and other material beneath the trees.

It is a breach of the byelaws to cut grass or to fly-tip any waste on our land.

Malvern Hills Trust staff will be clearing the dumped material from the base of the trees this winter to stop further damage to the trees.

For more information on how you can help care for this special place and to find out more about our tree safety survey and suburban tree management policies please visit our website: www.malvernhills.org.uk/living-in/tree-and-grass-management

Kind regards,

Beck Baker Community and Conservation Officer