

# MHT LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

## PART 2: EVALUATION

### 2.1 Evaluation of Features and Qualities

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

Now that Part 1 has identified what is present on the Malvern Hills Trust holding, this must be followed by an evaluation process in order to recognise the more important features and qualities that should be the focus of management effort. Importance in this context can be seen as having a legal duty attached or being rated by external authorities and/or the public as being of high priority for management effort.

This evaluation focuses on the individual features and qualities that have been recognised in Part 1 (An evaluation of the site as a whole using the Nature Conservation Review criteria (Ratcliffe, 1977) has been undertaken in a previous Malvern Hills Trust management plan (Alma, 1999) and is not repeated here).

Many of the features present have previously been evaluated as part of nationwide or international exercises by external authorities. This has provided the grounds for certain statuses and designations being assigned such as 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' for landscape.

Appendix 1 lists all features and identifies their independently recognised level of importance (internationally important, nationally important, locally important) and any relevant statuses or designations.

#### 2.1.2 Evaluation Summary

This section provides a short summary of the evaluation exercise in Appendix 1.

- Climate of the Malvern Hills – this is not evaluated.
- Landscape  
The landscape and its composite landscape character types within the AONB boundary are legally protected and of international importance.  
  
The landscape and its composite landscape character types outside the AONB boundary are of local importance.
- Geology and geomorphology  
The geological exposures of the Hills are of national importance and legally protected as notified features of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).  
  
Several geological and geomorphological features off the Hills are all of local importance and designated as 'Local Geological Sites'.

- Soils – these are not evaluated.
- Hydrology  
The aquifer and private water supply of the Hills are designated a ‘Groundwater Source Protection Zone’ and ‘Drinking Water Protected Area’ under various legislation and directives. These highlight the local importance of the water, its sensitivities and that action to prevent pollution should be a high priority.
- Flora - habitats  
A huge range of flora is recorded on the Malvern Hills Trust holding. However, Appendix 1 shows that certain vegetation communities are nationally important. The majority of these are notified by the SSSI legislation and there is, therefore, a legal duty to ensure their favourable status. They include; mire, ancient broadleaved woodlands, alder woodlands, meadow and acid grassland communities with their elements of heath.  
  
14 habitats are recognised as national priorities by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (and UK Biodiversity Action Plan). These include; calcareous & acid grasslands, heath, lowland neutral grasslands, bog, wet woodlands, ponds, hedgerows, swamps/mire, wood pasture, streams, rock/scree, broadleaf woodland and traditional orchards.
- Flora – species  
Several individual plants are noted by the SSSI notification. This, together with the Vascular Plant List for England (Stroh et al, 2014.), highlight the following species as of national importance: Annual Knawel, Slender Hare’s Ear, Wood Barley, Large-leaved Lime, Narrow-leaved Bittercress, White Horehound, Narrow-leaved Water Dropwort, Tubular Water Dropwort, Spreading Bellflower, Chamomile, Flat Sedge, Spring Cinquefoil and Small-leaved Sweet Briar.
- Fungi  
The waxcap assemblages are found to be of national importance although not covered by a formal process or legal duty. The status of certain species, such as Berkley’s Earthstar (critically endangered), would be frontrunners for action delivering Malvern Hills Trust’s biodiversity duty. Further work needs to be done on evaluating the full range of fungi present.
- Fauna  
Like the flora, certain species or assemblages are highlighted in the SSSI notifications making them of national importance. Many other species are protected nationally and given priority status in the UK under the NERC Act. For full details see Appendix 1, but these include: specialist woodland birds; birds of open ground; all bat species; all reptiles, toad, great-crested newt; specialist butterflies & moths associated with acid grasslands and ancient woodlands; dormice and polecat.

(Further work needs to be done on evaluating the full range of non-lepidopteran invertebrates present).

- Cultural heritage  
The Malvern Hills Trust holding contains a significant number of heritage assets. Three archaeological features are found to be of national importance and are designated as Scheduled Monuments, which conveys a legal duty to protect them. These heritage assets are; Herefordshire Beacon Camp, the Shire Ditch and the pair of barrows atop Pinnacle Hill. Plus a small part of the scheduled area of Midsummer hillfort.

All other archaeological features, such as the 17<sup>th</sup> century banks and ditches, are of local importance and enrich our understanding of how the landscape has been used in the past.

The majority of recent built heritage is of local importance. This includes the springs/spouts, toposcope, paths, carriageways etc. However, the following features are Grade 2 listed and are therefore of national importance; the stocks, whipping post and animal pound at Link Top, a sewer gas vent at Westminster Bank and St Ann's Well building.

Cultural activities and traditions can also hold local importance and be considered ahead of management. These would include: coppicing, exercising common rights, well dressing etc.

### 2.1.3 Evaluation of Special Qualities

Much about the Hills and Commons that is valued is not a physical entity and cannot appear as a feature above. These are captured here as 'qualities'. This is informed by the 'Your Views' public consultation of 2014. The special qualities are identified and evaluated here:

- Access – the right of the public to access all of Malvern Hills Trust land is made clear in the Malvern Hills Acts along with the Trust's statutory duty to ensure that the land is kept as open spaces for the recreation and enjoyment of the public. The right of access is therefore a legal requirement and thus of national importance. The work on infrastructure that facilitates appropriate access should also be valued in this way.
- Views – this quality of the Hills and other land came out as most popular in the public consultation. The maintenance of open hilltops and hillsides that give panoramic vistas and strategic viewpoints is very important.
- Bucolic and tranquil surroundings that provide a sense of wildness, inspiration and invigoration are a key quality of the area, as are dark night skies.
- A uniquely distinctive profile of the Hills. The latter three qualities are key parts of the visitor experience and have a large overlap with the landscape section and AONB designation.

## 2.2 Ideal Outcomes

In an ideal world, unfettered by finite resources and other limitations, what would Malvern Hills Trust wish for the Malvern Hills and Commons through the deliverance of their Acts and other duties?

- The Malvern Hills and Commons are a stunning, unique and inspiring landscape that is enjoyed and respected by everyone in harmony with rich and flourishing wildlife, natural and cultural heritage.
- That all legal obligations are met.
- That the entire Malvern Hills and Commons landscape is protected and well-managed.
- That suitable, safe access means everyone can use and enjoy the land in a way that does not negatively affect the important features and special qualities of the landscape.
- That all important features and special qualities are in favourable condition managed through traditional and/or sustainable land management practices.
- That the SSSIs have been restored and all achieve 'favourable condition'.
- That education and interpretation enlighten and enthuse a wide variety of stakeholders. This in turn helps protect the landscape.
- That science-based monitoring and research enhances our understanding and informs management.
- That working in partnership with nearby landowners/managers achieves great gains for the wider region and all in it.
- That adaptation to our changing world is possible whilst maintaining Malvern's special character. The impact of global climate change is minimised through positive action.

In the real world these ideal outcomes will be modified by all kinds of factors. These factors are identified in 2.3.

Realistic aims and objectives are then presented in Part 3.

## 2.3 Factors

The Hills, Commons and their features do not exist in isolation. They are affected by a wide range of local, regional and even global trends and influences, from financial cuts to atmospheric pollution. It is vital to understand the main factors that influence our land and affect what Malvern Hills Trust can realistically achieve in contrast to the ideal.

### 2.3.1 Identification of Factors

Factors can be defined as *‘anything that has the potential to influence or change a feature, or to affect the way in which a feature is managed. These influences may exist, or have existed, at any time. They can be positive, negative or both’* (Alexander, 2008). Constraints are included here as a form of factor.

A list of relevant factors for the Hills and Commons has been identified here:

On-site human factors:	Livestock grazing
	Disturbance from recreation, including dogs
	Erosion from recreation
	Other issues from recreation such as digging by metal detectorists
	Past land use
	Access
	Fire
	Highways and traffic
	Management – both inappropriate and appropriate
	Pollution
	Fly-tipping / litter / dumping of garden waste
	Encroachment
	Essential works – utility companies digging for pipes etc
	Culture / Archaeology
	Vandalism
	Vehicles – parking and driving on Malvern Hills Trust land
	Species introductions
	Land ownership and tenure
	Other features (as recognised in Part 1)
	Development
Disease / pests e.g. from livestock, pets, imported plants	
Off-site human factors:	Malvern Hills Trust resources, knowledge/skills and finance
	Wider economy
	Laws – health & safety etc (see 1.2 Setting)
	Climate change
	Stakeholders
	Policies – of Malvern Hills Trust and other relevant organisations

	Pollution, including atmospheric deposition
	Planning applications
	Tourism
	Designations – AONB, SSSI etc (see 1.2 Setting)
	Agricultural practices
	Forestry practices
	Minerals and Waste policy
	Species introductions
	Disease / health issues (e.g. tree diseases)
	Development
On-site natural factors:	Grazing – deer, rabbits etc
	Vegetation succession
	Geological processes
	Hydrology / fluvial processes – springs, flooding, waterlogging etc
	Fire
	Ecological processes – predation, decomposition etc
	Terrain
	Other features
Off-site natural factors:	Weather and climate
	Climate change
	Disease / pests
	Colonisation
	Natural processes – geological, hydrological, ecological etc

### 2.3.2 What are the main effects that these factors and constraints could have?

The list above highlights the main factors and constraints readily identified. It is not exhaustive. A variety of topics are covered and many of these are related to each other. It can be seen that some of the factors have major impacts upon our features and qualities and others have only minimal or localised effect. The major factors (in green) and their influence upon Malvern Hills Trust land are discussed here:

- Livestock grazing – having animals eating vegetation will slow or arrest vegetation succession and maintain open habitats especially grasslands and wood pastures. Livestock grazing by commoners has happened on the Hills and Commons for hundreds of years. However, the amount of livestock grazing has varied through time but has decreased significantly since World War Two. An increase in traffic and an increase in dogs causing loss of animals, together with social changes and changes in wider farm economics are oft-quoted reasons for the declines. Old Hills for example was grazed heavily by local commoners with a variety of different animals until the unfenced B4211 became busy and the number of dog attacks on livestock rose. Hefted flocks once grazed hills such as Midsummer without the need for fencing. However, this cultural tradition of hefting has all but died out now. The majority of Malvern Hills Trust land is not secure, meaning that the perimeter

boundaries are not complete (leaky) and that no other measures are in place to stop livestock from wandering off the commons and into properties, villages and beyond. This results in traffic incidents, damage to private property and time spent returning animals to the commons.

Issues that can arise from grazing include localised enrichment through dunging, erosion, overgrazing, poor siting of fencing and water troughs and possible conflict with people and dogs. Livestock grazing provides an essential management tool delivering work year-round. Well-grazed swards are excellent for maintaining the condition and visibility of archaeological features. Livestock form a characteristic element of the area and many people enjoy seeing the animals. For certain sites, such as those with steep terrain, livestock are the only management option.

Grazing also takes place by wild animals, this can be positive, such as the grazing of acid grasslands by rabbits, or negative such as the browsing of coppice stools by deer.

- The access arrangements mean that people can be anywhere at any time on Malvern Hills Trust. Large numbers of visitors can bring erosion, this is particularly noticeable on the ridge of the Hills and Herefordshire Beacon Camp. These worst affected areas are an eyesore, a safety hazard and are eroding away irreplaceable archaeology and reducing/fragmenting valuable habitats. Mountain biking in the wrong place can cause intense damage especially to heritage assets such as the Shire Ditch.

Increasing numbers of visitors and their dogs can also disturb wildlife especially adders and ground-nesting birds that can, following repeated flushes from their nest, desert. Skylarks, lapwing, tree pipits and meadow pipits are most at risk.

A wide range of other effects come with visitors including litter/flytipping, dog mess, vandalism, digging, parking and driving on the commons – all of which have a negative effect. However, there are visitors who advocate sensible behaviour to others and volunteers who give their own time to improve our Hills and Commons.

Visitor numbers are increasing and so too are resultant damaging effects.

- Past land uses have, coupled with natural processes, created the landscape and has an effect upon future management. The historic coppicing and quarrying of Park Wood for example created a light and species-rich wood – one worth preserving today.
- By far the most dramatic disease / pest to influence the estate in recent times is the imported, chronic tree disease Ash Dieback *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*. Predicted to kill 65 % of the UK's Ash stocks, this disease is now having a significant impact on the Hills and Commons whose woodlands and treescapes can be comprised of up two thirds Ash.
- Fire has occurred as a management tool, through accident and from natural causes. The effect is the burning of vegetation, altering of soils and, in the case of

uncontrolled fires, a danger to life (human, livestock and wildlife). The resultant bare ground is colonised by pioneer plants such as birch and foxglove – a radical change to flora can happen.

- **Practical management (both appropriate and inappropriate)** influences the features and qualities today and in the future. Management is largely beneficial (mowing paths, picking litter, rolling bracken, making dangerous trees safe) although there are conflicts. What is considered ‘appropriate’ may of course change through time, for example the planting of quarry exposures with non-native trees is now seen as inappropriate. The management delivered by Malvern Hills Trust is partly determined by **terrain**, with the steeper and more uneven ground making the use of certain machinery impractical such as mowing with tractors. The steepness of much of the Hills makes traditional forms of woodland management and habitat restoration very tricky and uneconomical, made even harder by a lack of access for modern machinery. Land management is also carried out by other parties, utility companies for example undertake **essential works** sometimes without knowledge of the features and causing damage.
- **Pollution** events, both on Malvern Hills Trust land and nearby, can be a threat. Certain substances can poison or even kill life. Surface water and groundwater are particularly sensitive to these events. Aerial pollution is also a factor, specifically nitrogen deposition which enriches the soil favouring coarser, common vegetation communities.
- **Encroachment** - this is land theft and has been an issue for hundreds of years. Clearly management cannot be brought about if the ownership, and therefore the control of the land, is lost from Malvern Hills Trust to another party.
- **Species introductions** – at best these are benign, but most have a negative impact such as bringing plant diseases or outcompeting native flora and fauna. Pheasants for example predate on native invertebrates and reptiles. Rhododendron alters the soils, vegetation, landscape character and can carry *Phytophthora* disease which threatens other trees.
- The facts relating to **land ownership and tenure** could have a bearing on our features, see 1.1.3. Most notable are the legal rights of others to exercise forms of land management, such as grazing, independently of Malvern Hills Trust.
- **Malvern Hills Trust** as land owner and the principle land manager has a significant effect upon the land. The type and extent are shaped by the **Trust’s resources, skills, finance, laws and policies**. A large decrease in finance for example could mean rationalisation of effort towards certain features. **Laws and policy** too can bring change. But Malvern Hills Trust are of course not the only body able to influence the site; **stakeholders** do too. Such a large, complex, popular and multi-designated land holding has a large range of stakeholders and their activities bring influence. External authorities have placed **designations** on much of the holding but especially on the Hills (as detailed in Part 1). Designations can mean the land



has to be managed for certain outcomes and management is somewhat pre-determined meaning Malvern Hills Trust may only have limited strategic control. Much of the land is also held in ten-year management agreements which to an extent dictate our land management for the agreement's duration.

Whilst this Management Plan has collated as much information as possible, it is important to acknowledge that as our knowledge and understanding of the land changes so may our management. With a limit to our knowledge, it is important to use the Precautionary Principle.

- The most important factor is **vegetation succession** – this is the natural development of the vegetation over time. In a wholly natural scenario, succession would be kept in check by the grazing of large mammals that are no longer extant in the UK such as Tarpan (wild horse) and Auroch (wild cow). However, left alone a lawn will turn into tall herbs and grass, then bramble, with shrubs and tree saplings emerging and taking over eventually turning into woodland. As a cultural landscape the Hills and Commons have a long history with humans arresting vegetation succession chiefly through cutting and livestock grazing. Many of today's important features (e.g. acid grasslands) and special qualities (e.g. views) are maintained through halting succession often through mowing and grazing. Succession is the single biggest factor and much of the landscape has already been radically changed by it in recent times.
- **Geological processes**, such as soil creep, are effecting the land all the time. Typically they operate over a very long timescale. But the archaeological features and Hills themselves are slowly being worn down.
- **Features** that are listed here can themselves be a factor influencing other features. Management decisions need to be careful to find the right course of action where there is conflict between two or more features. Their relative importance (as identified in Appendix 1) will be considered.

As a last resort, much conservation work uses the **Sandford Principle**; this states that *'If there is a conflict between protecting the environment and people enjoying the environment, that can't be resolved by management, then protecting the environment is more important'* (National Parks UK, 2016).

- Global climate change is altering our weather, making it less predictable, warmer and stormier with more extremes of temperature, longer spells of drought and heavy rainfall events. This has multiple implications for the features of the Hills and Commons and also for Malvern Hills Trust's practical work. Stormy weather damages trees, causes flash floods and washes out paths. Warmer weather increases drought events adding further pressure to wildlife. Fire risk is increased and the growing season is lengthened favouring Bracken and reducing our window of practical management.

Climate change may also allow new species to colonise which may bring new conservation requirements.

Part 2 has evaluated the features and qualities, identified Malvern Hills Trust's ideal land management objectives and discussed the factors that are relevant. This sets up Part 3 which moves away from theory and outlines our actual objectives and the work that must be done.

## References

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**END OF PART 2**