

Malvern Hills Trust
Land Management Committee
By Video/telephone conference

Thursday 8 April 2021 7.00pm

Present: Mr C Atkins, Mr D Baldwin, Dr S Braim, Dr G Crisp, Mr M Davies (non-voting), Mr R Fowler, Mrs H I'Anson, Mrs C Palmer, Dr T Parsons, Mrs G Rees (Chair), Mr C Rouse, Ms H Stace, Mr T Yapp.

In attendance: Conservation Manager, Community and Conservation Officer, Secretary to the Board.

Mrs Rees welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Ms M Alexander, Dr E Chowns.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mrs Rees declared an interest in item 8 on the agenda.

Mr Atkins declared an interest in item 8 as he lived close by.

Mr Rouse had grazing rights over MHT land.

3. Chairman's Communications

There was a second training session on trustees' responsibilities as employers on 28 April, and a session on equality and diversity on 5 May 2021.

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Matters Arising from previous meetings

Tree works update - the Community and Conservation Officer said that the tree safety work for the 2020/21 season had been completed.

The Conservation Manager had prepared a paper for the Tree Safety Working Group and a meeting had been arranged for early May.

Brockhill Road - a draft deed of easement was in the process of being agreed.

Stowe Lane – There had been further discussions with the Land Agent.

6. To approve updated Model Aircraft and Drone Policy

The Government Guidelines on drones had been updated, and the policy had been amended to reflect this. The policy had also been slightly changed to make it clearer that hobby flights were not permitted.

On the proposal of Mrs I'Anson, seconded by Dr Crisp it was **RESOLVED** (with three abstentions) to recommend that the Board adopt the revised policy.

7. Update on mountain biking

There had been an incident where someone had placed barbed wire across a path on the Hills. This was thought to be related to mountain biking. The police attended and wire was removed.

There had been an expansion of activity on Link Common. Some of the jumps had been removed and the staff engaged with the youths who were making them to try to minimise further damage and encourage them to respect and look after that part of the common. Mr Parsons commented that cyclists should not be spoiling other people's enjoyment of the Hills and that he had also spoken to a cyclist who said that no one wanted to ride on the permitted paths.

The Community and Conservation Officer said that all types of cyclists came to the Hills and the permitted paths were important. The closure of some mountain biking sites during lockdown had led to riders looking for alternative more challenging cycling, but hopefully this pressure would ease once the other sites reopened. Mrs Stace said there seemed to be increasing numbers of adventurous trails on the West side of the Hills and it was a matter which was causing annoyance and was consistently being raised with her. There seemed to be more cyclists now as people were acquiring and using electric bikes on the Hills.

The CEO said that the construction of trails and jumps was a consistent problem. The Community and Conservation Officer said that certain classes of electric bikes were permitted on bridleways. The Secretary to the Board confirmed that in law, cyclist should give way to other users on a bridleway. The Conservation Manager confirmed in answer to a question that any complaints received about mountain biking on Midsummer Hill were passed on to the National Trust.

8. Easements The High Ground Chandlers Cross

Dr Braim took the chair.

The CEO introduced the paper. The applicants, the owner of The High Ground, Chandlers Cross, had requested permission to install a hard surface along the tyre tracks on the steepest section of their easement. Permission for hard surfacing had been granted elsewhere by the Trust on comparable gradients.

- The proposal would stop further erosion of the track by vehicles
- Care needed to be taken to avoid possible erosion caused by runoff from the hard surface
- Could the material which was dig out be used to improve the other sections of track?

On the proposal of Dr Braim, seconded by Mr Baldwin it was **RESOLVED** (with two abstentions) that the Committee recommend to Board that permission be granted for the hard surfacing of 30 metres of the wheelings of this easement, subject to the following conditions:

1. The use of concrete of a natural grey colour. (The use of blocks not approved)
2. The permitted maximum dimensions of the concrete be limited to 2 parallel 600mm wide wheelings with a central gap of 1300mm, for a total length not exceeding 30m.

3. The concrete could either be:
 - a) combed horizontally with an outside angle to provide traction and throw water to the outside of the track, (not the centre) or
 - b) surfaced with a stone mix in accordance with the Trust's normal specification for easements, to provide traction and a colour/visual appearance similar to normal lose stone tracks.
4. The applicant must obtain any consent required under the Commons Act

9. Update on Stewardship agreements

Mrs Rees took the Chair.

The Conservation Manager confirmed that after a long delay two offers of Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements had been received.

Southern Hills

There had been a few minor reductions, but the grant would support works that the Trust needed to carry out. It had already been accepted. The agreement was for 10 years from 1 January 2021. Eastnor Estate were a key party to the arrangements and had been very supportive throughout. Differences between CS and the previous HLS scheme were that it was now an agreement with the Rural Payments Agency and the scheme was more complex and demanded more record keeping and box ticking. New rules meant certain areas which had been part of the previous scheme were excluded. The agreement would bring in just under £200,000 (approximately 95 % of which would be spent by the Trust, with some of the capital works being undertaken by the Eastnor Estate). The licence for grazing had been advertised.

A site visit would be arranged for the committee in due course.

Castlemorton

The offer closely resembled the application which had been made and was to run for 10 years. One of the new rules was that the whole common land unit had to be included in the application and all landowners and active commoners had to be parties to the agreement (9 people). A great deal of work had been involved in trying to reach agreement and there were still some issues which had to be resolved before the agreement could be signed. The value of the offer was £521,000 (75 % of which was being paid for options for managing the grassland) over a 10 year period. The "Native breed at risk" payments which were part of the HLS scheme were no longer available. The opportunity to carry out any capital works in early 2021 had been lost because of the late arrival of the offer. The committee thanked the Conservation Manager for all the work he had carried out and congratulated him on having achieved the 2 offers.

10. Project progress update

The CEO went through the paper and gave updates:

- The seating in the Community Woodland had now been installed.
- The work on the British Camp sewerage system would have to be re-tendered. The CEO had explored with Severn Trent the possibility of

connecting to the public sewer but had not had a promising response. Making a private connection across third party land was not feasible. The Conservation Manager said that the ponds on Castlemorton Common would be checked this spring. Covering the ponds to try to eradicate *crassula* was an experimental treatment and the coverings might need to remain in place for a further year. Mrs Rees thanked the staff for completing all the projects during a difficult year.

11. Graziers' report

The Conservation Manager reported on behalf of Mr Gardner. The graziers were hoping that the weather would warm up in order to promote grass growth. Some of the smaller cattle had wintered out. Mr Gardner was running a trial on eastern Swinyard Hill with cattle penned in to try to break up some of the bracken and bramble. The graziers were anticipating a tricky year with high visitor numbers and dog walkers.

12. Conservation Manager's Report

The Conservation Manager was planning to put the Land Management Plan 2021 - 26 on the website by the end of the month. Funding opportunities had been found for 2 of the projects in the plan (pond work and new hedge planting). He was reviewing the mowing schedule with the Operations Manager. The newly planted hedges and trees had been watered.

13. Date of next meeting

8 July 2021

14. Urgent business

There was a confidential item.

15. Confidential item

On the proposal of Dr Braim , seconded by Mrs Palmer, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to exclude the public for discussion of item 16 on the agenda and the urgent business item 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 (commercially sensitive and a legal matter).

CONFIDENTIAL

Minutes released

16. Land available to purchase

The CEO went through the paper. The Trust had been given the option of purchasing a parcel of land at Castlemorton. The Conservation Manager and CEO had scored the site against the criteria set out in the Land Acquisition Policy. It ranked as relatively low priority. The site had also been offered to another

conservation organisation and the CEO understood that organisation had indicated that they wished to purchase it. The site would therefore be safeguarded.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm