



## Report of the Recreation Advisory Panel

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021

**Present:** Beck Baker (Community and Conservation Officer), Jonathan Bills (Conservation Manager), Steve Braim (Chair), John Cuthbertson, Richard Davies, Ian Wells.

### 1. Welcome, introductions and appointment of Chair (annual)

Steve Braim was appointed chair. CCO explained that there had been some changes to the members since the last meeting in 2019:

- Iris Ellis had stepped down as the horse-riding representative and the Malvern Hills Riding Club had been approached for a new member.
- Dorothy Weet (Malvern District Dog Training Club) joined the panel as a dog walking representative following Chris Greensmith's departure.
- Jon Pickering had stepped down from representing the joggers and Warwick Taylor (Malvern Joggers) would be joining the panel.
- Alison Uren had moved out of the area and Ian Wells would now be representing the Malvern Bird Group.
- Trustees on the panel were now David Baldwin, Mick Davies, Steve Braim, Mark Dyde.

### 2. Apologies for absence

Mick Davies, Mark Dyde, Keith Evans, Steve Hannon, Robin Marling, Simon Smith, Rich Vale (warden), Dorothy Weet

### 3. Matters arising from the report of the meeting held on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019, and written reports from March 2020, and September 2021.

The CCO welcomed the members of the Panel to the meeting and provided the following updates from the previous meetings and reports:

- Ash dieback disease – The disease has spread across the UK and is affecting ash trees on the Hills and Commons. Infections cause the trees to become brittle and at risk of failing and is likely to lead to the loss of 60-80% of ash trees. The Trust has already begun to remove infected trees which pose a high risk near to properties and highways. Around 40 trees were removed from Earnslaw car park, Gardiner's car park and the Wells Road. More trees are due to be removed this winter including at Foley Terrace.
- Public events and activities – Following the cancellation of most public events in 2020 and reduced activities in 2021, there has been an increase in the number of applications for public events on Trust land to more

normal levels. The Trust will also restart a small programme of public events but with a focus on drop-in sessions to reach new visitors.

- Community Woodland path works – Following the installation of path improvements in the Community Woodland, Townsend Way, additional surface dressing is being carried out to further improve access. Interpretation boards and benches will be placed in the woodland this spring.
- New car park meters – New meters have been working well with card payment option being very popular. Data from the car park meters is being collected and will be used to evidence any decisions made relating to pay and display.
- Parking passes – As with last year, parking passes will expire on the 31<sup>st</sup> May (not March) and will be available to renew from the end of April.

#### **4. Warden updates**

There was no update as a warden was unable to attend the meeting.

#### **5. Tree planting projects**

MHT had been successful in applying for two tree planting grants to increase the numbers of trees on Trust land.

A Farming in Protected Landscapes grant of £11,200 from Defra has funded new hedges and trees in fields near to Upper Colwall. The hedges will provide homes and corridors for wildlife as well as helping to combat climate change. These grants are available to land managers in protected landscapes including within the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The second grant of £23,448 from the Forestry Commission will fund the planting of over 40 standard trees this winter in Sherrards Green and Poolbrook and the restoration of a neglected plum orchard near Malvern Common. Planting will be done by staff, volunteers and pupils from the Chase School.

Update following this meeting – Due to the locations of underground utilities some planting locations have changed or been removed from the application and the grant claimed will be £20,936.

#### **6. Trail Hunting decision**

At the November meeting of the Board, the Trustees voted to suspend the licensing of trail hunting activities on MHT land following breaches of Trust byelaws and trail hunting policy over the last 3 years. More information about the decision can be found in the papers for this meeting on the website (11<sup>th</sup> November 2021).

## 7. Land Management Plan 2021-2026

In the summer of 2020 members of the panel were invited to take part in a consultation on the new Land Management Plan 2021-2026. The plan was adopted in March 2021 and guides our work over the next 5 years. Projects within the plan that relate to access include:

1) Identification markers – Project to install identification markers on smaller sites or discrete areas owned and cared for by the Trust. Covid-19 means that these areas have been visited more frequently as people avoid crowded areas.

2) Repair the ridgeline – Increased pressure and higher visitor numbers during Covid-19 has eroded the ridgeline and the rare habitats. Any repairs to the ridgeline will be carefully considered and the SSSI, archaeology and public access will all be taken into account when planning work.

3) Gullet Quarry – Some members of the public are continuing to access the quarry despite efforts from the police and wardens and additional fencing to stop access for safety reasons. The LMP includes a proposal to review the methods being used at Gullet Quarry and to consider if other techniques such as adding in-water vegetation might be more effective. Any such work would have to be with RoSPA's approval. Plans are to plant up the edges with willow and floating vegetation to decrease the attractiveness of the water.

Comments from panel members included:

- Concerns swimmers would get trapped in floating vegetation.
- Would a wild swimmer representative be appropriate for the panel
- Seek advice on landowner liability relating to wild swimming
- Discussions should be kept open on different approaches
- Seek opinions from RoSPA with regard to additional interventions
- Recommended researching/contacting Visitor Safety in the Outdoors  
<https://www.visitorsafety.group/>

4) Visitor spread and numbers – Covid-19 brought a large number of returning and new visitors to the Malvern Hills. This increased pressures on all parts of the estate including some locations that were previously little visited. The Trust has commissioned, in part, a visitor survey and report of visitor patterns, behaviours and pressures that will be released later this year.

The Trust has not seen visitor numbers on the Hills as high as seen recently and the CM asked for the help of panel members to respond to this and the impacts.

Panel members were invited to assist with this project and are invited to provide the following:

**Action** – Provide locations for paths in need of repair. This includes both standard maintenance and areas that may have deteriorated in the last 12-18 months due to increased visitor numbers. Suggestions will be prioritised and added to the work list.

J. Cuthbertson suggested the path between Pink Cottage and Hangman's Hill needed repair as access on mobility scooters was now almost impassable.

**Action** – Consider how increasing visitor numbers and pressures may or may not be affecting your group's activities. Talk to members of your groups and gather

opinions on what the Trust should do. Suggestions will form part of the discussion at the next panel meeting in March.

Members should email their contributions to Beck [beck@malvern hills.org.uk](mailto:beck@malvern hills.org.uk).

## **8. Conservation Manager update**

Tree safety – Work is due to begin on the annual tree safety programme around the Hills and Commons. Trees identified in the inspection will be managed for safety reasons and areas where work will take place include Foley Terrace, West Malvern Road and Westminster Road.

Maintaining open habitats – Staff, contractors and volunteers (including Malvern Hang Gliding Club) will be carrying out work through this winter to remove and thin trees and scrub.

Action – MHT to send map to of planned scrub work to R Davies to assist with the Harlequin Orienteering Club maps.

## **9. Round the table updates**

J. Cuthbertson (Disabled Ramblers) – The Disabled Ramblers held 2 successful week rambles on the Malvern Hills and Commons in October 2021. Rambles with around 60 people over the two weeks took place from North Hill to Chase End Hill. The path maintenance on De Walden Drive at North Hill have improved access for the Trampers. There are many routes for the Ramblers to take and they like the challenge.

Access at the Community Woodland is suitable for Trampers but could be improved for smaller scooters. The bridges may also need alteration to make them more accessible.

R. Davies (Harlequin Orienteering Club and Malvern Hash House Harriers) – Orienteering events have restarted following lockdown and measures have been taken to minimise risk of Covid-19 including online registration to dissuade gathering. Recent activities include the West Midlands League event in November on the Worcestershire Beacon and Club Championships on Castlemorton Common in December. A night event will be going ahead on the Northern Hills in January.

I. Wells (Malvern Bird Group) – The bird group has been active throughout the pandemic and sharing sightings amongst the group has helped those unable to get out or those who can't access the Hills and Commons anymore. Increased pressure is negative for wildlife.

## **10. Any other business**

None to report.

## **11. Date of next meeting**

30<sup>th</sup> March 6pm. Outdoor venue to be confirmed.