

Malvern Hills Trust
Land Management Committee
Lyttelton Well, Church Street, Malvern
Thursday 13 October 2022 7.00pm

Present: Mr C Atkins, Mr D Baldwin, Dr S Braim (Chair), Mr P Clayburn, Mr M Davies (non-voting), Mr R Fowler, Mrs C Palmer (left the meeting at 9pm during agenda item 11), Dr T Parsons, Mr C Rouse, Mrs M Turner.

In attendance: Conservation Manager, Secretary to the Board, Operations Manager, CEO, Mr M Gardner.

Dr Braim welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Ms H Stace.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mr Rouse - grazing rights over MHT land.

3. Chairman's Communications

Dr Chowns had resigned as a trustee

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Matters Arising from previous meetings

There were none.

6. Winter Works programme 2022/23

The Conservation Manager introduced the paper and illustrated the work which had been carried out with a number of photographs. Board members made some suggestions for additional areas which might merit clearance and it was also suggested that the images shown could usefully form the basis of a record over time to illustrate the impact of the work which the Trust was carrying out.

7. Visitor number and erosion- -consultant reports (LMP project 35)

The Conservation Manager explained that a number of the SSSI units on the Hills were classed as in unfavourable condition because of the visitor pressure. Two research projects had been commissioned to look at erosion on the Hills and how to tackle it. The papers setting out the results were before the committee. The first project was to assess the degree of erosion and the coverage of acid grassland on the ridgeline. Only 8% of the ridge had little or no erosion, and only 2% of the grassland was assessed as completely intact. The second project looked at methods which could be used to stem the erosion.

The Trust had undertaken a trial on Summer Hill, using low steps to hold together path surface and this was broadly in line with the conclusions in the second report. A proposed alternative was to put in obstacles, vegetation and signage to persuade and steer people to use different, less sensitive routes.

Surface treatment for any bridleways would have to be assessed jointly with the Worcestershire Countryside Service.

The Conservation Manager said that further consideration was required about how to take matters forward. This would include working with partner organisations, selecting priority areas and working out the most appropriate methods to apply there. It was not anticipated that major work would be undertaken this financial year. The budget for 2022/23 and plans for next year included some path works, but alternative sources of funding were being sought to undertake major remedial work to the ridgeline, which would be a long term project. A period to inform the public about the problem of erosion and to try to secure their buy-in to any solutions would be helpful. Key to the success of this process was to ensure the public understood why the area was special and what the management process was. It was suggested that it might be helpful to focus on loss of habitat rather than erosion

8. Vehicle deterrents

The Conservation Manager introduced the paper, and provided photographs of examples of damage caused by vehicles driving on the Trust's land. Obstacles such as stones, posts and logs were already being used to prevent this. The Trust was running out of suitable sized stone. Stobs were used in other protected landscapes and this paper was primarily directed to consideration of this option as another tool for the Trust to use. The CEO said that the intention was to use a uniform style of post across the estate.

Committee members asked about the life of timber in the ground. Mr Gardner said that Eastnor Estate were trialling the use of untreated chestnut posts. There was agreement that it was appropriate to use stobs but there followed a discussion about whether any limitation should be imposed on the discretion of the staff in relation to the length of a run of stobs. A maximum of 200m of stobs was permitted *on any one common land unit* before permission was required under the Commons Act from the Secretary of State. The Conservation Manager said that a whole-common plan would be needed and anything other than small scale use would require local consultation. Mr Gardner had raised the matter with Castlemorton Common Association, who were happy in principle with the use of stobs, but large scale use would merit consultation, particularly in relation to issues such as access for the graziers.

There was a discussion about the use of electric bikes on MHT land. It was felt that there were now a lot more bikes on the Hills because people who were not previously able to cycle up the Hills now could. It was lawful to use an electric bike where a pedal cycle could be used provided they generated less than 250 watts of

power and the electrical assistance cut out at speeds of greater than 15mph¹. The Committee asked for this to be an agenda item at a future meeting.

9. Black Hill carpark

The CEO went through the paper. This car park could get very busy. The parking layout was unregulated and there had been issues in the past with cars blocking the easement through the car park, the disabled spaces and access for emergency vehicles.

There were two proposals:

(a) to make better use of the space by squaring off the shape of the existing parking area and creating parking bays and

(b) providing some additional parking along the side of the access track.

Both options would require planning permission, consultation with local residents and the AONB. It would be less costly to apply for planning permission for both proposals at the same time. The CEO would speak to the planning officers.

One of the problems with the existing loose stone surface was how to mark out bays. The CEO's preferred option was to set marker stones in the surface.

The additional parking alongside the access track could be created using loose stone or using a plastic grid system. The grid system would hopefully have a softer visual effect although it was acknowledged that under heavy use, the system was not always very successful.

On the proposal of Dr Braim, seconded by Mrs Palmer it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend to the Board that the car park at Black Hill be slightly extended in accordance with the diagram contained in Paper D and that parking bays should be marked out.

It was agreed that more work was required on proposal (b).

10. Improvement to agricultural buildings Colwall Lands

The Conservation Manager introduced the paper. There were 2 matters to consider – groundworks and the creation of another permanent building on site. Only one of the quotes obtained thus far itemised the groundworks separately to the cost of building. The Conservation Manager would obtain alternative quotes for the groundworks. The CEO clarified that, in the "Financial context" section of the paper, the balance which was forecast for the Parliamentary Fund at the year end was the figure *after* the other work itemised in the paper had been carried out. Comments made included:

- It wasn't strictly necessary to lamb the sheep
- Should the rent be increased to reflect landlord's improvements? The Conservation Manager explained that Colwall Lands was provided as a

¹ There is also a requirement for the bike to have pedals that can be used to propel it.

facility as an integral part of the grazing licence for the Northern Hills and was not licenced to the grazier as a separate unit.

- It might be better not to carry out the work piecemeal but to use the same contractor to carry out all the work.
- The site needed to be fit for purpose and the groundworks were overdue.

The Conservation Manager proposed delaying a decision on the building until January.

On the proposal of Mrs Turner, seconded by Mr Fowler it was **RESOLVED** (with one vote against) to recommend that the Board authorise expenditure of up to £7,900 to undertake the groundworks at Colwall Lands:

- a) add a stone surface to form a track between the hardstanding and the field/lambing shed
- b) Create a concrete hardstanding with associated drainage and a small retaining wall to the northern entrance to the existing barn.

11. Application to surface easement Clouds End

No further details of the specification for the surface and drainage had been received. The officers had visited the site and on balance were of the view that it was appropriate to hard surface the track in some form, particularly the lower portion in order to stop stone washing down onto the road. The CEO hoped to speak to the contractor to gain a better understanding of the preferred options. Points raised were:

- There was general agreement that the current construction of this track was not satisfactory.
- It was important to get the drainage right.
- Did the hard surface need to go all the way up the track?
- It was an urban area.
- Would wheelings be appropriate? They were less obtrusive, but one of the problems with this track was the turning area at the bottom by the road and how to finish the wheelings when they met the turning area.
- A possible problem with wheelings was rainwater run off scouring the stone out in between. The contractor had suggested that another potential issue with wheelings was that thin widths of tarmac were more likely to break up.
- If an Aco drainage system was used. that also required stability and any loose stone might wash down and block the drain.
- Aesthetically the access should not look like a manicured urban drive – it needed to be in keeping with the location.

On the proposal of Dr Braim seconded by Mr Clayburn it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend to the Board that they resolve that a non standard surface treatment is appropriate for this easement and that approval of the detailed specification for the surfacing and drainage should be delegated to the CEO.

12. Project progress update

The work on the Donkey Shed should be finished in the next two weeks. Delivery of the railings was still awaited.

Costings were being obtained for the work on the Lower Shed.

Mr Rouse suggested that some further work was required to the ponds at Castlemorton. The Conservation Manager said that quotes were being sought.

13. Land Acquisition

Board members were aware that the land kindly given to the Trust by the late Mrs Sealy had now been transferred. The Conservation Manager would be putting together a paper for a future meeting detailing the proposed management of the new pieces of land.

14. Ash dieback

The survey this year had found 98 trees which needed to be dealt with. About 3/4 of the work needed to be carried out by contractors, and the rest could be carried out by the staff. Expenditure on ash dieback this year would be around £25,000.

15. Graziers' report

The new Countryside Stewardship agreement for Castlemorton Common was working well so far. The major grazer in Castlemorton had said that he would be retiring at the year end. Consideration would have to be given to how to fill the gap which this would leave. The drought had had a major effect on the grass available and the graziers, especially on the north and central Hills, had spent a lot of time hauling water. There remained the question of whether forage levels would be adequate through the winter. There had been several sheep worrying incidents.

16. Conservation Manager's Report

The Trust had applied for a small grant for woodland improvement work by All Saints Church at Malvern Wells. The school there had approached the Trust to ask to develop a Forest School site within the wood, and the Trust would be working with them to develop this.

Sadly the Grayling butterflies had been declining over many years and were probably now functionally extinct despite the hard work carried out on habitat maintenance by many groups.

It appeared that the ELMS (Environmental Land Management Scheme) was in jeopardy as a result of planned changes from Liz Truss' Government. There had been a backlash from a number of environmental organisations. If the Scheme was dropped it would threaten the future of the Trust's conservation grazing.

17. Operations Managers Report

The Field Staff were involved in tree planting at the start of the year. The trees had survived very well, with the help of a lot of watering in the dry weather. The new hedges on Colwall Lands had also done remarkably well. Over the summer the usual grass management work had been carried out. Bracken had been mown instead of rolled this year. This had stirred up the bracken litter and allowed the grass to develop. It had also helped to control bramble. The staff had created a

new base for the water trough at Guarlford. Training had been undertaken by a number of staff.

There was a discussion on bracken control.

Mrs Turner said the new trees had been greatly appreciated and she asked if a meeting could be organised between trustees and field staff.

18. Wardens' report

There was no report.

19. Urgent business

There was none.

20. Date of next meeting

Dr Braim thanked the staff.

Next meeting: 1 December 2022 (plus possible outdoor visits)

The meeting closed at 9.35pm