

Malvern Hills Trust

Land Management Committee

The Gryphon Room, Malvern College, Thirlstane Road, Malvern WR14 3PL

Thursday 1 December 2022 at 7:00 pm

Present: Mr C Atkins, Mr D Baldwin, Mr R Bartholomew, Dr S Braim (Chair), Mr P Clayburn, Mr M Davies (non-voting), Mrs C Palmer, Dr T Parsons, Mr C Rouse, Mrs M Turner.

In attendance: Conservation Manager, Secretary to the Board, Operations Manager (left after item 11), CEO, 3 Wardens (left after item 7), Mr D Watkins, 1 member of the public.

Dr Braim welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mr Atkins took the Chair.

1. Election of Chair

There were 2 nominations, Dr Braim and Mr Rouse. Mr Baldwin proposed a paper ballot and the majority of committee members were in favour. Dr Braim was elected and took the chair.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

There were 2 nominations, Mr Rouse and Mr Bartholomew. Mr Rouse was elected Vice-Chair.

3. Apologies for Absence

Mr J Michael, Ms H Stace, Mr M Gardener.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

5. Chairman's Communications

- Trustee Workshop on the revision of South Worcestershire Development Plan, by Zoom 6 December 2022.
- Finance Administration and Resources Committee meeting on 8 December 2022.
- There would be a carol concert at Little Malvern Priory on Friday 16 December with a collection for the MHT Tree Replacement Fund.

6. Public Comments

There were none.

7. Warden's report

Three of the wardens were in attendance and Richard Vale gave a presentation on the work of warden team and then dealt with a number of questions.

The Secretary to the Board confirmed that whilst the Park Regulations Act 1872 applied in part to the Trust, the power of arrest contained in it was not effectively exercisable.

The Committee thanked the wardens for the work that they did.

8. Grazier's report

The Conservation Manager gave Mr Gardner's apologies and read a short report. Since the last meeting there had been an upturn in sheep worrying by dogs on the Hills and on the inbye land. The police had been very helpful and there was a prosecution pending.

There had been one calf killed as a result of a collision with a car – unfortunately driven by a local resident. Foggy weather was an additional concern.

Vegetation levels were still lower than normal following the drought during the summer. Mr Shale had confirmed that he planned to retire from active grazing, and the Castlemorton Countryside Stewardship Delivery Group planned to meet to discuss what action could be taken.

The Conservation Manager confirmed there was little interest from third parties in taking up grazing on the common as grazing an unsecured common did not fit in with most people's lifestyle. Those with grazing rights would be consulted first.

9. Operation Manager's report

The Operations Manager spoke about how the unusual weather pattern had influenced the work carried out by the Field staff over the autumn¹.

The CEO confirmed that Worcestershire Highways were going to carry out work on the junction at Chandler's Cross, Castlemorton but this would not be done until Severn Trent had carried out their planned water main replacement along New Road.

10. Matters Arising from previous meetings

Erosion control – The Conservation Manager said that contents of the reports presented to the last meeting were being analysed. The draft budget for 2023/24 had been adjusted to reflect the planned work. He confirmed that the temporary fencing south of Worcestershire Beacon was an erosion control trial which had been agreed by the Board.

Clouds End easement – A proposed specification had been received and considered by the CEO. The specification was satisfactory and the resident had confirmed they would contact Highways about cutting the new tarmac into the edge of the highway and had contacted DEFRA in relation to any Commons Act consent which might be required.

Vehicle management measures – The first area which would be looked at was the car park at Poolbrook Road.

11. To set the Land Management budget for 2022/23

The Conservation Manager went through the paper.

There was a five year plan of vehicle replacement. The CEO said that it had been intended to replace a field staff vehicle this year with an electric vehicle but this had been delayed as demonstration vehicles had not been available.

¹ (Full details in the Management Report for the Board meetings)

The Conservation Manager suggested the addition of a line in the budget to cover the cost of miscellaneous conservation work, allocating the sum of £500.

The CEO asked to change the rotovator item in the fixed asset purchases section to a grader.

Mr Rouse said he thought there would be a column to show whether the projected budget for this year had been spent². The Secretary to the Board said underspends would be identifiable from the management accounts. The CEO said that if a budgeted project had not been completed within the year any balance left in the budget would be put into a designated account.

The Conservation Manager referred to the Stewardship budget and said that a five year extension to the Chase End and Old Hills Stewardship Schemes had been offered to the Trust and would be accepted. Mr Davies said that it would be helpful to see the budgeted expenditure set against the projections on the Business Plan. The CEO said the Business Plan would be reviewed early in the New Year but the committee should note that inflation would have an impact.

The Conservation Manager confirmed that the bracken rolling with horses was paid for through the Stewardship Scheme. The reserve on the Stewardship budget was part of the cash reserve.

On the proposal of Dr Braim, seconded by Mr Atkins it was **RESOLVED** (with one abstention) to recommend approval of the draft budget to the Board with the addition of a new item of £500 for miscellaneous conservation work.

12. Bottom Shed progress

The CEO went through the paper which set out all the details of progress made to date. His choice was a metal building which would have a longer life than a wooden one. The site could not be used to build a new office as the Acts did not contain a power to put up a new office building.

13. Mountain biking

The Conservation Manager said that mountain biking on the Hills and Commons was an ongoing issue which had been discussed on a number of occasions and the intention of the paper was to ensure all trustees were informed about what the Trust could and could not do. The paper contained a list of all the actions the Trust had taken, and although the wardens had indicated that some of the routes they had attempted to close had been re-opened by the cyclists, the Trust had effectively closed off some unlawful cycling trails. There was information for the public on the website but it was clear that some individuals either did not want to read it or did not want to comply. The Community and Conservation Officer checked mountain biking websites and was aware of the popular routes on Strava. She contacted the sites to edit the routes where possible.

Mrs Turner said that the paper was most helpful. She had a number of questions but did not feel this was a good time to go through them. It was agreed in view of the length of time trustees had been in meetings that the item should be carried

² See FAR papers for meeting 8.12.2022

over to the next Land Management Committee meeting. It was suggested that if trustees had questions for the Conservation Team on this topic they should contact the Conservation Manager with a view to going through any questions together in the office.

The CEO said the Trust was not alone in facing these challenges. He confirmed that electric scooters could not lawfully be used on a bridleway.

14. Project progress update

A written report had been circulated. The railings for the donkey shed were in fabrication and the CEO hoped they could be installed within the next month or thereabouts. The stonework would be re-set when the railings were installed. The acquisition of an ATV had been considered but the Field staff and wardens had agreed that an ATV would not meet their needs in the same way as a landrover or pickup. Instead the pickup would be replaced in due course. Mrs Palmer asked the CEO to let her know the amount of funding expected from Malvern Spa Association for the repairs at St Ann's Well.

15. Conservation Manager's Report

- Work was starting on ash trees affected by ash die back and should be completed by the end of January.
- The general tree safety work had been put out to tender. Expenditure may be over budget because of the need to fell a Giant Redwood on Jubilee Drive.
- The Conservation Manager would provide a paper shortly with a description of the newly acquired land and management proposals for the sites. A visit and workshop would be arranged.
- Further tree planting was planned including 7 trees to commemorate the jubilee.

16. Outdoor visits 2023

The committee indicated its agreement to visits taking place during the afternoon over the winter months.

There would be visits to the newly acquired land and to meet the field staff.

There was a request to set up a visit to view the outcomes on the erosion control trials in due course.

17. Urgent business

There was none.

18. Date of next meeting

Next meeting: 13 April 2023.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm