

Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Land Management Committee

Park View Community Room, Malvern Town Council, Victoria Park Road, Malvern WR14 2JY

Thursday 26 March 2026 at 6.30 pm

Present: Felicity Robinson (Chair), David Baldwin, David Core (non-voting), Mark Driscoll, Chris McSweeney, David Reynolds, Peter Rogers, Chris Rouse, John Stock.

In attendance: Matt Gardner (grazier), CEO, Secretary to the Board, Conservation Manager, Land and Property Manager, Operations Manager, Peter Hughes (Chair – Guarlford Parish Council, left 6.45 pm).

Absent: Cynthia Palmer.

1. Apologies for Absence

Richard Bartholomew, John Michael.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Chair's Communications

- The Committee Chair reported that there had been a good meeting of the Wildlife Panel on 18 March and she recorded her thanks to volunteers serving on that Panel. A wildlife walk was planned for July, to which everyone was welcome.
- There would be an item of urgent business in the confidential session.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2025

5.1. Bin Review

The Land and Property Manager (LPM) reported that there had been a review of bin provision, beginning at Old Hills and then at Peachfield Common, when existing bins had been examined. Two new bins had been purchased and sited in the Old Hills car parks, and it was planned in due course to swap these two around. It was likely that the Trust would then proceed to remove targeted bins across the Hills (those with poor design, or that were difficult to reach).

6. Property Matters

6.1. Engaging Contractors

A paper from the CEO on how health and safety is addressed with contractors, together with the *Essential Information for Contractors* document supplied to all

contractors by staff, was received for information, following a request from the Board at its January meeting. The CEO reported that the contents of the paper had been discussed with the Health and Safety Working Group. She pointed out that the level of risk varied depending on where the contractor was working, with contractors working on Trust land clearly being higher risk than those working from their own premises. It was important for the Trust to document the level of risk that was being transferred. The Trust insisted that contractors had the same level of public liability insurance as MHT. There were a number of capital projects in the pipeline and the CEO explained that for each of these the Trust would appoint a principal designer who would develop the necessary health and safety documentation.

Questions from trustees were invited. A trustee asked whether a contractor was required to sign agreeing to the conditions in the Essential Information document. The Conservation Manager (CM) said that this would depend on the size of the piece of work, but they would certainly be required to do so for a full tendered contract. The Operations Manager (OM) added that there was a signing in process for contractors working on Trust property, when the contractor would confirm that they had read the risk assessment. Matt Gardner asked whether there was a requirement for a contractor to have the appropriate first aid training, for example, forest first aid training for someone doing tree work. It was agreed that this requirement should be added to the documentation. The CEO asked for it to be recorded in the minutes that the documentation had been reviewed and approved by the Health and Safety Working Group.

6.2. Proposal for Replacement Bus Shelter at Guarlford

A paper was received from the LPM, explaining that Guarlford Parish Council (GPC) was seeking permission to remove an existing timber bus shelter located on MHT land at Guarlford and to replace it with a new wooden shelter of improved structural integrity and appearance. The LPM confirmed that the existing shelter was beyond economic repair and confirmed that the new shelter would be sited on the existing concrete platform. This was raised and due to concerns about interim safety, GPC planned to retain the old shelter until the new one was ready. The Trust noted the position but given the shelter's condition was pushing for replacement as soon as possible.. Should GPC decide at some point in the future that the shelter was no longer required, it would be their responsibility to remove it. The LPM confirmed that the licence agreement for the shelter would mirror the one recently issued to Newland Parish Council.

On the proposal of John Stock, seconded by David Baldwin, it was RESOLVED unanimously to recommend that the Board: grant approval for the design of the replacement bus shelter at Guarlford; grant a single licence to Guarlford Parish Council (GPC); delegate to the CEO to finalise the licence and coordinate with GPC, and to authorise her to sign-off the completed licence.

The Chair of Guarlford Parish Council left the meeting at 6.45 pm.

6.3. Planning applications

The LPM gave a verbal report on the Trust's response to the consultation on the creation of Glynchbrook Garden Village, a proposed development of 3,500 houses in the Forest of Dean, within the catchment of the Southern Hills. The consultation had closed on 18 March. The Trust had submitted an objection to the plans, citing significant and irreversible damage to the landscape, risk of increased recreational pressures and risks to SSSI features, which would occur if the development were permitted. The Trust had formally requested the project's removal from the Local Plan. If the site was retained, the Trust would need to take an active role in future consultations and to collaborate with other stakeholders including National Landscape, local authorities and environmental bodies. If the site were withdrawn, the Trust would continue to engage and collaborate to make sure that any new site chosen did not create pressures for the Hills. Committee members expressed support for the Trust's response. In answer to a question, the LPM said she understood that there had been very little overlap in consultation between local authorities; a trustee said that even the CEO of Malvern Hills District Council had been unaware of the proposal until late 2025.

7. Annual Report on Delivery of the current Land Management Plan

The Committee received the Annual Report from the CM. He reported that this had been written using the 'traffic light' system introduced last year and went through the points marked as 'red'. A trustee suggested that it would be helpful to divide action points into two groups, namely one group of projects that were progressing well and others where lack of progress was out of the Trust's control. This proposal was agreed.

- Objective 2 – Earth Heritage. Three units had been assessed as 'unfavourable declining' including at Earnslaw Quarry, where it had previously been possible to walk round the lake, but no longer was due to higher water levels. The CM commented that the evaluation seemed impractical and unfair, but the Trust had to accept independent decisions. He added that the Trust had a good relationship with the Earth Heritage Trust, who had supplied volunteers to help out with geological restoration work at Top Shed.
- Objective 13 – Grayling. The Trust was fairly sure that grayling were now extinct, although the reason why was not clear.
- Objective 14 – Ponds. The CM said it was disappointing that pond work had not been possible for the second year in a row. The main reason this year had been the weather and rules on the disposal of dredge material. The newt nesting season, beginning in mid-February, restricted the time in which this work could be done and conservation staff were finding that the window of opportunity was growing ever smaller. The CM confirmed that funding for the work would be carried forward and ringfenced. A trustee asked whether the Trust focused first on those ponds deemed 'poor'. The CM confirmed this, adding that staff had carried out a condition assessment in 2025, which meant that the Trust knew which ponds required most urgent attention. A trustee

asked why there was a discrepancy between the numbers of ponds in 2024 and 2025, and the CM said this was because conservation staff had discovered additional ponds and created two new ones.

- The CM referred to the Special Projects Plan. All 36 of these projects were detailed in the plan. 13 of them were complete, nine due or delayed, eight not done due to resources and two not done out of choice.
- A trustee asked a question about deteriorating conditions of paths (objective 3). The CM said that the need for work was outstripping resources but added that volunteers were assessing path conditions now and once complete these assessments would be a valuable resource when planning repair works. The OM added that it was important to wait for all the assessments to be received before deciding which repairs were most urgent. Field staff were doing 'patch up' work where possible while awaiting further information.
- The Committee Chair noted that plenty of the action points in the plan were 'green' and expressed appreciation.

8. New Land Management Review

The CM shared hard copy slides of the results of the first two consultations; these would be circulated to committee members by email in due course.

- There had been a call for any information that might be relevant so that the Trust could ensure it based its management on the latest data. 29 pieces of evidence had been submitted by members of the public and organisations, all of which were useful in some way. This evidence would be summarised and circulated to trustees.
- There had been a pre-paid postcard 'light touch' consultation exercise, where members of the public were invited to state their top three special features of the Hills and Commons, together with what they considered the top three environmental challenges. Postcards had been displayed at 14 locations across the area and 200 responses had been received so far.
- The next consultation was to be an 'in-depth' consultation for members of the public and other stakeholders who wished to get involved in more detail. There would be four 'meet and greet' sessions and about 12 one-to-one sessions with specific groups. The CM would give a series of talks on land management, with question and answer sessions included.
- A trustee expressed disappointment in the level of response to the postcard exercise, which they considered too small to be statistically significant. It was noted that postcards had been handed out to members of the public on the Hills, as well being available at the 14 locations, and there was a QR code link to the web site for people who preferred to feedback online. The CEO thought there was general apathy, observing that the Malvern Town of Culture consultation had also attracted only 200 responses. She said the Trust was aware that it lacked presence in local leaflet dispensers, and this was being addressed. It was also a shame that there had been no leaflet enclosed with Council Tax invoices this year, because the Trust had featured in the 2025 leaflet. The CM said that the postcard exercise might be continued alongside

the new consultation, and the Committee Chair suggested discussing the issue at the next meeting of the LMP working group. It was noted that the Trust's Winter Newsletter, which had been circulated to 14,000 households, had included a link to the LMP web page.

- The CM reminded the meeting that the Epping Forest Management Strategy document¹ had been circulated to all trustees by email. He urged trustees to contact him with any comments on this document and ideas as to how MHT might use it or replicate it for MHT's new LMP.

9. Graziers' Report

Matt Gardner reported that the grass had finally starting growing again, which meant that cows were back out on Castlemorton Common. He referred to the campaign by Castlemorton Commons Association (CCA), backed by County Councillor Tom Wells, for reduced speed limits on the Common. CCA had carried out research on speed limits applied in other counties, compiling plenty of data, but so far Worcestershire had declined to act. The campaign remained a work in progress.

The Vice-Chair of the Board recorded thanks to Mr Gardner for his strong performance before the House of Lords Select Committee for the Malvern Hills Bill.

10. Officer Reports

10.1. Field Team

The OM reported that two newly promoted staff were settling well into their roles and training undertaken by the whole team was coming to fruition. He gave an update on field works undertaken and plans to test new machinery over the next 12 months, including new tractors. A trustee asked whether the Trust planned to buy similar tractors to the existing models. The OM said that he intended to buy a hydrostatic front mounting mower, which was safer for use on the slopes, followed by more traditional tractors for flatter areas. The CEO recorded her thanks to the OM for his work developing his team.

10.2. Conservation Team

- The CM said that staff were working on tree safety contracts, some of which were overdue, partly due to Highway closure issues and also railway closure, because part of one of the contracts was to fell trees at Malvern Common and one of the trees was next to the line.
- The Trust was looking to revise the design of electric hand gates on the Hills to bring them closer to British standards and had secured £7-8,000 of funding from National Landscape for this work. A trial gate was in production.

¹ <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/how-we-manage-epping-forest/consultative-group-and-management-documents>

- Fencing and planting work had been completed at the newly acquired orchard, named 'Mannings Orchard' after the lady who had lived at the adjoining property.
- Last year's mowing plan was under review, with this year's programme due to start in a few weeks.

10.3. Rangers

- The CEO gave an update on the current workload for the Rangers, stressing her huge respect for how they handled the challenges they faced on a daily basis.
- The car park machines needed to be adjusted ready for price rises on 1 April. Someone had repeatedly been placing notices on the machines complaining about the rise. The CEO said that the Trust did rigorous benchmarking of its charges and stickers had been added to the machines confirming this.
- The CEO confirmed that there were currently no known encampments, rough sleepers or adults at risk on Trust land.
- The Ranger team was going through a period of change with two retirements, the introduction of a team leader position, associated recruitment, and the transfer of line management to the LPM.
- A trustee asked how the new van was bedding in. It was noted that it was being used and appreciated by both the Field Team and the Ranger Team. It had been redesigned slightly to remove the canopy, which made bin collection easier.

11. Urgent Business

None

12. Date of next meeting

Thursday 2 July at 6.00 pm, followed by Summer Walk.

13. Confidential

On the proposal of John Stock, seconded by Mark Driscoll, it was **RESOLVED** to exclude the public for discussion of items 14 and 15 on the agenda 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 (legally privileged).

Matt Gardner left the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm