

Malvern Hills Trust  
Covid-19 Contingency Committee  
By telephone conference call  
Meeting 1 May 2020 4.00pm

**Present:** Mr R Bartholomew, Dr S Braim, Mr M Cordey, Mr M Davies, Mrs C Palmer, Prof J Raine, Mrs G Rees, Ms S Rouse

**In attendance:** CEO, Finance and Administration Manager, Conservation Manager, Secretary to the Board

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence**

There were none.

2. **Declarations of interest**

There were none.

3. **Chair's announcements**

Mr Davies had circulated a letter from four Board members which would be discussed under agenda item 9.

4. **To approve the minutes of the last meeting**

On the proposal of Mr Bartholomew, seconded by Prof Raine, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2020.

5. **Summary of actions taken**

The CEO reported that grass cutting had started. It had been a quieter week almost certainly as a result of the wet weather. There had been problems with scrambler bikes on a couple of occasions.

The Government had made minor clarifications to its advice on travel for exercise. He had reissued the tender documents for the British Camp toilets with a deadline for the return of tenders of 15 May.

The CEO was now considering how normal operations might be resumed, at least to a limited extent. Preparations were being made for staff returning to the office and its eventual reopening. Perspex screens had been ordered for reception and he and the Finance and Administration Manager had been looking at how to manage staff numbers and space within the building. One major issue was whether the Trust would need to start selling car park passes before the libraries re-opened (and whether the libraries would be willing to sell the passes in the short to medium term). He hoped the majority of pass sales could be dealt with by phone or by post but a percentage of people might still want to come to the office. The Trust did not have an online facility to buy passes at present, but he would look into it.

The Field Staff were currently operating on a one driver per vehicle basis. More careful management would be needed where there were jobs that needed two

people working in close proximity or for example, brush cutting on narrow paths where members of the public would find it difficult to keep an appropriate distance. The Wardens would have to adopt social distancing when dealing with the public. They had no responsibility for enforcing Government Regulations – that would be a matter for the police.

## 6. **Financial update**

The Finance and Administration Manager reported that the Job Retention Scheme claim had been paid within 5 days of application. Retrospective checks were unlikely to take place for some time. She had heard nothing from the District Council about the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants. There was a net decrease in cash for the month of April of £29,000, but there remained a cash balance of £945,000. A payment to the graziers was due in May (£65,000).

She had prepared a first draft of the end of year accounts. There were still bills to come in but the draft accounts showed a surplus of £29,000 (the budget had shown a deficit of nearly £9,000). The Auditors had confirmed that they could carry out their work remotely if necessarily.

## 7. **Car Parks**

In advance of re-opening the car parks, the CEO was looking into temporarily suspending the requirement for drivers to key in part of their registration number when purchasing a car park ticket, and into taking payment by card only. He was also undertaking a review of how cash payments could be dealt with, without posing a risk to staff.

Updated Government advice re-enforced the message that people should not travel unnecessarily for exercise. It also made clear that anyone with a disability was permitted to travel to an outdoor space if this was necessary for them to exercise safely. At present the CEO could not see a way to open up only the disabled bays because of their location within the car park.

The Secretary to the Board had spoken to a member of staff at the National Trust who had confirmed that they were trying to ensure that there was a co-ordinated approach to re-opening parking areas. This mirrored the information that the CEO had received from the National Association of AONBs. It was **AGREED** that the car parks should remain closed in line with other major land management organisations, to be reviewed again at the next meeting.

## 8. **Report from Conservation Manager**

The Countryside Stewardship (CS) applications had been submitted and acknowledged. He expected to hear back in mid-June whether the applications had been accepted. There would then be a period of discussion leading to a formal offer being made around October.

It had been agreed by the Board in August 2019 to use the reserves (from the Higher Level Stewardship and Basic Payment Schemes) to support grazing on Castlemorton Common and the Southern Hills until the new CS Schemes started in January 2021. The new Castlemorton Common management agreements and

Southern Hills grazing licence had been sent out to the graziers with a view to them coming into operation on 1 June.

He had submitted comments in response to a DEFRA consultation on the future of farming in the UK. There was also a consultation on the Environmental Land Management (ELM) Policy Discussion Document. This had been suspended due to the impact of Covid-19. He had prepared a response. This was available if anyone wanted to read it and would be submitted when the consultation re-opened. The CEO and the Committee thanked the Conservation Manager for all the work which had to be carried out in the process of making the CS application.

#### 9. **Any other matters for discussion**

Mr Davies had received a letter from Board members Dr Crisp, Mr Fowler, Dr Parsons and Mr Watts covering various topics.

In relation to holding meetings on-line, the Secretary to the Board said that the staff had been looking for some weeks at whether Board meetings could be resumed as virtual meetings. They had been trying to find a suitable platform which would also enable meetings to be streamed in the public domain. Zoom had well documented security issues and might exclude those who did not have satisfactory internet access. She and the CEO had had a demonstration from StarLeaf and were awaiting an E-mail confirming the cost of using that system. The CEO added that it was very important that the chosen platform allowed Board members to join by telephone as some Board members did not use IT or had insufficient bandwidth to have a stable connection. The problem would be having 30 people taking part in the meeting. It would be necessary to run trials before any meetings were streamed and to have a very structured approach to the conduct of the meeting.

The following comments and suggestions were made:

- See Wychavon Council meetings online and how they handled the various issues: <https://wychavon.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>
- Use a simplified agenda and do not try to replicate how Board meetings were conducted in the past
- Dispense with committee meetings for the time being
- Have a trial meeting/s before trying a full meeting to test the IT platform
- Ensure full information was available beforehand in order to minimise the content of the meeting itself
- The Covid Contingency Committee meetings were being held on a Friday as the Government tended to make major announcements on a Thursday
- A number of other trustees who were not on the Committee had been contacted and upon invitation, had not expressed any concern about the way business was being conducted at present
- It appeared it would be some time before in-person meetings could be resumed and the Trust had to consider how it was going to carry forward any important business which did not fall within the remit of the committee
- An additional member of staff might be required to act as meeting administrator eg to monitor whether trustees were losing their connection

- Set up some ground rules for the meetings – for example that if a trustee lost connection it did not require the meeting to be halted unless it became inquorate.
- It was not accepted that there was any lack of clarity in the record of decisions made by the Committee, nor the basis on which those decisions were made.

The Secretary to the Board reiterated that advice had been taken in advance of the Board meeting on 12 March about the proposed contingency arrangements. She had taken in part in a webinar following lockdown which emphasised that taking good decisions in a timely manner was more important than process in the current crisis, and the Charity Commission had confirmed that it would understand if charities had to act in ways which were not provided for in their governing documents.

It was **AGREED** to aim to hold some trial meetings in late May and if successful, to hold the June Board meeting as a virtual meeting on 11 June.

Mr Davies would respond to the letter.

The CEO had received a letter from Mr Fellows, which had been circulated. He confirmed that he had telephoned Mr Fellows and responded to the points he had raised.

#### **10. Date of next meeting**

Next meeting 7 May 2020 at 4.00pm (by telephone conference) – to be adjourned at 5pm and re convened after the Government briefing.

**The meeting closed at 5.45pm**