

Malvern Hills Trust
Covid-19 Contingency Committee
By telephone/video conference call
Meeting 22 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, Secretary to the Board

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence**

Conservation Manager.

2. **Declarations of interest**

There were none.

3. **Chair's announcements**

There had been no comments sent in for the committee.

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

On the proposal of Mrs Palmer, seconded by Mrs Rees, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2020.

5. **CEO's report and summary of actions taken in the last week**

The CEO reported that the Hills and commons had been busy, particularly at the weekend. Castlemorton and Hollybed Commons, West of England car park and Old Hills had been much busier than normal whilst the main Hills car parks were quieter than expected. Visitors also appeared to be younger than was typical prior to lockdown.

There had been a number of issues – rubbish on and misuse of the Hills and Commons had increased dramatically, in particular at Swinyard car park and the Gullett. The wardens attended on Wednesday just after 1.30pm following a report of a swimmer. They found about 10 people inside the quarry fence. The police were called. They removed two people who were drunk and the others left voluntarily. The police attended at least twice more that afternoon. At 6.30pm there were 80 people inside the fence and a number of police officers had to attend in order to remove them. When the wardens went in to clear up, there was evidence of barbeques and fires as well as around 260 nitrous oxide canisters. There was damage to the hill above the quarry. There were similar problems on Thursday and the police attended twice. They impounded 2 motor bikes. Again there was evidence of substance abuse in the car park and down the common, which the wardens spent the following morning clearing up. The police would continue to patrol. Other sites in the county were experiencing similar problems. The CEO felt if this continued, the Trust would have to look at putting up a more

imposing physical barrier around the quarry because of the amount of Trust and police time which was being taken up.

Elsewhere things had been manageable. There had been few issues with the car park ticket machines and people generally were happy to pay by card.

Another major issue was that the British Camp and Wyche Cutting toilets were closed. Herefordshire Council had sent a message saying that at the moment the Council did not intend to re-open the toilets. The reasons given were that the Council's contractors had carried out a risk assessment and thought it would be difficult to keep their staff safe, it would be difficult to put in social distancing measures and their cleaning contractor had a staff shortage due to staff being furloughed. Ms Rouse said that Wychavon were opening toilets this week and MHDC the following week, with appropriate signage, and she felt Herefordshire Council were being over cautious.

The CEO reported that people were going to the toilet "in the field" and in particular behind the toilet building at the Wyche. This was a public health issue. MHT staff did not have the correct PPE to clear up and he had alerted Herefordshire Council to the problem around the toilet block. The Trust would have to use a contractor to clear any accumulations elsewhere.

The CEO said that if the current restrictions stayed in place, high levels of use of the Hills would continue, particularly if there was no prospect of taking summer holidays abroad.

The warden vacancy had been advertised with a closing date of 8 June. To date there had been 35 applications. The Conservation Officer was working as a warden and carrying out no conservation work at present.

The Committee asked the CEO to thank the wardens – their hard work was much appreciated.

Prof Raine confirmed that the ice cream vans were at Beacon Road. The Finance and Administration Manager confirmed that the licence had been issued and the fee paid.

6. Financial update (including car park pass sales)

The Finance and Administration Manager welcomed the office staff back to work. Since they resumed work, 380 passes had been sent out with another 20 awaiting confirmation of payment. 180 applications had been received by E-mail (many for multiple passes), about 30 by post and the rest by phone. In the main, the passes had been sent out on the same working day the applications were received. There had been positive feedback.

The Financial Assistant had analysed the car park takings. Over a seven day period in May 2019, takings were around £7,500. In the last week they had been around £10,000.

The wording of the trustees report for the annual accounts would be sent out for review by the trustees next week.

The CEO said that not having to collect or count the cash from the car park machines freed up staff time. He wondered whether there would be a demand for cash payments when the covid –19 crisis was over, as habits would have changed.

7. Health and Safety update

The CEO went through the paper. There had been no further accidents or incidents since it was written.

8. Any other matters for discussion

The Secretary to the Board said that she had been running trial meetings using StarLeaf. She thanked Dr Braim for his help. Once all those trustees who wanted to join a small scale trial meeting had done so, the plan was to have an all-trustee trial on Thursday 28 May, hold a second all-trustee trial in early June and then to hold the Board meeting remotely with a short agenda on 11 June. She was negotiating with StarLeaf over the cost of streaming the meetings. Confidential business would have to be dealt with in a second meeting that was not streamed. The committee discussed the problem of dealing with confidential business in a virtual meeting. This required further consideration.

9. Urgent communications

There were none.

10. Date of next meeting

Next meeting 29 May 2020 at 4.00pm (by telephone conference).

The meeting closed at 17.15pm

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11. Update on staff and furlough scheme

Ms Rouse left the meeting.

Two staff were shielding (on furlough), one other staff member was on furlough until 27 May when he would return to work. There would be no further furloughing of staff unless circumstances changed. One person was signed off sick.

The CEO and Finance and Administration Manager had reviewed the policy on gifts to retiring staff members. The policy was 18 years old. It provided for a payment of £10 per year of employment, plus a rose bowl for employees who had worked 20 years or more for the trust. Ten pounds in 2002 would be worth in the region of £16.40 today. The policy needed to be updated. The CEO was of the view that £20 per year would be more appropriate. It was also felt that the rose bowl should be replaced by a contribution of up to £250 to a picture of the employee's choice. It was agreed that the Finance and Administration Manager

would prepare a paper for the Board meeting in June with a view to any payment being applied to the staff member who was about to retire.