

Malvern Hills Trust
Land Management Committee
By Video/telephone conference

Thursday 03 December 2020 7.00pm

Present: Mr C Atkins, Mr D Baldwin, Dr S Braim, Dr G Crisp, Mr M Davies (non-voting: left during item 13), Mr R Fowler (left during item 15), Mrs H I'Anson, Mrs C Palmer, Dr T Parsons, Mrs G Rees (Chair), Mr C Rouse, Mr T Yapp.

In attendance: Conservation Manager, Community and Conservation Officer, Secretary to the Board, Mr M Gardner, Mr D Core, Dr E Chowns .

Mrs Rees welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Election of Chair

Dr Braim took the chair. There was one nomination for committee chair and Mrs Rees was elected unopposed.

2. Election of Vice Chair

Mrs Rees took the chair. There was only one nomination for committee vice-chair and Dr Braim was elected unopposed.

3. Apologies for Absence

Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ms M Alexander, Ms H Stace.

4. Declarations of Interest

Mr Rouse had grazing rights over MHT land.

Mr Atkins had common rights and was a member of Castlemorton Common Association.

5. Chairman's Communications

Mrs Rees thanked everyone who had attended the Land Management Plan workshop. There would be a second workshop on 14 January 2021.

Dr Ellie Chowns had been appointed to the Board by Herefordshire Council and would be joining the Land Management Committee.

Mrs Rees reminded the Committee to let the Conservation Manager know if they had any items they wanted to be included on future agendas.

There was an item of urgent business.

6. Public Comments

There were none.

7. Matters Arising from the meeting of 8 October 2020

There were none

8. To consider the Land Management budget 2021/22

The Conservation Manager explained that the Committee was being asked to consider the Land Management part of the general fund budget.

He highlighted the key points in the paper. Comments made included:

- When power tools were replaced could the Trust consider electric ones?
- Should the Trust continue to have the tank pumped out at the British Camp toilets rather than replacing the sewage system?

The total reserves from the DEFRA schemes for 2021 were estimated to be £80,000. They could be used in the short term should the application for a Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Castlemorton Common and the Southern Hills fail for any reason.

On the proposal of Mr Baldwin, seconded by Mrs I'Anson it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve the budget as set out in the paper and to recommend its approval by the Board.

9. Land Management Plan (LMP) update

The Conservation Manager went through the paper, which set out current issues.

Points raised by trustees included:

- Item 1 Climate Change –
 - clarify what “Malvern” means in this context
 - Should there be a referring back in the text to the Trust’s statutory obligations?
 - Should targets be included?
- Item 2 Tree disease –
 - Should planting non-native trees be considered?
- Item 4 – Conservation grazing
 - There was no indication in the LMP whether stock levels might be increased or kept at current levels. The Conservation Manager felt current levels were appropriate, with the exception of Old Hills, where more stock could usefully be accommodated. Old Hills would benefit from being secured.
 - Would it be appropriate to explain in the document what was meant by securing the commons?
- Item 5 – Adapting to visitor pressure
 - In relation to mountain bikers, was there more to be done in co-operation with adjoining landowners and could the Trust support initiatives by others which would relieve pressure on MHT land?
 - Could some of the tops of the Hills be tarmacked?
 - Could MHT divert people onto footpaths on adjoining land?
 - Could something be done about parking on the road by Swinyard car park?

10. Countryside Stewardship application update

The Conservation Manager confirmed that no offers had been received in relation to the 2 applications for Countryside Stewardship Schemes.

11. Mountain biking on MHT land

The Community and Conservation Manager gave an update. The Secretary to the Board had circulated some of the E-mails received from members of the public, alerting the Trust to incidents involving mountain bikes, together with an extract from a copy of an E-mail from Cycling UK.

There had been more people on the Hills in 2020 and it was unsurprising that this had resulted in higher numbers of interactions between different user groups. The complaints had been brought to the attention of Board members because, as landowner, the Trust had some responsibilities towards its visitors. The Community and Conservation Officer had been in touch with the off-road advisor at Cycling UK. The risk of collision remained low and Cycling UK's records showed no recorded death caused by an off road cyclist over the last 10 years. Increasing numbers of off road cyclists was a UK wide pattern. The type of cyclist had also changed this year because many of the official off-road bike trails had been closed, and riders had been looking to the wider countryside for more challenging opportunities.

Cycling UK had shared examples of how other landowners were tackling the issues and how to encourage responsible riding. Further research would be carried out. Points made by trustees included:

- Cyclists and pedestrians did not mix. Was there any power to keep them apart or to create separate bike trails? The Community and Conservation Officer said that walkers and cyclists were both entitled to use bridleways. Visitors on foot had a right of access on all of the Trust's land.
- Could the Trust make representations to Government? The Community and Conservation Officer said a number of bodies were working on re-writing the Countryside Code to make it more relevant to current users.
- Should a trustee working group be set up?
- E-bikes - The Community and Conservation Officer said that these were allowed on bridleways as long as they met certain criteria, and more details were set out on the Trust's website. These included having peddles to propel them, and a maximum speed whilst using assisted propulsion of 15mph.

12. Project progress update

Dr Crisp pointed out that it was not clear from the report whether the power tools had been replaced or not.

The Conservation Manager said that the hedgelaying project was recorded as to be funded from the Parliamentary Fund. It should have been allocated for funding from the gift fund. Funding from the gift fund required Board permission but the committee indicated they would support such a request.

13. Graziers' report

Mr Gardner reported that the drought in the early part of the year had had a significant impact on the amount of vegetation now available on the commons, which could cause issues for some graziers through the winter. The stocking rates had been monitored for a number of years which would assist in assessing appropriate stocking rates in the future. Visitor numbers were still high but fortunately there did not seem to have been a proportionate increase in livestock worrying by dogs.

Mr Rouse said that there were excessive quantities of sheep muck in some areas of Castlemorton Common. The Conservation Manager had checked the area following Mr Rouse's previous comments but it was not a significant concern for the Trust.

Mrs Rees thanked Mr Gardner.

14. Conservation Manager's Report

The Conservation Manager said that the tree safety inspection had been carried out across the Trust's land. The necessary work would be divided between field staff and contractors. Scrub clearance was underway. The Trust had not been successful in securing any of the Green Recovery Challenge funding, but he understood another tranche of funding would be made available.

It had been difficult this year for trustees to meet on site to look at proposed projects and completed work. It was intended to make some short videos on key topics for trustees to watch. He asked trustees to get in touch if there were any topics they would like featured. It was suggested the Conservation Manager might include some pointers to enable trustees to carry out solo site visits and that the videos might be of interest to members of the public as well.

15. Urgent business

A short paper by the Community and Conservation Officer had been circulated, giving a summary of the content of a leaked webinar run by The Hunting Office which allegedly discussed the use of "trail hunting" as a "smokescreen" for unlawful activities. The webinar was the subject of a criminal investigation. The list of participants had not been released.

Licences to hunt on Trust land were issued by officers but the committee was asked to endorse the officer decision to suspend the issuing of licences for the remainder of the 2020/21 hunting season, in line with a number of other organisations. Dr Crisp said that until the Trust knew whether there had been any criminal activity, it was not appropriate for the Trust to change its policy.

On the proposal of Mrs Rees, seconded by Dr Braim it was **RESOLVED** (with 3 votes against) that all licences for Trail Hunts be suspended for the remainder of the 2020/21 season.

16. Date of next meeting

8 April 2021

The meeting closed at 9pm