

LAND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Manor House, Grange Road, Malvern

Thursday 14 July 2016, 4:00 pm

Present: Ms C Bovey, Dr S Braim, Mr S Freeman, Mr A Golightly, Mr R Hall-Jones (left during item 9), Mr J Michael, Mrs G Rees, Mr C Rouse (Chairman) and Mr T Yapp.

In attendance: Director, Conservation Officer, Deputy Conservation Officer, Community and Conservation Officer (CCO), Secretary to the Board, Mr M Gardner, Mr R Hale (Press) Mr J Taylor (Chairman 4Cs), Mr J Unwin (for items 1 – 5).

Mr Rouse welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Mr Baldwin, Mrs Cumming, Dr Forster, Mr Hawkins, Mrs O'Donnell and Ms Stace.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Rouse declared an interest in matters relating to the HLS scheme.

3. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

Forthcoming Visits:

- 3.1 Stroll (23 August 2016. Meet at 6pm, Free Church, Jubilee Drive)
- 3.2 Outdoor meeting (24 November 2016, 2pm venue TBC)

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF 14 April 2016

The Director was awaiting information on the progress of a planning application in relation to the easement at Montana, and he had spoken to Mr Frost at Lake House about the alternative arrangements proposed by the Board. The other matter outstanding was the review to select Land Management policies for updating.

5. THIRDS WOOD

The Conservation Officer introduced Jim Unwin, an arboricultural and silvicultural consultant who had been instructed on behalf of MHC. Mr Unwin drew attention to the previous advice which MHC had taken on the management of Thirds Wood. Thirds Wood was not a commercial woodland and any work undertaken would be at a cost. The aim of the proposed management scheme was to perpetuate the character of the wood. He went through the proposals set out in his paper. Some of the most hazardous larch trees would be carefully removed to make space for new planting. There was presently a moratorium on planting larch. He also suggested removing some of the smaller, scrubby, damaged broadleaved trees and leaving the larger feature trees. He expected the project to take up to 5 years.

In answer to questions, Mr Unwin confirmed that if the wood was infected by *Phytophthora* the whole area would have to be clear felled. At the moment this looked unlikely. The Conservation Officer confirmed that MHC always consulted the Forestry Commission in connection with tree work on MHC land and Mr Unwin would help choose and oversee the contractor. There would be a public consultation with details on the web site and in the press, and a public event was being held on 26 July. Mrs Rees confirmed that she had been keeping Colwall Parish Council and the Ballard family informed. She hoped they would be notified of the detailed scheme in advance of the general public. Mr Unwin anticipated that there would be a public response once the trees were marked for felling. Board members would be invited to inspect the site again once the trees had been marked up. Mr Unwin explained that it would be very expensive to remove all of the felled trees and the conifers would break down quite quickly if heaped up in situ. Felled trees would be removed where it was feasible. Mr Unwin proposed to invite contractors to view the site and ask for their views on how to do the work, rather than specifying the methodology.

The Conservation Officer confirmed the seven next steps:

1. Public consultation – making the public aware of the plan via social media, press, online and a public event near to Thirds Wood.
2. Review of feedback from public consultation and revision of plan where appropriate.
3. Mark up trees to be felled and submit a felling application to the Forestry Commission. Apply for SSSI consent from Natural England.
4. Put the work out to tender and select a suitable contractor.
5. Fine details of the operation to be agreed.
6. Commence works.
7. Plant new trees 2017 onwards.

On the proposal of Mrs Rees, seconded by Dr Braim it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve Mr Unwin's plan of works and to undertake the seven steps outlined above.

The Chairman thanked Mr Unwin for attending.

6. DRONE POLICY

The CCO went through the paper and outlined the problems arising from the flying of drones on MHC land. Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems were covered by the byelaws and it was not permitted to take off from or land on any land under the jurisdiction of MHC. (With an exception for gliders under 10kg) A policy had been prepared to make the position clear. On application, MHC would consider granting a licence to someone wishing to fly a drone across MHC land where it was considered safe and appropriate to do so.

On the proposal of Mr Hall-Jones, seconded by Dr Braim it was unanimously **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Board that the draft policy accompanying the paper should be approved.

7. MANAGEMENT RISK SCHEDULE

The part of the Risk Management Schedule which was relevant to the Land Management Committee was included in the papers. The Director highlighted the four areas categorised as high risk. The Health and Safety policy and procedures needed to be updated and a monitoring programme implemented. (Two items 2.3 and 4.7). The Director intended to ask the relevant committee to set up a working group to help progress this. The other categories (5.3 and 3.4) related to the impact of Government policy on grant funding and the impact of changes in legislation. The Director and Conservation Officer had examined where MHC was vulnerable to policy change following exit from the EU. Areas identified were Higher Level Stewardship, woodland grants and the scheme to secure Castlemorton Common. The impact was impossible to assess at present.

Dr Braim asked whether the Director would produce an “actions” column to record what needed to be done.

8. HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES QUARRY CAR PARKS

Following an external risk appraisal, it had been identified that there remained an easy access point for members of the public to Gullet Quarry and the Operations Manager had been asked to put up some additional fencing. There had been three minor rock falls in quarry car parks and the Director had asked the Operations Manager to put in earth bunds to prevent people parking close to the toe of the rock faces.

9. CONSERVATION OFFICER'S REPORT

New highway warning signs had been put up on the perimeter of Castlemorton and Hollybed Commons to ensure that drivers from all directions were aware that stock were turned out. This had created a debate on social media.

The Conservation Officer, with the Director, had prepared a paper looking at the risks to the organization of leaving the EU. HLS funding was used to cover the cost of grazing on the Hills and work to support that. MHC would start to look at other funding options but would also contact DEFRA and the 2 local MPs to ensure they were aware of the importance of the funding to maintaining the Hills. He hoped to have a joint meeting with Bill Wiggin MP and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust on the Hills. Mr Gardner added that the possible loss of grant funding highlighted the need for the infrastructure to be put in place on the commons to make grazing more appealing.

The Director confirmed that MHC would look at other sources of grant funding for the securing Castlemorton Common project. The Conservation Officer was also

looking at the options if grant funding for grazing was reduced – including which areas would be the highest priority.

The Conservation Officer had been speaking to a company called Brackenburn who produced pellets made of bracken for wood burners. The company was going to harvest bracken from Malvern and Hollybed Commons this winter, as a trial.

MHC intended to acquire several “tree poppers” for use by the volunteers, a tool which could be used to remove unwanted young trees. The AONB had offered to support the purchase with a grant from the Sustainable Development Fund.

10. UPDATE CENTRAL HILLS GRAZING

John Chance had brought 15 Belted Galloway cattle to the Central Hills and hoped to introduce sheep in a few weeks. He had been invited to attend the Stroll.

11. REPORT ON WORK RECENTLY UNDERTAKEN AND FORTHCOMING WORKS

During the summer, much of the Field Staff's time was taken up with amenity mowing and bin emptying. The first bracken roll had taken place. Giant Hogweed in Wood Street had been sprayed. There had been follow up on the sites where scrub was cleared in the winter, to cut back any re-growth. In the next few weeks there would be a second bracken roll and some areas would be cut for hay.

12. 4C'S MEETING MAY

There had been a meeting on 11th May. As well as the usual reports, there was a discussion on byelaw infringements and a request was made to residents to report any activity which might be a byelaw infringement, as well as any work being carried out by statutory undertakers. One of the committee had pointed out that there was a problem with cars partially blocking the road by parking on the roadside by Swinyards car park. There was also a suggestion that more vegetation should be cut back along the road edges, as it prevented drivers from seeing stock which was about to emerge onto the road. The Director confirmed he had had a meeting with the owner of Ambleside about encroachment by widening and deepening his easement, and the removal of an unauthorized turning area. Another concern was that he had used stone with the wrong pH. Mr Golightly asked about failure to cut the hedges on the boundaries, an example being with Fairoakes Farm (Hollybed Common).

13. GRAZIER'S REPORT

The Chairman asked when Mr Gardner planned to put up temporary fencing to confine the cattle on Castlemorton Common. Mr Gardner replied that one of the issues was a lack of watering points and a 4000l bowser lasted 60 cattle for 2 days. He would be targeting the areas on the west side of the road and the areas the Field Staff had cleared. The area by Hancocks' Lane would be targeted in late summer. He thought it was important in view of the possible reduction in grant funding to

improve the infrastructure if MHC wanted the commons to be grazed in future.
There were significant extra costs involved in managing stock on the commons.

14. MATTERS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

There were none.

15. URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

The meeting closed at 5.35pm.