

Malvern Hills Trust
Land Management Committee
Guesten Room, Lyttelton Rooms, Malvern
Thursday 13 July 2017 4.00pm

Present: Dr S Braim, Mrs P Cumming, Dr P Forster, Mr S Freeman (non-voting), Mr R Hall-Jones, Mrs G Rees, Mr C Rouse (Chair), Mr T Yapp.

In attendance: Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Secretary to the Board, Deputy Conservation Officer, Community and Conservation Officer (CCO), Mr M Gardner, 7 members of the public, Mr M Davies, Ms S Rouse, Mr R Hale.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies for absence

Conservation Manager, Mr D Baldwin, Ms C Bovey, Mr A Golightly, Mrs H Stace.

2. Declarations of interest

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

3. Chair's announcements

Forthcoming Visits

24 August 2017 6pm

Stroll - Meet at Swinyards Car Park and afterwards for refreshments at Castlemorton Parish Hall (Please bring a bottle!)

23 November 2pm Site visit details tba

4. Public Questions

These would be taken immediately before the relevant agenda item.

5. Matters arising from the meeting of 9 May 2017

There were none.

6. To approve revised policy on hunting

See Schedule for public questions.

The CEO went through the paper. He had proposed some amendments to the draft policy, as a result of the consultations which had taken place. These were shown in red on the draft policy in the paper. In particular, he asked the committee to consider how best to address the question of hunts exercising hounds over MHT land. This was not an event as such, if it was not publicized to hunt members, and could be considered to be the same as other individuals exercising groups of dogs over MHT land. He said that an option would be to address this in due course by way of a separate policy on exercising dogs. The CCO would be working on a responsible dog ownership campaign next year and

the policy was likely to be developed in connection with that. In response to a question, the CEO confirmed that each hunt operated in its own geographical area and therefore there were a limited number of hunts who might access MHT land. Mr Hall-Jones said he believed that, following the consultation, the revised draft policy balanced the competing interests well.

On the proposal of Mr Rouse, seconded by Mr Hall-Jones it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend the adoption of the amended policy to the Board.

7. To consider MHT Risk Schedule

The CEO went through the items flagged as “red” or “yellow” risks on the schedule, together with some of the new controls proposed. The risk identified in item 2.5 would increase as MHT would be affected by new Data Protection Regulations in 2018 and would have to review its processes. It was likely that the risk level set out in 4.7 would need to be increased in recognition of the need to tighten up procedures in relation to risk and site assessments and operator competency. The CEO asked Committee members to consider the risks identified and to let him know if they were aware of others that he had not identified.

8. Boer goat grazing trial

See Schedule for public questions.

The Deputy Conservation Officer went through the paper. Goats had been used to good effect elsewhere for conservation grazing but it was not clear how well the arrangement would work in the hills. The statement in the paper that the AONB would contribute to the cost of the fencing was not correct, although they were keen to see the project underway. The grazier would be responsible for moving the grazing compartment, if necessary, although this would be checked by MHT staff. It was not envisaged that there would be any supplemental feeding. The goats would need shelter if temperatures fell below 4 °C. Wheeled shelters would be used if needed but the enclosure would be set up (if possible) somewhere where some natural shelter was available. If the trial went ahead, the Conservation Department would evaluate whether the scheme was successful. Mr Freeman asked if the total cost of the equipment for trial would be £2,400 and that if the project was not a success, most of that equipment including the electric netting would be re-useable? The Deputy Conservation Officer confirmed that that was the case. The project would probably start in September/October. Any payment to the graziers had not yet been discussed. Mr Rouse said that the goats were susceptible to TB and would have to be tested, notwithstanding there was no statutory requirement to test goats at present.

On the proposal of Dr Braim, seconded by Mrs Rees it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to proceed with the trial as set out in the paper.

9. Good Neighbours’ Guide

The CCO went through the paper. She confirmed that the first run of printing might be done within the next few weeks. Mr Davies had been researching the possibility of distributing some of the leaflets with local parish magazines.

Because of the number of households involved, it was likely that the leaflets would

be distributed over the life of the Business Plan. Dr Braim asked about the cost of printing, which the CCO said she would circulate .

Dr Braim raised a separate point about the quantity of ashes being scattered on the ridge line at present.

10. Project progress update

The CEO highlighted 3 items:

St Ann's Well - the contractors would start on site on 17 July. If Board members wanted to have a look whilst the work was in progress, they should contact the CEO. The tenant had set up a temporary refreshment facility. The CEO would be carrying out a condition survey on 14 July.

British Camp repairs – approval from Historic England had now been received.

Mower – It had been planned to change one of the mowers in the second quarter, but that was under review following a recent Health and Safety review. The CEO was now considering whether to change 2 of the mowers to ensure there was suitable machinery to mow the smaller paths.

The CEO confirmed that the work at Top Shed had now been completed.

11. Proposed cuts H & W fire brigade – Malvern Fire Station

The CEO went through the paper. His concern was that the changes would affect the Fire and Rescue Service's ability to respond to incidents on MHT land. Ms Rouse had met the Area Commander, who had told her that full time firemen would be on duty on weekdays, but that retained firefighters would cover overnight. Her understanding was that the full time firefighters were fully trained in all aspects of their work but not all of the retained firefighters had undergone the same training. In particular they were not all trained in rope and water rescue, and should an incident occur when the full time crew was not available, firemen would have to travel from other stations. The retained crews could undergo some additional training, but it might not be feasible for example for them to put in the additional hours required to maintain their training for rope rescue.

At weekends, the Malvern station would be served by 16 part time fire crew from other stations. They would lack the Malvern fire crew's detailed local knowledge of the Hills.

Ms Rouse understood that negotiations were ongoing over the proposed arrangements.

The CEO would write to Hereford and Worcester Fire Service about MHT's concerns. Mr Rouse asked if the CEO had data on how many call-outs there had been, and the CEO said he would be able to obtain that information from the fire service. Mr Hall-Jones felt it was important to stress that a lot of the call outs to MHT land would be out of normal working hours. It would be helpful to have the data on call-outs to emergencies on the Hills to back up the assertion that many of them were out of hours.

12. Grazier's Report

Mr Gardner said that it had been a relatively incident-free period with 2 dog incidents reported and no road traffic accidents (probably as a result of the increased hours of daylight). The CEO reported that a 50 mph speed limit had

been imposed on the B4208 between Coombe Green and the junction with the Gullet Road. Mr Gardner intended to fence the cattle in towards the end of the summer and over the dark period.

13. Conservation Manager's Report

The Deputy Conservation Officer reported that tenders had been invited for the work at Thirds Wood. A contractor would be selected with a view to starting work in September.

Brackenburn would cut and collect bracken from Hollybeds Common and Malvern Common at the end of August.

Ash dieback had been reported in all but one of the 10km grid squares in which MHT held land. The disease had not yet been reported on MHT land, but its arrival must be imminent. There had been no significant felling on other public land.

Government Agencies would indicate what action had to be taken.

There was an issue on Castlemorton and Hollybeds Commons with internal parasites in sheep, which were increasingly resistant to commonly used treatments. The Conservation Manager was in consultation with local vets and graziers to work out a strategy to tackle this. The recommendation was to rest areas of the common for a period of months. Once a plan had been formulated the Committee would be informed.

14. Car parks update

The white lines had been repainted in all of the main car parks. Some repairs were needed. The CEO noted that there seemed to have been a drop in takings when the weather was very hot.

15. Matters for Future Consideration

The Secretary to the Board said that negotiations were ongoing in relation to payment of professional fees for advice in connection with the proposed easement application for Chance Lane. The CEO said that following the accident reported to the Staffing Committee, it was intended to visit all the paths currently being cut using a tractor to grade them for suitability. The consultant had also produced a draft access plan, and it was intended to combine the information and produce a report in due course. The CEO confirmed that there was money allocated for paths, but it might be necessary to increase funding following the review of accessibility for machinery.

16. Urgent business

There was none.

The meeting closed at 5.53

Schedule

Questions agenda item 6

Public Questions:

Committee members had been provided with copies of the full letters/E-mails containing questions although only the questions themselves are set out below.

From Pauline Burgess: Why has the policy on hunting been changed to allow hunts access 4 times a year instead of 3 as proposed at the last Land Management meeting? At that meeting it was said that damage had been caused by horses' hooves so surely this will be worsened by allowing hunts to go over the land more?

From Mr Haden: Is Mr Bridges aware that the MHT sponsored walk and event guidelines urge (but do not restrict) participants to avoid causing disturbance to ground nesting birds between the months of March and August inclusive and therefore is there any logical reason why the trail hunting season cannot be extended to include the month of February and will he amend his recommended policy accordingly?

Response - The CEO said both questions related to the season when trail hunting would be allowed and the number of times. Following the consultation, MHT had revisited the rationale for setting the period November to January. One of the key factors was the potential disturbance to wildlife of all types. MHT had looked at the times when mammals might be active and present. October to January was the safest period. It had been decided to extend the period from 3 to 4 months and to allow one additional hunt during that period. Having extended the period, it was reasonable to allow an extra event. The Secretary to the Board pointed out that if the ground conditions were poor, there was the option in the policy to stop a planned event.

From Mr Haden: Will Mr Bridges agree to enter into further consultation with the Hunts in the hope that a satisfactory agreement can be reached before the amended policy goes to the Board for adoption?

Response – The policy was put out to consultation to 6 organisations. Four responded. There was no plan to consult again. Two further responses had been received since the consultation deadline and had been taken into account although they were not referred to in the paper.

From Di Pugh: My question or rather request is that I believe that not warning the public when they are hunting would be irresponsible. How can people chose to keep away when they are hunting?

Response – As part of the policy, MHT have reserved the right to make available to the public the dates and areas where hunting was taking place. The hunts had said they were happy for the date and general area to be made public. It was not practical to give the route as it was liable to last minute change.

From Di Pugh: The hunt seems to be of the opinion that they would find it hard to give MHT much in the way of advance warning. Why should they be allowed to dictate to MHT how much warning they should give?

Response – The policy does not allow for organisations to dictate how much notice they give. There is a requirement in the policy for the organisers to notify dates a month in advance and routes 10 days in advance. These could still be changed at short notice. MHT would look for accurate information in order to evaluate the proposed route and get back to the hunt in time with any suggested amendments. If insufficient notice was given, it may not be possible to approve the event.

From Di Pugh: Point 6 page 7, why would this point not be applicable to the Ledbury Hunt.

Response – There is no suggestion by MHT that this would not apply to the Ledbury Hunt.

From Di Pugh: Will there be a MHT warden present at each hunt event?

Response – There would normally be at least one member of staff present.

From Di Pugh: Will the hunt be penalised should it break the rules agreed?

Response- As a general rule, if an event organiser failed to comply with MHT policy or conditions, MHT would reserve the right to refuse permission for further events.

From Max Burgess: What date will the proposed dog walking (Group) policy be addressed?

Response - There was no fixed date. It depended on whether the revised policy was adopted as written.

Questions agenda item 8

From Bobby Balfour

1. How many goats will be housed per 'up to 1 acre' enclosure and how often will they be moved so the goats have access to sufficient food?

Response: There will be a trial of 20 goats and the grazing will be monitored.

2. We already have sheep and cattle on the hills restricting public access. Doesn't adding goats exacerbate this as one of the main points of looking after the hills is so that the public can access them?

Response: The trial will take place in areas where there are no paths so there will not be a conflict with public access. The plan is to open up areas currently inaccessible through bramble and gorse.

3. I walked on a very hot day from the Link Top end to St Anne's Well last summer and I found it quite trying because there was absolutely no shelter at all. I was relieved when I finally got down to some trees and shade. If allowed to return to their natural state would the hills not provide shelter at or near the

top and would this not eliminate the need to have any livestock or their enclosures limiting public access?

Response: MHT are obliged to keep the hills in good order. Having stock on the hills helps stop the woody vegetation from taking over. If MHT carried out no management on the hills public access would be inhibited.

In response to a supplemental question the CEO reiterated that although scrub was “natural” in the sense that it grew up of its own accord, if it was not managed, it would spread and the grassland and with it public access would be lost. The goats were being trialled as a specialist tool to manage the very rugged areas which were too difficult to manage by manpower.

DRAFT