

Malvern Hills Trust

Land Management Committee

Guesten Suite, Lyttelton Well, 6 Church St, Malvern WR14 2AY

Wednesday 15 February 2023 at 7:00 pm

Present: Mr C Atkins, Mr D Baldwin, Dr S Braim (Chair), Mr P Clayburn, Mr M Davies (non-voting), Mr J Michael, Dr T Parsons, Mr C Rouse, Mrs M Turner, Dr D Westbury.

In attendance: Conservation Manager, Secretary to the Board, CEO.

Dr Braim welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Mr R Bartholomew, Mrs C Palmer, Ms H Stace, Mr Gardner (grazier).

2. Declarations of Interest

Mr Rouse –rights of common over Trust land.

3. Chairman's Communications

Dr Braim welcomed Dr Westbury to his first meeting since becoming a trustee.

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Matters arising from previous meeting

There were none.

6. Management proposals for 5 newly acquired land parcels

The Conservation Manager showed a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the key features of the sites.

Colwall Coppice

The following points were made:

- In relation to the western part of the wood (which it was planned to thin) would it be possible to ring bark some of the trees rather than removing them to create standing dead wood?
- Would the trees which were left on the western side recover their shape or would it be better to remove them all and start again? The Conservation Manager said that the consensus of opinion was that if correctly selected the remaining trees should recover once they had more light and space.
- Should the ash be left to die? The Conservation Manager said it was impossible to know when and if the trees would die and the work to clear the congestion should be carried out before the condition of the standing trees became worse.

West Field

The Conservation Manager had invited a decision on tree planting on West Field. The broad consensus during the site visit was low density planting on the lower two thirds of the field so that the trees would not impact on the views from the top nor on the grassland.

The following points were made:

- What was the purpose of having an orchard? The Conservation Manager said it was away of increasing tree cover. The fruit could be harvested or left for wildlife. Dr Westbury said there needed to be a clear objective in planting an orchard. There were a lot of wilding approaches which could be used without involving orchard trees. The Secretary to the Board pointed out that the Trust's charitable objectives in the Acts were preserving the natural aspect and any community benefit from harvesting fruit would have to be ancillary to that.
- Would they be old varieties on standard rootstock?
- Could the field not be left as it was and used as a hay meadow?
- An option was to take a cut hay around the trees but this made the operation much more difficult.
- Fruit trees required maintenance, which would add ongoing cost.
- Had there been historic orchards on the west side of the Hills?

The meeting was split on which was the best option. A vote was taken on a proposal from the Chair to have a sparse well managed orchard with 20/30 trees in the pasture. There were 5 votes in favour and 4 against. The Chair then proposed an alternative, and it was **RESOLVED** (6 votes in favour and 3 against) that 20/30 trees be planted with a mixture of orchard and broadleaf trees with pasture underneath. Dr Braim asked the Conservation Manager to consider whether that mixture would work.

Norbridge Field

The Conservation Manager explained that what he meant in the paper by "a peripheral site" was not a geographical reference but that it was a site with no designations and by comparison with some other parts of the estate, would command relatively lower input. It needed a simple management regime.

The following points were made:

- Could wild flowers be planted around the fence?
- There was a suggestion that it was not necessary to keep making the ground poor. The CEO said that this meadow was already species rich and enriching the land would allow more aggressive grasses to take over.

Stonepit Field

The management regime would be similar. The Conservation Manager spoke about where the walking routes might be connected. A bridge would be required but no estimate had been obtained. The Conservation Manager thought grant funding might be available for the bridge.

The Conservation Manager said that no water supply for stock was available in either field and he suggested the simplest option would be for the Trust to purchase a bowser at a cost of around £4,000. This could then be used at other sites as necessary. The other option was to install a permanent water supply. Purchase of a bowser was agreed in principle and would be put into the capital equipment budget for consideration by the Board.

Swinepit Rough

The decision required was on removal of the conifers and their replacement. A more detailed plan would be worked up. If all the trees were removed at the same time, a contractor had indicated that they would carry out the work at no cost in return for retaining the timber.

Comments included:

- Could some of the Scots Pine be retained? Do some of the exotic conifers have an ecological role to play? The Conservation Manager said that all of the trees would have a use for some species. However, they were taking the place of a native tree which would provide much greater wildlife and landscape benefit. Some of the Scots Pine might be retained.
- If all the conifers were removed in one go it would have a big impact on the species currently using them.
- There was a risk if some conifers were taken out it might mean other trees would be affected by windthrow. The Conservation Manager estimates that one in six of the trees in the woodland were conifers.
- Should all the conifers be taken out – could you choose to retain some?
- The green trees brightened the countryside up in the winter.
- The CEO said this was potentially an ancient woodland site, and could be restored back to a woodland with more ground flora. This would be more appropriate in this setting.

On the proposal of Dr Braim it was **RESOLVED** (with 2 votes against) that the Conservation Manager should develop a viable plan for removing the exotic trees and establishing new site appropriate tree/shrub species.

Dr Braim asked that the plan be brought back to the committee for consideration.

The Conservation Manager went through a table of the planned expenditure (see Schedule) for the sites, some of which had already been approved. Grant funding would be available for a number of items. He anticipated licencing a grazier to graze the grassland areas once the works were carried out.

On the proposal of Dr Braim, seconded by Mr Clayburn it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend approval of the Work Programmes to the Board for inclusion in the Land Management Plan (subject to the resolutions set out above)

7. Building at Colwall Lands

The Conservation Manager said that Mr Gardner sent his apologies but did support the provision of an additional building at Brockhill Road. Suitable housing

and in-bye land was needed to effectively support management by grazing of the Northern and Central Hills.

The CEO went through the supplementary paper which set out the power available to trustees to approve the expenditure.

Mr Rouse said that the grazier did not need to lamb the sheep and he had been told that landlords put things up and charge 15 % interest on the buildings.

The CEO said that the buildings were provided as part of the licence agreement to graze the Northern and Central Hills. They were part of the in-bye land provided to support the grazing. Breeding lambs to follow on enabled the lambs to become hefted, which would be much more difficult to do with sheep which were bought in.

The grazier was required to produce a business plan to support his application for the grazing licence. Not allowing the grazier to lamb the sheep would change the economics of the grazing arrangement on which the business plan was based.

The CEO suggested that Mr Rouse should declare an interest and the Secretary to the Board confirmed to the meeting that the previous grazier was Mr Rouse's son.

Dr Westbury asked whether in future the Trust might find it difficult to find people prepared to graze the Hills. Having facilities like the buildings would make the grazing a more attractive proposition.

On the proposal of Dr Braim it was **RESOLVED** (with one abstention) to recommend to the Board the expenditure of up to £40,000 from the Parliamentary Fund to construct a building to replace the temporary structure at Colwall Lands.

8. Mountain biking

This paper had been deferred from the previous meeting. The Conservation Manager and Community and Conservation Officer had met Mrs Turner and been through her questions. Mrs Turner was concerned about the damage which off road bikes caused to the Hills, the use of electric bikes and the increasing number of cyclists. She asked whether there were any plans to include anything in the proposed governance changes in relation to cycling on the Hills. The Secretary to the Board said the difficulties were practical, and any suggestions on how the byelaws could be better enforced were welcome.

Unauthorised mountain biking was a problem for many organisations who managed open access areas, not just the Trust. The Conservation Manager read a press release from the Forestry Commission outlining their plans to close some trails in the Wyre Forest. Education was a key tool but there was a category of cyclists who knew the rules but did not abide by them. This was the hardest group to tackle. The issue of cycling on the Hills was a matter which would be kept under review.

9. Outdoor visits 2023

The CEO suggested a meeting on Old Hills in April. The other topic for an outdoor meeting was tree and scrub control. The CEO would endeavour to arrange a meeting in an area where the field staff were carrying out work.

10. Urgent business

There was none.

11. Date of next meeting

Next meeting: 13 April 2023.

Mr Parsons wanted to raise an issue about the condition of Park Wood. He thought it was dangerous and was a complete jungle. He said that you could only walk on the paths. It was explained that the agreed Land Management for Park Wood was for around 30% of the wood to be managed as a coppice and in that part, the coppicing operations were carried out on a seven year rotation. This was a traditional method of management that improved biodiversity and the work took place at this time of year. The Conservation Manager had checked the site today and was happy there were no hazards beyond what would normally be expected in an active coppice woodland setting. There was a notice up explaining to the public about the coppicing operation.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

caital items for new lands				
site	no./length	cost	grant fundable?	board approved?
SWINE PIT ROUGHS				
boundary fencing ad hoc		200	n	✓
WEST FIELD				
Livestock fencing	345m	2760	y	✓
hand gates	2	800	y	
orchard trees	40	750	y	
tree guards	40	1600	y	
STONE PIT FIELD				
handgate	1	400	y	
livestock fencing	275m	2200	y	✓
NORBRIDGE FIELD				
access bridge	1	4000	y	
livestock fencing	500m	4000	y	✓
hand gate	1	400	y	
field gate	1	250	y	✓
tree planting	6	250	y	
UPPER PURLIEU FIELD				
livestock fencing	320m	2560	y	✓
hand gates	2	800	y	
field gate	1	250	y	✓
mobile bowser	1	4000	n	
other	1	1000	n	
total		26,220		