

Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Land Management Committee

Lyttelton Well, Church Street, Malvern WR14 2AY

Thursday 11 April 2024 at 7:00 pm

Present: Mr J Michael (Chair), Mr D Baldwin, Mr P Clayburn, Mrs C Palmer, Mrs F Robinson, Mr C Rouse, Mr M Victory (arrived 7.20 and left 8.30), Mrs F Victory (arrived 7.15), Prof D Westbury, Mr M Wilkinson, and Mrs S Wren.

In attendance: Mrs M Turner, CEO, Conservation Manager, Operations Manager, Secretary to the Board, one Warden (left after item 7), and two members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Mr R Bartholomew, Mr M Driscoll, Mr M Gardner, and Mr J Stock.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mr Rouse has commoners' rights on parts of the Malvern Hills that he has exercised in the past and could do so again.

In addition, his son, Matt Rouse, was formerly a grazier on MHT land under a grazing licence. This gives Mr Rouse a potential Conflict of Interest in relation to awarding the grazing licences and supporting the licensed grazier.

3. Chair's Communications.

- Mr Michael thanked the field and conservation staff for the Land Management Spring Walk held earlier in the day. He recorded the Committee's appreciation of the work they did, hampered by limited resources and bad weather.
- Mr Michael highlighted the current consultation on the Malvern Hills National Landscape five-year plan.
- Mr Michael welcomed Mrs Turner, who with her son was due to have a conversation with the Conservation Manager (CM) regarding possible alternative methods to control ash dieback. Any help to control the disease was of course most welcome.

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Matters Arising from the meeting held on 7 December 2023

There were none.

6. Wardens' Report

The Warden present gave a presentation on the day-to-day work of the Wardens, explaining how they contributed to the practical implementation of the Land Management Plan. She highlighted the challenges arising from the increased number of visitors to the Hills and of dog incidents. The Wardens spent a huge amount of time dealing with mess, emptying dog bins twice a day. Concern was

expressed about the increase in dog attacks and the Warden present was asked whether she thought there was more the Board could do to address the problem, for example placing notices in car parks regarding attacks and prosecutions. It was noted that if the Trust lost graziers, it would lose its ability to manage the land. The Warden said that the Wardens' presence and interaction with the public made the most difference. The Conservation Manager added that reports of livestock issues were circulated on social media via *StockWatch*. It was noted that the question of dog bin emptying and possible outsourcing of the task was on the CEO's to-do list.

The Warden present reported that all four Wardens had recently been beating the bounds of the Trust's land on their respective patches and she shared photos of encroachments identified on her own patch.

Mr Michael recorded a Vote of Thanks to the Wardens for everything they do.

The Warden left the meeting at 7.30.

7. Annual Progress Report on the Land Management Plan 2021-2026 (LMP)

The CM went through the paper, explaining that it provided feedback on delivery towards the nine Guiding Principles, and reported on the 14 Objectives¹. He explained that conservation began with maintaining the estate and this maintenance work accounted for most staff time. There were many challenges, every day.

7.1 Guiding Principles

- The boundary checks recently completed by the Wardens had been a huge job and had identified tens of issues, mainly minor but some more serious, although fortunately no major encroachments had been found. The CM said that ideally the Trust would like the Wardens to beat the bounds every winter, but that this was the first time it had been possible for three years.
- The CM reported that the Trust had been unable to carry out necessary tree works on the British Camp Road. It would be necessary to close the road in order to do so and County Highways had said they would charge the Trust £8,000 for this. Mr Victory said that he would raise this issue with the County Council.
- The CM said that the Trust wanted to bring back a public events programme, subject to capacity. It was hoped that it would be possible to have a mini programme during the summer. Public events improved engagement with the public and with local experts.
- The CM encouraged Trustees to visit the new forest school site developed by the Trust for Malvern Wyche Primary School, and to see for themselves how it had improved. The staff had done a very good job.

¹ The content of the paper is not repeated here; additional information only has been included.

- The CM advised that although the NVC (national vegetation classification) survey was due, the Trust would not be able to afford to do it. The cheapest quotation sourced for it had been £55k.

Questions and comments were invited on the Guiding Principles.

- Mr Wilkinson asked whether it would be possible to prioritise just a few areas for an NVC survey, perhaps heather and heathland. The CM pointed out that the Trust was increasing its holdings, which meant that there was more to manage, and that the Trust had to prioritise resourcing its maintenance work. Asked whether the volunteer programme helped with this, the CM said volunteers filled a certain niche well and added that the Trust would like to expand the programme, but that this would not be possible until the Lower Shed had been cleared and refurbished.
- Mrs Palmer asked whether numbers of volunteers had recovered since the pandemic. The CM said that numbers weren't back to where they had been, some volunteers having decided not to return. The Trust received plenty of requests from people wanting to do academic research but had no space to accommodate them. It would be possible to train volunteers to train new volunteers, but the Lower Shed facility was needed first.
- Mrs Wren asked whether, in an ideal world, boundary checks could be done by volunteers. The CM said this might be possible with the right people. The CEO added that until recently the Trust had had two volunteer wardens. There was information on the web site about how to volunteer.

7.2 Objectives

- The Committee was sorry to learn that the Trust believed grayling butterflies to be extinct on the hills. The CM said that although the local branch of Butterfly Conservation wanted to do more research on this, they were not being allowed to by their head office, for reasons unknown. The CM said that he had a paper he could circulate if Trustees wanted more information, adding that a century ago, the landscape of the hills would have been more suitable for grayling. Now there was less grazing on the hills and the tree line was creeping up. The closure of the quarries also meant the grayling butterfly no longer had an optimum habitat on the Hills. The CM recommended Trustees visit the 'Britain from Above' web site, which showed how Malvern had changed.

Questions and comments were invited on the Objectives.

- Mr Wilkinson thanked the Trust for its work on ponds, saying that Castlemorton residents were pleased to have their ponds back.
- Mrs Wren asked how a species qualified as an Objective for the Trust. The CM said the species were either a notified feature of a SSSI citation or they

were a useful talisman representing a certain habitat or other requirements.

- The Trust did review these objectives from time to time.

8. Property Management

The Committee received a paper prepared by the CEO, proposing the creation of a new Property Manager post to address gaps in experience and capacity amongst the current staff team, and freeing up their time to focus on conservation and governance. The Committee also received a draft role profile and costings.

The CEO reported that the new post would allow the Trust to be more proactive about property issues and to make sure that it received all the income to which it was entitled, for example from utility companies working on Trust land. It was also hoped that having a suitably skilled person in post would reduce expenditure on costly legal advice. The Committee was also asked to consider the option of engaging a private sector land agent to reduce the backlog of work; this would be funded from general reserves.

There was a discussion on the duration of the new post, and whether it should be full or part-time. If appointed on 26 hours per week for a year, the costs would be covered by the one-off additional £30,000 for the staffing budget approved by the Board for 2024-2025. However, there was concern that if the appointment were only for one year, it might fail to attract good candidates. It was noted that the holder of a similar post at the Madresfield estate had recommended it be full-time, and the Committee agreed with this. It was noted that the Finance, Administration & Resources Committee would need to look at costings, but that ideally Land Management Committee would want a two-year appointment with the possibility of extension, and a view to a permanent appointment. Mr Core recommended consulting recruiters on how the job might be best positioned.

On the proposal of Mrs Palmer, seconded by Mrs Wren, it was RESOLVED unanimously to amend the resolution recommended in the paper.

On the proposal of Mr Clayburn, seconded by Mrs Victory, it was RESOLVED to recommend to the Board the inclusion of an MHT Property Manager post in the MHT staffing structure, and actively to recruit to the post to address property matters proactively; and to work with a land agent to reduce the backlog. It was further RESOLVED that the Committee would draw on its skills and experience to support MHT in drafting the person specification for the role.

Mr Victory left the meeting at 8.30 pm.

9. Operation Manager's Report

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update on work carried out by the Field Staff during the autumn and winter periods, highlighting the challenges of storms

and wet weather. Mowing would be delayed until well into May, because there was so much surface water. Upcoming works for the Field Staff included fence repairs at Gullet Quarry, repairs to the Link Top sink hole, drainage at Colwall football field, and work to improve security at Top Shed.

10. Grazier's Report

In the absence of Mr Gardner, the CM gave his report:

- Two lambs and three cattle had been killed during the winter, one of the cow fatalities thought to have been caused by a hit-and-run driver, possibly driving a tractor. Poorly fenced neighbouring farmland allowed animals to stray onto the road.
- Some stock was now off the land for lambing and calving.
- Grass growth looked promising, and Mr Gardner wanted to assure the Committee that British Camp *would* be grazed again.

11. Conservation Manager's Report

The CM reported that:

- 2/3 of the RPA Stewardship Payments remained outstanding; these had been included in the end of year accounts as money expected.
- A very successful Wildlife Panel had taken place on the day prior to this meeting.
- The Office had been very busy with easements and wayleaves.

12. Outdoor visits and meetings 2024

Mr Michael announced that the Summer Stroll would take place on 27 June and an Autumn Stroll on a date to be arranged in mid-September.

13. Date of next meeting

Thursday 27 June at 5.30 pm followed by the Summer Stroll on the Old Hills

14. Confidential items

On the proposal of Mrs Palmer, seconded by Mr Clayburn, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to exclude the public for discussion of an item of urgent business on the agenda on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the exempt or confidential nature of the business to be transacted (commercially sensitive information).

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm