

## Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Land Management Committee

Callow End Village Hall, Upton Road, Callow End, Worcester WR2 4TA

Thursday 27 June 2024 at 5:30 pm

**Present:** John Michael (Chair), David Baldwin, Paul Clayburn, Mark Driscoll, Felicity Robinson, Chris Rouse, John Stock, Malcolm Victory, Frances Victory, Mike Wilkinson, and Sheila Wren.

**In attendance:** John Raine, Matt Gardner, CEO, Conservation Manager, Secretary to the Board, and Cllr Marilyn Birks, Mayor of Malvern (left 5.55).

### 1. Apologies for Absence

Richard Bartholomew, David Core, Cynthia Palmer, Duncan Westbury, and the Operations Manager.

### 2. Declarations of Interest

Malcolm Victory declared an interest as councillor for Malvern Wells in the item on signage for Malvern Wells village; he had been working on this with Marilyn Birks. He said he would like to be able to vote on the issue if allowed to do so; this was accepted.

Chris 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.

- John Michael reported that Severn Trent Water had taken steps to repair the pipe at the Link Top 'sink hole' and to restore the manhole cover for better access in future. This was a goodwill gesture; Severn Trent was still investigating ownership of the pipe. Once the owner had been identified, Malvern Hills Trust would seek to recover their costs. John Stock noted that following their most recent inspection, Severn Trent had carried out the repairs very quickly, possibly because they now realised they might be responsible. He recommended that the Trust continue its own investigations as to ownership, suggesting that it was 85 % likely that Severn Trent would be found to be responsible.
- The drainage problem at Colwall football pitch had been repaired by the operations team. It had been found to be the result of a blocked pipe under MHT land.
- The Trust had advertised for a Land and Property Manager. The advertisement was running on a variety of sites, with a closing date of 8 July.

- Mr Michael reminded everyone of the walk on the Old Hills taking place immediately after this meeting. It would be led by the Conservation Officer and would focus on the species of Old Hills and the work being done by Trust staff there.

#### **4. Public Comments**

There were none.

#### **5. Matters Arising from the meeting held on 11 April 2024**

- In answer to a question about action to prevent dog attacks, it was noted that the Trust had highlighted the problem on social media, but that no campaign had been launched. Matt Gardner said that this had been less of a problem recently.
- Malcolm Victory was asked whether he had been able to contact County Highways about the necessary tree works at British Camp Road and their insistence that they would charge the Trust £8,000 to close the road for this. Mr Victory said that the traffic lights had been removed temporarily, had returned for one week for inspection work, and should be gone again shortly. There should therefore be no barrier to the tree works going forward.
- It was noted that the field staff had been able to catch up with mowing following the recent improvement in the weather.

#### **6. Property Management**

##### **6.1. Proposed Signage for Malvern Wells Village**

The Committee received a paper prepared by the CEO on village gateway signage on Trust land. The CEO went through the paper. Malvern Wells Parish Council had wished to install white gates on their village boundaries, as was regular practice in Worcestershire villages, but these were not allowed on Trust land. The Parish Council's initial approach had therefore been rejected. However, the new CEO, wishing to adopt a participatory approach with local stakeholders, had met with the local councillor, Marilyn Birks, and a colleague to see if a way forward could be found. The Parish Council had funding to improve road safety that had to be used by March 2025; they wished to remove two old signs and associated posts and street clutter, and to replace them with new signs. The CEO appreciated the Council's concerns; there had been seven slight accidents and one severe accident in the area in recent times and there were two schools on the A449. It was proposed that the new signs would have a heritage style, a halfway house between the Worcestershire County Council signs and Malvern Town signs, aiming for optimum visual distinctiveness. Trustees thanked the CEO for her work in seeking a proactive, middle way forward, and Marilyn Birks assured the meeting that the Parish Council was confident that the new signs would have an impact.

On the proposal of Malcolm Victory, seconded by John Stock, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend that the Board approve the installation of Malvern Wells Parish Council's preferred design of signage, albeit with two posts per sign in all locations for visual attractiveness. The Peachfield Road sign was to be integrated in the space with other street signs. It was also **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend that the approach of finding consensus and a placemaking ethos should become a regular approach to land and property matters.

*Marilyn Birks left the meeting at 5.55*

## **6.2. St Ann's Well Road**

The CEO paper introduced a paper prepared by John Stock. The CEO explained that there had been various reports during May of possible subsidence in St Ann's Road. The Trust was monitoring the situation. There was minimal chance of collapse, but there would be huge impact if this happened. It was possible that the fault line from Rosebank Gardens was the cause. It was confirmed that St Ann's Road itself was unadopted and therefore in the Trust's ownership, but that Foley Terrace and the wall supporting St Ann's Road, which had been built later, was the responsibility of Worcestershire Highways, because Foley Terrace was adopted. Some urgent remedial action had been essential to preserve the surface of St Ann's Road. The Trust had done some repairs to the rockface as a gesture of good will without accepting responsibility. John Stock and one of the Wardens had installed line pins on either side of the main cracks to allow distance measurements to be taken across the cracks, and they were monitoring these readings. The CEO had alerted Highways three weeks previously and said she would contact them to check progress. A paper would be going to the Board on 11 July.

## **7. Land Management Plan (LMP) Timetabling**

The Board received a proposed timetable for the production of the next Land Management Plan, due to cover the period 2026-2031. Work would start in the Conservation office from July 2024, with the first involvement of the Board expected in June 2025, ahead of a public consultation in July and August 2025. It was noted that this was further evidence that the Trust *did* consult on its plans. In answer to a question, the Conservation Manager (CM) said that there had been a major consultation on the previous LMP, whereas for the current plan, proposals had just been published and made available for comment. He thought that a major consultation every 10 years was about right. The previous one had involved a pre-paid postcard exercise, which had attracted hundreds of responses, information in the Gazette, and focus groups. Trustees were keen to see this repeated for the new LMP.

On the proposal of Paul Clayburn, seconded by Sheila Wren, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to recommend that the Board approve the proposed timetable for the production of the Land Management Plan 2026-2031.

## **8. Operation Manager's Report**

The Committee received the Operation Manager's report for April to mid-June 2024. In his absence, the CEO reported that the team had been working very hard. Their work to relieve drainage problems at Colwall and Guarlford had been critical. The new truck was due for delivery on the day of this meeting. The CEO was pleased to report that the team had been able to source exact matches to replace the paviors at Hayslade Spout.

In answer to a question, the Conservation Manager said that the Trust had modified a couple of the bins to make emptying easier for staff. There was still concern and unaddressed issues around dealing with waste however and the CEO would be raising the issue at the Health & Safety visit by the Trust's safety advisor on Monday 1 July.

## **9. Grazier's Report**

Matt Gardner reported that there had been few problems with dogs recently. However, it had been one of the worst years for road deaths that the graziers had experienced. Driving standards seemed to have deteriorated. One of the Wardens had managed to trace a member of the public who had run over a sheep in the last week.

The graziers had struggled with the wet conditions during the winter. There was now grass everywhere, and Mr Gardner advised that more mechanical work would be required in the future.

## **10. Conservation Manager's Report**

The CM gave an update on recent work in his department:

- Ash surveys had been delayed until the canopy had come out, which had been later than usual; this work was divided between five staff. The CM anticipated that the full Ash Dieback fund would be required again this year.
- Mowing was in progress, albeit hampered by the post-operative leave of an experienced member of staff.
- Stewardship monies were due by the end of June. Monies from two Agreements - Southern, Northern and Central hills, of around £90k, were still outstanding.
- The CM had been involved supporting the recent Audit process, and with attending Bill drop-in sessions.
- The CM was booking works in for September rather than October, based on recent autumn wet weather. September was going to be a busy time and might well attract public attention.
- Repairs to British Camp had been carried out as per the LMP. The Operations Manager and his staff had gained useful experience from this work.
- There was a complicated change of use easement application for a caravan site at Sherrard's Green, which was expected to be presented to the Board in September.

- The gardening contract had been updated to include clearing vegetation from the St Ann's Well sign.
- The Wardens were progressing issues shared with the Board in their recent presentation.
- Orchids were enjoying a good year on the Hills and Commons, and the Community & Conservation Officer had recently led an orchid walk on Link Common.

*Questions to the CM were invited*

- David Baldwin asked for an update on the encroachment at Beacon Road, noting that the Board had previously refused an easement application. The CEO said that she had instructed the property owner to make an easement application or to remove the chippings. The owner had been trying to negotiate, and it was likely that the Trust would have to take action to remove the chippings. The CEO had hoped to resolve the issue collaboratively, but time was running out and it was now planned to instruct solicitors to issue a letter.
- Mark Driscoll asked about the potential land acquisition at Central Hills. The CM said that the Trust had made an offer to the Berrington Trustees, but they had decided to go to auction. The Trust had expected them to make a counteroffer.
- The Trust had made a first offer for the orchard at Swinyard Hill, which had been declined by the National Trust, and so a higher offer had now been put forward.

**11. Outdoor visits and meetings 2024**

A walk was planned for September, details to be confirmed.

**12. Date of next meeting**

Thursday 5 December at 7 pm

**The meeting closed at 6.37 pm**