

## **Minutes of the meeting of Ashdown Area Deer Forum (AADF)**

28 April 2010, Ashdown Forest Centre, Wych Cross, Forest Row

Present: Nick Birchell (Complete Land Management, CLM), Neil Brookes (British Deer Society, BDS), Jamie Cordery (Deer Initiative, DI; minute taker), Dale Foden (Deputy Network Manager, East Sussex County Council, ESCC), Paul Francis (Firearms, Sussex Police), Alan Morriss (Pippingford), Hew Prendergast (Conservators of Ashdown Forest), John Rich (Sec., Deer Management Group, DMG), Kim Wheeler Mallows (MoD).

### **1) Apologies**

Ian Byford (Inspector, Sussex Police), Colin Booty (RSPCA), Jochen Langbein (Deer Initiative), Derek Stimpson (BDS), Carol Pople (Firearms, Sussex Police).

### **2) Minutes of the last Meeting**

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

### **Matters Arising.**

There were no matter arising that are not covered by the following topics.

### **2) RTC Sub Group**

The number of registered Wardens has been slowly growing. The vetting procedure appears to be working with all applicants received by ESCC passed on to the Police. Just recently one applicant has been deemed unsuitable but another was taken on. Coverage is generally across the county, particularly in the AADF area, although thinner in the east of the county. NB offered to ask BDS if they would be able to advertise that fact with a view to improving coverage. ESCC have been very helpful in promoting the scheme in East Sussex. JR will now contact West Sussex County Council to discuss whether a similar level of support is available there. Some Wardens already operate across the West Sussex boundary. All new applicants will receive roadside risk assessment training in an event planned for later in 2010. This event will include the appropriate sections of the DI Best Practice guides.

NB reported that the call out system is now much better since the beginning of the Scheme, but that there still appear to be occasional difficulties in ensuring that the most appropriate Warden is called to an incident. PF reported that Ian Byford is investigating the cause (in response to an email from NB) and DF offered to help by supplying maps in paper and .pdf format to call centre staff. PF will provide JC with call-out details to be passed on to Jochen Langbein for the Deer Collisions project. It was noted that Wealden District Council now report deer casualties separately from other animals and those present were asked to use their contacts to request that other councils did likewise.

The deer casualty count reported by Forest Rangers for the period January to April 2010 is 84, just slightly lower than the figure for 2009. The year end figures for 2009 (244) show no significant drop from previous years given that Ranger coverage has been reduced by  $\frac{1}{4}$  because of staff shortage.

### **3) Traffic Mitigation Sub Group**

DF suggested that there is now no prospect of GOSE supporting any form of interactive signage for the area. The temporary "corex" cricket score signs attached to permanent signs on the A22 between Forest Row and Nutley) will continue to be maintained by ESCC.

The ESCC policy for erecting deer warning signs, which involves the use of ground truthing deer crossing points and checking traffic volume and deer casualty reports through the Deer Warden Scheme, has been approved and will be actioned from now on. This should help to ensure that the limited resources for such signage will be most effectively used.

The East Sussex Casualty Reduction Partnership (through Neil Banks of Wealden District Council) has funding available for warning posters and other materials. This should mean that the nationally available "Deer Aware" material can be more widely applied in the AADF and DMG area. ESCC will assist in this through DF and Graeme Lake. The Ashdown Villages Road Safety Partnership (of which ERCC, Sussex Police and the Conservators are members) will also be able to play a part. Details of the Deer Aware and Deer Collisions project can be found at [www.deeraware.org.uk](http://www.deeraware.org.uk).

Jochen Langbein will be sending further details of examples of retro-fitted wildlife overpasses shortly.

#### **4) Deer Management Group**

Following discussions and after seeking wider comment, the name of the deer management group will remain as the West High Weald Deer Management Group (WHWDMG). The temporary steering group (JR, John Johnson and JC) arranged a second meeting on 30/03/10 at the Ashdown Forest Centre. This again was well attended by over 30 people, half of whom had not attended before. In view of the number of new attendees it was difficult to ascertain opinion on the group constitution therefore the document that was distributed at the meeting will become the working constitution for the time being, until the group is better consolidated.

A Best Practice outdoor event will be held for the group in the autumn, with the likely subject being woodland deer impact assessment. A suitable site will be sought.

With advice from the Deer Initiative there has been a significant cull in the Pippingford area and a subsequent meeting with local landholders has agreed in principle that a sustained cull in the area is desirable for the future. This should benefit the well being of the deer (which currently are lower in body weight than might be expected) as well as reducing impacts on the habitat in which they live and might in time contribute to a reduction in road traffic accidents involving deer. HP reported that the position of the Conservators on the culling of deer was, now that landscape scale efforts were being made to control deer numbers, there was no barrier to some deer being culled on Forest land, where it was safe to do so and where it contributed to the overall humane management of the herds.

#### **7) AOB**

DF indicated that the ESCC policy of assisting the AADF extended to an offer of administrative support for both the AADF and the WHWDMG. This offer was gratefully accepted and is likely to be exploited in future.

#### **8) Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was provisionally set as the 19/10/10, timed to fall after the WHWDMG event, 10.30am at the Forest Centre.