

**Minutes of the
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

14.30 Monday 10 March 2008
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Cllr J Barnes (in the Chair), Mr M Cooper, Mr L Gillham, Mr P Glyn, Cllr B Lacey, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr R St Pierre, Cllr T Reid, Cllr S Shing, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R Stogdon and Mr R Thornely-Taylor. Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

The Chairman opened the meeting, welcomed the members of the public present and invited questions for 10 minutes from the floor.

The following notes on the questions/answers are an aide memoire only and do not form part of the minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest.

Mrs Mairede Thomas asked

Will the Conservators be responding to the consultation on the 'Habitats Regulations Assessment Scoping Report' for Mid Sussex District Council Core Strategy Pre-Submission Document (January 2008) by 19th March, that is the date the consultation on this document is scheduled to close?

Will the Conservators response incorporate a robust defence of Ashdown Forest SPA and SAC and will it include an invitation to all relevant statutory planning bodies and Natural England to work together with the Conservators to protect the SPA and SAC and to research and fully evaluate the pressures from disturbance and pollution that the SPA and SAC currently experience and the extent to which further pressures would damage Ashdown Forest.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Thomas and stated that the Board were making a response and a robust defence and that further research and discussion was needed. The Chairman commented that the document referred to was available from the Mid Sussex website and commended it to the Board.

Mrs Anne Haigh-McVitty sent in a paper – this was duly circulated but referred for discussion.

Cllr Barnes thanked the public for their points.

1/08 Apologies.

Cllr MJ Hoy, Mr E Stenhouse, Cllr F Whetstone.

2/08 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

Mr Thornely-Taylor declared an interest in Board agenda item 6/08 (FGP item 5/08 draft job description for a Finance Officer).

3/08 To approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting of 19 November 2007 and Matters Arising.

3.1/08 The Minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy. It was noted in minute 3.20 that the first line of the agreed action should be '*It was agreed that the Parkin Plan was not viable...*'. It was noted that minute 6.3 required some re-wording for greater accuracy. The Chairman agreed to provide the wording outside of the meeting and, with the amendments made, the minutes were duly received.

There were no matters arising.

4/08 To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Conservation Committee of 14 January 2008.

4.1/08 The Minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Conservation Committee for accuracy. No changes were required and the Board received the minutes.

4.2/08 Mr Glyn reported that the CLM Green Waste scoping study document, tabled at the last meeting, was currently being amended as it was thought to be less than satisfactory. He went on to say that it was recognised that such a technical document required better preparation, evaluation and clear summaries. Mr Glyn expressed his thanks to Mr Stenhouse and Mr Marrable for working together on the scoping study amendments and that the issue of burning versus chipping would be discussed further.

Mr Glyn went on to say the scoping study document was a very important one that would, in future, influence the Board's policy on the choice of chipping equipment. The Chairman noted that a decision was on hold and the minutes were agreed on those terms.

4.3/08 Mr Glyn reported that the site visit to the shepherded grazing project had been very good and went on to offer his congratulations to Louise Amos and all others who had been involved in the 'Open Country' radio broadcast.

4.4/08 After a brief discussion on the post of grazing project assistant the Chairman clarified that, in relation to Conservation minute 8/08, the terms of reference for the post had indeed been agreed.

5/08 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting of 15 October 2007.

5.1/08 The Minutes of the last Meeting had been circulated. The RPA Committee agreed the accuracy of the minutes. The Board received the minutes.

5.2/08 Mr Cooper clarified for the Board that minute 4.6/08 related more to the delivery of the report than the content.

5.3/08 Mr Cooper commented that the drafting of a policy for dealing with property and planning issues, as detailed in minute 4/08, was currently a work in progress. The Chairman asked that the draft policy be circulated to the Board for their input prior to the next RPA Committee. Mr Cooper stated that all exceptions to policy were currently on hold and property owners had been informed in writing.

5.4/08 The Clerk reported that a licence had been requested by Cats Protection and it was currently being prepared.

5.5/08 The Clerk thanked Mr Spicer for his assistance with the revised, pre-circulated, Appendix 4 and reported that he had made the changes that had been requested. Mr Gillham stated that point 5 was not strong enough. He went on to remind that Board that even though there were very few long-running cases, once they became contentious, the Clerk was very much in the 'sight' of the public which was not desirable. He went on to suggest that the RPA Committee should be more heavily involved and offered his re-wording of point 5 as follows, "In the event of non-compliance with the requirements of 3, within the given timescale, the matter with full supporting documentation should be placed before the RPA Committee for consideration; and point 6, "Act in accordance with the instructions of the RPA Committee".

After a very short discussion it was agreed that Appendix 4, as amended, be adopted as policy.

5.8/08 Mr Cooper stated that, in relation to minute 3.1/08, a paper was still in preparation and this item would be deferred to the next cycle of meetings.

5.9/08 Cllr St Pierre commented in relation to minute 8.2/08 that she had been overtaken by speeding cars on three separate occasions and asked if there was anything that could be done to get an occasional police presence. The Clerk responded that, from the police point of view, this issue was not a priority and that efforts were focused on areas where there had been fatalities or a high number of casualties. He went on to say that the Ashdown Forest Villages Road Safety Partnership, made up of local parishes, East Sussex Fire and Rescue and East Sussex County Council, had worked on three road safety awareness campaigns. The next one would take place in April.

Mr Thornely-Taylor commented it was locally perceived that the 40mph speed limit was not enforceable and that this was incorrect. He went on to ask if something could be put into the public domain to correct this misconception. The Clerk responded by saying that the Partnership had made it clear that the speed limit had been mandatory since 1996/7, however, it would be useful to remind residents via the parishes communication systems. Mr Spicer pointed out that speeding drivers were probably not local but commuters travelling between local towns and Gatwick. This was followed by a short discussion on the strategies used by ESCC to slow drivers down and steps that could be taken in the future.

It was agreed that the Board would take advantage of all opportunities available to make the legal position on speed limits clear.

6/08 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee of 5 November 2007.

6.1/08 The Minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the FGP Committee for accuracy. The Committee agreed the accuracy of the minutes. The Board received the minutes.

6.2/08 Mr Thornely-Taylor drew the Board's attention to two items:

- in the financial report there was a minor amendment to the final figure with a reduction of £500.00.
- DEFRA would not be making further single farm payments.

Mr Thornely-Taylor went on to recommend the financial report to the Board and it was duly accepted.

6.3/08 Mr Thornely-Taylor withdrew from the discussion on item 5/08. The Chairman stated that the job description was a formalisation of current arrangements and the recommendation had been agreed by the Board

6.4/08 There was a short discussion regarding potential discussion with ESCC in respect of their annual contributions. Cllr St Pierre reported that Sean Nolan was willing to give FGP a forecast for the next three years. Cllr Reid stated that he thought it wise that discussion should be opened. Mr Thornely-Taylor stated that while a process would be helpful discussions of the estimates had to take place annually and that ESCC had a residual responsibility in emergency situations such as HLS funding being suddenly withdrawn. He went on to say that it must be remembered that this is not a grant-making process.

7/08 Feedback from the Stakeholder meetings.

The Clerk tabled a short summary document. He reported that four meetings had been held with a total of 80 persons and it was clear that many who attended had not read the draft

Strategic Forest Plan. Of those who had read the Plan, and made written or verbal comments, they were critical, constructive and generally positive.

7.1/08 The Clerk reported that there had been an eloquent promotion of mountain biking at the Crowborough meeting and this was followed by a short discussion on ESCC promotion of cycling. Mr Gillham reminded the Board that the issue of mountain biking had been visited in 2005 and firm reasons for refusing were set then. The Chairman stated that it would be useful, as the issue had been raised again, to re-examine the arguments and create a clear policy based on research and evidence. He went on to say a background paper on mountain biking consisting of previous Board discussions would be helpful.

It was agreed that a paper be drafted consisting of previous Board discussions on mountain biking to be presented and discussed at both Conservation and RPA Committee meetings at some time in the not too distant future.

7.2/08 The Clerk stated that, due to the large number of comments received, it had not been possible to collate them and present them to the Board today. He went on to say the final report needs to be put back to the Committees, via an executive committee and then presented to the Board in June.

7.3/08 The Chairman stated that it would be helpful if the introduction included more about the legal requirements and background. Mr Spicer commented that an exit strategy should be included as part of section 3 as it was, in his opinion, vital that thought is given as to what happens at the end of HLS.

7.4/08 The Chairman thanked Mrs Haigh-McVitty for her helpful document, that had been tabled, pointing out certain inaccuracies in the 3KQ report and stated that this would be borne in mind when considering the Board's response to 3KQ.

It was agreed that the draft Strategic Forest Plan be amended to include the suggestions made about the introduction; a fall back strategy should HLS fail or not be continued would be addressed.

It was agreed that the changes would be made with the assistance of the Executive Committee, then by way of procession; through the Committees. It was hoped to place the final draft before the Board in June.

08/08 Appointment from the Board to the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust

The Clerk gave background to the formation of the Trust, its role and constitution. He went on to describe how helpful and supportive the Trust had been with the recent HLF bid. There was currently a vacancy and an appointee from the Board was required. The Chairman proposed Mr Glyn and this was seconded by Mr Cooper. Mr Glyn was duly appointed and the Chairman stated he was pleased that there would be an acceptable element of continuity.

09/08 Verbal report of the Commoners' Annual Meeting held on 7th March 2008

09.1/08 Mr Glyn gave a short verbal report. There was no election this year and one candidate, Mr Roy Galley, a Nutley resident, dog walker, rider and Wealden Councillor with a knowledge and interest in the Forest. There were approximately 80 people in attendance, a very good turn-out for a non-election, and indicative of the current level of interest in the Forest. The meeting was ably chaired by Mr Robert Watson. There had been 45 minutes for questions. The addresses made by the Clerk and the Chairman of the Board were very well received and generally very positive.

09.2/08 Mr Glyn commented that there remained some criticisms about communication. He went on to say there was no single answer, however, the Board should maximise its

opportunities to communicate with the public. There followed a short discussion on how to further improve communication and parish magazines and parish assemblies were again suggested. The Clerk stated that, during the Commoners meeting, a straw poll was taken as to the number of attendees with access to the internet – over 90% had access and this was clearly a good channel of communication.

15.45 Cllr Lacey left the meeting

09.3/08 Mr Spicer stated that he had enjoyed the Clerk's presentation at the Commoners meeting and Mr Thornely-Taylor commented that the Chairman's attendance had obviously been welcomed by the Commoners. He went on to say that there was a long-standing misconception that the Commoner Conservators are the Board and suggested that non-commoner Conservators should be enabled to attend the meetings. Cllr Martin stated that she would have liked to attend. There followed a discussion regarding the pros and cons of non-Commoners attending the Commoners annual meeting. Mr Glyn stated that the meeting was traditionally held for Commoners by Commoners, however, there was nothing in the Act to prevent the meeting being opened to the wider, and younger section, of the community. Cllr Reid stated that there may be some concern that Commoners could feel side-lined if the meeting was widened. The Chairman asked if a Forest Annual General Meeting, without any voting power, be a way of communication with the local community and after a short discussion it was thought a good idea.

15.55 Cllr Shing left the meeting

10/08 Any Urgent Items of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman

10.1/08 It was noted that minutes from Executive Committee meetings had not been circulated. The Chairman stated that notes would be circulated in the future and reported to the Board.

10.2/08 A Parish Liaison Panel was briefly discussed based on a paper that the Chairman had drafted. He went on to say that parishes with land on the Forest should be invited to provide two delegates and those bordering the Forest one. He added that the Clerk should be in attendance. Cllr Reid stated that this was a timely move and Cllr Martin added it was a good initiative that should go forward. Mr Cooper suggested the first meeting should happen within the next three months and then take place bi-annually. During further discussion it was suggested that: minutes of the meetings should be circulated via the parishes; the meetings themselves should be roughly rotated through the parishes; the inaugural meeting should be held at the Forest Centre; leaders of the parishes be made aware of the proposed meetings, formally invited and allowed to decide who will attend on each parish's behalf.

There being no other questions or comments, the meeting ended at 16.15.

Chairman _____
10 March 2008

Clerk _____