

Document Details

Note:

This report is a transcript of the notes taken during the meeting. It is intended as an aide memoir for participants rather than a definitive record of every detail.

During the next few months the Conservators will consider the views of the public gathered from a range of public meetings and the internet and produce a response to the comments made. This will be available at www.ashdownforest.org and at the Forest Offices.

This document will also be used in the production of a draft Forest Plan for consultation later in the year.

Facilitator and Report producers:

Carl Reynolds, Maureen Mead 3KQ Limited

Contacts :

carl@3kq.co.uk

maureenmead@btintnet.com

Telephone: 01892 506909 (3KQ)
01892 853844 (MM)

3KQ Limited
Pantiles Chambers
85 High Street
Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN1 1X

If you wish to contact the Ashdown Forest Centre then please contact Chris Marrable on 01342 823583 or chrism@ashdownforest.org

1. Purpose of the Workshop and Ground Rules

The **purpose** of this workshop was to:

- continue the ongoing process to produce a *Forest Plan* in order to improve Forest management and public confidence in it
- to listen and record concerns about the management of the Forest
- to reach and engage a wider number of people from in and around the Ashdown Forest

Ground Rules or ways to make the meeting run smoothly:

- mobile phones off please
- space for people to be heard
- recognise differences

Reporting and recording of each meeting:

- a record of comments, questions and responses from each meeting will be made
- these transcripts will be typed as a record of each meeting
- these transcripts will be put on the Forest website, in the public domain
- everyone at the meeting, who has asked to receive the report, will do so

2. Context setting

The following bullet points are a brief indication as to how 3KQ became involved in the local people's process

- 3KQ were asked by the Board of Conservators to get involved near the start of 2006
- 3KQ advised that it needed to talk directly to people who live on/near the Forest to understand the range of views concerning Ashdown Forest management
- 25 people were interviewed in May 2006
- Some clear conclusions were drawn :
 - everyone cares passionately about the Forest
 - some agreements, some disagreements
 - lack of clarity in peoples' minds on what the 'plan' is for the Forest and its management
- Advised the development of a Forest Plan with local people input

3 . Introduction

Carl Reynolds of 3KQ welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that this is the second Workshop of a sequence of Workshops in and around Ashdown Forest Parishes. (Crowborough, Forest Row, Hartfield, Withyham, Maresfield and Buxted, Danehill). During the meeting Carl introduced Philip Glyn (Chairman of the Board of Conservators), John Spicer (Conservator), Jane Mortimer (Natural England) Mike Yates (Ranger). Michael Cooper (Conservator) was also present.

For ease of reference during the recording of this meeting, the following key has been used :-

C = Comment; Q = Question; R = Response (if any)

4. Issues

Funding and participation

- Q. How were the people chosen to participate in the process?
- C. Lack of public confidence in the management of the Forest by the Forest Superintendent and his staff
- C. The management of the Forest is taking away the cover for the deer
- C. Deer casualties down by 25% from last year.
- Q. Is meeting as a consequence of Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) funding?
- R. Heathland funded by DEFRA. New funding has given opportunity for consultation. Funding of Ashdown Forest has been received for the previous 15 years and is continuous.
50% funding from EU
50% funding from DEFRA
- C. Rather have consultation without legislation
- C. Not enough advertising of meeting and not enough notice. Even forest staff at the Centre were unaware that the meeting was being held. Forest Row Councillors were not even invited until the morning of the meeting
- R. Advertised AFC web site
Press release sent to the East Grinstead Courier
Forest Row Parish were sent an advertisement to place on their website and Parish notice boards
The Clerk was requested to invite the Forest Row Councillors on the 2 May

Some stakeholders were e mailed notifying them of meeting
Notices were put up on Ashdown Forest notice boards
Notice in some local shops

- C. The Conservators were forced into public consultation due to public disquiet
- C, Public consultation is at least 6 years too late

Felling

- C. Public do not like the way the Forest is being butchered
- Q. Is it management policy to cut back trees to 40% of the Forest? The public need overview of where felling is taking place
- Q. Why has Beech and Oak been felled? Why have mature indigenous trees been cut down?
- C. Birch is accepted as a 'no no' on the Forest
- Q. Has funding been reviewed due to climate change?
- R. No. HLS was launched 18 months ago. Climate change is being considered. Looking at connectivity
- C. We should be protecting trees and saying no to deforestation
- C. There are papers reporting that protection of trees is necessary
- R. The trees on the Forest are encroaching on the heathland.
- Q. Why have 200 year plus trees been felled?
- R. Not aware of trees older than 40 years being cut down
- Q. Why has earth been exposed?
- R. The area of earth exposed is .3% of the Forest and this has been measured accurately. Trees need to be felled as they are encroaching on the heathland. Ashdown Forest has 4% of the UK lowland heathland. We are only just in time to save this valuable, precious and dwindling resource. We are doing our best to work within the law
- Q. Why have trees next to road been cut down?
- C. Shelter belts along roads are needed for screening
- R. Thanks for comments and suggestions are always welcome
- C. We need research on effects of climate change on heathland
- R. Heather responds better to drought than woodland – ling needs dry, sandy soil
- C. Gills Lap has been decimated. Who asked anyone? The Ashdown Forest belongs to the people of East Sussex and important decisions are made without consultation. Even a Ranger agreed and did not know what was going on
- C. We need proper answers and not glossy magazines
- R. Woodland now obscures Gills Lap
- C. Trees in the 21st century are most important and this needs to be taken into account
- R. The word 'forest' is derived from land outside cultivation. It is a Norman term. Deer hunting enclosure
- C. We cannot re-write what happened at Wrens Warren, but the Conservators could apologise for the devastation - it is hideous
- R. The reason for Ashdown Forest being here is because of the heathland
- C. The Forest is for people to enjoy and mature trees are very much part of that enjoyment.
- Q. Is it not true that the UN recommend that trees should not be cut down and deforestation should not be carried out?
- C. If Conservators had consulted locals about felling, a lot of problems would not have arisen. The Conservators are arrogant
- R. Would you prefer consultation before action?
- R. An overwhelming 'yes'
- R. There was no intention of arrogance, just trying to get it right and would value comments.
- Q. Why have Rhododendrons been cut down?
- R. Birch and Rhododendrons are invasive and exclude other native trees.
- Q. Why have new trees been planted opposite Wych Cross Garden Centre?
- R. The land is not part of the Ashdown Forest

- C. We should be protecting trees and saying no to deforestation
- C. There are papers reporting that protection of trees is necessary
- R. The trees on the Forest are encroaching on the heathland. Cutting trees on heathland actually has a beneficial effect on levels of 'greenhouse' gases. Soil contains more carbon than all the vegetation and atmospheric carbon combined. Wet heath in particular locks up carbon and invasion by (mainly) Birch dries the heath soil out leading to bacterial action that releases carbon in the form of methane, a gas with 10 x the 'greenhouse' effect of carbon dioxide.
- Q. Where does the 60/40 ratio come from and is it set in stone?
- R. No it is not set in stone and it comes originally from one of the Streeters maps. Aerial maps confirm the ratio. There are no plans to fell trees where there is no evidence of heather remnants. It is important that heathland be restored to 'favourable condition'. 90% of area shows remnants of heathland. Conservators would welcome input into which trees to fell.
- Ashdown Forest staff will look at flexibility of management operations with object of preserving heathland. The Forest Plan is a generic document.
- C. Rhododendrons have toxic root fungus that kills other plants
- C. Consultation is fine, but the idea that everyone's view has equal weight is dangerous. The Forest Management is competent. I have learnt a lot today.
- C. Trees alongside roads. Conservators have a problem getting it right
- R. Verges cut back from road encourages the deer to graze it.
- C. Gills Lap now support Dartford Warblers, Hobbys, Tree Pipits and Wood Larks after being felled.
- C. Meeting hugely valuable. We the Conservators try to maintain balance between conservation and amenity.
- Q. Will there be a meeting next year before felling commences?
- R. Should be, but consensus needed.

Grazing

- C. The Forest is a place for deer, not sheep or heather. The policy in the New Forest is not to graze sheep as they are too destructive.
- Q. Why is sheep grazing encouraged?
- R. In the New Forest there are many options for grazing – cattle and ponies. The Ashdown Forest has no infrastructure to support grazing diversity.
- Q. LUC report (Land Use Consultants) recommended which area should be covered by grazing and it was understood there would be a 5 year review. What happened to this review? Do we know whether grazing was a good idea and if so why?
- R. Chris Marrable has studied the effects of grazing and is the person with the most knowledge.
- C. A grazing heather study has not been carried out. It was meant to be experimental.
- R. An independent report is being considered
- C. Deer graze forest in addition to sheep and there is scientific evidence grazing benefits heathland. The Ashdown Forest contains two areas of outstanding countryside – one ancient woodland and the other lowland heathland. If we do not restore, we lose protection, we lose the beauty and the wildness and maybe the land will be developed. There needs to be engagement with the public to move forward in positive way

- R. This meeting is part of the process of consultation and moving forward and it is hoped you will accept this.
- C. It is obvious that trees near to roads make a difference and are very important. Lack of balance shows lack of appreciation.

Heathland

- Q. Do the Conservators have a duty to preserve heathland?
- R. Conservators have a duty to conserve bio-diversity
- C. When the Misbourne Valley was cleared there was a lot of criticism
- C. Misbourne Valley was only Birch not mature Oaks.
- C. Gorse is becoming a nuisance especially around Chelwood Vachery
- R. Gorse is managed to provide mosaic of maturity. Gorse is part of the heathland and is managed when it becomes over mature.

Heritage Lottery Fund

- Q. Has a Lottery Grant been awarded to Ashdown Forest
- R. Grant of £2M has been set aside for the whole of heathland in S E England. Ashdown Forest will get £300K, depending on how well we do in the second round. And it is for the development of the Forest Centre and other activities.
- C. Conservation is not the only part of the Conservators brief, but also to conserve the Forest as a place of enjoyment and peace and quiet.

Management of contractors

- Q. Contractors cause a huge amount of damage to the forest breaks. Why are these areas never repaired?
- R. Work will be done to remove ruts left by Contractors
- Q. When?
- R. As soon as possible, in drier conditions. Work has to be done in the winter because of ground nesting birds.
- C. Why wait until ground is rock hard?
- R. Resources are limited. HLS brings more money. Forest Plan will allow people to have input into future felling. The Forestry Commission to be consulted on some future felling.

Deer

- Q. Has there been an increase in the deer population?
- R. Deer cross roads in larger groups and hence are seen more easily. The deer are not always killed by traffic travelling too fast. Some private owners are culling.
- Q. Who made decision to remove signs? The new ones are pathetic.
- R. They were felt to be more modern. The Council have put up deer signs. The deer are wild animals and as such do not belong to the Conservators. The Conservators are authorised to cull, but it is considered too dangerous
- C. A Ranger and the Forest Superintendent were seen trespassing in Pippingford Park to take pictures of the deer
- S. Apologies were given by the Chairman of the Board of Conservators
- C. More deer are killed during the rutting season.
- Q. Why no signs put up during this period?
- C. Compliments for the excellent Byelaw signs, but new logo is horrid.
- Q. Could Lottery money be spent on underpass at the top of Millbrook Hill?

- C. Ashdown Forest Riding Association (AFRA) have written to the ESCC Transport Department requesting a Pegasus crossing at this point
- C. The underpass could also be used by deer and pedestrians.

Car parks and litter

- Q. Why were rubbish bins removed from car parks?
- R. The public do not use bins responsibly, but leave their rubbish around the base, leaving the Rangers to clear it up. There is less rubbish now.

Governance

- Q. Do the Conservators have a duty of care?
- R. The Board have a duty to comply with legal constraints arising from statutory designations and GB law passed after the 1974 Ashdown Forest Act. These are, in chronological order, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and 1985 leading to renotification in 1986 of its SSSI status (first notified in 1953), the 1992 EC Habitats Directive leading to the Natura 2000 Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designations, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000, The Commons Act 2006 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006.
- C. Should be more contact between Conservators and local Parish Councils.
- R. Work is being done and we are working towards more liaison with the Councils.
- C. 3KQ involvement is invaluable. Communication is vital and regular Parish meetings and consultations are needed. The Chairman of the Conservators presence at this workshop made meeting more valuable. We thank him for that. We need more consultation for a range of operations/policies and the Parishes and public need to know what before decisions are made and not presented with fait accompli. Please consult people before action is taken.
- C. Future meetings could be held at Michael Hall School.
- C. They could take format of Q & A session for an hour and then split into smaller groups.

The workshop finished at 21.00 hrs. It was recorded that there were approximately 80 people present