

Document Details

Note :

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

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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 fourth Workshop of a sequence of Workshops in and around Ashdown Forest Parishes. (Crowborough, Forest Row, Hartfield, Withyham, Maresfield and Buxted , Danehill) Philip Glyn (Chairman of the Conservators), Leslie Gillham (Conservator), Frances Whetstone (Conservator) Hew Prendergast (Clerk to the Conservators) and Rich Allum (Forest Ranger) were 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

Felling/heathland

- C. UK has least percentage of woodland than in Europe, so why cut down more trees?
- Q. Surely there is a Forestry Commission ruling, putting a constraint on felling trees over a certain diameter?
- R. The Conservators work within permissions granted and constraints imposed.
- C. Gills Lap area has been desecrated and the scarring from the felling is very bad and can be seen from the other side of the valley. It is like a war zone. Traffic can be heard on the Forest due to the felling and the whole Forest is an eye-sore.
- Q. Why can't the Conservators leave the trees alongside roads. Priory Road was a beautiful area prior to the removal of the trees.
- C. Forest land should be woodland.
- R. The definition of the word 'Forest' does not imply woodland. It was a deer forest. Photographs taken during and just after WWII show two airstrips and showed the Forest as almost treeless. During 1965 to 1995 the woodland increased by 1000 acres, on average 30 acres per year. 27% of the High Weald is wooded - however it is the heathland that gives the Forest its distinctive character and its protective designations.
- Q. Will the Conservators produce the Forestry Commission Guide to felling trees?
- R. The Conservators will produce the Forestry Commission guidance for the Ashdown Forest as soon as it is available. The FC guide states that a certain number of trees above a given diameter may be felled per year without permission.
- C. Any area designated an SSSI has to apply for permission prior to felling.
- Q. Can the Conservators publish a plan of work for specific areas? Why can't hardwood trees be left?
- Q. Why are trees cut down where heather has never grown?
- Q. Is the Forest exempt from TPOs.
- R. In every place that trees have been felled, heather will grow. The work that was carried out last winter was planned in 2001, prior to HLS funding. This work included scrub clearance. We will consider not felling trees along road sides and we may consider selecting what kinds of trees to fell. There is a seedbank in the soil so heather will return to those areas. There are no TPOs on the Forest.
- Q. Can the public apply for TPOs?
- C. We do not have to ask the Conservators should we wish to apply for TPOs. The Forest is not exempt from having TPOs applied.
- R. There are very few old trees on the Ashdown Forest, it is mostly secondary woodland.
- C. Heathland is man-made. Created by all sorts of activities. Scarring from tanks during WWII are still there. The clearance of Wren's Warren has been done with lack of care and sensitivity and Contractors have left glass, plastic and other rubbish. There has been a total lack of care and supervision by the Superintendent and his staff. Large oaks have been felled and the trees left are sub-standard.
- Q. If areas of work are pre-planned what is the point of this meeting?
- Q. What happens to the felled wood?
- Q. How much woodland will be left?
- Q. Does our distress have any collateral - what can we do to stop this felling?
- R. We will be tidying up the areas as soon as possible. The work has to be carried out in winter because of the ground nesting birds. We are only just in time to save the heathland and the bio-diversity it maintains. Secondary woodland is not a rare habitat and is not rich in species. The canopy of the woodland areas are closed, so no heathland species present. If you look at AA Milne's Pooh books and EH Shepard's drawing you will see Scots Pine, gorse, heather and wonderful landscapes.

- C. Heathland restoration and conservation along New Road has been replaced by a lovely crop of bracken.
- Q. When does the ground nesting bird season start?
- Q. What about the recent fire experiment, which was carried out without permission from Natural England.
- Q. What do we want now? Why do we hang our hats on the past?
- R. Visited the site at Wren's Warren and confirm that only one tree over 40 years old was felled and that was 46 years old. The majority of trees were well under 40 years old. The UK Bio-diversity Action Plan explains why heathland is so important. Felling can only be carried out up to end March, but this date should be reviewed in light of earlier Springs.
- C. The Conservators need heathland to keep them in jobs. We need minimal management of the Forest, it can look after its self. Why is there a fixation with heathland? We should be more complicit with nature.
- Q. Why keep land artificially barren, it is against nature.
- R. It will look like the Nature Reserve if we do not manage the Forest.
- R. People hate trees being cut down and we must do the felling with more sensitivity. 13 acres have been felled out of 1000 acres. We must decide whether heathland is worth saving and consultation is essential, but if heathland is to be saved we need to act now.
- R. There are many ways the work of conservation can be altered, but ultimately trees must be felled, even though it is unpopular.
- Q. Why is cutting young trees of no comfort to us?
- C. The felling in the New Road area, has opened up the farm and the farm machinery is now on view. It has also created a fire hazard. Deer have no cover, which leads to the spreading of deer. Conservators need to be more selective and act with due diligence .
- Q. Why do you not need Planning Permission?
- Q. Is there a number of more mature trees that can be left?
- R. The whole area would be developed if our ancestors hadn't used the Ashdown Forest by cutting litter, etc.
- Q. How many more trees are planned to be lost?
- R. The Conservators are expected to get the Forest back to 'favourable condition' by 2020
- Q. If you have plans, what is the purpose of this meeting? Will the Conservators adapt their plans after this meeting?
- R. Consultation with Forestry Commission – scrub can be removed and successional woodland can be removed. There is no intention to remove all trees. 40% of the Forest will be left under woodland management, but we must lose some trees to maintain bio-diversity. We are all interested and love the Forest and views are taken on board and conservation plans will be adapted. There are some statutory 'givens' to improve bio-diversity.
- Q. What law?
- R. Habitats Directive 1992 (copy requested)
- C. The clearing/felling of the trees has been a PR disaster for the Conservators and the meeting is a knee-jerk reaction to 'vandalism'. This meeting would not have been needed were it not for the barbaric wholesale clearance/distruction of the Forest. This consultation process should have started before the start of the clearance. There should be an agreement with Conservators before any further action is taken.
- R. Tree clearance work was carried out under CSS, but now have funds for consultation under HLS. Misbourne Valley was cleared, two consultations took place and the Conservators have not started a new programme. Anger has been caused because it is now in local area. The Misbourne Valley clearance opened up and restored spectacular views and people now approve of the action.

- C. Misbourne Valley looks like a disaster plus the fencing.
- Q. What percentage of trees will be removed in the next few years?
- R. Much of the Forest is already good open heathland and so a lot of further clearance is not required.
- Q. How are tree stumps to be removed?
- R. By stump grinders. Reptiles over winter in piles of timber.
- Q. Can we agree an upper limit on size of trees felled?
- R. Criteria of beauty – open landscape vs. woodland.
- Q. Lets forget about age of trees, where can we have hardwood trees and can we have an objective from the Conservators to encourage trees across the Forest where compatible with heathland management?
- C. 40-50 years ago Forest was burnt each year, and all trees were burnt. Trees were stunted Conservators are now having to replicate that action mechanically.
- C. I enjoy the views as I drive and walk across the Forest, but I think you could leave some trees.

Grazing

- C. The Conservators have put the cart before the horse, going through public consultation after decision to join HLS.
- C. Grazing has never been proven.
- C. What is the real purpose of this meeting? Is it to confirm what has already been done and decisions already made. All we ask for is transparency.
- R. The Conservators do not want any more fencing. Grazing is not the whole solution, but we cannot return to old time management.
- Q. Why are there no deer warning signs? The new Forest signs say nothing about deer. Why were original signs taken down?
- R. The Parish Councils can apply to have as many signs as they like put up, but Conservators have no obligation. There are conspicuous signs on the A22, but there has been no reductions in the number of deer hit on the road.
- Q. Have ESCC got no money for warning signs?
- R. New signs are going up on highway verges, but the cost of flashing signs is horrendous. Maybe we will get some on the A22 – more deer killed on that road than in whole of the country. Way to cut numbers of deer, is for private land-owners to cull on private land.
- C. If verges are cleared, they attract the deer to graze and congregate.
- Q. Why is there no cull on the Forest?
- R. For reasons of safety. Public access.
- C. Consider painting warnings on road surfaces.
- C. The deer are increasing and are now all over the place, mild winters means they are in great condition. The numbers are a nationwide problem.
- Q. Why did the Superintendent trespass on private land at night?
- R. Invited by the Army.

Funding/Governance

- Q. Can you explain the funding that the Conservators receive to manage the Forest.
- R. For heathland conservation the Board now receives £200/hectare/year from Natural England. For ca. 1500 hectares, the figure is therefore £300k.
- C. There is something wrong with the Constitution. Parish Councillors should be represented on the Board.
- R. Nonsense.
- C. Ten years ago people wanted to join, but were refused by ESCC.

Communication

- C. The notes taken at the Forest Row meeting have not yet been sent out.
- Q. Will there be further meetings next year?
- R. Communication will be sorted. Amended Forest Plan will be issued late Summer/early Autumn.

The workshop finished at 21.00 hrs. It was recorded that there were approximately 50 people present