

**Notes of the Residents meeting held at the Ashdown Forest Centre
on Monday, 15 July 2013.**

Board members present: Mr R Galley (Chairman), Mr M Cooper, Mr J Francis, Mr P Glyn, Mrs D Hurrell, Mr A Reid, Mrs R St.Pierre, Mr J Spicer and Cllr R Stogdon.

Staff members present: Mr R Allum, Mrs P Buesnel, Mrs T Buxton and Mrs R Marriott

There were approximately 40 residents present.

Mr Galley welcomed all present and introduced Board members and staff present to the residents. This was followed by the short film on the Flora and Fauna of the Forest funded by the Friends of Ashdown Forest.

Rich Allum gave a Power-point presentation entitled "What is a Forest?" He explored the origins of Ashdown Forest and its development over the millennia. He emphasised the importance of the biodiversity of the heathland habitat which had contributed to the various internationally recognised environmental conservation designations awarded to the Forest. He also explained the consequences on the habitat if management stopped, outlining the main methods used on the Forest and the animals that are now grazing the Forest.

Mr Galley invited questions.

Mr Neal asked about the origins of the "Clumps" and was told that they had been planted in the early 19th Century by the then Dowager Duchess.

Mr Leng expressed his concern over the damage done to the surface of the Forest by contractors doing winter work and asked what could be done. The limited time frame for doing winter work was explained and the Director commented that the contractors' contracts were becoming more stringent but the matter would be referred to the Conservation Committee for further consideration.

Dr Prendergast commented that he had noted from the Board's Minutes on the web site that a small area of Forest had been transferred from the Ashdown Forest Trust to Mr and Mrs Reid, owners of Millbrook Farm after a recent ruling by the Land Registry that the land had been acquired by adverse possession. He asked when Mr Reid had become joint owner with his wife of Millbrook Farm. When Mr Reid informed him the transaction had occurred in March, Dr Prendergast asked how, at the time, he could be a Trustee of the Ashdown Forest Trust and a Conservator, both positions which imposed a duty to protect the Forest from encroachments. Mrs Reid commented that the land had been enclosed for over 50 years and since she had been informed of the encroachment, she had felt pressured and been bullied. The Land Registry had decided in favour of herself and her husband.

Miss Glyn suggested that adverse possession was similar to squatting and said she had contacted the Land Registry who had no knowledge of the registration of the septic tank area to Millbrook Farm.

Mr Poole expressed his deep concern over the matter and suggested that Mr Reid should stand down as a Conservator until an enquiry was held. Mr Galley offered to arrange a seminar because of the complex legal issues involved but various members of the public felt that this would not be sufficient. Mr Vivian commented that it may be wise to seek independent advice. Dr Prendergast commented that it was a moral issue. Mr Stogdon felt the meeting should not be persuaded that Mr and Mrs Reid had not acted well; it was the Land Registrar who had decided the boundary. Mr Poole reiterated his view and Mr Galley again offered a seminar and said that the process of recording encroachments had already been reviewed. Dr Prendergast commented that the boundary maps held by the Conservators were quite clear, the boundaries of the Forest being defined by the 1887 Award map which followed the Ashdown Forest Act 1885. Mrs Buchanan, whose expertise is in reputation management, said that a seminar would not address the issues of trusteeship and integrity. She said that for the sake of the Forest, an independent view should be sought otherwise she foresaw serious trouble.

Mr Spicer suggested an Extraordinary meeting of the Board, not to look at the legal side as there was no dispute about this but how the issues could affect the Board's reputation. He suggested that Mr Reid should stand down for the time being.

Mr Manthorpe spoke as a past Land Registry registrar. He explained that the Land Registry recognised that boundaries could move from time to time. It was the length of time that land had been enclosed that would have been the deciding factor. It would not have been interested in issues of trusteeship. There was a comment that Mr Reid should not wear three hats.

Mr Cooper expressed his concern to Mr Galley and commented that the Board needed to revisit the matter. He did not intend to comment in any detail on the circumstances of the Millbrook Farm issue and the election of the Vice Chairman, however, he wished to record that he had emailed the Chairman after the Board on 10 June expressing his concerns and making reference to the probable reaction of those from the wider community. He added that, in his view, the Board of Conservators needed to act quickly to redress matters, looking to restore confidence in its collective exercise of its responsibilities. He supported John Spicer's proposal that there should be an Extraordinary Board meeting.

Mrs Reid commented that during the time she had lived on the Forest, four Forest Superintendents had not commented on the encroachment. She had affidavits as to the boundary before 1965 when her father had bought the property. The property had been put in both their names and she felt comments made against Mr Reid could be viewed as slanderous.

Mrs O'Grady felt that something had to be done quickly and the trust issue had to be resolved.

Clr St.Pierre said that she would ask for an Extraordinary meeting. Mr Poole was assured that it would be a public meeting.

There being no further questions, the meeting ended.