



Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest
Monday 01 February 2021 at 11:00
VIRTUAL MEETING - MS TEAMS

Present: Mr C Smith (Chairman), Ms S McAll (Vice Chairman), Mr C de Mestre, Cllr S Tidy, Mr J Spicer, Mr A Reid, Mrs R St Pierre, Cllr J Barnes, Cllr D Elkin, Cllr C Hardy, Cllr R Stogdon, Cllr F Whetstone, Cllr P Roundell, Mr M Cooper

In attendance: Mr J Adler (CEO), Mrs K Dirs (Clerk) and Mrs L Meehan (Finance Officer)

Minutes were taken by the Clerk

Members of the public present: Ms L Maudsley, Mrs E Riminton-Drury and Ms S Way

Item	Action
The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed members of the public The Chairman introduced and welcomed James Adler, CEO	
<p><u>Questions from the public:</u></p> <p><u>Elizabeth Riminton-Drury:</u> <i>What commitments have the Conservators had from DEFRA and/or Natural England that they will uphold the Countryside Stewardship (CS) grant contract until 2025? Are you concerned by the government's footnote in its briefing of Dec 2019 and the continuation of direct payments?</i></p> <p><u>Response:</u> The CEO advised that the CS agreement is a contract in place with the British Government to deliver a set of defined prescriptions. The Government have committed to honouring existing agreements and we do not believe there is an issue for the Forest's CS agreement. What the funding for the replacement scheme in 2024 will look like is at present unknown.</p> <p><u>Susanna Way:</u> <i>I would like to know how I can effectively help in any future campaign to ensure that our precious Forest continues to thrive. I am aware that funding is likely to be an issue but I'm keen to understand how my campaigning efforts can be used as effectively as possible. As my question perhaps implies, we need 4 things:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Transparency - to be honest about where we are and what the priorities for the AF</i>• <i>A Plan - with defined Objectives & Responsibilities</i>• <i>Coordination - so that all of our arrows are pointing in the same direction</i>• <i>Leadership - to provide the energy to deliver the Objectives</i> <p><u>Response:</u> The Chairman advised the Board would be holding an off-site to address these questions, particularly in relation to coordinating the charity. The Chairman explained a restructuring programme was underway and a work stream prioritisation plan had been created. The Chairman acknowledged the need for a transparent and defined programme of activity and hoped such plan would be accessible in the coming months.</p> <p><u>Liz Maudsley:</u> <i>What might the impact of any shortfall of budget be for ongoing forest maintenance particularly with the large increase of visitors during lockdown?</i></p>	

	<p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>The Chairman responded it was a difficult juggling act managing visitor pressure with ongoing challenges. The CEO explained that such conflict was being experienced nationwide and the issues were not unique to Ashdown Forest. The CEO advised the increase of new visitors to the countryside has spurred Natural England to review the Countryside Code.</p>	
01/21	<p>Apologies</p> <p>There were apologies from Mr Mawdsley Cllr Shing did not attend</p>	
02/21	<p>Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature</p> <p>Cllr Tidy declared she was a member of ESCC Cabinet Mr de Mestre declared he is a commoner grazier and receives the BPS payment</p>	
03/21	<p>To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 23 November 2020</p> <p>The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6</p>	
04/21	<p>To approve the 2021/22 budget and agree formal submission to ESCC</p> <p>The Committee Chairman provided an overview of the current financial position. He explained the budget had been adjusted since the Finance and Regulatory Committee on Monday 25 January to include two amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The removal of the Covid-relief fund of £60k, which has not been put to ESCC for approval yet • Additional expenditure had been included for the 21/22 CS programme of £40k in order to help achieve the CS deliverables. <p>The Committee Chairman reminded Members that ESCC are reluctant to accept an unbalanced budget and it was possible that ESCC may classify the Budget as interim.</p> <p>The Committee Chairman presented two recommendations to the Board:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. The formal approval of the 21/22 budget for submission to ESCC II. The agreement to seek the shortfall in the 20/21 budget from ESCC, pursuant to the Ashdown Forest Act 1974, S24 <p>The later recommendation may not be required where ESCC is able to provide Covid-relief funding and the forecast to year end is met.</p> <p>The Committee Chairman advised the budget expenditure has been increased to reflect truer operational costs which had previously been stripped back to balance the budget. Mrs St Pierre asked whether there was tolerance in the budget to allow for the delay in the restructuring programme. Mr de Mestre confirmed the budget had not been flexed because of the delay but adjustments were anticipated as salaries needed to be regraded.</p> <p>Cllr Elkin suggested to Members there needed to be a full review of services provided by the Forest which should form part of a 3-year plan focusing on cost efficiencies.</p> <p>The Committee Chairman sought formal approval of the 21/22 budget. The motion was proposed by Ms McAll and seconded by Mrs St Pierre and agreed unanimously.</p> <p>The Committee Chairman sought agreement to seek the shortfall in the 20/21 budget from ESCC if required at the year end. The motion was proposed by Mrs St Pierre and seconded by Cllr Barnes and agreed unanimously.</p>	

	The CEO sought confirmation from the Chairman that the recommendation to formally approve the 21/22 budget was not simply to approve the budget for submission to ESCC. Noted and agreed.	
05/21	Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman	
	There were none	

The meeting closed at 12:05

Chairman _____

Clerk _____

15 March 2021