

**Minutes of the
EXTRAORDINARY CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

Thursday 26 August 2010

14.30 at the Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Cllr R St Pierre (Chairman), Ranger R Allum, Cllr J Barnes, Mr P Glyn, Cllr M Hoy, Mr C Marrable (Conservation Officer) and Dr H Prendergast (Clerk).
Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

Apologies: Mr N Bennett, Mr M Cooper.

Action

24/10 Grazing Project.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending, at short notice, this single item meeting regarding the Grazing Project and asked the Clerk and Mr Marrable to give further background.

24.1/10 The Clerk said that a few weeks ago the grazing assistant had received a job offer with a better salary and nearer to home. On Friday 13 August, the day before he was due to go on leave, Louise Amos also resigned. The Conservation Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman were immediately informed by e-mail and the pros and cons of the various options were detailed. During the week he was on leave the Chairman talked to Ranger Allum who had identified a potential replacement for Ms Amos and at the request of the Chairman and in the absence of Mr Marrable made an informal approach.

24.2/10 The Chairman said that there had been a sense of urgency as it had been unclear when Ms Amos would be leaving. Therefore it was vital to make arrangements for interim help with looking after the sheep on a day-to-day basis. It was clarified, after a conversation with the Board Chairman, that a person could be employed on an hourly basis. However it had transpired that Ms Amos would not be leaving so precipitously and her last working day would be 10th September 2010.

24.3/10 Ranger Alum made initial contact with a potential replacement who was well known to him and to the Forest and had extensive experience of both Hebridean sheep and lowland heathland stretching back over many years. Mr Marrable confirmed he had had a conversation yesterday (25 August) with the person identified who stated they were prepared to step into the breach and also would be willing to forego two other pending job offers in order to work full time on the Forest. He confirmed that Ms Amos was willing to offer a full handover.

24.4/10 Salary was discussed. The Clerk said the post had been originally assessed by ESCC. Miss Amos had previously cited the lack of provision of accommodation as a shortcoming of the post highlighting the importance of recruiting a local person. The Clerk and Mr Marrable would be looking closely at the job-description and that of the assistant.

**HP
CM**

24.5/10 There was a short discussion on recruitment process and the Clerk agreed to contact ESCC immediately to clarify the legal position on the necessity of advertising the post in such an acute situation, depending on the response, either place a tightly drafted advertisement in the appropriate media or a job offer would be made.

HP

24.6/10 There was agreement that the project should continue and move forward and that it was now entering a very new phase. There was a short discussion on what the future could hold. Mr Marrable said that there might be a combination of shepherd

grazing with some sheep being retained at night in enclosures on the Forest and allowed out to graze daily. It was intended to move any temporary fencing around the Forest, however, the size of the fenced areas was yet to be determined. Anything from 2 to 50 acres at a time could be fenced. This would allow better targeted and intense grazing and, ultimately, better evaluation..

24.7/10 There was a short discussion regarding funding implications with Mr Marrable confirming that funding from HLS was based on a 'area' payment rather than a 'close shepherded' payment.

24.8/10 There was a discussion regarding fencing. Mr Marrable reported that he had sought advice from the legal expert who represented ESCC at the Chailey Enquiry. Under the Commons Act 2006 enclosure was not permitted without the permission of the Secretary of State and after the due process of a public enquiry (as at Chailey). However, there were exemptions under the Act which allowed restricted grazing for conservation purposes. It was the legal expert's opinion that extra fencing could be allowed under the Ashdown Forest Act 1974. Therefore an extra 100 acres could be fenced over and above the current 500 hectares. Electric fencing would be permitted. It was agreed that informing the Parish Councils by letter of the current situation, and apologising for the lack of consultation, would be a good idea to maintain the current levels of goodwill shown by the public.

24.9/10 The Chairman asked about winter accommodation, fencing of in-bye fields, feed and grazing. She thanked Mr Glyn for his help on this issue. Mr Glyn said there were 11 in-bye sites and though in-bye was an issue it was not a big one. Mr Marrable said there were plans to cull some of the sheep and others on loan be returned to their owner. This would reduce the number requiring winter feed to approximately 200. Mr Marrable went on to say that the project was operating without the benefit of a farm and that there were no resources other than summer grazing – all winter feed, housing etc. had to be bought in. He went on to say that the hard part of the shepherd's job was through the winter and this needed to be somehow resolved in the future. The Chairman said that other sites had systems of local 'lookers' and this was something that needed to be fully explored for the future and incorporated into the job description.

24.10/10 The pros and cons of selling sheep at the end of the summer grazing were briefly touched upon and it was thought to be very problematical and not worth pursuing at present.

24.11/10 The breed and species of grazing animals for future grazing on the Forest was touched on and it was agreed this was a discussion for a later date.

The Committee confirmed the Board's policy to continue to graze and agreed that, subject to County's advice regarding advertising the post, the job would be offered to the person identified.

Decisions regarding the terms of the contract (i.e., an open ended short-term offer followed by a permanent post) would be discussed further by the Clerk and Mr Marrable.

The Committee recommended that up to 100 acres of temporary fencing be erected to facilitate future grazing.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 15.20.