

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

Monday 28 June 2010

Commencing with a site meeting at Reservoir Car Park, 14.30 (for approx 1 hour)
then at the Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Mr P Glyn (Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Cllr N Bennett, Mr M Cooper, Mr J Francis, Mr R Galley, Cllr M Hoy, Mr J Harding (Forestry Commission), Mr C Marrable (Conservation Officer), Dr H Prendergast (Clerk) and Cllr R St Pierre (Vice-Chairman). Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

Also present: Cllr F Whetstone.

The Chairman opened the meeting. There were no members of the public present.

15/10 Apologies.

Apologies were received from Mr C Hewitt (County Ecologist), Mr E Stenhouse and Mr R Thornely-Taylor (*ex-officio*). Mr J Spicer has withdrawn from the Committee.

16/10 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

There were none.

17/10 Discussion of site visit.

Mr Marrable gave a short verbal report of the site visit. The Committee had looked at areas of bracken mowing, bracken scraping (older and more recent sites), turf stripping, a small area identified for burning and the effect of the Ahwi flail.

17.1/10 There was a short discussion regarding the overflow from Wych Cross reservoir. The Chairman asked if the matter fell within the remit of the Committee and it was agreed that it did. The Chairman said the water appeared to be treated and as such was a waste of a very valuable resource. There was concern that chlorinated water may cause ecological damage. There was general agreement that a written complaint would be made to the water company concerned and to NE with correspondence copied to Ofwat.

17.2/10 The Chairman said the site visit clearly demonstrated the complexity of heathland management. HLS had allowed the Board to experiment and learn a great deal more. Cllr Barnes said it was pleasing the Board had been able to try a great number of differing techniques. Cllr St Pierre said it had been useful to discuss the pros and cons of burning.

17.3/10 Cllr Barnes commented that he had noted the screen of trees left alongside the A22. Mr Marrable confirmed that the default was to leave woodland as a roadside screen except where there was heathland on the opposite side of the road.

17.4/10 Mr Cooper said it was important that local people were kept informed of any work taking place on the Forest particularly where work was 'dramatic'. He suggested signage and using the website. Cllr Barnes said before and after photographs were very useful and that he was very impressed with how areas, cleared in 1989, looked now. He went on to say he found it very reassuring to hear about the tractor driver's training and the height the cut of mower was set at in regards to protecting ground nesting birds.

Cllr St Pierre to organise water testing by Sussex Ouse Conservation on the outfall pipe to confirm whether or not the water coming from the pipe is potable and therefore is an outfall from the Wych Cross Reservoir.

Action

CM

RStP

18/10 Chailey fencing application ruling – verbal report by Conservation Officer.

The full ruling and Inspectors report was tabled recommended and Mr Marrable suggested that members of the committee should read the full draft. He went on to say the ruling was made in the middle of June and he directed the Committee to the following sections of the document: page 3 gave a good explanation of grazing on heathland; page 5 clarified the Commons Act and how the ruling was reached; page 14 gave the preliminary conclusion and page 17 explained the conditions on consent and the 20 year limitation on that consent.

18.1/10 Mr Marrable went on to describe how the grazing area fencing on the Forest, for which permission was granted in 1996, was subject to a 15 year review by English Nature in 2011. The matter had been raised with Natural England and they agreed they had taken over responsibility from English Nature and it was their duty to make the necessary studies regarding fencing and to write the report.

19/10 Findings from the Close-shepherded grazing feasibility project on Ashdown Forest 2007-2010 – Draft report for the Conservation Committee for comment - CON 06/10.

The draft document, requested at the Conservation Committee of 29 March 2010, had been circulated and the Chairman pointed out two typographical errors in the tables and reminded the Committee the document was an internal one. He invited comments.

19.1/10 Cllr Bennett said he was very happy with the document and thought it appropriate to put it on the website and let Natural England have a copy. He said it was exactly what was needed and was a good steer for the future. Cllr St Pierre agreed that the report did everything the Committee had asked for.

19.2/10 Mr Cooper said he would like a précis for circulation to the Parish Magazines as there was wide spread interest and general approval of the grazing scheme. The Clerk said the abstract on the front page along with the conclusion could be used.

19.3/10 There was a short discussion regarding reducing staff costs. Cllr Barnes said there was a balance to be struck between the number of sheep grazed and the staffing costs associated with their management. He went on to say it was important to monitor the comparative costs. The Chairman replied there was an economy of scale but that, like in so many areas, pay took a large proportion of the funds. Mr Cooper commented that the costs reduction over the three year project was, in fact, quite dramatic.

19.4/10 There was some concern that the costings might be misunderstood by some, however, it was considered important be open about the fact that shepherded grazing was an expensive option. After a discussion it was agreed that the document be made available to the public via the website. It was agreed that some minor re-drafting, including tightening the bibliography, would take place to achieve clarity in regards to funding and the pros and cons of shepherded grazing to ensure there was no misunderstanding by the public or the press.

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HP
PG
CM

20/10 Financial information for Conservation Committee responsibilities – CON 07/10.

Mr Marrable gave a brief explanation the financial information. He said that the figure relating to archaeology was for the second phase based on the LiDAR photographs. He said that the figure for heathland restoration work by contractors was a conservative estimate and may be substantially lower than indicated. Contractors were paid for the job, not a day rate, so any adverse weather would not affect the costs.

21/10 Update on HLS funding – verbal report by the Conservation Officer.

Mr Marrable said he had recently attended a meeting of the HLS panel set up by Natural England. He was reassured by Mr Seymour from Natural England that the full area payment (i.e. £200/ha/year) would be made until 2016. Mr Marrable reported that there was a substantial amount of EU money available for new schemes in the south east for this year and that deals with the EU were frequently re-negotiated. Mr Cooper said he was re-assured by Mr Marrable's report. Cllr Whetstone asked what the Board's liability was 'once finished'. Mr Marrable replied, 'none at all' though there were obligations on the Board to manage the SSSI.

20.1/10 There was a short discussion regarding what could be done to look out for warning signs that indicated the EU financial situation might alter. Mr Marrable said NE were re-assuring and they had no indication there might be changes ahead. The Clerk pointed out that any threat to Natura 2000 sites would be reported in the press (such as what he received from the EU) and that the Forest was a very large, high profile site which would have a measure of protection due to its prominence in SE England.

22/10 Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman.

Chairman - Mr Cooper nominated Cllr St Pierre and was seconded by Mr Glyn. As there were no other nominations Cllr St Pierre was duly elected and took up the Chairmanship. Cllr St Pierre warmly thanked Mr Glyn for his very hard work as Committee Chairman. The Clerk said Mr Glyn had been a superb Chairman who had steered the Committee through some challenging times.

It was agreed that the Committee recommend to the Board that a resolution of thanks be made to Mr Glyn.

Vice Chairman – Cllr St Pierre nominated Cllr Bennett and was seconded by Cllr Hoy. As there were no other nominations Cllr Bennett was duly elected and took up the post with thanks.

23/10 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

There was none.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 16.50.