

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

Monday 27 June 2011

Site visit to see: Sheep grazing within electric fencing; Winter restoration area; Erosion and ride management

Ashdown Forest Centre at 15.15

Committee members present: Cllr R St Pierre (Chairman), Mr M Cooper, Mr J Francis, Mr R Galley (*ex-officio*), Mr P Glyn, Cllr C Hardy, Mr C Marrable (Conservation Officer & Acting Superintendent), Mr R Thornely-Taylor (*ex-officio*). Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

Also present: Ranger Rich Allum, Caroline FitzGerald (site visit only) & Cllr F Whetstone.

The Chairman opened the meeting. There was one member of the public present.

*Mrs Haigh-McVitty stated that it was difficult to ask questions at the start of the meeting and would prefer questions to be at the end. She went on to say she wanted to ask a question about the future after HLS.*

**Action**

**18/11 Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Cllr N Bennett (Vice-Chairman), Dr K Cole (Ecologist ESCC), Mr J Harding (Forestry Commission), Ms L Hutchby, Dr C Johnson (County Archaeologist) and Cllr M Weaver.

**19/11 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.**

There were none.

**20/11 Co-option of Committee members**

Mr Thornely-Taylor explained that the Committee was required by Standing Orders to co-opt its members. Cllr Whetstone said that as the Governance Committee at ESCC had not yet met it made it difficult to proceed with co-options. There was a short discussion on who ESCC would nominate and who might stand down. However, it was proposed that Dr K Cole (Ecologist ESCC), Mr J Harding (Forestry Commission), Ms L Hutchby (Natural England) and Dr C Johnson (County Archaeologist) be co-opted on to the Conservation Committee in their capacity as external experts. Cllrs Hardy and Weaver, new Board members, were also co-opted onto the Committee.

**It was agreed that Dr K Cole, Mr J Harding, Cllr C Hardy, Ms L Hutchby, Dr C Johnson and Cllr M Weaver be co-opted onto the Committee.**

**21/11 Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman**

Mr Marrable explained that the two positions required election as per the Standing Orders and asked for nominations for the Chairmanship.

Mr Glyn proposed Cllr St Pierre. This was seconded by Mr Francis and put to a vote, which was carried unanimously.

Mr Marrable then asked for nominations for the Vice-Chairmanship. Mr Glyn proposed Cllr Bennett. This was seconded by Mr Cooper and put to a vote, which was carried unanimously. Cllr St Pierre thanked the Committee and took the Chair.

## 22/11 Discussion of site visit

The Chairman thanked Mr Marrable and Miss FitzGerald for arranging the site visit. The pros and cons of bridges and their construction had been discussed; the sheep enclosed within electric fences were looked at and there was a discussion regarding firebreaks and rides.

There was a short discussion regarding the sheep. All agreed they looked very healthy and that there was plenty for them to eat in the enclosure. Mr Thornely-Taylor suggested that, as there was good grazing for them, the sheep may not be fulfilling their conservation objectives. Mr Marrable replied that the palatability of Molinia would reduce as the season went on. Mr Francis suggested that more sheep were needed. Cllr St Pierre said that the plan was for tugging to take place next year and a breeding programme re-introduced. She went on to say it was a fine balance between grazing a sufficiently high number of animals and the availability of suitable winter grazing.

There was a discussion regarding winter grazing and all agreed that now was a good time to be looking for suitable locations. It was stated that 60 acres was the bare minimum required to hold the whole flock in one place. Mr Marrable said the site didn't need to be close to the Forest just fenced and with good winter keep. He also said that, with a team of lookers, Miss FitzGerald would have to make less frequent visits to the flock. Whilst having the flock in one place was ideal, having it in two would be manageable. Mr Cooper said that hay would be in short supply again this year and probably at a premium price making it vital to find good winter grazing. Mr Marrable said he would welcome any information regarding landowners who may be able to offer suitable grazing from all Board members.

There was a discussion regarding making payments to land owners. Mr Marrable said that, at 25 pence per head, per week, the cost was minimal in relation to the overall budget. He went on to say that payments were made last year and he fully expected to do the same this year.

Mr Galley said he was keen to get a feeling for the longer term and asked for a paper looking at the pros/cons/options. Mr Marrable said he had already produced a paper but would re-visit it. It was agreed that the grazing paper would be re-presented at the next Committee.

**It was agreed that the previously circulated paper on the future of grazing would be re-visited and presented at the next Committee meeting.**

CM

**The search for suitable winter grazing would continue and any information regarding potential willing landowners would be passed to the Office.**

CM/ all Board

## 23/11 Wych Cross Reservoir – verbal update

Mr Marrable said that he had had a long conversation with Helen Bates from South East Water and that the problem was an extremely complex one. South East Water were fully aware of our concerns and were doing all they could to locate the source of the leak. It was agreed that Mr Marrable obtain a written report from South East Water before the next Committee meeting and ask if Ms Bates would be willing to make a site visit.

There was a brief discussion regarding whether the water leak was a conservation issue. Mr Glyn and Cllr Whetstone suggested that it was not but that it did highlight a public body (South East Water) failing in its duty. Mr Marrable said that the leak, when compared to the natural flow of water from the surrounding landscape into the stream below, seemed

to have a minimal effect.

**It was agreed that a written report from South East Water be obtained and made available at the next Committee meeting and to ask if a site visit could be arranged.**

CM

#### **24/11 Higher Level Stewardship Scheme after five years - CON 06/11**

A paper was tabled. Mr Marrable reported that over half of the heathland had now been covered and those areas would be re-assessed in due course. Places where there scrub re-invasion was worst would be prioritised for further work. All areas of the heathland would be visited within the ten years of the HLS scheme and it would be increasingly easy to maintain them in the future.

There was, in 1992, in the region of 1000 acres of monoculture bracken. This figure had now been approximately halved which indicated the success of the mowing programme. However, it was difficult to predict how the mown sites would react and develop as factors such as litter depth, soil type etc. had an impact.

The species accounts and bird scores could not be directly related to management. Species such as Dartford warbler, for example, had been provided with excellent habitat but had been adversely affected by the severe weather.

There was a short discussion regarding what may happen to HLS finance in the future. Mr Marrable said that there were suggestions the Government would continue taking European money and that HLS would have a successor.

There was a discussion regarding extending grazing on the Forest. Mr Marrable reported that Louise Hutchby was due to compose a report evaluating the benefits of the enclosed grazing area on habitats and ecology (this was a requirement made by the Secretary of State when the fencing was originally given approval). It was hoped the report would be available this year.

Mr Marrable went on to say that the best and most effective grazing had taken place during the Shepherded Grazing Project as it was so targeted. However, it was recognised there were enormous practical problems and that financially it was very costly. Mr Glyn said that there were also huge physical demands on staff and that a large amount of equipment and volunteer input was required to make it viable.

#### **25/11 Financial information for Conservation Committee responsibilities - CON 5/11**

This was tabled. There were no comments from the Committee.

Mr Marrable reported that English Heritage had asked for work to be carried out on one of our Scheduled Monuments (an incomplete iron age rectangular enclosure with double ditch and bank). The work would have to be done by hand due to the sensitivity of the site and could be fenced and grazed in order to maintain it in the future. Costs for this work were currently being awaited. He went on to say that the archaeologists had extended an offer to give a power point presentation on their recent work. The Committee suggested that prior to the next Board meeting would be a suitable time.

Mr Thornely-Taylor asked if the Board could be served with a notice for work and what the statutory obligations were. He went on to say that the Ashdown Forest Trust, as the landowner, should be asked for support with works over and above the Board's statutory duties. There was a short discussion on providing ESCC with a list highlighting their responsibilities and what the Board actually does on their behalf. Mr Thornely-Taylor

thought that this may have a beneficial bearing on the Board's VAT status.

**Arrange, for the next Board meeting, a power point presentation by archaeologists on their recent work** CM

**Research and report to the Committee the statutory obligations placed on landowners in relation to scheduled monuments.** CM

**26/11 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 15.45. The next meeting is Monday 26 September 2011.