

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

Monday 20 September 2010

Ashdown Forest Centre at 14.30

Committee members present: Cllr R St Pierre (Chairman), Mr J Francis, Mr R Galley, Mr P Glyn, Cllr S Martin, Mr R Thornely-Taylor, Ms L Hutchby (Natural England), Mr C Marrable (Conservation Officer), Dr H Prendergast (Director). Minutes taken by C Marrable.

Also present: Cllr F Whetstone.

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

**Action**

**24/10 Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Cllr M Hoy, Cllr N Bennett, Mr J Harding (Forestry Commission), Mr C Johnson (County Archaeologist).

**25/10 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.**

There were none.

**26/10 Verbal report on the work done at Wych Cross Reservoir**

Dr Prendergast reported that SE Water were currently carrying out maintenance on the reservoir and would try to repair the leaking valves as part of that operation. A manager from SE Water (Paul Howells, Head of Production) had been in regular contact with the Forest.

Cllr St Pierre said that unless a satisfactory repair was made soon, a formal complaint should be made to Ofwat.

**HP**

**27/10 Shepherded grazing (Phase 2)**

27.1/10 Caroline FitzGerald was appointed Grazing Officer on the 20<sup>th</sup> September. Ms FitzGerald has a long history of working on heathlands with Hebridean sheep and is familiar with the Forest through the Weald Heathland Initiative. The post is permanent and full-time. It was suggested that Ms FitzGerald should attend the next meeting with a view to meeting the committee and discussing the future of the grazing scheme.

27.2/10 Though the 'phase 2' grazing scheme is still in its infancy, certain capital expenditure can be anticipated and an initial sum of £3000 has been added to the HLS grazing budget to cover temporary fencing. Other issues were discussed including the need for proper warning signs on the electric fence and the associated health and safety concerns, insurance on equipment and the impact of dogs.

27.3/10 As the work load associated with looking after the sheep in winter is low, it has been determined that a grazing assistant need not be employed until the spring. Week-end inspections will be carried out by the Duty Ranger, Conservation Officer or volunteers.

27.4/10 Successful Forest sheep grazing requires adequate in-bye land for winter keep and accommodation for those animals not in the main grazing flock. There are several cooperating local landowners who allow the Forest sheep to graze on their land for free or for a small payment. The desirability of longer-term formal agreements was discussed but Mr Francis felt that some landowners would not want to be tied into such agreements. Mr Glyn suggested that a written agreement with a peppercorn rent might be acceptable to landowners while giving the Forest more confidence that grazing could continue. It was suggested that an article should be included in Forest Life with a request for in-bye land and for potential volunteers.

CM

27.5/10 It was agreed that sheep breeding should be suspended for this year at least, to reduce the work load on the shepherd and to maximise the number of days that the animals are able to graze the heathland next spring.

27.6/10 An 'away day' for Conservators was discussed. It was felt that most benefit would be derived from a trip to see the grazing on Chailey Common, where Hebridean sheep are being grazed within electric fences. This could be followed by a visit to Piltown golf course, where heathland management takes place, including grazing. Mr Marrable will arrange the visit for the spring. Cllr Martin brought up the subject of traffic speed limits and mentioned a change in policy which would allow lower speed limits on non-residential roads, which could eventually impact on the ability to graze livestock close to road verges without fencing.

#### **28/10 Deer**

Dr Prendergast reported that the West High Weald Deer Management Group was meeting local land-owners and stalkers with a view to establishing a coordinated local approach to deer management. Forest staff were to meet the Forestry Commission and Natural England to discuss the possibility of the Forest claiming a Forestry Commission grant of £6 per ha of woodland for deer management which would lead to the Forest's woodland achieving favourable conservation condition. Currently, deer grazing is damaging woodland by removing ground flora, preventing regeneration of new trees or coppice and creating a significant browse line. A summary of this meeting will be presented to the Conservation Committee.

HP

#### **29/10 Verbal report of alien species**

There have been some reports of wild boar and large cats on the Forest. Mr Thornely-Taylor said that wild boar dung had been found in Oldlands Hall grounds and Mr Galley suggested that there had been sightings from Masketts Farm. Dr Prendergast stated that sightings of big cats are occasionally reported to the Office but there has been no evidence. It was agreed that no action could be taken in anticipation of wild boar reaching the Forest.

Mr Thornely-Taylor raised the issue of invasive, non-native plant species over and above those which are already recognised as a Forest problem. It was agreed that such species should not be allowed to spread on the Forest.

#### **30/10 Financial information for the Conservation Committee**

Mr Marrable handed out the correct Financial Report (Cons 8/10), two incorrect versions having been circulated previously. Mr Marrable pointed out that the subsidy paid to Commoners who graze their livestock on the Forest had not been increased since it was introduced around 1998. The headage subsidy was intended to encourage Commoners to use the Forest and should be increased at least in line with inflation. Whereas the

Committee agreed that an increase was appropriate, it was felt that the issues concerned with the amount and the need for an audit trail should be explored more fully in a paper presented to the Committee at the next meeting.

CM

**31/10 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.**

31.1/10 Cllr St Pierre reported that the bridleway to Pooh bridge was to be re-surfaced

31.2/10 Cllr St Pierre stated that she had received a post-card from Mr White reporting that there was a large amount of ragwort between Nutley and Maresfield on the Forest. Mr Marrable said that the Forest Rangers try to control ragwort and denied that there was a large quantity anywhere on the Forest.

31.3/10 Mr Francis asked that more detail could be provided on the proposed winter heathland management areas. Mr Marrable agreed to take any Conservators onto the Forest to explain the work.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 16.00