

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

Monday 26 September 2011

Ashdown Forest Centre at 14.30

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

Also present: Cllr S Tidy and Cllr F Whetstone.

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

Action

27/11 Apologies.

Apologies were received from Dr K Cole (Ecologist ESCC) and Mr J Harding (Forestry Commission).

28/11 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

There were none.

29/11 Election of a Vice-Chairman

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

30/11 Review of the previously circulated paper on the future of grazing – CON 6/11

Mr Marrable stated the paper was a re-draft of a previously circulated paper. He said that the emphasis in 2.2 would be modified. Grazing on neighbouring land was a pointer illustrating the importance of grazing. He went on to say that the grazing in both Kings Standing and Pippingford Park had no public access and that at the SWT reserve was dog free thus they were not strictly comparable to Ashdown Forest. Chailey Common had more similarities. Mr Marrable said he was not keen to create another permanent enclosure and wanted to move in the direction of targeted grazing concentrating on areas that would benefit.

He went on to say he was making a fact finding visit to Epping Forest to look at their 'fenceless fencing' trial and there was a brief discussion on the viability of such a scheme.

Mr Francis asked why there had been a policy change in regards to fencing. Mr Marrable explained that there could be greater control over what the animals are eating and that grazing acidic grassland had obvious ecological benefits.

There was a brief discussion on costs and the pros and cons of fencing along roadsides to prevent animal deaths. It was noted that ESCC highways lacked the resources to carry out further traffic management. All agreed that it was unlikely any further permanent fencing would be well received by the public.

The Chairman said she would draft a brief note to the head of highways regarding traffic management across the Forest in order to raise the issue and enquire what cost effective measures could be taken.

There was a short discussion regarding dog training schemes. Mr Marrable said a proposal would be drafted and presented to the Committee in due course.

Mr Francis asked about grazing with large herbivores. Mr Marrable replied that there were many issues surrounding grazing with ponies etc and he was aware that the New Forest had considerable problems with road traffic accidents and feeding by the public. It was a matter that would doubtless come back to the Committee in the future.

The Chairman thanked Mr Marrable for an excellent comprehensive paper.

The Committee recommend to the Board their proposal that all future new grazing will be, within reason, targeted grazing.

31/11 Wych Cross Reservoir – CON 7/11

Mr Marrable said it was difficult to make contact with the same person twice at South East Water. There were now several bypass pipes coming from the reservoir probably in an attempt to isolate the leak. He went on to say another factor to consider would be a possible future request to dig, which in the long run, may be more detrimental to the Forest than the leak itself. Mr Marrable said he was keeping a watching brief on the issue.

32/11 Statutory obligations placed on landowners in relation to scheduled monuments.

Mr Marrable reported that landowners must not damage nor undertake activities likely to damage a scheduled monument site without the permission of English Heritage. There was no obligation on the landowner to manage a site but there was encouragement to 'maintain'. He went on to say care had to be taken not to damage sites when undertaking heathland management. For example the Iron Age enclosure at Kings Standing was covered with 12' high geriatric gorse this was damaging but also offered a refuge to rabbits. There was remedial work planned which involves the gorse being tackled by hand and the area (probably) fenced and grazed. He went on to say that, in the past, gorse would have been managed Commoners grazing animals and by regular burning. He confirmed that the Rangers were familiar with the sites on their chases.

33/11 Planned winter heathland restoration work – CON 8/11

Mr Marrable said that basic Forest wide heathland management was aimed at reducing scrub invasion and controlling geriatric gorse. Each chase has at least one area of work as it sends a positive message about our commitment to managing heathland. The prices shown on the plan reflect the level of difficulty and quantity of work, for example the hand clearance work at the Iron Age enclosure (discussed above). He went on to say there were also additional smaller areas of in-house work not shown on the plan.

Mr Marrable confirmed that the plan had been shared with the Parish Councils and notices would be posted at the various work sites and on-line for the benefit of the public.

34/11 Tree disease and dangerous tree responsibilities.

Mr Marrable said this was a very difficult issue. Tree disease was difficult to recognise and correctly identify and often only the most obvious cases were identifiable. There had recently been one call out by a concerned member of the public to look at a significant area of defoliated trees. On close examination it was seen to be moth caterpillar infestation and in the fullness of time the trees recovered. It was not possible to identify the moth in question. When the Rangers become aware of 'dead looking' trees they keep a watching brief before deciding on the course of action. Mr Marrable said it was worth noting that there were approximately ½ million trees on the Forest.

Mr Marrable confirmed that there was an obligation to inspect trees along public rights of way, footpaths, bridle paths etc to look for, and manage, potentially dangerous trees. This should be done annually and when the tree is bare. However, advice has been taken from the Woodland Trust who inspect 18 monthly. They recommend inspections for de-foliation in summer and fungi on the trunk and limbs in autumn.

35/11 Financial information for the Conservation Committee responsibilities – CON 9/11

Mr Marrable said this was a simple update. There were some errors to be corrected. There was a short discussion regarding HLS payment. Mr Marrable reported there had been an inspection by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) to look at cross-compliance. They inspected, and signed off, sheep movement records, spraying records and felling licences. This was followed by an inspection of the Forest. Happily record keeping was good and stood up to scrutiny. Cllr Weaver said the inspection would be followed up by a letter, probably making recommendations. Mr Thornely-Taylor said he was surprised at the inspection considering the RPA make no payments to us and hoped the inspection was an error rather than a waste of tax-payers money. He hoped it was a signal that the RPA were considering making a payment.

There was a short discussion regarding Nature Improvement Areas. Mr Marrable said he was aware of the scheme and was keeping a watching brief on developments. Cllr Tidy stated that the High Weald Unit were putting in a bid.

36/11 Any other business

Mr Thornely-Taylor said had made a visit to the High Weald Unit as he had thought it a good idea to find out what they do. He had discussed joint interests with them.

36/11 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 15.45. The next meeting is Monday 9 January 2012.