

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

**Monday 26 November 2018**

14.00 at the Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Mr N Mawdsley (Chairman), Mr J Francis (Vice Chairman), Cllr S Tidy, Mr M Cooper, Mr C Smith and Mr S Alton (Conservation Officer)

Co-opted Members/Advisors: Ms J Field (Natural England)

Also present: Mr AG Reid, Mrs P Buesnel (Director), Mrs L Meehan (Finance Officer), Mrs K Dirs (Clerk)

Minutes taken by Mrs Kirsty Dirs

There were no members of the public present

**40/18 Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Cllr R Stogdon, Mrs R St Pierre and Cllr S Shing.

**41/18 Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature**

There were none.

**42/18 Matters Arising**

The Chairman enquired about progress with the following actions from previous meetings:

*42.01/18 Visit to Thames Basin Heaths*

The Committee agreed a visit to the Thames Basin Heaths would be beneficial to the Members, given the similarities between environment, habitat and recreational impact with the Forest.

*42.02/18 Broadstone Farm barn proposal update*

Item taken as part of the Grazing Officers Report 47.04/18.

*42.03/18 Capital funding under Countryside Stewardship (CS) and exceptional circumstances*

The Chairman asked for an update from Natural England (NE) regarding whether additional capital funding would be forthcoming in terms of the NE conditions for additional funding requiring exceptional circumstances. Ms Field advised that there was likely a good case and that the Conservation Officer should continue to liaise with Ms Field as is current practice.

Ms Field advised Members that the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) had taken over the responsibility for CS since 01 October and that a Service Level Agreement is currently being prepared between NE and the RPA. The Committee expressed concern that NE would have less decision-making power. Ms Field to report back further at the next Conservation Committee meeting.

*42.04/18 Verge Maintenance and ESCC Highways*

The Conservation Officer is to meet Dale Poore, the Contract Manager for Highways Maintenance at East Sussex County Council (ESCC), to look at areas of uncertainty.

*42.05/18 Habitat mapping*

The Committee considered habitat mapping was not a priority given the financial position of the organisation but that the exercise should be carried out before the implementation of the 2021 Management Plan. The Chairman asked the Conservation Officer to explore options and costs to present to the next Committee.

**Action**

**SA**

**SA**

**SA**

#### *42.06/18 Forest Centre barn extension*

The Committee resolved that whilst funds for the barn extension project are not currently available, small improvements should be considered in the interim. Item to be delegated to Conservation Working Party for consideration with Rangers.

#### *42.07/18 Matthew Boyer grazing compliance*

The Director advised Mr Boyer's amended response had been circulated to the Board and new wording has been proposed and that the Grazing Risk Assessment was being revised. The Clerk confirmed the Conservators' insurers (NFU Mutual) had been issued with Mr Boyer's opinion.

### **43/18 Financial Information for the Conservation Committee**

#### *43.01/18 Countryside Stewardship Financial Summary Q2 2018/19*

The Report was received and the Chairman queried whether line item MD31/02 included costs relating to public fencing. The Finance Officer confirmed the item included legal advice received. The Chairman then asked the Conservation Officer whether he anticipated the budget would be spent. The Conservation Officer advised it was difficult to predict expenditure until fence lines had been examined but the item included gates which are costlier. There were no further questions.

**The Committee entered confidential session**

**The Committee left confidential session**

### **44/18 Natural England Response to WDC including Shared Nitrogen Action Plan (SNAP)**

The Chairman asked NE to provide an update given their response to the Wealden District Council (WDC) Local Plan that stated there was no requirement for mitigation of Nitrogen impacts on Ashdown Forest SAC from the proposed additional development contained in the Local Plan. The NE response also highlighted that a Shared Nitrogen Action Plan (SNAP) would be put in place to mitigate broader Nitrogen impacts on Ashdown Forest SAC. Ms Field confirmed that Marian Ashdown, (Protected Species and Environmental Planning Adviser) at NE, is leading a pilot scheme to consider the impact of nitrogen on a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Ms Ashdown to be invited to next meeting.

**NM**

### **45/18 The Committee entered confidential session**

**The Committee left confidential session**

### **46/18 SAMMS Update**

The Director explained the SAMMS project has been delayed until 2019/2020, following concern raised at the long-term obligations and liabilities in recruiting the post. Secondment potential is being considered by WDC but this may leave the Conservators with less control over the programme. The Director will seek agreement with WDC regarding a secondment arrangement and will circulate the updated SAMMS Bird Monitoring Strategy to the Committee.

**PB**

### **47/18 Conservation Reports**

#### *47.01/18 Conservation Officers Report*

The report was received. The Conservation Officer highlighted the visible improvement to the North Chase since the recruitment of Ranger Clow and the success of the recent Chase tours. The pilot gorse spraying initiative was discussed and given the positive initial findings, Members agreed it should continue, subject to the consent of NE.

#### *47.02/18 Deer Panel Meeting*

The report was received and there were no questions.

#### *47.03/18 Deer Business Plan*

**The Committee considered the report and, subject to confirmation of the financial and regulatory aspects, agreed to progress Option 2.**

*47.04/18 Grazing Officers Report*

The Chairman advised he was yet to see a planning application for the barn proposal at Broadstone Farm barn and would continue to review WDC's planning portal. The Committee considered the justification for the Conservators to maintain a breeding herd of cattle, and broadly concurred that this was the most appropriate means. The Vice-Chair suggested a cost comparison of different types of grazing would be a useful tool.

*47.05/18 Management Team Meeting Report*

The report was received and there were no questions.

**48/18 Compliance checklist and Monitoring (standing item)**

*48.01/18 Monitoring and evaluating the impact of management*

The Conservation Officer advised species monitoring will form part of the Annual Report and will include quadrat data from the Grazing Officer. SA

*48.02/18 CS compliance monitoring*

There was nothing to report.

*48.03/18 Risk assessments and monitoring*

Grazing Risk Assessment currently being drafted. SA

**49/18 Governance Proposals and Conservation Function**

The Chairman spoke to his report raising a number of questions in relation to the conservation functions and how they would be undertaken by the new Programme Committee. Ms Field confirmed she would attend the new Programme Committee and Members proposed the other matters be considered at the forthcoming Board meeting. CF

**50/18 Strategic Plan and Conservation Management Plan review (standing item)**

*50.01/18 Urgent action needed before next meeting – Working group*

There were none.

**51/18 Management Information (standing item)**

The Clerk advised Management Information had not been updated but reported a surge in deer collisions for the month of November.

**52/18 Any urgent item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman**

There were none.

The meeting closed at 4:45pm