

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

Monday 21st May 2018

14.00 at the Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Mr J Francis (Vice Chairman), Mrs R St Pierre, Cllr R Stogdon, Cllr S Tidy, Cllr S Shing and Mr S Alton (Conservation Officer).

Co-opted Members/Advisors: Ms J Field (Natural England) and Dr N Mawdsley.

Also present: Mrs P Buesnel (Director) and Mrs L Meehan (Finance Officer)

Minutes taken by Miss K Meade.

There were no members of the public present.

10/18 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Mr C Smith and Mr A Reid

11/18 Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature

There were none.

12/18 Matters Arising

12.01/18 Site visit discussion

The site visit to Wren's Warren took place on 21st May 2018.

12.02/18 Actions arising from last meeting

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

1. Removal of bracken arisings - action still outstanding
2. Volunteer Coordinator – this role is taking on more conservation work and freeing up Ranger time. It is hoped the volunteer coordinator will take on more in this role.
3. Matthew Boyer – Cllr Stogdon will write to him again and ask if the quotation still stands.
4. Progress on minor temporary adjustment – The Conservation Officer and Grazing Officer will finalise the list of compartments to be signed off by Ms Field

13/18 Construction of new barns/alterations of existing barn (Planning Application 2)

Mrs Buesnel summarised the plans for the new barns and barn alterations. More space is needed for the deer project to have a cutting room thereby enabling it to be self-sustaining. This will take yet more space from the tractor shed and workshop. The original plans (Planning Consent granted in 2015), providing space and storage for the Grazing Programme, have since been revised to avoid pillow mounds.

There followed a discussion about the funding for the plans. The first stage has been estimated at £130,000. The CS budget has been proposed as funding for the project given the requirements of the deer and grazing programmes. Mrs Meehan advised that £200,000 surplus is forecast for the end of 2018/19, but that is accrued income and receipt of the actual cash depends on payment timing from Natural England. A funding proposal would be beneficial, so it could be seen how much funding would be needed for each phase since not all the funds would be available at the same time.

Ms Field expressed concern that if this project took funds from the CS budget there would not be enough funding remaining to deliver the CS objectives which are legally required. This could

Action

jeopardise future funding from Natural England.

A discussion followed regarding the priority of the building works and whether the CS budget could be used. The current budget forecast does not include funding for the project and other areas of work would be affected by the reallocation of funds.

RECOMMENDATION: The committee agreed, in principal, to the proposed development in the amended version but requires further information to show how it will affect the CS budget over the next 10 years and how it relates to the previously proposed grazing base.

Dr Mawdsley stated that the public enquiry had also not been accounted for.

Mr Alton agreed to recast the budget to include funding the renovations and public enquiry; a report will also be made to the FGP Committee.

14/18 Financial Information for the Conservation Committee

14.01/18 Countryside Stewardship budget 2017/18 (15 months)

The accounts have now been brought in line with the tax year and will run from April to March. This should make the accounting easier. Dr Mawdsley highlighted the difference between the actual and forecast income. **Mrs Meehan advised that this was due to the reporting of accruals, but she would check to confirm.**

14.02/18 18 Countryside Stewardship budget 2018/19 – revised

It was highlighted that there is a shift towards gorse management and away from birch & scots pine management.

The Committee entered confidential session

The Committee left confidential session

Dr Mawdsley noted that there is currently a £40,000 underspend on the CS budget.

The Finance Officer left the meeting.

15/18 Conservation Officer's Report

15.01/18 The Conservation Officer's report was summarised. It was noted that the fencing repairs are increasing each year. It might be necessary to undertake section replacements in future instead of patching.

The Committee entered confidential session

The Committee left confidential session.

Mr Alton said that the site visit had shown that the management is working. Dr Mawdsley said that gorse was a concern for the commoners who didn't feel the burns were effective. Following a short discussion, it was suggested that the burns should be carried out as early in the season as was possible. Cllr Tidy suggested more should be done to engage with the public and explain more about the management practices. Dr Mawdsley said that site visits would be a very useful tool. Mr Alton agreed but noted that care should be taken to choose the sites.

15.02/18 Grazing Officer's Report

Mrs St Pierre asked if the sales of meat produce will be sustained or increased following the successful lambing season. Mr Alton confirmed that it would be similar to previous years. Dr Mawdsley requested that figures for grazing in the South Chase be included in future reports.

15.03/18 Management Team Meeting Report

There was a discussion about the cutting and dumping of bracken on the South Chase. Alternatives

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to the current method of dumping have been investigated but are prohibitively expensive. Fencing off a small area to use as a dumping area could be a short-term solution.

16/18 Compliance checklist and Monitoring (standing item)

16.01/18 Monitoring and evaluating the impact of management

The Conservation Officer has started monitoring. He expressed concern that the numbers of Early Purple Orchid are significantly lower. This must be due to the weather since they are not in a managed area. There are also fewer Birds Nest Orchids on the verges. Dr Mawdsley suggested this is possibly due to the mowing regime implemented by ESCC.

Mr Francis asked to know the extent of gorse on the Forest. Mr Alton said it should be possible to show this with current software. There was a brief discussion about bracken management. The Conservation Officer stated that the fixed-point photography shows better than 90% kill rate, with little regrowth. It is a 2-year cycle so every year a new area is sprayed, and an old area is resprayed.

SA

16.02/18 CS compliance monitoring

The Conservation Officer confirmed there was grazing in all the required areas. The Grazing Officer was carrying out quadrat surveys. There had been approaches from two Sussex University groups: deer impact on heathland (2 undergraduates); study site for rewilding including monitoring and social science aspects (PhD).

16.03/18 Risk assessments and monitoring

Nothing to report

17/18 SAMMS

Following WDC meeting in January, responses have been received. All amendments were agreed except 5.3. **The Committee agreed to recommend to the Board that the SAMMS Agreement should now be signed.**

Mrs Buesnel had met with WDC officers to review the agreed projects. The SAMMS Joint Steering Group will meet in June to work on delivery of SAMMS. A workshop event will be held in August to discuss bird monitoring. The Ashdown Forest Bird Group will be involved but will not be responsible for coordinating. Mrs Buesnel to forward the Draft Monitoring Strategy to the Committee.

PB

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

18.01/18 Urgent action needed before next meeting – Working Group

Review of the Strategic Plan and Conservation Management Plan can be done via email. The Annual Report is a higher priority to get to the Board. The working group should meet when reports from Footprint Ecology have been received.

18.02/18 Compartment Management Plans

The Conservation Officer showed an example of the GIS maps that can be created. Ms Field asked how often the information is updated. The Conservation Officer stated that the initial data was still being uploaded. Dr Mawdsley agreed that this is will be a very useful way to access data.

19/18 Management Information (standing item)

There was a brief discussion about the reported deer and dog incidents.

20/18 Any urgent items for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman

It was brought to the notice of the Committee that three areas of land bounding the Forest in the former Crowborough Warren have been put up for auction.

The meeting closed at 4:25pm