

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

**Monday 6th August 2018**

14.00 at the Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Mr J Francis (Chairman), Mrs R St Pierre, Cllr R Stogdon, Mr C Smith, Dr N Mawdsley and Mr S Alton (Conservation Officer).

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

Also present: Mrs P Buesnel (Director)

Minutes taken by Miss K Meade.

There were no members of the public present.

The Chairman welcomed Dr Mawdsley to the Board.

**21/18 Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Cllr S Tidy, Mr M Cooper and Mr J Harding

**22/18 Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature**

There were none.

**23/18 Matters Arising**

*23.01/18 Actions arising from last meeting*

The Chairman advised the committee of the amendment to the previous minutes as agreed by the Board:

Item 13/18 (Paragraph 5 – Recommendation)

*“whilst noting NE’s concerns the Conservator committee members agreed in principle.....”*

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

1. Removal of bracken arisings – There has been no further action. Ms Field advised the committee that the SNAPS scheme was still in the early stages of planning and that it could help fund the removal of bracken arisings in future.
2. Matthew Boyer – A letter had been received from Mr Boyer and has been circulated to the Board.
3. Consultation Project Manager – No action taken
4. Gorse mapping – Mr Alton had looked at data provided by Wealden District Council (WDC), but this had not proved useful. Mr Alton advised the Committee that the area should ideally be remapped.
5. SAMMS – East Sussex County Council (ESCC) have provided a Job Evaluation of the proposed post. The Director will now meet with WDC to agree the SAMMS budget. It is anticipated that the Strategic Access Officer will be in place by the start of the new calendar year.

**24/18 Construction of new barns/alterations of existing barn (Planning Application 2)**

*24.01/18 Proposal to extend existing facilities*

The working party had met and carried out a site visit. They reported that it was clear from the visit that more space was required in order for Countryside Stewardship (CS) work to be carried out. A discussion followed regarding the need for the deer business plan to be finalised and made available to the Board. Mr Smith and Dr Mawdsley expressed concern about the budget availability and cash flow over the duration of the Countryside Stewardship agreement. Mr Alton advised the

**Action**

committee that although the indications were that the project could be done on a budgetary basis the Finance Officer had also expressed concern that the money would not be available when needed. Mr Smith suggested that the Finance & General Purposes Committee should now be involved to consider the funding.

**The Conservation Committee agreed in principle to the proposed development, but further information is required to show how it will affect the CS Budget. The proposal should now be passed to F&GP to agree funding and CS finances of the project.**

F&GP

Dr Mawdsley asked that a long-term CS budget should be brought to the next Conservation Committee meeting.

SA

## **25/18 Financial Information for the Conservation Committee**

*25.01/18 Countryside Stewardship Financial Summary Q1 2018/19*

Dr Mawdsley highlighted some differences in the budget of the Q1 financial summary compared to the budget presented in the May Conservation Committee meeting. He asked for some clarification from the Finance Officer.

LM

The low level of expenditure at the end of the quarter was raised. The Conservation Officer advised the Committee that expenditure was not constant through the year but fluctuated depending on the work being carried out. Following a period of low CS spend, the expenditure is expected to rise when the contractors start work.

Mr Francis asked for a long-term budget to be presented to the next meeting including the cost of the legal advice and public consultation on fencing. Mr Alton advised that Mr Boyer had invoiced and been paid.

SA

**The Committee asked for a note to be produced to explain the changes in the annual 2018/19 budget presented at this meeting.**

LM

## **26/18 Conservation Reports**

*26.01/18 Conservation Officer's Report*

The Conservation Officer's report was summarised. It was noted that the weather was having a mixed effect across the Forest. Some areas of the Forest that are normally inaccessible were now accessible by tractor and were being mowed for grazing and fence lines. Much of the CS work was on hold due to the weather conditions so amenity work, repair of structures etc was being done which had been slipping over the past few years. Spraying was not being done because the plants were heat stressed. There are indications that the bracken season might be shorter than normal. There had been no uncontrolled fires on the Forest. There was a brief discussion about the apparent increase in deer movements and rise in deer incidents.

**The Committee entered confidential session**

**The Committee left confidential session**

*26.02/18 Grazing Officer's Report*

The Committee were advised that Broadstone Farm had submitted a planning application. Mr Francis suggested that volunteers could be utilised more. The Conservation Officer responded that there were plans for volunteers to work on the North Chase.

All/FGP/

SA

*26.03/18 Management Team Meeting Report*

The Conservation Officer expressed concern that the non-CS work that the staff carry out as a requirement under the 1974 Ashdown Forest Act was not being recognised and has a decreasing budget. There followed a discussion about which Committee should be responsible for overseeing all the work being done. Mr Smith asked if there is a break-down of the sources of income and contingencies if these are lost, the legal requirements and the minimum work needed to meet

these requirements.

**27/18 Compliance checklist and Monitoring (standing item)**

*27.01/18 Monitoring and evaluating the impact of management*

Species monitoring will be reported when it is completed later in the year.

*27.02/18 CS compliance monitoring*

There was nothing to report.

*27.03/18 Risk assessments and monitoring*

The Committee were pleased with the paper produced by Mr Boyer. Mr Francis noted that some of the items included in the paper would lead to a rethink on procedures and the recording of decisions. There followed a discussion on the clarification of paragraph 20. Mr Smith suggested that the content of the paper should form the basis of the grazing proposal, but the team need to show that the current situation complies.

**An action plan should be drawn up in a matrix, showing each of the proposed actions, the response by the Conservators and who is responsible**

CF/PB

The Committee was informed that paragraph 35/36 was being considered already by the Clerk and Grazing Officer.

**28/18 Strategic Plan and Conservation Management Plan review (standing item)**

*28.01/18 Urgent action needed before next meeting – Working group*

The Conservation Officer is in the process of producing a budget for Countryside Stewardship 2016-2020.

SA

Mrs Buesnel advised the committee that the strategic plan will form the basis of the business plan for the transition to charity status. The quarterly strategic plans will not be produced until the way forward has been decided.

**29/18 Management Information (standing item)**

No issues were raised from the information provided

**30/18 Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the following year**

Chair: Dr N Mawdsley was nominated by Mr J Francis and seconded by Mr C Smith and was duly elected to the position of Chair.

Vice-Chair: Mr J Francis was nominated by Mr C Smith and was seconded by Dr N Mawdsley and was duly elected to the position of Vice-Chair.

**31/18 Any urgent items for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman**

Cllr Stogdon made the Committee aware that Wealden District Council are in the process of publishing their new local plan.

The meeting closed at 4:05pm