

Minutes of the
ASHDOWN FOREST
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING

1430, Monday 3 April 2006

Ashdown Forest Centre

Present Mr L. Gillham (Chair), Mr F. Brown, Mr M. Cooper, Mr C. Marrable, Ms J. Mortimer (Defra), Mrs R. O’Keeffe, Mr J. Spicer, Dr A. Tait (ESCC)

Apologies Mr J. Barnes, Mr P. Glyn, Dr H. Prendergast, Dr A. Woodcock,

Also present Mr F. Whetstone,

1) Election of Chairman

Mr Gillham was proposed by Mr Cooper and seconded by Mr Brown. There were no other nominations and Mr Gillham took the Chair.

2) Progress on HLS application

Ms Mortimer informed the Committee that the HLS scheme was in operation, with first round applicants already receiving grants. In Sussex, these were concentrated around the Pevensey Levels. The Ashdown Forest application had been received in time to meet the March deadline; if successful, it would be the first lowland heathland scheme in the country. Ms Mortimer said that the Forest application scored sufficient points to be successful but it is a competitive process. She explained that the next stage was for Defra to set prescriptions for management guidance and indicators of success for the Forest. These conditions would be agreed with the Conservators and would also be designed to fit with EN’s condition assessment targets. Mr Spicer asked whether this additional funding from Defra would lead to a reduction in contributions from the County Council. Mr Whetstone thought that this was a reasonable supposition. Ms Mortimer stated that more work would be expected in return for the additional funding and that Defra targets would be onerous; money could be withheld if targets are not being met. Mr Cooper stated that any money from Defra should be ring-fenced for heathland conservation projects.

3) Early results of species monitoring

Mr Marrable reported that: i) three reptile transects have been set up, monitored mainly by volunteers. Adders and common lizards are already being recorded, indicating the locations of hibernacula; ii) seven butterfly transects are in operation, using Butterfly Conservation methodology (no butterflies have been recorded yet); iii) the nine ant transects continue; they will be recorded once in July; iv) the AF Bird Group are contributing to national surveys for Woodlark and Dartford Warbler, as well as continuing their *ad hoc* recording over the Forest. A new data collection system is in operation, run by a member of the group.

4) Construction of barn at Whitehouse Farm

Mr Marrable reported that the construction had stalled due to a shortage of the reinforced fibre cement roof panels. The latest news is that these should be available in the week beginning the 10 April. Problems with the groundworks will be resolved once construction is complete.

5) Stakeholder analysis

Mr Marrable gave a brief review of the position on stakeholder analysis, beginning with the training course held at Sussex University in October 2005, sponsored by EN and WHI. Three members of Forest staff attended. The current position is that the company which carried out the training (3KQ) have put forward a proposal to carry out a scoping study, involving interviews with several Forest stakeholders, to determine 'the need and potential for a stakeholder engagement process'. EN and the Conservators have some queries regarding the proposal and we are awaiting a reply to these queries before we proceed. Mr Gillham said that the Conservators were not trusted by the public and that they were considered remote and undemocratic. It was essential that engagement with the public was done properly and that the Conservators required professional help. Mr Spicer said that engagement should be carried out sooner rather than later. Dr Tait said that any costs would be recouped by the savings made by having good community relationships. There was some discussion on how information should be disseminated, including through parish magazines. Mrs O'Keeffe offered to gather information on the parish magazine network.

6) AOB

There was no other business.

7) Field visit to Lintons carpark

The Committee were shown an area of heathland which had been cleared of trees and scrub during the winter. There was a general discussion about heathland management, including the role of fire and the necessity for bare ground. The Committee visited a new pond, dug in 2005, and were told how important open water can be in heathland areas.

The meeting closed at 1630.