

**Minutes of the**  
**ASHDOWN FOREST**  
**CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING**

1430, Monday 15 January 2007

Ashdown Forest Centre

Present Mr L. Gillham(Chairman), Cllr. F. Brown, Mr P. Glyn, Mr C. Johnson (ESCC Archaeologist), Miss J. Mortimer (Natural England [NE]), Mr C. Marrable (Conservation Officer), Mr F. Marshall, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk) and Dr A. Tait (ESCC Ecologist). Minutes taken by Mrs R. Marriott.

Also present: Cllr. J. Barnes, Cllr. R. Parsons, Mr J. Spicer, Mrs F. Temple (attended on behalf of Mr R. Thornely-Taylor), and Cllr. F. Whetstone.

Apologies: Cllr. D. Elkin, Cllr. R. O’Keeffe and Cllr. A. Reid.

Mr Johnson was welcomed to the Committee. Two members of the public were present.

**1) Pro-forma for HLS work**

Mr Glyn explained that he had invited all members of the Board to attend this meeting in order that it could be aware of the implementation of the HLS agreement.

Mr Marrable explained that, in essence, the HLS Pro-forma was a summary of the HLS agreement which had been signed on 1 August.

The first requirement of the HLS agreement is that a Forest Plan should be written. The earliest work on the Plan has been based on CMS7 software which is particularly good for ecological and conservation issues. It is not so good for access or education. The final physical form of the Plan is yet to be determined. The Plan is dependent on public consultation and, when finally published, will include the results of stakeholder engagement.

Cllr Barnes felt there should be an overall objective document that would be more easily understood by the public. It was agreed that the public consultation process would lead to the generation of documents that would be easier for the general public to understand.

Miss Mortimer then explained how the various items of expenditure under HLS were calculated. 50% of the annual income must be ring-fenced for practical heathland operations; of the remaining 50%, any activity that costs more than 2% of HLS income should be agreed by the Panel as a special project.

Mr Johnson offered to liaise with Mr Marrable on the archaeological/historic features work. Cllr Barnes was anxious that work would encompass a wide view of ‘historic interest’, for example, the remains of the iron industry. Mr Johnson confirmed that there would be an overall review with concentration on ‘hot spots’. Mr Marrable confirmed that work would be ongoing to the end of the HLS scheme.

Mr Marrable commented on the different special projects. 1) A job description has been written for the post of project officer for the close-herded grazing feasibility study. The salary has been agreed with Sheena Bridger, Human Resources, ESCC. He had also spoken to Complete Land Management (CLM), a local company that has some assets that could be used: land, buildings and a need for grazing animals. The project had already raised national interest and was being closely followed by a range of conservation organisations. 2) CLM is also developing a green waste handling facility. It would appear that costs and legislation make such a facility uneconomic for the Conservators to set up on their own; a cheaper option could be to supply CLM with Forest green waste. 3) Get-Mapping took aerial photographs of the whole Forest area in 2004 and Mr Marrable anticipated that someone will be appointed to prepare a vegetation map from these photographs.

Mr Marrable confirmed that the Conservation Objectives and monitoring methodology were already in place for the ecological Indicators of Success. The Ashdown Forest Bird Group were already actively engaged and other help would be employed as necessary.

Miss Mortimer outlined the 'modus operandi' for NE's input to the HLS scheme. The Forest has been divided into different parcels; each parcel will be 'condition assessed' by NE (Condition Status Monitoring) every six years. Mr Glyn reminded everyone that NE had a Public Service Agreement to have 95% of all SSSIs in a 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition by 2010. It was agreed that it would be helpful to have the guidelines for these two conditions discussed at the next Conservation meeting; this would help to define aims and set targets. There was concern about the amount of trees to be cut. Mr Marrable suggested that the additional funding from HLS would allow more re-creation of heathland and restoration of degenerate heathland at the expense of young successional woodland. The often quoted 60:40 heathland/woodland split was not a statutory agreement and should be abandoned. The woods along ghylls, the coppice woods and old beech woods would be left untouched but the successional woods with clear heathland remnants would be cleared as heathland. Older successional woods might be cleared to create 'soft' edges between heathland and woodland habitats. Dr Prendergast pointed out that the 1000 hectares of woodland on the Forest had received little management in the past. He was currently seeking woodland grants to rectify this. The results could be the reappearance of unexpected heathland as rides and glades are opened up.

Miss Mortimer then explained the purpose of the Panel which would consist of Jim Seymour from NE (Chair), Jason Lavender from the High Weald AONB Unit, and Alex Tait. Chris Marrable and herself would present progress on HLS objectives. Its purpose would be to ensure compliance with project aims and to monitor funds spent. Mrs Temple asked what level of detail in the financial reporting process would be required. It was felt that expenditure would be expected to keep within the guidelines listed in the notes; cost centres would be identified within the Board's computerised accounting system and staff time would be calculated and allocated accordingly. The cashflow reports would enable the Board to have good financial control, agreed to be of paramount importance. Miss Mortimer pointed out that the Panel would be able to agree important areas of expenditure; this would help other organisations/individuals see the development of the Forest Plan. Mr Gillham said that, in effect, the Panel would be an external audit of the implementation of the Plan. Dr Prendergast stressed that both NE and the Board were trying to achieve the same end, not through negotiation but by co-operation. Mr Gillham commented that HLS was a wonderful, positive opportunity and hoped that people would realise that NE and the Board were going in the same direction.

**Mr Gillham proposed that the Committee recommend the Board approve the Pro-forma for HLS work. This was agreed.**

## **2) Stakeholder Meeting (13 January)**

Dr Prendergast reported that about 45 people had attended the meeting which had been facilitated by 3KQ. Three issues had been discussed; Conservation (woodland and heathland), People (education and access) and Governance. A good spread of views had been gathered, efficient and effective notes taken and opinions had been sought. All Board members and staff who had been present agreed that it had been a positive meeting, ably handled by 3KQ. Mr Marrable commented on the contrast between the meeting and the open meetings held 15 years ago prior to the re-introduction of grazing. Cllr Barnes said that he was a little concerned about the age structure of the meeting and hoped this might be addressed in the future. Cllr Parsons welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate that the Board had taken note of public opinion.

## **3) Deer**

Dr Prendergast reported on deer casualties dealt with by Rangers. There had been 336 in 2006 compared with 215 in 2005. A workshop had been held in the summer which resulted in the formation of the Ashdown Area Deer Group whose objectives are to reduce deer road traffic collisions and to ensure the welfare of a healthy, local deer population. It was hoped this would be done by improved signage (to be done over the coming year), liaison with Sussex Police by defining call centre protocols and by deer management. The group is currently collecting figures for deer culling carried out in the Ashdown Forest area. Although the Conservators have no remit to manage deer and a deer cull cannot be carried out on Forest land, the Board are increasingly having to incur costs as a result of the increase in the wild herd. Over 20 years ago, the Rangers volunteered to attend deer road traffic accidents as a humane gesture. Today they are called out, on average, every day. The general public on the Forest edge are becoming increasingly aware of the deer problem, either through impact on their gardens or by witnessing traffic accidents involving deer. The Ashdown Forest Deer Group will be meeting on 17 January to consider the way forward.

Cllr Barnes advocated raising the profile of the contribution made by the Rangers and suggested funds should be sought to covers costs. Cllr Parsons suggested moveable signs and it was agreed these may prove useful but responsibility for the signs should remain with the Highways department.

## **4) Any Other Business**

Dr Prendergast informed the meeting that the new Forest gateway signs would be erected on 29 January.

Mr Marshall informed the meeting that he had received a guarantee from the builders of the barn at Whitehouse Farm and, therefore, the final payment should be made.

The meeting closed at 16.50.