

Minutes of the

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

1430, Monday 2 July 2007

Present Mr M Cooper, Mr L Gillham, Cllr M Hoy, Mr J Harding (Forestry Commission), Mr C Marrable (Conservation Officer), Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr R St Pierre, Mr J Spicer, Mr E Stenhouse and Dr A Tait (ESCC Ecologist).

Also Present: Ms Louise Amos (Close Herded Shepherding Project Officer); Cllr F Whetstone.

Apologies: Cllr J Barnes, Mr P Glyn (Chairman elect), Ms L Hutchby (NE), Miss J Mortimer (Natural England [NE])

Introductions of the members of the committee were made.

Election of Vice-Chair. Mr Gilham proposed Cllr St Pierre, seconded by Mr Cooper. Mr Spicer proposed Mr Stenhouse but there was no seconder.

Cllr St Pierre was elected Vice-Chair and in the absence of Mr Glyn took the Chair.

Mr Stenhouse asked why, on the website, co-opted members were so called? Dr Prendergast responded that the term used was 'advisor'.

Questions were taken from members of the public.

Mr P Crane: Ownership of the sheep in the close shepherding project.
Matter is on the agenda and will be responded to during the meeting.

Mr F Marshall: Suggestion to identify member of the public who wished to speak to the Chair can allocate equal time.
Chair agreed, subject to revision of Standing Orders.

Mr P Crane: AOB matters should be addressed.
AOB arise at the discretion of the Chair. The Chair should be advised of issues prior to the meeting so informed responses can be given.

Mrs G Nassau: Seating arrangements recommended at the 3KQ meeting were not adopted.
The seating plan was trialled but tables need more baize covering to reduce the effect of poor acoustics. This is in hand.

1) Conservation Objectives

This item, based on a document produced by Natural England (NE) was to be led by the advisor member from NE who was not in attendance. Mr Marrable offered to speak to the main points:

- The document is for internal NE use, its objectives being largely for lowland heathland as a whole and needs further development in its application to Ashdown Forest;
- It was decided that the detail behind the document could not be discussed without a member of NE present. This item is postponed to the following Committee meeting.
- **It was agreed that the Committee will make strong representation to Natural England to attend meetings or to give their apologies.**

2) **HLS update**

GIS vegetation mapping project

Mr Marrable reported that this was almost complete and was due for finalisation at the end of July. It was based on 2004/2005 aerial photographs and had not yet been ground truthed but was very detailed and accurate. A small section was complete and tabled.

Green waste scoping study

Mr Marrable reported that this comprehensive study examined the handling of products from heath and woodland management for uses such as composting and fuel. There was an opportunity to dispose of some of the products for a fee. Compost was of low value due to the volumes available of domestic green waste but fire wood was one of the higher value products. There was a short discussion on the appropriateness of commercial undertakings. It was agreed that the public are made aware that any decisions were not commercially driven but the best processing of by-products of land management. The Committee was assured that Commoners' rights were protected.

Archaeological fieldwork

Mr Marrable gave an update on the work undertaken by Chris Butler, Archaeologist. The Historical Environment Record held at County Hall had previously shown 70 sites, however, since this new work undertaken a further 450 sites have been identified. *Ashdown Forest Archaeological Reporting Forms* were now in use and items were still being fed back by staff to Chris Butler. So far there had been a combination of desk, aerial and field work with the Rangers; this will be followed up by field studies of sensitive archaeological sites and a full report. The work so far has changed understanding of the Forest. It was hoped that a publication would result from this work. The Chairman stated that this was very interesting and looked forward to receiving the review document when it was ready.

Proposed winter work 2007/2008

The list of proposed winter works was tabled and Mr Marrable explained the content, the process, the input of the Forestry Commission, felling licences, tenders and quotes. There were 12 sites proposed for winter work.

It was agreed that, in the light of the communication exercise undertaken this summer, people nearby the works be notified.

A discussion followed on the details of the work. The following points were made:

- There will be closer working with the Forestry Commission;
- Bracken continues to be a problem after the clearing of scrub and trees. Mowing is undertaken but grazing and other methods are also used to reduce bracken.

3) **Close Shepherding Project**

The Chairman welcomed Louise Amos to the meeting.

Ms Amos gave an explanation of her background and what she wanted to achieve on the Forest with grazing. Hebridean ewes had been purchased and they would arrive on the Forest in about two weeks; they had good breeding and were scrapie tested. Ms Amos explained the programme of training for the sheep over two to four weeks and some of the problems in regards to fencing. She described some of the areas targeted as 'in-bye' land adjacent to the Forest. There was a very short discussion regarding the system employed in the Netherlands. The sheep are owned by the Conservators. There followed a discussion regarding insurance cover against accidents involving the sheep.

Ms Amos stated that she would be setting up an area on the website informing the public of where she is going to be working with the sheep. There would also be information signs in the car parks as well as an on-line 'blog'. Cllr Whetstone suggested putting bells on the sheep and Ms Amos replied that it may be a good idea especially as the first area to be grazed was very open with areas of gorse where sheep could be hidden.

Ms Amos confirmed that the project would last for three years in the first instance and there would be a report submitted to the Board at the end of the project. Ms Amos reported that in the Netherlands there was a great deal of public involvement and input with the sheep being part of the community; they are loved and people go out to see them. The Chairman asked that Ms Amos return to the Committee to give regular updates.

The Chairman asked Dr Prendergast to obtain legal and insurance advice regarding livestock accidents on the Forest.

4) Forestry Commission

Mr Marrable reported on dealings with the Forestry Commission in relation to the winter works, that the 12 identified areas will be visited, environment impact assessments made and licences applied for. Mr Harding stated that this was a public process and on the public register. There was a report on the woodland management plan for the 1000 hectares of woodland on the Forest and what Forestry Commission money was available. There was a discussion regarding a long term policy over some twenty to thirty years policy and the Board's basic duties in relation to the Forest as an amenity and an area of high bio-diversity.

Mr Harding stated that there would be a written set of aims and objectives including a management plan for the next 20 to 30 years. However, it was agreed that, in regards to long-term objectives, it was normal for the plan to be drawn up and put before the Board when amendments and changes could be made, but it was not appropriate for this Committee to draw up those objectives.

There was a short discussion regarding UKWAS accreditation and Mr Harding explained that there would be help with Forestry Stewardship Council certification which covers issues such as health and safety and frees up grants for management. There was a short discussion on the implications including costs and it was agreed that this matter should be passed to FGP and that the Committee supported the initiative at this stage and that it should go ahead.

5) AOB

It was agreed that the Chairmen, when drafting the Agenda for meetings, should decide which paper should be circulated to members and which could be tabled at the meeting.

16.15 Mr Cooper left the meeting

Members were reminded that Minutes are not usually presented at Committee meetings as they arrive at the Board. There was discussion of level of management and control of management. The Chair stated she respected the views of individual members but noted that the majority of the Committee were satisfied with the current management practice.

16.20 Meeting concluded