

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

1430, Monday 30 June 2008  
Education Barn, Ashdown Forest Centre

Present Mr P Glyn (Chairman), Mr M Cooper, Mr L Gillham, Cllr M Hoy, Mr C Marrable (Conservation Officer), Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Mrs J Robertson (NE), Mr J Spicer, Mr E Stenhouse.

Also present: Cllr J Barnes and Cllr F Whetstone.

**Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Conservation Committee as required by Standing Orders 5.3** *“Each Committee shall elect its Chairman and Vice Chairman at its first Meeting following appointment of the Committee members by the Board.”*

Mr Gillham proposed Mr Glyn and this was seconded by Mr Cooper. Mr Spicer proposed Mr Stenhouse. This was not seconded. Mr Glyn was therefore elected and took up the Chairmanship with thanks.

The Committee went on to elect a Vice Chairman. Mr Cooper proposed Cllr St Pierre and this was seconded by Cllr Hoy. Cllr St Pierre was duly elected and will take up the Vice-Chairmanship at the next meeting.

There were no members of the public present.

**21/08 Apologies**

Mr J Harding (Forestry Commission), Mrs L Hutchby (NE), Mr C Johnson (ESCC Archaeologist), Cllr R St Pierre, Dr A Tait (ESCC Ecologist). It was noted that Dr Tait was on long term sick leave and the Committee wished him a swift recovery.

**22/08 Declarations of Interest**

Mr Glyn pointed out that he had sold hay to the Board at the market rate for the Hebridean sheep.

**23/08 Financial information for this cost centre – CON 10/08**

Mr Spicer queried the amount shown for the grazing project as there seemed to be a discrepancy with the figures shown in the Grazing Project report. After discussion it was agreed that the appropriate salaries needed to be attributed and that a more accurate breakdown of costs was required. Mr Glyn stated that Mr Spicer’s query would be taken up with Mrs Marriott and a better method of reporting the accounts devised. Mr Glyn would contact Mr Spicer in due course.

**It was agreed that Mr Glyn would work closely with Mrs Marriott to devise a better reporting system and to answer Mr Spicer’s query.**

**24/08 Areas for restoration: winter 2008/2009 – CON 11/08**

The document had been pre-circulated. Mr Marrable stated that the restoration would be taken forward in a similar manner as before and that felling licences had been awarded. A felling licence for the area marked on the plan as H053StH had been applied for but not yet awarded and Mr Marrable stated he was working closely with the Forestry Commission on this. Mr Glyn asked what more could be done to alert the public about proposed works. The public were currently alerted via the website and local signposts. Residents who were directly affected would be contacted in person. Cllr Whetstone stated the parish councils also needed explanations. He went on to say that it was best done by members of the Committee who were also local councillors visiting the proposed work sites with Mr Marrable and seeing for themselves what work was proposed; this would enable them to communicate effectively with the parish councils. Mr Gillham asked that the parish magazines be used to communicate wherever possible.

Mr Stenhouse asked why there was not a detailed description of what was happening on each site. Mr Marrable responded that this information was available.

Mr Stenhouse asked why there had not been consultation on the felling proposals. Mr Marrable replied that he was very happy to arrange site visits for any member of the Committee who would like one. Mrs Robertson commented that such information was readily available on the public register. Mr Stenhouse went on to say it was not just a question of site visits, written information was required and, in his opinion, there should have been Committee input. Mr Gillham stated that, in his opinion, it would do no harm to have the Committee fully briefed so that a judgement could be made and that the Committee should not be in the position of not knowing. Mr Marrable stated that previous criticisms had been taken on board and local sensitivities would be taken into account. He went on to say that there would be felling of older trees to facilitate heathland restoration but the vast majority of the proposed work involved small scrubby areas previously managed with a flail. Mr Glyn stated that, in relation to sensitive areas, it was important to rely on the expertise of the staff and trust them to recognise potential problems. Mr Spicer stated that staff have not previously taken this on board and could the Committee be assured of a more sympathetic and sensitive view being taken by the Rangers? Mr Glyn replied that Mr Marrable has overall responsibility and the Committee have to take on face value that there has been a change and have total confidence. Cllr Hoy stated that if there was likely to be any controversy it would be best for the Committee to know why something is being done so that there was something to take back to concerned local people. Mr Cooper stated that micro-management was not needed and it was up to Committee members themselves to find out what work is likely to be contentious and to talk to Mr Marrable about it.

#### **25/08 Information points about Forest conservation – CON 12/08**

The document had been pre-circulated. Mr Spicer commented that signs stating dog walking was not allowed because of ground nesting birds were confusing the public – particularly when the same area was being mown by a tractor. Mr Marrable stated that he took Mr Spicer's point, however, both tractor drivers were trained to take note of birds, that a risk assessment was used and work delayed if ground nesting was detected.

#### **26/08 Heathland management planning – CON 13/08**

The document, created on CMS 7 software, had been pre-circulated. Mr Glyn complimented Mr Marrable on the excellent document and thanked him for his hard work. He stated that it gave a clear picture of what goes on behind the scenes and that the document was a dynamic one. Mr Marrable reported that the document brought everything together for the first time and, although large, was a more or less complete record of the management of the Forest. He went on to say that the software used was new but an increasingly respected way nationally of writing a management plan. It would be tidied up and updated on an almost daily basis. The document would be published on the website as a series of pdfs, probably every six months, to make it easier to download. Members of the Committee should contact Mr Marrable for the most up-to-date version. He went on to say if mowing were not done at all ground nesting birds would not be present.

*15.35 Mr Gillham left the meeting*

#### **27/08 Shepherded grazing first annual report – CON 14/08**

The document had been pre-circulated. Mr Marrable commented that some of the considerable difficulties, such as foot and mouth and blue-tongue, had been rather underplayed. He went on to say a vast amount had been learned about practicalities and that the project was well ahead of target. Mr Marrable stated that the grazing was having an effect and it was now taking place every day. Mr Spicer commented that the document was very nicely put together but that the costs seem to be out of all proportion to the benefits. He went on to say, in his opinion, the project was not viable and a tractor could do the job at the fraction of the cost. Mr Glyn responded by saying the project was not

a financial feasibility study and it was unrealistic to expect costs to be covered under the circumstances.

Mr Stenhouse stated, in his opinion, lambing had been a disaster and the costs were ridiculous. He went on to say that for the same amount of money parts of the Forest could have been permanently fenced. He also stated that costs could only rise, the project was not sustainable, there were no data on which to base a judgement and it should be scrapped. The Clerk responded that the public response had been a massive success and overwhelmingly positive, there had been high media interest and the project had moved forward a long way in 12 months. He agreed that, in the future, fencing might be the only way forward but that would be very emotive; he added that mechanical intervention was increasingly expensive and unsustainable. He went on to say the project, unique in the UK, showed the Conservators as dynamic and innovative and that they should be congratulated for taking a lead.

Mrs Robertson commented that Ashdown Forest had shown leadership, something she felt the Board should be proud of, and that many other sites were looking to see how the project would proceed and how they could manage it.

Mr Cooper stated he understood the lambing problems and that better success was needed next time, however, the positive PR was quite remarkable. He also stated it was important not to make any form of judgement now.

Mr Glyn commented that there had been horrendous problems and it illustrated a great deal of courage on the part of Louise Amos; many others might have quit. Mr Glyn agreed that the project was expensive and the Board were aware of that fact, however, it was important to keep an open mind at this stage of the process.

Cllr Barnes commented that more statistical information would be helpful but agreed that rushing to make a judgement would not be the correct thing to do. He went on to say it that it would be useful to make direct financial comparisons with mechanical intervention. Mr Marrable replied that it is not possible to achieve mechanically what can be done with grazing.

Mr Stenhouse asked what exactly had been grazed for £61,000 and as for PR every open farming exercise had the same positive response. He went on to ask for running costs of £30,000 how many days grazing had there been. Mr Cooper responded that the report did contain information on the areas grazed and in some detail. There was a further lengthy discussion regarding the future costs, pros and cons of grazing, numbers of sheep required and the data and detail that any future report would need. It was also agreed that it was too early to make any judgements and that the project needed to run its allotted time.

Mr Stenhouse repeated his earlier questions asking how many days of grazing, how many acres grazed. He went on to ask how much in-bye land there was, what the quality of the land was, how many more sheep were required. Mr Stenhouse went on to ask that the last 12 months worth of data be gathered now and Mr Glyn replied that he would discuss the data with Miss Amos and respond.

**28/08 Any urgent item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.**

There was a short discussion regarding gorse being used to screen cars in car parks to enhance views, about signage on Sandy Lane and the Mid Sussex Habitat Regulation report. It was agreed these were RPA issues. Mr Stenhouse asked about the ESUS report and Mr Glyn replied it might be discussed at the next meeting.

*The meeting closed at 16.35*

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

8 September 2008