

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

1430, Monday 26 September 2005

Ashdown Forest Centre

Present        Mr L. Gillham (Chairman), Mr F. Brown, Mr P. Glyn, Mr C. Marrable (Conservation Officer), Mr F. Marshall, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk), Dr A. Tait (ESCC), Mr A. White, Mrs J. Wirdnam

Also present   Mr J. Barnes

Apologies     Ms J. Mortimer (DEFRA), Mr. M. Knight (EN; stand-in for Ms L. Hutchby), Dr A. Woodcock (ESCC)

**1) Update – Higher Level Scheme; Whitehouse Farm**

Mr Marrable reported that no maps for entering into the Higher Level Scheme have yet been received from the Rural Land Registry (RLR); the delay appears not to be atypical. He said that RLR would require him to fill out many features by hand, which would then be digitised by RLR, even though they were already digitised on the Forest's GIS. He was concerned about the delay.

The Committee agreed to a proposal from Mr Barnes that a letter should be sent to Mr C. Hendry MP requesting him to urge RLR to give priority to sending out maps to those land owners/managers who already have digitised versions for their own land. Mr Glyn offered to do this on behalf of the Board.

Mr Marrable said that he had visited D+D who had provided a quote for the erection of the barn. He had clarified that the quote included all barn infrastructure and trackway but did not cover electricity and water supply.

He said that a visit to DMC (accountants) had clarified that the transfer of the land to the Board would not incur capital gains tax for Mr Osborne. Mr Osborne is apparently dealing with correspondence himself from Mr P. Vince, acting on behalf of the Board in drawing up terms for the sale, rather than allowing it to go direct to, and be dealt with by, his own solicitor. Mr Marrable thought this was only slowing up progress.

**2) Monitoring**

There was some discussion about the entomological survey done by Dr M. Edwards and team. Given the complexity of the data, and the importance of interpreting them correctly, the Committee agreed to Mr Marrable's suggestion that the most sensible next step was for him to write a 'non-technical' summary and to pass it to Dr Edwards for approval.

A successful reptile training day, sponsored by the High Weald Initiative and led by herpetologist Dr L. Brady, took place at the Centre on 16 September. It covered the basic biology, identification and habitat requirements of Britain's six species of reptiles. There are four species on heathlands such as

Ashdown. For the Adder Dr Brady emphasised the importance of protecting the hibernacula where high concentrations can occur of animals that can come from as far as three kilometres away. Reptiles are very hard to monitor, except through the use of protective sheets (such as corrugated iron or felt), under which the animals can be found, where they can be identified, counted and even sexed with relative ease. Mr Marrable recommended that Dr Brady do a return visit to advise on setting up a monitoring programme on the Forest.

Mr Marrable reported that he had done a survey of Marsh Gentians throughout the Forest. More were recorded than in any year since 2000; plants were doing particularly well in the grazing area.

Dr Prendergast said that it was important for the Forest to expand its use of volunteers to do the ever-increasing amount of survey work required.

### **3) AOB**

Mr Brown said that he was concerned that WDC appear not to be taking into account comments from the Forest on planning matters, a recent example concerning an application for a mobile phone mast in Nutley. Dr Prendergast, with whom he had previously discussed the matter, said that in this instance he had proof that his email submission had been received by WDC. He agreed to write to WDC and ask why comments from the Forest are apparently being excluded.

### **4) Site meeting – below Lintons car park**

The Committee visited the heathland where Michael Yates, who introduced the session, will be carrying out, or supervising, scrub clearance during this the last winter of funding by the Weald Heathland Initiative (it finishes in February 2006). Much of the area had been burned a few years ago but the tide of scrub invasion is relentless. Given the scale of the work even on this relatively small part of the Forest, the benefits of fire and grazing were discussed.

The Committee left the site at 1715.

**Minutes of the**  
**ASHDOWN FOREST**  
**ROADS, PLANNING & AMENITIES COMMITTEE MEETING**

1430, Monday 10 October 2005

Ashdown Forest Centre

**Minutes**

Present                    Mr F. Marshall (Chair), Mr F. Brown, Mr P. Glyn, Mr M. Lock, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk), Mr R. Beal (Ranger), Mr F. Whetstone, Mrs J. Wirdnam

Apologies                Mr L. Gillham, Mr R. Parsons

Also present             Mr J. Barnes

**1) Planning issues**

a) As he had also raised at the Conservation Committee meeting of 26 September, Mr Brown said that WDC officers were not accounting for comments from the Forest on planning applications. The Clerk reported that he had contacted WDC about this apparent lack of attention and Mr I. Kay of WDC had replied to say that he is looking into the issue.

Mr Barnes suggested copying Forest objections to the local District Council member. Mr Brown will send Dr Prendergast a list of the councillors concerned.

b) There was a brief discussion of the archaeology of the Pale. Dr Prendergast reminded the Committee that there has been some progress towards getting research done. [N.B. See *Annual report to the Conservators of Ashdown Forest 2004/2005*.]

c) Dr Prendergast said that on 5 September there had been a site meeting looking at access to Pooh Sticks Bridge (with e.g. the Ramblers Association and AFRA), including the proposed diversion of the route from the future car park (on private land) to the road over about 50 m of Forest land. Dr Prendergast said that the meeting had agreed that there was, on the ground, an obvious route that would a) minimise impact on the Pale, b) would use tracks already available and c) be relatively direct. None of the various other organisations had expressed reservations over the route except the need to widen it and improve the surface. He asked the Committee whether it had any particular views on the diversion on the Forest. The Committee had none and agreed to leave the detail of the route in the hands of Dr Prendergast.

d) Dr Prendergast reported that one of the planning applications where Forest comments had apparently been ignored concerned the erection of a mast by a mobile phone company at the Nutley Telephone Exchange. BT owns the site and has an access licence across a strip of Forest land by the A22. In the event that the application had been successful (it has in fact been refused), Dr Prendergast asked for the Committee's view on the implications this would have had for a licence.

Mr Barnes suggested that a commercial rate may be needed. Mr Glyn emphasised the importance of a consistent response to licence applications and thought that a professional look at accesses is

needed. The Committee agreed that BT should be informed that there would be a review of its licence.

**The Committee recommended that the Board appoint agents, selected via tender from at least three applicants, to review existing licences and access on the Forest and made recommendations as to whether their value can be enhanced.**

e) On the A275 access, Mr Glyn reported that he had received an acknowledgement from Cats Protection to his letter of 21 September, saying that their Trustees would meet at the end of October.

## **2) Encroachments/byelaw breaches**

a) Dr Prendergast reported that Mr K. Doherty of Old Fox House, Duddleswell signed an undertaking at Lewes County Court on 22 September that he would not park or deposit anything on the Forest for a year. Mr Beal said that on 30 September, Forest staff obtained photographic evidence that both parking (for which permission had been granted until this day) and a mound of soil and bricks were on the Forest. On Monday 3 October further photographs were taken of three vehicles belonging to the firm (Forest Green Construction) apparently owned by Mr Doherty were on the Forest, as well as the mound of soil. All photographs were sent to the County Solicitor. On the weekend of 8/9 October, Mr Beal said there were no cars or other vehicles on the Forest but he could not get close enough to see if the rubble was still in place. He said he was wary of the builders.

b) Dr Prendergast said that the application to the Ashdown Forest Trust Trust for a bye-law enforcement officer is being passed round officers at County Hall.

## **3) Forest Centre development - update**

a) A catering consultant, Food Service Associates (Henley) Limited, had submitted a *Café feasibility study* for the Centre.

The main conclusions were that:

- ?? a sustainable café is a viable option if visitor numbers to the Centre increase (to a minimum of 100,000/year) and overall facilities (e.g. shop), signage, marketing and car-parking improve;
- ?? the café should be 'tea shop' style, offering a simple menu of high quality, locally farmed/sourced produce, aimed at a 'mature' market but also catering for families with children;
- ?? the design and development of external seating should be given priority;
- ?? the operation should be contracted out to a small local company and should not be run in-house or by volunteers;
- ?? on the basis of conservative forecasting, the café would not make a direct financial contribution of significance to the Centre but indirect benefits would lead to increased visitor numbers, higher shop spend and greater understanding of the aims and objectives of Forest management.

Mr Barnes said that a tea business could run on 30-40 people/day. He suggested an interim plan for a tea-room that would not be prejudicial to the bigger plans, using a local person, suitably qualified (certificated).

Mr Beal said that 50% of visitors over the weekend are looking for refreshments.

Mrs Wirdnam said that volunteers at the Centre need to see that change is happening.

b) Dr Prendergast said that Tenders were sent to six companies to do a business plan for the Centre. A business plan is not only strongly recommended by the Heritage Lottery Fund (from which funding is being sought for developing interpretation and education at the Centre), but also an essential component of the planning process in case the HLF bid fails.

Professional help was obtained from Sussex Enterprise in drawing up the brief for the plan and in awarding the contract – from among the four tenderers – to Parkin Heritage and Tourism (Dartmouth), which is already working in the area. The Urgency Committee approved the hiring. A first meeting is planned for 11 October, along with an architect and WDC. The plan must be completed by 23 December.

#### **4) Commercial activities on the Forest**

a) Both the Old Surrey and Burstow & West Kent Hunt and the Coakham Bloodhounds will be meeting on the Forest this autumn and winter. The Master of the former has requested whether the Board would consider increasing the number of hunting days up from the current level of four.

Mr Barnes thought that the Board could not be held liable for hunts breaking the law. The emphasis should be on enforcement of the bye-laws. The hunts must respect them and the future of their activity would depend on compliance. The Committee agreed that Rangers should check on this.

b) Although a conservation issue, Dr Prendergast asked if the Committee had any experience regarding the possible impact of a commercial, gundog training venture on the Forest in summer. The Committee agreed that, if this involved the firing of blanks and projectiles, the activity would be incompatible and inappropriate on the Forest.

c) He also asked for views on the flying of model planes on the Forest. Mr Beal thought that electric radio-controlled models are better than the gliders over which owners have no control. The Committee thought that uncontrolled flying should at most be put in specific areas.

#### **5) Update**

a) A draft legal agreement between the Board and Mr H. Osborne on the acquisition of the barn at Whitehouse Farm was shown to the Committee. Dr Prendergast said that the Board's lawyer, Mr P. Vince, had spent considerable time on this so would not expect any changes. He suggested that any comments be made to Mr C. Marrable who has been responsible for the negotiations on the Board's behalf so far. Any comments would lead to delay. Dr Prendergast suggested that the signature of the Chairman of the Board would be needed for the agreement. The Committee agree to submit any queries to Mr Marrable by 0900 on Friday 14 October.

b) On memorial benches, there has been no offer of a design from a contact of Mr Whetstone. Dr Prendergast suggested that he move ahead with the original craftsman but select another, cheaper, style than the ones originally designed. The Committee agreed.

c) Dr Prendergast said that visitor numbers to the Centre in this calendar year so far were 14,220; at this rate this will be the best year since 1999. Previous whole year figures are 12,086 in 2004; 12,850, 2003; 13,232, 2002; 13,091, 2001; and 14,706, 2000. The Shepard exhibition has clearly been a draw. He added that, welcome though the rise in numbers is, it is still only very modest. Only a substantial change to the site will make an impact. The next exhibition, for which a grant of £2,000 has been obtained from the Weald Heathland Initiative, will be on Forest maps and photographs. An invitation to attend a preview opening on Wednesday 23 November will be sent to all commoners, Conservators, Forest residents and members of the Friends to attend the opening. Mr Barnes agreed to do the official opening.

d) On 7 October Dr Prendergast gave a presentation about the Centre to a conference organised by ESCC on visitor centres.

e) On the last day of the Shepard exhibition (30 October), the Ashdown Forest Tourism Association is organising Pooh's Hunny Festival as part of the Food Festival. Dr Prendergast is giving a talk on wild foods and Mr C. Marrable is identifying fungi during the Festival week.

f) Dr Prendergast said that he had obtained a permanent loan from ESCC of the predecessor of the current Pooh Sticks Bridge. The presence of the Bridge could add to the attraction of the Centre.

g) Mr Marshall mentioned that on the morning of the meeting he had telephoned Matthews, the contractor whose lorries damaged the road verges on Kidds Hill during large numbers of deliveries to Cobbers Farm, and was told that they were not doing any more work, i.e. would not repair the damage that had been done. This is contrary to what Mr Mark Matthew had written to the Centre on 22 November. The Committee suggested sending a letter to Mr Matthews, and copying it to the County Solicitor, requiring the work to be done.

## **6) AOB**

a) Mr Glyn said that he is arranging an exhibition in the Forest Centre of works by the well-known local photographer, Mr S. Dalton.

b) Via Mr Marshall, Mr A. White asked about progress on the bridge below King Standing (at new pond Cottages). Dr Prendergast said that work finished some weeks ago.

The meeting finished at 1706.

**Minutes of the**  
**ASHDOWN FOREST**  
**FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING**

1400, Monday 5 September 2005

Ashdown Forest Centre

**Minutes**

Present: Mr R. Parsons (Chairman), Mr M. Cooper, Mr P. Glyn, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk), Mr F. Whetstone (arrived 1410), Mr A. White  
Apologies: Mr A. Reid, Mr R. Stogdon  
Also present: Mr J. Barnes, Mr F. Brown (arrived 1430), Mr F. Marshall (arrived 1430), Mrs J. Wirdnam

**1) A business proposal to the Board**

This item was discussed in Confidential Session (see separate page).

**2) Development of the Forest Centre.**

Dr Prendergast reported on progress.

- 1) Consulting engineers had completed their survey of the Centre's buildings. There are no serious problems but crack markers will need further monitoring.
- 2) A brief for a business/development plan for the Forest Centre had been sent out for tender and a decision would be made on the award of the contract on 22 September. The plan must be submitted by 23 December. Help on drawing up the brief had been provided by the High Weald Unit (HWU) and Sussex Enterprise.
- 3) A catering specialist had been hired for four days to advise on how to set up a facility, and provide options on staffing, siting, and financial projections. The work will be completed by the end of September and its results made available to the contractor in 2) above.
- 4) A chartered architect, a specialist in old barns, has been hired for 30 hours to do some initial architectural drawings of how the future Centre might look according to the latest ideas. The drawings will be made available to the contractor in 2) above.
- 5) Outline funding proposals for future interpretation and education on the Forest are being submitted to the HWU as part of the latter's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Much of the proposal is based on the *Ashdown Forest area interpretation strategy* produced for the HWU (but with substantial input from the Forest) in May 2005. A further document is being submitted to HWU in September on access to the Forest.
- 6) The Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Service carried out a *Quality assessment report* on the Forest Centre on 2 August. The Centre was not of a high enough standard to achieve accreditation. However, the assessor described the plans for the Centre as "very encouraging".

The Committee agreed to Mr Whetstone's suggestion that the final figure for the contractor should be approved by the Urgency Committee. It was also suggested that new members of the Board should be offered a tour of the Centre to hear of the development ideas.

Mr Glyn concluded the discussion by observing that there is no hope of managing visitors if the Forest Centre is not developed up to a national level.

### **3) Re-presentation of the 2004/2005 accounts to illustrate (only) use of the new cost centres**

Dr Prendergast handed out a summary of the accounts according to the major divisions of Finance and Support, Amenity and Community and Conservation. The accounts will no longer be presented in the old system. The new one allows for more detailed itemisation of expenditure and easier budgeting. The time sheets now being filled out, following the same divisions, by all field staff will also allow better itemisation of how the Forest spends its working time. Mr Cooper commented that time-sheets were a management tool and were not necessarily of any interest to the Committee.

### **4) Staffing matters**

David King, Ranger of the West Chase, has tendered his resignation after 13 years on the Forest. His new post is as warden for the Kent Wildlife Trust at a gravel pit site near Sevenoaks.

Dr Prendergast said he will be trying to recruit a 1 day/week litter picker and that he is applying to the Ashdown Forest Trust to support a 2 days/week, 3 year FTA Bye-law Enforcement Officer. The Committee supported this idea.

### **5) AOB**

Dr Prendergast said that the latest quote for the construction of a barn at Whitehouse Farm came to ca. £61,000. Mr Barnes said it was important to assess maintenance costs.

Mr Parsons made some comments on the new Ashdown Forest map and congratulated staff (Roger Beal, Chris Marrable, Hew Prendergast) who had appeared in the Meridian TV programme about the Forest screened on 30 August.

There was some discussion of the access from the A275 to the Cat Protection site. Mr Parsons reminded the Committee that the matter was being handled by the Urgency Committee. An offer for a licence fee had been made by Cats Protection to which the Board will have to respond.

On the perpetual licence that was originally granted to the company developing Wrens Warren, Mr White thought that he recalled that, once the houses were sold, the new owners would have to obtain their own licences. The Committee asked for this to be checked up.

The meeting finished at 1702.