



**Minutes of the Extraordinary Board Meeting of the Board of Conservators
Monday 27 September 2021 at 14:00
VIRTUAL MEETING - MS TEAMS**

Present: Ms S McAll (Chair), Mrs R St Pierre (Vice Chair), Mr C de Mestre, Mr N Mawdsley, Mr A Reid, Mr R Stogdon, Mrs S Tidy, Mr C Smith, Ms F Thomas, Mrs L Maudslay, Mrs E Riminton-Drury, Mr J Squire and Cllr J Howell

In attendance: Mr J Adler (CEO), Mrs K Dirs (Business Services Manager) and Mr M Infield (Stakeholder Consultation Project Manager)

Minutes were taken by the Business Services Manager

Members of the public present: Ms S Way and Ms J Clark

	Item	Action
	The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed members of the public	
29/21	Apologies Cllr Pragnell, Cllr Roundell and Cllr Hardy	
30/21	Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature Mr de Mestre declared he is a commoner grazier and receives the BPS payment	
31/21	Outstanding Actions from Previous Meeting 1. Circulate the draft Vision and Strategic Plan to Members and follow up with individual Members directly. Status Closed 2. CEO to initiate a feasibility study to establish whether car park charging would be a sustainable source of income to offset the financial pressure on the budget. Status Closed 3. Establish a Governance Working Group to review current Board Delegated Authorities and scheduling of Board/Committee meetings. Status OPEN: Working Group convened but not yet in a position where recommendations can be presented 4. Allocation of Board Members to committees to be circulated. Status Closed 5. Additional September Extraordinary Board to be arranged. Status Closed	SMcA
32/21	To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 12 July 2021 The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy. The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6	
33/21	To receive the minutes of the Executive Committee of 13 September 2021 The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy. The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6 The CEO referred to paper BD 29/21 and gave an overview of the DEFRA ELMS Test and Trial scheme. The CEO sought approval in principle to enter the agreement. Mrs Tidy asked whether smaller farms should be involved with the project in addition to the five large private estates that had been identified. The CEO confirmed he was looking to partner with a number of small farms adjoining the Forest. The motion was proposed by Mrs St Pierre and seconded by Mrs Tidy and carried unanimously.	
34/21	To receive the minutes of the Finance and Regulatory Committee of 13 September 2021 The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy. The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6 <i>34.1/21 To approve the Mid Term Financial Plan (and timetable)</i>	

	<p>Mr de Mestre gave an overview of the three-year Medium-term financial Plan (MTFP) due to be presented to ESCC Cabinet on 20 October 2021. The Chair explained the plan demonstrated a balanced financial position with current resources, but there was no room to expand and advised that indexation of expenses and the increase in National Insurance contributions was not reflected in the current plan. Mr de Mestre sought approval for the MTFP. The plan was proposed by Mr Reid and seconded by Mr de Mestre. The adoption was carried unanimously.</p> <p><i>34.2/21 To note the extension of the Refreshment tender for one year</i> The Business Services Manager reported Committee members had unanimously supported the extension of the Refreshment tender for a further year. Mr Mawdsley asked about the initial public response to the licence. The Business Services Manager explained the majority of concerns related to litter management, but strict terms within the licence meant that far from generating litter, the car parks in which the vendors operated were cleaner than ever. ACTION: The Business Services Manager to publicise the 2022 tender.</p> <p><i>34.3/21 To note the proposal to store fete equipment on Fords Green</i> The CEO reported Committee members had unanimously supported the proposal for the Nutley Fete Committee to store fete equipment in a shipping container on Fords Green. The CEO explained the existing storage facility was no longer available and the future of the fete was in jeopardy. The fete has been held annually on Fords Green for the past 40 years and is an important part of community life. Mr Siddons of Nutley Village Fete Committee has undertaken extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including Matthew Boyer, a solicitor with expertise in common land. The CEO confirmed the proposed site was not part of the Forest's SSSI designation. ACTION: The CEO to organise a licence for the shipping container subject to planning permission.</p>	<p>KD</p> <p>JA</p>
<p>35/21</p>	<p>To approve the Strategic Plan and Vision</p> <p>The CEO presented the redesigned Vision, subject to minor design amendment. The CEO explained the purpose of the Vision was to define a high-level strategy for the organisation and set out key objectives. He emphasised the need to embed the document within the organisation and explained it was pivotal to drive the impending management plan and fundraising strategy. The CEO sought approval from the Board to launch the document. Subject to some suggestions as to minor modification, the Board agreed the motion and it was proposed by Mrs Tidy, seconded by Mr Stogdon and carried unanimously. ACTION: The CEO to finalise and launch the Vision.</p>	<p>JA</p>
<p>36/21</p>	<p>To consider the feasibility of introducing Parking Charges on Ashdown Forest</p> <p>The CEO gave an overview of the financial challenge ahead for the organisation. He explained the Conservators needed to explore sustainable and achievable revenue opportunities that would relieve the financial pressure and enable the Conservators to continue to manage the Forest and develop the visitor experience.</p> <p>The Stakeholder Consultation Project Manager referred to paper BD 33/21 and gave a summary of the preparatory work undertaken as part of the feasibility study of parking charges. He explained the headline elements of the feasibility study including legal questions, research and gathering, parking solutions, displacement parking, public consultation, benchmarking and tariffs. He advised further clarification was needed in relation to enforcement around verge and highway parking and parking on access tracks.</p> <p>The Stakeholder Consultation Project Manager confirmed all 47 Forest car parks had been included in the study and engagement with users of non-standard car parks would take place if the Board approved to develop the feasibility study into a business plan.</p> <p>The CEO reported that early revenue projections, based on three different tariffs, returned a low tariff of £58k net and a high tariff of £208k net. The projections were based on visitor numbers from the 2016 visitor survey. He concluded that whilst the higher projection would enable the Conservators to improve the visitor experience, the most conservative revenue would create a balanced budget for the mid-term.</p>	

The CEO sought approval from the Board to develop the feasibility study into a business plan and introduce a two-point stop/go decision making process for the Board. He also sought approval from the Board to publish the feasibility study, which they agreed. The CEO concluded by giving thanks to Officers at Epping Forest who had provided immense support following the introduction of parking charges at their site.

The Chair addressed the Board and summarised the proposal explaining the Board were being asked to consider two motions:

- I. The development of the feasibility study into a comprehensive business plan
- II. To agree the timeline and decision making process recommended in the feasibility study

The Chair reiterated the Board were not being asked to approve car park charging at this stage.

The Board considered the motions and discussed the schedule for the introduction of parking charges in April 2022. Some concern was expressed that the timeline for a public consultation was not long enough and did not allow reasonable time for public response. The CEO explained ESCC would host the consultation on their website and if the Conservators approved the development of a business plan, a number of Town Hall meetings would be organised.

There was some discussion whether all car parks across the Forest would be included in the proposal. The CEO confirmed that as part of a protected European site, Ashdown Forest cannot displace people as that would impact ground nesting birds. All car parks would therefore be subject to parking charges.

There was some discussion around the installation of parking machines in car parks and how this would be managed. The CEO explained the intention was to install 5 machines across the Forest and to avoid the potential for vandalism and theft, the machines would be cashless.

The motions were proposed by Mrs Maudslay and seconded by Mr Stogdon. Whilst the Board agreed the introduction of parking charges would be challenging, the lack of sustainable income presented a greater risk to the future of the Forest and the motions were carried unanimously. ACTION: CEO to develop Feasibility Study into a comprehensive Business Plan to present at an Extraordinary Board meeting on Monday 25 October.

JA

37/21 The Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF)

Mrs St Pierre (Trustee) gave an overview of the charities developments to date, highlighting the engagement and collaboration with Friends. She explained Friends have agreed to fund a new Forest website which will have links to TAFF and the Friends. Mrs St Pierre spoke of a forthcoming event with author and Forest rider Julian Roup and Forest Poet-in-Residence, Sian Thomas. She advised that an approach to Natwest Bank had been made to discuss a corporate responsibility scheme and a community fund grant was being considered through Aviva.

Some concern was expressed that the contract with Apple Fundraising Consultants had been terminated without consulting the full Board. The Chair explained TAFF Trustees had made the decision to exercise the break clause as they felt the next phase of the fundraising work could be undertaken by the new Trustees. The CEO confirmed the contract with Apple Fundraising Consulting was with TAFF and not the Conservators and that TAFF was an independent entity with oversight from the Board.

It was agreed the TAFF Chair, Robin St Clair Jones should be invited to the November Board meeting to give an overview of progress. ACTION: RSP

RSP

38/21 Any urgent Item of which the Clerk has noticed in order to pass to the elected Chairman

The Chair referred to a discussion note that had been circulated earlier in the week relating to Planning Developments. The paper outlined the Forest’s current position on responding to notable applications. The Chair reminded Members that they should not be commenting on individual planning applications on behalf of the Forest and formal responses should be directed to the CEO or Business Services Manager. Cllr Howell offered to provide impartial planning assistance given her position as Chair of Wealden’s Planning North committee.	
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There was no other business and the Chair ended the meeting at 15:55.	
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Chair _____

Clerk _____

25 October 2021