

## Minutes of the

### FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

1430, Monday 3 August 2009  
Education Barn, Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Cllr F Whetstone (Chair), Cllr R Galley, Mr P Glyn, Cllr M Hoy, Mr R Parsons (co-opted), Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr T Reid, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R Stogdon, and Mr R Thornely-Taylor (*ex officio*). Minutes were taken by Mrs R Marriott.

The Clerk took the chair to facilitate the election of a Chairman and Vice Chairman and asked the Committee for nominations.

Mr Thornely-Taylor proposed Mr Whetstone and this was seconded by Mr Glyn. There were no other nominations. Mr Whetstone was duly elected and took up the Chairmanship with thanks.

The Committee went on to elect Vice Chairman. Mr Whetstone proposed Mr Hoy and was seconded by Mr Thornely-Taylor. Mr Hoy was duly elected and took up the Vice-Chairmanship with thanks.

There were no members of the public present.

#### **13/09 Apologies.**

Apologies had been received from Cllr J Barnes (*ex officio*).

#### **14/09 Declarations of Interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.**

Mr Thornely-Taylor declared an interest as Mrs Temple, the financial adviser who prepared the financial report, is a family member.

#### **15/09 Financial Report – FGP 6**

The updated financial information had been pre-circulated to the Committee.

Concern was expressed that the surplus shown in the accounts could have an impact on future grants. There was some confusion over the explanation for this. It was suggested that clear notes explaining any major changes should accompany the financial report in future.

*Post meeting note: Subsequent discussion with Mr Marrable, the Conservation Officer and Mrs Temple, the Financial Advisor, after the meeting clarified the situation as follows:*

*Natural England invited the Board to apply for an extra fund available through HLS. Mr Marrable put in a claim for special projects which amounted to £40,660.50 and this was paid. Mrs Temple had understood that as all HLS money should be spent in the current year, it was her practice to reallocate countryside worker team costs to HLS to balance the HLS budget. This meant that any surplus then showed in the general expenditure. However, following a meeting with an ESCC officer in the Transport and Environment Department, it is now understood that HLS can build up a surplus in any one year in anticipation of a special project. This should be shown in the accounts as a specific reserve and would not therefore influence the final balance at the end of the year. A revised Financial Report will be presented for the Board Meeting on 7 September 2009.*

The Clerk reported that Mr Marrable had recently received a telephone call from the Rural Payments Agency advising him that the Single Farm Payments made in the past would have to be repaid. This amounts to £42,025. Despite a request for the information to be presented in writing, nothing had been received to date.

It was agreed that the Clerk should ask Charles Hendry MP to seek clarification from the Minister. Subsequent action would depend on the reply. It was agreed that an independent enquiry should be made seeking clarification of the link between Single Farm Payments and HLS payments. Mr Whetstone agreed to seek advice from the Country Landowners Association.

**16/09 Registration of land adjoining Woodcock Cottage, Fairwarp– FGP 7.**

A document had been pre-circulated. Using the map compiled in 1877 as a result of Mr Raper's investigations into encroachments, the Clerk demonstrated that the land under discussion had not been part of the Forest at that time. The Board had never managed the land and it would not be pragmatic to claim it. However, part of the land in question is a continuation of an established access onto the Forest.

**It was agreed that the Clerk should write to Andrew Le Gresley, the Rights of Way officer at ESCC in support of the track being designated a Right of Way.**

**17/09 Heritage Lottery Funding - verbal update.**

The Clerk reported that work had begun on drafting the new walk leaflets and the smart board was ready for installation. Once installed, it would expand the teaching options for schools and other users of the Education Barn.

**18/09 Board's Bank Accounts Update – FGP 8.**

The application form for the Co-operative Bank brought to the Committee's attention that the Board no longer has a formally appointed accountant since the appointment of DMC as the internal auditor. A discussion followed and it was agreed that Mrs Temple should be approached to see if she would be willing to extend her role.

**19/09 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman**

*19.1/09 Comments from Mazars, auditor appointed by the District Auditor*

A list of comments made by Mazars via the telephone were circulated and noted. Once again, the question was raised as to why the Board needed to have the accounts audited as directed by the District Auditor in view of the fact that the work had been subcontracted to Mazars. The Clerk agreed to seek clarification. It was suggested that the Committee draw on the expertise of Cllr Reid with regards to the financial risk assessment. In the meantime, the Committee thought it would be useful to use the tables presented to identify areas of risk and its management.

The Clerk proposed that the Committee went through the list of comments and confirm action where possible.

**It was agreed:**

- 1) the Fidelity Guarantee should be increased to cover the maximum held in the bank account at any one time;**
- 2) a nominal land value of £1.00 should be stated in the accounts for each parcel of land in the ownership of the Board,**
- 3) the Committee noted the comments made by the Internal Auditor;**
- 4) it should be recommended to the Board that Standing Order 4.1 be amended to read "The Practitioners Guide 2008"; and**
- 5) the Asset Register should be reorganised so that items are grouped for ease of reference and should tally with the insurance schedule.**

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 16.35.

