

## Minutes of the

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

1430, Monday 18 February 2008  
Education Barn, Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr R Thornely-Taylor (Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Mr P Glyn, Cllr A Reid, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R Stogdon and Cllr F Whetstone. Dr H Prendergast (Clerk)

Also present: Cllr J Barnes, (*ex-officio*), Mr M Cooper and Mr R Parons (co-opted).  
Minutes were taken by Mrs R Marriott.

The draft agenda was agreed.

#### 1/08 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Mr L Gillham.

#### 2/08 Declarations of Interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

No declarations were made other than Mr Thornely-Taylor stating that Mrs Temple was seconded from his own office and was a family member.

#### 3/08 Stakeholder engagement

The Committee considered the options on governance presented in the report from 3KQ. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to keep local people informed and favoured the formation of a Liaison Panel consisting of members from all Parishes Councils that served areas within and bordering the Forest, including those in West Sussex, and members of the Executive Committee. It was considered that twice yearly meetings would allow for effective exchange of views, share workplans and allow good discussion. Cllr Barnes offered to compose a resolution that could be put to the Board at its next meeting. It was agreed that a draft resolution would be circulated by email prior to the Board meeting so that the Board could make a decision.

#### 4/08 ESCC contribution to the Board's 2008-2009 budget

The Chairman announced that the contribution from ESCC had been increased to £87,000 and the Ashdown Forest Trust contribution would remain the same at £65,100. Cllr Reid and Cllr Whetstone commented that the ring-fencing of £10,000 for a Bye-law Enforcement Officer had been withdrawn and that it had been agreed that the funds could be absorbed in the Board's general expenditure. It was agreed that formal confirmation should be sought.

The Committee formally expressed its thanks on behalf of the Board for the County Council's support.

#### 5/08 Draft job description for Financial Controller

5.i/08 The Chairman offered to withdraw from the meeting but the Committee asked that he remain.

5.ii/08 It was noted that the minute of the Board's Executive Committee meeting on 13 December 2007 should be amended to read "*A job description should be drawn up for the F&GP.*"

5.iii/08 The draft proposal that had been previously circulated was considered. It was agreed that a fifth task, “To attend Committee and Board meetings as required” should be added to the job description.

5.iv/08 Cllr Reid informed the Committee that figures for the County Council’s contribution over the next three years were now available and it was agreed that these figures should be sought in order to facilitate the Finance Officer’s preparation of the estimates.

5.v/08 **It was agreed that the Committee recommend to the Board that it approve the amended job description, the rate for the contract and the time commitment. The Committee also recommends that the job title should be Finance Officer and that Mrs Fiona Temple be offered the contract.**

## **6/08 Financial Report (year to date)**

6.i/08 The revised estimates The Chairman drew the Committee’s attention to alterations in the expenditure estimates which had arisen through subsequent refinement of the HLS expenditure. He noted that there was no variation in the anticipated surplus.

6.ii/08 The Vachery The Clerk informed the Committee that he had raised £35,000 for the restoration of the garden; £25,000 had been donated to the Friends of Ashdown Forest by British American Tobacco, the former owner of the gardens and a further £10,000 had been donated by an individual to the Friends. £1000 had also been donated to the Conservators by the Sussex Gardens Trust for the preparation of a management plan. The funds with the Friends could be drawn upon as required to renovate the ponds, weirs and landscape. The Clerk envisaged the gardens becoming a specific attraction as one of the High Weald’s historic gardens of note, albeit one not easily accessible. He stated that all the work had been done by volunteers with the exception of path mowing. Cllr Barnes suggested a guide book about the garden could be made available for sale at the Forest Centre. Cllr Whetstone expressed his concern that the garden should not be part of the Forest if it diverted effort from the Board’s principal aims. The Chairman noted that the importance of the garden was not known when it was acquired by the Friends. The Clerk reminded the Committee that the Board had acquired 74.35 hectares of land since the Ashdown Forest Act 1974 and this had been administered as Forest land. Cllr Stogdon stated that the Act did allow for this. It was agreed that this matter should be explored outside Committee and a separate set of accounts should be prepared for the project.

6.iii/08 VAT The Chairman drew the Committee’s attention to the note about irrecoverable VAT and suggested that advice be sought to discover a structure that would enable a more effective recovery of VAT. Mr Cooper agreed this was necessary as the Board would increasingly be required to look at generating income. Cllr Reid offered to pursue the matter and report to the next meeting.

6.iv/08 Income from the Forest Centre The Clerk commented that improvements at the Forest Centre could have an impact on income generation. It was noted that this was allowed under the powers within the 1974 Act. He had arranged a meeting with Mr Andrew Ogden, Director of Law and Personnel at the County Council in the near future. The Chairman offered to attend if possible. Cllr Barnes commented that the principal aim of the Board should remain the conservation of the Forest.

6.v/08 **The Committee recommend that the Board accept the Financial report.**

**7/08 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman**

7.i/08 HLF bid Mr Parsons briefed the Committee on the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust's contribution towards the High Weald Ridge's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Clerk, as the Forest's part of the bid, had applied to the AFCT for match funding. After questioning other aspects of match funding, the AFCT had agreed to underwrite £18,500 should the bid prove successful. The outcome should be known in September. The Clerk informed the Committee that he had been asked to prepare the bid since the last F & GP meeting, the deadline having been 18 January 2008. The RPA and the Executive Committee had been informed of the bid. He stated that the Friends of Ashdown Forest had also agreed to support the bid and he had approached the Rotherwick Foundation, a charity linked to the Ashdown Park Hotel, for support. If the bid was successful, the financial implication to the Board would be approximately £8,000 per year, the same as the current spend on the Centre.

7.ii/08 The Clerk then proceeded to outline the proposals of the Forest's part of the bid. There were two main elements; interpretation of the Forest through the refurbishment of the exhibition, the development of interpretation via modern technology out on the Forest and, on a historical note, the transfer of the Board's Minutes since 1885 into an electronic searchable format; and the improvement of the Centre as an educational resource for local schools. The total value of the bid to HLF is £2 million but this is spread across projects throughout the High Weald; the Forest's portion being *circa* £200,000. The bid is being co-ordinated by the High Weald Unit.

7.2/08 The Deer Warden Scheme Cllr Reid announced the inception of the scheme which is being supported by East Sussex County Council. The Clerk commented that for two years he had been chairing the Ashdown Area Deer Group, representatives from local and national organisations involved with deer and/or the consequences of deer road traffic accidents. Although deer casualties on Forest roads had always been dealt with by the Forest Rangers, there had been no recognised system in other parts of the County. Now, deer stalkers would attend deer casualties in areas other than Ashdown Forest and would help cover the Forest when Rangers were not available. The Clerk had a meeting planned for 29 February when the details of the scheme would be discussed. He pointed out that the scheme did not deal with the problem of deer numbers themselves.

7.3/08 DEFRA Mr Cooper drew the Committee's attention to the news that morning that DEFRA were having some financial problems following the outbreaks of blue tongue and bird flu around the country. Discussions were taking place with Natural England. The Clerk agreed to follow up this matter.

The meeting finished at 16.40.