

**Minutes of the
FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

Monday 14 February 2011
1430 Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Cllr F Whetstone (Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Cllr N Bennett, Mr M Cooper, Mrs D Hurrell, Cllr M Hoy (Vice Chairman), Mr R Galley (*ex officio*), Mr P Glyn, Cllr A Reid, Cllr R Stogdon, Mr R Thornely-Taylor (*ex officio*). Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

Also present: Mrs R Marriott (Clerk).

The Chairman opened the meeting. There were no members of the public present.

01/11 Apologies.

Apologies were received from Dr H Prendergast (Director) and Mr J Spicer.

02/11 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

There were no declarations of an interest.

03/11 Financial Report (year to date) – FGP 01/11.

The Chairman introduced the Financial Report which was scrutinised page by page.

03.1/11 There was a short discussion regarding HLS. The Clerk explained there had been delays in finishing work due to the snow and wet weather in January and early February. Invoices were now starting to come through and the planned spend would be used. It was noted that the Forest Ridge Project was due to end in June 2011 and no further sundry expenditure was expected. The Clerk said that the footnote shown would stand as it could take up to five months for financial re-imburement.

03.2/11 There was a discussion on the VAT disallowed status. Mr Thornely-Taylor explained the background to our current VAT status and suggested it may be a good opportunity to re-open negotiations with HM Customs and Revenue as VAT rules were currently under review by central Government.

03.3/11 There was a short discussion regarding monies held in the bank account. It was noted that there had been an unsuccessful attempt in the past to seek better interest rates and it was decided that none of the options available were satisfactory. Internal loans to the County and District Councils at a more favourable rate of interest was mooted. Cllr Reid and Mr Galley thought it unlikely to be acceptable but offered to make enquiries.

03.4/11 Mr Thornely-Taylor and the Chairman congratulated Mrs Marriott for reaching a very satisfactory state of affairs. Cllr Reid commented on the considerable and very welcome financial support given by the Friends of Ashdown Forest. The Committee agreed wholeheartedly with his comments.

04/11 Update on staffing matters – verbal report by the Director.

04.1/11 In the absence of the Director there was no verbal report. Although a written report would have been helpful it was noted that the Director would provide a 'Director's Report' at the beginning of Board meetings to bring everyone up to date. There was a short discussion on staffing. It was noted that there was a budget for a fourth Ranger but the position was not yet filled. Cllr Barnes said there had been a delay in filling the position rather than a decision to leave the post unfilled or to reduce staffing. Cllr Reid said that there would be further funding cuts over the next three years and that the Forest would have to 'bear its part of the load'.

04.2/11 The document FGP02/11 on the phasing out of the retirement age of 65 years was noted.

Action

RG/TR

Cllr Barnes said the change emphasised the importance of the annual appraisal and retirement should be addressed as part of that discussion. The Chairman commented, as there were no staff within retirement age, it was an academic exercise.

05/11 Consideration of residential car parking fees.

It was noted that there were several places on the Forest where permits had been issued in the past. It was noted that a flow-chart was in use by staff to decide if a permit should be issued or not. There was a discussion regarding adding parking fees to perpetual licences, regarding business parking, regarding a system of graduated fees and the cost of the permit itself. Mr Thornely-Taylor said that parking was as large a burden as accesses across the Forest and he would like to see the fees reflect that. Cllr Bennett said that enforcement could be an issue. The Chairman said that the Committee required a paper setting out the proposal and suggesting a scale of fees.

HP

06/11 Any urgent item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

06.1/11 To agree a budget for the outline planning application for the Centre Development suggested maximum £1000.

Mr Thornely-Taylor commented that the Board had agreed that there should be no cost incurred by the Board for the Forest centre development. The Clerk reminded the Committee that the Standing orders allowed the Board to re-visit a topic after six-months had elapsed. It was suggested that the architects be asked the exact cost. The Committee would recommend that the Board take a favourable view of the request for funds.

06.2/11 To note the introduction of the Risk Assessment Toolkit and the Business Continuity Plan.
The documents were tabled for information only.

06.3/11 The Chairman said that the title of 'Director' was somewhat misleading, as evidenced by a recent local newspaper article where Dr Prendergast was referred to as 'the Director of the Board of Conservators'. He said this was not acceptable but understandable as the media made a habit of such errors. He therefore suggested that the title be revised to 'Forest Director' to prevent such errors in the future. There was a short discussion and it was agreed that the title should be amended and the change recommended to the Board.

HP

06.4/11 There was a discussion on ESCC funding reductions. Cllr Reid said that the Forest should calculate an, on average, 25% cut over four years. However, the cuts were 'front-loaded' therefore a smaller reduction could be expected in years two, three and four. There could also be differences in how funding was distributed. There was a short discussion on three year financial planning and it was thought that, in the present financial climate, such planning was almost impossible.

06/11.5 Mr Thornely-Taylor said that most members of the Board were unaware that they were landowners (i.e. the Vachery) and that he was uncomfortable with this concept. There was a brief discussion on the financial pros and cons of the Board owning land. It was agreed that there should be a full discussion on the matter and that the Ashdown Forest Trust Deed should be scrutinised. The pros and cons of acquiring and disposing of land or passing land to the Ashdown Forest Trust should also be discussed.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 15.50.