

Minutes of the

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

1000, Monday 19 May 2008
Education Barn, Ashdown Forest Centre

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

Also present: Cllr J Barnes (*ex-officio*), Mr R Parsons (co-opted), Mr E Stenhouse and Mrs F Temple.
Minutes were taken by Mrs R Marriott.

The draft agenda was agreed.

8/08 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Mr L Gillham and Mr P Glyn.

9/08 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 a family member.

10/08 Access Licences

10.1/08 Cats Protection

It was agreed that the licence for Cats Protection was unique and the Board's solicitor should be asked to prepare the licence without delay. The Committee agreed to delegate the responsibility to the Chairman of the Committee and the Chairman of the Board.

10.2/08 Proposed changes to standard Perpetual Licence for business premises.

It was agreed that the current Perpetual Licence needed to be updated and the Board's solicitor should be asked to review it and to prepare a new licence for commercial premises. It was agreed that the RPA Committee should be asked to define the circumstances that would necessitate a commercial licence and the F& GP Committee would consider the basis for the fees once legal advice had been sought.

11/08 Review of the comments about FGP matters made at the recent round of stakeholder meetings

11.1/08 Income generation

A general discussion took place and it was agreed that the Committee should keep under review ways to develop income generating opportunities.

11.2/08 Governance

The Clerk informed the Committee that he had contacted the Parish Clerks in anticipation of setting up the Parish Liaison Meetings and awaited their responses. Cllr Barnes asked the Clerk to circulate a progress report.

11.3/08 Consultation

Cllr Barnes commented that the Strategic Forest Plan stated the Board's ten year strategy for the Forest. An implementation plan would facilitate the understanding of the Board's aims and it was agreed that whereas the Annual Report which currently summarised the work done in the past year, an implementation plan, similar to the Action Plan, could be developed to include an implementation plan for the coming

year. The cost of publishing and disseminating the Forest Plan was discussed. It was agreed that an executive summary should be added to the Forest Plan. The Clerk was asked to explore the cost of having the full document printed with a view to circulating it to key stakeholders. The full document could also be made available on the web and interested bodies and stakeholders in general could be so advised.

12/08 Updating of Health and Safety Policies

12.1/08 The Clerk pointed out to the Committee that the document is operational and would improve the awareness of Health and Safety as staff will be required to sign the document as read. He added that the document had been developed from the Board's previous policy following advice from East Sussex County Council. Mr Thornely-Taylor asked whether it was fit for purpose in view of the important status of the document, for it had legal obligations and insurance implications. The Clerk responded that he felt the Board could trust the advice of ESCC, however, Mr Stenhouse thought it essential that an outside Health and Safety consultant should be asked to review the document. The Clerk said he had looked into this prior to going back to ESCC and found that the cost was £4000 – £5000. Cllr Reid offered to make enquires about the advice obtained from ESCC and liaise with the Clerk.

12.2/08 Cllr Stogdon raised the matter of formal Accident Reports and reports of contractors' risk assessments. The Clerk said that an Accident Register was maintained and the contract signed by contractors requires full compliance with health and safety regulations. Cllr Barnes commented that the increased activity, both in-house and with contractors, would merit a review of risk management procedures. He suggested a policy of reporting should be adopted. Mr Thornely-Taylor suggested that as the Board is a member of the Federation of Small Businesses, their advice should be sought with regards to Health and Safety, all corporate risks, assurance and risk management. The Clerk agreed to pursue the matter.

13/08) VAT situation

Mrs Marriott had met with Estelle Sherlock of DMC to explore options for reducing the VAT burden on the Board. A report was tabled which set out these options. No financial advantage was apparent given the Board's current status of being subject to partial exemption for VAT. The only significant change would be if the Board could be added to the list of organisations in Section 33 of the VAT Act 1994. The Clerk was asked to seek advice from Charles Hendry and Norman Baker with regards to applying to be added to the list.

14/08) Financial Report (year to date)

HLS

Mrs Temple explained how the surplus had arisen in the HLS budget: the amount of work carried out in house had been less than anticipated. Cllr Barnes asked if it would be feasible to significantly increase the work done in-house next year. Mr Parsons asked if the Clerk's time was included. Mrs Temple explained that an accepted multiplier of 1.6 was added to the salaries of the Conservation Officer and the Close-herded Grazing Project Officer to cover administration expenses. The Committee felt that it would be appropriate to ask the HLS panel if the time spent by the Clerk on HLS matters could be included.

15/08 Sundry financial matters for information

15.1/08 Pay award

Mr Parsons stated that it had been the Board's practice to award staff an inflation pay increase on 1 April each year, whether or not the Local Government Pay Award had been settled. It was agreed that a provisional increase of 2% would be granted from 1 April with any upward adjustment being made once the Local Government Pay Award had been settled. Should the pay award be less than 2%, no member of staff would suffer a reduction in pay.

15.2/08 Correspondence circulation

The Clerk had sought the advice of the Director of Law and Personnel at ESCC with regards to aspects of the development of the Forest Centre having had preliminary informal discussions with Cllr Stogdon. It was agreed that all correspondence should be circulated to all Board members and the matter would be considered by the RPA Committee.

The meeting finished at 12.35.