

Minutes of the

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

1430, Monday 3 September 2007
Lancaster Room, Ashdown Forest Centre

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

Also present: Mrs R Marriott, Cllr S Martin and Mr E Stenhouse. Minutes were taken by Mrs T. Buxton.

No member of the public was present.

1. Apologies

There were apologies from Mr L Gillham, Cllr A Reid and Cllr R Stogdon.

2. Elections to the Committee

2i. Election of Vice Chairman

Cllr Whetstone was proposed by Mr Glyn and seconded by Cllr Barnes. Cllr Whetstone was unanimously elected and took up the Vice Chairmanship with thanks.

2ii. Election of Co-opted Members

Cllr Barnes proposed that Mr R Parsons (Chairman, Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust and former Chairman of this Committee) be co-opted to the Committee. This was seconded by Mr Glyn. Mr Parsons took up membership with thanks.

3. Declarations of Interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

No declaration was made.

4. Finance items

4.i. Statement of Accounts for year ending 31 March 2007

Documents had been pre-circulated.

4.ii. Financial Statement for Year Ending 31 March 2007

Documents had been pre-circulated.

4.iii. Financial Statement for Year to Date

Documents had been pre-circulated.

4.iv. Cash Flow Statement to 14 August 2007

Documents had been pre-circulated

There was a short discussion regarding the content of the above documents which were considered as a whole. It was agreed that next year the presentation of the accounts should continue to follow the format devised by Mrs Temple. This format meets the requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003. It was agreed that Mrs Marriott will ensure that the accounts for 04/05, 05/06 had been finalised and correctly signed off by the Board. She would also ascertain the status of the 06/07 accounts prior to the Board meeting.

The Committee recommended that the Board accept the accounts.

5. Stakeholder Engagement

Dr Prendergast reported on the meeting held with 3KQ earlier today. 3KQ will make a presentation to the Board on the 13th September to report on the progress made and the way forward. The draft Forest Plan would be passed to each Committee prior to being presented to the Board on 19th November. It was reported that there were Parish meetings, Governance meetings and a full Stakeholder meeting all planned to take place before Christmas and that the whole process was due to finish in January 2008 with the Forest Plan being signed off by the Board in March 2008.

There followed a lengthy discussion on the possible future role of Parish Councils and their relationship with the Board. It was agreed that it would be productive to have some form of consultative panel made up of Parish Council representatives. The Committee was broadly in favour of the consultative way forward but would wait until the Governance Working Party had made its report before commenting further.

6. Standing Orders/Financial Regulations

The suggested wording on single tenders was discussed. It was agreed that the figure be £10,000.00 and the suggested wording amended to read: “the limit as shall be set from time to time by the FGP Committee”.

There was a short discussion regarding minutes. It was agreed that the Standing Orders remain open for revision and that at Board meetings the Committee Chairmen agree the accuracy of the Committee minutes and that the Board then agrees and accepts the minutes. It was agreed that Cllr Barnes and Mr Thornely-Taylor draft appropriate wording to be used in the Standing Orders.

The Committee recommended that the Board accept the amended wording to Section 11.5 of the Financial Regulations.

7. Staffing Matters

7.i. *Interview with candidate for Environmental Protection Officer*

Dr Prendergast reported on the outcome of the interview with the candidate for the post of Environmental Protection Officer. The candidate was not offered the post. He also reported that PCSOs were not able to assist as hoped and that the post would be advertised in the local press. There followed a lengthy discussion regarding the funding of the post. It was agreed that the post be put on hold until the Bye Law Working Party had made its report. There was a discussion regarding the title of the post and it was agreed that ‘Forest Protection Officer’ would be more appropriate.

7.ii. *Codification on current practice regarding hiring of staff*

Dr Prendergast tabled a paper on the process of hiring staff into newly created posts and this was discussed. It was agreed that any decision on any new post is supported and agreed by the Board. It was agreed that the ‘establishment’ of any permanent post should be set by FGP in conjunction with the budgetary process. It was agreed that recruitment be delegated to the Clerk but that the relevant Committee Chairman or appropriate Board members would be consulted. It was agreed that such involvement must not hinder appointments being made. It was agreed that where a direct staffing replacement was being made the appropriate Chairman should be made aware.

8. Updates

8.i. Cats Protection

Dr Prendergast reported that there was still no response from the Expert and it was agreed that it was vital the decision was known before the next Board meeting. It was proposed that a joint letter from the Board and Cats Protection should be drafted to move the issue forward.

16.00 Cllr Barnes and Mr Stenhouse left the meeting

Cllr Martin read a statement that she had prepared, as the WDC Ward representative, on the Cats Protection issue. The Chairman explained that the Board and Cats Protection had agreed to be bound by the expert determination. It was agreed that second guessing the outcome was not productive and that the issue would be further discussed at the next Board meeting.

16.20 Cllr Martin left the meeting

9. Creation of separate Trust for land owned by the Conservators

Dr Prendergast tabled an e-mail from Peter Vince, Solicitor, regarding the pros and cons of establishing a separate Trust for land owned by the Board. There was a short discussion on the issue and if funds were available to pursue the matter further. It was agreed that Dr Prendergast should have a fact finding meeting with Peter Vince. It was agreed that any detailed work or hiring of legal services should be held over until November and taken into account when budgetary revisions were made.

10. Post HLS Funding

There was a discussion regarding the forward planning required to smooth the transition to a post HLS situation as there were major budgetary implications. There was a discussion regarding the income being whittled away by inflation and the inevitable decrease of purchasing power. It was agreed that Dr Prendergast produce a detailed briefing paper for the Board on this issue. The paper should include current figures of funding.

11. Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman

There were no further items.

The meeting finished at 17.25 approx.