

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE, WYCH CROSS, FOREST ROW ON 18TH APRIL 1994

PRESENT: Mr. L.J. Gillham (In the Chair), Mr. D.C. Cumming, Mrs S.F. Whitley, Mrs E.M. Gabriel, Mrs S. Stokes, Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey, Messrs. D.H.O. Allen, J.M. Dunn, D.L. Hall, L.C. Hardy, R.I.F. Parsons, C.W. Riley, A.N. White

The Clerk called the meeting to order.

Item 1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Mr. D. Bellotti, Mr. G. Griffiths and Mr. O.E.B. Hughes.

Item 2. To elect a Chairman and Vice Chairman

The Clerk invited nominations for a Chairman to the Board. Mrs E.M. Gabriel nominated Mr. L.J. Gillham. This was seconded by Mr. D.C. Cumming.

Mr. Gillham took the Chair and thanked the Board for their confidence and said that during his term of office the previous year many changes had taken place.

Lt. Colonel J.R. Nicholls had retired on 31st. March 1994. The Board had held a high public profile due to their proposed application to the Secretary of State to erect fences on the Forest to enable the re-introduction of safe grazing. The Local Government Elections had resulted in the replacement of four Board members. Mr. Gillham conveyed the Board's appreciation to two of the new members Mrs Stokes and Mr. Hall for their wholehearted commitment in support of the Conservators' policy for traffic calming on the Forest roads.

Mr. Gillham nominated Mr. D.C. Cumming as Vice Chairman of the Board. This was seconded by Mr. R. Parsons. Mr. Cumming thanked the Board for their support.

Item 3. To note the appointment of Mr. Colin Riley and the re-election of Sir Frederick Sowrey as Conservators of the Forest

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Riley to the Board. Mr. Riley had replaced Mr. D. Tutt, who had retired due to the pressure of other commitments as he felt unable to support the Conservators in the way he would wish.

The Chairman congratulated Sir Frederick Sowrey on his unopposed nomination at the Commoners' Annual General Meeting held on Friday, 4th March and his return to the Board as a Commoner Conservator.

Item 4. To receive a report on the Commoners' Annual General Meeting from Mrs Gabriel

Mr. Gillham invited Mrs Gabriel as Chairman of the Commoners' Annual General Meeting held at Fairwarp Village Hall to report to the Board.

Mrs Gabriel reported that the meeting had been very well attended, with all seats taken and many Commoners standing at the back. All Commoner Conservators had attended the meeting.

Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey was returned unopposed to serve a further five years as a Commoner Conservator

Notice of the Forest Rate for 1994/95 was accepted.

The Chairman of the Board of Conservators Mr. Leslie Gillham gave an excellent account of the grazing project and traffic management on Ashdown Forest. Questions were put and answered on these subjects.

Lt. Colonel J.R. Nicholls, whose attendance at the meeting was his final duty as Superintendent of the Forest and Clerk to the Conservators, gave an interesting report on Forest matters, illustrated by slides.

Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey paid tribute to the dedicated work of Lt. Colonel John Nicholls on the Forest over the last ten years. The Commoners enthusiastically endorsed Sir Frederick's words.

The next AGM of the Commoners will be held on the 3rd March 1995 at Nutley Village Hall.

Item 5. To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 29th November 1993

The Minutes, which had been circulated, were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct and accurate record subject to the following amendment:-

Page 3, Paragraph 11 - "Mrs Gariel" should read "Mrs Gabriel"

Item 6. Matters arising

The Chairman informed the Board that the continuing

intermittent failure of Nutley Pumping Station resulting in pollution of the Forest streams, was yet to be resolved.

The Board unanimously agreed with Mrs Gabriel, who commented that a solution to the problem was long overdue and that the National Rivers Authority should bring more pressure to bear.

Item 7. To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting held on 7th February 1994

The Minutes, which had been circulated, were presented by Mrs Gabriel.

Mrs Gabriel referring to Item 2. - car park improvements for 1994, expressed her admiration for the way the Rangers maintained the car parks, keeping them as natural as possible.

Mrs Gabriel, together with Mr. Parsons, gave the Board an update on planning applications effecting the Forest as follows:-

1. Lone Oak Hall - WD/93/3114

Mr. Parsons reported that the Planning Committee had agreed with both the Conservators' and Parish Council's views that an Oast House was inappropriate on this site and the application had been deferred.

2. Chelwood Vachery - WD/93/3027

Mrs Gabriel informed the Board that she had withdrawn from the discussions as she felt she was too involved to present an unbiased view.

Mr. Parsons reported that the Planning Committee had discussed the transfer of the 69 acres of woodland available for sale to the Conservators by the developers. He had explained that the Conservators were in discussions with the developer's solicitor with a view to purchasing the woodland.

3. Ashdown Park Hotel - WD/93/3308

The Planning Committee supported the Conservators' comments in opposition to the application for an extension of the present pitch and putt course into a full nine hole course on environmental grounds. The application had been refused.

The Board accepted the Committee's recommendation to agree the proposal to build 'in house' a gallery in the Education Barn as proposed in the original building plans.

Referring to Item 7 the Chairman said that the draft letter compiled by the Clerk in response to the Conservators' position on the role of the A22 and the County Council's proposals for managing traffic was excellent and put the Conservators' case. He then asked Mr. Hall for an update.

Mr. Hall reported that he was attending a meeting of the Joint Environment & Highways & Transportation Committee to be held on the 21st. April. East Sussex County Council had recommended Option 2 - a single carriageway from the County boundary to the Uckfield By Pass. Little had been done in the short term. The East Grinstead By Pass could possibly take ten years to resolve. £250,000 is to be included in a draft capital programme.

The Clerk reported that he had had a meeting 10 days ago with Simon Crew and Nigel Marshall from East Sussex County Council Planning Department to discuss traffic calming on the Forest. It had been agreed that The High Weald Transport and Environment Forum was not the right place to discuss the Conservators' traffic calming proposals; Ashdown Forest should be discussed as a separate entity from the A22.

Mrs Whitley said that as a result of meetings with the County Engineer, she considered the package of recommendations were as much as the Conservators could have hoped for. Comments were awaited from West Sussex County Council. The impression she had received was that the proposals would not be so unhelpful as originally assumed.

Mrs Stokes said that one recommendation had been discussed at length and the County Engineer was investigating the depriving of the A22 north of the A272 and changes would be made to traffic signs to discourage traffic from using the A22 for access.

Mrs Whitley added that proposals would work in conjunction with the A27 and commented that the meetings had been well conducted and constructive.

The Clerk referring to Item 1, the plans submitted by the Forest Row Lawn Tennis Club for a third court, reported that to date no reply had been received from the Club in answer to the Conservators' suggestion of adjusting the boundary of the Recreational Ground, keeping within the 5 acres permitted under the Act. A copy of the letter had been sent to the Memorial Committee and at their meeting on 15th March 1994 no objections had been raised to the proposal.

Mrs Gabriel moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

Item 8. To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 14th February 1994

The Minutes, which had been circulated, were presented by Mrs Whitley.

Mrs Whitley asked the Clerk for an update on the Conservators' application to the Secretary of State for permission to erect fences on Ashdown Forest to enable the re-introduction of safe grazing.

The Clerk reported that the application had been displayed at Wealden District Council Offices for the required three weeks. A Public Notice announcing the Conservators' intention to submit the application had been published in two local newspapers for three consecutive weeks. The finalised application had been dispatched to the Department of the Environment at Bristol. He had contacted the Department of the Environment last week and had been informed that a number of objections had been received together with a substantial number of letters in support of the proposals. The Clerk said he understood that any correspondence would be forwarded to the Conservators for comment and return, until a satisfactory conclusion had been reached.

Mrs Whitley moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

Item 9. To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 14th March 1994

The Minutes, which had been circulated, were presented by Mr. Allen.

The Board agreed the proposed dates for Committee and Board meetings in 1994/95 and also the proposed composition of the Committees.

Referring to Item 5a) the Chairman invited the Board to comment on the forthcoming Tour de France cycle race.

Mrs Gabriel said she understood volunteers would be responsible for litter clearance - Wealden District Council had set aside a separate budget to administer the event.

Mrs Whitley commented that it would be a damage limitation exercise for the Forest. Chailey Common were looking for volunteers to assist the marshals. If weather conditions were dry, fire was a major risk. She was anxious, together with others, to avoid road marking with spray cans.

Mr. Cumming said it would be extremely difficult to apprehend hawkers, once a Ranger was installed in a car park he would be hampered by the race regulations that state that no one will be allowed on the roads during the period before the caravan and racers go through, also for a period afterwards. The marshals were employed to clear the roads only - the Conservators would be likely to have to rely on volunteers to clear up afterwards.

Sir Frederick Sowrey suggested that the Board look at temporarily relaxing the Bye Laws, although he added it should be thought through thoroughly as it could set a precedent and leave us vulnerable to subsequent abuse of the Bye Laws. He said that there were limits on the 'policing' that could be carried out and the Bye Laws could only be enforced as far as was practicable to avoid confrontation between the Rangers and the public.

Mr. Allen considered whether it might be worthwhile mentioning the possibility of unauthorised traders to the local police as the Rangers could only indicate the relevant Bye Law.

The Chairman said the maximum fine of £50 for breaking the Bye Laws would not be a deterrent. The Bye Laws currently worked only with the persistence of the Rangers.

Mr. Hall suggested that if the Rangers pointing out politely that the Bye Laws were being broken did not have any effect, maybe the suggestion that a prosecution could be brought against the offender, followed up by a solicitor's letter could be a possible alternative. The Chairman replied that this could be an expensive exercise and the offender could prove difficult to trace.

Mrs Stokes commented that as P.W.W. Ice Cream Supplies hold a licence with the Conservators, any competitor who set themselves up alongside would certainly cause repercussions against the Conservators. She said some sort of definition was required.

Mr. Parsons considered that if traders operated under a form of licence with the Tour de France Caravan, the organisation might be interested in illegal traders. Mrs Whitley confirmed that there were traders attached

to the caravan.

The Clerk reported that he had received a letter from Fairwarp Village Hall requesting permission to charge for parking on the Village Green if the conditions were dry, also to sell soft drinks on the roadside. As the event was to be held two days before the Village Fete, the organisers felt it would be an ideal opportunity for additional fund raising.

The Board discussed the requests at great length.

Sir Frederick Sowrey suggested granting permission for signs directing the public to the Village Hall for refreshments. This was agreed. The Board also agreed to permit parking on the Village Green with the proviso that no charge could be made, but the taking of donations was acceptable.

The Clerk reported that he had held a meeting with the Police Divisional Commander and had informed the Police of the Conservators' policy with regard to the Tour de France. The Clerk considered that the Conservators could not rely on support from the Police as there would only be two motorcycle patrols and these would be positioned at Lye Green, which is to be the only entry point on the route as far as the Forest is concerned and this was for emergency vehicles only. He suggested contacting Wealden District Council for large wheeled litter bins and erecting notices emphasising the Bye Laws in car parks. Another suggestion was to approach The Friends of Ashdown Forest with a view to them carrying out some fund raising.

The Board asked the Clerk to write to East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council with regard to assisting in making the public aware of the Ashdown Forest Bye Laws within any publicity literature that they maybe publishing to promote the Tour de France.

Referring to Item 5b) the Clerk reported that he had visited the Duddleswell Bunker on the day a television crew were filming. Following discussions with a Home Office Representative, the Clerk understood that no decision had been reached over the future of the Duddleswell Bunker, but other bunkers would be sold off. The ground inside the inner fence belongs to the Home Office, while the ground outside belongs to the Earl De La Warr. There is a small sewerage plant on the Forest that is licensed with the Conservators.

Referring to Item 5c) Mrs Gabriel said that in the past where property had been developed, extra payments had been split between the Lord of the Manor and the Conservators. She enquired if this was still the case. Mr. Cumming replied that there had not been a case to his knowledge in recent years. If a case did occur, the Conservators should refer to the Ashdown Forest Trust.

Mr. Hardy as a member of the Ashdown Forest Trust Panel informed the Board that any income of this nature was dealt with at the Lord of the Manor's discretion and would be included within the grant the Conservators received from the Trust.

The Board agreed the matter would be discussed in the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

Referring to item 5d) the Clerk reported that the Countryside Commission had looked at the Conservators' proposals for Interpretive Boards and had disagreed with the layout. As a result a meeting had been arranged with a Countryside Commission Officer. The Clerk commented that as the Countryside Commission fund a number of Ashdown Forest management projects, it would be prudent to consider their advice.

The Board discussed the draft submission to the Local Government Review Commission prepared by the Clerk as directed by the Committee. The Board agreed that the submission should emphasise the importance of Ashdown Forest remaining within the control of a single large authority as a danger existed that new council boundaries could possibly divide the Forest, causing financial and management difficulties. The Board approved the draft submission subject to this amendment.

Item 10. Clerk to report on Sundry Matters

- a) Estover cutting had ceased on the 31st. March. 36 Commoners and 48 non-Commoners had cut estovers during the period November 1993 to March 1994.
- b) Riding Permit numbers were down on last year to 323 Adult Permits and 39 Child Permits.
- c) Weather conditions had delayed maintenance on the Forest this winter. Damage had been caused by excessive water-runs and the Rangers had been unable to gain access to stone for repairs due to the quarry being flooded. The wet conditions had also delayed the removal of cut timber by Kent Woodware. Riding had



been suspended for a period in January and February and the current Riding State is 3 - 'walk only'.

d) Mrs S. Whitley and Mr. A. White had agreed to represent the Board during the year at meetings held with the Ashdown Forest Riding Association.

Item 11. Any other business

The Chairman informed the Board of the death of Miss Barbara Willard. Miss Willard was a Commoner for many years, she had also been a Conservator. She had been a campaigner over anything she considered important - even the preservation of bracken. She had supported that Chairman during his election to become a Conservator and he considered the area to be poorer for her passing.

Mr. Fred Kirby had also died. He had followed in his Father's footsteps to become Manor Reeve. His knowledge and sense of humour would be sorely missed. The Clerk displayed to the Board a framed copy of an 18th Century map of the Forest donated to the Conservators by Mr. Kirby's son.

The Clerk enquired if the Board wished to continue with the current practice of circulating the monthly Diary of Events to members. Mrs Gabriel, the Chairman and others said they found the Diary extremely useful. The Board agreed to continue with the monthly circulation of the Diary.

The Chairman closed the meeting by welcoming Brigadier M.R.I. Constantine as the newly appointed Clerk to the Conservators and wished him a long and enjoyable term of office.

THE BOARD THEN WENT INTO COMMITTEE

See Confidential Minute No. 78

THE BOARD THEN CAME OUT OF COMMITTEE

There being no further business the meeting closed at 4.50 p.m.

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Chairman