

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF
ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE, WYCH
CROSS ON MONDAY 23 JUNE 1997**

Present: Mr D C Cumming (in the Chair), Air Marshall Sir Frederick Sowrey,
Messrs D H O Allen, P J Bodiam, L J Gillham, D L Hall, RIF Parsons,
H D V Prendergast, A G Reid, R M Thornely-Taylor, F W J Whetstone,
A N White.

ITEM 1 To note and welcome the seven new East Sussex County Council appointees and one new Wealden District Council appointee to the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest

1.1 The Chairman welcomed the new members of the Board; Mrs Bagshawe, Mr Bodiam, Mr Prendergast, Mr Reid, Mr Thornely-Taylor and Mr Whetstone. He drew the Board's attention to the fact that there was a vacancy for a further appointee from the East Sussex County Council.

1.2 The Chairman informed the Board that Mr Hughes was no longer a nominated appointee and proposed that a letter from the Board should be sent to Mr Hughes thanking him for his dedication to Ashdown Forest and his significant contribution to the work of the Conservators during his years as a member of the Board. This was agreed unanimously.

ITEM 2 Apologies for absence

2.1 Apologies had been received from Mrs D M Bagshawe, Mrs S Stokes and Mr D Norcross.

ITEM 3 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 March 1997, including Confidential Minute No 87

3.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had previously been circulated, were presented by the Chairman. The Minutes were signed after they were corrected to read at:

4.2 Mr Prendergast was elected to serve for five years on the Board from 1 April 1997.

6.9.1 ... "parking on the Forest in the vicinity of the Ashdown Golf Hotel."

3.2 The Confidential Minutes were agreed and signed.

ITEM 4 Matters arising

4.1 6.9.1 Wheel Clamping The Clerk informed the Board enquiries had shown that whilst the law allows wheel clamping by the Conservators to take place on the Forest, signs would first need to be erected to indicate where it would take place. A firm in Brighton quoted a charge of £250 for ten signs. Additional costs would include the clampers' expenses and insurance to cover the operation plus the need for somebody to be available to unclamp the vehicles. In summary, the Clerk felt that it would be an expensive option. The Chairman outlined the history of the parking problems on

Ashdown Forest and commented that wheel clamping had been viewed as a possible source of funds for the Forest. However, it was agreed that the idea was unworkable.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 28 April 1997

5.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Gillham who summarised the current situation for the benefit of the new Board Members.

5.2.1 Sir Frederick Sowrey asked if the Clerk had heard from Commoners interested in grazing stock, whether they felt the current traffic calming measures adequate to obviate the fencing extension. Should the fence be put up, he felt a notice should be placed on the fencing to say that it was a temporary measure.

5.2.2 Mr Gillham confirmed the Board's overall aim was the reintroduction of open grazing combined with modern techniques for traffic speed regulation. He restated Mr Brian Kermode's opinion that it could take at least three years for speed limits to become effective and therefore the need for temporary fencing in the interim. He stressed that the Conservators' principle aim was to conserve the heathland; the protection of wild animals and visitors to the Forest was an additional benefit from slowed traffic.

5.2.3 Mr Cumming informed the Board that the Police should be able to give some results of the traffic surveys over the last three months.

5.2.4 Mr Thornely-Taylor felt the introduction of animals would automatically slow down the traffic but he queried the need for insurance. It was confirmed that the graziers were responsible for insurance of their stock, not the Conservators. Sir Frederick Sowrey questioned the need for graziers to take out insurance as they have the right to graze stock on common land. The Clerk informed the Board that graziers' rights and public liability were a "grey" area, but in the meantime, Commoners would have more confidence for the safety of their stock if the grazing area was fenced.

5.2.5 The Clerk informed the Board that invitations to tender for the fencing contract would be sent out in August with the work to be done in the winter so that grazing could start in the early summer of 1998.

5.2.6 Mr Whetstone queried the type of fencing and the numbers of potential graziers. The Clerk outlined the type of stock fencing, gates and cattle grids to be used in the project and explained the payments from MAFF for the management of heathland. Although only fifteen Commoners had so far expressed an interest in grazing their stock, there was bound to be an element of "wait and see".

5.3 There being no further questions, Mr Gillham moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 6 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting held on 19 May 1997

6.1 Sir Frederick Sowrey confirmed that he had agreed to act as Chairman of the Committee until it had gained experience. He then presented the Minutes which had been previously circulated.

6.2.1 Way marking of Maresfield Parish Council's Proposed Millenium Walk The Board agreed in principle to the temporary way marking of the Millenium route where this crosses Ashdown Forest, subject to:

Their permission being valid for a period not exceeding ten years - the specific period to be negotiated by the Forest Superintendent.

The number of proposed new posts being radically reduced and the final locations agreed by the Committee on behalf of the Board.

6.2.2 The Board also agreed that they should offer support with text for the proposed booklet if required.

6.2.3 Mr White felt the Board should be aware of the danger of marking anything other than definitive footpaths. The Board agreed that no further schemes involving way marking of routes on the Forest should be supported.

6.3 Waste Bins at Wych Cross Dump The Clerk informed the Board that four refurbished bins were now in place but a further two were needed.

6.4 Traffic Calming Mr Cumming outlined the history of discussions about traffic calming with the County Highways Department.

6.4.1 Mr Thornely-Taylor and Mr Reid both reported dissatisfaction felt by Maresfield Parish Council and the general public over the introduction of the present traffic calming measures. Mr Hall felt that the vociferous minority was given too much credence and asked for a list of specific complaints. There was a general agreement that the public should be made aware that the roads were not the responsibility of the Conservators; the Board had no responsibility for the scheme's implementation, having only an advisory role.

6.4.2 The Clerk informed the Board that the proposed introduction of weight limit restrictions was in abeyance pending further consultations between the Highways Department and local businesses. The understanding was that weight restrictions may be introduced when traffic calming was introduced to Nutley. In the meantime, the Board remain keen to see a weight limit introduced, particularly on the C3, Nutley/Crowborough Road, because of the damage done to the banks and road edges.

6.4.3 The Board felt that although there were some initial problems, the introduction of the speed limit across the Forest was as a real achievement. It was agreed that the Clerk should write to the Highways Department on behalf of the Board to acknowledge their appreciation of the scheme and also to point out the disparity between the original plans and the actual execution of the scheme, in particular the urgent need for an explanatory leaflet aimed at informing the general public.

6.5 There being no further questions, Sir Frederick Sowrey moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 7 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 2 June 1997

7.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr White.

7.2 Phase II fencing

7.2.1 In general discussion about the fencing programme, it was felt that the scheme would last about 10 years, by which time, technology and the general movement nationally towards a need for reduced traffic speeds, might have advanced sufficiently to enable effective management of traffic across the Forest. There would be no second hand value in the fencing after 10 years.

7.2.2 Mr Thornely-Taylor suggested that notwithstanding fencing and slower traffic, animal deaths would inevitably occur. Mr Whetstone asked if the Conservators had considered having their own herd. Mr Cumming said that this was not an option at present.

7.3 ESCC Grant The Clerk reminded the Board that before the election he had warned of a possible reduction by £10,000 in the ESCC grant. He has since checked and there has been no further mention of this.

7.4 Sussex Heathlands leaflet

7.4.1 Mr Prendergast asked if the Conservators' financial support for the leaflet would be recognised. This was confirmed.

7.4.2 Mr Prendergast asked if the Conservators would see a draft of the leaflet. The Clerk explained that the time scale may make this difficult but he would certainly press for it.

7.5 There being no further questions, Mr White moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 8 The Clerk to report on sundry matters

8.1 There were no sundry matters.

ITEM 9 Any other business

9.1 The Clerk offered to brief new Board Members on any detail about the organisation and the Forest they may wish.

9.2 Fly-tipping Since his last report, the Clerk reported that there had been five further incidents of fly-tipping. He recommended that at the end of the first year, a report should be submitted to Council detailing the costs incurred. The Board agreed.

9.3 School visits

9.3.1 Mr Prendergast requested the figures for the number of school visits made to the Centre. He also wanted to know what information was available for children. The Clerk outlined the booking process for school visits and explained that the subject matter for lectures was tailored to the request of the teacher. All levels of students were successfully catered for from first year juniors to those doing PhDs. The Clerk repeated his invitation to Mr Prendergast to visit the Centre to be briefed more fully on the educational work undertaken.

9.3.2 Mr Gillham pointed out that no extra funding was provided by ESCC for the educational work.

9.4 Training the Clerk informed the Board that two Rangers would be attending a one-day course on "Commons Law" at Whitley Common.

9.5 Strategic Planning implications of the Lorry Weight Restriction Mr Parsons expressed the view that Wealden District Council may need to review its planning strategy if the proposed weight restriction across Ashdown Forest was introduced.

9.6 A275 Ride Crossing Mr White expressed his thanks to the Clerk for the new Ride Crossing on the A275. He reported that it worked well.

9.7 There being no further business, the Meeting closed at 4.30 pm.

Chairman _____
22 September 1997

Clerk _____