

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF
ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE, WYCH
CROSS ON MONDAY 22 JUNE 1998 AT 2.30 pm.**

Present: Mr D C Cumming (in the Chair), Air Marshall Sir Frederick Sowrey,
Mrs D M Bagshawe, Miss M McPherson, Mrs S Stokes,
Dr H D V Prendergast, Messrs D H O Allen, L J Gillham, D L Hall, T R May,
R I F Parsons, A G Reid, M Skilton, R N Thornely-Taylor, A N White.

ITEM 1 To note and welcome two new County Council appointees to the Board

1.1 The Chairman welcomed the members of the public present. He welcomed Cllr Maurice Skilton, the newly elected Chairman of the County Council representing the Lord of the Manor and Cllr Trevor May who had been appointed to the Board in the place of Mr Stevens. The Board expressed its wish that a letter of thanks should be sent to Cllr Derek Norcross for his help and support during his term of office as representative of the Lord of the Manor.

ITEM 2 Apologies for absence

2.1 Apology for absence was received from Mr Whetstone, who was in hospital, by post the following morning.

ITEM 3 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 March 1998

3.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had been previously circulated, were presented by the Chairman. The Minutes were then approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 4 Matters arising

4.1 Fire sites The local archaeological society had examined the sites of fires on the Forest in February and April and the Clerk said two areas had been discovered where bloomery slag was evident. The extent of these iron working sites had still to be determined; they could be any date from iron age to late medieval, but in this area are probably Romano-British.

ITEM 5a Fox hunting on Ashdown Forest

5a.1 In the interest of the members of the public present, the Chairman, with the Board's approval, then adjusted the agenda so that the items from the Conservation Committee and the Roads Planning and Amenities Committee, which appertained to fox hunting on Ashdown Forest, could be considered.

5a.2 Mr Gillham outlined the Conservation Committee's consideration of this matter and confirmed they had concluded that the hunting of foxes over the small areas of the Forest used by the hunts was neither to the benefit nor detriment of conservation or management of the Forest, a view fully supported by the County Ecologist.

5a.3 Mrs Stokes said the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee had discussed the matter at length. There was broad agreement that in view of the publicly perceived legal conflict between the Byelaws, the Ashdown Forest Act and the Board's policy, the Board should review its policy. She stated that the day after the Committee's consideration, the County Council had supported a motion to the Conservators on fox hunting. The Clerk read the following motion and pointed out that the original wording had been changed shortly before being taken by Council.

“In view of their statutory and other duties, the County Council urges the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, as the body responsible for the good management of the Ashdown Forest, to consider introducing a ban on fox hunting on all land in the Forest under their management.”

5a.4 The Board agreed the recommendation to review its policy on fox hunting on the Forest, initially seeking legal advice on whether there is a conflict between the Byelaws and/or the Ashdown Forest Act and the current policy of the Board.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Meeting held on 27 April 1998

5.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Gillham.

5.2.1 Western Hemlock The Clerk circulated copies of a letter which he had received from Mr Longley prior to the meeting.

5.2.2 Mr Reid queried the removal of the Western Hemlock in Chelwood Vachery, arguing that resources could be better used to maintain the heathland. He also felt that, if left alone, the area could be used for monitoring wildlife and the site's amenity value should be recognised.

5.2.3 Mr Gillham said the aim was to rejoin two areas of broadleaf woodland in the Vachery. He informed the Board that all the professional advice had been to clear the Western Hemlock and that the Board should be aware of the implications of acceding to requests from the public to change the management plan on aesthetic grounds when the aim was to conserve the Forest for the benefit of future generations. Extensive research on wildlife in similar habitats was well documented.

5.2.4 The Clerk confirmed that the area was subject to a Forestry Commission Woodland Grant Scheme. The Committee had already compromised and agreed to allow 25% of the Western Hemlock to remain.

5.2.5 Mrs Bagshawe, whilst recognising the strength of the conservation argument, felt that the Board should be more sympathetic to the wishes of local people and concede that the Chelwood Vachery is a different place.

5.2.6 Mr Allen pointed out that at the time of the purchase of the Vachery, the stated intention had been to manage the area so that it would be incorporated into the Forest; no concession would be made to its past usage.

5.2.7 Dr Prendergast thought a reasonable balance had been struck between the need to listen to local people and to manage the Forest and that a 75% reduction of the Western Hemlock was acceptable.

5.2.8 Mr Parsons suggested that, as the Board appeared divided, the matter should be referred back to the Conservation Committee. Mr Gillham agreed and hoped all the members of the Board would manage to visit the site at the next Conservation Committee meeting on 6 July at 2.30 pm. He stated a decision must be taken subsequently.

5.2.9 In view of the fact that professional advice had already been sought from the Forestry Commission, English Nature and the arboriculturist from Wealden District Council, the Clerk asked the Board who should be invited to attend the site meeting. It was agreed that a representative of the Forestry Authority and the arboriculturist from Wealden District Council should be invited.

5.3 English Nature The Clerk confirmed that a representative from English Nature would continue to attend the Conservation Committee meetings.

5.4 Grazing The Clerk reported that due to the piecemeal installation of the cattle grids and associated gates and fencing, he had been thwarted in his plan to have a special press release. However, as soon as the County Council had completed the work, he intended to contact the local media.

5.5 Heath Week The Clerk informed the Board that one walk for the public had been arranged for Heath Week in the middle of July.

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 18 May 1998

6.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mrs Stokes.

6.2 Separate access across the Forest for Spring Garden Mr Thornely-Taylor declared an interest and withdrew from the meeting.

6.2.1 After discussion, the Board agreed the Committee's recommendation that the Board should uphold its policy and not permit a separate access to Spring Garden.

6.3 Enforcement of the speed restriction The Clerk informed the Board that he understood the Police studies had been completed and they required another 100 pairs of roundels before they could properly enforce the speed restrictions. The Board were dissatisfied with this proposal and it was agreed that the County Councillors present would seek clarification from the Police Authority and a meeting with the Chief Constable be arranged to clarify their position.

6.4 Proposed lorry weight restrictions on Forest Roads Mr Gillham reported that he had attended a meeting of the local Parish Councils and although a letter, stating the Conservators' position had been sent to all the Parish Clerks, few Councillors were aware of

it. Forest Row, Hartfield and Maresfield Parish Councils subsequently fully supported the Conservators' line whilst Withyham felt there should be no weight restriction on Forest roads at all. The consensus with the local Councils seems to be support for a weight restraint of 17 tonnes on the C3 between Nutley and Duddleswell only, and no other restriction.

6.5 Land acquisition The Clerk informed the Board that the County Council Estate Surveyor had examined the 2.56 acres of land which had been offered to the Forest. The owner had been advised and was considering the valuation.

6.6 Fly-tipping The Board expressed its concern over the planned closure of the Crowborough domestic rubbish site in April 1999. The Clerk informed the Board that he understood a possible new location was a "brown-field" site off the A26 close to the Crowborough Army Camp. Mrs Bagshawe informed the Board that a meeting of interested parties had been arranged for 3 July at Sackville House, Lewes.

There being no further questions, Mrs Stokes moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 7 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 1 June 1998

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

7.2.1 The un-audited Accounts for 1997/98 Mr White took the Board through the Accounts, which had been previously circulated. It was thought that clarity could be achieved by amalgamating the two bank accounts and it was suggested that this should take place after the Audit. Mr White moved the adoption of the Accounts. The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation to accept the Accounts presented and that they represent fairly the financial position of the Conservators as at the 31st March 1998 and reflect their income and expenditure during the year.

7.2.2 The Clerk informed the board of a local firm of accountants who could help with preparation of the accounts for audit in future. The Board agreed that the Clerk should seek their assistance.

7.3 Tax After a brief discussion, it was agreed that the Clerk should appoint the same firm of accountants to act as Tax and PAYE advisors in the future. Other matters relating to tax were considered in the confidential session.

7.4 Grazing incentive/subsidy Mr Thornely-Taylor offered to withdraw as he had a pecuniary interest. The Board felt this would be unnecessary and agreed the principle.

7.5 Distribution of the Board Minutes Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that when a reply had been received from the County Library Service on whether they would be prepared to pay the production costs, a decision should be taken on where Board Minutes should be distributed. Dr Prendergast thought that in future, the Minutes could be placed on the Internet. He suggested that the cost of this may be something the Society of Friends of Ashdown Forest may support.

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

ITEM 8 Clerk to report on sundry matters

8.1 Fly-tipping The Clerk reported that there had been one major incident of fly-tipping in Four Counties car park when a large quantity of human waste had been tipped onto the Forest. Owing to the health hazard, a disinfectant had had to be spread over the area but, on consultation, English Nature had accepted that this would probably damage the land no more than the chemicals that were with the waste.

8.2 Brief of Crowborough Town Council The Clerk reminded the Board of the briefing for the Town Council due at 7.30 pm on 23 June.

ITEM 9 Any other business

9.1 Riding Permit Fees Dr Prendergast asked members if anybody knew the charges being made to horse riders in neighbouring areas. A number of sources of this information were given to him.

There being no further business, the public withdrew at 4.50 pm before the Confidential Session.

Chairman _____
21 September 1998

Clerk _____