

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

1000, Monday, 19 June 2006
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present Mr P. Glyn (in the Chair), Cllr J. Barnes, Mr M. Cooper, Mr F. Marshall, Cllr R. Parsons, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr S. Radford-Kirby (arrived 1446), Cllr A. Reid Mr J Spicer, Cllr R. Stogdon, Mr R. Thornely-Taylor (arrived 1448) and Cllr F. Whetstone.

Minutes taken by Mrs R. Marriott.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public present.

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr L. Gillham, Cllr M Lock, Cllr Mrs R. O’Keeffe and Cllr R. St.Pierre. Cllr F. Brown telephoned his apologies the next day.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 March 2006 and matters arising

2.1 The Minutes were amended at 2.1 to read:

“The Chairman Committee agreed for the Chairman to visit Cats Protection soon after the above date. The Chairman informed the Board that he and the Clerk had had a meeting on 7 March 2006 with Helen Ralston, Chief Executive of Cat Protection, and Dominic Sullivan, Head of Legal Services, at which it was agreed that both the Cats Protection and the Board should make a list of agreed and disputed items by 7 April 2006. This list would be looked at by an independent expert, appointed by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, who would then make a judgement, in writing, on the basis of valuation for a licence fee for access to the A275 and its subsequent review.”

2.2 Cllr Parsons informed the Board that he could find no evidence that the Board’s comments on planning matters were not included for consideration at planning meetings. Occasionally the Board was omitted from the consultation process; it was sometimes difficult to judge whether consideration of an application was within the Board’s remit.

2.3 The Clerk informed the Board that the member of the public who had written to the local press about the use of burning as a management tool had been invited to the Visitor Centre. A useful meeting had ensued.

2.4 The Chairman moved the adoption of the Minutes with the amendment. This was agreed.

ITEM 3 To approve the Minutes of the Conservation Committee held on 3 April 2006

3.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Glyn.

3.2 Whitehouse Barn

3.2.1 Mr Glyn informed the Board that he and Mr Marshall had had a number of site visits at the behest of Mr Osborne. All problems were now resolved and he was confident that the building would be a real asset for the Forest.

- 3.2.2 Cllr Reid queried the cost of the barn. He expressed his concern over the possible impact on the County Council's budget. The Clerk acknowledged that the cost of the barn had exceeded the estimate. He explained that English Nature had agreed to contribute £25,000 over three years with the first payment due this summer. However, if the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme application is successful by 1 August 2006, they will not pay.
- 3.2.3 It was agreed that the HLS funds should be ring-fenced for agreed conservation projects.
- 3.3 There being no further comments, Mr Glyn moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 4 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning and Amenity Committee Meeting held on 24 April 2006

- 4.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Marshall.
- 4.2 Development of the Forest Centre – Parkin Business Plan
- 4.2.1 It was agreed that some modernisation was necessary in the immediate future in order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. The Centre car park, access to the Information Barn and the toilet facilities were all aspects that would need upgrading in the near future.
- 4.2.2 Some simple steps to improve the Barn had already been taken such as the introduction of an electronic cash till. The introduction of vending machines would be dependent on precise recommendations and financial costings.
- 4.2.3 Some concern was expressed that the development would encourage an excess of visitors to the area. It was stressed that the current number of visitors to the Forest were already being managed with the help of the bye-laws, car parks and interpretation panels. Their number would increase inevitably and the Board had a duty under the Ashdown Forest Act 1974 to maintain the Forest as an amenity.
- 4.2.4 Mr Cooper said that he felt very strongly about the issue of staffing. Points 1-4 of the Parkin Plan excludes the appointment of a Visitor Services Manager. It is important, he said, to have someone to deal with the ~Centre and communications and to implement recommendations.
- 4.2.5 Cllr Barnes said that any short-term appointment should be compatible with long-term ones. It should be in the overall strategy to “catch” people, to educate them and to prevent them from destroying what they have come to see. He wondered how far the Board would go with Point 5 (the appointment of a Visitor Services Manager).
- 4.2.6 Mr Glyn said that the Act stipulates that the Forest is managed as an amenity.
- 4.2.7 Mr Parsons regretted not hearing the presentation by Ian Parkin. He said that the Clerk had (in the F&GP Committee meeting) advised on taking forward some of the recommendations more steadily. He wondered at setting aside a Board meeting (in September?) to discuss the development.
- 4.2.8 Cllr Barnes said it was important to modernise the toilets (which are not DDA compliant) and the access to the Centre. Refreshments would be an enhancement.
- 4.2.9 Mr Glyn said the Board must accept that conservation (viz the statutory designations) and educational activities are part of the Board's responsibility. The Information Barn was state-of-the-art in the 1980s but was not so anymore; it is losing money.

- 4.2.10 It was suggested that a working party should look at alternative sources of funding; hosting courses was suggested as an example. It was agreed that all projects should be achievable within the Board's budget.
- 4.2.11 The Board agreed that it was important that the whole Board should have a clear understanding of the project and its responsibilities and be in agreement on a way forward that is financially viable. It was agreed that a working party consisting of Cllr Barnes, Mr Cooper and Mr Thornely-Taylor will consider the priorities and examine the financial implications both in the short and long term. The Clerk would be invited to contribute background information.
- 4.2.12 It was agreed the working party would report and make recommendations to the Board at the September meeting. The matter would be the first item on the Agenda.
- 4.3 There being no further comments, the Minutes were then approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 12 June 2006

- 5.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Cllr Parsons.
- 5.2 The Accounts Concern was expressed at the delay in signing off the 2004/05 accounts by the District Auditor. It was suggested that the view of the Secretary of State should be sought to ascertain whether the Board could have its accounts signed off by an independent auditor.
- 5.3 Cats Protection
- 5.3.1 The Clerk informed the Board that Cats Protection had sent an email on the previous Friday about the form that was to be sent to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. He had been unable to look at the email in detail but will forward it to all Board members at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.3.2 Extreme concern was expressed by various members of the Board over CP's continual questioning of the wording of the issues first communicated to CP on 18 November 2005 and further discussed and agreed at the meeting on 20 March 2006. The slippage in time was unacceptable to the Board. It was agreed that the wording should remain the same and the Board should keep to its decision made in March 2006.
- 5.3.3 It was agreed that the Urgency Committee should reconvene as soon as possible and that and other Board members would be kept informed of progress.
- 5.4 East Sussex County Council Grant
- 5.4.1 A discussion took place about the impact of a surplus or deficit in the Board's funds on the subsequent grant from the County Council. The Ashdown Forest Act requires the County Council to meet any shortfall and the Board to return any surplus, leaving the Board with a neutral budget; in practice, a surplus is adjusted in the annual grant the following year. The Board's proposed budget for any year is considered by the County Council at its February meeting preceding the financial year in question; in theory, it could ask the Board to reconsider its budget.
- 5.4.2 Cllr Barnes stressed again that it was very important the money from HLS be ring-fenced for heathland conservation work.

5.5 Repairs to the Forest caused by traffic

- 5.5.1 The Clerk informed the Board that East Sussex Highways Department had obtained a quote of £2,500.00 for the repairs to the bank at the top of Kidds Hill damaged by earth moving lorries whilst doing work on a property on Kidds Hill. The quote had been passed to the company concerned.
- 5.5.2 The Clerk suggested that Board members look at the work done in the last few days at the junction of the C3 and the B2026 at Duddleswell where traffic has pulled up the granite setts and caused severe erosion of the verges. The conservation kerbing used is pitted; this will encourage rapid weathering. Similar kerbs will be used at the top of Kidds Hill.
- 5.5.3 Heavy traffic has caused severe erosion of the verges beside the High Road and along the C3. A possible deterrent could be the flexible posts as used on Chailey Common; these encourage traffic to keep away from the edge but collapse if brushed by traffic. If such measures appear too intrusive, kerbing the roads may prove the only option if road widening is to be avoided.
- 5.6 There being no further questions, Mr Marshall moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 6 Any other business

6.1 East Grinstead Relief Road

- 6.1.1 The Clerk distributed a draft response he had composed on behalf of the Board for their consideration.
- 6.1.2 Cllr Reid summarised the view of the County Council; it was against the relief road as the East Sussex Structure Plan did not allow for the enlargement of the A22. There should be no increase in traffic volume above 5%. It was becoming increasingly apparent that it was not practical to build 2,500 homes on the south-west corner of East Grinstead. He agreed to arrange for the formal response of East Sussex County Council to be sent to the Clerk for circulation to Board members.
- 6.1.3 The Board agreed that its response should be vigorous, stressing the environmental impact and tranquillity of the Forest. The Clerk would circulate a further draft by email with a view to sending the final response before the deadline of 3 July 2006.

6.2 Stakeholder analysis

- 6.2.1 English Nature had agreed to pay for the scoping study as it was their duty to seek the opinion of local stakeholders. It had contributed £2000.
- 6.2.2 Mr Glyn commented that the results were interesting. Three main points needed to be highlighted: the fear of change; the need to address the public relations gap and the need to help people understand the issues. Cllr Whetstone felt the Councillors on the Board should take the opportunities presented at their other meetings to share information about the Forest.
- 6.2.3 Mr Cooper commented that the report had resource implications. It was agreed that the report would be considered at the various Committee meetings enabling the Board's in-depth response to be reported in the Minutes. In the meantime, the Clerk would circulate by email a draft initial response which could be posted on the web site.

6.3 Deer casualties Mr Cooper reported that he had been approached by a gentleman after the lecture by Dr Langbein who was selling a device called a “Deer whistle”. It was said to produce a high whistle when a car exceeded 35 mph, a sound unpleasant to deer and which made them turn away from the road. He could not vouch for its efficacy personally but it was claimed to be quite effective.

7 **Presentation by the Clerk on his first three years in post.**

Chairman _____
18 September 2006

Clerk _____