

**Minutes of the
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

14.30, Monday 14 June 2010
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Cllr J Barnes (Chairman), Mr R Thornely-Taylor (Vice Chairman), Cllr N Bennett, Mr M Cooper, Mr J Francis, Mr R Galley, Mr P Glyn, Cllr M Hoy, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr A Reid, Cllr R Simmons, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R St Pierre, Cllr R Stogdon and Cllr F Whetstone. Also in attendance, at the Board's invitation, Mr I Hurst. Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

The Chairman opened the meeting. There were no members of the public present. The Chairman welcomed Mr Hurst to the meeting.

	Action
11/10 Apologies Apologies were received from Mr E Stenhouse.	
12/10 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature. Mr Glyn stated that the Hebridean sheep were currently in a field he owned but was currently leased. The Chairman said this would not be prejudicial.	
13/10 To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 8 March 2010, and matters arising – BD 08/10. The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly approved.	
13.1/10 Mr Spicer asked, in regards to minute 03.2/10, if there was any update on liabilities or insurance. The Clerk replied the insurers had very recently visited and any response would be circulated to all Board members.	HP
13.2/10 Mr Spicer asked, in regards to minute 04.1/10, if Mr Glyn, Cllr St Pierre and Mr Thornely-Taylor had take into account his comments and redrafted the minute. Mr Glyn apologised and said he had not but would do so at once.	PG
13.3/10 Mr Spicer said, in regards to minute 09/10, that he was disappointed the meeting had not been more widely advertised. The Chairman said that the date for 2011, which was agreed at the meeting, would be added to the diary for next year and advertised as widely as possible.	
13.4/10 Cllr Whetstone said, in relation to minute 08/10 on gorse, that it was his recollection that Dr Tait said he would not be willing to sanction any burning of more than one acre. There was a brief discussion regarding Dr Tait's replacement and it was agreed that this was a discussion for the Conservation Committee in the future.	
13.5/10 There was a short discussion regarding the minute of the closed session, tabled paper BD8/10i. There were no amendments other than to add the closing time of the meeting and the names of the working party members. It was agreed that the minute would remain confidential other than the final paragraph which would be added to the main body of the minutes.	
14/10 To approve and note the minutes of the Conservation Committee of 29 March 2010 – BD 09/10. The Chairman asked Mr Glyn to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were two typographical changes. The Minutes were duly received. Mr Glyn said there were some action points for the Committee but no recommendations for the Board.	
15/10 To approve and note the minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee meeting of 12 April 2010 – BD 10/10. The Chairman asked Mr Cooper to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly received.	
15.1/10 The Clerk said, in regards to minute 10.1.2/10, that issues remained at this property and as yet a solution had not been reached.	
15.2/10 The Clerk said, in regards to minute 10.1.3/10, this remained a frustrating problem. There was constant contact with the County Solicitor, however, pressures within County Hall was hindering progress. Cllr Reid said there was considerable restructuring taking place within	TR

legal services and he would do what he could to help speed things up. The Clerk went on to say a different approach was now being considered but this required clearance by the County Solicitor before any progress could be made.

15.3/10 Mr Spicer asked, in regards to minute 14/10, if the Clerk had written to the residents of Ford's Green. The Clerk replied he had composed a letter but was waiting for feedback from the Fords Green Sports Ground Association before writing. The Association was due to meet on 15 June.

15.4/10 Mr Thornely-Taylor said, in regards to minute 14/10, that he thought it inappropriate for the Committee to have asked the Clerk to take legal proceedings without the sanction of the Board or an Executive Committee. He said there was a considerable budgetary impact in taking out injunctions and the Chairman said that a Judge would probably not seriously consider an injunction without evidence of Board approval. There was a short discussion regarding process in cases where swift action was required. It was agreed that ideally the Board should take the decision, however in emergency situations the Executive Committee could discuss the issue and make the decision to act by e-mail. It was noted that all actions, other than legal, were delegated to the Committees. The Clerk explained that an injunction was not sought from the County Solicitor as, once again, there were problems of capacity. Cllr Reid said again he would take this up with County Hall.

16/10 To approve the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting of 24 May 2010 - BD 11/10

The Chairman asked Cllr Whetstone to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly received.

16.1/10 Cllr Whetstone presented the accounts and said that they were clearer but still not perfect. Figures were now set out on pages five and six with notes on page seven. The Clerk added that the General Reserves Fund should be shown as Total Reserves on page four. Grants would be specified on page ten.

16.2/10 Mr Galley said that he recalled a request for a three-year financial plan and this seemed to have disappeared. The Chairman remitted the question to the next FGP.

16.3/10 Mr Spicer said page 11 painted an optimistic if unrealistic picture. The Chairman said it was perfectly legitimate but the way it was presented was probably not helpful and the FGP may wish to look at this.

FW

17/10 To receive the recommendations of the Executive Committee meeting of 27 May 2010 and Report of the Staffing Working Party - BD 12/10A and B.

The Chairman presented the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated.

17.1/10 Cllr Whetstone said, for the sake of clarity, the Board were hiring the services of the Pooles rather than the Pooles themselves. The Chairman agreed to that amendment.

17.2/10 The Chairman said that the Clerk had withdrawn his offer to reduce to four days per week and that was for further discussion outside this meeting. Mr Spicer asked if the Executive Committee had determined how savings were to be made to pay for the services of the Pooles. The Chairman replied that this was being considered and financial reductions would have to be made.

17.3/10 Mr Thornely-Taylor said that the status of the document needs to be clearly stated. Points one, five and six were wholly dependent on point three. He said though the recommendations have been accepted the Board did not yet know if they had been agreed. He said it was concerning that the Board currently had no professional accountancy in the organisation.

17.4/10 The Chairman said, for the sake of clarity, there was agreement on the way to proceed, however the Clerk would need to agree to reduce to four days per week and points five and six were contingent on that. If the Clerk does not reduce his days per week then, in order to proceed with the Pooles, the Board would have to make budgetary savings and controls elsewhere unless the Clerk reversed his decision.

17.5/10 The Chairman said that the Board needed to be clear what it meant in point five and that he would amend that minute for the sake of clarity.

JB

The Board approved the appointment of the Pooles as laid out in the Minutes of the Executive Committee BD 12A/10. However, the Chairman would amend point five for greater clarity. The Chairman asked that the Executive Committee should identify ways of funding the fees of the Pooles.

18/10 Proposed project for the development of the Forest Centre – BD 13/10

The Chairman gave a brief history of the proposal and explained phase 1 for the benefit of new Board members. The Clerk gave further detail on phase 1 and how it related to the project as a whole and fundraising. He went on to say the paper had been re-drafted to emphasise the minimisation of the financial risk to the Board. Mr Hurst gave a short history of his background with English Heritage and his current work with Great Dixter. He went on to say that the project costings were a relatively small sum and there was considerable funding available from funders who would welcome an association with Ashdown Forest.

18.1/10 Cllr Whetstone said it was wrong to be seeking money from the tax payer. He said he 'didn't see it' and that income streams were 'drying up fast' and gave the example of the Natural England project relating to Sea Eagles in East Anglia. He said 'locals and dog walkers wouldn't come here' and that he was concerned regarding funding at the end of HLS.

18.2/10 Mr Cooper said that after the last working party meeting, which he found enlightening and re-assuring, he was pleased that the project could happen without funding risks to the Board. He went on to say that running costs were a problem but that Mr Hurst had been reassuring and he saw an opportunity for the Board to add to its income. Risk was no longer a serious issue, however, getting the project funded and off the ground was a great challenge.

18.3/10 Mr Galley said he applauded the vision and supported the concept, however, he remained concerned about the financial risk of the catering element and he would welcome a detailed business plan. Mr Hurst replied that a detailed catering appraisal had been made for the Parkin Plan. Catering was no risk at all as it would be franchised out and the figures contained in BD13/10 were very cautious. It would be a useful income stream, however it would depend on what was written into the tenders.

18.4/10 Cllr Reid said the project was very exciting and appealing. He saw the Forest Centre being marketed as a tool to deliver something or an 'experience'. He said the stress should be placed on the Forest as a whole rather than on the visitor centre.

18.5/10 Cllr Martin read a short document entitled 'Tourism in Wealden' quoting facts and figures regarding the benefits and income tourism brings to the region. She said there were large numbers of visitors coming into the area and there was no reason why some of the income should not come to the Forest. Mr Cooper said it had never been the Board's objective to attract, rather to manage and respond to visitors. The Clerk said that an appealing visitor centre would act as a gateway to the Forest, generate income and influence visitors to behave in a responsible manner. The new exhibitions, a programme of rolling exhibitions and new buildings would make the visitor centre more attractive to locals and visitors alike. The Board would not be marketing the Forest as a whole but the Forest gateway where more people would drop in and the Board would get a better informed visitor and some income generation.

18.6/10 Cllr Bennett said he welcomed the document and appreciated the content. He said, with the formation of the South Downs National Park, more visitors were likely to visit the region and he agreed the Board could capture some of those visitors. He looked forward to receiving documents in the future that would keep watch of the progress of the project.

18.7/10 Mr Spicer said that it was time the Board got on and did something but he queried the Board's fall back position should funding not become available. The Chairman said the Board would, in that scenario, have to get funding out of the current buildings by letting them out or borrowing. Cllr Bennett said that if that was to happen it would be a whole separate project and it was not a reason for not taking the project forward.

18.8/10 Cllr Stogdon said the capital resources were easily achievable, however, it was the sustainability that was concerning. The Centre would need to be open seven-days-per-week for the maximum number of hours and this would have a considerable impact on staffing resources. He went on to say a detailed business plan was required.

18.9/10 Cllr St Pierre said that it would be difficult to seek funds without planning consent and asked if there were architect's plans available. Mr Hurst replied that it was possible to get a set of plans that could be added to the funder's brochure and that there had been informal meeting with the planners who were very supportive of the project. There was no indication that the project would not get their support during the planning process. Cllr Martin said that there was every indication that Wealden District Council was keen on the project. The Chairman said that funding for plans could be sought from the Ashdown Forest

**CENTRE
WP**

Conservation Trust. Mr Glyn replied, as a member of the Trust, he could see no difficulty in finding funds for getting blue prints and planning.

Action

- 18.10/10 There was a short discussion regarding the eco-options for the building and there was general support for ground source and solar heating in terms of attracting capital.
- 18.11/10 The Chairman said more work was needed on the business plan and that a professional should be commissioned to do this. He went on to say plans should be commissioned from an architect and that Mr Hurst and the Clerk should make the approach. Furthermore the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust should be approached to provide the funding for both of these matters.
- 18.12/10 The Chairman said an upgraded Centre could be achieved with minimal additional day-to-day running costs, other than staff, going to the Board and that capital costs could be minimised.
- 18.13/10 On the basis that the costs of implementing the recommendations would not fall on the Board, and that the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust would respond favourably to a request to fund the preparation of architectural drawings, the Chairman asked that the Board vote on the recommendations shown on page one of BD 13/10.

The Board resolved to accept the recommendations which were put to the vote, with 14 votes in favour and none against.

Cllr Whetstone did not vote saying he was not abstaining, just not taking part. Mr Glyn asked for a vote of thanks to Mr Hurst for his hard work. He said the Board was very lucky to have him and he should be warmly thanked. The Board agreed.

- 19/10 To receive the Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2010, approve the Accounting Statement, the Internal Auditors Report and the Annual Governance Statement for the year ending 31 March 2010 contained in the Annual Return and to approve the Annual Return - BD 14/09 - to be tabled**

These had been circulated and were approved without further discussion.

The Board received the Internal Auditors Report and recommendations were noted.

The Board approved the Accounting Statement for the year ending 31 March 2010.

The Board approved the Annual Governance Statement for the year ending 31 March 2010.

The Board approved the Annual Return for the year ending 31 March 2010.

- 20/10 Annual Public Meeting (8 June 2010)**

Mr Spicer said attendance was disappointing. The Chairman said the meeting was actually very interesting and there was a feeling that the public would like another meeting. The Chairman said that the date for 2011 would be added to the diary for next year and advertised as widely as possible. It was suggested that a short presentation by the Clerk would be very useful and that refreshments be served. Cllr St Pierre said it was good to see the Clerk being thanked by the Ashdown Forest Riding Association. The Chairman thanked Board members for attending.

- 21/10 Election of new Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Board**

- 21.1/10 Election of Chairman - Cllr Barnes nominated Mr Thornely-Taylor and this was seconded by Cllr Reid. There were no other nominations. Mr Thornely-Taylor was duly elected and took up the Chairmanship with thanks
- 21.2/10 Election of Vice-Chairman - Mr Thornely-Taylor nominated Mr Galley and this was seconded by Cllr Barnes. There were no other nominations. Mr Galley was duly elected and took up the Vice Chairmanship with thanks.
- 21.3/10 Mr Spicer said that the Chair and Vice Chair were normally rotated through the elected Commoner and non-elected Conservators and he would like to be assured that this would remain the case. Cllr Barnes said the convention would remain but these days there were Board members who were neither of those things and that conventions do change with time.
- 21.4/10 Cllr Barnes congratulated the new Chairman and thanked fellow Conservators. He said he had very much enjoyed the last three years. The Chairman thanked the Board for their

support and said that they might be heading into difficult times. He said he had a very wide background and range of experience and hoped he could bring effective governance and good financial management to the Board. He went on to warmly thank Cllr Barnes for his able Chairmanship.

Action

22/10 Allocation of Board members to Committees

The Board approved the appointments of Mr Francis to the RPA and Conservation Committees, Cllr Barnes to the RPA and FGP Committees and Cllr Bennett to the FGP Committee.

22.1/10 There was a short discussion on the upper / lower membership numbers of Committees. Cllr Barnes confirmed there was no upper limit but there was a quorate figure. He went on to say that all Board members can attend whatever meeting they are interested in and there was no reason why that could not continue.

23/10 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

Cllr Simmons asked for an update on culling. The Chairman replied that the Clerk gave a very interesting update at the Parish Liaison Panel. The Clerk said there was a lot of progress on culling on neighbouring land with two landowners shifting their policy in favour of culling. Currently there were two strongly held opposing expert views on whether shooting on the Forest was safe or not. The matter had been discussed informally with the Deputy Chief Constable and a further meeting might be required with Sussex Police. Stalkers were required to undertake any shooting and there were practical on the ground issues to resolve. It was hard to know if anything would be in place later in the year. He went on to say that even with culling it would be many years before the deer population stabilised. The Chairman said that the issue was not in the eye of the Conservation Committee and the public may think it odd that we are planning to cull grazing animals on one hand and employing sheep on the other. He thought it a good idea to get the issue onto the Conservation Committee agenda. The Clerk said small deer exclosures had been put out on the Forest to measure the impact on vegetation.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 17.00.

Chairman _____
September 2010

Clerk _____