



Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest
Monday 25 June 2012 at 14.30
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr R Thornely-Taylor (Chairman), Mr R Galley (Vice Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Mrs P Buesnel (Director), Mr M Cooper, Cllr C Dowling, Mr J Francis, Mr P Glyn, Mrs D Hurrell, Cllr A Reid, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R Stogdon, Cllr S Tidy, Cllr M Weaver and Cllr F Whetstone.

In attendance: Mrs R Marriott (Clerk), Mr B Hassall and Mr I Hurst.

The Chairman welcomed the members of the public present and invited questions. There were no questions.

	Item	Action
11/12	Apologies. Apologies were received from Cllr C Hardy and Cllr R St. Pierre.	
12/12	Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature. Mr Galley and Cllr Reid expressed an interest under minute RPA 12.2/12.	
13/12	To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 6 March 2012, and matters arising – BD 06/12. The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy. There was one small amendment on minute 05.1/12 with the word 'current' is to be changed to 'proposed'. The minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.	
14/12	To approve the minutes of the Conservation Committee meetings of 26 March 2012 – BD 07/12 and 11 June BD 08/12. The Chairman asked Mr Francis to present the minutes of the meeting which had been assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There was one minor change in the attendance with (<i>ex-officio</i>) being removed from Cllr Whetstone's name in BD 07/12. Both sets of minutes were then duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.	
	<i>14.1/12 Matters Arising</i> <i>Minute 11/12 Cattle collars and Highland cattle</i> – these had been purchased and were being worn by several cows within the grazing area. Highland cattle were now grazing on the Forest within their enclosure. <i>Minute 13/12 The Board's policy on fracking</i> – there was a short discussion. The Chairman said it was important to ensure that the Board was briefed correctly on this issue so that a fully informed and Forest specific response could be made should the matter arise in the future. Cllr Whetstone stated that ESCC would 'not entertain' any application until councillors had received a full briefing. The Director said she had approached Rupert Clubb at ESCC to request that non-councillor Board members be invited to attend the briefing and that they receive the briefing papers. Mr Francis said that Cllr St Pierre, who produced the original papers for the Committee, would be attending a fracking information session at the Royal Geographical Society and would, in due course prepare a paper based on that meeting. <i>Minute 15/12 Ring barked trees</i> – Mr Spicer thanked the Director for her full written explanation. He went on to question the practice of ring barking saying it could lead to problems. The Director replied that the issue had been discussed at length in the Committee and that Rangers knew where the trees were and managed them appropriately – which could include lopping branches or felling them. Mr Francis went on to say it was very unlikely that any other trees would be ring barked in the future. <i>Minute 10/12 Dog Project</i> – The paper detailing finance for the Project was tabled. There was a short discussion. The Director said that the project had come about due to concerns regarding the number of dog related incidents. The staff had established a working group and were taking	

forward some of the recommendations from the 'Every Dog Matters' report produced in April 2012 such as setting up a database. There was a possibility of obtaining outside funding from HLS. The Dogs Trust and the Kennel Club had also been approached. Cllr Barnes said that, although he was sceptical, it seemed like a good pilot project and worthy of a trial and he was happy to see outside funding was being sought. Mr Spicer said the project was aimed at the 'uninterested' and asked if funding was not obtained would the Board be financing it. The Chairman replied that, should funding not be available, the Board would 'cut its cloth accordingly'. The Chairman asked the Board for approval to take the Dog Project Forward.

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It was agreed that the Dog Project could be taken forward.

15/12 To approve the minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee meeting of 16 April 2012 – BD 03/12.

The Chairman asked Mr Cooper to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.

15.1/12 Matters Arising

Minute 16/12 Jubilee Beacon – The beacon lighting was a great success and Chairman thanked Mr Galley for instigating the event. Mr Galley thanked Ranger Chris Sutton and the team for their efforts.

Minute 14/12 Forest Centre Development – Mr Cooper re-introduced Mr Hurst and Mr Hassell and gave a brief summary of their backgrounds. Mr Hurst said he had recently met with Mr Kenebel (WDC Planning Officer) and discussed the progress of the application. He explained that it was delayed by two recent events. Wealden Council had submitted to The Planning Inspectorate its Core Strategy or Local Plan covering all development proposals in Wealden up to 2027. This strategy has to be found sound for it to be applied legally. The Inspector wrote on March 5th to say he was happy with the Strategy subject to some modifications. The Council must then consult on the modifications. The modification that affects the Board is a proposal that no development will be allowed within 400m of the Forest and that any development within 7km must be subject to mitigation measures. The threat to the Forest comes from nitrogen deposition and from recreational pressure. So any development within the 7km zone must indicate that it will not overall increase nitrogen deposition and/or provide alternative suitable green space for recreation. The second event was the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework at the end of March which said that emerging Core Strategies carried legal weight. In other words, the proposals above now had to be applied as policies. Nevertheless the Inspector is still considering all the representations made to him so there could be some changes although the substance is not likely to be removed. Mr Galley said that Wealden Council would need to work on mitigation policies with the Board of Conservators and a letter was on its way seeking an initial meeting. The Board would be kept informed about these continuing discussions.

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RG

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the Section 106 that was in place at the Llama Park. Mr Francis said the farmhouse was surplus to the Board's requirements and a process to separate the land from the building would have to be worked through before an application to have the Section 106 removed could be made. He said that, in the first instance, an occupier who was able to lease the property and who was, or had been, an agricultural worker should be sought.

Cllr Tidy said she had spoken to ESCC on two issues. Firstly, with Cllrs Stogdon and Reid, she had asked Andy Robertson (ESCC Assistant Director of Transport and Environment) about providing a crossing on the A22 from the Llama Park to the Forest. He said that a crossing would need to be signalised and lit; the costs would be prohibitive. He went on to say that a bridge would be expensive and difficult and a tunnel would be even more costly. Secondly, she had spoken to Mo Hemsley, (Assistant Director, Resources) and Amanda Walker, (ESCC Deputy Director of Finance) regarding the purchase of the Llama Park. They had asked a 'third party' for their opinion who stated that a café/restaurant, in the right hands, could be viable. It was also said that locally, supply outweighed demand. Cllr Tidy went on to say Mo Hemsley and Amanda Walker would be able to provide expert management advice to take the potential purchase forward. Cllr Reid said that it was

encouraging to hear that ESCC officers thought the purchase of the Llama Park was an opportunity to take seriously. The Chairman said he was pleased to hear of the support from key people at County Hall. Cllr Tidy went on to say that Andy Robertson agreed to speak to Strutt and Parker (Commercial Property Estate Agents) who, in turn, has agreed to draft a purchase report for the Llama Farm and for the sale of the current Forest Centre. There would be a fee of approx. £3,500.00 for doing this work. A full report would then be drafted for the Board by Nick Watson and Dennis Thompson at ESCC. It was agreed by all that the process would need to move quickly. Cllr Galley reiterated that it was vital that the Board had external advice on the revenue and capital implications and these needed to be fully understood before final decisions could be made.

Cllr Whetstone said that the Llama Park was, from an education point of view, a 'no-no' especially now it was confirmed a crossing was not viable. Cllr Barnes said that although ESCC would not fund a bridge he got the sense that it would not be impossible to gain planning consent but it would be very expensive.

There was a discussion regarding the sale of the current Forest Centre. It was thought that leasing the current office accommodation was viable. Cllr Stogdon said that he had looked at the lease and the Deed of Gift and there were no covenants, as far as he could see, that would cause the current Forest Centre to revert back to the owners. It was thought that the Llama Park was an option that the staff could move in to without any planning permissions being required and that, except for the lack of education facilities and of tractor / shed workshop space, it was viable.

There followed a very short discussion on operating a 'split-site' with education and machinery remaining at the current Forest Centre and the offices, staff, visitor centre and café being based at the Llama Park. Mrs Hurrell said that staff had real concerns about the day-to-day operations on a split-site. She went on to report that a questionnaire had been circulated to the staff regarding the merits of the current Centre, the Llama Park and a 'split-site' scenario. The replies were being analysed and would be circulated to the new Forest Centre Development Committee in due course. She went on to say the general view was that staff were concerned about the lack of machinery sheds/ workshop space (and these would require planning permission) and the lack of educational facilities. She went on to say that the Board's education partners, Sussex Wildlife Trust, had categorically said they would withdraw their activities if the education moved to the Llama Park. She went on to say that there were other interested parties, not just the Board, who would be affected by the move.

16/12 To approve the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting of 21 May 2012 - BD 10/12.

The Chairman asked Cllr Whetstone to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There was one minor change in the attendance as Cllr Barnes had sent his apologies. The minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.

16.1/12 Matters Arising

Minute 14.2/12 – Mr Glyn said that it had always been the Board's policy to pay volunteer expenses; however, this had fallen into abeyance. He went on to say that the Board had not changed that policy and it was a simple matter of re-activating that policy. Cllr Whetstone said he was very happy that the policy should be brought to the attention of the volunteers.

It was agreed that the policy regarding payment of volunteer expenses be re-activated.

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17/12 To receive the Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2012, approve the Accounting Statement, the Internal Auditors Report and the Annual Governance Statement for the year ending 31 March 2012 contained in the Annual Return and to approve the Annual Return - BD 11/12.

The Statement of Accounts, the Accounting Statement, the Internal Auditor's Report and the Annual Governance Statement contained in the Annual Return had been previously circulated.

Cllr Whetstone proposed acceptance of the Statement of Accounts, the Accounting Statement, the

	<p>Internal Auditor's Report and the Annual Governance Statement contained in the Annual Return. Cllr Barnes seconded the proposal. The Board agreed.</p> <p>Cllr Whetstone proposed acceptance of the Annual Return. Cllr Barnes seconded the proposal. The Board Agreed.</p> <p>The Annual Governance Statement forms part of the Annual Return. It was noted and accepted by the Board as was the report from the Internal Auditor.</p>	
<p>18/12</p>	<p>To receive the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of 21 May 2012 – BD 12/12</p> <p>The Chairman presented the minutes of the last meeting which had been assessed by the Committee for accuracy. The minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.</p>	
<p>19/12</p>	<p>To approve the Confidential Session of the minutes of the Board meeting of 6 March 2012, and matters arising – BD 13/12</p> <p>The Chairman presented the minutes of the confidential session. The minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.</p>	
<p>20/12</p>	<p>Establishment of a Forest Centre Development Committee – BD 14/12.</p> <p>20.1/12 The document had been previously circulated. The Chairman said it was a straightforward paper that could be taken as read. Mr Cooper said that he was happy to see the new Committee taken as part of the Board's formal structure. He said it was important that Mr Hassell and Mr Hurst be co-opted members of the Committee. The Chairman said that once formed, the Committee could go ahead and co-opt members as necessary and that the process could start on the rising of the Board. The Chairman pointed out that it would be necessary to revise Standing Orders to take account of the formation of the new committee.</p> <p>Cllr Whetstone proposed that a Forest Centre Development Committee be established. This was seconded by Cllr Barnes. The Chairman asked for a show of hands and the motion was passed unanimously.</p> <p>Cllr Barnes, Cllr Tidy, Cllr Stogdon, Cllr Reid, Cllr Whetstone, Cllr Galley, Mr Cooper, Mrs Hurrell and Mr Francis all agreed to join the Forest Centre Development Committee.</p> <p>It was agreed that a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and co-opted members would be elected at the first full meeting and that the Clerk would circulate dates as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>20.2/12 Mr Hassell reported he had met with the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust. The Chairman said that a charity should receive funds and that raising funds and receiving them were two different things. In his opinion the AFCT should not be charged with raising funds. There was a short discussion on the process of raising funds and it was agreed this would be an agenda item at the first meeting. However, the Board agreed to make a formal request the AFCT asking them to act as a receiving body for funds.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Board should make a formal request to the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust to act as the receiving body for funds.</p>	<p>PB</p>
<p>21/12</p>	<p>Election of a Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Board (as per Standing Order 1.2)</p> <p>The Clerk invited nominations for the post of Chairman of the Board. Cllr Barnes nominated Mr Thornely-Taylor and Cllr Stogdon seconded the proposal.</p> <p>There being no other nominations, Mr Thornely-Taylor was duly elected as Chairman for a further year.</p> <p>The Clerk then invited nominations for the post of Vice Chairman of the Board. Cllr Reid nominated Mr Galley and Mr Francis seconded the proposal.</p> <p>There being no other nominations, Mr Galley was duly elected as Vice Chairman for a further year.</p>	

22/12	Allocation of Board members to Committees.	
	After a brief discussion it was agreed that all of the RPA and Conservation Committees would remain the same. Mr Glyn asked to retire from the FGP Committee.	
23/12	To receive the Director's Report – BD 15/12	
	The document had been previously circulated. Cllrs Whetstone and Reid congratulated the Director on a clearly written and very helpful report. Cllr Barnes asked what steps had been taken regarding security and Director explained that advice had been taken from the Crime Prevention Team and the recommendations listed in her paper were being taken forward. The Director said that she had spent much of her first two months in post getting to know the Board members and staff, meeting the volunteers and making contact with key organisations.	
24/12	To receive the Clerk's Report – BD 16/12	
	The document had been previously circulated. The Clerk said that she was still working on an increase in the fines for By-law breaches. She also said that a section of Forest track had been adopted as a bye-way which may impact on licences. Some may have to be rescinded. She was still working on this matter.	
25/12	Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.	
	There were none.	

The meeting closed at 16.15

Chairman _____
10 September 2012

Clerk _____