

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF
ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE, WYCH
CROSS ON MONDAY 23 MARCH 1998 AT 2.30 pm.**

Present: Mr D C Cumming (in the Chair), Air Marshall Sir Frederick Sowrey,
Mrs D M Bagshawe, Mrs S Stokes, Messrs D H O Allen, L J Gillham,
D L Hall, R I F Parsons, H D V Prendergast, A G Reid, F W J Whetstone,
A N White.

The Chairman welcomed the members of the public present pointing out that contrary to the article in the press, the meeting was not a public meeting but a regular meeting of the Board of Conservators and members of the public, though welcome to attend, were not permitted to take part.

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies had been received from Miss M McPherson, Mr D Norcross and Mr R Thornely-Taylor.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 November 1997

2.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had previously been circulated, were presented by the Chairman. Two amendments were recorded as follows:

4.3 To read "The Board agreed to continue with their current policy of not managing the deer and not culling the deer on the Forest."

9.3 To read "Mr Reid reported that he had had several requests for bicycle paths to be constructed on the Forest"....

The Minutes were then approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 3 Matters arising

3.1 There were no matters arising.

ITEM 4 Report on the Commoners' Annual General Meeting - held on 6 March 1998

4.1 Mr Allen, who attended the meeting with the four other Conservators who are commoners, gave the Board a brief resume of the meeting. 79 people attended and Mr Philip Glynn was in the Chair.

4.2 Mr White, was re-elected to serve five years on the Board from 1 April 1998.

4.3 Sir Frederick Sowrey spoke on the Forest Rate for the next year. The meeting unanimously agreed the increase set by the Department of the Environment of 4.6% and Mr White gave a report on the Forest finances.

4.4 Mr Cumming, as Chairman of the Board of Conservators, briefed the Commoners on the traffic calming measures instigated during the past year and the Conservators' concern

about the impact on Forest roads of the proposals to build 45,000 new homes in East Sussex by the year 2011. There were no questions.

4.5 With the aid of slides, the Forest Superintendent spoke on the progress made in the grazing project with the establishment of a graziers' committee and the erection of the new fences. The impact of the cessation of grazing was vividly demonstrated by aerial views of the Forest taken just before grazing ceased and last year, a gap of 15 years. These clearly showed the invasion of the heathland by scrub vegetation. The flood damage caused by periods of heavy rainfall and the work carried out in repairs and preventative measures were also shown. He reported that in 1997 there had been 13 fires over a total of 57 acres and the cost to the Conservators of litter removal and fly-tipping had been £8000. Concluding, he reported that the Forest was in good shape and the Commoners expressed their appreciation for the work of the Forest staff.

4.6 After an opportunity for questions to the Forest Superintendent and the Commoner Conservators, it was agreed to hold the next meeting at Nutley Village Hall on 5 March 1999 at 8 pm.

4.7 Mrs Bagshawe expressed her view that there was a danger of the Board of Conservators concentrating only on the Commoners to the detriment of other people who lived near the Forest. Mr Gillham assured her that he had never differentiated between Commoners and other members of the public, and was sure that this was the same for the other members of the Board who were Commoners.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 26 January 1998

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

5.2 Weather and winter work associated problems The Clerk was able to report that the work schedule was now up to date.

5.3 The reintroduction of grazing The Clerk briefed the Board on current progress. 14 Commoners had attended the initial meeting to set up a Graziers' Committee. This had been successful with six Commoners forming the committee. The Board agreed to endorse the roles of the Forest Superintendent and the Board of Conservators as recommended by the Committee.

5.4 Proposed Wealden Tourist Information Office at Forest Row Mr Parsons informed the Board that no decision had yet been made to locate an office in Forest Row. The Wealden District Council were aware of the pressure on the Forest and it was the Council's intention to manage the impact of tourism with sensitivity.

5.5 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 16 February 1998

6.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Sir Frederick Sowrey.

6.2 Enforcement of the 40mph speed limit on Forest roads The Clerk informed the Board that the Department of Transport's resolution to lift the requirement for the upright repeater signs was with their legal department. An answer is expected shortly.

6.3 Fly tipping The Clerk reported that the estimated costs to the Board of taking fly tipped waste to the County Council's land fill sites was £50 to Beddingam and £60 to Hastings. This represents approximately the costs for half a day's work of two Estate Workers and mileage.

6.4 Proposed lorry weight limit restrictions on Forest roads In considering the draft letter to the County Council:

6.4.1 Mr Hall felt that the Board should take a positive approach to the 7.5 tonne limit and support its application to all Forest roads.

6.4.2 Mrs Bagshawe confirmed that she had made the County Highways Committee aware that the Board were only interested in the C3. She expressed her view that the Board must be aware of the interests of those living around the Forest and should not underestimate the people's feelings in Crowborough.

6.4.3 Both Mr Gillham and Mr Cumming assured Mrs Bagshawe that the Board had always considered the feelings of the general public but the duties of the Conservators towards the Forest are clearly set out in the Ashdown Forest Act 1974 and Mr Gillham quoted from the Act for the meeting's benefit. Mrs Bagshawe pointed out that the Ashdown Forest Act 1974 could be changed in the future.

6.4.4 In the absence of a ban on lorries over 7.5 tonnes, the Board confirmed their support of a ban on lorries over 30 tonnes (3 axle lorries) on the C3 between the Duddleswell crossroads and Nutley. Mrs Bagshawe asked that her personal view that there should be no weight limit restrictions be noted.

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 March 1998

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

7.2 Consideration of Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation to adopt or not to adopt the following policies:

Regulation 31. Early payment of retirement benefits from age 50. The Board should not adopt this policy.

Regulation 52. Increasing membership on retirement from age 50. The Board should not adopt this policy.

Regulation 53. Increasing membership for new employees on commencement. The Board should not adopt this policy.

Regulation 67. Shared cost AVCs. The Board should not adopt this policy.

Regulation 9. Widowers pensions in respect of pre 1988 service. The Board should not adopt this policy.

Regulation 14. Employees currently paying a 5% contribution should be allowed to continue doing so. The Board should adopt this policy.

Regulation 15. Reducing or waiving employees contributions for Scheme members with 40 years membership. The Board should not adopt this policy.

Regulation 66. The ability of an employer to extend the time limit for converting in-house AVCs to service. The Board should adopt this policy.

Regulation 109. Abatement. This policy is at the discretion of the Administering Authority following consultation with other employers in the Pension Fund. The Board felt the Administering Authority 's proposed abatement policy would put an employee at a disadvantage compared with one who retired and found work elsewhere - but this is the nature of the Local Government scheme.

7.3 Board and Committee dates for 1998/99 It was agreed that it would be wise to leave the dates and times of Board meetings unchanged as the general public had become used to the start time being 2.30 pm. In future, Board Members will be asked to provide the Clerk with a list of dates on which they are unable to attend Board meetings before the diary is set, in order to avoid conflicts. However, the Board agreed to bring forward the start time for the following Committee meetings in 1998 from 2.30 pm to 10.30 am:

Roads Planning & Amenities Committee on 27 July and 19 October
Finance & General Purposes Committee 1 June, 24 August and 2 November.

7.4 A new book on Ashdown Forest The book written by Ranger Chris Marrable and Nicky Muggeridge had been received from the printers that morning. The Clerk advised the Board that the book was not intended to replace the Teachers Pack, but it was a source of information on Ashdown Forest for people of all ages.

7.5 Employment Contract for the Clerk and Forest Superintendent The Board agreed that a written Contract of Employment be drawn up between the Board and the Forest Superintendent and that the Chairman of the Board and the Chairman of the Finance Committee should do this on behalf of the full Board. The written contract will replace the informal Contract of Employment between the Clerk and the Board that had been in existence since his appointment.

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

ITEM 8 To consider a separate application for relocation of the access to Spring Garden, sent direct to all Members of the Board

8.1 In view of the separate application, the Chairman moved that this item be referred back to the Roads, Planning and Amenities Committee. This was agreed.

ITEM 9 Clerk to report on sundry matters

9.1 Talks and donations The Clerk reported that his winter programme of talks was coming to an end; he had given 21 talks to a wide variety of local groups (over one thousand people) which had led to a number of generous donations. Of particular note were the donations and letters of appreciation for the work carried out on the Forest received from the North Weald Association of Local Councils and Danehill Parish Council.

9.2 Fires There had been four fires on the Forest totalling 146 acres in all.

9.3 C3 work The County Highways Department were about to start work installing the cattle grids on the C3 at Duddleswell and Nutley. The contractors are to use Box Car Park for their site office.

9.4 Fox hunting The Clerk briefed the Board on a number of articles on fox hunting on the Forest which had appeared in the local press recently. He pointed out that although the Board's policy had been extant in its current form since 1993, only one verbal enquiry (in early 1997) and no complaints had been received and there had been no requests from any individual or organisation for the Board to review its policy. The Board was concerned about the misinformation in the articles and felt it should be corrected. The Clerk was tasked to write to the Editor of the Courier and to Crowborough Town Council and invite them to separate briefings on Ashdown Forest and its management.

ITEM 10 Any other business

10.1 The Clerk confirmed that the local archaeological society had been informed of the fires on the Forest so they could investigate the sites.

10.2 Mr Prendergast expressed his concern over possible disturbance from the flying of model aircraft over the Forest. Mr Gillham explained that whilst trying to accommodate the Club, an increasing number of restrictions had been imposed on flying conditions and the Club was being encouraged to find alternative sites but they had been experiencing difficulties. He added that the matter had been regularly reviewed by the Board and the Club was on notice.

The public withdrew before the Board went into the Confidential session at 4.40 pm.

Chairman _____

22 June 1998

Clerk _____