

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF
ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE, WYCH
CROSS ON MONDAY 20 MARCH 2000 AT 2.30 pm.**

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

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

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence

1.1 There were apologies for absence from Miss M McPherson and F W J Whetstone.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 November 1999

2.1 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 3 Matters arising

3.1 The Millennium Clump has now been planted.

ITEM 4 Report by Deputy Chief Fire Officer Pritchard

4.1 Mr Pritchard briefed the Board on the concerns of the East Sussex Fire Service following the spate of fires which had occurred on the Forest over the last eight days. The County Fire Service had been ably supported by both Kent and West Sussex Fire Services and the support of the Forest Staff had been much appreciated. Concerns included the considerable costs being incurred, the loss of the Crowborough 4x4 vehicle, and the cause of the fires over which they were liaising with the police. He briefed the Board on their operational procedures, including the procedures for liaising with the other emergency services and the local authorities. He had spoken to the local media to encourage the public to be both careful and vigilant.

4.2 The Chairman informed Mr Pritchard that whilst controlled burning was a recognised technique for heathland management, it had not been carried out on Ashdown Forest for over 12 years. The Clerk informed the meeting that bonfires were started after scrub clearance, but only when weather conditions allowed and the Fire Service were always informed.

4.3 It was agreed that a meeting should be arranged between the Fire Service and Forest Staff to exchange information.

4.4 The Chairman thanked Mr Pritchard for attending the meeting and the Board formally recorded their thanks for all the work the Fire Service had done over the past few days on the Forest.

ITEM 5 Report on the Commoners' Annual General Meeting

5.1 Mr Glyn briefed the Board on the Commoners' AGM held on 3 March. 58 people attended the meeting. All five Commoner Conservators were present. The meeting

was chaired by Mrs Marjory Pegg. Mr Leslie Gillham was elected unopposed to serve on the Board from 1 April 2000 for a period of five years.

- 5.2 The meeting had been informed that Dr Prendergast had moved to a property which did not have Rights of Common over Ashdown Forest attached to it. He would therefore represent the Commoners as a non Commoner as allowed by the Ashdown Forest Act 1974.
- 5.3 Mr White reported on the Forest's finances for the year 1998/99. The meeting agreed the Forest Rate increase of 2.1%.
- 5.4 The Chairman of the Board presented his report. After informing the meeting of the death of Ranger John Linton and the renaming of Hollies Down Car Park to Linton's Car Park in memory of his 33 years on the Forest, the Chairman concentrated on a number of matters which are of concern to the Board:
 - i) The plundering of Forest fungi for commercial gain
 - ii) The proliferation of planning applications for mobile telephone masts
 - iii) The problems caused by the increase in visitors to Pooh Bridge
 - iv) Fly-tipping.
- 5.5 The Forest Superintendent presented his report on management matters with the aid of slides. He reviewed the grazing project and the problems caused by fly-tipping. He had given a brief description of the scrub clearance and coppicing carried out over the past year and concluded with the results of monitoring of Marsh gentians.
- 5.6 The Commoners had raised two particular concerns; the pressures caused by the increase in visitors to Pooh Bridge and the possibility of the Forest being considered for National Park status. In response the Chairman of the Board confirmed that the Conservators would be taking an active part in the consultation exercise initiated by the East Sussex County Council. No mention had been made to date of the prospect of the Forest becoming a National Park. Mr Prendergast thought further protection for the Forest would be through AONB legislation.

ITEM 6 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 24 January 2000

- 6.1 The Minutes which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Gillham.
- 6.2 Forest Ponds Whereas most of the Forest ponds are allowed to develop natural flora and fauna, it was conceded that one or two in high visitor pressure areas would be damaged by dogs.
- 6.3 Heather trimmings The Clerk informed the Board that heather trimmings, not required for spreading on bracken clearance sites, are sometimes given to other conservation organisations who are attempting to recreate heathland. No charge is made. Any excess cut heather is spread on Forest rides.
- 6.4 Pollution by domestic oil spillage Concern was expressed at the potential damage done to Forest water courses by leaks from domestic oil tanks. The Environment Agency will take action when necessary. It was agreed the Conservators could do little beyond place a warning in the Ashdown Forest News.

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

ITEM 7 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting held on 17 February 2000

- 7.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mrs Stokes.
- 7.2 Planning Applications: Mobile Telephone Masts
- 7.2.1 Mrs Bagshawe stressed the importance of any objection to a planning application being couched in planning terms. As an example, she quoted “Impact on a visual amenity” being a valid objection whereas a risk to health was not.
- 7.2.2 Mr Thornely-Taylor advised the Board that as a public body, the Board is open to challenge so any objection to a planning application from the Conservators must be on adverse impact on the Forest.
- 7.2.3 Mr Parsons informed the Board that professional advice about all aspects of mobile telephone masts had been sought by Wealden District Council. The planning application for Kings Standing Police Training Centre had been allowed as a mast was already on site and the proposed dishes would have little further impact. A seminar involving Wealden District Council and the mobile phone operators is planned.
- 7.3 There being no further questions, Mrs Stokes moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 8 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 28 February 2000

- 8.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr White.
- 8.2 Wealden District Council Grant
- 8.2.1 The Board expressed its grave concern that the grant for the year 1999/2000 had not yet been paid. Mr Parsons explained that new procedures put in place by the Council in the past year had been responsible for the delay but it was expected that it would be paid before the end of the month.
- 8.2.2 Mr Thornely-Taylor, who had been unaware of the delay, confirmed that he would investigate the matter and liaise with the Clerk. He also informed the Board that certain conditions may be imposed for the next financial year, linked to the provision of Tourist Information facilities at the Centre. It was agreed that it should be made clear to Wealden District Council that the Information Centre is entirely manned by volunteers and the current resources of the Conservators are used entirely for the management of the Forest, as determined by the Ashdown Forest Act 1974.
- 8.3 The new tractor and grinder The Chairman informed the Board that the tractor and grinder were now in use. The grant from English Nature is possibly the first of its kind and is an indication of the confidence English Nature has in the management of the Forest. He expressed his thanks to the Friends of Ashdown Forest who also generously contributed to the purchase of the vehicles. It was agreed the Clerk would convey the Board’s thanks to both English Nature and the Friends.

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

ITEM 9 The Clerk to report on sundry matters

- 9.1 East Sussex County Council Grant The Clerk informed the Board that the East Sussex County Council contribution for the next financial year shown in the Council Tax leaflet distributed with Rate Demands for this year showed them paying £144,000. He had sought clarification from officers at the County Council and had been told that the figure of £144,000 was a result of internal accounting and the Conservators would in fact only receive the sum of £131,000 as had been previously indicated.
- 9.2 Fly-tipping The cost to the Conservators of removing the 841 wheels that had been dumped in Long Car Park had been in the region of £2,900. There had also been two further incidents of fly-tipping which, due to the vigilance of a local resident, had enabled the perpetrator to be traced. The Environment Agency may prosecute.

ITEM 10 Any other business

- 10.1 The resignation of Dr Hew Prendergast The Chairman informed the Board that Dr Hew Prendergast had tendered his resignation as from 1 April 2000 due to pressure of work. The Chairman expressed the Board's thanks for his valuable contribution to Forest matters.
- 10.2 Fox hunting The Clerk passed round a letter from Mr May in which he sought answers to questions raised by a member of the public following the hunts on the Forest this year. Answers were given by the Clerk. In discussion, it was agreed that if there was irrefutable evidence of failure to observe the Board's conditions, the Clerk should write to the hunts accordingly.
- 10.3 Board procedures Mrs Bagshawe queried the procedures for the Board Meetings. She felt that the meetings should be used to bring to the Board's attention anything that needs a decision from the Board or to inform the Board of matters which affect the whole Board. As minutes of Committee meetings were distributed 10 days before the Board meetings, she felt repetition at the Board meeting was unnecessary. The Clerk reminded the Board that the current practice had been introduced about four years ago when the Board had agreed that the public attending the meetings would have a better understanding of what was being agreed. The Chairman suggested that the matter should be discussed in Committee.
- 10.4 There being no further questions, the meeting closed at 4.45 pm.

Chairman _____
19 June 2000

Clerk _____