

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF
ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE,
WYCH CROSS ON MONDAY 15 MARCH 2004 AT 2.30pm.**

Present: Mr RIF Parsons (in the Chair), Miss M McPherson, Mrs J Wirdnam, Messrs F Brown, L Gillham, PJ Glyn, FJC Marshall, P Scott, T Slack, R Thomas, FWJ Whetstone, AN White and Dr HDV Prendergast (Clerk).

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence There were apologies for absence from Mrs D Bagshawe, Messrs MJ Cooper, C Dowling and AG Reid.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 November 2003

2.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had been previously circulated, were presented by the Chairman. Following the correction of a small typographical error and the correction of Air Vice Marshall Sir Frederick Sowrey's title, the Minutes were approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 3 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 19 January 2004

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

3.2 Extension of Grazing The Clerk reported that funds had been found for researching the effectiveness of grazing. It was confirmed that the report had been commissioned by English Nature and was being carried out on behalf of English Nature by Chris Marrable. Following its publication by English Nature, it will be considered by the Conservation Committee.

3.3 Royal Ashdown Golf Club Stewardship Scheme The Clerk informed the Board that Chris Marrable was assisting the Golf Club in drawing up a Stewardship Scheme for heathland management and restoration on the golf course. The Clerk would be signing the application as representative of the landowner.

3.4 Land at Whitehouse Farm The Clerk had no update about the construction of a barn on land at Whitehouse Farm.

3.5 Britain's Wild Harvest exhibition The Chairman congratulated the Clerk on the exhibition and the publication of the book which accompanied it.

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

ITEM 4 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting held on 9 February 2004

4.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Marshall.

4.2 Open access maps Concern was expressed about the inaccuracies of the Open Access maps in relation to the Forest. The Chairman confirmed that the maps were still under construction and any inaccuracies would be corrected.

4.3 Infringements of the Bye-Laws

4.3.1 The Board expressed its support of the Rangers in their duty to protect the Forest. It was agreed that strong action should be taken over serious breaches of the bye-laws, such as

the recent successful legal action taken by the County Council as landowner against a persistent offender.

4.3.2 Concern was expressed that the Eridge and Southdowns Hunt had not responded to the Clerk's letter with regards to the all terrain vehicle that had been seen on the Forest in conjunction with the Hunt on 12 November 2003. It was agreed that the Clerk should take further robust action.

4.4 There being no further questions or comments, Mr Marshall moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 23 February 2004

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

5.2 Draft Action Plan The Clerk confirmed that the comments made by the Committees had been incorporated into the Action Plan. He commented that the Plan was a working document and would be subject to revision as plans progressed and needs change.

5.3 Local Authority Grants The Clerk reported that he had heard that the Wealden District Council grant of £14,000 had been agreed and payment would be made before the end of the financial year. He had been advised that steps were to be taken to ensure that the grant was paid earlier in the financial year in future.

5.4 VAT issue with HM Customs and Excise The Board expressed its appreciation for the work done by Mr Thornely-Taylor.

5.5 Access for the Disabled review Following advice that it would be wise to have a professional report rather than seek recommendations from Wealden District Council, the Clerk informed the Board that a firm of consultants had been appointed to carry out the review at the end of the week.

5.6 Accounts In view of the new format for the accounts, it was agreed that there should be a periodic review of the new working to assess clarity.

5.7 There being no questions or comments, Mr Glyn moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 6 Action Plan The Clerk presented the finalised Plan which incorporated the suggestions from the Committees. He stressed that it was a dynamic document and requested that it be formally endorsed. It was agreed that the Plan would be reviewed on an annual basis and the Board formally endorsed its acceptance.

ITEM 7 A presentation on deer issues by Mr Fred Marshall

7.1 Mr Marshall gave a comprehensive and informative lecture on the history and management of deer on Ashdown Forest and the immediate area of the High Weald. The lack of natural predators and the abundance of food have led to a dramatic rise in the deer herd in the whole area. The herd is estimated to be increasing by 150 head per year. Damage to agriculture, forestry and horticulture is significant and the sharp rise in traffic accidents over the last few years would indicate that the herd is a problem that cannot be resolved by lone individuals or organisations. During 2003 there had been 250 road traffic accidents involving deer; 185 had been attended by the Rangers.

- 7.2 Mr Slack offered to investigate sources of funds for measures that might reduce traffic accidents but the Board agreed the Clerk's proposal that any action should await the results of the Deer Initiative, a Highways Agency funded initiative which is looking at the deer problem across the whole of the country. In the meantime, deer road casualties would continue to be reported to the Highways Agency.
- 7.3 The Chairman thanked Mr Marshall for his presentation.

ITEM 8 Election of Board Chairman and Vice-Chairman (to take place at next Board meeting, 21 June)

- 8.1 The Chairman reminded the Board that Standing Orders dictate that elections for Chairman and Vice-Chairman should take place annually. Over the years, it had become common practice for the positions to be held for three years and that the posts alternate between a Local Authority member/appointee and a Commoner or their representative. Elections are due this year. The Board agreed to hold the election in June. This would allow any changes in personnel following the Commoner Conservator election and the Local Authority elections to be established.
- 8.2 The Chairman asked the Board if there were any objections to the next meeting being brought forward to 14 June 2004. This was agreed.

ITEM 9 Any other business

- 9.1 The Centre The Clerk informed the Board that Mr Parsons and Ranger Chris Sutton had been looking into the feasibility of putting two windows in the Rangers' office and moving the fuel tank. It is proposed that a planning application be made.
- 9.2 Sustainable Tourism Strategy The Clerk informed the Board that Wealden District Council, with the support of the High Weald Unit, would be publishing a strategy for sustainable tourism. It would have two foci: Winnie-the-Pooh and Ashdown Forest.
- 9.3 New Age Travellers Mr Whetstone informed the Board that travellers had moved in to Phie Forest Gardens in Crowborough. He had received reports that they were dumping their sewerage on Forest land. Ranger Sutton would be investigating and reporting to the Clerk.
- 9.4 Security of the Forest Mrs Wirdnam expressed her concern over the security of the Forest in view of the fact that the County Council are in the process of selling Bentley Wildfowl. It was confirmed that even if the Forest was sold, the Ashdown Forest Act 1974 would still protect the Forest.
- 9.5 Election of a Commoner to the Board The Board congratulated Mr Glyn on his recent re-election to the Board at the Commoners' Annual Meeting.

The Board then moved to a confidential session.

Chairman _____
21 June 2004

Clerk _____