

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

1430, Monday 14 March 2005
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr P. Glyn (in the Chair), Mrs D. Bagshawe, Mr F. Brown, Mr M. Cooper, Mr L. Gillham, Miss M. McPherson, Mr R. Parsons, Mr A. Reid, Mr R. Tidy, Mrs J. Wirdnam, Mr A. White, Mr F. Whetstone and Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk).
Minutes taken by Mrs R. Marriott.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public present. He then congratulated Mr Gillham on his election to the Board on 4 March 2005 to serve as a Commoner Conservator for the next five years.

Mrs Daphne Bagshawe, Mrs Mary McPherson and Mr Tony Slack, who had announced that they would not be standing for re-election at the next County Council election, were thanked for their work in support of the Forest.

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence Mr F. Marshall and Mr T. Slack.

ITEM 2 Access issues

- 2.1 The Chairman gave a brief history of the subject. The Isle of Thorns' principle access at present is via Laundry Lane in Chelwood Gate. To alleviate the distress to local residents, the Board had agreed a second access across Forest land to the A275 provided there would be a substantial benefit to the Forest. The matter had been discussed in the RPA Minutes of 2001.
- 2.2 The access to the A275 would need to be wide for safety reasons and would be a new alien feature on the Forest. The aim of the Board has been to seek a balance between the needs of the Cats Protection (CP) and the Forest.
- 2.3 It should be noted that the Board are not holding up the proceedings: WDC had not granted planning permission to date although a Section 106 agreement (involving the closure of Laundry Lane to CP traffic) was due to be signed soon
- 2.4 The Ashdown Forest Act 1974 forbids the Board to dispose of land. The Board must be aware of the danger of setting a precedent for the exchange of land for the widening of accesses.
- 2.5 It should be noted that the CP bought the Isle of Thorns without resolving the access issues. The Board is under no obligation to give up land simply because an independent organisation decides to expand its business.
- 2.6 The Board were aware of the distress caused to the residents of Laundry Lane by the increase in the traffic to the CP. They felt a satisfactory result could be reached through negotiation with the CP.
- 2.7 The Board agreed that a professional advisor should be appointed

ITEM 3 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 November 2004 and matters arising

- 3.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had been previously circulated, were presented by The Chairman.
- 3.2 The Minutes were then approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 4 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 17 January 2005

- 4.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Gillham.
- 4.2 Entomological surveys The Clerk confirmed that it is anticipated that surveys of ants and butterflies would be carried out during 2005 and 2006.
- 4.3 Mountain biking
- 4.3.1 The Board agreed that it was not necessary for the RPA and F&GP Committees to consider the matter. The firebreaks bear no resemblance to the gravelled tracks through land owned by the Forestry Commission and would not be able to support heavy use by mountain bikes. The nature of the Forest made it difficult to control the numbers of riders and it would not be practical to confine them to a particular area. It was agreed that a Press Release would be issued.
- 4.3.2 **The Board agreed that Mountain Biking should not be allowed on Ashdown Forest.**
- 4.4 Hunting It should be noted that the Coakham Bloodhounds are used for a "Clean Boot" hunt, not a "Drag" hunt.
- 4.5 New DEFRA schemes The Clerk informed the Board that the proposed payment for land in the Higher Level Scheme will be £200/hectare for land not in a current Stewardship Scheme. Although entry into the HLS is competitive, the Forest is in good condition and will be a good candidate. As the existing Stewardship Schemes come to an end, it is anticipated that the land will be brought into the HLS.
- 4.6 Deer casualties Bearing in mind that deer cannot be culled on public access land, Mr Marshall had offered his services as a deer stalker to cull deer on private land. It was agreed that the matter should be discussed at the next Conservation Committee.
- 4.7 English Nature grazing policy The Clerk reported that the national report would be produced during the summer. It is anticipated that the local team will draw up their own report in the meantime.
- 4.8 There being no further questions, Mr Gillham moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting held on 11 October 2004

- 5.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by the Chairman in the absence of Mr Marshall.
- 5.2 Visitor Survey 2004 The Clerk reported that the results of the Visitor Survey should be available in the middle of April.

- 5.3 Access to Forest at Boringwheel Mill The Clerk informed the Board that English Nature would not tolerate the importation of foreign materials to improve the access.
- 5.4 There being no further questions or comments, Mr Marshall moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 6 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 21 February 2005

- 6.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Parsons.
- 6.2.1 Development of the Forest Centre The Clerk informed the Board that the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust had agreed to reimburse the Board for the expenses of a consultant to draw up a business plan. It was agreed that no drawings would be needed at this stage.
- 6.2.2 The Board agreed that any plans should be under their supervision.
- 6.3 There being no further questions or comments, Mr Parsons moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 7 Forest Centre Development Working Party

- 7.1 The Clerk informed the Board that deadlines were approaching for some stages in the development plans. The High Weald Unit (HWU) would employ a consultant to assist in the development of the education, interpretation and access plans. The Healthland Lottery Fund (HLF) has advised the HWU that the Visitor Centre can only be 25% of the bid.
- 7.2 The Friends of Ashdown Forest have offered their support for the project.
- 7.2 The HWU have obtained a guide to the bidding process from the HLF. The deadline for the HLF bid is later in the year.

ITEM 8 The future of hunts on the Forest

- 8.1 The Clerk informed the Board that he had been approached by a member of the public for the Board's view on hunting following the new legislation. He asked for the Board's guidance on policy towards "Clean Boot" and "Drag" hunts.
- 8.2 It was agreed that the hunts would be consulted over the introduction of a per capita charge for hunting.
- 8.3 **The Board agreed that it would allow hunting to continue on the Forest subject to the following conditions:**
- 1) **The hunts must obey the law.**
 - 2) **Clean Boot and Drag hunts must agree their route with the Forest Superintendent before the event.**

ITEM 9 Urgent update

9.1 The Clerk informed the Board that he had received a letter from ESCC stating that the grant for 2005/06 would be £106,000. The Ashdown Forest Trust would make up the difference. Mr Reid confirmed that the ESCC had agreed the Board's budget for the same period.

9.2 There being no further business, the Board moved to a confidential session.

The meeting closed at 4.55pm.

Chairman _____
20 June 2005

Clerk _____