

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

1430, Monday March 2007
Education Barn, Ashdown Forest Centre

Present Mr P. Glyn (in the Chair), Cllr J. Barnes, Mr M. Cooper, Cllr D. Elkin, Mr L. Gillham, Cllr R. St. Pierre, Mr J. Spicer, Cllr R. Stogdon, Mr R. Thornely-Taylor and Cllr F. Whetstone, Mr E Stenhouse.

Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk)

Minutes taken by Mrs M.A. Mead.

The Chairman opened the meeting, welcomed the members of the public present and invited questions for 10 minutes from the floor.

The following notes on the questions/answers are an aide mémoire only and do not form part of the minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest.

Mrs Sheila Van Maurik asked:

- Is there a proposal to extend the fencing on the Forest and if so where? The Chairman replied that there are no such plans and that the future of the Forest is being discussed via the stakeholder meetings.
- Are deer affected by the grazing? The Chairman replied that there are instances where sheep and deer graze together.
- Would the Board consider urging East Sussex Highways to put up signs indicating numbers of deer killed? This is done on the New Forest and parts of Somerset. The Chairman replied that there was some support and was a valid point.
- Does the Board support Mr Alan Morris's proposal for an underpass on the A22 at Millbrook? The Chairman replied that the Ashdown Area Deer Group, on which the Conservators are represented, feel that an underpass would not be viable and would not solve the problem.

Major Edward Stenhouse stated:

- He was elected as a Conservator as from 1 April 2007 in a 'land-slide' victory. On the grounds that the Commoners and a large proportion of the people are extremely concerned as to the way the Forest is going with tree felling and the mess, should the Board not, therefore, consider a moratorium – so that the people can be given the facts and have a chance to discuss the way forward. He also stated that the signs should be uplifted and binned. The Chairman asked Maj. Stenhouse whether he wanted an answer to a moratorium and said that the signs had been agreed by the Board. Mr Glyn stated he did not want to diminish the 'land-slide' success, but there are over 730 Commoners. Maj. Stenhouse replied that he has talked to a great number of Commoners over the last month and they have all agreed that he can talk on their behalf. The Chairman replied that the stakeholders meetings in conjunction with 3KQ were for those interested in the Forest to have their say.

Mr Glyn thanked the public for their points.

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr F. Brown and Cllr R. O'Keeffe.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting of 13 November 2006 and Matters Arising

2.1 Item 2.1 The last sentence should read '*web site amended if necessary*'.

- 2.2 Item 2.2 The last sentence should read '20 November 2006'.
- 2.3 Item 5.2.5 The auditors have still not forwarded the appropriate paperwork so the accounts have yet to be submitted.
- 2.4 The Chairman moved the adoption of the Minutes with the amendments. This was agreed.

ITEM 3 To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of Conservation Committee meeting of 15 January 2007

- 3.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting had been circulated. Mr Gillham took questions.
- 3.2 Item 1 A discussion took place. It was suggested by Cllr. Whetstone that the item be deferred until it is discussed under Item 6. Mr Gillham pointed out that we must agree the minutes.
- 3.3 Item 3 It was agreed by the Board that they reiterated the importance of raising the profile of the contributions made by the Rangers. A discussion took place about exploring the liability/responsibility of hitting a wild animal with regard to insurance companies and the police. Mr Marshall pointed out that the animal is the property of the landowner where it dies and the question was posed as to whether the car owner in some circumstances could claim from the County Council. Cllr Barnes suggested that this point should be explored as we are not in a position to answer. Mr Cooper pointed out that the Rangers provided a free service to the community. Cllr St Pierre suggested we follow the trial in the New Forest, whereby a high pitch noise identifies crossing places. Mr Marshall said that national experts, who are part of the Ashdown Area Deer Group, are carrying out these and other trials relating to mitigation measures against deer crossing roads.
- 3.4 The Chairman moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 4 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting 5 February 2007

- 4.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting had been circulated. Mr Marshall took questions.
- 4.2 5) **New lease of golf courses by the Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Club.** Cllr Barnes and Dr Prendergast both said they had heard nothing from ESCC in connection with the lease. Cllr Whetstone reported that, following a discussion with officers of ESCC, he stated that they felt there was no need to involve the Board and that the lease was between ESCC and the Golf Club only. Cllr Whetstone had already asked for a reply. Dr Prendergast suggested it would be helpful to have on record a response to his letter, adding that, although the former lease was a tripartite affair, it contained very little between the Board and the Golf Club. He thought that this was important, giving as an example, the area of the lease land itself which in some places he suggested should be redrawn.
- 4.3 6) **Visitor Access and Parking Management Strategy.** Mr Marshall asked whether we should delay future consideration and perhaps the matter should be re-visited in a year's time.
7) **Amenity and Community Action Plan 2007-2008 (draft).** Line 4 should read '*conservation and public amenities*'. It was considered that the word 'conflict' gave the wrong connotation, the *balance* between conservation and amenities sounds more favourable. The Chairman remarked that that was a point well made. Further discussions ensued and it was agreed that the word conflict was likely to be misinterpreted. Mr Spicer said that there was a difference between public relations and relations with the public. The Chairman stated that the Board should agree that they were discussing 'relations with the public'.
8) **Report on Signage and Memorial Benches..** Mr Spicer stated that he had had a negative response, but that he personally liked the new signs, perhaps a little small. Mr Gillham reported that he had had adverse response and he did not like them. They seem to be dotted around rather than at the gateways and do not perform the function of stating that you are entering into a special area. Cllr. Whetstone remarked that the bye-law presentation signs were good, but were easily removed by the public and will not last due to vandals. Dr Prendergast replied that the proof will be in the pudding; they are very robust and have proved to be no problem so far. Cllr St. Pierre remarked that people always tell you if they do not like something, never the other way round. The signs need to tell people where the Forest

begins which is what they do. Dr Prendergast stated the only comment he had received was that the gateway signs may not be big enough although those on the A22 were considerably larger than those installed elsewhere. Most of the signs are on the same sites as their predecessors. Mr Thornely-Taylor commented that the old signs warned against sheep and deer. If we do not have a warning sign, then insurance companies will possibly look to us. Mr Cooper commented that the Board saw the signs before they went up and in hindsight suggested that they should have seen them in position. He had no second thoughts. Mr Gillham stated that maybe had the Committee received clear indication of the siting of these signs, the Committee would have taken a different view. Mr Thornely-Taylor stated that the Board did not resolve to remove the deer/sheep signs. Dr Prendergast informed the meeting that the ESCC is putting up new deer signage on the A22.

9) AOB

(i) Drying facilities for the staff. Mr Parsons stated that this was a managerial problem and should be referred to the FGP Committee. Round the old wood-burner (replaced in 2001) there were some sort of drying facilities. He felt the Board could be criticised for not providing facilities for drying clothes and it was an important matter for the staff.

(ii) Un-registered land at Fairwarp. Mr Gillham enquired whether there had been any progress. Dr Prendergast reported that he had considerable correspondence with local people about the land and had referred them to ESCC. ESCC had come back to him seeking to establish if the was on the Forest (it is not). Mr Thornely-Taylor asked if the land had common rights. Dr Prendergast said it had not.

4.4 Mr Marshall moved an amendment to the minutes by removing Mrs F. Temple from 'Also present'.

4.5 The Chairman moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee of 19 February 2007

5.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting had been circulated. Mr Parsons stated that the table lay-out had been modified so that the meeting become more easily understood. He was prepared for 10 minutes question time from the public, but there was no public in attendance. Cllr Parsons invited questions.

3) Finance items

(i) It was pointed out that the second line should read '£84,800' and at the bottom of the paragraph it should read '*the Board should continue to seek alternative sources of funds*'. In the following discussion it was stated that the 1974 Act through to 1986 required a great deal of legal scrutiny. Work is already in hand. We need to look at the facts and in extreme cases we need to seek advice with significant points of conflict. Cllr Whetstone stated that the Act was not altered by the following legislation. The SSSI is not an Act, it is a statutory designation and we have to comply with that and it requires landowners to maintain bio-diversity. Further discussion ensued and the Chairman stated that further clarification of legal status was required. Under (iii) Cllr Barnes suggested that the wording at the bottom of paragraph should read '.....was time-limited: the HLS project budget should be identified separately with an overall budget '.....

4) **HLS.** Cllr St Pierre stated that congratulations were in order for the progress made so far.

5) Improving Public Involvement

(ii) Working with local Parish Councils. Mr Spicer stated that he was worried about regular meetings and whether they would be structured meetings or open fora. The Chairman replied that he cannot answer that, but he felt structured meetings were a good idea and would keep everyone up-to-date, but he asked how often the meetings would be held. Cllr St Pierre remarked that the Board needed to be careful about the time of meetings, so that a diversity of age groups could be present; it is essential to accommodate young mothers. Mr Parsons stated

that perhaps meetings could be once a year or hopefully more than that. Cllr Whetstone suggested we explore together with the Parish Councils what form these meetings should take.

6) **Action Plan 2007/2008 – Finance and Resources.** Mr Cooper stated that he felt it was more a management plan. Cllr Parsons said we have to take on board the policy issues.

The Chairman moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 6 Action Plan 2007-2008 – submission for approval by the Board

Dr Prendergast introduced the Action Plan. He invited questions and suggested that the Board considers Item 3 - Conservation first.

2.1 **Objective – establish perceived conflict between amenity and conservation.** It was stated that this refers to RPA – Item 6. It was agreed that the title should read '*Objective – Resolve perceived conflicts between amenity and conservation*'. Mr Gillham understood that zoning meant that if we were working on certain parts of the Forest then there were other areas of the Forest available as a public amenity. It was suggested that the Action Plan was perhaps getting zoning of car parks through the 'back door'. Dr Prendergast said that this was not the intention, but was a question of looking strategically at how the Board were going to manage the Forest for both people and wildlife. Cllr Whetstone asked why we needed zoning and he was concerned that it would cause more trouble and was a waste of time. Cllr Barnes stated that the Board do not want to re-open the car parks debate and we need different approaches to different parts of the Forest.

Mr Thornely-Taylor said zoning should mean which parts of the Forest were to be reclaimed as heathland and which wooded, and Cllr Reid said there was a lot of uncertainty of what is heathland and what is wooded. Cllr Whetstone commented that he agreed that zoning could apply to Heathland/woodland, but he was totally opposed to zoning visitors around. Mr Gillham stated that the zoning in the document is talking about visitors and we must ensure plenty of amenity land for visitors and we must be transparent. Mr Spicer said that zoning of visitors was totally wrong and it will not work. The Chairman remarked that he understood the reason why car parks came into the zoning was that it was well known that most visitors drive to the Forest. Future consultation with stakeholders via 3KQ will develop a Forest Plan. Due to the Forest fragility, we may have to manage visitors.

2.2 **Objective – Improve understanding, appreciation and perception of the Forest by the Public**

2.2.1 Cllr Parsons suggested we drop the first objective. It was agreed that the next key target should read '*Review implementation of Parkin Plan for Centre*'. The Chairman suggested that it be reviewed at the next RPA Committee meeting or that this recommends when it comes to the Board.

2.3 Cllr Stogden remarked that Section 16 remained the 'bedrock' and reminded the Board what their duties are, but that a quotation in connection with finance should be inserted. The Chairman asked the meeting to adopt the Action Plan as amended; this was agreed.

ITEM 7 Forest Centre Development – update

Dr Prendergast reported that the new 'brown-backed' signs were being designed and that they will go up fairly soon at Wych Cross. Cllr Parsons stated that new deer signs were up on the A22 and the next signs will go up in the next financial year.

ITEM 8 Any Other Business

1. Standing Orders

Dr Prendergast stated that the original Standing Orders were written in 1975 and the new draft was the first attempt since to update them.

It was agreed that the last part of 3.19 ('by prior agreement') should be struck out. The Chairman said that this was a working document and should be looked at by all members of the Board. Mr Thornely-Taylor stated that the FGP Committee should consider and recommend the Standing Orders but that the Board should then adopt them. This was agreed, but Cllr Parsons said that this should not stop us making comments in the meantime. Dr Prendergast asked that before the next FGP Committee meeting everyone emails their thoughts on it. The Chairman asked whether it was appropriate to obtain legal advice since the Standing Orders should be able to withstand scrutiny and be easy to read. Mr Thornely-Taylor agreed to find a solicitor.

2. 3KQ – Developing a Forest Plan through Consultation

2.1 Dr Prendergast stated that the costs did not include administration costs. The Chairman asked the Board whether they approve the tabled document as a generic document which could be sent out to stakeholders and put on the Centre web site. He stated that this was a significant cost and it is important that the Board get it right. It is part of the HLS agreement that this process is carried out and that there is public involvement. Mr Spicer said he would like to see ongoing costs for the following years. It was generally felt that the Board needed professional assistance as it lacks the skills to manage the process. Dr Prendergast stated that by November 2007 there should be a draft Forest Plan and that is as far as 3KQ will proceed. Staff are being trained in facilitation methods and generally people regarded the first Stakeholders Meeting as very fruitful. The November deadline is the cessation of 3KQ's involvement. Cllr Elkin commented that he felt the process was most comprehensive and good value for money. Mr Thornely-Taylor thought that as the employment of 3KQ was a single tender appointment, the Board should put the work out to competitive tender to check the rates were reasonable. The Chairman asked the meeting how did they wish to take the matter forward. Cllr Parsons suggested that the Board asked 3KQ to substantiate their costs and to consider whether some items can be done in another way. Before agreement to go ahead, there should be more clarification of costs and investigation about whether one or two items could be dropped. Dr Prendergast confirmed that the process has to go through an HLS panel, but he felt that the Board has been more rigorous than Defra or Natural England. It was suggested that the Conservation representative from NE be invited to attend a Conservation Committee meeting to confirm NE's financial support. It was pointed out by Dr Prendergast that Jane Mortimer is not a financial person.

2.2 When will this happen. Cllr Whetstone commented that the 4th paragraph in connection with governance of the timetable of activities was a very valid point and the Chairman pointed out that this came out of the first Stakeholders meeting. Cllr Whetstone felt that the first discussion on governance should be by the main Board.

2.3 Cllr Parsons commented that he felt the way forward was to hold an Urgent Committee Meeting, but perhaps the Board should agree to half the costs to keep us on programme or to agree costs for two months at a time. Dr Prendergast agreed it was vital to keep momentum going.

3. Communication Cllr Parsons stated that the Board cannot do enough about communicating with the public; people are crying out for more information and we must learn by our mistakes. Dr Prendergast confirmed that the new web-site was up and running and that he was producing the next issue of *Ashdown Forest Life*. He commented that the more communication that is done, the more there is still to do. Mr Gillham commented that complaints are fairly local and the Board should consider including information on what is happening and what is going to happen in the local Parish Council communications and that the Board should have pre-empted the formation of the new Ashdown Forest Action Group by being more pro-active.

4. Deer Mr Marshall reported on ESCC's continuing development of the deer warden scheme (dealing with deer/traffic collision on roads county-wide) although ESCC had few funds available to support it. He strongly recommended to the Board that they consider very carefully before shooting deer on the Forest.

5. **Cats Protection** Mr Thornely-Taylor enquired about any news on the Cats Protection issue. Dr Prendergast said that the Independent Expert would make a decision by 31 May 2007.

6. **Farewells** The Chairman bid farewell to Cllr Frank Brown and commented that he will be missed. He also said that Mr Fred Marshall has contributed a lot to the deer side and was instrumental in getting the barn at Whitehouse Farm up and ready. Cllr Ray Parsons is retiring as Chairman of the FGP Committee, but will continue to offer advice as and when required.

There being no other questions or comments, the meeting ended at 17.30. The Board then went into a Closed Session

Chairman _____
18 June 2007

Clerk _____