

**Minutes of the
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

14.30, Monday 8 March 2010
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Cllr J Barnes (Chairman), Mr R Thornely-Taylor (Vice Chairman), Mr M Cooper, Mr R Galley, Mr L Gillham, Cllr M Hoy, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr A Reid, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R St Pierre, Mr E Stenhouse, Cllr R Stogdon and Cllr F Whetstone. Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public present who included Mr John Francis, elected to the Board at the Commoners Annual Meeting on 5th March 2010.

Cllr Reid asked, as a Commoner, if there had been any progress on deer culling. The Clerk replied that no decisions had been made and there were two meetings planned, for the end of March, with the district and area deer groups to discuss the matter further.

The Chairman reminded the Board that this meeting was Mr Gillham's last after 20 years of service. He read out a warm tribute written by Mr Glyn. He went on personally to thank Mr Gillham for his help and to say the Board would miss his wise counsel. Mr Gillham replied that it had been an honour to serve and wished the Board well.

Mr Spicer raised a point of order regarding agenda item 07/10 which he felt was presented as a series of *fait accompli*. He questioned the purpose of the Executive Committee and remit of the Chairmen. The Chairman replied that the agenda item would be discussed in closed session at the end of the meeting.

01/10 Apologies.

Apologies were received from Cllr N Bennett, Mr P Glyn and Cllr R Simmons.

02/10 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

There were none.

03/10 To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 23 November 2009 and matters arising - BD 01/10.

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly approved.

03.1/10 Cllr Whetstone asked, in regards to minute 31/09, if the relevant passages of Nix had been circulated as requested. The Chairman replied that they had been circulated by e-mail and would probably be discussed again in future Conservation Committee meetings.

03.2/10 Mr Stenhouse asked, in regards to minute 37.1/09, if there was any update on liabilities or insurance. The Clerk replied the insurers had been contacted and any response would be circulated to all Board members. Culling would probably be discussed at the next cycle of committees.

04/10 To receive the minutes of the Conservation Committee meeting of 11 January 2010 (there were no recommendations to the Board) - BD 02/10.

The Chairman asked Mr Thornely-Taylor, in the absence of Mr Glyn, to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy.

04.1/10 There was a discussion regarding the accuracy of minute 3/10. Mr Spicer said that, in his opinion, the minutes did not correctly reflect the discussion. He went on to say he was not being critical of the project rather of the Board and the Conservation Committee for not looking forward to what will happen next. Mr Thornely-Taylor commented that the Committee was awaiting the outcome of the Chailey Common fencing application before moving forward. It was agreed that Mr Glyn, Cllr St Pierre and Mr Thornely-Taylor would take into account Mr Spicer's comments and redraft the minute.

- 04.2/10 Mr Stenhouse prompted a very short discussion on the standards expected of reports presented to the Board. The Clerk said that the Board should consider more the outcome and conclusions of a report than its presentation and structure.
- 04.3/10 There was a short discussion regarding minute 3/10 (document CON 01/10). Mr Spicer clarified that there was no criticism of the report or of the report's author. All agreed that re-drafting was required as some aspects of the report were very technical and other areas not fully expanded. Mr Thornely-Taylor pointed out that the document would play a very important role in the process if the Board were to choose to enclose any further parts of the Forest. He went on to say it was good that the Conservation Committee had had the opportunity to participate in the formation of the document.
- 04.4/10 There was a brief discussion regarding the Shepherded Grazing Project Report. The Clerk confirmed that the paper was in the final stages of preparation. The Chairman said all members of the Board would receive a copy in order to be fully informed if they should decide to attend the Conservation Committee.

05/10 To receive the minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee meeting of 18 January 2010 (there were no recommendations to the Board) - BD 03/10.

The Chairman asked Mr Cooper to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly received.

06/10 To receive the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting of 15 February 2010 - BD 04/10.

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the FGP Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly received.

06.1/10 The Chairman noted the Urgency Item on the record of the interview with the tenderer for the purposes of outsourcing the book keeping in the light of Mrs Temple's resignation. He went on to say no decision had been taken and a fresh tender was expected that would be considered by FGP Committee or the Executive Committee as a matter of urgency.

06.2/10 Cllr Martin asked about the remuneration for the post. The Chairman confirmed the arrangement was a contractual one and the tenderer would not be an employee. He went on to say tax and legal implications were being assessed.

06.3/10 Mr Stenhouse asked where would the book keeper be based as, in his opinion, off site with regular visits would be preferable. The Chairman replied that Mr Stenhouse's suggestion was a good one.

06.4/10 Cllr Whetstone drew the Board's attention to the Estimates and HLS budget as recommended by the Committee. There were no questions or comments.

The Board agreed to approve the budgets and estimates without any further discussion.

07/10 To receive the recommendations of the Executive Committee meeting of 19 January 2010 – BD 05/10.

07.1/10 Standing Orders, BD 07/10, were discussed. Standing Orders 1.6 and 5.13 were duplicated and should be cross referenced.

07.2/10 The Chairman said that Standing Order 8.8 was an attempt to establish a process. Mr Spicer replied that it had been previously agreed that the Commoners should be consulted and their acceptance sought before the form of words be used. He went on to say he remained unhappy with the form of words used and they did not make sense and required tidying up. The Chairman replied that the form of acceptance would need to be looked at, however, he thought it odd that a Conservator whose role it was to enforce bye-laws could be seen to be in breach of them. He thought this was an obligation every Conservator should be willing to take on as it was not an undue requirement.

- 07.3/10 There was further discussion on the form of words with Cllr Whetstone reporting a point raised by Andrew Ogden at ESCC. Cllr Stogdon thought the Code of Conduct was inappropriate for Commoner Conservators.
- 07.4/10 After further discussion it was agreed that ESCC, with regards to Standing order 8.8, be asked to provide an independent member of any review panel. Therefore a review panel would be made up of two Board members and an outside nominee provided by ESCC. Mr Spicer suggested that a friend could accompany the Board member under review and this was thought a good idea. It was agreed that the wording of the Standing Order be re-drafted to reflect the discussion.

It was agreed that Appendix 1 be set aside again for separate review. It was agreed that the form of acceptance be looked at again and put before the Commoners at the next Annual Meeting in 2011.

- 07.5/10 The Board agreed that, for those residential properties acquiring a Perpetual Licence, annual acknowledgement rents should be increased to £85.00 and their subsequent increase be linked with RPI. The Board did not approve any additional charge in relation to the length of access tracks.

The Board agreed to the Executive Committee's recommendation that acknowledgement rents for business properties should be based on 1.5% of their Rateable Value. It was further agreed that this percentage be reviewed in future by the FGP Committee.

Discussion of BD 06/10 was taken at the end of the meeting in a closed session and without staff present. Mr John Francis was co-opted for the discussion. The Board took note of the recommendations of the Committee of the Whole, agreed that in principle the post of Superintendent and Clerk should be separated, agreed the formation of a working party (Mr R Galley, Mr M Cooper and Mr R Thornely-Taylor) to work with the Superintendent to formulate a detailed scheme for implementing that change for submission to the Board, if possible in June, and resolved that the Clerk should be empowered to enter into an agreement with the Pooles to carry out the financial responsibilities outlined in the revised tender they had submitted. This would be for a trial period of six months.

08/10 Verbal report of the Annual Meeting of the Commoners held on 4 March 2010.

Mr Gillham reported that a new Commoner Conservator, Mr John Francis, had stood unopposed and had been appointed. The turn out was low and the meeting uneventful. There were no major complaints. A further explanation on tree cutting was given to a new Commoner. There was some concern about the effects the current methods of gorse cutting were having in re-growth (cutting low creates dense mats). Mr Stenhouse said there was a lack of interest among Commoners and asked that more be done to communicate with them. Mr Spicer said he supported the Board and staff who attempt to improve communication and they must not get down hearted!

It was agreed that gorse control methods and fire as a tool should be passed to the Conservation Committee for further discussion at a future meeting.

09/10 To approve a date for the first Annual Public Meeting.

This was for the general public, for example, Forest residents who were not Commoners. It was agreed that it would take place on Tuesday 8 June 2010 at 7.30pm at the Forest Centre. If the meeting was a success other venues would be considered. The meeting would be advertised through every possible channel.

10/10 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

There being no urgent items, the meeting went into closed session at 16.00 and the Board concluded its deliberations at approximately 17.00.

Chairman _____ June 2010

Clerk _____