



Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest
Monday 6 March 2012 at 14.30
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr R Thornely-Taylor (Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Mr M Cooper, Mr J Francis, Mr R Galley, Mr P Glyn, Cllr C Hardy, Mrs D Hurrell, Cllr A Reid, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R Stogdon, Cllr R St. Pierre, Cllr S Tidy, Cllr M Weaver and Cllr F Whetstone.

In attendance: Mr C Marrable (Acting Forest Superintendent) Mrs R Marriott (Clerk).

The Chairman welcomed the members of the public present and invited questions. There were no questions.

Prior to the meeting Mr S Aguss of the High Weald Unit gave a detailed presentation on the background to, and the wider advantages of, the Weald Forest Ridge Project. The Chairman thanked Mr Aguss.

| Item | Action |
|--|--------|
| 01/12 Apologies. Apologies were received from Cllr C Dowling. | |
| 02/12 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature. Mr Galley expressed an interest under minute RPA 04.12. | |
| 03/12 To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 28/11, and matters arising – BD 01/12. The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy. The Minutes were then approved. | |
| <i>03.1/12 Matters Arising</i> Cllr Hardy stated that in relation to minute 31.2/11 that Wealden District Council (WDC) had issued Lawful Development Certificates to five of the six structures. At present there was no indication regarding how WDC would proceed with the sixth structure. | |
| <i>03.2/12 Action Log</i> The Board noted the Action Log. | |
| 04/12 To approve the minutes of the Conservation Committee meeting of 9 January 2012 – BD 02/12. The Chairman asked Mr Francis to present the minutes of the meeting which had been assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6. | |
| <i>04.1/12 Matters Arising</i> <i>Minute 03/12 Fenceless fencing</i> – progress made at Epping would be monitored. The system, as it stands, is not suitable for use on the Forest. <i>Minute 04/12 Winter Grazing</i> – there was plenty of grazing available thanks to the generosity of many people. <i>Minute 07/12 Potential land purchase</i> – this land had been withdrawn from sale. <i>Minute 07/12 Forest Centre trees</i> – the remedial work had been completed. <i>Minute 07/12 Ecological report</i> – this had been forwarded to the WDC planning office. | |
| 05/12 To approve the minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee meeting of 6 February 2012 – BD 03/12. The Chairman asked Mr Cooper to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6. | |
| <i>05.1/12 Matters Arising</i> <i>Minute 3.1/12 Ashdown Forest Llama Park</i> – Mr Francis said he was finalising a feasibility paper for the next RPA meeting. The Chairman asked if he could précis the content for the benefit of the | |

Board. Mr Francis said there would be issues surrounding a purchase; there was an Agricultural Occupancy Tie and a Section 106 agreement in place. The floor space is comparable with the proposed Forest Centre and the costs of purchase would be similar to the Forest Centre development. The land, car parking, café facilities and access to the A22 were advantageous. However, there were disadvantages in that there was no direct access to the Forest for visitors and, in particular, school groups. Visitors would be required to cross the A22 or to use the public footpath that crosses private land (approx. a 15 minute walk). This would be a logistical problem for school groups. The current livestock barn would require expenditure; there were questions over the size of the tractor storage and lack of office space. There were also legal and conveyancing costs to take into account. It was agreed to defer further discussion to the confidential session.

04.2/12 Millbrook Farm – Mr Cooper stated that Mr Marrable and The Clerk had met with the property owners and their legal representative. Nothing had been settled. He felt that he should now distance himself from the situation. He said that discussions had been amicable and constructive and both parties had tried hard to reach an accommodation. The Clerk clarified the areas under discussion and gave an account of the meeting which would be recorded in a note. She reminded the Board that it was contrary to policy to give up land. The Chairman suggested that, as there were precedents, there should be a unilateral grant of a perpetual licence to legitimise the current state of affairs. He went on to say that the issue could not currently be resolved and should return to the next RPA committee.

It was agreed that a paper, clearly showing the areas under discussion and laying out a proposed resolution should be available to aid the discussions of the next RPA Committee. The matter would then be placed before the Board for final agreement.

RPA /
RM

Minute 06/12 Forest Centre Working Party – Mr Cooper gave a brief outline of the current situation: The ecology report had been submitted to WDC. A great crested newt population study was underway and a mitigation strategy had been commissioned which would be submitted to WDC and Natural England (NE) hopefully with approval in due course. The ‘Working Party’ should be renamed and become a formal body within the Board’s organisation structure. The ‘Project Committee’ would have a chairman and Board representation. Mr Cooper would be putting together a paper for the next Executive Committee meeting and, in due course, the Board. There was a short discussion on the legality, status, liabilities, responsibilities, delegated powers and structure of a ‘Project Committee’. Mr Cooper said the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust (AFCT) had been financially very helpful in taking the project forward and he was in communication with Mr Parsons, chairman of AFCT, to seek further support and to assess if the AFCT was an appropriate place to hold funds for the Forest Centre development. Mr Hassall and Mr Hurst would be addressing the AFCT AGM on March 21st regarding the current status of the project and, depending on the reaction, a formal proposition would be made. Mr Cooper also hoped that the AFCT would agree to fund the work of the ecologist and for the mitigation strategy which would help take the project a further step forward.

04.5/12 Ashdown Forest Golf Club - The Chairman reported that East Sussex County Council had not granted a lease to the Golf Club. A formal letter to the Board would arrive in due course.

09/12 Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Beacon – The Clerk confirmed that the beacon would only be lit if weather conditions were favourable and there was no risk of a Forest fire at such a sensitive time of the year.

06/12 To approve the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting of 20 February 2012 - BD 04/12.

The Chairman asked Cllr Whetstone to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been assessed by the Committee for accuracy. The Minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.

06.1/12 Matters Arising

Minute 04.2/12 – The Clerk explained the situation in regards to spending the identified surplus. She said that the radio improvements (adding a booster station at Kings Standing Police Training Ground gatehouse) would cost more than anticipated. She had also been informed by ESCC

procurement office that she would not be able to tap into any ESCC procurement systems until at least May.

Minute 05.2/12 Disposal of Land – The Chairman said that there had been concern from the Friends of Ashdown Forest regarding the disposal of land which the Friends had acquired on behalf of the Forest. He said he had had a conversation with the Friends' chairman and had explained the underlying considerations and that small areas could be sold in order to facilitate the purchase of large and significant areas within the Pale. He stated that it was the Board's policy to acquire land within the pale, that the Friends had hugely helped the Forest over the years and that there was normally no question of land being sold apart from isolated areas outside the Pale not connected to the Forest (such as the recent sale of land at Jessops). Only in special circumstances might land be considered for sale, for example if a large area of land became available within the Pale, the purchase of which could not otherwise be funded.

Minute 05.3/12 Friends of Ashdown Forest – There was a brief discussion and it was agreed that a reduction in riding permits would be problematical and logistically difficult. The Clerk had met with Mrs Arnold, Friends chairman, and had found a way forward. Events sponsored by the Friends would be free and other events would be available at a reduced rate to their members.

Minute 05.4/12 Glenwood South – The Clerk said that she had been in contact with ESCC and that she had been advised that the land in question was registered to ESCC in 2008. She went on to say that she had written to the Land Registry and was awaiting a reply.

07/12 To approve the revisions to the accounts made at the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting of 20 February 2012 - BD 05/12.

The Chairman presented the revised accounts. He said that the budget had been agreed by ESCC and that the grant would remain the same in this financial year with a small increase in the next.

07.1/12 Cllr Tidy said that the routine provision for the purchase of capital items should be made in the estimates. She went on to say the Board should be financially "more self-reliant". The Chairman said that the Friends supported the purchase of Ranger vehicles and Mr Marrable stated that the Friends generous contributions allowed the staff to work more effectively. Cllr Barnes said that the Friends method of providing capital was not unusual and was, in fact, common practice outside local government. Mr Cooper said that charities were expected to spend monies for the purposes for which they were intended and suggested that, perhaps, the AFCT should be purchasing radios and vehicles. Cllr Whetstone said the Board should clarify with the Friends about what they spend their monies on.

07.2/12 The Clerk said that up until this point she had understood that the accounts needed to have identified reserves and that she had not been able to 'ring-fence' finances in the past. Mrs Hurrell said that the general reserves contained, as agreed, six-months salaries and office/administration costs to allow 'business as usual'. There was a short discussion on the appropriateness of reserves. The Chairman stated that the Board had no choice in regards to the accounting practices as they were pre-determined. The Chairman asked the FGP committee to debate the issue of reserves at the next meeting

It was agreed that the FGP committee should, at its next meeting, debate and clarify the issue of 'reserves'.

**FGP /
RM**

08/12 Update on the recruitment of the new Director – verbal report.

The Chairman reported that, after interviews, the post had been offered and accepted by Pat Buesnel who will take up her post, on May 1st, after a medical and contracts had been signed. A formal announcement would be made at a later date. The Board thanked Mrs Douglas for her assistance.

09/12 Clerk and Superintendents Report – verbal update.

09.1/12 Superintendent's Report - Mr Marrable said he had had meetings with NE. There had been no NE representation at the last few Conservation Committee meetings due to the logistics within

an organisation that had suffered severe cuts. He had had meetings with Louise Hutchby from NE regarding retaining the fences on the south of the Forest – this issue was due for a 15 year review. He had been involved with the new radio installation and stated the additional costs would allow the Board to fulfil its Health and Safety obligations in regards to its lone working policies; he had attended two deer meetings, one of which was a warden training day; the staff had hosted a Christmas lunch for Forest friends such as contractors and those who help out on a regular basis and this was a much appreciated ‘thank-you’; he had attended the Army Conservation Meeting; met with the armed security guards at Wych Cross Place; been involved with the grazing trainee interviews, attended the Friends Vachery meeting; attended the Ranger’s ‘Shotgun Safety’ course (led by a firearms officer from the Met. Police); had numerous meetings with ecologists; undertaken night-time newt populations surveys; led three Conservation Group sessions and attended a ‘Local Nature Partnership’ workshop. He went on to say there had been five fires in the last two weeks – three were controlled burns and two were contractor accidents. Deer RTAs were recorded as 43 to date which is down on previous years. Finally, the tractor had been involved in a serious road traffic accident (Friday) neither driver was injured and the insurance process was underway.

09.1/12 Clerk’s Report - The Clerk stated that as yet there was no correspondence from WDC regarding the service level agreement; the Forest had been assisted on numerous occasions by volunteers from Crawley Probation Services; she had attended meetings of the Ashdown Forest Visitor Management Partnership and that there had been a fall in the numbers of Information Barn Volunteers. The Clerk asked if there could be some form of travel expense remuneration for these volunteers and if this could be discussed at the next FGP meeting. School visit numbers recorded only one visit since the last Board meeting; 115 wood permits had been issued with 66 to Commoners and 49 to non-Commoners; the next exhibition in the Information Barn would be photographs by John Lanteri-Laura; there had been no incidents of misbehaviour by dogs; there had been no incidents of fly-tipping; £1000 worth of Christmas trees had been sold; the Forest had been used by a wide range of organisations including astronomers, scouts and lowland search and rescue dogs. In regards to social networking 581 people subscribe to the e-news (181 of which are riders), 962 people follow on Twitter, 136 on Facebook and 66 on LinkedIn.

It was agreed that Information Barn volunteer expenses be discussed at the next FGP meeting.

**RM /
FGP**

10/12 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

There were none.

The Board then entered a confidential session.

The meeting closed at 17.15

Chairman _____

June 2012

Clerk _____