

## **CONFIDENTIAL**

### **Emergency Meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest Ashdown Forest Centre 1830, Tuesday May 25 2004**

Present: Philip Glyn (Chair), Frank Brown, Michael Cooper, Chris Dowling (left at 1935), Leslie Gillham, Fred Marshall, Hew Prendergast (Clerk), Tony Reid (left at 1935), Tony Slack, Frances Whetstone, Alan White.

Apologies: Daphne Bagshawe, Mary McPherson, Phil Scott.

Also present: David Streeter (President, Society of Friends of Ashdown Forest).

Hew Prendergast gave the background to the meeting. The previous Wednesday he had learned by chance from a member of the Stuart family that trustees (possibly of a family will; Simon Stuart of Windyridge died in 2002 [?]) were selling 450 acres of woodland at Crowborough Warren. The area had apparently been on the market for some time and an offer for it had already been made by local property owners that was acceptable to the trustees.

When Hew said that the Board of Conservators had a policy of trying to purchase land within the Ancient Pale, he was encouraged to get in touch with one of the trustees who advised that the Board could submit an expression of interest to a meeting that is taking place on Saturday 30 May involving the trustees and the Stuart family. She emphasised that the trustees would consider only an offer for the whole area.

As far as Hew knew, the 450 acres are a mixture of softwood (mainly pine) plantations, chestnut coppice, and unmanaged deciduous (e.g. birch) woodland. Aerial photographs taken in September 1999 appear to show areas without trees although Fred Marshall suggested that these may have been planted up since. The woodlands are divided up by rides and banks, and through their eastern part runs a stream with some lakes – an area of high amenity value and interest. The northern and western boundaries are with the Forest but the exact extent of the area for sale is not yet known. Tilhill Forestry manages the woodlands and ‘tolerates’ public access. A Woodland Grant Scheme runs until 2009 but neither its value nor its aims are known. According to the trustee the woodlands have been valued for the Inland Revenue at £1000/acre.

Hew outlined the post WW2 acquisitions of Forest land totalling 200 acres, the largest single block being 89 acres (Chelwood Common). He said that the Board had to decide a) whether it was interested in the land and b), if it was, to devise and implement a strategy straightaway in order to give the trustees an offer that would attract their attention. He had already told the trustee that the Board could not simply make an offer but would have to seek funds.

Philip Glyn asked if, given the Board’s policy, there was unanimous agreement that the Board should consider the possibility of buying the land. There was.

David Streeter said that the Friends too supported the buying of land within the Pale. He added that the response to the trustees must indicate the Board's serious intent, and mention the ways in which funds might be raised. A possible source of funds is the Heritage Lottery Fund to whose Regional Manager he had talked earlier in the day. Any grant < £1 million could be dealt with by its local panel which takes an interest in its own region and does not need to consider national priorities. He said that the funds are there. Its contribution to a purchase could comprise 90% of the District Valuer's valuation, but a figure of 70-75% is more likely. Mr Gillham warned that actual costs may well exceed a District Valuer's valuation. Criteria for selection for HLF support include a) its conservation designation – and Crowborough Warren is not an SSSI – and b) public benefit. The removal from private ownership and into public ownership would clearly fit the second. Mr Streeter said there was no other fund of HLF's magnitude. He doubted whether even a fast-track review of an application for funds could be decided upon before September.

Chris Dowling warned against the danger of getting embroiled into competitive bidding against other potential purchasers and Leslie Gilham said that the Board's course must be through the proper channels. Frank Brown said that the land would enable direct access to the Forest from Crowborough. Philip Glyn mentioned that Home Farm, near/ adjacent to the land for sale is also on the market, for £1.8 million.

Michael Cooper had talked to two commercial valuers (he gave the contacts to Hew Prendergast), one of whom, at Knight Frank, would charge £1500 + VAT and travel expenses. He said that the Board's commissioning of a valuer would strengthen the impression given to the trustees of the Board's interest and intent. Leslie Gillham said that the Board must express its excitement at the opportunity to purchase and say that it has held an emergency meeting. It was important to strike the right balance between the Board's urgency of response and its need to act according to the protocol fitting for a public body with a constitution, such as getting valuations of the land.

The agreed action points for Hew Prendergast were to contact as follows:

- contact the trustee, emphasising the Board's high interest, and its intention to approach HLF; asking for information regarding the exact boundary of the area and the terms of the lease to Tilhill; and asking for permission to get the land valued;
- contact one of the valuers (initially Knight Frank) with whom Michael Cooper had been in touch;
- the Heritage Lottery Fund;
- contact the District Valuer.

The meeting ended at ca. 1955.