

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF
ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE, WYCH
CROSS ON MONDAY 23 NOVEMBER 1998 AT 2.30 pm.**

Present: Mr D C Cumming (in the Chair), Air Marshall Sir Frederick Sowrey,
Mrs D M Bagshawe, Miss M McPherson, Mrs S Stokes,
Dr H D V Prendergast, Messrs D H O Allen, L J Gillham, R I F Parsons,
A G Reid, R N Thornely-Taylor, F W J Whetstone, A N White.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public present.

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies for absence had been received from Mr D L Hall, Cllr T R May and Cllr M Skilton.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 September 1998

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

ITEM 3 Matters arising

3.1 Foxhunting on Ashdown Forest

3.1.1 In the interest of the public present, the Board agreed to take Item 1 from the Minutes of the Roads, Planning and Amenities Committee Meeting held on 19 October 1998 first. The item was presented by Mrs Stokes who stated that the advice from Mr Fleming QC was that the Board could ban or allow foxhunting on the Forest and not be in breach of their duties under the Ashdown Forest Act 1974. The possible ambiguity in Byelaw 6 should be resolved, if necessary, after a decision on foxhunting has been taken. Mrs Stokes also covered the main points in the Committee's consideration of the way ahead for review of the Board's policy on foxhunting and put the following recommendation to the Board:

In the absence of any legislation on foxhunting with hounds, the review of the Board's policy on foxhunting should be continued within the context of its current Management Plan review, and the Board should now consider entering into a wide ranging consultation phase in accordance with the 'Notes for Guidance' which form part of the advice from Nigel Fleming QC. However, as the Board has neither the manpower nor financial resources to conduct such a wide ranging consultation, the Committee recommends that no such consultation is begun until the Board receives unequivocal confirmation in writing from East Sussex County Council that it will pay all costs involved in undertaking such a consultation including all administrative costs incurred by the Board and all fees, expenses and other costs which may arise as a result of any legal action or actions, entered into in connection with the review of the Board's policy on foxhunting.

The Committee further recommends to the Board that, in line with the advice from Mr Fleming, the Clerk should write to the two Hunts and

inform them that it is the Board's intention to review its policy on foxhunting within the context of the Management Plan, but in the meantime in accordance with the 1993 Management Plan, to continue to permit foxhunting on the Forest under the same conditions and restrictions as apply at the present time.

3.1.2 The Chairman invited comments from the Board. There were none. The recommendations were agreed unanimously.

3.2 There were no further matters arising.

ITEM 4 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 5 October 1998

4.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Gillham.

4.2 Sheep savaging The Clerk reported that 28 sheep had been killed by dogs whilst they had been grazing on the Forest. A further two sheep had been killed after the sheep had been relocated in a field nearby. This would indicate that the dog or dogs were local to the area. He confirmed that dogs caught savaging sheep on common land could be shot by the owner of the sheep.

4.3 English Nature representation Concern was expressed at the withdrawal of the English Nature representative from the Heathland Project Officers Meeting. The Clerk was unaware of the reasons. He did state that a new officer had been appointed to the Sussex and Surrey Team; he had been briefed by the Clerk and was due to have a conducted tour of the Forest the following week. It was hoped that the new English Nature officer would attend the Conservation Committee meetings.

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 19 October 1998

5.1 The presentation of the Minutes, which had been previously circulated, was continued by Mrs Stokes.

5.2 Planning applications

5.2.1 Lattice mast at Nutley Telephone Exchange Wealden District Council is under some pressure to agree the mast. Mr Parsons reported that he understood current Government advice was to disguise such masts if possible. He added that owners are responsible for maintenance of any structure and this responsibility would encourage dismantling should it become redundant in the future.

5.2.2 Dallingridge dam The Clerk reported to the Board that the work on the bund had not yet begun.

5.2.3 Animal incinerator on Mardens Hill Mrs Bagshawe reported to the Board that this matter would be considered at the December meeting of the East Sussex Planning Committee.

5.3 Speed limit enforcement on Ashdown Forest

5.3.1 Mr Gillham expressed his extreme exasperation and concern over the reasons given by the Police for the lack of enforcement of the speed limit, namely the distance between the roundels. Mr White stated that the upright signs between Newick and Haywards Heath were not visible from one to the next. The Board agreed that the Clerk should write to the Chief Constable, with a copy to the Chief engineer of the County Council, asking why, when there had been police representation at every meeting of the High Weald Traffic Forum, the number of roundels required to enable enforcement had never been mentioned.

5.3.2 Dr Prendergast stressed that an unenforceable speed limit would jeopardise any possible extension of grazing on the Forest.

There being no further questions, Mrs Stokes moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 6 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 2 November 1998

6.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr White.

6.2 Budget Estimates

6.2.1 In view of the possibility of the East Sussex County Council contribution being reduced, the Board discussed possible ways to reduce expenditure and increase income. Some ideas had been raised at previous Board Meetings, including the removal of litter bins (in the hope that visitors would take their rubbish home) and charges for car parks. It was agreed that a working party, similar to that established in 1993, should be set up to investigate all sources of income.

6.2.2 Mr Thornely-Taylor queried the expenditure for cutting of the roadside verges by Forest staff. The Clerk explained that the verges of the A22 had been mown to reduce deer casualties and the verges of the C3 had been mown to enable drivers to see and avoid the sheep and cattle.

6.2.3 The Board accepted the Committee's recommendation to agree the Revised Estimates for 1998/99 and the Estimates for 1999/00.

6.3 Forest Rate for 1999/00

6.3.1 The Board discussed the possibility of raising the Rate more than RPI +1%. It was felt the idea should be put by a Commoner Conservator at the Commoners' AGM but should first be considered by the working party looking at income.

6.3.2 The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation to increase the Forest Rate by 4.2%, being the RPI of 3.2% plus 1%.

6.4 Dates for Board and Committee Meetings in 1999/00 It was confirmed that all Meetings would normally start at 2.30 pm but where site visits were involved, start timings would be on the appropriate Agenda..

The Board agreed the dates for Board and Committee Meetings in 1999/00.

6.5 Ashdown Forest Panel In response to a question the Clerk confirmed that under the Trust Deeds the Panel may spend any income it deems to be surplus on environmental projects within East Sussex.

6.6 Ashdown Forest Map The clerk informed the Board that the map would need to be updated and reprinted next year. Mrs Bagshawe suggested that a quote be obtained from the printing department of the East Sussex County Council.

There being no further questions, Mr White moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 7 Clerk to report on sundry matters

7.1 “Kill Your Speed” campaign The Clerk informed the Board that he had attended the launch of the County Council “Kill Your Speed” campaign and had committed the Conservators to supporting the campaign aimed at reducing speed related road deaths in the County.

7.1 Distribution of Minutes The Minutes of the last Board Meeting had been placed in Crowborough Library. Space on the County Council’s Web Page had been negotiated and future Minutes would be placed there together with a brief description of the duties of the Board of Conservators and the role of the Information Centre. It was agreed that copies of the draft Committee Minutes should be made available to members of the public who attend the Board Meetings.

7.2 Traffic safety The Clerk reported that he had been informed by the Highways Department that a realignment of the Kings Standing junction was planned. It was anticipated that making it into a ‘T’ junction would reduce the number of accidents at this site. It was agreed that the Clerk should try to find out if the County Council had monitored speeds on the Forest roads since the introduction of the 40 mph limit.

ITEM 8 Any other business

8.1 There being no other business the public withdrew and the Board went into Confidential Session.

Chairman _____
22 March 1999

Clerk _____