

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF
ASHDOWN FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE, WYCH
CROSS ON MONDAY 22 NOVEMBER 1999 AT 2.30 pm.**

Present: Mr D H O Allen (in the Chair), Mrs D M Bagshawe, Miss M McPherson,
Mrs S Stokes, Dr H D V Prendergast, Messrs D C Cumming, L J Gillham,
P Glyn, D L Hall, T May, R I F Parsons, A G Reid, M Skilton,
R M 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 There were no apologies for absence, there being a full attendance.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 September 1999

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 Speed limits The Clerk informed the Board that the speed limit on the built up section of the C3 was being enforced as it was elsewhere on Forest roads; he was not aware of any police checks within the grazing area. There had been no further sheep or cattle casualties since the last Board Meeting.

3.2 Assemblies on the Forest

3.2.1 The Clerk advised the Board that Counsel's advice had been received as to what constituted an "organised gathering or assembly" as referred to in the Ashdown Forest Act 1974. He drew the Board's attention to Item 4 of the advice and quoted "A body of people, such as a hunt, or a sponsored walk or run, is not a 'gathering or assembly' in the Forest unless there is at least some fixed element of the activity which can reasonably be said to occur in the Forest as an event ... If the hunt meets outside the Forest, but merely travels through the Forest whilst the hunt is in progress, again it seems to me unlikely that this could sensibly be described as a gathering or assembly in the Forest. In any event, if the hunt is to be seen as an *organised* gathering or assembly, the number of persons within the 'assembly' can only sensibly be those within the hunt itself, and hunt followers (certainly hunt protesters) could not reasonably be included.

3.2.2 Approval for such assemblies or organised events which do come under the terms of the Act should be sought from the relevant Local Authorities who must act according to the law and must abide by the decision of the Court of Appeal in the Somerset ruling.

ITEM 4 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 11 October 1999

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

4.2 To review the grazing of heathland to date

4.2.1 Mr Gillham recommended all Board members visit the grazing area to see for themselves the effect of two years grazing on the heathland in the grazing area.

4.2.2 It was noted that deer had been seen grazing amongst the sheep and cattle. It was agreed that an increase in the number of cattle would be beneficial as they are particularly good at grazing the regrowth of scrub birch. However, the animals would never be able to tackle the established scrub so a combination of grazing and mechanical management would be needed in future.

4.2.3 Mr Glyn, supported by Mr Whetstone, advised the Board that in some areas of the country where horses had been introduced to graze heathland, there had been some evidence of abuse. The Board agreed that should the need ever arise to consider the introduction of horses to graze the heathland, strict guidelines would need to be in operation.

4.2.4 A few residents within the grazing area had found the cow bells irritating at night. This matter will be brought to the grazier's attention.

4.2.5 **The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation that, in addition to regularly monitoring progress, a cycle of three five yearly reviews of the overall management of the heathland on the Forest, covering both the grazing area and outside areas for comparison, should be carried out.**

4.3 Additional sources of funds

4.3.1 Mr Skilton asked if grants available from the EU or other bodies were exploited to the full. Miss McPherson said the County Council employed dedicated staff. The Clerk informed the Board that he used the County Council's database facility when appropriate. The Chairman reminded the Board of the brainstorming session on alternative funds planned for the following week.

4.3.2 **The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation that in principle, it should seek to renew Stewardship Schemes for the heathland areas of the Forest where appropriate.**

4.4 Forest Vegetation Survey and computerisation of records

4.4.1 The Chairman of the Board drew the Board's attention to the cost of the proposed survey. Although not yet costed, it is estimated that the whole project, including 6 months staff costs and the purchase of the necessary software will be between £12,000 and £15,000.

4.4.2 **The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation in principle to obtain during 2000, the necessary hard and software systems for recording Forest data in consultation with the County Ecologist and English Nature. Secondly, to let a short term contract for a suitably qualified person to conduct and record a Vegetation survey of the whole Forest during the course of 2001.**

- 4.5 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 25 October 1999

- 5.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mrs Stokes.

5.2 Planning Applications

- 5.2.1 Pooh Bridge Mr Parsons informed the Board that an entirely new bridge was being built on the site of "Pooh Bridge". The old wood was being stored by the County Council until a use for it had been found. The Clerk confirmed that the proposed new car park would replace the existing car park. The Forest would benefit by footpath access to the bridge being on private land and a reduction in maintenance costs. The property owner did not wish to proceed with the application unless the Board's approval for the project had been obtained. The Board supported the project in principle.

- 5.2.2 Mr Parsons also informed the Board that the granting of planning approval in Wrens Warren was a major exception to Wealden District Council's planning policy and had been advertised as such.

- 5.3 Millennium project Concern was expressed that a new clump of Scots Pines was contrary to the Board's aim to maintain heathland. However, as there was an established tradition to mark significant events by the planting of such clumps and the seedlings used would all come from the Forest, **the Board agreed the Committee's proposal for a new clump. The Board also agreed to the erection of a suitable stone monolith, subject to any costs being met from outside the Board's budget.**

- 5.4 Wooden finger posts Mrs Bagshawe informed the Board that the County Council's policy was now to maintain those wooden signs which are essential and the County Council would make a small fund available for this purpose.

- 5.5 Dog Fouling The Clerk reminded the Board that a decision had been taken last year not to provide bins for dog waste as these would lead to urbanisation of the Forest and special arrangements would have to be made for its collection. Mr Prendergast informed the Board that a survey of one car park had been carried out on the South Downs. It was suggested that the Clerk contact the South Downs Conservation Board.

- 5.6 Mardens Hill incinerator The Clerk informed the Board that he would be attending the forthcoming Public Enquiry.

- 5.6 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 8 November 1999

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

- 6.2 Forest Rate The Clerk agreed to find out if the areas which determine the Categories could still be stated in acres. **The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation to increase the Forest Rate by 2.1% being the RPI of 1.1% plus 1%.**
- 6.3 Revised Estimates for 1999/2000 **The Board agreed the Committee's recommendation to approve the Revised Estimates for 1999/2000 and the Estimates for 2000/01.**
- 6.4 Dates for Board and Committee Meetings in 2000/01 The Chairman confirmed that the dates could not be changed due to the problem of synchronisation. As no other day of the week other than Mondays seemed suitable, it was agreed that one meeting would start in the morning. Mr Thornely-Taylor was most affected and he was asked to advise the Clerk as to which meeting should be scheduled for a morning start.
- 6.5 Crowborough Integrated Transport Strategy Plan Mrs Bagshawe informed the Board that she would be attending the meeting in her capacity as a County Councillor. She offered to represent the Board if required. The Board agreed that Mrs Bagshawe should ask that the Board be kept informed.
- 6.6 There being no further questions, Mr White moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 7 The Clerk to report on sundry matters

- 7.1 The Clerk informed the Board that a few members of the public had contacted the office to find out the purpose of the clearing made alongside the B2188. They had been informed that this was part of the heathland management programme being a bracken scrape which was to be reseeded with heather, and not the site for a new car park as some thought.

ITEM 8 Any other business

- 8.1 Ashdown Forest on television The Clerk informed the Board that an episode of "Carlton Country" was to be screened that night. The subject of the programme was the pros and cons of Rhododendron; Ashdown Forest Conservation Volunteers were shown clearing Rhododendron ponticum from heathland.
- 8.2 Teachers Pack Mr Prendergast informed the Board that he may have located a possible source of funds to enable the project to proceed.
- 8.3 There being no further questions, the meeting closed at 4.15 pm.

Chairman _____
20 March 2000

Clerk _____