

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

1430, Monday 14 November 2005
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present Mr P. Glyn (in the Chair), Mr J. Barnes, Mr F. Brown, Mr M. Cooper,
Mr L. Gillham, Mr M. Lock, Mr F. Marshall, Mrs R. O’Keeffe, Mr R. Parsons, Dr
H. Prendergast (Clerk), Mr S. Radford-Kirby, Mr R. Stogdon, Mrs R. St Pierre,
Mr F. Whetstone (arrived late), Mr A. White, Mrs J Wirdnam.
Minutes taken by Mrs R. Marriott.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public present. He reminded the public that they were not allowed to speak to the meeting. He also announced that Mr Tim Raikes would be available for advice by telephone.

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr A. Reid.

ITEM 2 Access to the A275

2.1 The Chairman reported that he had recently received a letter from Mrs Helen Ralston in which she advised that the Trustees of the Cats Protection had agreed to seek expert opinion. The Board agreed that a positive response should be made, in line with Mr Raikes’ comments. The Board agreed to abide by the outcome.

ITEM 3 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 September 2005 and matters arising

3.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by the Chairman.

3.2 6.3 Appendix 1 had not been sent to Board Members. It was arranged that it would be sent out as soon as possible.

3.3 6.4 (iv) to read “The Board agree to derogate the principle of land in exchange for access in this instance”.

3.4 There being no further comments or amendments, the Minutes were then approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 4 To approve the Minutes of the Conservation Committee held on 26 September 2005

4.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Gillham.

4.2 Higher Level Stewardship Scheme Mr Glyn informed the Board that he had received a reply from the House of Commons acknowledging DEFRA had a major problem with the maps for the new scheme. Until the computers had been sorted out, there would be little progress. The officers could do nothing.

- 4.3 Grazing In response to a query from Mr White, the Clerk reported that English Nature had yet to clarify its attitude to grazing. For the benefit of new members, Mr Gilham gave a brief background to the grazing issues. He confirmed that grazing on the Forest was a success and would enable future comparisons to be made that would reflect the change in management techniques.
- 4.4 WDC Planning comments Mr Barnes suggested that comments on planning matters should be copied to local WDC members. Mr Parsons undertook to ensure that the consultation process via WDC web site worked in practice.
- 4.5 There being no further comments, the Minutes were then approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning and Amenity Committee Meeting held on 10 October 2005

- 5.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Marshall.
- 5.2 Planning matters
- 5.2.1 It was agreed that Committee members would receive a summary of applications and comments made.
- 5.2.2 Concern was expressed at the visual intrusion of the development at Faircote Stud.
- 5.2.3 The Clerk agreed to look at the timescale for comments.
- 5.3 Review of Licences It was agreed that the review of Licences would be put out to tender, not because of the expense but for the purpose of best practice.
- 5.4 Encroachments/Byelaw breaches
- 5.4.1 The Clerk reported that there had been no further problems at the Old Fox House and the matter remained in the hands of the County Solicitor. Mr Barnes stated that if the undertaking was breached, it would be grounds for an injunction.
- 5.4.2 It was agreed that, if a Ranger was threatened while carrying out his duties, the police should be informed.
- 5.4.3 Following a discussion, it was agreed that the legality of recorders should be investigated although the use of the open two-way radio (so that all staff could hear any discussion) would be the preferred method of protecting a Ranger in a potentially difficult situation.
- 5.5 Tea Rooms Concern was expressed about the profitability of a tea room. While supporting the idea of providing refreshments at the Centre, it was suggested that an interim plan for the provision of refreshments at a simpler level could be considered.

5.6 Commercial activities on the Forest

5.6.1 Hunting The Chairman confirmed that drag hunting, ie the hounds follow a scent previously laid by a member of the hunt, is allowed on the Forest providing the law is observed and the participants comply with the Forest bye-laws.

5.6.2 Gun dogs It was agreed that the organised training of gun dogs on Forest land should continue providing the participants kept to the allocated area and there was no firing of blanks. The fee would be decided at the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

5.6.3 It was agreed that enquiries should be made as to how other managers of public access land deal with the risk of kites causing injury.

5.6.4 Non-reinstatement of Forest verge at the top of Kidds Hill Mr Marshall expressed his dissatisfaction with the failure to enforce the repair of the verge.

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

ITEM 6 To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 7 November 2005

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

6.2 It was proposed and agreed that the motion at 6.5 (2) should read “establish by arbitration, through an appointee suggested by the President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the uplift in value of the site with due regard to its potential for development”.

6.3 Whitehouse Farm barn

6.3.1 Mr White expressed his concern over the potential of a cash flow difficulty, as it is the Board’s policy that the general reserve should amount to 50% of the annual salary and administration costs.

6.3.2 It was suggested that a possible way to protect the reserve would be to seek interest free funds from the Ashdown Forest Trust (AFT) and the Society of Friends of Ashdown Forest. If funds for a bye-law officer were rejected by the AFT, funds could be sought for the barn. A good precedent had been set with the funding of machinery. Advice would be sought from Mr Reid.

6.3.3 The Board agreed an expenditure of £88,000 on the barn.

6.4 Fees for activities on the Forest **The Board agreed to adopt a policy that all fees relating to activities on the Forest should be raised annually by the rate of inflation to the nearest full number.** It was agreed that the fees for riding permits would be discussed at the next F&GP meeting.

6.5 Defra Stewardship Schemes

- 6.5.1 The Clerk summarised the position regarding the four stewardship schemes currently in place. These will taper off or they can be withdrawn by mutual agreement after five years. Currently, the schemes give back 50% of the costs of work such as bracken mowing and tree felling; work is done in house and by contractors.
- 6.5.2 It is hoped that the Higher Level Stewardship scheme, a competitive scheme, will eventually cover the whole of the Forest's heathland and will be paid at a rate of £200 per hectare. There will be a phased introduction as the current Countryside Stewardship schemes finish.
- 6.5.3 Work done on the Forest is done in line with English Nature's Public Service Agreement to get 95% of English heathland into favourable condition by 2010.
- 6.5.4 A major cost will be the extension of the grazing, the favoured method of heathland management, either through close-shepherding or by some use of fencing.
- 6.5.5 The Clerk confirmed that the Forestry Commission contribute towards the cost of woodland management.
- 6.6 Estimates The Board agreed the revised estimates for 2005/06 and the estimates for 2006/07.**
- 6.7 Mr Lock drew the Board's attention to the state of the County Council's finances. It was agreed that the F&GP Committee would look at potential savings that could be made.
- 6.8 Signage
- 6.8.1 The Clerk showed the Board samples of the proposed new gateway signs for the Forest. These, with minor adaptations, would be used to scale for the entrance to the Visitor Centre and Forest car parks.
- 6.8.2 The Board agreed that the design was good but felt that a phased introduction might avoid the charge of extravagance while helping to generate income by directing the public to the Centre. A discussion about the merits of seeking sponsorship for the signs followed. A press release would be prepared for the launch of the signs.
- 6.9 There being no further questions or comments, Mr Glyn moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed. The Board moved to a Confidential Session.

The meeting closed at 5.25 pm.

Chairman _____
13 March 2006

Clerk _____