

**Minutes of the  
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

14.30, Monday 23 November 2009  
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr R Thornely-Taylor (Acting Chairman), Mr M Cooper, Mr R Galley, Mr L Gillham, Mr P Glyn, Cllr M Hoy, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr A Reid, Cllr R Simmons, Mr E Stenhouse, Cllr R Stogdon, and Cllr F Whetstone. Minutes taken by Mrs R Marriott.

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

**29/09 Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Cllr J Barnes and Cllr N Bennett.

**30/09 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.**

The Chairman, Cllr Reid and Dr Prendergast declared a personal prejudicial interest in agenda item 32/09. Mr Cooper agreed to chair the meeting for that item.

**31/09 To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 7 September 2009 and matters arising - BD 22/09.**

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy.

31.1/09 Mr Glyn and Cllr Whetstone asked that minute 22.1/09 be corrected to read "Mr Stenhouse said that the 'vet and med' referred to in minute 22/09 was three times the cost normally expected and this was worrying. Mr Glyn replied that the most appropriate cost comparison was not for a lowland flock. Cllr Whetstone said that the flock, though operating in a lowland area, was not a 'lowland' flock as described by Nix and that the grazing project was very different. The Chairman asked Mr Glyn to ensure the relevant passages in Nix were circulated to the Board and the Conservation Committee to facilitate any further discussion."

31.2/09 Cllr Whetstone asked that the letter mentioned in minute 29.1/09 be circulated to Board members.

31.3/09 There being no further amendments, Mr Cooper proposed the adoption of the minutes and Mr Glyn seconded the proposal. The Board agreed the Minutes.

**32/09 To receive the minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee meeting of 26 October 2009 and to receive any recommendations to the Board - BD 23/09.**

The Chairman asked Mr Cooper to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy.

32.1/09 *Mountain biking* The Clerk agreed to inform Mr Galley of the date of the site visit.

The Clerk informed the Board that the weekend duty Ranger had been verbally abused when advising three mountain bikers that they should not be cycling on the Forest. They had not heeded his advice. This was not an isolated incident; Rangers reported increasing incidents of mountain biking on the Forest. Mr Cooper felt it important to maintain the dialogue with the local mountain bikers.

32.2/09 *Remembrance Day gathering* The Chairman informed the Board that the gathering at Airman's Grave had been slightly smaller this year. He stressed that it was not a religious service. Air Vice Marshall Richard Kyle, who gave the address, had had the use of a small megaphone which proved effective. The Board expressed its appreciation of Mr Parkhouse's generosity in providing the poppies for the poppy drop which he organised and carried out.

32.3/09 *Mrs Hammond* Mr Stenhouse pointed out that the access claimed by Mrs Hammond was not maintained.

32.4/09 *Nutley Arms, Nutley* Cllr Martin asked for an update on the situation. The Clerk stated that he and the County Solicitor had had a meeting with the owner of the Nutley Arms. This had not reached a satisfactory outcome as the owner had stated that he believed the land in question belonged to him. The Clerk has since supplied the County Solicitor with maps dating back to 1885 which clearly confirm the Ashdown Forest Trust's ownership of the land. He had not had any subsequent news.

32.5/09 *Proposal for assessing Acknowledgement Rents for properties access across the Forest via the Perpetual Licence – BD24/09* The Chairman, Cllr Reid and Dr Prendergast left the room and Mr Cooper took the Chair.

32.5.1 Cllr Whetstone commented that the proposal of the F&GP Committee (see BD24/09) had been his attempt to draw to a close a lengthy discussion. He conceded that the situation was a muddle. Mr Cooper stated that he felt the initial proposal had been an attempt to look to the long term and address the need for the Board to develop diverse sources of income in view of funds from the Local Authorities slipping.

32.5.2 Mr Galley thought there were two strands to the debate: first, the original proposal seemed opportunistic and he suggested that there should be calm and rational thought about income streams, secondly, he questioned the logic of linking the charge to the rateable value as this could be seen as a progressive tax. He could see that it may be logical to link the rent to the length of the access track but he preferred a flat rate. He felt the matter highlighted the need for a medium term financial plan.

32.5.3 Cllr Stogdon questioned the suggested grouping of the tax bands and said that, if the tax bands were the preferred option, it would be more logical to link the rent to the individual tax bands. Mrs Martin thought the original proposal had the advantage of being a simple method and Mr Glyn thought it was justifiable as property owners benefited from being within the Forest through increased property values.

32.5.4 Mr Stenhouse thought that residents would be averse to linking the rent to the length of the drive. There are occasions when Forest vehicles use the tracks, the upkeep of which the residents pay. He also questioned the cost benefit of the proposal. Mr Gillham said that he couldn't see the rationale for linking the rent to property value. He agreed with Mr Stenhouse that the Board should only be charging for the right to make up and maintain the access tracks, any hint that the Board were charging for living on the Forest would be dangerous. He favoured a flat rate.

32.5.6 Cllr Simmonds said that he was mindful to agree a flat rate but suggested the issue was being taken in isolation. He favoured an overall look at the Forest's income and expenditure and felt if this were done, the settlement of the acknowledgement rent would be seen to be in that context. Cllr Whetstone also favoured a flat rate and suggested that this could be reviewed every five years. He accepted that the Board needed to raise its income but felt the original proposal would be unpopular for little gain.

**32.5.7 Mr Cooper drew the discussion to a close and suggested that the matter should go back to the RPA Committee with a view to deciding a flat rate which would be subject to a regular review. He felt the starting point should be higher than the existing £55.00. Cllr Hoy formally proposed the suggestion and Mrs Martin seconded the proposal. It was agreed.**

### **33/09 To receive the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting of 2 November 2009 - BD 25/09.**

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the FGP Committee for accuracy. Cllr Hoy pointed out that he had been present and the Chairman commented that he had formally declared an interest.

33.1/09 The Board formally approved the Forest Rate for 2010/2011.

33.2/09 There being no further comments, Cllr Martin proposed adoption of the minutes and was seconded by Mr Glyn. **The Board agreed the Minutes.**

**34/09 To receive the recommendations of the Executive Committee meeting of 8 October 2009**

34.1/09 *New 1.7 of Standing Orders* It was agreed that site visits and seminars should be brought into line with other Conservator meetings.

34.2/09 *New 2.7 and 5.8 of Standing Orders* Some concern was expressed over the length of time proposed for a Board Member to react to circulated papers. Although the principle of a time constraint was approved, it was agreed that further consideration needed to be given to the actual length of time. Cllr Whetstone felt that it was too difficult to review the Standing Orders without a copy being available at the meeting. He proposed that the matter be taken at the next meeting.

34.3/09 *Staff restructuring* The Chairman felt that this item needed further consideration at the next Executive Committee meeting ready for the following Board Meeting. Cllr Whetstone commented that he had not been sent the agenda for the Executive meeting. The Clerk said he would re-send the email.

Cllr Whetstone withdrew from the meeting.

**35/09 To receive the results of the Away Day of 16 October 2009 – BD 26/09**

The document had been pre circulated.

35.1/09 The Clerk observed that he had had very positive feedback from the event; attendees had found the day unexpectedly productive and enjoyable. He felt that more work needed to be done on the “Vision” element but found the views expressed in Point 2 onwards were well represented within the Forest Plan. He highlighted a few comments and ideas that were of particular interest: the fact that the intrinsic importance of the iconic nature of the “Clumps” was not recognised in the Forest Plan; the introduction of ponies to graze the Heathland and the fact that the need to develop education featured so highly. Above all, the results of the event confirmed that the Board was moving in the right direction.

35.2/09 The Chairman and Mr Galley both thought that to progress matters, the action points should be distilled out and considered by a small group such as the Executive Committee. Mr Stenhouse suggested that such a group should then pass individual items for discussion to the appropriate Committee.

35.3/09 Mr Cooper and Mr Glyn both commented on how much they had appreciated the input from members of staff who had attended and thought their contribution and that of the volunteers had been most valuable. Both thanked Mr Galley for suggesting the exercise.

**36/09 A talk (ca 30 mins) by Jamie Cordery of the Deer Initiative: *Landscape scale deer management***

36.1/09 Mr Cordery gave a presentation which compared the Ashdown Forest area with that of the New Forest, Hampshire and Ashridge Forest, Hertfordshire. The increase in deer population over the areas was highlighted and he outlined the need and difficulties for deer management. He stated that deer/vehicle collisions (DVC) were unacceptably high, particularly in the Ashdown Forest area. The Clerk pointed out that the figures stated did not highlight the fact that the deer density on the land managed by the Board was considerably less than on surrounding farmland and Mr Cooper commented that the deer culling figures were only an estimate as the numbers culled by landowners surrounding the Forest were unknown, despite an invitation to provide figures through a recently circulated survey. What was known was that no culling took place in Pippingford Park, an area of private land surrounded by Ashdown Forest. Mr Cordery stressed the need for more information and cross-boundary co-operation.

36.2/09 Cllr Reid queried the public acceptance of a deer cull. Mr Cordery commented that the RSPB had carried out a cull on one of their reserves and had not had one complaint.

**37/09 To discuss the paper *Ashdown Forest Conservation policy on deer culling* – BD27/09**  
The paper had been pre-circulated.

37.1/09 The Board acknowledged the deer problem but felt that there were several issues that needed to be clarified before any cull could be carried out. In particular:

- more background information to support Mr Cordery's figures;
- a clear digest of the legal and insurance position;
- a genuinely safe method of culling deer on public access land be established;
- seek more information from organisations that carry out culls on public access land.

37.2/09 Cllr Simmonds was mindful of the need for a strategic policy to bring all landowners together to seek a cull. Cllr Reid stressed the need to move forward and suggested that the Board, as a community leader, should set an example and support the steps to communicate with neighbouring land-owners.

37.3/09 Mr Gillham queried whether a cull would be effective if Pippingford Park did not participate. Mr Cordery thought it would, provided everyone else took part. The Chairman invited Mr Marshall, a member of the public who is also a member of the Ashdown Area Deer Forum (AADF), to comment. Mr Marshall felt that a cull, under those conditions, would not reduce the number of DVCs as the deer would concentrate on private land in the centre of the Forest and move out at night across the roads to the woodland areas. He also commented that the deer in the area were free of ticks and caused no health risk to humans.

37.4/09 The Clerk introduced Mr John Rich, the co-ordinator of the AADF and asked for his comments. He felt that a cull would only work if all land-owners participated. Mr Glyn thanked Mr Rich for all his hard work for AADF.

37.5/09 The Board wished to formally acknowledge its regret at the death of Mr Simon Bishop, a lecturer at Plumpton Agricultural College, which had arisen as a result of a DVC.

**38/09 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.**

There being no urgent items, the meeting closed at 1705.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

8 March 2010

Clerk \_\_\_\_\_