

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN
FOREST HELD AT THE ASHDOWN FOREST CENTRE,
WYCH CROSS ON MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2003 AT 2.30pm.**

Present: Mr RIF Parsons (in the Chair), Mrs J Wirdnam, Messrs, BF Brown MJ Cooper, C Dowling, LJ Gillham, PJ Glyn, FJC Marshall, AG Reid, T Slack, FWJ Whetstone, AN White.

ITEM 1 Apologies for absence

There were apologies for absence from Mrs D Bagshawe, Miss M McPherson, Mr R Thomas and Mr P Scott.

ITEM 2 To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 June 2003

2.1 The Minutes of the last Meeting, which had been previously circulated, were presented by the Chairman. Clause 7.6 was removed. The Minutes were then approved and signed as an accurate record.

ITEM 3 Matters arising

3.1 In response to a question from Mr White, Mr Reid said that a meeting was imminent with his opposite number in West Sussex about the East Grinstead Bypass. Mr Parsons asked Mr Reid to keep the Board updated on this matter.

ITEM 4 To receive the Minutes of the Conservation Committee Meeting held on 30 June 2003

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

4.2 Grazing study by English Nature

4.2.1 Concern was expressed that the Board may be open to the charge of lack of objectivity as Ranger Marrable had written the report on behalf of English Nature.

4.2.1 Mr Gillham felt it was inappropriate to send the English Nature report to the Secretary of State. He would support the acquisition of a herd if necessary but the Board should keep in mind that its primary role was to protect the rights of the Commoners.

4.2.2 Mr Slack expressed his concern that the costs of mechanical “grazing” would increase as more scrubland was cleared and stock introduced. The Clerk confirmed that mechanical clearance occurred in many parts of the Forest as the boundaries between heathland and scrub were pushed back. However, the need for mechanical clearance would eventually disappear as grazing became established.

4.2.3 Mr Glyn commented that the phrase “business plan” as used by Mr Tait really referred to the need for long term planning; the Board should take into account the future possibility of no active Commoners.

4.2.4 **The Board agreed to accept the recommendations in the English Nature Report.**

- 4.3 Feasibility study into extension of grazing Although it would be more cost efficient if Ranger Marrable assisted Louise Hutchby of English Nature to do the study, Mr Whetstone felt it important that the view of an outside organisation should be sought. As English Nature would be the lead organisation, Mr White pointed out that it was appropriate for Ranger Marrable to assist English Nature as he would be working on behalf of the Board.
- 4.4 Interpretive panels The Clerk informed the Board that English Nature had agreed to fund interpretive panels for the grazing area.
- 4.5 Archaeology Concern was expressed about the role of the Board in the plan for the management of the High Weald AONB which has an archaeological section within it. The Board expressed its support for the High Weald ANOB but felt it important that the views and responsibilities of the Board should not be compromised.
- 4.6 Dog fouling Mr Slack reported on the success of the introduction of dog waste bins on Crowborough Beacon Golf Course. Support had been obtained from Wealden District Council. He suggested that a similar approach would be suitable for the Forest. It was agreed that a public relations exercise would be necessary before the introduction of dog waste bins.
- 4.7 There being no further questions, Mr White moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 5 To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting held on 28 July 2003

- 5.1 The Minutes, which had been previously circulated, were presented by Mr Marshall.
- 5.2 Llama trekking from Ashdown Forest Llama Park The Clerk reported that no trial had been carried out to date.
- 5.3 Pooh Car Park
- 5.3.1 Mr Reid reported that some concerns had been expressed about the plans. The Clerk confirmed that he would bring any developments to the Board's attention.
- 5.3.2 **The Board accepted the Committee's recommendation that a cautious approach to the idea of taking on the management of the proposed car park on private land adjacent to the Forest be taken.**
- 5.4 Wych Cross Dump – storage of recycled surplus highway maintenance materials
- 5.4.1 Mr Reid asked the Board to support the trial; it would be seen as a significant contribution to the recycling programme.
- 5.4.2 Mrs Wirdnam suggested a one-day demonstration of the mobile crusher in action so that noise levels could be assessed. Mr Reid said he thought this could be arranged.
- 5.4.3 Mr Marshall asked if planning permission would be required and would the site be considered an industrial site. If so, the Board's stance may be viewed adversely by the general public. A public relations exercise would need to be undertaken.

5.4.4 **The Board agreed to accept the Committee's recommendation that a cautious response to the proposal be taken and that the Clerk should seek more information about the noise levels of a mobile crusher.**

5.5 There being no further questions or comments, 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 18 August 2003

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

6.2 The Board agreed all the recommendations of the Committee:

- Fees for Estate Agents' signs to be increased from the current rate of £25/6 months to £100/3 months.
- Superintendent's talks to societies should be increased to £30.00 per talk plus travel expenses at the standard Board rate of 40p/mile. The typographical error at 2b) was corrected to read "The Committee also left to the Superintendent's discretion whether such a charge would be applied in all cases and whether he should necessarily accept all requests for talks".
- There should be an annual report.
- The minutes of the Committee meetings should be taken as read to allow more time for fruitful discussion.
- In future, no Committee or Board meetings should take place in the month of August.

6.3 There being no questions or comments, Mr Glyn moved the adoption of the Minutes. This was agreed.

ITEM 7 The Clerk to report on sundry matters

7.1 Estate Workers Michael Payne had been appointed as an estate worker/tractor driver. There remained one vacancy for an estate worker. This had been offered to a female applicant but she had not responded to any contact; the post had then been offered to a male applicant who similarly had not responded to repeated telephone calls and letters; finally the post had been offered to another male applicant and the Clerk awaited his acceptance.

7.2 English Nature grant English Nature had expressed interest in funding three different projects; rhododendron clearance at a cost of £2000; scrub clearance over three years at a cost of £25000 and interpretation panels in five car parks within the grazing area at a cost of £7-8000.

7.3 Financial planning ESCC had requested a draft budget for the Board's income and expenditure to aid their own budget planning. He had forwarded to them the draft proposal that had been drawn up in February 2003. Mr Reid confirmed that this would be of a great help to ESCC. It was anticipated that any shortfall in the ESCC grant would be made up from funds from the Ashdown Forest Trust.

7.4 Access to island sites Following the discovery that a property which had been recently divided had made a new access onto the Forest, the Board confirmed its policy that access to island sites should be by the original track only. Any division of the track should take place within the

original curtilage of the property. The Board agreed that the owners of the property should be asked to reinstate the ditch and boundary of the Forest.

ITEM 8 The future of the Forest Centre

- 8.1 During a tour of the facilities offered at the Forest Centre, the Clerk presented his ideas. He felt two principle aspects should influence any developments; the fall in visitor numbers and the low use of the Education Barn.
- 8.2 Mr Cooper commented that the Board needed to establish its aims and objectives for the Information Centre..
- 8.3 Mr Gillham proposed that a management plan be developed to the reflect aims, objectives and performance indicators for Ashdown Forest over the next ten years. This would include plans for the Forest Centre and costings for its development.
- 8.4 Mr Brown advised that assistance could be obtained from Wealden District Council and Mr Parsons confirmed that WDC has several tourism partnerships, for example with the High Weald AONB Unit.
- 8.5 Mr Parsons emphasised that the Board's primary aims are to protect the Forest and preserve the rights of Commoners; care must be taken not to destroy that which the Board must protect.
- 8.6 It was agreed that the Clerk would have a first draft of the management plan prepared for the next Board meeting.

ITEM 9 Urgent Business

- 9.1 Corporate image
- 9.1.1 After some discussion, it was agreed that the official colour for the writing on the Board's fleet vehicles, Forest signs, letter heading and business cards would remain Forest green. The design of the deer logo and type face would be altered to reflect the more modern style suggested by the Clerk. The Clerk said that a colour appropriate to the Forest's heathland - and used by heathland sites and initiatives elsewhere - should be evident.
- 9.1.2 The Board acknowledged that the division between policy and management needed to be more clearly defined.
- 9.2 GM Crop trials Mr Brown asked if the Board should be consulted about proposed GM crop trials in the area. It was agreed that the subject was not of immediate concern to the Forest.
- 9.3 Mr Parsons informed the Board that the High Sheriff had requested to visit the Forest. The Clerk agreed to liaise with Mr Parsons.
- 9.4 Mr Parsons reminded the Board that the AGM of the Society of Friends of Ashdown Forest would be held at the Nutley War Memorial Hall on 10 October at 20.00.
- 9.5 There being no further urgent business, the Board moved into confidential session at 16.50 when the meeting was updated on the theft of the hired equipment.

Chairman _____

17 November 2003

Clerk _____