

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

14.30 Thursday 13 September 2007
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Cllr J Barnes (in the Chair), Mr P Glyn, Cllr MJ Hoy, Cllr B Lacey, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Mr J Spicer, Mr E Stenhouse, Mr R Thornely-Taylor and Cllr F Whetstone. Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

The Chairman opened the meeting, welcomed the members of the public present and invited questions for 10 minutes from the floor.

The following notes on the questions/answers are an aide memoire only and do not form part of the minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest.

Mr Alan White asked

Would Commoners require felling licences from the Forestry Commission in order to cut trees for their Estovers. The Clerk responded that his understanding was they would. He was planning to make wood available to Commoners in selected car parks or refer them to areas where felling licences had already been granted. There was a short discussion regarding the various pieces of legislation that impinged on Commoner Rights.

It was agreed that the Clerk would assess the interaction of the various pieces of legislation, including Forestry Commission felling licences, in regards to Estovers and report the findings to the appropriate Committee.

Cllr Barnes thanked the public for their points.

1. Apologies.

Mr M Cooper, Mr L Gillham, Cllr R St. Pierre, Cllr S Shing and Cllr R Stogdon.

2. Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

No declarations were made.

3. Approval by the Board of New Committee Members.

Mr P Glyn and Mr J Spicer were appointed to the FGP Committee and Mr R Parsons was co-opted. Cllr S Martin and Cllr S Shing were appointed to RPA.

4. Stakeholder Engagement.

The Chairman welcomed Mr R Harris, from 3KQ to the meeting. Mr Harris tabled a progress update document and this was discussed at some length. There was some concern voiced over the Governance Group and who was driving it forward. It was confirmed, during the course of the discussion, that the Group was a forum for ideas, not decision makers.

There was a discussion over the role of Parish Councils and there was a general agreement that a consultative committee approach would be favoured. This issue would be put to one side until the Governance Group had made its report.

There was a short discussion on the process of making appointments to the Board. The Chairman confirmed that the Board could not determine the process of appointments which was the responsibility of the parent bodies, i.e. WDC and ESCC.

The Forest Plan was discussed at some length and concerns were voiced over the Board's input to the plan. The Chairman reminded the Board that the Plan had, indeed, been discussed at various Committees and was a high level document. The Clerk commented that the draft

Forest Plan would be discussed by each Committee in turn and a final draft, prior to wider consultation, be signed off by the Board in November.

The felling plans for this winter were discussed at some length. There was some concern voiced that those people who were upset by last year's felling were ready to be upset again and that good communication was very important. The Clerk confirmed that, as yet, the plans for felling were with the Forestry Commission. The Chairman stated that there would be communication about where, when and why felling would be taking place on the website, in public notices and via the Parish Councils. The Chairman stated that Mr Glyn had compiled a very useful summary outlining all the pieces of legislation that affect and have a bearing on Forest activities and that this document should be in the public domain in order to give a flavour of the complexities faced.

Mr Glyn thanked Mr Harris and 3KQ for their input which had allowed many people to explore options and see the complex background to the Forest and its management.

Mr Stenhouse read a paragraph from Jane Mortimer of Natural England about whom to contact for information and this was discussed. The Clerk replied that Mr Marrable was the HLS Lead on behalf of the Board, just as Jane Mortimer was on behalf of Natural England and that any information required could be provided on request. The Chairman stated that it was correct that Mr Marrable was the person who should give updates to the Conservation Committee. The Chairman asked that any further discussion of this issue should be held outside of this meeting.

5. Cats Protection.

The Clerk reported that this issue had not moved forward and explained that the delay was due to a change of senior staff at the planning office. An outcome was now expected at the beginning of the second week of October. The Clerk reported that a joint letter from FGP and Cats Protection had been sent to Mr Quirk expressing concerns over the delay. There was a discussion on the best way to discuss the outcome and whether calling a full Board meeting or an expanded RPA would be most appropriate.

It was agreed that the Clerk would draft a short summary, on the background to this issue, with cross references to the key minutes for the benefit of new Board members.

It was agreed that the RPA meeting on 15 October would be, in part, a special Board meeting with a confidential closed session to allow a full discussion followed by an announcement of the decision to the public.

6. To approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting of 18 June 2007 and Matters Arising.

The Minutes of the last meeting had been circulated. It was noted that Dr Prendergast should be referred to as Clerk throughout the minutes and that Cllr Barnes had chaired part of the meeting. The Board agreed, with the amendments made, the accuracy of the minutes and they were duly received.

Item 6 was discussed in relation to the removal of sheep signs from the grazing area at the end of the season and the Clerk reported that this would go ahead as it was a long established practice.

7. To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Conservation Committee of 2 July 2007.

The Minutes of the last meeting had been circulated. The Conservation Committee agreed the accuracy of the minutes. The Board received the minutes.

Mr Stenhouse voiced his concerns regarding Natural England's non-attendance at Conservation Committee meetings. The Chairman agreed that Natural England should take steps to ensure

someone was available to attend future Conservation Committee meetings and indeed this had now been arranged.

Cllr Whetstone expressed his sympathy regarding the tragic loss of Rosie, one of the dogs belonging to Louise Amos. The Chairman added the Board's sympathy and hoped for a swift recovery for Coire.

Cllr Whetstone described his visit with Cllr Hoy to the Vachery to see the sheep in action and he reported he was impressed by what he saw but that many more sheep were required to make an impact and to test the viability of the project. The Chairman confirmed that this was a three year pilot project.

15.50 Cllr Lacey left the meeting.

Mr Stenhouse asked about third party insurance for the sheep and asked that the existence of cover be confirmed in writing to the Board.

Felling licences were discussed and Mr Spicer asked if local people were to be notified. The Clerk confirmed again that, as yet, the plans for felling were still with the Forestry Commission. The Chairman confirmed that there would be communication about where, when and why felling would be taking place on the website, in public notices and via the Parish Councils. There was a further short discussion on this issue and Mr Glyn confirmed that locations were chosen to be as non-controversial as possible and out of the way to avoid upset.

Mr Stenhouse commented that FSC certification would be a great deal of work and a very expensive project. The Chairman asked that the FGP Committee look at this matter once costs were known.

8. To receive the Minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee Meeting of 16 July 2007.

The Minutes of the last Meeting had been circulated. The RPA Committee agreed the accuracy of the minutes. It was noted one amendment was needed to improve the sense of item 5. The Committee agreed, with the amendment made, the accuracy of the minutes and they were duly received by the Board.

There was a short discussion regarding a deer underpass on the A22. The Clerk reported that he had just left the Ashdown Area Deer Group meeting where it was repeated that the underpass would be ineffective not least because the A22 formed just a small percentage of the overall deer problem. The Clerk also reported that GOSE had been approached regarding signs at Pippingford bends showing the number of deer casualties. As yet there had not been a response.

It was agreed that the Board would be happy to offer information and advice on deer habits to assist ESCC in managing the deer problem.

Mr Spicer was asked by the Chairman how the working party on encroachments was progressing. Mr Spicer reported that a Code of Conduct had been agreed and that classification of infringements and how to deal with them, i.e. by permit or licence had also been agreed. These recommendations would be put to the Committee in due course.

Forest Centre Development was discussed and the Chairman reported that Mr Hurst had not been available to attend this meeting. The Chairman commented that the working party should re-convene to look at the new Forest Centre development plan and make a written report to the RPA where it could be discussed. He went on to say that it would be valuable for new Board members to attend that meeting and that the Board had committed to moving forward and developing the Centre.

It was agreed that the Parkin Plan and relevant minutes relating to the Plan be retrieved and sent to new members of the Board for their information.

9. To receive the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee of 3 September 2007.

The Minutes of the last meeting had been circulated. The FGP Committee agreed the accuracy of the minutes. The Board received the minutes.

Forest signage, its suggested unpopularity and the cost implications of replacement were briefly discussed. There were two suggestions; that all signs be removed and replaced in one go or that they were replaced as and when required with a new design. Cllr Elkin suggested that when people write in to complain about the signs they should be asked what they would like as a replacement design. Mr Glyn commented that there were those who did appreciate the new signs and that they mark the boundary of the Forest which many were unaware of. The item would be revisited at the RPA Committee.

The Accounts were introduced and explained by Mr Thornely-Taylor. It was suggested that dates be added as footers to these documents to avoid confusion between various versions. The cash flow statement was found to be very useful.

It was agreed that the Board accept the Accounts and they be signed off.

10. Standing Orders.

Mr Stenhouse raised his concerns regarding the issue of single tenders being assessed by members of the Board. The Standing Order was read out and it was agreed that it covers the points of concern. There was a short discussion regarding single tenders and the limit being set at £10,000.00 and it was agreed after going around the table that this was a reasonable figure. The Chairman suggested that this item be reviewed in one year.

There was a short discussion regarding single tenders over the limit set and it was agreed that should this arise the matter should be discussed and agreed by the FGP Committee as a whole.

The Chairman stated that the Standing Orders remain as a typescript version for the moment and be printed in one year's time when all the amendments are likely to have been made.

It was agreed that Standing Orders remain as a typescript version for one year.

11. Report of Chairman's action with regard to Annual Report 2006/2007.

The Chairman stated he was anxious to have the Report published, not least because it covers a period before he took over as Chairman. Mr Glyn drew attention to the item about the Airman's Grave. He stated that he had officiated there for three years on Remembrance Sunday and he had been asked to provide loud-speakers so that everyone present could hear. After a short discussion it was agreed that the 'service' was becoming a difficult logistical exercise but that the Board had a duty of care to those who do attend. There was agreement that the event should remain spontaneous and not become formalised. Were it to become formalised, permission of ESCC would need to be sought.

It was agreed loud-speakers would not be provided at the Airman's Grave service.

12 (a) Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

Mr Spicer asked if the public could be allowed to ask written questions in advance of the meetings. The Chairman stated that he would encourage written questions and to avoid any unnecessary delay questions should be sent to the appropriate Committee Chairmen. Once the

wording had been agreed this information would be displayed on the website. Cllr Whetstone asked if the public could have two questions or ten minutes which ever is the longer.

It was agreed that a Standing Order would be drafted by Mr Spicer and put to the Board for fine-tuning.

- 12 (b) Cllr Martin described a parcel of land at Chelwood Gate currently owned by the Smith Trust which was in the process of being de-registered as common land at a hearing of the Commons Commission next week. There was a discussion regarding planning and development of this land and it was noted it was not covered by any special designations. There was agreement that the Board could offer no formal objection to de-registration of this land but that it was likely, although not certain, to object if any development on the land were sought.

It was agreed that Cllr Martin attend the Commons Commission meeting on behalf of the Board.

- 12 (c) Mr Stenhouse commented that the organisation of the Conservators is not responsive enough and that it should look at how it works and be a smaller, sharper organisation. The Chairman thanked Mr Stenhouse for his comments and suggested if Mr Stenhouse wished to pursue his views he should put a paper to FGP Committee in the future.

There being no other questions or comments, the meeting ended at 16.57.

Chairman _____
19 November 2007

Clerk _____