

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

14.30, Monday 7 September 2009
Ashdown Forest Centre

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

The Chairman opened the meeting, welcomed the Cllr R Simmons as Lord of the Manor. There were no members of the public present.

19/09 Apologies.

Apologies were received from Mr R Galley, Mr L Gillham, Cllr A Reid and Cllr R St Pierre.

20/09 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

There were no declarations.

21/09 To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 8 June 2009 and matters arising - BD 15/09.

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy. There were no amendments and no matters arising and the Board received the minutes.

21.1/09 The Clerk reported that the 'Away Day' and Parish Liaison Meeting would be discussed under minute 28/09.

22/09 To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Conservation Committee meeting of 29 June 2009 – BD 16/09

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Conservation Committee for accuracy. Amendments were required as follows: Mr Thornely-Taylor should be recorded as being *Ex officio* rather than present. *Ex officio* should be removed from Mr Gillham's name. In minute 22/09 the post-meeting note should be removed and the paragraph on dog walking made clearer. In minute 23/09 the statement on burning should be altered to make it more accurately reflect the discussion.

22.1/09 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 costs were comparable to those recorded in Professor John Nix's 'Farm Management Pocket Book' and that the most appropriate cost was 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. He agreed that this was the best comparison, though not ideal. 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.

22.2/09 There was a short discussion on the value of post-meeting notes and the Chairman clarified that they should only be used where there were purely factual issues to be resolved; any other comments should be confined to matters arising.

22.3/09 Mr Glyn reminded the Board that the Grazing Project was a feasibility study not a cost effectiveness exercise. Costs would be looked at in great detail later in the process. The Chairman said that the collection of costs was a valuable exercise and would assist in making a decision on the project. Mr Glyn agreed and stated the Conservation Committee would look very closely at costs and do their best to get accurate costings towards the end of the feasibility study. The Clerk said that the project was not just about cost a but about the efficiency of grazing. The Chairman stated it was abundantly clear that machines could not reach all areas of the Forest and that it had been agreed that grazing was the best method, for some areas, to deliver the Board's policy.

22.4/09 Cllr Whetstone asked about the comment on burning being a ‘relatively modern management tool’ in conservation minute 23/09. Mr Glyn replied it was modern in the context of many hundreds of years and would not be a major management tool in the future. The Chairman agreed that burning was an option and echoed Mr Glyn’s comment about it not being a major management tool.

22.5/09 Mr Stenhouse said that there had been a presentation by Mr Marshall on why culling could not take place on the Forest. Mr Stenhouse said he wanted to hear from those with a ‘can-do’ attitude before the Board could discuss any policy. The Clerk replied that the issue of culling had been discussed exhaustively and that Mr Marshall had given a very good presentation on why shooting was not viable on the Forest. He went on to say the Deer Management Group was still gathering data from neighbouring landowners on shooting and drew the Board’s attention to the Group’s minutes on the website, which showed the ‘can-do’ attitude Mr Stenhouse was looking for. The Chairman said any further discussion on culling should be deferred until the Conservation Committee had met and produced relevant papers to enable the Board to have, if needed, a discussion. He went on to say the current policy statement, saying that the Board were not against culling *per se* but that it was considered unsafe on the Forest, would stand. Mr Stenhouse repeated he wanted to see a ‘can-do’ point of view and the Chairman replied it was permissible for a member of the Board to provide a paper in support.

23/09 To receive the minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee meeting of 13 July 2009 - BD 17/09.

The minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy. Amendments were required as follows: Minute 22.1/09 should be amended to read ‘properties’.

23.1/09 Mr Cooper said, in relation to minute

25/09 To consider proposed changes to Standing Orders - BD 19/09.

The document had been pre circulated and was reviewed section by section. .

25.1/09 The amendments were reviewed page by page

- In paragraph (1.1) re-wording was agreed to remove the second ‘normally’.
- Paragraph (1.6) was thought to be sensible and reasonable.
- In paragraph (2.6) the suggested alteration was agreed.
- There were no changes in paragraphs (3) and (4).
- In paragraph (5) the Executive Committee should be referred to and described with some care.
- In paragraph (5.1) it was noted that the June meeting was fixed and an addendum should be added to say it was an annual meeting. It was thought useful to refer to other committees as ‘specialist’.
- There were no comments on paragraph (5.7).
- Paragraph (5.8) required more thought with achievable timescales set out for both general corrections and for challenges to accuracy (similar alteration was thus required in 2.7 and the last line would not be needed). Mr Spicer said the current draft timings were very short and a longer time period would be more realistic. There was a brief discussion on the time taken to turn around minutes.
- The Executive Committee, as discussed in paragraph (6), can meet as and when required.
- Paragraph (6.1) should stand.
- Paragraph (6.3) should refer to the attendance of the Chairman and/or the Vice-Chairman at meetings.

- In paragraph (5.10) it was thought helpful to have some wording on delegated powers. Mr Thornely-Taylor said that Executive Committee's role was one of forward planning and strategy rather than policy and that needed to be reflected in paragraph (6.1). The Chairman asked Mr Thornely-Taylor to draft some wording.
- There were no changes to paragraph (7).
- There was a discussion about people behaving as Conservators outside of meetings. Cllr Whetstone and Mr Spicer stated they strongly objected to paragraph (8.8 and 8.9) but Cllr Hoy said he agreed with (8.8). The Chairman said Conservators could only act collectively and not as individuals.

25.2/09 There was a short discussion on whether delegated decisions require the Board to 'rubber stamp' them. The Chairman thought that they did not require formal Board approval as long as the decision was within the terms of the delegated powers.

25.3/09 There was a short discussion regarding circulation of papers and it was thought appropriate that all Board members receive all papers and decisions for all Committees. It was noted only decisions could be challenged. Cllr Whetstone asked if there should be a clause ensuring Committees referring items to the Board if sufficiently important. The Chairman responded that Committees could refer any issue they so choose to the Board.

25.4/09 It was noted that there was a lack of internal consistency when referring to the 'Forest' and 'Ashdown Forest' was thought to be clearer. It was also suggested that the Vice-chairman be indicated on minutes.

25.5/09 Mr Stenhouse said that all Committee supporting documents should be posted on the internet in addition to the agendas. The Chairman agreed (notwithstanding confidentiality issues.)

25.6/09 The Chairman suggested that all changes be accepted up to paragraph (8) which will stand in its existing form. A form of words will be drafted by the Clerk and the Chairman to be discussed at the Board meeting in November.

25.7/09 There was a discussion about Section (9)1 of the Ashdown Forest Act.

26/09 To receive the Annual Implementation Plan 2009/2010 - BD 20/09.

The document had been pre circulated.

26.1/09 The Clerk reported that the Annual Plan was an update based on the Strategic Plan. The Chairman said the Annual Plan showed what was being done this year towards reaching the goals of the 10 year plan.

26.2/09 Mr Stenhouse stated the Annual Plan should go via the committees. The Chairman replied that in future that would be the normal procedure. The Clerk said that the Implementation Plan was a management rather than a policy issue.

26.3/09 There was a discussion around whether the continuing dialogue with biking should be reflected in the document. The Chairman stated he was happy to continue dialogue with the mountain bikers but did not want the issue to form part of the Annual Plan.

27/09 To receive the Financial Report for the year to date – BD 21/09

The document had been pre circulated.

27.1/09 Mrs Temple talked to the document and gave a brief explanation of the figures page by page.

27.2/09 Mrs Temple said that there was a financial exercise, reviewing the budgetary processes, underway. It was an arduous task as currently there was not a system of budgetary control in place and neither were finances broken down to allow easy identification of over spends. It was a big exercise and efforts were being made to complete it as soon as possible. She went on to say the exercise was part of the production of a three year plan required by County. It was

hoped the three year plan would be ready by Christmas. The Chairman welcomed the fact that the work was being done and said the simpler format was an improvement.

27.3/09 There was a discussion regarding the need to provide County with a supplementary estimate and there was general agreement that the exercise described above should be completed and the Board have confidence in the figures provided in future financial information sheets before County were contacted. It was agreed to look at the position regarding supplementary estimates at the November Board meeting.

27.4/09 The Chairman said it would be appropriate for Cllr Whetstone to informally notify Cllr Reid about the ongoing DEFRA situation and that monies were being prudently put aside.

28/09 To receive the Executive Committee Minutes

The document was tabled.

28.1/09 Mr Stenhouse asked, in relation to (1) where the duty to educate was written as it was not in the Act. The Chairman replied it was a part of the HLS contract. Cllr Whetstone said it was also part of the Trust commitment. The Chairman said any suggestions should be passed to the Clerk and that the issue could be discussed at the 'Away Day'.

28.2/09 The Chairman said, in relation to (3), that there were no further suggestions and asked the Clerk to investigate further. He went on to say there were no concrete recommendations for the Board.

28.3/09 The Chairman said, in relation to (4), that an attempt to streamline should be made and powers of delegation should be looked at in order to speed up discussion. Security systems and processes for safeguarding the Board should also be looked at. The role of the Executive Committee should be assessed and terms of reference set out. He went on to say strategic planning and policy creating were all duties of the Board. The frequency of Board meetings could be reviewed and meetings held only when required. It was noted that the June meeting was a fixed commitment for the purpose of elections.

29/09 Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.

29.1/09 Parish Liaison Panel – Core Strategy Summary Tables and Guide Maps

The Chairman stated that the Board's response to the Local Development Framework of WDC had been raised at the Panel Meeting and it had been suggested that it would have been appropriate, when considering building and development, that any impact on the Forest should be taken into account. The parishes represented felt that the Board should have commented on the various options available in the above document.

There followed a discussion on the various options presented. The Clerk felt the Board was not in a position to comment as the results of the Wealden/Mid Sussex Visitor Survey had not yet been made available and thus there were no hard data on the possible impact extra residents would have on the Forest. He went on to say the Board's response had been based on the EU Habitats Directive.

There was a short discussion on the impact flooding may have on local building developments and the impact that water extraction may have on the Forest.

The Chairman stated the Board's duty was to protect the Forest, however, favouring specific options was outside of its remit. It would not be unreasonable for the Board to have a view on the minimum number of houses in order to protect the Forest from any adverse impact from increased visitor numbers. It was considered that a general, rather than option specific statement, would be appropriate. The Board, therefore, would favour any of the options that provided a minimum number of houses in the villages and settlements contingent to the Forest. The Chairman would draft a reply to be circulated to the Board for information.

29.2/09 Away Day

The Away Day was scheduled for October 16th. The Clerk asked the Board what format they would like it to take and suggested sending an e-mail asking them for agenda items. He went on to say the Away Day was not designed to re-write the Forest Plan.

The meeting ended at 16.20

Chairman _____
23 November 2009

Clerk _____