



Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest

Monday 6 September 2010 at 14.30

Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr R Thornely-Taylor (Chairman), Mr R Galley (Vice Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Cllr N Bennett, Mr M Cooper, Mr J Francis, Mr P Glyn, Cllr M Hoy, Cllr A Reid, Cllr R Simmons, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R St Pierre, Mr E Stenhouse, Cllr R Stogdon and Cllr F Whetstone. Also in attendance, at the Board's invitation, Mrs R Marriott. Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

The Chairman opened the meeting. There was one member of the public present.

	Item	Action
24/10	Apologies Apologies were received from Cllr S Martin and Dr H Prendergast (Clerk).	
25/10	Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature. There was none.	
26/10	To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 14 June 2010, and matters arising BD 15/10. The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated and were assessed by the Board for accuracy. Other than adding names to the action column there were no changes. The Minutes were duly approved. 26.1/10 Cllr Reid reported, in regards to minute 15.2/10 that he had spoken to the County Solicitor and confirmed that any slowness in service was due to departmental restructuring. He went on to say service was now back on track and that County Hall wished to continue offering the Board legal services and at a reasonable cost. 26.2/10 Cllr Barnes said, in regards to minute 17.5/10 that this was tidied up at the Executive Committee. 26.3/10 Cllr Simmons asked that the issue of deer culling be given full consideration by the Conservation Committee. Cllr St Pierre said it would be an agenda item at the next meeting.	RSP
27/10	To approve and note the minutes of the Conservation Committee of 28 June 2010 BD 16/10. To approve and note the minutes of its Extraordinary Meeting of 26 August 2010 BD 17/10. The Chairman asked Cllr St Pierre to present the minutes of the two meetings which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. Both sets of Minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6. 27.1/10 Cllr St Pierre reported, in regards to minute 17.4/10, that water tests were carried out and showed that the water was potable. The results were immediately sent to the Clerk and to South East Water. She reported a considerable amount of maintenance work was now being carried at the reservoir. A report had not yet been received from South East Water. She went on to say that she would like to take up the issue with Ofwat once the report was received. 27.2/10 Cllr St Pierre said that the report on fencing at Chailey, mentioned in minute 18/10, was important and the Board should take note of it. 27.3/10 Cllr St Pierre reported that, in regards to minute 19/10, some re-drafting had taken place and it was now available on the website. Mr Glyn said the full document had been discussed at the Conservation Committee meetings but had not been circulated to the Board. Any Board members wishing to have a copy should contact the Office. 27.4/10 In regards to minute 22/10 the Chairman said he was very happy to propose a resolution to formally thank Mr Glyn for his immense contribution and he was delighted to see it recognised. 27.5/10 Cllr St Pierre reported that an Extraordinary Conservation Committee meeting had been called on 26 August due to the resignation of the Assistant Shepherd, quickly followed by the Shepherd herself just prior to the Clerk taking annual leave. The Clerk had produced a very good paper setting out the pros and cons of taking the grazing project forward.	

	<p>She went on to say that cover was in place and the job had been advertised. There was currently one applicant.</p>
27.6/10	<p>Mr Spicer asked if the advertised job had a project manager element to it and Cllr St Pierre said project and staff management was emphasised. Mr Spicer said that as the project had lost three assistants and one shepherd did this call into doubt the feasibility of close shepherding and would fencing be considered. Cllr St Pierre replied that the Conservation Committee had discussed fencing an additional 100 acres (40 hectares), as allowed under the 1974 Act, and that the project had now moved to 'phase 2'.</p>
27.7/10	<p>Stenhouse said the shepherding report was not a feasibility report and failed, in his opinion, to justify the expenditure. He said he had voiced his unhappiness about the management of the Board and the project and resigned as a Conservator with immediate effect. Mr Stenhouse then left the meeting.</p>
27.8/10	<p>Cllr Barnes said that he was not sure that close-shepherding lead to the resignations of the shepherds, rather the lack of tied housing was a problem. He went on to say he hoped that close-shepherding would continue to be an element of the project and that a way would be found to bring grazing costs down. He thought it wise to keep a range of options under review and look at them systematically. Cllr St Pierre replied that a new project officer may have new ideas and views. Cllr Whetstone said he thought the title was a problem and questioned if someone so well qualified was needed. He also asked if, for ease, if acreage could be followed by hectares.</p>
27.9/10	<p>Mr Spicer said that it was minuted on many occasions that he was not against shepherding but was keen to see alternatives that could run alongside.</p>
27.10/10	<p>Mr Galley said he was uncomfortable with giving blanket agreement to fencing and he would like to see a timetable, budget and maps. The Chairman agreed and said maps would be available in due course and that a formal resolution by the Board would be required.</p>
27.10/10	<p>Cllr St Pierre said that the Conservation Committee was not yet at that stage and there followed a short discussion on the required processes by the Committee and the Board should emergency fencing be required. Cllr Barnes said temporary fencing would need to be checked for legality and that an Executive Committee meeting, using urgency procedures, may be required. He went on to say the Board would need to be fully informed as there could be local opposition and local Board members would need to act as 'ambassadors'.</p>

28/10 To approve and note the minutes of the Roads, Planning & Amenities Committee meeting of 12 July 2010. BD 18/10.

The Chairman asked Mr Cooper to present the minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated and assessed by the Committee for accuracy. There were no changes. The Minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6.

28.1/10 Mr Cooper said, in regards to Minute 19/10, that raising money was not easy and in order to facilitate this Mr Barry Hassall had been invited to join the Working Party. Mr Hassall has considerable fund raising experience and it was thought sensible to utilise that experience.

28.2/10 Mr Cooper said that contributions would be voluntary. There was ongoing research into the feasibility and practicalities and the experiences of others were being sought. If any interesting progress was made the issue would come back to the Board.

28.3/10 Mr Cooper reported that an objection had been made regarding the footpath at Woodcock Cottage. Cllr Whetstone said this issue was going to public enquiry.

28.4/10 Mr Francis reported that progress and a satisfactory agreement had been reached with the owner of Brown's Brook. A letter had been sent to the property owner confirming the outcome of the meeting and setting out the licence fee. The Chairman said that once the agreement had been finalised the Board should make a formal resolution as the agreement was an exception to the Board's policy. The Chairman thanked Mr Francis for his help on this matter.

29/10	<p>Financial Update. BD 19/10.</p> <p>The Chairman stated that there had not been a Committee Meeting and asked Cllr Whetstone to present the financial update.</p> <p>29.1/10 Cllr Whetstone said he had been told by ESCC that there would be a 10% reduction in funding, some £8,000.00, to the Forest next year. He went on to say he was aware that there was a change in how HLS was funded by EU and central Government and that he had made enquiries regarding the 'safety' of HLS funding. He had received reassuring responses.</p> <p>29.2/10 Cllr Whetstone said the revised figures had been tabled. He asked Mrs Marriott to answer any questions. There were none. Cllr Whetstone said a deficit was forecast and that an Executive Committee might have to find a way to cover that. The Chairman agreed and said there were a number of uncertainties and reviews needed. Mrs Marriott confirmed that reviews were underway. She also asked the Board and the Committees if the information provided was what they wanted. Cllr Whetstone said that that an additional column showing the previous year to date would be useful. Cllr Barnes suggested a percentage figure. Mr Glyn urged caution as much of the Forest work is weather dependent there could be some huge variances. The Chairman asked the FGP Committee to consider these suggestions at their next meeting.</p> <p>29.3/10 Mrs Marriott requested signatures on the bank mandate for the HSBC accounts be signed</p> <p>Mr Glyn proposed and Cllr Barnes seconded the resolution that the bank mandate for the HSBC accounts be signed by the Board Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the FGP Committee. The Board approved the signatories and the mandate was duly signed.</p>	FGP
30/10	<p>To receive the recommendations of the Executive Committee meeting of 23 August 2010. BD 20/10.</p>	
	<p>30.1/10 The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated. There was a brief discussion regarding Minute (3). Mr Francis said the matter would not be pursued due to lack of funds. He went on to say the planning department would probably not allow the site to be split as the house and operation had an agricultural tie. There was a short discussion regarding the possibility of leasing the site.</p> <p>30.2/10 There was a discussion regarding Minute (4). The Chairman gave a brief background of the lengthy process the Committee had gone through. In short the post of Superintendent would be split into the role of 'Clerk' and 'Director' with Mrs Marriott assuming the duties of the Clerk. This would include the formalities surrounding the business of the Board. This was dependent on money becoming available to fund the book-keeping services of Mr and Mrs Poole which, in turn, was dependent on Dr Prendergast reducing his work week to four days. The Chairman stated that there were financial consequences as Mrs Marriott's role would need a thorough job evaluation. Mrs Marriott said she was happy in broad terms but wanted to have further discussions with the Executive Committee.</p> <p>30.3/10 The Chairman asked if there were any impediments to awarding the post to a single applicant and he felt this should be checked. Cllr Barnes replied that it was a simple re-arrangement of duties but it would be wise to seek advice.</p> <p>30.4/10 The Chairman said that the Board appreciated Mrs Marriott's approach to the situation and hoped that the Board's business would suffer fewer irregularities in the future.</p> <p>30.5/10 There was a discussion regarding re-designating the title of 'Superintendent' to that of 'Director'. It was generally agreed it was unfortunate that the term Director had two distinct meanings. Mr Cooper said it was difficult to find an accurate term. Mr Spicer thought that the title didn't really matter. He went on to say that the Standing Orders would need to be amended to reflect these changes in titles. Cllr Stogdon asked what the Director's role would be and Mr Francis said he was confused about line management. The Chairman read out the job descriptions and clarified that Mrs Marriott would deal with all Board and Committee business. There was a vote on the issue. The majority were in favour with none against, however, there was one abstention by Cllr Stogdon.</p>	

	<p>30.6/10 Mrs Marriott asked that, at the earliest opportunity, the changes should be fully communicated to the staff. Mr Cooper replied that the Chairman and Mr Galley had met with staff at the start of the process and said, in his opinion, the Board had a clear obligation to communicate with the staff. The Chairman replied he would write to members of staff.</p> <p>30.7/10 The Committee went into Confidential Session in order to discuss Minute (5).</p> <p>30.8/10 There was a discussion regarding Minute (6). The Chairman had received a letter from James Pavey at Knights Solicitors and a briefing note from Dr Prendergast setting out pros and cons had been circulated by e-mail. There was agreement that the legal details needed to be fully explored and a site visit and full consideration by the RPA Committee would be needed before any recommendation was made to the Board.</p> <p>30.9/10 The Board agreed that the landowner should be formally thanked for their offer.</p> <p>The Board resolved to split the post of Forest Superintendent into two positions; that of Clerk and Director.</p> <p>The Board resolved to appoint Mrs Marriott to the post of Clerk and Dr Prendergast to the post of Director as laid out in the job descriptions and subject to consultation with, and advice from, County Hall.</p> <p>The Chairman agreed to communicate with staff by letter.</p>	<p>RPA</p> <p>MC</p> <p>RM</p> <p>RTT</p>
<p>31/10</p>	<p>Board of Conservator representation on the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust.</p> <p>31.1/10 The Board Cllr St Pierre nominated Mr Glyn. This was seconded by Mr Cooper and approved by the Board. Mr Glyn said he was delighted to continue.</p>	
<p>32/10</p>	<p>Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman.</p> <p>31.1/10 The Chairman reminded the Board that there was a Parish Liaison Meeting on 15 September. There was no need for formal appointees to this useful meeting and the Chairman encouraged Board members to attend. Mr Galley confirmed he would chair the meeting.</p> <p>31.2/10 Mr Francis asked if the Board should reply to Mr Osborne (in relation to his recent communication). There was agreement that the situation had somewhat improved since the initial contact. It was agreed the reply should be made by phone call.</p> <p>31.3/10 Cllr Reid said deer on the roads was, in his opinion, a health and safety issue and he would like to see it have a higher profile. Cllr Whetstone replied that deer were wild animals thus the Board had no liability whatsoever. Cllr Stogdon said the Board should be looking at the issue urgently. Cllr St Pierre said the Conservation Committee would discuss culling. Mr Cooper said road speed and traffic was a policing issue but the RPA Committee would discuss deer in this context. Cllr Barnes said it was a topic for the Parish Liaison Meeting.</p>	<p>JF</p> <p>CC/RPA</p>

There being no other business the meeting closed at 16.20.

Chairman _____ 2010

Clerk _____