



Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Liaison Panel of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest

Wednesday 28th June 19.00 – 20.00 Ashdown Forest Centre

Present on behalf of the Conservators of Ashdown Forest: Tony Reid and Philip Glyn. **Staff:** Pat Buesnel (Director).

Present on behalf of Parishes/Councils: Lolita Reeves (Maresfield), Keith Obbard (Withyham), Vivien Hill (Forest Row), Vivienne Blandford (Buxted), Quentin Burch (Crowborough Town Council), Peter Ellefsen (Crowborough Town Council) Brian Phillips (Ashurst Wood Village Council), Derek Waits (Ashurst Wood Village Council), Douglas Denham St Pinnock (West Hoathly). **Representing the Friends of Ashdown Forest:** Pat Arnold

1. **Introductions:** Tony Reid (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies: John Francis, Michael Cooper and Richard Stogdon (Conservators), Catherine Crouch (Danehill), Paul Brown (West Hoathly).

2. **Deer Programme Presentation:** Glen Poland (Deer Programme Coordinator) gave a short presentation about the Deer Programme, a project within the Countryside Stewardship Scheme funded by Natural England. A series of slides showed how the trial cull, started three years ago with the aim initially to ensure public safety and stalker standards and not to reduce the numbers significantly, had incrementally expanded both by area and numbers. Glen explained the standards that were expected of stalkers and the annual assessment procedure that were now in place. Recently 20 deer 'enclosures' have been erected to monitor the impact on the heathland of deer being excluded from an area – these are already showing clear changes. Glen outlined the plans for the future including the purchase of a chiller, processing and selling of Ashdown Forest venison. In answer to a number of questions Glen talked about the estimated deer numbers (8-10k), how and where the deer are shot, what happens to the carcasses and skins, the building up of local knowledge and deer movement patterns, collaboration with local landowners and the police. For any further information please contact Glen direct: glenpoland@ashdownforest.org
3. **Minutes of the last meeting (March):** agreed.

4. **Matters arising:**

Meeting with Parish and Town Councils: Tony Reid reported that the April meeting had been a positive one and it was pleasing that there had been so much support and good will towards the Forest. The Conservators fully understand that each of the Councils are under pressure for take up of the limited resources they have available, however they wish to pursue with each of the Councils any financial support there may be available, whether it be a grant or donation, to support us through the period of transition 2018 -2020. All Parish and Town Councils had received a copy of the Annual Report, and a three year Business Plan is currently being prepared. It is hoped that Conservators will be invited to attend Parish meetings in September/October in time for budget setting October/November.

5. **Forest Update:** The Director spoke to her report (previously circulated) and added the following:

- The Friends of Ashdown Forest: have generously agreed to sponsor three car parks this year; held a very enjoyable Teddys Bear Picnic at the Forest Centre and will be hosting a Cheese and Wine Fundraising evening on the 21st September
- Latest edition of Ashdown Forest Life has been published

- Annual Report has been published (previously circulated) and available on the website.
- Strategic Plan review published – available on website
- Ashdown Forest Audio Trail launched funded by Friends and GACT
- Kitchen refurbishment in Education and Community Barn to commence in July/August

Members commented on the usefulness of the Management Information provided and also the quality and readability of the Annual Report.

6. **Every Dog Matters (EDM):** The Director reminded members of the EDMs programme with its priority to promote responsible dog ownership, the protection of threatened animal species and rare plant communities. The Forests 4 'Cs' had been developed after a lot of consultation with leaflets, signage and poster being circulated widely. Unfortunately, the SAMMS funding to support a number of EDW projects had not been forthcoming from the Local Authorities as promised some years ago so the full force of the programme has not been felt. Out of control dogs continues to be a major issue with attacks on stock, riders, walkers plus an impact of species and habitats particularly ground nesting birds. Members were encouraged to take leaflets and promotional material to distribute in their communities. The Conservators are putting pressure on the LAs for a release of the funds. A further issue is the amount of dog mess immediately around the Forest Centre where children work and play – a 'clear up and take your mess away' campaign will take place before the start of the next school year.
7. **Governance review:** the Chairman reported progress was slow during this period due to pressures on ESCC Legal Department and the Council and General elections however confirmed that the Charity Commission (CC) had agreed in principal to a Charitable Company Ltd by Guarantee being established to handle the general management of the Forest and develop a trading and fundraising platform, with the Board acting as both Charity Trustee of the Ashdown Forest Trust, and in its traditional role as Conservators under the 1974 Act. The Articles of Association had been drafted with input from the Board and will be reviewed again prior to submission form the Charity Commission. There was discussion with regard to timings as it was felt the CC were very slow to respond and that the one year timescale mentioned by the Chairman was being very optimistic.
8. **Countryside Stewardship (CS):** Philip Glyn (PG) (Vice Chair Conservation Committee) updated on progress of the CS scheme. Frustratingly late payment of funds due from Natural England was once again an issue that we had to deal with which does impact including on scheduled work and external contractors. PG reconfirmed that Natural England had promoted and encouraged the extension of grazing and the use of invisible fencing, however fencing technical issues and the restricted allocation of fencing posed major challenges – as a result consideration was being given to commissioning a Public Consultation. As at previous meeting, members agreed that roadside fencing particularly along the A roads would be a benefit in terms of road and animal safety. PG reported on a meeting held with WDC re nitrogen deposition. WDC had suggested restoring areas heathland as a mitigating measure, but it had been pointed out that ecologically this would be a 'non-starter', was not practical and would take 100s of years for any impact to be felt. The Conservation Officer had suggested that a far more effective mitigation measure would be for WDC to support the Conservators to remove materials cut from the Forest – this is being followed up with WDC. The Director reported that 2 Training events had been held: Invisible Fencing Workshop for Practitioners and a Training Seminar for Lookers. 2 Grazing Walks/Rides are being held for the Friends and AFRA – if any parishes would like us to arrange one please contact: caroline@ashdownforest.org
9. **Items from Parishes:**

Further discussion/queries took place around the request for funding support by the Conservators from the Parish and Town Councils. The Director reported on the other areas of funding being explored including

grant applications, promotion of a donation culture and sponsorship. The Chairman confirmed that due to the results of the public consultation and the overwhelming desire for the Ashdown Forest Act to be kept the make-up of the Board of Conservators would remain the same, as determined in the Act; however, the (Trustee) Directors of the new Foundation would be recruited based on skills and knowledge.

10 **Any other business:** none

11 **Dates of meetings 2017: 7-8pm at the Forest Centre**

September 27th

December 13th