

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

1900, Wednesday 16 December 2009
Forest Row Community Centre

Present on behalf of the *Board*: John Barnes (Chairman), Michael Cooper, Philip Glyn, Hew Prendergast (Clerk).

Present on behalf of Parishes/Councils: *Buxted*, Geoffrey Sheard; *Danehill*, Joan Lunn; *Forest Row*, Brian Killick; *Hartfield*, George Korbel; *Maresfield*, Roger Street; *West Hoathly*, Paul Brown.

1) Apologies

Parishes: *Buxted*, Louise Daniel; *Crowborough*, Sandra Timms; *Danehill*, Mike Wells; *Forest Row*, Vivien Hill; *Hartfield*, Clair Park; *Withyham*, Jill Pardey.

2) Minutes of the last meeting (2 September 2009)

After notification that 'Minutes' should replace 'Agenda' as the heading, the minutes were accepted as accurate.

3) Matters arising

There was none.

4) Items submitted for discussion

i) Biking

Michael Cooper said that the Board continued to maintain a dialogue with bikers, indeed he and Hew Prendergast had had a meeting with two representatives this week. They had walked a route below Gills Lap that had been proposed by bikers. The bikers were told that it was unlikely that routes on the open high ground of the Forest would find favour with the Board and that they should look at possibilities in the wooded fringes, especially those of lesser usage by riders and others. The bikers expected to pay a licence fee and were prepared to put in volunteer time to do practical work. They said they were less inclined to set up a separate biking group than to be affiliated with an already existing one, for example in East Grinstead. They agreed to present details for the April meeting of the Roads, Planning and Amenities Committee of the Board in April. It was emphasised that the Board was making no commitment. The spirit of the meeting, Mr Cooper concluded, had been very constructive.

John Barnes said future of input of parishes would be welcome and that, were biking to go ahead, it would be on an experimental basis. Paul Brown said that West Hoathly PC had thought there might be a place for designated biking routes and was very glad that a dialogue was taking place. He added that many biking organisations were affiliated to the national CTC. Michael Cooper commented that it would be helpful if some formal group represented bikers.

George Korbel said Hartfield PC was behind the Board in maintaining the dialogue.

ii) Bye-law infringements

Hew Prendergast reported three recent incidents of asbestos being dumped on the Forest, costing the Board nearly £3k to remove. They had been reported to Wealden DC who had had some success in tracking down the origin of the asbestos, in Surrey. Brian Killick said that Tanbridge DC

follows up determinedly on fly-tipping and will pursue a case. George Korbel said that PCSOs were very keen to help and Roger Street suggested that parish clerks be alerted to incidents.

John Barnes requested residents to keep a watchful eye and to report anything untoward.

iii) Remembrance Sunday

It was noted that fewer people attended this year; a fly-past took place and poppies were dropped (whether, or how quickly, these are bio-degradable is not ascertained). At his request Air Vice-Marshal Richard Kyle had been provided with a megaphone which had been partially successful but somewhat unidirectional. Roger Street said that Richard Kyle was willing to take over the running of the ceremony. Michael Cooper said the ceremony had become a tradition but the Board was reluctant actively to encourage it. Philip Glyn added that under his Chairmanship of the Board there had also been a reluctance to formalise the ceremony. John Barnes pointed out issues of insurance and staff-time and that informality was part of the appeal of the occasion, as was, Michael Cooper added, the fact that it was not religious.

Hew Prendergast said that some unforeseen events had caused parking problems on the Crowborough Road this year and attempts to get Police assistance had failed. Roger Street said that Richard Kyle might be able to wield some influence in this regard and it was agreed that an early meeting with him be set up.

iv) Deer

John Barnes said that, in November, the Board had discussed shooting on the Forest but that safety was a barrier; it also wondered at its effectiveness. It was not in principle against shooting. It is looking into legal and insurance issues, and how deer can be shot on public access land.

Hew Prendergast reported 237 known road casualties on the Forest and in the surrounding area so far this year, 19 fewer than by this time in 2008. He also reported that Wealden DC had this year dealt with 131 roadside deer carcasses by the end of November, most of them not in the area covered by Rangers. The deer population is increasing everywhere. The Deer Management Group (DMG) that the Board helped to set up in April is still making contacts with land-owners and gathering information about the numbers of deer being shot. It appears likely that local DMGs will spring up.

Philip Glyn said that poaching is taking place with dogs with their canines removed; it seems that poaching is economically worthwhile.

George Korbel asked what the H+S issues were. Hew Prendergast replied that a well-known local stalker was of the view that the Forest was not a suitable place to shoot because of the presence of people at all times of day and night; the small and disjointed nature of the Forest compared with (for example) the New Forest; and the distance a bullet can travel. The Board, he added, does not have the power to close the Forest; on many occasions, indeed, when staff attempt to shield off machinery in operation, the public ignore warning signs and barriers. John Barnes said that bullets can easily be deflected as they pass through an animal. An alternative view of H+S issues is that they are not site-related but rather to the risk assessment made on the spot by a stalker. Philip Glyn cautioned that, in a recent incident of which he was aware, a stalker had a deer in the cross-wires when a walker, who had not right to be there, appeared directly in line of sight too.

There was some discussion about traffic speed and the problems in imposing and enforcing limits.

5) Other issues

Brian Killick mentioned the travellers who, in August and September, camped initially on the Forest between the A22 and Priory Road and then went onto nearby private land (although they still chopped down trees and had fires on the Forest). He was concerned that they intended to return next year for a further 'gathering' in greater numbers. Hew Prendergast replied that Rangers had encouraged the campers to move, having warned them that bailiffs would be used, and that he had monitored the website of the campers which was directing people to the Forest. The website would also be monitored next year.

George Korbel asked why cattle were still out on the Forest. Hew Prendergast said that it was up their commoner/owner when they came off but suspected that they might do so soon given the change in the weather.

6) Dates for meetings in 2010:

John Barnes asked if the meeting was useful: the unanimous response from parish representatives was that it was. After noting the dates of the meetings next year (repeated below), he thanked everyone for their attendance, and drew the meeting to a close at 2030.

Wednesday 17 February

Wednesday 19 May

Wednesday 15 September

Wednesday 8 December