

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

1900, Wednesday 8 December 2010
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present on behalf of the Board: Roy Galley (who took the Chair), John Francis, Diana Hurrell, Hew Prendergast (Director).

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

1) Apologies

Board: Nick Bennett, Michael Cooper, Philip Glyn, Sylvia Martin, Rupert Simmons, Richard Stogdon, Rupert Thornely-Taylor.

Councils: *Crowborough*, Paul Adams; *Forest Row*, Brian Killick (resigned from Council), Vivien Hill; *Hartfield*, Clair Park; *Withyham*, Jill Pardey (to be replaced by Keith Obbard).

2) Minutes of the last meeting (15 September 2010)

These were approved as an accurate record.

3) Matters arising

Diana Hurrell, of Nutley (attending this meeting for the first time), was elected to the Board by commoners on 12 November.

Roger Street reported that a Hebridean sheep had been killed by a dog on Piltdown Golf Course recently.

4) Update from the Forest (verbal reports by Hew Prendergast)

i) Forest Centre development

Architects are producing plans sufficient for applying for planning permission in the spring. Sustainability is a key component of a developed Centre, with green (*Sedum*-covered) roofs on new build, PV panels on the tractor shed roof and grey water harvest and use. There was a short discussion about pay-back times and feed-in tariffs.

ii) The Board's Hebridean flock

Some of the flock were kept in a temporary enclosure at Chelwood Gate in the autumn. The fencing had to be repaired after being vandalised. The same happened at another such enclosure at Groombridge, one of the locations found to accommodate the flock overwinter. Caroline Fitzgerald is training up 'lookers' to keep an eye on the flock. Staff are also developing plans to offer sessions for training dog behaviour in the presence of livestock. Suggestions for fields where the stock may be held are welcome.

iii) Roadside tree clearance

The Board has responsibility for clearing overhanging trees from about 35 kms of roads. Last month staff spent 140 hours one week in clearing both sides of the B2026 between Chuck Hatch and Gills Lap. That so much was achieved was largely due to closure of the road for highway repairs.

It was noted that the responsibility of land owners for roadside tree maintenance is not always appreciated.

iv) Division of the role of Clerk to Conservators/Superintendent

Because of the increasing complexity of managing the Board's finances, the Board has hired both book-keeping and accounting contractors, thereby relieving Mrs Marriott of much of the task. This in turn has enabled her to take over tasks from Hew Prendergast, such as commenting on planning applications. To reflect changes in their jobs, Ros is now the Clerk to the Conservators while Hew becomes Director. Hew's reduction of working to four days/week effectively pays for these changes.

Comment about planning led to discussion about EU Habitat Regulations, the state of flux with respect to Natural England's current stance towards its objection to development within 400m of the Forest boundary and uncertainty about what mitigation measures might be put in place were development near the Forest to go ahead. Hew Prendergast thought that funds towards managing the Forest – perhaps, as Joan Lunn suggested, to do something about dog waste - would be more appropriate than the Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) mooted elsewhere.

v) Board minute books online – 1887 onwards

Thanks to funding from the Society of Friends of Ashdown Forest, and from the Heritage Lottery Fund under the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme, the Board's historical minutes are now viewable and searchable on the Forest website.

Roger Street said he found them fascinating and suggested a glossary of some of the unusual colloquialisms and terms that appeared.

vi) Cuts to Board income

The Board is expecting cuts to its income from both ESCC and WDC in the next financial year. In view of the unfavourable economic climate, the Board has asked the Director to see how other countryside sites have introduced or manage car park charging. Recently he visited the Malvern Hills Conservators. There the inhabitants of local parishes, who pay an annual levy to the Conservators, can acquire an annual parking ticket for £2.00 (to cover costs) from the Conservators' office, whereas visitors from further afield either pay £30.00 for an annual ticket or £3.00 for a day ticket from a meter. After costs, the Malvern Hills benefit by £130,000 a year from their eight metered car parks.

George Korbelt suggested that local parishes, or, as Paul Brown put it, those using the Forest, be asked to approve in principle the idea of introducing a precept payable to the Forest. Roger Street mentioned the difficulties of doing this when councils are cutting services.

On the specific issue of car park charging Paul Brown wondered at the electricity costs of meters and Roger Street, acknowledging that everyone is aware of the strain in finances of public bodies, suggested contractors might be brought in to manage any system. Both John Francis and Roy Galley thought it a good idea to get some feedback about the whole idea from the parishes.

5) Proposed meetings dates in 2011

The proposed dates were agreed.

6) AOB

George Korbel reported that construction of the long awaited new route to Pooh Bridge was due to start soon.

Roger Street mentioned an email he had received from a Nutley resident about the Board's public accountability, its need for a bad weather strategy (to do with access), and greater communication and information for local people. On the latter point Hew Prendergast said that the Board sends a letter every year to all Forest residents and commoners (about 1100 households all told), sends them twice a year an issue of *Ashdown Forest Life* (for the latest between 3-4000 copies have been distributed in all in the last few weeks) and has an e-news service with more than 330 recipients. Sixty five people now follow the Board on Twitter (set up three weeks ago), 113 do so on LinkedIn and three joined up on Facebook within the first hour on Facebook earlier today!

Hew Prendergast mentioned that one of the greatest concerns of staff was the constant pressure on the Forest and its boundaries that they, on behalf of the Board, are charged to protect. Doing this, and enforcing the bye-laws, may be no more a popular task than that of traffic wardens. He was happy to read in the local press that East Grinstead Councillors support the wardens there as they try to keep the streets free of illegally parked vehicles!

Roger Street felt he had enough information with which to reply to the Nutley resident.

At 2030 the Chairman closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.