

## Minutes of the

### Second meeting of the Parish Liaison Panel of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest

1900, Wednesday 11 February 2008  
Ashdown Forest Centre

#### 1) Welcome and introductions

Present on behalf of the *Board*: John Barnes (Chairman), Michael Cooper (arrived 1940), Philip Glyn, Hew Prendergast (Clerk), Francis Whetstone. Apologies: Leslie Gillham, Rupert Thornely-Taylor.

Present on behalf of Parishes/Councils: *Buxted*, Louise Daniel, Geoffrey Sheard; *Danehill*, Joan Lunn, Mike Wells; *Forest Row*, Vivien Hill, Brian Killick; *Hartfield*, John Chalke, Tom Mitchell, Chris Simmonds; *Maresfield*, Roger Street. Apologies: *Crowborough*, Sandra Timms; *Hartfield*, George Korbel, Clair Park; *Maresfield*, Tony Allen, Charlie Stevenson; *Withyham*, Jill Pardey.

#### 2) Winter work 2008/2009 - what is being done (primarily for heathland restoration) and public reaction

Philip Glyn said that there had been very little comment, just one or two about felling and ruts in the South Chase. Tom Mitchell said that he had seen very few ruts. In handing out maps of the winter work (that had been on the Forest website for months) Hew Prendergast said that most of it had already been done despite the poor weather. (PS. Parish Clerks were emailed the map on 3 October 2008.)

John Barnes mentioned the Hebridean sheep flock and confirmed that it belonged to the Conservators and that breeding was taking place; meat was not available. Philip Glyn said that the shepherded grazing project involving the flock, a three year feasibility study, was gathering very useful information which will be central to weighing up the benefits of grazing against other forms of management, such as mowing. John Barnes said the project was promising, not least since the sheep can get to places that machines cannot. Francis Whetstone said that shepherded animals had no problem with dogs unlike the free-roaming ones in the grazing area; dogs that worry sheep are very devious and clean themselves afterwards. Roger Street added that Piltdown Golf Course also has Hebridean sheep.

Chris Simmonds wondered at the selection of Hebrideans and whether goats had been considered. Hew Prendergast replied that Hebrideans were good at eating the sort of plants that needed control on the heaths, such as moor-grass, birch, bracken and gorse. Traditionally, goats have not been Forest animals and public reception of them might not have been so positive as it has been to the sheep.

#### 3) Proposed housing developments/EU Habitat Regulations - the latest situation on the East Grinstead relief road and housing and implementation of the associated Appropriate Assessment under EU Regulations because of the Forest's designation as an EU Special Protection Area and Special Area for Conservation.

Hew Prendergast reported that development of both the relief road and the housing was on hold. Nonetheless a visitor survey had been done in August/September in order to provide predictions about the additional pressure the Forest would incur in the event of the development. While he had reservations about the predictive model being used, he thought the survey estimate of a minimum of ca 1.4 million visitors/year to be reasonable. The survey, finding that for every 100 visitors there were 62 dogs, may recommend that the effect of dogs on the Forest and its wildlife is a topic for future research. Brian Killick doubted if people would use dog bins and Tom Mitchell said that dogs let loose from cars go to the loo while those on leads do not.

Vivien Hill said that, although present plans appear to have been shelved, development within the Gatwick Diamond was an active long-term planning matter within the relevant departments in Crawley.

#### **4) Biking - update on the Board's review of biking on the Forest**

Michael Cooper said that the issue doesn't go away. The Conservators had decided to retain the policy of not allowing biking but a persuasive group from Crowborough had continued to argue the case. Control was a key issue: while local bikers might be responsible, what about those, he wondered, coming from a greater distance? The North Downs were now difficult for walkers. A meeting had been held with bikers in December and the issue will be discussed at the next meeting of the Roads, Planning and Amenities Committee on 23 February.

Hew Prendergast reported that most local parish councils had submitted their views on biking (Roger Street said he would get the Maresfield response) as well as members of the public. He added that there was a dearth of study of the impacts of biking in the UK, most studies being done in North America. Francis Whetstone said that no one wanted unlimited biking.

Roger Street stressed the danger of biking and mentioned a case of someone getting hurt by a bike on the Forest; horses, he said, go slowly, bikers do not. It was observed that on the Forest Way biking is very aggressive. In reply to a question from Chris Simmonds, Michael Cooper said that bikers had proposed a biking route across the Forest. John Chalke said that biking will bring people seeking a rush of adrenalin. Mike Wells thought bikers would be across the spectrum in terms of behaviour.

John Barnes said that limiting biking to those who were responsible would be less of a problem, Philip Glyn adding that licencing would be necessary. Tom Mitchell said he had asked a dozen people about biking on the Forest and none of them (admittedly elderly) said they wanted to see it. John Chalke described the Forest in terms of its tranquillity and Brian Killick thought that not just families but clubs would come too. Michel Cooper finished the discussion by saying that the Committee would be making a recommendation to the Board and that blanket agreement was unlikely.

#### **5) Local Development Framework - how does the Board contribute to the LDF?**

Roger Street introduced the question for which John Barnes thanked him. Hew Prendergast said that he had contributed to one of the LDF documents, the Wealden Design Guide, and commented on the Issues and Options Consultation Paper.

#### **6) AOB**

Vivien Hill extended a vote of thanks for dealing with a parishioner's concern raised at the last meeting.

On deer, Hew Prendergast summarised what the Ashdown Area Deer Group (of which he is Chairman) has been doing: setting up a warden scheme to cover East Sussex, erecting new hazard signs on the A22, and currently collating information from landowners/mangers about the scale of the deer problem locally and the level of shooting. The Board has no policy to cull deer; it would, anyway, be impossible to shoot safely on that part of the Forest it manages. In the meanwhile Rangers continue to deal with ca 300 deer casualties/year. Francis Whetstone said Fred Marshall says a third of a population needs to be shot each year in order for it to remain level.

John Chalke was referred to ESCC Rangers to deal with badgers digging on the Forest Way.

John Barnes thanked everyone for coming. The meeting ended at 2041.