

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

1900, Wednesday 17 February 2010  
Ashdown Forest Centre

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

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

**1) Apologies**

Parishes: *Buxted*, Louise Daniels; *Hartfield*, Tom Mitchell, Clair Park; *Maresfield*, Charlie Stevenson; *Withyham*, Laurence Burton, Jill Pardey.

**2) Minutes of the last meeting (16 December 2009)**

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

**3) Matters arising**

Biking: nothing has been heard from bikers since the last meeting. Paul Brown said that any association of bikers would best be affiliated to the CTC (Cyclists' Touring Club). He passed over a copy of an issue of *Cycle*, the CTC magazine, and also the February/March issue of *The Chronicle*, the parish magazine for Highbrook, Sharpthorne and West Hoathby with a short feature by him about the Forest.

Michael Cooper suggested that any proposals for bike routes be passed to the relevant parish councils for their comment; George Korbel supported this. John Barnes emphasised that any routes would be through woodland rather than heathland and added that the Board would also need to take into account the views of other users and, following Roger Street's concern, of dwellings on the Forest.

**4) Items submitted for discussion**

i) Destination of wood cut on the Forest

Hew Prendergast said that wood (mostly birch, also oak, seldom any other species) went in various directions. That cut by staff was brought to the Forest Centre for use in the woodfuel boiler; most contractors took wood away as part of their contract (e.g. for resale as logs); some wood is piled roadside for permitted removal by commoners (who have a right to two cords of wood, i.e. 2 x [8'x4'x4']) or for sale to non commoners who have applied for a wood permit. Most commoners and wood permit holders in fact cut their own wood on the Forest in designated areas of woodland. This winter, more than 100 people, mostly commoners, have, or are still, cutting wood (i.e. ca 200 cords in total).

In answer to a question from George Korbel, Hew Prendergast said that the general rule is that any cut wood is removed from the Forest by the end of March.

ii) Conservator communications: *Ashdown Forest Life*, website, e-news service, talks, media appearances, site notices – do they suffice?

John Barnes said that communication with the community had been a concern of the Board three or so years ago and that it was time to take stock. Hew Prendergast summarised the various outputs:

- *Asbdown Forest Life*, two issues/year; print runs of 5,000; mailed to all Forest residents, commoners and Friends; also placed in local halls, libraries, shops, the Forest Centre etc.;
- website: comprehensive, regularly updated (but not at present due to long-term staff illness);
- e-news service: news items sent on *ad hoc* basis to ca 150 on mailing list, including parish clerks, parish magazine editors and online subscribers (i.e. via the website);
- talks: staff give talks locally (four so far this year);
- media appearances: numerous articles (including those arising from press releases) are published in the local press, and local radio and TV often request interviews on a range of subjects;
- site notices: all major works on the Forest are publicised weeks in advance via site notices with a map explaining the nature, rough timing and description of the work.

Vivien Hill suggested that Forest Row Village Hall would be a good place to deposit written material and she offered to send the email address of the Forest Row group of churches. She added that she writes the Village Voice for Forest Row in the *Courier* but does not have editorial control. George Korbel said that Hartfield PC produces two newsletters/year. John Barnes said that he was always prepared to attend parish assemblies and Michael Cooper concluded the discussion by observing that it was useful to get feedback on communication after three years of considerable effort by the Board.

## 5) Other issues

i) Habitat Regulations and their application to the Forest as an EU Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area

Hew Prendergast described, in brief, the two EU designations and the importance of the Forest heathlands and bird populations (Dartford warbler and nightjar) that underpin them. The Habitat Regulations require that plans or proposals (e.g. housing developments) that may adversely affect these features must undergo a so-called Appropriate Assessment; in practice this is carried out by the District Councils. Key issues include the impact of increasing numbers of visitors (and their dogs) through disturbance and nitrogen deposition. Councils need to put in place strategies either to avoid or to mitigate for adverse impact. In other parts of England (the New Forest, Dorset heaths, the Thames Basin) these regulations are already making their mark. On the Forest they have so far led to a visitor survey being commissioned by WDC and Mid Sussex DC in 2008 (which had a lot of input from the Board) and to a meeting being hosted by WDC on 19 February.

Roger Street said that the issue had arisen at Maresfield PC because of Natural England's supposition that there should be no development within 400m of the Forest – which would have a significant impact on, for example, the provision of new affordable housing. A 12 house development is being sought for Fairwarp. John Barnes replied that the Board has not yet taken a view although it was likely to articulate a preservation argument. In the end it was up to WDC to strike the appropriate balance. WDC would be presenting a consultation document in the autumn.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1947.

NB. Next meeting: Wednesday 19 May