

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

1900, Wednesday 23 February 2011  
**Ashdown Forest Centre**

Present on behalf of the Board: Rupert Thornely-Taylor (who took the Chair), Michael Cooper (arr. 1927), John Francis, Michael Hoy (arr. 1930), Sylvia Martin, Hew Prendergast (Director), Tony Reid, Rosalyn St Pierre (arr. 1928), Francis Whetstone (arr. 1922).

Present on behalf of *Parishes/Councils*: *Danehill*, Joan Lunn; *Hartfield*, John Chalk (arr. 1930), Claire Risby; *West Hoathly*, Paul Brown; *Withyham*, Keith Obbard (arr. 1933).

Rupert Thornely-Taylor asked everyone to introduce themselves and apologised for an apparent mix-up about the agreed start-time for the meeting.

### **1) Apologies**

Board: Richard Stogdon.

Councils: *Buxted*, Geoffrey Sheard; *Crowborough*, Paul Adams (both emailed late apologies); *Maresfield*, Roger Street.

### **2) Minutes of the last meeting (8 December 2010)**

These were approved as an accurate record.

### **3) Matters arising**

Hew Prendergast regretted that, on 3 February, he had emailed the Panel with dates for this year's meetings when they had in fact already been agreed at the 8 December meeting, viz. on Wednesday 18 (rather than 25) May, 21 September and 14 (rather than 7) December.

For the Forest Centre development, architects are still working on the plans but submission for planning permission will take place soon.

Hew Prendergast said he is still looking at the issue of car park charging. This topic had reached the *Kent and Sussex Courier* front page (a copy was shown). The article was accurate but the headlines were sensationalistic and inaccurate, notably in their use of the word "plan" to describe the Conservators' approach. There is no "plan"!

Claire Risby said that to Hartfield PC both Michael Hoy and Francis Whetstone had reported that there was indeed no plan. There were concerns that ratepayers might feel they already support the Forest. Joan Lunn reported that at Danehill PC there was a presumption that local people would be against charging since they had a stake in the Forest resulting from having helped ESCC purchase it. There was no adverse comment at West Hoathly PC according to Paul Brown; he added that in Crawley one can pay by phone. Rupert Thornely-Taylor thought paying by mobile phone was time consuming unless an iPhone/smartphone would be used and if local people would accept visitors having to pay. John Francis thought voluntary payment might work.

Rupert Thornely-Taylor finished the discussion by saying that the Board was less concerned about next year's budget – this had already been agreed – but was really thinking about further cuts from ESCC. The 2011-2012 contribution showed a 10% drop compared with 2010-2011 and the Board had to be prepared for a further drop in 2012-2013. He said that the Board would be in dire straits if no funding replaces that from Higher Level Stewardship when this finishes in 2016.

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

##### **i) Temporary electric fencing on the Forest over the summer**

Hew Prendergast said that, under the Ashdown Forest Act, the Board could fence an additional 40 hectares (100 acres) out of the Forest's 2,500 hectares. Chris Marrable (Conservation Officer) has so far identified eight remote sites, away from dog walking areas, that could be temporarily fenced for summer grazing. The additional 40 hectares would not all be fenced at the same time. Larger areas would require the fences to be moved less often and allow the sheep to settle and graze widely. Temporary fencing last autumn at the Isle of Thorns, a popular dog walking area for locals, had received a mixed reaction and incurred some vandalism. It was clearly sensible to ensure that any enclosures did not straddle paths or rides. When the areas are finalised they will be shown on the Forest website. The sheep are unlikely to be out before ca mid April.

There was a short discussion about Exmoor ponies; some are on MoD land at Pippingford where they are highly effective at controlling gorse.

##### **ii) Pooh Bridge**

The main works on the access and car park for Pooh Bridge were completed last week although weather has delayed the opening for use of some of the bridleway. Some signage is still required and no doubt some teething issues will need to be dealt with. Last weekend the car park was fairly full.

Rosalyn St Pierre suggested that ESCC officers are thanked. Hew Prendergast said he had done that, admiring the patience needed to see through the project over at least ten years.

##### **iii) Forest communications**

The latest figures for the Board's various forms of communication are: 52 followers on Twitter, 226 on Facebook, 274 on LinkedIn (Rupert Thornely-Taylor queried this figure), 321 on the e-news service. The next issue of *Ashdown Forest Life* (print-run 5,000) is in preparation.

John Francis asked if the parishes felt that communications had improved. Joan Lunn said that everything is 'there' if people want it. Claire Risby wondered why she had not received anything from the Forest e-news service recently and thought it useful to put the Annual Public Meeting mentioned by Rupert Thornely-Taylor (for 7 June) in village columns in the *Courier*. In response to a query from John White, Hew Prendergast said that he was happy to accept invitations to talk to parish assemblies (as he is to Withyham on 18 April) and that he would follow up on a question from Claire Risby about taking felled wood at Newbridge.

## **5) AOB**

Michael Hoy described a public hearing the previous day with a Planning Inspector regarding a proposed development in Fairwarp. He said that, apart from the vendor, the entire village was against it. WDC officers had recommended approval of the development but councillors had not because of Natural England's concern about the impact of developments within 400 metres of the boundary of the Forest with its EU conservation designations. When NE then withdraw its objection due to the apparent revocation of the South East Plan, the developers appealed, hence the hearing. He commented on the Localism Bill that will allow communities to appeal against inappropriate development.

At 2012 the Chairman closed the meeting, apologised again for any confusion about the start time, and thanked everyone for their attendance.

NB

The next meetings will take place at the Forest Centre as follows:

1900, Wednesday 18 May

1900 Wednesday 21 September

1900, Wednesday 14 December