

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

1900, Wednesday 15 September 2010
Ashdown Forest Centre

Present on behalf of the Board: Roy Galley (who took the Chair), John Francis, Sylvia Martin, Hew Prendergast (Director), Tony Reid, Rosalyn St Pierre, Francis Whetstone.

Present on behalf of *Parishes/Councils*: *Buxted*, Geoffrey Sheard; *Crowborough*, Paul Adams; *Danehill*, Michael Fishlock; *Forest Row*, Vivien Hill, Brian Killick; *Hartfield*, George Korbel, Clair Park; *Maresfield*, Roger Street; *West Hoathly*, Paul Brown.

1) Apologies

Board: John Barnes, Nick Benett, Michael Cooper, Philip Glyn, Michael Hoy, Rupert Simmons, Rupert Thornely-Taylor.

Councils: *Danehill*, Joan Lunn.

2) Minutes of the last meeting (19 May 2010)

These were approved as an accurate record.

3) Matters arising

Under 3, Hew Prendergast reported that copies of the Natural England presentations had been circulated to Parish Clerks on 2 June. Under 4i, he said that the West High Weald Deer Management Group was holding a training day somewhere locally in October. Tony Reid confirmed that ESCC had updated the deer/vehicle collision figure signs on the A22. Under 4iii) Roger Street reported that funding cuts had stopped ESCC carrying out the proposed speed calming measures on the B2026 south of Fairwarp.

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

i) Development of the Forest Centre

At its last full meeting in June the Board approved the full development of the Centre, including the introduction of catering and a new building between the Office and Information Barns. The next steps are commissioning full architectural drawings and applying for planning permission.

ii) Shepherded grazing

After three years in post Louise Amos has resigned and her replacement is to be announced shortly. Louise's skill-set – comprising, for example, a good ecological knowledge alongside sheep husbandry, and dog handling experience - was very unusual, at least in South East England and unlikely to be replicated. One likely consequence is that the amount of shepherded grazing will probably decline and that the Hebridean sheep will, instead, be put into temporary enclosures on the heaths – something that is permitted under the 1974 Ashdown Forest Act. Suitable sites are yet to be selected.

Vivien Hill commented that fencing might not be contentious if the reasoning for it was well displayed. Roger Street described electric-fenced enclosures for Hebrideans on Piltdown Golf Course and warned that the latter managed to escape there. Several had been killed by dogs. Hew Prendergast reported that a sheep had been attacked on the Forest the previous week after a

Siberian husky got away from its owner in Kings Standing car park and ran across the B2026 into the grazing enclosure. Because the owner had immediately contacted a Forest Ranger and the Police, and then driven to the Forest Centre, the owner of the sheep decided not to prosecute. An account was, however, relayed to the local press (PS: and has appeared).

iii) Winter work 2010/2011 (a map was distributed)

Work is already underway east of Crows Nest Clump and north of the New Road (traversing the Forest from Duddleswell to the A26). This early start is due to the October arrival of hen harriers whose roost in the area (up to four birds) is the largest concentration of the species in Sussex. Both Forest and contractors' signs advising of the work had been stolen. Work in all areas will involve scrub and small tree clearance, although that near Wych Cross also comprises rhododendron removal. Hew Prendergast described a student project on the Forest last winter whose findings supported the well-known rule of thumb that a tree's girth increases by one inch per year, irrespective of species and site.

iv) Disabled access by car parks

Four 'bridges', with disabled parking signs, have been built over the bank and ditches at Broadstone, Bushy Willow, Hollies and Kings Standing car parks. A small grant from Tourism South East had helped fund a consultant to assess what might be done to improve facilities for visitors unable to enjoy the Forest other than taking in the views from some of the car parks. The bridges will allow them to get out of the car parks and either onto adjacent flat ground suitable for placing a portable chair or to a nearby memorial bench. The Sussex Probation Service did much of the construction work. The work will be extended to other car parks if resources permit.

5) AOB

In response to a request from Roger Street about biking, Roy Galley said that, after presentations from mountain bikers and a site meeting with them late last year below Gills Lap, the ball was now in their court to propose a route in that vicinity where control on numbers could be applied. There had been no feedback. Hew Prendergast said that local parishes had previously been asked for their input on the whole topic and that the majority view, as with the public, had been firmly against the Conservators' allowing it. The bikers on the Forest are invariably males in their 20s, 30s and 40s – not the family groups as they are often portrayed.

Vivien Hill wondered at non-electronic means of informing people about why shooting of deer on the Forest was not possible. In general discussion it was made clear that the limits to shooting deer are not defined by the availability of suitable stalkers (of whom there are many) but of public safety and the location of deer. Deer (especially fallow) learn very quickly where they are safe. There was agreement with Francis Whetstone's observation that the general view of deer by the public is very different now from when a demonstration took place some years ago at a nearby hotel that offered locally shot venison on its menu.

Roy Galley drew attention to a vacancy on the Board after the recent resignation of a commoner-elected Conservator. An election is due to take place on 12 November at the Forest Centre.

There being no further business, Roy Galley thanked everyone present and closed the meeting at 1954.

Date of next meeting: 1900, Wednesday 8 December.