

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Programme Committee

**Monday 17 May 2021 at 14:00**

**VIRTUAL MEETING - MS TEAMS**

Committee members present: Mr N Mawdsley (Chair) Mrs S Tidy (Vice Chair), Mr C Smith and Mr M Cooper

Co-opted Members/Advisors present: Kristoffer Hewitt (NE)

Also present: Mr J Adler (CEO), Mrs K Dirs (Clerk) and Mr A Reid

Minutes taken by the Clerk

There were no members of the public present

		<b>Action</b>
<b>08/21</b>	<p><b>Apologies</b> Apologies had been received from Ms McAll, Cllr Hardy, Mr Stogdon and Carole Mortimer (NE).</p>	
<b>09/21</b>	<p><b>Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature</b> There were none.</p>	
<b>10/21</b>	<p><b>Matters arising</b></p> <p><u>10.01/21 RPA Update</u> The CEO advised that the Conservators had received a sum of £366k from the RPA, but the remainder of the grant was being withheld whilst the eligibility disagreement in relation to disputed land parcels was contested. The CEO confirmed he was meeting with James Couzens who had been tasked to resolve the matter. The CEO advised that if the matter was not resolved, it would be escalated to the Secretary of State. <b>ACTION:</b></p> <p><b>JA</b></p> <p><u>10.02/21 SAMMS</u> The CEO reported a disappointing response to the SAMMS role and as a result, Wealden District Council (WDC) would be re-advertising the role and it was unlikely an Officer would be in post until late summer, with the project set to commence Spring 2022. The CEO confirmed WDC were now in dialogue with other established SAMMS authorities. There was some discussions around SAMMS contributions and whether interest was accumulating on existing contributions to WDC.</p> <p><u>10.03/21 Grazing Base</u> The CEO reconfirmed the project was on hold and would be reviewed as part of the strategic plan for the grazing programme.</p>	<b>JA</b>
<b>11/21</b>	<p><b>Financial Information for the Programme Committee</b></p> <p><u>11.01/21 Countryside Stewardship finance summary YE 31 March 2021</u> The CEO spoke to the CS Financial Summary advising Members of cashflow issues and the need for sustainable core funding.</p> <p>It was noted that income from Educational visits (Project M160) had surpassed original expectations, despite the restrictions of the pandemic.</p> <p>The Chairman questioned the VAT liability for the current financial year and Mr Reid confirmed that VAT relating to expenditure was predicted.</p>	

	<p>There was some discussion about the development of a vision and strategy for Ashdown Forest and the priorities for increasing income. The CEO advised that initial investigations into the possibility of car park charging were underway.</p>	
<b>12/21</b>	<p><b>Progress Reports</b></p> <p><u>12.01/21 Grazing Officer's report</u>  Members were advised that a review of the Conservators' grazing operation would be undertaken to include consideration of the sheep/cattle balance, a sustainable grazing resource and support for Commoner's grazing. The CEO expressed concern at the lack of lay-back land available for grazing.</p> <p>There was some discussion about Commoner's grazing provision and the affect this might have on the habitat and available subsidies. The CEO advised that he was looking into the possibility of a landscape scale nature recovery programme and applying for a "dummy" ELMS Test and Trial agreement to facilitate a smooth transition when the CS agreement concludes.</p> <p>Members were advised that the Sussex Rural Crime Police Team were conducting patrols with the staff team to educate the public on livestock worrying.</p> <p><u>12.02/21 Deer programme report</u>  The CEO reported that a specialist infra-red drone survey was being considered for the autumn to help gauge deer numbers on the Forest and neighbouring estates. It was recognised that a greater understanding of fallow deer populations is needed and that the Deer Programme Coordinator requires additional support, possibly from AONB. There was some discussion on deer strikes and deer populations.</p> <p><u>12.03/21 Stakeholder consultation report</u>  The CEO advised Members that much more work is required before the organisation is ready to carry out the consultation. The CEO is due to meet Kate Ashbrook from the Open Spaces Society in the next few weeks.</p> <p>The Chairman spoke of the need for consensus and harmonised consultations and the importance of creating a robust amenity and forest management plan to deliver the CS agreement.</p>	<b>JA</b>
<b>13/21</b>	<p><b>Compliance Checklist and Monitoring</b></p> <p><u>13.01/21 Monitoring</u>  The CEO explained the necessity to implement a wide yet focused ecological monitoring programme. Members were informed that several universities and colleges are independently carrying out monitoring work on the Forest. A Forest-wide Nightjar survey is scheduled for June.</p> <p><u>13.02/21 Strategic Risks</u>  The CEO advised members that a full risk management overhaul was required.</p>	
<b>14/21</b>	<p><b><u>Any Urgent Item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman.</u></b>  There was none.</p>	

The meeting closed at 15:49