

Minutes of the
ROADS, PLANNING & AMENITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

1430, Monday 18 July 2005

Ashdown Forest Centre

Minutes

Present: Messrs F. Marshall (Chair), Mr R. Beal (Ranger), Mr F. Brown, Mr L. Gillham, Mr P. Glyn, Mr M. Lock (arrived at ca. 1515), Mr R. Parsons, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk), Mrs J. Wirdnam
In attendance: Mr F. Whetstone, Mr A. White

1) Review of seats/benches on the Forest

With the aid of a map, Dr Prendergast pointed out that the Board's current policy on seats is based on the 35 that exist on the Forest (until this review the number was not known). Their positions vary from being inside car parks (e.g. Hollies), to between car parks and the view (e.g. Lintons) and to 200-300 m from a car park (e.g. Gills Lap, Camp Hill). All are uncompromisingly ugly, urban and concrete (as had been mentioned in the last meeting of this Committee). Furthermore, some are either in bad condition or have had the ground eroded around them after years of use. Dr Prendergast showed some pictures taken by Mr Beal.

He proposed a simple policy on the introduction of replacement of seats, namely that they should be:

- limited to a maximum of 2/car park, sited close to/beside those car parks with an extant or potential view;
- introduced to new sites or used as replacements as appropriate;
- made to an appropriately rural design using local materials;
- paid for by those sponsors wanting to dedicate them as memorials, such that they provide an income, and are not a cost, to the Forest;
- dedicated for a maximum of 10 years, after which there could be either a 're-dedication' or a new dedication at appropriate cost.

Mr Beal introduced and recommended a design by High Weald Furniture. He said that people pay £1500 for seats at a site he knows near Hastings. Mr Marshall suggested a metal plate up the legs, and at the junction of the upright and the headboard, to prevent chainsawing. Mr Glyn said that good timber was essential for seats.

The Committee had no issue with the policy suggested above but wanted to have itemised costs for design and manufacture, a quote from another company, and the factoring into the costs passed onto the seat sponsors for replacement and repair (especially since it was unlikely that insurance could be obtained for the seats).

[Mr Lock was welcomed to the Committee and to meeting during the discussion.]

2) Planning matters

Cats Protection

Dr Prendergast said that Tim Raikes had had a meeting with Dominic Sullivan of Cats Protection (CP) on 1 July. He had explained the methodology being used by the Board for assessing a licence fee and was (as of today) awaiting further contact.

Mr Whetstone was assured that the land by the A275 was part of the Forest. Mr Gillham said that CP had not actually started to negotiate and that the 'ball is in the court' of CP. Mr Parsons said that planning approval has not yet been given for the new access.

3) Encroachments/byelaw breaches

i) Old Fox House, Duddleswell

After years of the Forest having problems with the owners of this property, Mr Beal and Dr Prendergast had approached the County Solicitor to instigate court proceedings.

Mr Beal described how Mr Doherty had taken out a deposit licence in 1999. Since then, at various times and for varying periods, he had had building materials, a shipping container and vehicles parked on the Forest. He had not been able, as he had been due, to attend a court appearance (apparently being overseas) but now that his building work was near an end was prepared, according to his solicitors, not to break bye-laws anymore. Even today he had vehicles on the Forest.

As a new Committee member, Mr Lock was informed that problem with the bye-laws is the £50 maximum fine that is imposed for breaking them; this is why the Board has been prepared to take out court injunctions. Mr Lock suggested asking the County Solicitor if Forest staff could clamp illegally parked vehicles.

Mr Parsons said that Dr Prendergast should have the authority to act on behalf of the Board in these matters. It was agreed that he go back to the County Solicitor to find the best grounds for a case.

ii) Kidds Hill

Mr Marshall mentioned the encroachment at the top of Kidds Hill on the corner with the B2026. ESCC had agreed to have a sandstone wall erected to prevent further cutting of the corner by heavy traffic, and Matthews, the contractors whose lorries had done the damage, had agreed to pay for any works. Instead, ESCC had now surfaced the cut corner. He urged the Board to demand ESCC to reinstate the corner. The Committee agreed and Mr Lock suggested that a copy of the letter be sent to him.

4) Forest Centre development – update

Dr Prendergast reported that a) a structural engineer had assessed (but not yet reported on) what he had seen in trial pits that he had asked be dug by the toilet block (which has a number of cracks in its walls); b) he was hiring a consultant to look at the options for catering facilities and contracts at the Centre (Mr Lock suggested a franchise that could be taken in-house if successful); and c) that the next stage was to get a business plan in place. Given the amount of work involved, this would have to go out to contract and would cost considerably more than the 'high single figure' thousands that he had previously envisaged.

5) Entrance signs to the Forest

Dr Prendergast showed a draft design for entry signs into the Forest; such signs, he suggested, should provide an 'impact statement'. Mr Marshall agreed, saying that "we certainly need to tell people when they come onto the Forest". Mr Gillham said "we have to go down that route." Mr Whetstone said he did not like the design but Mr Glyn thought it "excellent" and "distinctive". The Forest, he added, "must have an identity".

Dr Prendergast added that the same design should go onto bye-law signs that Mr Beal said were much needed.

The Committee approved the continuation of this work by Dr Prendergast.

6) AOB

In answer to a question from Mrs Wirdnam, Dr Prendergast said that he had had no news from ESCC about the success of its Interreg funding bid that included a study suggested by Dr Prendergast and Mr Beal on disabled access in and around a sample of Forest car parks. [News of the success of the bid came in the following day.]

Dr Prendergast informed Mr Gillham that Mr Marrable had sought legal advice on the transfer of land at Whitehouse Farm.

The Committee welcomed the invitation from the Conservators of Malvern Hills for a return visit.

The meeting finished at 1706.