

Minutes of the

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

Monday 12 April 2010

Lancaster Room, Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr M Cooper (Chairman), Cllr J Barnes (*ex officio*), Mr R Beal (Ranger), Mr JA Francis, Mr R Galley, Cllr M Hoy, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr R St Pierre, Mr J Spicer (Vice Chairman), Mr E Stenhouse, Mr R Thornely-Taylor and Cllr F Whetstone. Minutes were taken by Mrs T Buxton.

08/10 Apologies.

Mr I Hurst (co-opted).

09/10 Declarations of Interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

There was none.

10/10 Matters arising – RPA03

10.1.1/10 *Mountain Biking*

The Chairman said the mountain bikers had not produced the cycling routes as previously discussed. He went on to say that the ‘ball was in their court’. Cllr Martin stated she hoped that any future emphasis would be on ‘family’ biking. She went on to ask if the Clerk had been aware of a 1000 competitor biking event at Pippingford Park. He replied he had been aware and confirmed no bikes had gone onto the Forest.

10.1.2/10 *Beech View*

The Chairman had passed the property en-route to the meeting; there had been no progress towards implementing the agreement made at the recent site meeting with the property owner. It was agreed that the Clerk should write again to the property owner setting out the agreement reached. The letter should contain an offer to assist with the removal the hardcore. The owner would then be billed. It was agreed that, if the owner continued to use the access for non-agricultural vehicles, the Board would take the matter further. Mr Stenhouse was concerned that the removal of the hardcore should not interfere with the property owner’s business and the Clerk said the hardcore would be removed with the utmost care.

10.1.3/10 *Nutley Arms*

Cllr Martin said the signage at the property was now even worse than before. The Committee noted that four signs remained on the Forest despite the licence being for two. The Clerk said the signed licence had still not been returned (after a seven year wait) and went on to say the owner was in arrears for both Forest rate and annual rent. After some discussion it was agreed that the legal position must be further explored, without any delay, before a new perpetual licence could be issued and a rescindment of the current licence.

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10.1.4/10 *Browns Brook Cottage*

At the invitation of the Chairman (and following his, the Clerk’s and Ranger Beal’s visit on 19 March) Mr Spicer, Vice-Chairman had met with the owner at the property, he explained the situation after his own site visit. Ranger Beal expressed his concern that the issues at this property were not being dealt with and that its

secluded position was being used as a reason for an exception to policy being made. He said the situation was the same as at Beech View namely the use of an agricultural access by non-agricultural vehicles. After a lengthy discussion the Chairman suggested that a further site visit, for the sake of clarity, would be useful before any decision was made. Cllr Barnes suggested that all available evidence (including copies of the 1910 maps and aerial photographs) should be gathered together and circulated prior to any site meeting. No decisions regarding any encroachment and access would be made until after the site visit.

It was agreed a site visit, with full background information, would be arranged for the meeting on 12 July.

10.2/10 Tenants in Kind

The idea of tenants in kind was briefly discussed and it was decided to not take this suggestion any further. This was followed by a discussion regarding the availability of wood permits. The Clerk said less and less wood was now available at the roadside. Mr Spicer suggested a *moratorium* on wood being available to non-commoners for one or two years to which the Clerk replied that this was beginning to happen in practice anyway given the number of Commoners collecting wood. It was agreed that Commoners would have priority as a matter of policy.

11/10 Planning and property issues – RPA 04

The document had been pre-circulated. It was noted that the planning application for White Plat had been withdrawn.

12/10 Forest Centre development – RPA 05

The document had been pre-circulated. There was a brief discussion regarding the merits of the document and the Clerk reminded the Committee it was for internal use. A fuller document designed to be presented to potential funders would be drafted in due course. It was generally agreed that a full business plan, with real costings, would be required.

There was some discussion regarding the validity of the proposed visitor numbers. Mr Stenhouse reiterated his concerns regarding the project as a whole. Mr Thornely-Taylor reiterated his concerns regarding future funding and severe financial losses the Board could be potentially responsible for. He went on to say the Board must be absolutely satisfied as the development would represent an additional financial commitment. Cllr Whetstone expressed concern about the use of public money to set up a commercial enterprise and how competition could impinge on local catering outlets. Cllr Barnes said it would be logical and proper to offer any franchise to local catering businesses in the first instance. Cllr Martin observed that competition was a good thing.

There followed a discussion on the Board's position regarding the Forest Centre development. Cllr Barnes reminded the Committee that the current proposals were modest and that the Board were totally committed to Stage 1. The Clerk replied that he was surprised that, after six years of discussion, Committee members were going back to fundamental issues.

Cllr St Pierre said she was appalled with the Committee and Board's response to the Forest Centre development. She asked who the Committee were protecting the Forest from and for whose benefit. She wanted to see a vibrant, forward looking organisation and the Committee and the Board should face up to the need for a hub from which to manage tourism and direct visitors to less 'sensitive' areas of the Forest.

The Clerk said Board members should be very grateful to its bold, forward-thinking predecessors who had a vision and put up the wonderful buildings on this site. He went on to say that, after six years, the Board were no further forward and in 2003 he had suggested that the Forest Centre should either close or the Board do something about it. He went on to say it was not good

enough to ignore visitors to the Forest and any income generated by a catering franchise would support education and information for visitors. Furthermore Mr Hurst, who was sadly not present today, had extensive experience and expertise in the development of visitor centres having had a senior position with English Heritage.

It was agreed that the Board would discuss Forest Centre development in June and that Mr Hurst should be asked to attend the meeting.

It was agreed that the Working Party (Cllrs Barnes and Martin, Mr Thornely-Taylor and the Chairman) should address the concerns regarding the document prior to the Board meeting and convene as soon as possible.

13/10 Financial information for RPA Committee responsibilities – RPA 6

There was no information as the financial year was only a few days old.

16.05 Cllr Barnes & Mr Thornely-Taylor left the meeting

14/10 Any urgent item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman

Mr Stenhouse said he had received a complaint about the access track alongside Ford's Green and asked whose responsibility repair was. Mr Beal and the Clerk said they had not received any complaints from the public. The Chairman reminded Mr Stenhouse that all complaints should be forwarded to the office for the staff to investigate. It was noted that some properties along the access track in question had perpetual licences, others had much older style licences, other (long-term) residents may have no licence at all. The residents would be informed and reminded about where responsibilities for repairs lie.

The Clerk was asked to write to the residents along the track beside the Green at Nutley, explaining the position. Cllr Martin offered to provide names and addresses.

Cllr Whetstone said repairs were needed on a section of the Vanguard Way that crosses the Forest.

Mr Beal explained the serious breach of bye-laws at Gorselands and this was discussed. Photographs were tabled. It was agreed that Natural England and the Forestry Commission should be informed of the unlicensed felling that has taken place and that an injunction be taken out immediately to prevent further felling.

It was agreed that the Clerk should take out an injunction on behalf of the Board as a matter of urgency.

The meeting closed at 16.15