

## Minutes of the

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

1430, Monday 5 February 2007

Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr F. Marshall (Chairman), Mr R. Beal (Ranger), Cllr F. Brown, Mr L. Gillham, Mr P. Glyn, Cllr R. Parsons, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk), Mr J. Spicer, Mr R. Thornely-Taylor (arrived 1445).  
Minutes taken by Mrs R. Marriott.

Also present: Cllr J. Barnes, Mrs F. Temple (financial adviser) and Mr F. Whetstone.

Apologies: Cllr D. Elkin and Cllr R. St.Pierre.

#### **1) Matters arising from last meeting.**

All matters arising had been dealt with at the previous Board meeting.

#### **2) Encroachments/bye-law breaches/access issues**

- (i) Access Licence for Cats Protection It was suggested that the Board's current Perpetual Licence could be shown to the independent expert as an example of the licence used for dwellings. The Committee recommended that, once the licence for Cats Protection had been determined, a complete review of the Perpetual Licence used for dwellings should take place.
- (ii) Bye-law breaches Mr Spicer enquired if there was a standard for pursuing bye-law breaches. He was especially concerned about the enforcement of speed restrictions on local access tracks and parking problems. Dr Prendergast explained that the residents' access licences allowed the installation of speed ramps and new "No parking" signs would be put up in the near future around the Forest. Priority at present was to deal with longstanding bye-law breaches and new ones committed by new residents. On seeing an obvious infringement, staff write to the offender pointing out the breach; if it persists a photograph is taken and the matter is put in the hands of the County Solicitor. Mr Beal explained that, when parking infringements occur, a warning notice is placed on the car. Residents could apply for a parking permit if certain conditions applied at a cost to the householder. Dr Prendergast pointed out how time-consuming it was to deal with bye-law infringements by Forest residents.

#### **3) Planning applications**

Dr Prendergast presented some recent examples of his comments made on-line to Wealden concerning planning applications that affected the Forest. It was agreed that any comments made should clearly show they are made on behalf of the Board of Conservators as an interested party, and be limited to what affects the Forest and the duties of the Board.

#### **4) Forest Centre development – update on the Parkin *Business plan***

- (i) Brown tourist signs. Dr Prendergast informed the Committee that East Sussex County Council had approved the placing of brown tourist signs at Wych Cross directing people to the Centre which could be viewed from both directions on the A22.
- (ii) Volunteer recruitment campaign. This had met with some success; more Volunteer Rangers than Information Volunteers had come forward and even a volunteer for archiving had been recruited.

#### **5) New lease of golf courses by the Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Club**

Dr Prendergast reported his concern about the new Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Club (RAFGC) lease which has been drawn up without any consultation with the Board even though it appears as a signatory on the lease dated 16 April 2006. Responsibility for a number of operational issues direct the RAFGC to ESCC rather than the Board and there appears to be no mention of the Bye-laws or Health and Safety legislation. Dr Prendergast is concerned about dealings with day to day practical problems and about the relationship between the Board and RAFGC. He had been in touch with ESCC's legal department. Cllr Barnes felt the matter was important; there was a need to look at the relationship between the Board and the RAFGC in the Ashdown Forest Act 1974 and the derogation of responsibilities in the lease.

#### **6) Visitor Access and Parking Management Strategy**

Dr Prendergast distributed a paper outlining a proposed strategy for an important element of future visitor management on the Forest, written by the Principle Landscape Architect of ESCC. The distribution of the car parks had been planned in the 1970's and remained little changed today. Dr Prendergast asked for comments.

There was a reluctance from Committee members to pursue the matter at present due to the volume of work in hand. Mr Glyn asked about the possible impact of the Commons Act 2006. Dr Prendergast replied that only new car parks are affected and added that, in his view, for the future sustainability of the Forest, some closures would be necessary in order to take visitor pressure off some of the more environmentally sensitive areas of the Forest, i.e. that some zoning of the Forest should be developed. Cllr Barnes suggested that the cost of a proper traffic/user survey should be sought and a date be set for future discussion.

#### **7) Amenity and Community Action Plan 2007-2008 (draft)**

Dr Prendergast explained that the Plan broadly set out the work that he would be doing over the next year and did not include the day to day maintenance of the Forest. It was agreed that Section 2.2 involving the enhancement of car parks would be removed. In view of the importance of resolving the conflict between conservation and public relations, it was agreed that this should be a primary objective and 2.1 should be headed "Resolve conflict between Conservation and Amenity" with key targets being communications through web site management and a newsletter, interpretation and education. 2.2 would therefore become the remaining objectives in the original 2.1 i.e. "Improve the appreciation and perception of the Forest by the Public" and would include the key targets of continuing the implementation of the Parkin *Plan* for the Centre as funds became available, improve sign-posting to and of the Visitor Centre and to produce a draft annual report for the Board by the end of June. 2.3 should remain unchanged, that is, "Enhance the Forest, and access to it, as an outstanding area of quiet and safe recreation". Mr Gillham commented that there was some overlap with the

Conservation objectives; Mr Marrable, the Conservation Officer, had suggested that some areas of the Forest should be left for purely aesthetic values. Cllr Barnes suggested that this is where some aspects of zoning may be applicable. Mr Glyn commented that the stakeholder consultation process undertaken by 3KQ would influence the development of the Forest Plan.

### **8) Report on signage and memorial benches**

Dr Prendergast reported that the new gateway and bye-law signs had been erected. Five new memorial seats had also been installed.

Some Committee members reported that they had received complaints that there was no deer warning on the gateway signs. Some regret was expressed that the gateway signs were rather small and had no “welcome”. Dr Prendergast said that deer warning signs were a highways issue; new deer signs, set against fluorescent yellow, were to be erected in the very near future at the entrance to the Forest along the A22 north of Nutley and south of Forest Row. Mr Marshall suggested that the B2026 needs Highways deer signs. Mr Glyn asked if flashing deer signs would be possible. Cllr Barnes said that they used solar energy, were very expensive but would be suitable for sponsorship if the chance arose. Dr Prendergast said that the Ashdown Area Deer Group had also discussed this idea and made a similar proposal to ESCC.

### **9) AOB**

- (i) Drying facilities for the staff. Mr Beal explained that the staff worked outside whatever the weather, consequently their clothes became soaked during incessant rain. The new boiler was better lagged than the old version, consequently the boiler room was no longer suitable for drying clothes. He requested that proper drying facilities be installed. It was agreed that the F&GP Committee should be asked to support funding for drying facilities.
- (ii) Un-registered land at Fairwarp. Mr Thornely-Taylor had been approached about some land which appeared to be un-registered and was causing some concern amongst residents of Fairwarp. He asked if this should be considered at another meeting. Dr Prendergast said that he had had extensive correspondence on the matter and that the land had not been part of the Forest since at least 1887. There was no indication that there had been any error of mapping. Cllr Barnes suggested that the Board take action to seek registration of the land as it was an important access to the Forest. If this failed, the Board could ask ESCC if the land could be registered as a public Right of Way. Dr Prendergast said he had recommended to correspondents that they take up the matter with ESCC, perhaps via Maresfield Parish Council.

Before the end of the meeting, Mr Marshall announced that he would not be standing for re-election as a Conservator at the approaching Annual Meeting of the Commoners. He expressed his appreciation for the support he had received whilst serving on the Board and said that he had enjoyed the company of his fellow members.

The meeting closed at 1720.