

Minutes of the

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

1430, Monday 17 July 2006

Ashdown Forest Centre

Members present: Mr F. Marshall (Chair), Mr R. Beal (Ranger), Cllr F. Brown, Mr P. Glyn, Cllr M. Lock, Cllr R. Parsons, Dr H. Prendergast (Clerk), Cllr S. Radford-Kirby, Mr J. Spicer, Mr R. Thornely-Taylor

Also present: Cllr F. Whetstone arrived at 1440

Apologies: Mr L. Gillham

1) Matters arising from last meeting

Mr Beal said that the issue of access to Hobgoblins (mentioned at the last meeting on 24 April) is still unresolved and that a more formal approach is needed with respect to the owners of Yew Tree Cottage where extensive mowing is still going on and trees planted on the Forest are still in place.

On the re-making of the verge at the top of Kidds Hill, Dr Prendergast said that a quote had been obtained from a contractor and that he was sending a letter to Matthews. The Committee expected a reply within a month.

2) Encroachments/bye-law breaches

Dr Prendergast said that there will be a hearing at Lewes Magistrates for the owners of a property in the West Chase who have been enclosing part of the Forest and parking without permission for a long time. He also said that he had written a letter to Commoners and Forest residents in which he had listed, for the second year in a row, the main bye-law breaches encountered by Rangers. He had hoped that the letter would be read and understood. He did wonder at its impact, however, given, for example, that he had been told that there had been extensive parking on the Forest at the end of Sandy Lane the previous Wednesday (although, on being asked, Mr Spicer said he had not seen any).

Mr Spicer said that dog-walkers who see tractors mowing find it incongruous that their dog cannot run free in the same open areas where there might be ground-nesting birds. There was some discussion about the applicability to the Forest of the CROW Act 2000. Dr Prendergast said he would once again look into how this affects dogs and their owners.

Mr Glyn said there was a perception of antagonism on the Forest against dog-walkers; this needs to be addressed as part of stakeholder engagement. Mr Spicer supported the idea of forming a Dog Walkers Forum (as mentioned in *Action plan 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007*).

Mr Beal handed out copies of pages relating to dogs from the *A-Z of countryside law*.

3) Planning applications

a) Cricket pitch, Forest Row. Forest Row Cricket Club has asked for a 30m artificial pitch to be laid on the cricket ground (as at Birch Grove). Dr Prendergast said he saw no reason why permission should not be granted. The Committee agreed to this provided that the pitch is reinstated if and when it ceases to be used.

b) New property entrance, Kidds Hill

The owners of Cobbers Farm are applying for permission for a new agricultural access across Forest land. The Chairman said that there are already two agricultural accesses to the property (one at the top of Kidds Hill, a second into a farm yard) as well as one to the house. Cllr Parsons and Mr Spicer both declared an interest although the former, when asked by the Chairman, told the Committee that, over a two year period, there had been some 5000 lorry movements into the farm in order to build a manege. He wondered what might happen in future in the field to which access is required (it is currently used for the Colemans Hatch Flower Show). Observations were made about the 4.5 m width of the proposed new access, in excess of the 3.0 m one allowed elsewhere on the Forest, the width of the bell-mouth, and the removal of Forest top soil.

On the question of declaring an interest, Mr Glyn said this was something that needs to be encompassed within new standing orders.

Cllr Radford-Kirby said he would vote against granting permission since the Board is in the business of protecting the Forest, through the Act, and there was no benefit to the Forest in this proposal.

The Committee agreed that permission for a new access should not be granted at this stage. In order for a balanced judgement to be made at a later stage, they requested the applicant to supply a current map (not one that is many decades old), a plan with the dimensions allowed for Forest accesses, and the presentation of a case that takes into account the views of local residents, including for example the impact on relieving traffic and the merits of closing a hunting gate. The Committee also questioned the motivation behind the application.

[NB After the meeting it was discovered that an application for a new access from this property over Forest land had been turned down by the Board in May 1994.)

4) Forest Centre development – review of the Parkin *Business plan*.

Further comments/questions

It was pointed out that the last Board meeting resolved to set up a Working Group to look at the financial implications of the development and of the various initial options. Mr Glyn said that the appointment of a Visitor Services Manager (as suggested by the *Business plan*) would entail a financial cost, which would be looked at by the Working Group, and presented to the Board before the next meeting.

Cllr Radford-Kirby wondered at the value of car park charges and of the income at Seven Sisters from annual permits and *ad hoc* visits respectively.

Mr Glyn asked about compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) at the Centre. Dr Prendergast said that some of the top priority issues highlighted in the 2004 report (*Access audit report* by A.P. Appleby) were done, but many others are not – e.g. the disabled toilet. Cllr Parsons said the test for compliance is feasibility, based on resources. He added that the goal of the DDA Act was to ‘lift the temperature’ of DDA issues and to progress on a reasonable basis. It has not yet been tested in court.

At Hartfield Parish Council Mr Parsons was asked why the Parkin *Business plan* was not in the public domain. He had replied that it was going through the three committees and that in September the Working Group would advise the Board on what steps to take. Each committee should take a view. This committee should take a view on the considerable changes to the existing buildings. He expressed concern at the ‘overfull plate’ facing the Board.

Mr Radford-Kirby said that some Board members were excited by proposals in the *Business plan* and others were confronted by the reality. His understanding was that the Working Party would be assessing this.

Mr Marshall said that the sale of refreshments in the tea rooms at Ashdown Forest Garden Centre is doing well.

5) New designs for bye-law signage

Dr Prendergast showed draft designs for new bye-law signage. There were no comments other than a suggestion by Mr Thornley-Taylor to modify one referring to ‘no parking’ on Forest access tracks and praise by Mr Glyn in the success in getting a unified style to Forest signage, something he had been looking forward to ever since joining the Board seven years ago.

6) New temporary exhibition at the Centre (opening 3 August)

Dr Prendergast announced the opening of a new exhibition called *Winnie-the-Pooh in the landscape* on 4 August, with a preview for the Board, Friends and Volunteers the day before. The exhibition is a joint effort with Egmont Publishing.

7) AOB

In answer to a question, Dr Prendergast said that the Urgency Committee had met on 28 June to discuss the access licence application of Cats Protection. It had revised the wording of issues to be determined by the RICS-appointed Expert and on 10 July the Chairman of the Board had sent a letter, with this new wording, to Cats Protection.

The meeting finished at 1710.