

Minutes of the

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

1430, Monday 16 July 2007

Present: Mr MJ Cooper (Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Cllr D Elkin, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Mr J Spicer, Mr E Stenhouse, Mr R Thornely-Taylor. Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

Also present: Mr G Lake (ESCC), Cllr F Whetstone.

Apologies: Mr R Beal, Mr L Gillham, Cllr B Lacey, Cllr R St. Pierre.

1) **Election of Committee Vice Chairman and proposal for additional members**

In accordance with the Standing Orders a Vice Chairman was elected. The Chairman proposed Mr J Spicer and this was seconded by Mr J Barnes. Mr Spicer was duly elected and took up the Vice-Chairmanship with thanks. Cllr Martin was proposed and accepted as a new member of the Committee.

2) **Matters arising**

Standing Orders were briefly discussed in relation to the process of approving minutes and those of the meeting of 23 April were duly approved. There was short discussion regarding RPA expenditure from 1 April to 4 July and it was agreed that FGP would review how best to make such figures available to the Committees in future.

Mr Spicer asked if any further discussion had taken place, since the last meeting, about deer signs with Mr Crane. Dr Prendergast replied that he had met Mr Crane but the latter had had to leave.

3) **Questions taken from members of the public.**

There were no members of the public present.

4) **Deer Signs**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Lake who was attending on behalf of Mr I Johnson (responsible for regulatory road matters including signage). Dr Prendergast described the location and style of the current deer warning signage. Mr Lake explained about proscribed signs as used on the public highway and tabled a highways policy document. He added that the current signs were located to act as a 'gateway feature' and were designed with an additional fluorescent background to be more highly visible; it was recognised that a plethora of signs was ineffective; that the current regulatory signs were not sympathetic to the surroundings and that variations to regulatory signs were limited. The Chairman asked about evidence of signage effectiveness and Mr Lake responded that as the signs were 'passive' no evidence was available. He added that attempts were made to identify areas of conflict but that it was difficult and depended on many variable factors. Dr Prendergast presented some local deer casualty figures. On the A22 between Wych Cross and Nutley there were 13 deer / vehicle collisions between 1 April and 11 July 2006 when the old deer signs were present, yet 23 in the same period in 2007 after the new signs had been put up. The efficacy, or not, of the presence of deer signs can be further gauged from figures for the C2 between (a) Goat cross-roads and Wych Cross with high traffic volume and no deer signs and (b) Wych Cross and Coleman's Hatch with low traffic volume and two deer signs: (a) had just 16 casualties in 2006 compared, surprisingly, to 35 for (b). Mr Thornely-Taylor stated that the old signs, which had stood for over 30 years, had become familiar to local people, however, visitors to the area found them unusual and striking and asked if it was now the case that such signs could not be erected? Mr Lake replied that no

planning permission was required for statutory signs, however, replacement of old signs could be undertaken at the Board's own cost 'off' the highway and that planning permission would be required. He added that if 'non-standard' signs were to be erected 'on' the highway verge planning permission would have to be granted by GOSE and this could be problematical. Mr Lake stated that he had already been in contact with GOSE regarding 'cricket board' style signs to record the number of collisions and that these had not been approved. He added that Corex corrugated plastic signs, with figures changing from month to month, might be approved. There was a brief discussion regarding an underpass on the A22 and it was agreed that this would be discussed in October when more information was available. After further discussion the Committee agreed (a) to ask Mr Lake again to approach GOSE to apply for modified 'cricket board' signs supported by evidence such as photographs and breakdown of costs including Ranger time and (b) to ask ESCC for a 'repeater' deer warning sign near the Pippingford bends.

15.15 Mr Lake left the meeting

5) Forest Plan

Dr Prendergast asked that Committee members to look at the 2007 / 2008 Action Plan and consider additions to it. He asked that suggestions be forwarded to him via e-mail, with a copy to the Chairman, by Friday 21st September so that a briefing paper can be compiled. He added that the Plan was a fairly short document and it was agreed that a succinct document would be welcome. It was noted that a ten year plan would end after the completion of HLS. A nine year plan might be more appropriate, given the significance of HLS in terms of both level of activity and finances. It was suggested that 'strategy' was a more appropriate term than 'plan' but Dr Prendergast said that 'plan' had been used at stakeholder meetings so, for the sake of clarity, might be retained for the time being.

6) Encroachments / bye-law breaches

Mr Spicer gave a report on the progress made by the working party. He stated that the working party were trying to formulate a 'code of conduct' to prioritise actions leaving aside those where there were no resources or equipment available, for example parking and speeding. He added that it was paramount enforcement was needed in situations that caused damage, destruction or infringement and that temporary infringements such as skips required a system of licensing to be developed. It was agreed that methods of dealing with infringements that were user-friendly and non-adversarial be developed.

There was a discussion regarding the content of a 'code of conduct' and who it was aimed at. It was agreed that the terms of reference of the working party should not be restricted to property alone and that a broader remit was now required. It was agreed that Dr Prendergast would supply the working party with copies of the documents that go to new Forest residents.

There was a discussion regarding content of the database of Forest residents. Dr Prendergast said that databases in the office contained almost all properties on the Forest that have to make some sort of annual payment (exceptions include those at Streeter's Rough and Chelwood Gate that have access crossing land that has been part of the Forest only since 1982). It was properties adjoining the Forest that caused most problems. There was a short discussion regarding the role of the Parish Councils in assisting with providing information on those who live on the border of the Forest.

There was a brief discussion regarding the level of fines available and recent enactments which changed the level of fines across the UK and it was agreed that this would be looked into.

There was a discussion regarding the appointment of a bye-laws enforcement officer and it was agreed that an approach should be made, as a high priority, to the local Police Community Support Officers who may wish to do extra hours.

7) Forest Centre Development

Dr Prendergast reported that the results of the quantity surveyor would not now be available until the next meeting. The Chairman asked that Mr Ian Hurst be asked to attend the next meeting.

Mr Stenhouse challenged the accuracy of a statement he read out regarding the Board's approval in principle of developing the Forest Centre. It was agreed that the Board had in fact given a clear decision to look at improvements to the Centre. It was agreed that the Board had approved moving forward with stage one of the Parkin Plan rather than the Parkin Plan in its entirety. It was agreed that the ideas of Mr Hurst were a modification and that they should be passed to the Board for further discussion or for the reconvening of the working party. It was agreed that at the next meeting Dr Prendergast should present a paper on Mr Hurst's ideas and have copies of relevant Board minutes available.

8) Stakeholder Engagement

Dr Prendergast presented the 3KQ Consultation Plan Update for July 2007 and added that there was a Governance Meeting tomorrow evening (17 July) that would be attended by three Conservators.

There was a short discussion regarding the level of consultation provided to the local communities on the proposed winter work and it was clarified with 3KQ that no commitment was given to provide detail, only that information and explanation would be given.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding Parish Councillors becoming Conservators and having an 'advisory' tier. There was some concern that interested groups could consider themselves on a 'par' with regulatory and statutory bodies and it was agreed that there should be no special privileges for stakeholders. It was agreed that the Board should discuss the creation of an advisory tier including Parish Councillors that would provide a degree of consultative input.

9) AOB

Planning Application

Mr Thornely-Taylor asked what delegated action was being taken in regards to planning applications. Dr Prendergast responded that there had been none worthy of comment to the Committee and explained that the Conservators were not a statutory consultee. The Chairman stated that he needed confidence that planning was being assessed and comments made be passed to RPA.

Forest Signage

Mr Spicer commented that some new Forest signage were now obscured by undergrowth and asked if there was a date by when all signs on the Forest would be replaced. Dr Prendergast replied that there was no end date planned as the replacement was taking place as and when possible. Mr Stenhouse asked when the new Forest signs were going to be removed and the originals replaced? The Chairman stated that the signs had been approved by the Board and on the grounds of cost the new signs should remain. There was a brief discussion regarding the new signs and it was agreed that any change of policy had to come from the Board.

Cats Protection

Cllr Whetstone asked if there was any progress on the Cats Protection situation and Dr Prendergast replied that, despite further documents being forwarded and more correspondence, this remains ongoing.

The meeting closed at 16.30.