

Minutes of the

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

1430, Monday 15 October 2007

Beechview, Crowborough Road, Nutley and Ashdown Forest Centre

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

1. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Cllr D Elkin, Mr L Gillham, Mr P Glyn, Cllr B Lacey and Cllr R St. Pierre.

2. Declarations of Interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

No declarations were made.

3. Questions taken from members of the public.

There was one member of the public present and no questions were raised.

4. Matters arising.

Cats Protection was briefly discussed and the Clerk reported that the expert determination had not yet been made. There were no further matters arising.

5. Planning and Property Issues.

This item was discussed at the end of the meeting in a closed session.

6. The draft Strategic Forest Plan.

The draft Strategic Forest Plan had been circulated and was discussed in some detail. It was agreed that any debate on the principle of Plan should be held at the next Board. The Plan was also scrutinised page by page and small amendments and suggestions regarding headings and order were made.

There was a short discussion regarding the Ashdown Visitor Management Partnership and there was some concern voiced that members of the Committee were not aware of its existence. It was noted that the minutes from this group were available on the Wealden District Council website.

There was a short discussion on obtaining better information on visitor numbers and movement. The undertaking of regular visitor surveys was also briefly discussed and a recommendation that the need for this be included in the Plan.

There was a discussion on car parks as a mechanism for managing visitors and it was agreed that a review of car parks might be of use in the future and a further discussion in the issue sensible. However, it was recognised that any such review might be emotive.

It was felt that provision for regular consultation with Parish Councils should be a specific objective in the Forest Plan. However, it was agreed to await the recommendations of the Stakeholder Governance Group.

Mr Stenhouse asked why estate management was not specifically mentioned within the Forest Plan and after a discussion it was agreed that it did not fall within the brief of this document. There was a brief discussion about parts of the Forest owned by the Board, i.e., Chelwood Vachery and the Forest Centre, rather than the Ashdown Forest Trust. The Committee agreed that in regards to

the Vachery the wording in the Forest Plan should be 'establish a plan for the future of the Vachery'.

During the course of the discussion it was also noted that woodland management was not recognised in the Forest Plan. It was agreed that the Conservation Committee be asked to ensure that this is adequately covered.

It is agreed that the order of sections would be altered and the agreed amendments be included in the forest Plan when it is submitted to the Board.

It was agreed that the Conservation Committee be asked to ensure that woodland management is adequately covered.

7) **Forest Centre Development**

The Chairman read out e-mailed comments from Mr Glyn and Mr Gillham in response to the documents from Mr Stenhouse that were pre-circulated. It was agreed that these comments be taken into account by the Committee during the deliberations. The Chairman described his meeting and site visit to the Centre with Mr Ian Hurst and stated that there were two issues which required immediate resolution: the boiler where there were health and safety issues of some concern and the public toilets which were inadequate and in breach of current legislation. Mr Thornely-Taylor described his meeting with Mr Hurst whose proposals he thought were 'straightforward and enlightened'. Cllr Barnes related that he too had met with Mr Hurst and that he had looked at the proposals in some depth and felt that, for a reasonable expense, the facilities in existence could be brought into greater use. Cllr Barnes stated that he thought the Phase 1 proposals should be recommended to the Board.

Mr Stenhouse had a number of questions regarding the appropriateness of the current site, the proposed visitor numbers, and the adequacy of the size of the car park. Mr Spicer agreed and also said that Phase 1 contained some essential work. Mr Thornely-Taylor wondered at the proposed running costs for the Hurst concept and commented that they were more realistic than those of Parkin. He went on to state that he hoped that the Centre would do better than break even but that the Committee needs to be entirely satisfied with the running costs.

It was agreed that, in the light of the feelings of the Working Party, the Centre re-development strategy, taking into account the proposals of Mr Hurst, would be discussed at the Board along with the paper written by Mr Stenhouse.

8. **Bye Law Working Party**

Mr Spicer presented the pre-circulated paper he had compiled on licensing and enforcement. It was agreed that the rights of the Board could be enforced more successfully via licensing rather than prohibition. He went on to say that it was vital that property and Forest boundaries were confirmed before any enforcement took place and property owners are fully aware of their duties. The Clerk said that this already happened. There was a short discussion regarding the feasibility and desirability of hiring an expert in boundary disputes; it was thought this would only be necessary in a small number of cases, when an expert could be brought in on an ad-hoc basis. It was proposed that the range of licensed activities should be increased and that current licensing, for example car parking, sign boards, builders deposits, should be fully utilised. It was suggested that in some instances a more pro-active stance could be taken such as making representations to builders and skip hire companies about the licence charges. It was agreed that any information on the proposed licensing should be forwarded to the Parish Councils in due course. It was agreed that the licensing process was time-consuming for staff.

It was agreed that it would be valuable to re-draft the current procedures and create a new protocol to be presented at the next Committee meeting; Mr Spicer agreed to undertake this in consultation with the Clerk.

9. Forest Signage.

The Chairman read out e-mailed comments from Mr Glyn and Mr Gillham in response to the document from Mr Stenhouse that was pre-circulated. The Clerk commented that the current signage was the first successful attempt at unification across the Forest and that the signs had also met with praise as well as disapproval. The Board had previously no coherent style on any of its signage. He went on to describe how the signage, approved by the Board, was in use across all aspects of the Forest such as the website, bye-law signs and in Ashdown Forest Life. There was a wide ranging discussion on the pros and cons of removal and replacement of gateway signs and that costings for replacement were needed. It was agreed there was merit in having a 'corporate' image.

It was agreed that a paper with a summary of costings be prepared for the Board to inform any discussion on changes to the new signage.

5. Planning and Property Issues. CLOSED SESSION.

17.45 Cllr Martin left the meeting.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding about the second property, 2 Jubilee Cottages, Mardens Hill, and the small slither of unregistered land between it and the Forest. The Committee accepted that there could be a degree of disagreement about the precise boundary between Forest and non-Forest land. It was noted that the property owner recognised the need for a perpetual licence through his acquiescence to agreeing to pay the annual acknowledgement fee although he was unwilling to pay for the preparation fee. It was noted that the lack of a perpetual licence could jeopardise the sale of the property.

It was agreed that the principle was the same as in the first case and that there was a clear policy in place that must be adhered to.

It was agreed that the Clerk communicate with the property owner informing him there would not be a compromise and that the fee for the preparation of the licence and the annual fee should stand.

10. AOB.

The Chairman, in response to correspondence received about an individual Conservator supporting a local planning application, stated that any such action would, amongst other things, risk a conflict of interest and was inappropriate.

The meeting closed at 18.20.