

Minutes of the

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

Monday 26th October 2009
1430 at the Education Barn, Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Mr M Cooper (Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Mr R Beal (Ranger), Mr I Hurst (co-opted), Cllr S Martin, Cllr R St Pierre, Dr H Prendergast (Clerk), Mr J Spicer (Vice Chairman). Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

Also present: Cllr M Hoy, Cllr F Whetstone.

There were three members of the public present. The Chairman opened the meeting, welcomed the members of the public present and invited questions for 10 minutes from the floor while advising the two representatives of Ashdown Cycling Campaign that he would offer them an opportunity to comment after any discussion of Item 30.1/09.

Mrs Hammond

There had been a site meeting and a letter regarding her property. She queried if RPA minute 22/09 paragraph 3 as a true record of the meeting and asked that it be corrected. The Clerk said the minutes had been approved by the Committee and the Board and no one present disagreed with the accuracy of the record. Cllr Barnes stated it was indeed a true record of what was said but it obviously did not clearly state the case and that it was an expression of personal opinion. It was clarified that as the access, described by Mrs Hammond, had been in use for a considerable length of time thus she had right of access. However, she did not have the right to make up and maintain that access. The Clerk said having two accesses was contrary to the bye-laws and Board policy, however, the Board would allow the use of the unlicensed access until the property was offered for sale when the position would change and one access must be closed.

27/09 Apologies.

Cllr R Galley, Mr E Stenhouse, Mr R Thornely-Taylor.

28/09 Declarations of Interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

Mr Spicer and the Clerk declared an interest in item 29.4 as they lived in property accessed over the Forest.

29/09 Planning and property issues

29.1/09 The Nutley Arms, Nutley

The Clerk reported there had been correspondence from the County Solicitor who had suggested a meeting with the property owner. It is hoped a resolution can be found but, if necessary, legal action would go ahead even in the event of adverse PR.

29.2/09 The Forest Gables and Orchard Farm, Nutley

The Clerk reported that the parking issues previously reported were gradually being rectified.

29.3/09 Comments on recent planning applications – RPA 17

The document had been pre-circulated to the Committee. The Clerk gave a brief explanation but had nothing further to add. The Chairman stated that the document was very reassuring.

29.4/09 Proposals for assessing Acknowledgement Rents for properties accessed across the Forest via the Perpetual Licence – RPA 18

Mr Spicer said that he found this proposal, in the current financial climate, ill advised and reprehensible. Cllr Barnes said there were not huge sums of money involved and that this income stream allowed the Board to continue to fulfil its statutory duties. There was a short discussion on encouraging property owners to move to perpetual licensing and it

was noted that approx 20 properties per year changed hands. The Chairman said that the perpetual licence had been fully discussed and was now agreed.

The Chairman asked the Committee to approve the proposal laid out in the document. Cllr Martin and Cllr St Pierre seconded the proposal. Mr Spicer asked that his dissent be recorded in the minutes.

30/09 Mountain Biking on Ashdown Forest – a proposal for discussion – RPA19

The Chairman gave a brief synopsis of how the current situation had been reached. The document had been pre-circulated to the Committee.

30.1/09 There was a short discussion on the terms ‘mountain biking’ (seen as competitive and speed orientated) versus ‘family biking’ and the impression that these terms gave. There was some agreement regarding family/child friendly orientated biking being of somewhat less concern to the Conservators but there remained deep concern that biking would be an additional pressure on the Forest and that there would be clashes with other user groups. It was thought useful to estimate how many potential bikers there would be on the Forest. There was agreement that more detail on the proposed route should be provided and there were concerns that areas such as Old Lodge Bottom were not suitable due to the fragility of the path. There remained concern regarding the protection of the heathland from biking but some agreement that biking in woodland was of a lesser concern. There was a suggestion that a local licensed cycling club could be created and that peer pressure could come into play when policing any cycling.

30.2/09 The Clerk thanked Duncan Thomson and Paul McIlveny for the article they had contributed to a biking magazine.

30.3/09 The Chairman asked Duncan Thomson for his comments. Mr Thomson said that map provided was a basis for discussion and attempts had been made to find a route that avoided heathland areas. He went on to say dedicated trails were one way of avoiding conflict with other users and that ‘mountain biking’ was a generic term, however, he was promoting family recreation biking not competitive biking and was happy to drop the term ‘mountain biking’. A licensed club had been successfully created at Swinley Forest in Berkshire but to create such a club on Ashdown Forest would require work. He agreed that peer pressure had a part to play and that there was a network of local riders with whom he was promoting sensible cycling.

30.4/09 The Clerk reported that, after discussion with the Rangers, it was agreed there seemed to be an increased number of cyclists on the Forest and the evidence of their presence was to be found everywhere.

It was agreed that the Clerk would contact Mr Thomson to arrange a site visit to parts of the proposed routes which the Chairman and Clerk would attend. Other interested Conservators would be welcome and it was noted that Mr Galley, when speaking with the Chairman before the meeting, had indicated that he would like to be there.

31/09 Updates

31.1/09 Forest Centre Developments (verbal update)

Mr Hurst said that the project definition document covering the scope, title and vision with all options set out was now almost complete. The quantity surveyor’s report was still awaited (due at the end of October). Environmental issues were also being taken into consideration. The next stage was to develop the funding strategy and there were advantages in taking it through as a single concept even though the process was to be staged. The Chairman said the Working Party would meet again before any papers were put before the Committee.

31.2/09 Remembrance Sunday arrangements (verbal update)

The Clerk said the pilot had agreed, weather permitting, to fly over again. He claimed he had found a source of biodegradable poppies. Mrs Buxton would check this again, having been informed to the contrary by the Royal British Legion Poppy Factory. A bugler was arranged and Air Vice-Marshal Kyle would give the address. There was a discussion regarding loud speakers and it was agreed a megaphone was not appropriate.

It was agreed that some form of easily portable audio amplification be sourced and provided.

32/09 Any urgent item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass the elected Chairman

There was a discussion, in the light of queries raised prior to the meeting by Mr Spicer, regarding the dissemination of information relating to the potential legal proceedings. The Chairman stated that the Committee should not be swayed by local gossip, rumour and innuendo and hard facts were required before the Committee was alerted to issues. Cllr Barnes agreed and said that if there were solicitor's letters then the Board should be taken into the Committee's confidence. The Clerk said if any members of the Board heard rumours they should contact the Office to find out the true situation. Cllr Barnes said every effort was made to get minutes published as soon as possible and there were no efforts to deprive the Board or the Committees of information.

There was a short discussion regarding the purchase of land. The Clerk confirmed that it was the Board's policy to purchase land that was within the Pale. He also confirmed the Board's finances were unaffected by any such purchase.

It was noted the minutes of the Executive Committee were not yet available. Cllr Barnes explained that re-drafting had been required and that they would be circulated as soon as possible.

The meeting closed at 16.00.