

**Minutes of the
ROADS PLANNING AND AMENITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

Monday 11 October 2010
Site visit at Lamberts, Colemans Hatch at 1400
Then (ca 1500) Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Mr MJ Cooper (Chairman), Mr R Galley, Cllr S Martin, Dr H Prendergast (Director), Mr R Thornely-Taylor (*ex officio*). Minutes taken by Mrs T Buxton.

The Chairman opened the meeting. There were no members of the public present.

26/10 Apologies.

Apologies were received from Cllr J Barnes, Ranger R Beal, Mr J Francis, Mr I Hurst, Mr J Spicer, Cllr R St Pierre.

27/10 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature.

There was none.

28/10 Matters arising.

28.1/10 *Browns Brook Cottage, Fairwarp.*

The Director reported that the property owner had acknowledged receipt of the last correspondence; however, there had been no further communications. The Chairman asked Director to follow up, and close, this matter as quickly as possible.

HP

28.2/10 *Nutley Arms.*

The Director reported that he and a County Solicitor met the property owner whilst waiting for the case to be called into the County Court in Lewes on 6 October. The property owner agreed, out of court, to remove the a-frames, sign the perpetual licence and pay the acknowledgement rent and this was done the next day. According to the County Solicitor the Judge will give the property owner two months to remove settle the out-standing issues. If they are not settled the case will go back to court.

28.3/10 *Snuff Cottage, Cripps Manor.*

The Director said that there was a long history of problems at this property. There were more problems reported by staff this week. A series of photographs were tabled showing that a wide swathe of Forest trees that had been removed, evidence of fires on the Forest and that tyres had been used to light some of those fires. The Chairman said that these reports were taken very seriously by the Committee and that there should be a site visit before the RPA Committee meeting on 17 January 2011. Mr Thornely-Taylor asked that, before the site visit was made, the Director confirm the distance allowed for a fire break and what tree felling was allowed under commonable rights.

HP

29/10 Planning and property issues.

29.1/10 *Comments on recent planning applications*

Cllr Martin declared an interest as she was a member of WDC Planning Committee. Mr Thornely-Taylor said that two of the properties would be subject to an appropriate assessment under the Habitat Regulations. The Director stated he was disappointed that planning consent had been given to one property an objection had been lodged due to visual intrusion.

29.2/10 *Discussion of site visit to Lamberts.*

Ranger Michael Yates had met, on site, with the Committee to assist with discussions. Mr Thornely-Taylor said that transferring the access to the Board was a way of achieving long-term maintenance of the track as the Conservators were a permanent presence. He went on to ask if such an acquisition was an acceptable burden on the Board's finances.

Clr Martin said that the access was already in need of upkeep and suggested that the Board ask for a stipend. Mr Thornely-Taylor suggested a commuted sum. The Director suggested the land being offered to the Board was inadequate and more should be sought as well as a commuted sum. Mr Thornely-Taylor asked if there would there be a direct liability for this access. It was agreed that the landowner/ manager did have obligations for example dangerous tree management had been mentioned at the site meeting. The Director went on to say it was vital that there were conditions put in place to allow the closure of the access in bad weather to horses.

Mr Thornely-Taylor asked for confirmation of the Board's resolution on accepting land as many Board members were uncomfortable with land ownership. The Director and the Chairman both said it was a resolution of many, many years standing.

The Chairman asked that the Director calculate a 'ball-park figure' for the annual maintenance which could be used to calculate a present value lump sum to cover future maintenance costs and write a 'probing' letter with no commitments to the landowner. Clr Galley said he would ask the advice of WDC on calculating commuted sums. Depending on the response from the owners of Lamberts the issue would be discussed at Board level in the future.

HP
RG

30/10 Forest Centre development.

The Director said that monies had been received from the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust. Mr Ian Hurst and he had had an initial meeting with the architects and, after further meetings, it was hoped that drawings would be available probably by mid to late November. He went on to say that the working party would meet once drawings were available. He also said that a bat and an asbestos survey would be required. Mr Thornely-Taylor asked if an appropriate assessment as per the Habitat Regulations would take place and this was followed by a short discussion. The Director said that he hoped to meet with the planners again at a later date.

31/10 Bye-law enforcement across the Forest

Mr Thornely-Taylor said he felt it inappropriate for him to take part in the discussion.

The Chairman proposed that the Committee should revive consideration of whether the Board should take a more pragmatic approach on certain bye-law infringements and consider the income that could be generated by 'permitting' some breaches in some areas. He went on to say that he and Mr Spicer would try to put together a paper to help the Board deal with such issues in a pragmatic way. Mr Galley said the Board took a too legalistic line and should adopt a more common sense approach. He went on to say there was often a combative relationship with those breaking bye-laws. The Director said he totally disagreed and that a combative stance was taken for good reasons. He said a softer approach being linked with income generation was not a good idea. Some residents broke bye-laws repeatedly and staff feared that the future response to any attempt at bye-law enforcement would be 'if he can do it why can't I'. The Chairman said he and Mr Spicer would wish to discuss the matter with the Director and welcomed the latter's suggestion that such discussion should include the Rangers. Mr Galley agreed that it was important, and probably very helpful, to talk to staff as they were actually 'on the frontline'.

There was a short discussion on having a spreadsheet on bye-law breaches. Mr Galley said they had one at WDC that was regularly updated. The Chairman said a high proportion of bye-law breaches were settled by the staff very quickly and there was no need to for the Committee to be involved. He went on to say that significant or potentially significant breaches should be passed to the Committee.

32/10 Car parking on the Forest

The Chairman thanked the Director for his helpful paper. He said that car park charges should be considered in the light of income generation rather than visitor management, although the two are closely connected. He went on to say that in the current uncertain financial climate he feels it is

incumbent on the Board to look at ways of generating income. He was thinking along the lines of voluntary car park charges that would be out-sourced to a contractor to manage. Mr Galley said he was filled with horror at the potential urbanisation that parking meters on the Forest would bring. Cllr Martin suggested asking local residents to make donations. Mr Thornely-Taylor said there had been donation boxes on the Forest in the past and they usually contained everything except donations. Cllr Martin said that dealing with parking meters would be an additional burden on Rangers and all agreed this would not be acceptable and that contracting out was a possible solution.

The Committee agreed that car parking charges should be looked at. The Chairman asked that the Director find out about the practicalities and the experiences of others. The Chairman also asked that in the conclusions on page three of the paper a reference should be made to voluntary charges, to vandal proof/tamper proof parking meters and to looking for contractors. He asked for a further discussion at the next RPA meeting.

HP

33/10 Financial information for RPA Committee responsibilities

There were no comments regarding the financial information.

The Chairman said he had spoken to Mrs Marriott about where the ice-cream income should be shown. Mr Thornely-Taylor asked if there were any problems with the match funding for the Forest Ridge Project. The Director said no, some income had recently been received.

34/10 Any urgent item for which the Director has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman

Cllr Martin asked if anything could be done about the leylandii hedge at Lamberts. The Director replied that very little could be done and this was followed by a further discussion regarding the property, commonable land and access. It was agreed there was a lack of clarity.

There was a short discussion on manorial waste and areas that had, or had not, been transferred to the Forest and the rationale or lack of it, behind the decisions made.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 16.20.