



PRESS RELEASE

Statement from the Conservators of Ashdown Forest

“We would like to offer our thanks to everyone who helped us control and manage two fires which affected Ashdown Forest this week. We are most grateful to members of the public who contacted us to report the fires’ spread and to firefighters from East Sussex Fire and Rescue, our staff and volunteers who promptly and bravely worked to deal with the fires.

“The good news is that neither fire will cause any long-term damage to the habitat or landscape and only a small proportion of the forest, a little over 1 per cent of its 2,500 hectares, has been affected. Visitors can continue to enjoy Ashdown Forest unaffected by these events, but we need to continue to be vigilant to the risk of fire on the Forest.

The smaller fire at Kidds Hill was the result of sparks from a bonfire, part of scrub control work being carried out by a group who regularly undertake conservation work for us. The area affected was a little over two hectares.

The larger fire, in the area around the Old Airstrip, was the result of a planned burn for gorse management. Gorse is an increasing problem on the forest and small controlled burning has traditionally been a routine method of managing it, in accordance with national guidelines. Burns are carried out in February to avoid impacts on nesting birds. Three other burns had already been completed without incident in the week before the fire.

Ground and weather conditions were checked and monitored carefully before work began, with additional firebreaks cut. East Sussex Fire & Rescue were informed in advance and full risk assessment was carried out – standard practice in these cases.

Unfortunately, a freak gust of wind combined with unseasonably dry conditions allowed the fire to spread beyond the area planned and about 35 hectares were affected.

At no point was there any danger to surrounding properties, and although the area affected was larger than planned, the effects on the habitat are likely to be beneficial in the longer term.

We continue to monitor both sites with East Sussex Fire and Rescue to ensure safety. We are carrying out a full evaluation and review of these incidents: as always, our focus is on protecting and enhancing the landscape and habitat of Ashdown Forest for the benefit of all.

The Conservators of Ashdown Forest
1 March 2019