



Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest
Monday 23rd November 2020 at 14:00
VIRTUAL MEETING - MS TEAMS

Present: Mr C Smith (Chairman), Ms S McAll (Vice Chairman), Mr C de Mestre, Mr J Spicer
Mr A Reid, Mrs R St Pierre, Cllr J Barnes, Cllr D Elkin, Cllr C Hardy, Cllr R Stogdon, Cllr F Whetstone, Cllr P Roundell, Mr M Cooper (Cllr S Tidy was unable to access the meeting)

In attendance: Mrs K Dirs (Clerk) and Mrs L Meehan (Finance Officer)

Minutes were taken by K Meade

Members of the public present: Mr B Clegg, Ms AM Brody, Ms L Maudsley, Mr M Coyne, Mrs E Riminton-Drury, Ms S Way, Ms J Clark, Ms C Ridout

Item	Action
<p><u>Questions from the public:</u></p> <p><u>Brendan Clegg (on behalf of Chair of Wealden Constituency Labour Party):</u> “I refer to Wealden Conservative Party's 2019 general election address. I have supplied a copy to the board (attached). This document was delivered to every home in the Constituency of Wealden by Royal Mail during November and December 2019.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Was the then chairman of the board authorised to endorse the Conservative Party and the Conservative candidate, Nus Ghani - and thus politicise the Ashdown Forest?2. Does the board anticipate similar endorsements of party politicians being made in future?3. How will the board respond to the formal written complaint lodged by Wealden Labour Party in February 2020?” <p><u>Response:</u> This question was addressed as item 37/20 on the agenda</p> <p><u>Anne Marie Brody:</u> “I am involved in a small group with Mike Coyne and Liz Maudsley to see what we can do to support the work of local people working on issues related to the Ashdown Forest.”</p> <p><u>Response:</u> The Chairman advised that we already have a large group of volunteers who are key to achieving the work we do. The pandemic has meant that they have currently been stood down but there has been increased interest from people wishing to volunteer and it is an opportunity for the organisation to build on our volunteer base. The Chairman agreed to look into the possibility of providing government-funded work experience opportunities.</p> <p><u>Liz Maudsley:</u> “We all know there has been a steady increase of traffic across the Forest. Much of this is through traffic, although in recent months since Covid there has also been an increase of visitors coming to walk on the Forest. While welcoming the fact that people can come and enjoy the open space, has any assessment has been carried out on the risk that a substantial increase in traffic poses to the Forest environment and have there have been any suggestions for ways of mitigating the risk?”</p> <p><u>Response:</u> The Chairman agreed that traffic levels are increasing but advised that the Conservators have no jurisdiction or authority on the highways. Mrs St Pierre agreed that new development within Wealden will add to this and that the council should be mindful of this. Highways England carry out traffic surveys across the county. She suggested car park counters could be utilised to assist with managing car park use and with the implementation of charging. Cllr Barnes added that ESCC</p>	CS

has a project to look at climate change and highways is a big part of this. The new government planning reforms are not necessarily favourable in this regard and MPs are being contacted.

Mike Coyne:

“The RSPB appears to be having some success in its management of its Broadwater Warren reserve, which is adjacent to the Ashdown Forest. Of particular note is its encouragement of a return of certain species, which include nightjars and wood larks among the bird population. Are there lessons that the Forest can learn from this success and how far can the Forest managers work with the RSPB?”

Response:

The Chairman advised that the Conservation Officer is aware of the success of Broadwater Warren and confirmed that the species mentioned by Mr Coyne are also found on Ashdown Forest.

Elizabeth Riminton-Drury:

“I would also like to raise again the question of future funding for the Forest, and ask the Conservators for an update on the funding situation, what resources will be available in the coming year, and whether they have secured increased commitments from the local Councils, from Parish to ESCC”

Susanna Way:

What has been done so far to obtain funding for the Forest and what does the Board consider to be the best options to explore in order to secure long term funding?

Response:

Mr de Mestre responded that The Ashdown Forest Foundation will be the main fundraising platform. The Conservators will continue to work with the councils but there will be limited funds available from them. Restricted funding is a major concern. Cllr Whetstone suggested that suitable funding may be achieved through a public appeal.

Due to time constraints, any unanswered questions will be addressed by the Chairman via email.

CS/KD

35/20 Apologies

There were apologies from Mr Mawdsley

36/20 Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature

None

37/20 The Board of Conservators at the time of national or local elections

Mr B Clegg asked the Board for the policy allowing Councillor Conservators to use Ashdown Forest to help endorse political candidates at the time of national or local elections.

Following some discussion, it was proposed that a statement should be issued that the Board will not use their association with Ashdown Forest to endorse or promote political campaigns and to be especially careful about comments that could be seen as representing the Forest during the purdah period of elections.

Proposed by Mrs St Pierre, seconded by Mr Cooper. Proposal agreed

CS

38/20 To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 14 September 2020 BD33/20

The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy.

The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6

39/20 To receive the minutes the Programme Committee meeting of 14 September 2020 BD34/20

The Chairman updated the Board:

- 25/20 – The SAMMS Officer job description has been withdrawn by Wealden District Council (WDC). A Co-ordinator role is now going to be advertised and recruited with a SAMMS officer working with Ashdown directly at a later date.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Stogdon advised the Board that legal advice has indicated that the original proposal for White House Barn is unsatisfactory and additional advice is now being sought. • The grazing base project is being reconsidered as the Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement only has a few years left • Deer stalkers have undertaken training and assessment at Bisley • The Clerk is now over-seeing the Education Programme which will continue with Board support. <p>The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy. The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6</p> <p><u>39.01/20 Rural Payments Agency (RPA) claim – late paper circulated</u> The Conservation Officer and Ranger Allum had provided a written update. The Chairman advised the Board that the RPA are yet to provide their maps and evidence. The Conservation and Ranger Allum are continuing their work to ascertain the disputed areas. The Board asked for clarification of task 4 outlined in the paper.</p> <p><u>39.02/20 Deer Programme update (night shooting) BD 35/20</u> The proposal for night-stalking is to be amended to include a review after one season and to include engagement with local landowners. Motion proposed by Colin Smith. Seconded by Mr Cooper. <i>Due to technical issues the vote was conducted offline, to include all Board members.</i></p> <p><i>Post meeting note: The electronic Board vote returned a result with a majority <u>in favour</u> of night shooting.</i></p>	RS
		SA
		CS
40/20	To receive the minutes the Finance and Regulatory Committee meeting of 14 October 2020 BD 36/20	
	<p>The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy. The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6</p> <p><u>40.01/20 To approve the Budget 2021/22 BD 37/20</u> Mr de Mestre advised the Board that there continues to be an imbalance between the core and CS budgets. The aggregate deficit is expected to be approximately £55k for the current financial year. Both income and expenditure are lower due to implications of Covid 19. Mr de Mestre advised that there may be amendments to the budget following the closed session.</p> <p><u>40.02/20 Asset and project list (for information - supporting paper to budget) BD 38/20</u></p> <p><u>40.03/20 To agree the Forest Rate for 2021/22 BD 39/20</u> Proposed by Cllr Barnes, seconded by Mr Reid – approved</p> <p><u>40.04/20 To agree fees and charges 2021/22 BD 40/20</u> Proposed by Cllr Barnes, seconded by Mr Reid – approved The proposal to agree the Forest rate on a biennial cycle was agreed subject to legal advice.</p>	KD
41/20	To appoint an Internal Auditor	
	The Board agreed to reappoint the internal auditors for a second year	LM
42/20	Proposed Board and Committee dates 2021 BD41/20	
	The proposed dates were accepted	
43/20	To receive the Clerk’s report BD42/20	
	The Clerk reminded the Board that some staff were still working remotely due to the pandemic. The Forest has continued to be exceptionally busy, particularly at weekends during the lockdown period, which had led to more bye-law breaches. The Sussex Police Rural Crime Team continue	

	<p>to work with and assist the team. The Chairman advised the Board that The Friends of Ashdown Forest have agreed to fund new radios.</p> <p>Cllr Barnes congratulated the staff on their grant application to High Weald Landscape Trust and asked for a public acknowledgement to AFRA, parish councils and others for their continued financial support through grants and donations</p> <p>The Chairman proposed a vote of thanks to the staff team for their efforts during a period of unease.</p>	
44/20	<p>Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman</p> <p>There were none.</p>	
	<p>The public meeting closed at 16:00.</p> <p>At the request of the Chairman, the Officers and staff left the meeting.</p>	
	CLOSED SESSION	
45/20	CEO Recruitment update	
46/20	Discussion on the Conservators of Ashdown Forest Proposed Plan	

Chairman _____

Clerk _____

01 February 2021