

**Minutes of the
PROGRAMME COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

Monday 16 September 2019

14.00 at the Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee members present: Mr N Mawdsley, Mr J Francis, Cllr S Tidy, Mr C Smith, Mr AG Reid, Mrs R St.Pierre and Mr S Alton (Conservation Officer)

Co-opted Members/Advisors: Ms J Field and Ms C Mortimer (Natural England)

Also present: Mrs L Meehan (Finance Officer), Mrs K Dirs (Clerk)

Minutes taken by S Alton

There were no members of the public present

		Action
29/19	Apologies Apologies had been received from Cllr R. Stogdon, Mr M Cooper	
30/19	Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature The wife of Mr Smith is the treasurer of SPGCT (Sussex Pony Grazing Conservation Trust)	
31/19	Matters arising <u>31.01/19</u> RPA update There had been no further news on the inspection carried out earlier in the year. RPA to be contacted to request a timeframe. The tabled letter (PROG 11/19) from Paul Caldwell, CEO of the RPA, was discussed. It was suggested that other organisations with Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements on Common land be contacted with a view to submitting a joint representation to the RPA, expressing our concerns at continued delays to payment. <u>31.02/19</u> Thames Basin Heaths Visit A note (PROG 12/19) about the visit by staff and Conservators to the Thames Basin Heaths was tabled. CS pointed out there were a large number of follow-up actions. It was suggested that these should be a priority for the SAMMS Officer when in post.	SA SA
32/19	Financial Information for the Programme Committee <u>32.01/19</u> Countryside Stewardship Financial Summary for information PROG 13/19 LM highlighted potential cashflow issues arising from continued late payments of CS funds by the RPA. It was pointed out that the new committee meeting cycle means that the next Programme Committee meeting will fall too late to discuss the budget for next financial year. It was agreed a stand-alone meeting was needed.	LM
33/19	Progress Reports	

	<p><u>33.01/19 Conservation Officer's report</u> <u>PROG 14/19</u></p> <p>The Conservation Officer summarised his report. Questions were raised about the degree to which we should notify the public of herbicide spraying on the Forest. It was agreed that using the web and social media would generate undue attention but that signage on site was essential. There was a discussion of how long such signage should be left in place and whether this should be linked to the period over which the pesticide remains a hazard. The Conservation Officer pointed out that all the chemicals used on the Forest are of low toxicity and are applied in strict accordance with the label instructions, COSHH legislation etc.</p> <p>Gorse and Rhododendron control were also discussed.</p>	
34/19	<p>Specific Issues for Consideration</p> <p><u>34.01/19 SAMMS</u></p> <p>The Conservation Officer gave a brief summary of the recent meeting with Kelly Sharp of Wealden District Council. Despite some misgivings, it had been agreed to sign the agreement with Wealden and the other six Local Authorities, with some of the outstanding concerns to be addressed through a Memorandum of Understanding. Recruitment of the SAMMS Project Officer would start as soon as possible, employed by Wealden but under the line management of the Conservation Officer. Interviews will be held at the Forest Centre and the Conservators will be able to have two people on the interview panel.</p> <p><u>34.02/19 Sussex Pony Grazing Trust</u></p> <p>A paper – PROG 15/19 – produced by the Lead Grazing Officer was tabled. The recommendation from that paper – that that the Conservators will accept the transfer of assets including ponies, equipment and cash to continue the service provided by the High Weald herd with its associated income and expenditure – was agreed and would be recommended to the Board.</p> <p><u>34.03/19 Fencing Consultation</u></p> <p>The Conservation Officer reported that he had heard back from the High Weald Unit and Sussex Wildlife Trust, and that both had expressed willingness to be part of a project Steering Group. It was agreed that the priority was to begin the recruitment process for a Project Officer. This would require revising the job description, a check on future cash flow given the situation with the RPA and, assuming all is good, to proceed with a repeat recruitment process.</p> <p><u>34.04/19 Whitehouse Barn</u></p> <p>There was little progress to report on this matter.</p> <p><u>34.05/19 Grazing base</u></p> <p>The Conservation Officer reported that groundworks had commenced and that Batcheller Monkhouse had been tasked with negotiating the terms of the lease and agricultural tenancy on our behalf. The Lead Grazing Officer would liaise over the details of the barn.</p> <p><u>34.06/19 Communications strategy</u></p> <p>The meeting note prepared by Warwick Smith of ESCC was tabled and discussed. It was agreed that a corporate mission statement and series of key messages were vital for both our interaction with the public and for fundraising. Longer term it would be</p>	<p>SA</p> <p>BOARD</p> <p>SA/LM</p> <p>CF</p> <p>SA</p>

	<p>necessary to spend money on either a staff member or consultant to lead on communications, but in the shorter term it was felt possible to come up with key messages in house. SA to lead on this. A Comms Working Party should be established and the development of communications work included within a proposal for the Heritage Lottery Fund.</p> <p><u>34.07/19 Deer Programme</u> The Conservation Officer reported that the chief piece of recent work had been the drafting of a Firearms Policy to cover not only the Deer Programme but all other use of firearms on the Forest, and thanked CS for his contribution. A final draft of the Policy was expected imminently from the Deer Initiative and then would be ratified by the Finance and Regulatory Committee and Board. Practical measures deriving from that Policy would be put in place as soon as practical.</p> <p><u>34.08/19 Education Programme</u> The Clerk advised she was due to meet with the Education Team to review the programme curriculum to ensure it is current and applicable to Forest issues with a focus on relevant conservation matters such as heathland management and dog control. The events programme will also be reviewed in terms of its performance with respect to income generation.</p>	<p>SA FinReg</p> <p>KD</p>
35/19	Compliance Checklist and Monitoring Nothing to report	
36/19	Strategic Plan and Conservation management Plan review Nothing to report	
37/19	Management Information The Clerk reported a successful prosecution at Hastings Magistrates' Court of Ms Atkinson-Turnbull for allowing her Sussex Bulldog to be out of control in the Hebridean sheep grazing enclosure at the Isle of Thorns site. On the same day Wealden District Council successfully prosecuted David Lowe of Turners Hill, for dumping waste from his Astroturf business on Ashdown Forest.	
38/19	Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the following year Chair: Dr N Mawdsley was nominated by Mr J Francis and seconded by Mrs R St.Pierre and was duly elected to the position of Chair. Vice-Chair: Mr C Smith was nominated by Mrs R St.Pierre and was seconded by Mr J Francis and was duly elected to the position of Vice-Chair.	
39/19	Any urgent item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman Nothing to report	

The meeting closed at 16:20