

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

14 September 2020

14.00 via Zoom call arranged by Dr N Mawdsley

Committee members present: Dr N Mawdsley (Chairman), Mr C Smith (Vice Chairman), Cllr C Hardy, Cllr S Tidy, Cllr R Stogdon, Mrs S McAll, Cllr David Elkin and Cllr S Shing

Co-opted Members/Advisors: N/A

Also present: Mr S Alton (Conservation Officer), Mrs K Dirs (Clerk) and Cllr Whetstone

Minutes taken by the Clerk

There were no members of the public present

		Action
21/20	<p>Apologies Apologies had been received from Mr Cooper and Ms Mortimer (Natural England)</p>	
22/20	<p>Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature Ms McAll declared her husband is an active Commoner.</p>	
23/20	<p>Matters arising</p> <p><u>23.01/20 RPA Update</u> The Conservation Officer explained he had received an unsatisfactory response from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) in relation to the over-claim of a number of disputed land parcels. The RPA have not been able to provide clear mapping data for the contested sites and had sent maps without legends which is hampering the appeal. The Conservation Officer explained that a ground truthing exercise was being organised to provide proof that the contested sites have been managed in accordance with the terms of the CS agreement. The Committee raised concern that the RPA had the upper hand and it was impossible to answer queries until the land discrepancies had been clarified. ACTION: The Conservation Officer will contact the RPA and press for a response within seven days.</p> <p><u>23.02/20 Climate Change Policy</u> Item deferred</p>	SA
24/20	<p>Financial Information for the Programme Committee</p> <p><u>24.01/20 Countryside Stewardship (CS) finance summary to date 20/21</u> The Conservation Officer confirmed there were no big-ticket expenditure items on the horizon. Winter contract work has been signed off and will be due for payment in February as normal. This is factored into the Forest's cash flow forecast.</p> <p><u>24.02/20 Revised Countryside Stewardship budget 2020/21</u> The Chairman asked the Conservation Officer for reassurance that a reduction in the CS budget, as a result of the RPA over-claim, would not impact ongoing projects. The Conservation officer explained the Broadstone Barn grazing base project had not</p>	

	<p>progressed (due to ill health of the land owner), so this project cost would be carried over to the following year. The salary for the Fencing Consultation Project Manager had been prorated due to the PM commencing in July, therefore reducing the total cost of the project for this financial year. The Conservation Officer proposed that a number of management techniques (such as spraying) could be cut back to assist with the cash-flow issue. A number of Committee members expressed concern that money had been allocated in the CS budget for projects that were not progressing and questioned whether the projects were still necessary given the financial burden the organisation was facing.</p>	
25/20	<p><u>Progress Reports</u> The following relevant items were discussed at this point.</p> <p><u>25.01/20 – Conservation Officer’s report</u> The Conservation Officer reported that CS work was able to continue during the lock-down period as most of the practical work involves lone working. The last quarter had been dominated by gorse and bracken control and invasive species management.</p> <p><u>SAMMS</u> – The Conservation Officer expressed his disappointment at the lack of progress for the recruitment of the SAMMS role by Wealden District Council. Issues around Covid-19 and working from home were understood to be the cause of the delay. ACTION: Cllr Hardy to pursue the matter with Kelly Sharpe from Wealden.</p> <p><u>Fencing Consultation</u> - Mark Infield started work on 20 July and has settled into the team well. Mark has prepared some initial control materials including a contracted time allocation table, draft document handling system and a draft work plan and timeline for the Consultation Project. ACTION: Next steps/project plan to be shared with the Board</p> <p><u>Whitehouse Barn</u> - The Conservation Officer advised the building of the new barn at Whitehouse is scheduled to begin imminently. The barn is being erected at the Osbornes’ cost on land belonging to the Conservators. ESCC Legal Team are considering an appropriate legal instrument for the licence/lease. ACTION: Licence/lease requirements to be pursued by Cllr Stogdon. The Conservation Officer to discuss the option of a Farm based tenancy with Chris Tipping, Batcheller Monkhouse.</p> <p><u>Grazing base</u> - A proposal at Little Broadstone Farm is now in place (<i>CS project 13. MD03</i>) and the barn is currently under construction. The Grazing Officer is liaising with Batcheller Monkhouse to negotiate a 10-year assured tenancy with a 5-year break clause. The team are looking to rent four bays of the barn and 10 ha of land. Concern was expressed over the long delay to initiate the project. The Chairman requested the project be revisited in light of the CS timeline and the fencing project. ACTION: The Conservation Officer to review the strategic priority for the barn/grazing programme.</p> <p><u>25.02/20 – Grazing Officers report</u> The Conservation Officer outlined the work achieved by the grazing team.</p> <p><u>Sussex Pony Grazing Trust</u> The Conservators of Ashdown Forest are now the owners of a 42 strong herd of Exmoor ponies and the assets of the Sussex Pony Grazing and Conservation Trust (SPGCT) which has now been wound up. The ponies are currently employed on the Pippingford Estate and for the Woodland Trust at Brede High Woods.</p>	<p>Cllr CH</p> <p>SA/MI</p> <p>Cllr RS/SA</p> <p>SA</p>

	<p>Cllr Tidy questioned the staffing costs of managing the Exmoor herd and the structure of the team, noting that the agreement to take on the Pony Grazier was dependant on the Grazing Officer reducing her hours. Ms McAll suggested the Conservators flock was denying the Commoners their right to graze. The Chairman proposed a review of the programme including the financials.</p> <p>ACTION: The Conservation Officer to produce a note to the Committee explaining the total figure for the excess staff costs resulting from both roles being full time.</p> <p><u>Commoners, Commoner Grazing and BPS Claims</u></p> <p>The Conservation Officer confirmed a Commoner volunteer programme had been devised to allow the same opportunities for all would-be BPS claimants. A scrub clearance working party has been organised for October.</p> <p><u>25.03/20 – Deer Programme Report</u> – The Conservation Officer outlined the work undertaken by the Deer Programme Coordinator, including the stalkers’ shooting assessments for the coming season and the preparation of the Night shooting licence (pending Natural England approval). The Vice Chairman expressed concern that the proposal for night shooting had not been raised to the Board and that appropriate risk assessments needed to be carried out, in conjunction with a comprehensive communication plan, before the proposal could be advanced.</p> <p>ACTION: The Conservation Officer to confirm Night Shooting has been sanctioned by the Board.</p>	<p>SA</p> <p>SA</p>
26/20	<p><u>Specific Issues for Consideration</u></p> <p><u>26.01/20 – Education Programme Report</u> – The Clerk spoke to her report highlighting the work of the Education Team during the lockdown period. Cllr Stogdon expressed concern over the process to re-issue the Education contract for another academic year. The Clerk explained the requirement to provide schooling was part of the CS agreement and reiterated that the non-CS aspect of the programme is self-funded through a grant from the Friends and other donors and has no financial impact on the Conservators. The Chairman expressed a need for the Stakeholder PM to liaise with the Education Team.</p> <p>Action: The Chairman to liaise with the Clerk to ensure appropriate delegated responsibility for the programme.</p>	<p>NM/KD</p>
27/20	<p><u>Compliance Checklist and Monitoring</u></p> <p>Items largely covered in previous agenda items.</p>	
28/20	<p><u>Strategic Plan and Conservation Management Plan</u></p> <p>The Conservation Officer provided an update on his work to update the existing Conservation Management and advised that a revised plan, including work programme, would be completed before the end of the year.</p>	
29/20	<p><u>Management Information</u></p> <p>The Clerk reported there had been an increase in fly-tipping throughout the lockdown period as a direct result of the closure of Household Waste Recycling sites.</p>	
30/20	<p><u>Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the following year</u></p> <p>Chair: Mr Mawdsley was nominated by Cllr Tidy and seconded by Cllr Stogdon and was duly elected to the position of Chair.</p> <p>Vice-Chair: Cllr Tidy was nominated by Mr Mawdsley and was seconded by Cllr Stogdon and was duly elected to the position of Vice-Chair.</p>	

31/20	<u>Any Urgent Item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman</u> There were none.	

The meeting closed at 17:00 approximately