

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

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

14.00 via Zoom call arranged by Dr N Mawdsley

Committee members present: Dr N Mawdsley (Chairman), Mr C Smith (Vice Chairman), Mr M Cooper, Mr AG Reid, Cllr S Tidy, Cllr R Stogdon, Mrs R St Pierre and Mr C De Mestre

Co-opted Members/Advisors: N/A

Also present: Cllr F Whetstone, Mrs S McAll, Mr R Voden (Interim Chief Executive Officer) and Mr S Alton (Conservation Officer)

Minutes taken by Mr C Smith

There were no members of the public present

		<b>Action</b>
<b>11/20</b>	<b>Apologies</b> Apologies had been received from Cllr Hardy and Ms C Mortimer (Natural England)	
<b>12/20</b>	<b>Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature</b> The wife of Mr Smith is the treasurer of SPGCT and Mr De Mestre declared being a recipient of BPS payments	
<b>13/20</b>	<p><b>Matters arising</b></p> <p><u>RPA Update</u> –The Conservation Officer (SA) had been in touch with a number of Officers at both the RPA and Natural England to request an update on the inspection undertaken in 2019. It had been suggested that there were issues around the classification of areas of the Forest as heathland or woodland. A reply was expected imminently but had not been received prior to this meeting. We have been informed by the RPA that we are not eligible for a bridging payment, principally due to the nature of our submission requiring manual handling. <b>ACTION:</b> The Conservation Officer will continue pressing for a response.</p> <p><u>ESCC Cashflow Agreement</u> – ESCC has recommended using the Conservators’ reserves for the moment. We will initiate a formal request for support in June if necessary through following up with the ESCC Finance Team. This matter to be dealt with through the Finance and Regulatory Committee from now. <b>ACTION:</b> Finance Officer to prepare formal request in June if required.</p> <p><u>Grazing base at Broadstone Farm</u> – SA informed the Committee that due to the owner of the site being in isolation, conversations have been delayed but are due to be held soon. Several Committee members expressed their frustration at the time period of several years that this proposal has been under discussion with little demonstrable progress and reiterated its comments and concerns from the prior meeting minuted “that the Conservators would not be able to commit to a lease beyond funds currently available. This is currently 2025 and the Conservators need to be clear about</p>	<p><b>SA</b></p> <p><b>LM</b></p>

	<p>requirements and the business case relative to the proposed agreement.” Mr J Francis has yet to be contacted by anyone from the team but remains available to assist. <b>ACTION:</b> SA to follow up.</p> <p><u>Climate Change</u> – The Chairman provided a draft policy statement on climate change for consideration by the Committee, item 16.01/20.</p>	<b>SA</b>
<b>14/20</b>	<p><b>Financial Information for the Programme Committee</b> Postponed to the 8<sup>th</sup> June Finance and Regulatory Committee meeting.</p>	<b>LM</b>
<b>15/20</b>	<p><b>Progress Reports</b> The following relevant items were discussed at this point.</p> <p><u>05.01/20 – Conservation Officer’s report</u> The majority of resource intensive and outdoor activity had been completed before Covid. Lambing was completed successfully. Summer work is now underway and most can be completed by individuals e.g. cutting bracken, control of invasive species and remedial tree work supervised or performed by the Rangers.</p> <p><u>Sussex Pony Grazing Trust</u> – Significant work undertaken in the last week or so preparing to receive the assets and donation of money to TAFF. The Committee expressed its thanks to Alison Smith of the Pony Trust for her efforts in assisting in the transaction completing.</p> <p><u>SAMMS</u> – Recruitment process expected to start for the SAMMS employee in the next two weeks and a memo from Wealden expected shortly on the expected engagement between ourselves and Wealden. There was a discussion on potentially leveraging the SAMMS monies to enhance our understanding of traffic flows using the Forest’s car parks.</p> <p><u>Fly Tipping during Covid lockdown</u> – anecdotal evidence of an increase in more domestic and garden refuse being dumped on the Forest</p> <p><u>Fire</u> – The Committee expressed its thanks to the Fire Service and staff, notably, Rangers Clow and Sutton working with ESFRS, for successfully dealing with the Gills Lap fire which covered approximately four hectares and took nine hours to put out. If appropriate, the Conservators should write to thank the ESFRS. Cllr Tidy informed the meeting of the ESFRS consultation on the future service that the Conservators should consider (deadline of 19 June 2020 – <a href="https://www.esfrs.org/safer-future/">https://www.esfrs.org/safer-future/</a>).</p> <p><u>Public Consultation</u> – The Project Manager has been recruited. His work expected to commence soon, delayed by Covid.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> The Committee expressed its thanks to the Forest team and in particular, the entire grazing team and Rangers Clow and Sutton for their commitment and performance. Other actions above to be completed.</p> <p><u>15.02/20 – Grazing Officers Report</u> SA outlined the success of the grazing team who have extended the areas grazed in recent months to new sites.</p> <p>Natural England (NE) are about to undertake a Common Standards Monitoring condition assessment of the Forest that will include a study of the impact of grazing on the condition of the Forest. The Lead Grazing Officer is compiling the data for the condition assessment and study, which will also provide useful information for future, wider, consultation exercises. SA expressed his expectation that a positive assessment would result from the NE review.</p> <p><u>Sussex Pony Grazing Trust</u> – There was a conversation about the time taken for the Pony Trust merger of its remaining activities and implication on overall on-going</p>	<b>SA</b>

	<p>staffing needs amongst the grazing team based on internal agreement when the deal was approved by the Board in 2019. This included (a) the wider implications on the nature and funding of grazing activity its requirements for premises and a reiteration of its importance in delivering on the commitments to improve the Forest condition based on the wider body of applicable scientific evidence and (b) the need to resolve the staffing and contract changes associated with the completion of the acquisition.</p> <p><u>Meat Sales Income and Costs</u> – The meat sales income of £13,000 was noted and welcomed. A question was asked regarding the costs of the programme, which will be considered within a future strategic review.</p> <p><u>15.03/20 – Deer Program Report</u> – A discussion was had on the challenges and implications in achieving the target numbers of deer required to be shot, in particular regarding deer movements and relatively low numbers encountered during the day, and the possibility of revising the plan via night shooting. Given the closure of the Deer Initiative and its representative Jamie Cordery (JC) becoming the Forestry Commission deer representative for our region, it was felt to be an appropriate time to reconnect with JC and attempt to continue to leverage his expertise and advice. The need to revisit the business plan relative to realised outcome for the year was highlighted.</p> <p><u>15.04/20 – Education Programme Report</u> – The report provided was welcomed and praised. Given the implications of Covid, both near term and potentially longer, the Committee felt a discussion on its impact on the program would be useful. Additionally, RSP highlighted the importance of viewing, leveraging and benefits of, the program, in the broader context outside of direct engagement with schools but focused on families and other groups. The question was raised as to the possibility of refreshing the Education Barn. RSP and ST offered assistance in completing a review of our program when compared to other Trusts. The Committee was reminded that this was a good example for the necessity for planning and prioritisation of all of our activities and whilst the Education Program had strong Committee support, it needed to continue to be considered as part of the overall plan.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Sylvia Tidy and Rosalyn St Pierre to liaise with the Education Officer to revisit and compare our programme with other Trusts activities.</p>	<p>SA</p> <p>GP/SA</p> <p>ST/RSP</p>
<p>16/20</p>	<p><b><u>Specific Issues for Consideration</u></b></p> <p><u>16.01/20 – Climate Change policy statement</u> – The Committee debated the draft policy statement kindly drafted by the Chair of the Committee. Consideration was given to the specifics of our existing carbon footprint and wider greenhouse gas emissions as well as overall benefit provided by Ashdown Forest to the climate. Aspects such as emissions (and pollution) from older ice cream vans were raised, fuel consumption by the Forest’s vehicles and the benefit of the Forest in acting as a “heat sink” to mitigate the impact of warming on London. It was accepted that this topic is one that will become an increasingly important aspect of the perception of Ashdown Forests benefits and that a statement was needed linked to its communication strategy, strategic management plan and hence its funding model.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> The statement to be updated, consulted on further and presented at the next meeting.</p> <p><u>16.02/20 – Commoners, Commoner Grazing and BPS Claims</u> It was felt that whilst this topic has taken on increasing importance over the last year with several Commoners having expressed interest in expanding their activities, supported by BPS payments for doing so, it was felt that we have not made as much progress on this as we considered appropriate. Whilst we have material conceptual</p>	<p>NM/SA</p>

	<p>plans for a wider grazing program, these need articulating, socialising, agreeing and delivering. Clearly, being able to offer additional grazing opportunities for Commoners is a substantial part of that effort and accepting the efforts in trying to make invisible fencing a success.</p> <p>In the interim, several Commoners have expressed a desire to graze but feel they cannot. The current situation has evolved over at least the last 20 years and there are a range of issues that need to be resolved in addition to the future direction of the grazing programme. The Committee and Conservation Officer agreed that this needed to be part of an overall strategic review of developing grazing, recognising that the current BPS program will come to an end by 2027 and that the Conservators will presumably have the opportunity of entering the new ELMS stewardship scheme in 2026. The Committee felt that we need to have something in place soon that is sensible, prudent and conscious of future changes under the ELMS program being developed by the Government. This was also discussed at the March Commoners meeting this year. Furthermore, this topic reinforced the necessity for understanding our overall and longer-term needs required to support facilities such as additional barn leases etc. The Conservation Officer thought this overall topic appropriate for the Public Consultation Project Manager.</p> <p>On the immediate issue of the transitional period of the coming 2-3 years, the Committee took the view that the recommendations presented in the grazing officer's report were appropriate but that this must be discussed with Commoner graziers in advance to gain their agreement.</p> <p><b>Action :</b> Potential Commoner graziers to be approached and canvassed as to (a) their desire and scale to graze the Forest with a view to delivering a comprehensive and practical approach to facilitating increased and beneficial grazing under a common set of understood practices as soon as rational and (b) their views on the proposed transitional policies as proposed in the Grazing Officer's report.</p>	<p><b>CF/SA/ Others (e.g. Commoner Conservators)</b></p>
<b>17/20</b>	<p><b><u>Compliance Checklist and Monitoring</u></b></p> <p>A brief conversation on items 17.01-03/20 followed as it was felt that these had been largely covered in previous agenda items.</p>	
<b>18/20</b>	<p><b><u>Strategic Plan and Conservation Management Plan</u></b></p> <p>SA provided an update on his work to update the existing Conservation Management Plan rather than starting a new five-year plan. The Committee proposed that this higher-level plan is complemented by a provisional costed operational plan that will chart how the remaining CS resources will be used through to 2025.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> SA to consider this proposal on approach to updating the Strategic Plan and revert.</p>	<p><b>SA</b></p>
<b>19/20</b>	<p><b><u>Management Information</u></b></p> <p>Not available</p>	
<b>20/20</b>	<p><b><u>Any Urgent Item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman</u></b></p> <p><u>Harts Lane Planning Application (WD/2020/7026/AD)</u> – A number of Board members in their role as Councillors had been approached by members of the public regarding the aforementioned planning application. There was a discussion of the issues around staff entirely appropriately continuing to source and discuss possible opportunities to enter commercial contracts and relationships with respect to premises etc needed to support the Forest's activities but also to avoid these conversations to be seen or misused as "official" Ashdown Forest needs supporting personal activities of these</p>	

	<p>individuals or organisations. Where a planning application is made that has any level of involvement of the Conservators as an organisation, then it is considered appropriate for the Board to be advised, and if appropriate, provide approval. Further the potential issuance of a lease should presumably be a matter for a senior officer, who should be briefed of such an opportunity. The delegated authorities of the organisation are yet to provide clarity on this matter and should be clarified in the future.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> SA to clarify position of the Hart Lane application and report to Committee Chair as soon as possible. Delegated authorities to clarify such matters.</p>	<p><b>SA / Board</b></p>

The meeting closed at 16:20 approximately