

**MINUTES OF THE COMMONERS' ANNUAL MEETING
HELD ON 04 March 2022 AT UCKFIELD CIVIC CENTRE**

Five Commoner Conservators attended the meeting: Mr C Smith, Mr N Mawdsley, Ms S McAll, Mr C de Mestre and Ms L Maudslay. 120 Commoners signed the register. The Minutes were taken by Mark Infield.

1. Reading of the notice

The Clerk to the Conservators of Ashdown Forest read the notice.

2. Introduction of Elected Commoner Conservator Board Members

The Commoner Conservator members of the Board of Conservators introduced themselves to the Commoners attending the meeting.

3. Election of Chair

The Chair of the Board of Conservators requested the Commoners present elect a Commoner to chair the meeting. None being proposed, the Chair of the Board of Conservators proposed that she chair the meeting, and this was accepted without comment from the floor.

4. Approval of the agenda

A draft agenda was circulated amongst the Commoners and projected on a screen. The agenda was approved.

5. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Mr Henry Osbourne, Mr PD Cooper, Ms J Till, Mr & Mrs Dewhurst, Rev W St J Kemm and Mrs Kemm, Ms G Rolfe, Mr M Gellatly and Lady Davies.

6. Matters arising

No matters arising were raised.

7. Election of a Commoner Conservator to the Board of Conservators

The election was between Mr Neil Goldie-Scott and Ms Rachel Millward. Each of the contestants were invited to make a statement of their candidature. Following their statements Commoners were invited to put questions to the candidates. Commoners were requested to put questions that both candidates would answer.

Question 1. Muccini Iacopo

The recent storm which brought down many trees can be considered as providing a resource. Ashdown Forest produces many potential resources. Do the candidates have knowledge about 'biochar' that could be made from fallen trees?

Question 2. Andy Way

There is concern that land is being offered for development within the 400m buffer around Ashdown Forest. What is the position of the candidates on this?

Question 3. Nick Atwell

Is the priority concern for Ashdown Forest and the candidates landscape recovery and species conservation?

Question 4. Lorna Dawson Collins

How can the right balance be established between creating understanding and valuing of the Forest through exposure to it, and the disturbance and damage done by these visits?

Question 5. Flora Pethybridge

How do the candidates respond to the suggestion that land owned by one of them within the 400m planning exclusion zone for new residential properties around Ashdown Forest has been offered for development?

8. Presentation by Mr James Adler, CEO, Ashdown Forest

While votes were cast and the ballots counted, Mr James Adler gave a presentation about the history, ecology and management of Ashdown Forest.

9. Voting and result of the election

34 votes were cast for Mr Goldie-Scott. 32 votes were cast for Ms Millward. Mr Goldie-Scott was duly elected as a Commoner Conservator member of the Board of Conservators for five years.

10. Presentation of the finances of Ashdown Forest

The Chair for the Finance Committee, Mr Chris de Mestre, gave a presentation on the finances of Ashdown Forest. He gave a brief overview of the 2021/22 income and expenditure, explaining the difference between the Core budget and CS budget,

11. Conservator update

The Chair of the Board of Conservators, Ms Susan McAll, gave an update to the Commoners regarding the Board of Conservators and Ashdown Forest.

Liz Maudsley thanked both candidates for standing for election.

12. Question and Answer session

A question-and-answer session was facilitated by the Chair of the Board of Conservators with questions answered by the CEO, James Adler, and Commoner Conservator members of the Board.

Question 1. Ms Hazel Carter

What actions are the Board of Conservators taking with regard to Wealden District Council, especially with regard to their responses to planning applications around Ashdown Forest and conservation issues more generally given that there is no Landscape Officer in place?

Question 2. Ms Diana Harrison

The presence of a large number of orienteers and associated cars was observed on the Forest, with runners crossing the area. What impacts do such events have on wildlife, what plans do we have for managing such events and what revenues do such events bring in?

How do you intend to police the parking of cars on verges, laybys and Forest tracks?

Question 3. Elisia

Buchan Country Park in West Sussex has free parking with requests for voluntary contributions from visitors. Has this arrangement been considered instead of introducing a parking payments scheme?

Question 4. Muccini Jacopo

Have you considered producing biochar from Forest trees?

Question 5. Rod Thonger

We have been expecting to receive appeals for funding from Ashdown Forest in response to the funding crisis but have not received anything. Can you consider appeals for developing special projects for improving the Forest? And would ESCC not then continue to cover any annual operating budget deficit?

Question 6. Kevin Hawes

How can Commoners receive better communications from the Board? Are you, for example, collecting email addresses of those attending this meeting?

Question 7. Donald Speedy

Do you have a plan for gorse management? And are you winning the battle?

Question 8. Michael Castles

Can you explain about the use of NoFence technology, the grazing of livestock with collars? What animals can this work with?

13. Any other Business

Dr Atkins told the meeting that this was, in his view, the best Commoners' meeting he had attended and called for thanks to the organisers and for a round of applause.

Susan McAll, Chair of the Board of Conservators, thanked Colin Smith for his contributions to Ashdown Forest as he is standing down as a Commoner Conservator.

14. Request for agreement to call the next Commoners Meeting

The Chair of the Board of Conservators proposed that the next meeting would be held on Friday 3rd March 2023. There being no objection the proposal was accepted.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 21:30.