

**Minutes of the
FINANCIAL & REGULATORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

Monday 13 June 2022

14.00 via MS Teams

Committee members present: Mr C de Mestre (Chair), Mr AG Reid, Mr Stogdon and Ms F Thomas

Ex-Officio: Mrs R St. Pierre

Also present: Mrs S Tidy, Mr N Goldie-Scot, Mr J Adler (CEO), Mrs K Dirs (Business Manager) and Mr C Ball (Finance Officer)

Minutes taken by the Business Manager

		Action
10/22	Apologies Apologies were received from Susan McAll, Cllr P Roundell and Cllr P Pragnell	
11/22	Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature There were none	
12/22	Matters Arising The Business Manager spoke of an outstanding action to conduct a site visit to The Gatehouse, Kidds Hill, to consider a change of access. The Committee agreed to delegate the matter to the Chairman and CEO in order to expedite the decision. ACTION: KD <i>Post meeting note: A site meeting was conducted at The Gate House, Kidd's Hill on 23 June 2022 with the Chair of the Finance and Regulatory Committee. From this it was determined that developing a new residential access across Ashdown Forest to The Gate House garden is not appropriate under the terms of the 1974 Ashdown Forest Act.</i>	KD
13/22	Finance <u>13.01/22 General finance update – verbal update</u> <i>Year ending documentation - March 2022:</i> <u>13.02/22 To receive a copy of the Asset Register as at 31st March 2022 and to recommend the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 for Board approval</u> The Finance Officer presented the asset register advising additions of £2k and that there was no planned replacement policy for any assets and that this was to be addressed in the current financial year. The Committee acknowledged the asset register. The Finance Officer presented the Statement of Accounts highlighting the YTD deficit of £51k which included a previously unreported staff holiday and TOIL accrual of £19k which is a reporting requirement of FRS102. He explained the 2021-22 financial year has been a challenging one for the organisation with a significant restructure as well as the continuing pandemic and that the organisation needs to adapt and modernise. The Committee reviewed the Statement of Accounts and agreed to recommend to the Board for authorisation. The Chair gave an overview of the work of The Ashdown Forest Foundation noting a significant donation from an anonymous donor. A grant for a carbon sequestration review had been received along with income from talks and a cake sale. The charity is targeting HNWI's, endowments and planning a quarterly schedule of engagement and fundraising initiatives. The Committee gave a vote of thanks to Mr de Mestre for opening his house	

	<p>to the public for a charitable engagement day which raised £12.5k. The Chair concluded his update advising the charity AGM would be held on Monday 27 June directly after the Conservators' Board meeting.</p> <p><u>13.03/22 To receive the Internal Auditor's Report</u> The Committee considered the report, noting the weaknesses in the accounting and internal control systems.</p> <p>The Finance Officer explained the weaknesses noting the fixed asset register should be loaded onto Sage. He highlighted the importance of efficiencies within internal processes to enable more robust financial reporting, concluding a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system was required to manage and maintain the day-to-day functions of the business. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Board the Internal Auditor's Report for authorisation.</p> <p><u>13.04/22 To recommend the Annual Governance and Accounting Return 2021/22 for Board approval</u> The Committee considered the Annual Governance and Accounting Return and agreed to recommend the statements to the Board for authorisation.</p> <p><u>13.05/22 Pension provision</u> The Finance Officer spoke to the paper explaining the current pension provision (a defined benefit average salary pension scheme operated by East Sussex County Council) is unsustainable and that having sought advice from ESCC, the pension scheme fund can be closed to new entrants.</p> <p>Mr Stogdon advised a previous report from Hymans Robertson (Actuaries to the fund) in 2017 had identified that for the purposes of the fund, Ashdown Forest is pooled for contribution rate purposes with the Town and Parish Councils. The employers in this pool benefit from a more stable contribution rate which are part of the fund's stabilisation mechanism and at the time of the report, the fund was to remain open to new staff over the long term, either through the existing body or by new admission. The Committee recommended the paper to the Board for discussion. ACTION: CEO and Finance Officer to investigate with ESCC Pensions.</p>	JA & CB
14/22	Forest Amenity	
	<p><u>14.01/22 Parking payments update - verbal update</u> The CEO gave an update on parking payments advising contracts with Horizon were being drawn up. The payment rates had been agreed, concessions are being reviewed and signage is being prepared. It is anticipated payments will launch in the summer once planning permission for signage and payment machines has been granted.</p>	
15/22	Encroachments and Bye-law breaches	
	<p>The Business Manager informed the Committee the fencing encroachment at Linton House would be removed after bird nesting season. A number of attacks on livestock have occurred, with one individual receiving a Community Resolution Order. A family in Fairwarp have received a verbal warning from the Police for using motorised vehicles on the Forest and an ongoing initiative with the Rural Crime Policing Team focused on promoting dog control is underway.</p> <p>A fly-tipping forum has been set up by Sussex Police Partnership with representation from the Environment Agency, National Parks Authority and Cowdray Estate.</p>	
16/22	Licences, Permits, Rates and Wayleaves - verbal update	
	<p>Just over 200 riding permits have been issued since the start of the season, which represents a year on year decrease of around 20% compared with 2021. Fewer requests</p>	

	for multiple permits have been received. Property licences have flattened as the market for sale remains low after the ending of the stamp duty holiday.	
17/22	Employment & Staffing Arrangements (Referred from HR Sub Committee) - verbal update	
	There were none	
18/22	Policy and Procedures and Statutory Documents - verbal update	
	A new credit card policy is being created to ensure strong financial management and accountability controls are in place for credit card transactions and to protect both staff and the Conservators from the risk of fraud and unauthorised expenditure.	
19/22	Health and Safety and Insurance claims (standing item) - verbal update	
	Two insurance claims have been submitted during the reporting period. One claim was a result of property damage from Storm Eunice and one for damage to a stalkers truck. An incident involving a dog being kicked and fatally injured by a galloping horse is currently under investigation.	
20/22	Data breaches (standing item) verbal update	
	There were none	
21/22	Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman	
	There were none	

The meeting closed at 15:25