

Minutes of the Meeting of the Programme Committee

Monday 06 February 2023 14:00

Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee Members present: Mrs S Tidy (Chair), Mr N Mawdsley, Mrs L Maudslay, Cllr A Newton and Mrs E Riminton-Drury

Co-opted Members/Advisors present: None

Ex-officio: Mrs R St. Pierre

Also present: Mr J Adler (CEO), Mr A Walmsley (Countryside Manager), Mrs K Dirs (Business Manager) and Mrs K Dunbar (Lead Warden) for item 03/23

Minutes taken by the Business Manager

There were no members of the public present.

		Action
01/23	Apologies Mr Squire and Cllr Howell. The Chair welcomed Kari Dunbar to the meeting and gave brief introductions.	
02/23	Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature There were none.	
03/23	Matters arising <u>03.01/23 Management Plan update</u> The Countryside Manager gave an update on the management plan explaining a new SSSI status level had been added to the plan. The status showed a number of woodland quadrants were in decline but the overall picture was incomplete as the survey had not been undertaken by Natural England of the whole Forest. The woodland is currently in decline due to heavy deer browsing impacting on the vegetation understory. A number of heathland units are in unfavourable condition due to a lack of grazing. The Countryside Manager explained the next steps were to simplify and implement the plan. <u>03.01/23 Lead Warden (SAMMS) update</u> Kari Dunbar introduced herself to members and gave an overview of her plans for the next few months. These include visits to other Special Protection Areas such as Thames Basin Heath, South Downs National Park, Bird Aware Solent and East Devon Wildlife, to develop a programme of interactions with dog walkers promoting good dog ownership. Kari is currently collating baseline data so patterns of behaviour can be identified. Kari will be identifiable on the Forest in uniform.	
04/23	Progress Reports <u>04.01/23 Countryside Manager's report</u> The Countryside Manager spoke to his report. Mrs Maudslay asked whether, in the south chase, cattle numbers were going to be increased and whether this would affect the headage payment. Mrs Riminton-Drury asked how using cattle for grazing would be managed. The Countryside Manager	

	<p>responded that there is an agreement in place with the commoners on the south chase for livestock numbers.</p> <p>Mrs Maudslay asked about plans to make houses safe from fire. Work is ongoing to build fire resilience plans for the Forest. This winter has focused on protecting the most vulnerable properties on the Forest where fire loading is high (gorse and bracken). The properties identified have been consulted with and a 30m buffer will be created around the properties.</p> <p>Mr Mawdsley asked for an update on the Footprint Ecology strategy to establish and monitor the effects of grazing on Ashdown Forest. Footprint ecologists will be visiting the Forest to create enclosures and monitoring at the end of the month. The results will demonstrate impacts that grazing has on floral diversity on lowland heathland and provide indications as to grazing regimes.</p> <p>A question was asked about the bare ground scrapes and the habitat this provided. Heather regeneration is starting to appear and the bare ground is a valuable habitat for encouraging the spread of important species like the Silver-Studded Blue butterflies.</p> <p><u>04.01/23 i. Grazing Report</u> The grazing programme was discussed by the committee. Early winter is a busy period for the team; moving animals off the Forest and getting the summer enclosures moved to the winter areas. Income from a recent sale of meat boxes had generated just under £10k. A possible 'bull-share agreement' is being investigated with Chailey Moat.</p> <p><u>04.01/23 ii. Deer Programme</u> Since the start of the season the team have culled 94 animals; 55 does and 39 bucks. Although night shooting has a high success rate, the amount of night shooting has been limited. Poor weather and available personnel are the main factors. A drone survey was conducted in December which identified landholdings which had large groups of deer and contact has been made with the landowners to discuss deer management as part of the wider AONB programme.</p> <p><u>04.02/23 Education programme report</u> The Business Manager spoke to the report noting the popularity of the newly created weekend volunteer Youth Group which was now fully subscribed with a waiting list. Activities include clearing bramble from the paths in the education area, scrub control, installing log seats and building a reptile hibernaculum.</p>	
05/23	<p>Any Urgent Item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman. The CEO advised the following an incident in which a member of the public was struck by a falling tree, the Health and Safety Executive had launched an investigation, an internal review was ongoing and tree management by the team is presently suspended.</p>	

The meeting closed at 15:30