



Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Board of Conservators
Monday 13 March 2023 at 14.00
Cats Protection Visitor Centre, Lewes Road, Chelwood Gate, RH17 7TT

Present: Ms S McAll (Chair), Mrs R St Pierre (Vice Chair), Mrs S Tidy, Mr R Stogdon, Mr A Reid, Ms F Thomas, Mrs L Maudslay, Mrs E Riminton-Drury, Mr J Squire and Mr N Mawdsley

In attendance: Mr J Adler (CEO) and Mrs K Dirs (Business Manager)

Minutes were taken by the Business Manager

Members of the public present: Emily Munn and Isabel Manweiler

	Item	Action
	The Chair welcomed members Nick Mawdsley and Isabel Manweiler recently appointed at the Commoners Annual meeting.	
01/23	Apologies Cllr P Pragnell, Cllr Newton, Cllr Lunn, Cllr Howell and Mr N Goldie-Scot. As Cllr Pragnell was unable to attend the meeting he asked for the following statement to be read: <i>It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as Lord of the Manor for a second time and to see how the management and conservation of the Forest has progressed since my last term of office. Under their stewardship, I am very optimistic for the future.</i> Mrs St Pierre proposed a formal vote of thanks be written to Cllr Pragnell acknowledging his dedication and commitment to the Forest.	
02/23	Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature None	
03/23	Outstanding actions from previous meeting 1. <u>Creation of a Youth Board</u> The CEO is working with London Youth to develop a joint youth programme, and the Forest Education Team have introduced a youth volunteer group. Item closed. 2. <u>Pension Provision</u> Liabilities within the LGPS scheme are in the region of £265k. Further work is underway to investigate whether it is reasonable to look at closing the scheme to new entrants. The pension deficit has fallen due to a sharp reversal in UK Government Gilt yields. 3. <u>Internal Audit.</u> Item closed. 4. <u>White House Barn.</u> Heads of Terms are currently being negotiated, following which a Farm Tenancy Agreement will be established between parties.	
04/23	To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 21 November 2022 and matters arising The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy. Mr Mawdsley requested an amendment to item 34/22 The Ashdown Forest Foundation – verbal update. Mr Mawdsley felt his concerns around the constitution of the charity were not captured and requested the minutes be edited. The following text has been inserted into the November minutes: <i>There was a discussion on the interaction between the Board of Conservators and The Ashdown Forest Foundation.</i> Subject to amendment the minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6	KD
05/23	To receive the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of 07 March 2023	

	<p>The Chair spoke to the minutes highlighting the incident on the Forest on 25 January and the subsequent elements involving 1) the Health and Safety Executive 2) a Civil element and 3) internal improvements to managing H&S, including policy and risk assessment. The NFU and Peninsula HR services are supporting the work.</p> <p>The level of vehicular use on the Forest is being considered.</p> <p>The Chair concluded the summary advising the topic of farmers shooting dogs worrying livestock on common land was being examined.</p>	
06/23	<p>To receive the minutes of the Programme Committee meeting of 06 February 2023</p> <p>The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy.</p> <p>The Committee Chair gave an update on the Deer project with the High Weald, working on a wider landscape scale to survey zones in multiple holdings. Sandy Williamson of the AONB is preparing a paper which will be circulated to the Board when received. The CEO confirmed 150 deer had been culled to date, an increase on previous years. ACTION: JA</p> <p>The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6</p>	
07/23	<p>To receive the minutes of the Finance and Regulatory Committee meeting of 20 February 2023</p> <p>The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy.</p> <p>The Committee Chair gave an overview of the current financial situation reporting a positive net income of £32k following the introduction of car parking payments. The balance sheet shows an underbudgeted deficit of £32k vs a CS surplus of £37k. The budget is being presented to ESCC at the end of March.</p> <p>The Countryside Stewardship grant has yet to be received and this is causing cash flow issues. It is anticipated payment will be made in the week commencing the 20 March. The organisation currently holds 6 months of operating costs in reserves; this limit is to be reviewed as the organisation regularly drops below this level.</p> <p>The Committee Chair presented the following documents for retrospective Board approval noting a new risk framework will be considered for 2023/24 to include appropriate RAG status reporting.</p> <p>07.01/23 To approve the General Risk Management Plan 2022/2023 The Board unanimously approved the General Risk Management Plan</p> <p>07.02/23 To approve the Financial Risk Management Plan 2022/2023 The Board unanimously approved the Financial Risk Management Plan</p> <p>07.03/23 To approve the Standing Orders 2022/2023 The Board unanimously approved the Standing Orders 2022/2023</p> <p>07.04/23 To approve the Financial Regulations 2022/2023 The Board unanimously approved the Financial Regulations 2022/2023</p> <p>07.05/23 To note the conclusion of audit 2021/22 and external auditor's report The Committee Chair explained the conclusion of the audit 2021/2022 and the technical qualification resulting from an inaccurate declaration by the Board in the AGAR Part 3 Assertion 4, whereby a change to the date of the June Board meeting meant there was not enough opportunity for the exercise of elector's rights in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Board acknowledged this qualification.</p>	

KD

	Mrs Rimington-Drury asked why the wording of the Standing Orders was so antiquated and suggested the document needed rewording. ACTION: KD to liaise with ESCC to determine if their Code of Conduct is more appropriate.	
08/23	CEO Update – Verbal update (Standing Item)	
	<p>The Forest has officially joined the Weald to Waves project and is also moving towards a Landscape Recovery bid with a number of local farmers and land managers.</p> <p>The Test and Trial programme has been completed with the support of twenty local farmers, a number of other organisations and a local land agent. The draft report is with the DEFRA team and we will be circulated when received.</p> <p>The highest level of ambition, Landscape Recovery, will have a second round of pilots opening in the spring. With Natural England’s assistance, the Forest is considering entry into this scheme. This would benefit the Forest and its neighbours financially but also enable the organisation to turn around wildlife declines. Natural England have given the Forest two additional pots of funding. One is to conduct a desktop exercise on the possible reintroduction of Black Grouse. The other is to look at nature’s recovery at scale across the Forest and the surrounding area which includes a wider carbon audit. Both of these elements of work are being delivered by consultants paid from NE funding.</p> <p>A new Winnie the Pooh puppet production has engaged with the Forest for publicity.</p> <p>Grant funding of £90k for a new modular accessible toilet facility and accessible path has been secured from the AONB, with work set to start shortly. This is a short-term development whilst the long term Visitor Centre strategy is developed.</p>	
09/23	Update on Parking Payments on Ashdown Forest	
	The CEO summarised the current position with parking payments. Over 1500 annual permits and 100 concessionary permits purchased. This has generated a net income of £32K with projected income of £15-£16k per month. Whilst some displacement parking is being monitored, the majority of Forest visitors are supporting the Forest with their payments.	
10/23	The Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF) – Verbal update (Standing item)	
	<p>The Vice Chair (as Corporate Trustee) gave an update on the recent work of the charity.</p> <p>Two meetings had been attended with Emma Taylor Head of Trading, Commercial and Corporate Partnerships at of SSAFA (The Armed Forces Charity) to discuss the potential for assistance developing TAFF. Mr St Clair Jones had attended the launch of Wealden District Council’s charity lottery and was in talks with representatives of the Brighton Festival and the Communications Director of Bluebell Railway.</p> <p>Ashdown Park Hotel have been very supportive of the charity and held a team quiz fundraiser and are also working on further fundraisers for 2023.</p> <p>A donation of £1,200 had been received from Coleman’s Hatch Horticultural Society, £250 from the Rotarians and a £10k donation from a private individual.</p> <p>Mrs St Pierre concluded her report explaining the next step was to employ a dedicated fundraiser for the charity.</p>	
11/23	Any urgent item of which the Clerk has noticed in order to pass to the Chair	
	There were none. There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15:35.	

Chair _____

Clerk _____

19 June 2023

UNADOPTED