

Minutes of the Meeting of the Programme Committee

Monday 22 May 2023 14:00

Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee Members present: Mrs S Tidy (Chair), Mr N Mawdsley, Mrs L Maudsley, Mr J Squire

Co-opted Members/Advisors present: None

Ex-officio: Mrs R St. Pierre

Also present: Mr T Reid, Mr J Adler (CEO), Mr A Walmsley (Countryside Manager), Mrs K Dirs (Business Manager). Mr Glen Poland (Deer Warden) and Mrs Sandy Williamson (AONB) attended for item 09/23

Minutes taken by the Company Secretary

There were no members of the public present.

		Action
06/23	Apologies Cllr Newton, Cllr Howell and Mrs Riminton-Drury, The Chair welcomed Sandy Williamson for the AONB and Charlotte Janjetich to the meeting and advised that she would be interim cover for the Company Secretary role	
07/23	Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature There were none.	
08/23	Matters arising <u>Management Plan update</u> The Countryside Manager gave an update on the management plan explaining that it had been reprioritised due to the Forest incident in January and would be completed over the coming weeks and expected that it would be ready for circulation by the end of July. The Chair proposed a morning where all Conservators would meet to understand the key actions from the plan. Mr Mawdsley asked about resources available to implement the Management Plan. The Countryside Manager spoke about the variety of works required from the Management Plan and a number of projects will be delivered by external contractors funded by the Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement. Staff will deliver a number of elements.	
09/23	Deer across the High Weald Ms Williamson gave an introduction and explained the overall aim of the project to improve deer management across the High Weald which included a key partnership with Ashdown Forest. As part of the project a survey of Ashdown Forest had been undertaken including a thermal drone survey and the heat maps had shown high density of herds on neighbouring land. Ms Williamson explained the importance of working collaboratively with neighbouring landowners and so far, 60 landowners have signed up to take part in the programme. The drone survey had shown that there were around 2,200 deer in the area equating to an estimate of around 14 fallow deer per square km. The survey suggested that the population is 80% female. Presently around 500 deer a year are	

	<p>being culled in the area. It is estimated that this needs to be 1,500 a year to reduce the population. This is work that requires action at the wider landscape level and cannot be delivered on the Forest alone where the large visitor population makes culling challenging.</p> <p>Equestrian areas had been identified as a particular location for action as there was often no culling in these areas and horse owners did not mind an amount of the grass being removed.</p> <p>The project is offering financial support for the culling of deer to help to stabilize numbers and to reduce the negative impact the deer are having on the environment. Both Dormice and Nightingale numbers have suffered due to the large number of deer. Ms Williamson explained the project has received funding for another year. Another thermal survey is planned for December 2023.</p> <p>There was a discussion around the Forest’s role in potentially providing facilities and sales for venison culled in the surrounding area. This may support neighbours and the AONB in delivering required culling levels and making the operation more financially viable in the future. A business case would be needed to support decision making in this area. Ms Williamson will consider what information is available to support this.</p> <p>The chair thanked Mr Poland and Ms Williamson for their time and their insightful presentation</p>	
<p>10/23</p>	<p>Progress Reports <u>10.01/23 Countryside Manager’s report, incorporating:</u> The Countryside Manager spoke to his report and The Chair invited questions.</p> <p>Mrs Maudslay asked about Dartford Warbler and Nightjar populations. The Countryside Manager advised a Nightjar survey is taking place in June and that 85 Dartford Warbler habitats had been identified. Part of the work undertaken by contractors is the management of gorse to create a mosaic heathland habitat which supports larger numbers of Dartford Warblers</p> <p>The Chair asked what other considerations were taken into account when understanding floristic survey data. The Countryside Manager explained that in 22/23 the weather was taken into account, but information was not available for previous years’ plant monitoring.</p> <p>A question was asked about tree safety and the frequency of tree surveying on the Forest. The Countryside Manager advised survey work had been undertaken and that Savills had been employed to update a Forest wide survey methodology. This is in production.</p> <p>A question was asked abouts the cost of repairs to the Black Hill carpark. The Countryside Manager explained that there is a sum of £6,000 for these repairs, which quotes are being gathered for at present.</p> <p><u>i. Grazing Report</u> Invisible fencing was discussed. The training methodology, involving over winter paddocks and the way the collars work was detailed. The first area to exclusively use Invisible Fencing is being prepared close to the Forest Centre. The communications are in preparation.</p> <p><u>ii. Deer Programme</u> This was covered at 09/23.</p>	

	<p><u>iii. SAMMs report</u> The Countryside Manager spoke to the report. A signage review forms part of this work.</p> <p><u>10.02/23 Education programme report</u> The report had been circulated and the committee asked for their thanks to be passed on to the Education team for all their hard work.</p>	
05/23	<p>Any Urgent Item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman. Consideration is being given for a Forest feature to mark the coronation. This may involve the creation of a new clump using native species to increase pollinators.</p>	

The meeting closed at 15:30