



**Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Board of Conservators  
Monday 20 November 2023  
Education Barn, Ashdown Forest Centre.**

**Present:** Ms S McAll (Chair), Mrs R St Pierre (Vice Chair), Mrs S Tidy, , Mr N Goldie-Scot, Mr J Squire, Cllr P Pragnell, Mr A Reid, Ms F Thomas, Mrs L Maudslay, Mrs E Riminton-Drury, Cllr J Howell, Cllr R Millward, Cllr G Owen-Williams, Mr N Mawdsley, Ms I Manweiler

**In attendance:** Mr A Walmsley (Countryside Manager) and Ms Z Nichols ( Administration Manager)

Minutes were taken by the Administration Manager

**Members of the public present:** Mark Pearson, Paula Da Luz and Lisa Stevens.

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>
	The Chair welcomed the Board and introduced the new Administration Manager, Ms Z Nichols	
<b>25/23</b>	<b>Apologies</b> Mr R Stogdon	
<b>26/23</b>	<b>Notice by the Chair of any Urgent Business Items</b> As the organisation was still without a CEO/Clerk, under paragraph 15, Extraordinary Circumstances, for the purposes of this meeting, the Chair delegated Clerk responsibilities to of Ms Z Nichols, Administration Manager and CEO responsibilities to Mr A Walmsley, Countryside Manager.  The Chair stated that there were two pieces of news which she wished to bring to the attention of the board.  The very good news that Mark Pearson has been appointed as the new CEO and starting at the end of January 2024. The Chair provided some details of his experience, to include 10 years with Surrey Wildlife Trust and the last 4 years with the Canal and River Trust.  The Chair then provided the Board with an update on the HSE investigation regarding the incident that took place in January 2023.	
<b>27/23</b>	<b>Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature</b>  Ms I Manweiler and her landholding is part of the Landscape Recovery project.	
<b>28/23</b>	<b>To review the Board Action Log</b>  The Clerk confirmed that the only Action was the review of Firearms Policy. Mr A Warmsley confirmed that he was proof reading the final version and which will be submitted to the Executive Committee. The delay was in part due to Deer Ranger leaving the organisation.  <b>There is no further action</b>	
<b>29/23</b>	<b>To approve the minutes of the AGM Board meeting of 19 June 2023 and matters arising</b>  The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy.  <b>The minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.7</b>	
<b>30/23</b>	<b>CEO Update</b> -Verbal update ( Standing Item ) Update provided by Mr A Walmsley highlighted the positive work undertaken on the Forest This included: A report on some of the species monitoring like Nightjar and Silver-studded Blue butterflies, which have had good years.	

Car park repairs have been completed in several high profile car parks, with more hopefully planned for the new year depending on resources. 12 different areas of rides have been repaired, including two Bridleways with the assistance of ESCC PROW.

120 hectares of bracken have been managed this year and this winter approximately 50 hectares of scrub and gorse will be managed as part of our winter contracts

The No Fence collar system for cattle has been trialled this summer, which has proved to be very successful. This also gained some positive media attention. It will hopefully be rolled out next year.

Paid parking has now been in place for a year and although quieter summer than expected the autumn and spring had a higher number. There has been some sign vandalism in the last quarter and the police have now charged a man with criminal damage. Since this point there has been no repeated incidents.

Projects commenced by the late James Adler:

Harper Collins are publishing a new book about Winnie the Pooh. As part of the publishing of this new book, we are working with Harper Collins and their partners around an educational piece that will encourage school age children to get involved and create a tree sculpture that is based in the Visitor Centre garden.

Working with and funded by Taff, there will be a Winnie the Pooh partnership in the lead up to the centenary.

A feasibility exercise is being undertaken with regards to the reintroduction of Pine Martens. Surveys will be undertaken next year and discussions with local land owners and communities.

Events: All local fetes were attended by the Forest Staff and TAFF, which included the Good Vibration festival in Pippingford.

Mark Infield's talks this autumn were well attended. Some had to be cancelled due to illness and rescheduling is being looked into.

The Countryside Manager has been giving talks to various local groups and it is clear that there is interest in the Forest and how it is managed.

There is the Winters Day event on 2 December and Craig Payne will have an exhibition.

A walk in memory of James is being organised which will include walking the 100 mile corridor 'Weald to Waves' with a ceremony of remembrance being held on the Forest as the walk concludes. This will take place in April 2024.

Submissions have been registered for the Gatwick Expansion Project on behalf of the Conservators.

Recruitment is taking place for the Deer Ranger position.

**To receive the minutes of the Programme Committee meeting 02 October 2023 and matters arising**

The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy.

The Chair of Programme Committee reported that the meeting had included a detailed discussion on bracken. The Chair explained that there were issues with bracken on the Forest and how to control it. Further discussion would be necessary.

**The minutes were duly received .**

<p><b>32/23</b></p>	<p><b>The Finance and Regulatory Committee meeting of 30 October 2023 and matters arising</b></p> <p>The minutes had been circulated and assessed for accuracy.</p> <p>The Chair of the Finance and Regulatory Committee gave a detailed summary of the current financial position to the Board. She confirmed that the budget had been approved by ESCC.</p> <p>The issue of Cash reserves is being looked into and there will be a proposal to be dealt with under Standing Orders at the June Board Meeting.</p> <p><u>31.01/23 : To approve the budget for 2024/2025</u></p> <p>The Chair summarised the main points of the budget.</p> <p><b>The budget was approved by the Board.</b></p> <p><u>31.02/23: To agree the Forest Rate For 2024/2025</u></p> <p>The Chair summarised the proposal for Forest Rates. She confirmed that the increase for most Commoners would be £2.28.</p> <p><b>The Forest Rate proposed was agreed by the Board.</b></p> <p><u>31.03/23: To agree fees and charges for 2024/2025</u></p> <p>The Chair summarised the proposal for fees and charges. An increase of 6% is proposed for the coming year.</p> <p><b>The Fees and Charges proposed were agreed by the Board</b></p> <p><u>31.04/23 : To approve the changes made to AGAR Section 2</u></p> <p>The report was approved at the last Board meeting. It was noticed almost immediately that there had been a transposition error which did not affect the document. The changes have been signed off by two Board members and require Board approval.</p> <p><b>The Changes made to AGAR Section 2 were approved by the Board.</b></p>	
<p><b>33/23</b></p>	<p><b>To receive the risk register</b></p> <p>This had been done in a previous meeting and was included in the agenda in error by the Clerk. The Chair stated that the Board need to be up to date with their Health and Safety obligations and it was agreed that there should be some mandatory training in January. There should then be regular refresher training.</p>	
<p><b>34/23</b></p>	<p><b>To appoint an Internal Auditor</b></p> <p>Ms F Thomas as chair of the Financial and Regulatory Committee explained that it would be usual to change Auditor every 5 years , but the Finance Officer has only been dealing with them for 2 years. Therefore this was a fairly new working relationship. A quote from another auditor had been obtained which was £200 higher than the current one. The proposal is that the current Auditor RPD continue in the role and this was agreed by the Board.</p>	
<p><b>34/23</b></p>	<p><b>Proposed Board and Committee dates 2024</b> <i>BD 31/23</i></p> <p>The Chair suggested that all Board members put the dates in diaries.</p>	

35/23	<p><b>The Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF) -verbal update</b></p> <p>The Vice Chair provided a detailed update.</p> <p>The Chair of TAFF and Mark Pearson have had an informal meeting.</p> <p>The Vice Chair stated that there had been an increase in income generation, to include a significant legacy.</p> <p>The Conservation Trust has wound down and funds were split equally between TAFF and the Friends.</p> <p>TAFF are employing a professional fundraiser who will be working on corporate fundraising and legacies.</p> <p>With regards to the Winnie the Pooh anniversary, TAFF will be paying the employment costs of Ashley Beevers to coordinate the partnership</p> <p>TAFF is looking to accrue larger reserves. They are funding the new Mezzanine flooring in the Information Barn and emergency lighting at the Visitor Centre.</p> <p>The Vice Chair also raised the issue of volunteer help with social media</p> <p>The Chair of TAFF has met with directors of a peer to peer business growth network who have shown interest in renting Cotchford Farm and the Education Barn.</p> <p>The Vice Chair mentioned the Christmas Celebration event on the 26<sup>th</sup> November.</p> <p>She also said that TAFF is supporting the Weald to Waves walk in April.</p>	
36/23	<p><b>Any urgent item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the chair</b></p> <p>Milbrook carpark: the Countryside Manager reported that ESCC had provided an MOU which is being reviewed.</p> <p>Education update: There has to date been a lot of work done with primary school children. A parent/ toddler group is run on a monthly basis. There is a weekly "Wild Wednesdays" in the summer holidays.</p> <p>The need to work with secondary age children has been identified. There is a youth volunteer group that has been running for a year, which is mostly 12 and 13 year olds.</p> <p>They will be looking to engage with secondary schools and although funding is not in place at the moment, this is something for the future. Duke of Edinburgh already takes place on the Forest.</p> <p>There will also be an environmental GCSE and the Forest could be a site for practical work.</p> <p>The Chair stated that this fits in with the strategic plan and the Board agrees that this area should be expanded.</p> <p>The Vice Chair raised an e-mail address issue and asked the members of the Board if they wanted a specific Ashdown Forest email address. A consensus was not reached as several members did not feel this would be useful and would cause more issues.</p>	
There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15:35pm.		

Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Clerk \_\_\_\_\_

20 November 2023