



Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Board of Conservators
Monday 11 March 2024
Education Barn. Ashdown Forest Centre, Wych Cross, RH18 5JP

Present: Ms S McAll (Chair), Mrs R St Pierre (Vice Chair) ,Cllr Peter Pragnall, Mr R Stogdon, Ms E Riminton , Ms F Thomas, Mr A Reid, Mr J Squire, Ms I Manweiler, Mr N Mawdsley, Cllr G Owen-Williams.

In attendance: Mr M Pearson (CEO) , Ms Z Nichols (Administration Manager) , Mr A Walmsley (Countryside Manager)

Minutes were taken by the Administration Manager

Members of the public present: Mr E Stenhouse

	Item	Action
	<p>Mr Stenhouse raised the Pine Marten project and he asked if the committee were aware of and had been advised/ discussed how the introduction of pine martens would affect for example chickens and lambs.</p> <p>The CEO said that there is simply a feasibility study taking place which is supported by the Board . We will be very open with the results and there is a lot of data being collected. The feasibility study will take a year. There will then be a public consultation and engagement.</p> <p>The Countryside Manager, asked if Mr Stenhouse has seen the invitation to meet the Pine Marten Group . Mr Stenhouse confirmed he will be having a discussion with them.</p>	
01/24	Apologies Ms L Maudslay, Ms S Tidy, Mr N Goldie-Scot. Cllr R Milward	
02/24	Declarations of any interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature None	
03/24	Outstanding actions from previous meeting None	
04/24	<p>To approve the minutes of the Board meeting of 20 November 2023 and matters arising</p> <p>The minutes had been circulated and assessed by the Board for accuracy. Ms Thomas asked for an amendment to 32/23 with reference made to the Chair of the finance and Regulatory Committee and in 34/23 for the appointment of auditors to be in bold.</p> <p>Subject to amendment the minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6</p>	
05/24	<p>To receive the minutes of the Programme Committee meeting of 5 February 2024</p> <p>The minutes had been circulated to the Board for accuracy. Ms Thomas asked that the following was added 'The minutes were duly approved in accordance with standing order 2.6.'</p> <p>Subject to the amendment the minutes were duly received and approved in accordance with Standing order 2.6</p>	

The Countryside Manager summarized the minutes from the meeting. He confirmed that the Deer Survey has been completed with High weald and that there are approximately 900 deer in a larger area similar to 2 years ago.

The Zoning report is imminent.

Ms St Pierre raised education and the CEO said that although education sits within the organisation, it is structurally outside. This is something he is looking into and the mindset is to bring inhouse.

Mr Drury raised the fact that Asulox is not available and said was please Glyphosate has been ruled out. The Countryside Manager said Glyphosate is used on the Forest in the form of roundup to treat invasive species (Japanese knotweed), and this is spot treatment. It is not an option for Bracken as it is too widespread.

Mr Stogden asked about the Pine Marten project and the countryside manager confirmed that the feasibility study was in conjunction with the wildwood trust and Kent wildlife trust: the initial pilot is on the Forest and at Bedgbury and ecological data is being collected about small mammals, birds, moths and bats. This is data that will be available to manage the forest. T here is no financial transaction for the Forest: simply use of the Barn and the Countryside Managers time.

Mr Reid asked if it is feasible to cut bracken early in the season and The Countryside manager said that the Rhizomes would still be alive and there would be about 10 years before and impact.

06/24 To receive the minutes of the Finance and Regulatory Committee meeting of 19 February 2024

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

Ms Thomas asked that the words ‘the minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with standing order 2.6’

Subject to amendment the minutes were duly received and were approved in accordance with Standing Order 2.6

The Committee chair provided a brief update.

She said that there had been a discussion as to how the Programme and Financial Regulatory committees interact.

The issue of unpaid rent and rates is being looked into by the Administration Manager.

The issue of risks on a red/amber/green basis has been picked up again.

There is a risk if Landscape Recovery not successful and alternatives need to be considered.

The Finance Manager is looking into alternative banking arrangements. Mr Goldie-Scot had highlighted concerns with using a small bank.

06.01/24 To approve the General Risk Management Plan 2024/2025
The Board unanimously approved the General Risk Management Plan

06.02/24 To approve the Financial Risk Management Plan 2024/2025
The Board unanimously approved the Financial Risk Management Plan

06.03/24 To approve the existing Standing Orders
The Board unanimously approved the Standing Orders

06.04/24 To approve the existing Financial Regulations
The Board unanimously approved the Financial Regulations

07/24	CEO Update – Verbal update (Standing Item)	
	<p>The CEO said that he has found that people are passionate about the forest. His priorities: 1. Health and Safety review is the biggest challenge in next few weeks. 2. Vision and producing an action plan and having a dialogue with senior management team. 3. Management plan: Natural England and future funding. 4. Conservators/ Taff/ friends working together. Really important as the two funding arms need direction and support.</p> <p>Thanked Beth for dealing with Communications as a volunteer and said she would step down 12 April. Niamh will be in charge of with support from Ignite. A number of Board members thanked Beth.</p> <p>Mr Reid raised the lack of peoples at the Commoners Meeting and Ms McAll said this was because there was no vote. We are looking into GDPR issues connected to sending information to commoners.</p> <p>The CEO said that there is to be a soft campaign for volunteer engagement.</p> <p>The issue of the minority of commoners rates outstanding was raised by Mr Stogdon. Ms McAll said that there is never 100% payment. We have to wait until property sold to get new owner details .</p>	
08/24	Discussion of parking after one year report	
	The report was approved to go onto the website.	
09/24	Brief discussion of interaction between Programme and Financial Regulatory Committees	
	The CEO said that there is a common thread as Clerk. There is Recognition that they should not be exclusive of each other and the Clerk will make sure that this is the case.	
10/24	The Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF) – Verbal update (standing item)	
	<p>The report was provided by the Vice-Chair, Ms St Pierre.</p> <p>New Board member Emma Taylor has a fundraising background. Ashley Beevers is looking at commercial sponsorship. They have first employee, Katie Jones who is a fundraiser. She is looking at grant applications/ legacies/ donations. Taff funds are approx £350-400K. Money has been passed over from the Conservation Trust. They are looking at long term strategic funding., and are waiting for the CEO’s strategic direction.</p> <p>The CEO stated that there are a pipeline of projects and that there needs to be dialogue first. He has also spoken to Pat (Friends) .</p>	
11/24	Any other Business	
	<p>The Countryside Manager said that he had received an e-mail on Friday about the Gatwick north runway project. There is a deadline of Tuesday to respond. There are a few points he will raise.</p> <p>James’s Walk 25-28th April. Climping Beach to Friends Clump, with people meeting at Millbrook East on last day to do last section.</p> <p>Wealden Local plan. Issue of more traffic on Forest, Ashdown Forest Business park and North Uckfield. When Consultation opens, the Administration Manager is to send details to the Board.</p> <p>H & S claim: there is a good legal team and all in place. The hearing in a few days time may be adjourned, as will be pleading guilty so the hearing may be a hearing to agree the plan or put back to another date. The CEO and Chair will attend the hearing.</p> <p>10 out of 16 of the Board attended training. The remaining 6 will do online training and the funding needs to be found . There were a few takeaways to include that there should be an H & S on agenda for every committee and Board meeting. There needs to be and H & S dashboard.</p> <p>The CEO mentioned the business cycle and the Financial and Regualtory Committee reviewing policies. The Heath & Safety committee will provide and end of year report to the Board. The senior Management Team are assisting with this. The CEO will be speaking to staff tomorrow and this will be imbedded in appraisals .</p>	ZN

Cllr P Pragnall said that his term of office comes to an end on 7 May . Ms McAll thanked him for his contribution as the representative of the trust that owns Ashdown Forest.

The meeting came to a close at 15.37

Chair _____

Clerk _____

Unadopted