

Minutes of the Meeting of the Programme Committee

Monday 20 May 2024 14:00

Ashdown Forest Centre

Committee Members present: Mr J Squire (Vice Chair) , Mrs I Manweiler, Ms E Riminton-Drury , Mrs L Maudslay

Board Members Present: None

Ex-officio: Mrs R St Pierre

Also present: Mr M Pearson (CEO), Mr A Walmsley (Countryside Manager) and Ms Z Nichols (Administration Manager)

Minutes taken by the Administration Manager

There were no members of the public present.

		Action
06/24	Apologies Cllr S Tidy (Chair) , Mr G Owen-Williams, Mr N Mawdsley	
07/24	Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature None	
08/24 08.01/24	Matters arising <i>2026 Countryside Stewardship agreement (verbal update)</i> The Countryside Manager advised that as the Landscape recovery bid had not been successful, a new Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement will be applied for with Natural England to commence 2026. There are three main points in connection with this: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Management Plan2. Remapping of vegetation types3. Woodland Management in conjunction with the CS agreement. The Countryside Manager advised that it can take a while to get forestry commission approval for a woodland management plan. Natural England will be preparing a SSSI condition report by the end of 2026, which they will be commencing in August/ September. They will be looking at all SSSI criteria. If the 2 nd tranche of Landscape recovery is successful, can pull out of CS. Still very keen to do Landscape recovery bid. Countryside Management is managing habitat . Update on trails and Boardwalk. Access for all grant of nearly £100k. Centre car park to fire ride to link to Broadstone car park with viewing platforms. A second one through Friends wood with viewing platform. Mrs St Pierre mentioned Lord's Taverners and said they may provide some funding and this will be looked into. Permission needed from Natural England, but they have no issue from initial conversation. The funding has to be used by March.	

	<p><i>Tree Risk Management Policy</i></p> <p>The Tree Risk Management Policy will go to the Financial Regulation Committee to be signed off. The committee confirmed they are on board with the policy.</p> <p>The Forest has been placed into 3 zones. The whole area has been risk zoned: Red means that trees are next to a high risk infrastructure. Yellow is medium risk area , such as access tracks. Green is low risk areas, such as trackways.</p> <p>All high risk areas are on a 3 year cycle. Medium on a 4 year cycle.</p> <p>This is so the Forest can be proactively managed. There will be repeat surveys in high risk areas. The Policy has been signed off by insurers.</p> <p>The Rangers are to be provided with a higher level of training . Contractors will do most of the work and there is the aim to have a service level agreement for tree work.</p> <p>Ms St Pierre suggested that we put information onto the website as to why we fell trees.</p> <p>There is no replacement planting, but natural regeneration.</p> <p>The issue of deer fencing was raised and the Countryside Manager explained that only a certain amount of fencing is allowed on the Forest and that is currently used for grazing.</p> <p>The Countryside Manager confirmed that the document can be shared with the public and why felling is being done from a risk management perspective.</p> <p>Tress in low risk areas are to be dealt with within 12 months, medium risk 6 months and high risk within one month.</p> <p>The committee unanimously said they were happy with the approach. The policy is to go to Fin Reg and then Board.</p>	
<p>09/24</p> <p>09.01/24</p>	<p>Progress Reports</p> <p><i>Countryside Manager's report incorporating:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Grazing Report</i> 2. <i>Deer Program Report</i> <p>The Countryside Manager did not go through the report and asked if there were any questions.</p> <p>The Vice-chair raised bracken and gorse.</p> <p>There is no chemical available for Bracken. Therefore it will be necessary to do cut and collect. Done in September. It will be necessary to have three contractors not two.</p> <p>There will be a big push in June/July for volunteers to help pull and cut. The rangers are buying tools and there will be work by volunteers in Broadstone Valley. There will be a PR push</p> <p>The bracken pulling will be done bit by bit to visually assess nesting birds.</p> <p>Will see what can be achieved with volunteers to ascertain how feasible in future years.</p> <p>The possibility of pigs on the Forest was raised. The issue is the substantial fencing requirement and the management of pigs which is a logistics issue.</p> <p>The Countryside Manager said that the no fence grazing is going well and is currently at Milbrook West.</p> <p>Mrs Maudslay asked about South Chase. The fencing is as stock proof as it can get and there are self closing gates.</p> <p>The rural crimes team, spoke recently to over 50 people in South Chase .</p> <p>It was confirmed that there is extra money in the budget this year for car park maintenance.</p>	

	<p>Deer Programme: Last year 170 were culled which is on par with the previous year. The doe to buck ratio is 60/40 and want to have 70/30. The Countryside Manager said that the concentration of most deer on the survey were not on the Forest. There is still a very high deer population . We are undertaking coordinated work with neighbouring land owners. Need to focus on High Weald and larger area. Culling/ fencing are the only ways available to control Deer and we cannot fence.</p> <p>The Vice -Chair raised the issue of gorse. The Countryside Manager said we were doing as much as possible and that Winter contracts would be going out to tender. An increase in gorse means an increase in Dartfords. The priority is to reduce dense areas.</p> <p><i>SAMMS report</i></p> <p>The Countryside Manager said that Kari has done exciting work and a lot of engagement. The walk with the wardens is popular and the naked tree workshop sold out. Yellow dog week was to try to get the dog community on side and working with us. Kari is involved with rural crime and there was a BBC piece on livestock worrying. There has been a site visit for the annual Samms workshop. Looking at trailer/ vans to kit out for Ashdown Forest for engagements and fetes. There was a discussion on how to deal with the dog pooh issue.</p> <p><i>Education Programme Report</i></p> <p>It is not known if the Natural History GCSE will start in September.</p> <p>There are not enough staff members to offer more secondary school work experience.</p>	
<p>10/24</p>	<p>Any Urgent Item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman.</p> <p>The issue of ticks was discussed and the different treatments for dogs.</p> <p>Asian hornet sightings were raised and the fact that they should be reported on the government website.</p>	

The meeting closed at 15:30

Action log

1. Look into other forms of funding for the balance of monies needed for the Boardwalk.
2. Tree Risk Management policy to go to Fin Reg
3. Bracken and Gorse Management.

Unadopted