

/Notes from Parish Liaison Group Meeting 12 June 2024 at the Ashdown Forest Centre.

Meeting attended by :

Ashdown Forest:

Mark Pearson CEO (who led the meeting)

Zoe Nichols Administration Manager

Parish Council

Donna French Uckfield

Bernadette Reed Uckfield

Lolita Reeves Maresfield

Alice Tyrrell Ashurst Wood

Sharon Broad Ashurst Wood

Douglas Denham Pinnock West Hoathly

Tony Martin Danehill and Chelwood Gate

Martyn Everitt Crowborough

Introductions

The CEO introduced himself to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

Matters Arising

1. Ashdown Forest Management plan.

This is in draft and has been discussed with Natural England. This has the goal of favourable status. The key issues are Deer and the lack of Grazing across the forest. There is an associated work programme that accompanies with the plan which will be live until the end of next year. A new ten year plan will be written to coincide with a proposed 10-year countryside stewardship agreement. There will be engagement around the new ten-year plan.

The Countryside Manager Ash Walmsley will come to the next meeting to present details of this.

Deer are being managed in partnership with the High Weald. There are using drone surveys to map the number of Fallow Deer per square km and then target those key areas. Already this is showing positive signs as the population has gone down from 18 to 13. The ideal amount is below 5.

The Forest has a new Deer Ranger, Darren Kilner. A new member of the Livestock Team has just been appointed.

2. Landscape Recovery

The initial bid to the Landscape Recovery bid was not successful, It was discussed that the application had failed due to the score relating the carbon sequestration. This is challenging to understand because the Forest holds a lot of Carbon, and .

the CEO stated that there were positives to take away from the bid. There are 42 partners who continue to be supportive, and many are new landowners, unknown to us beforehand.

We've been informed that there will be another tranche of applications after the Election.

Hopefully a second application will be made near the end of the year..

3. The CEO spoke briefly about tree works and commented on the Forest Tree Safety Policy. He explained the three zones and how the areas will be dealt with in rotation.

4. Car Parking

The CEO confirmed that in the first year there was just over £232K net profit.

This is slightly more than the Grant that was cut by ESCC.

The cost of parking charges will remain the same for three years.

The surplus is reinvested into the Forest, to include car park maintenance.

The sum's received are 60% annual permits and 40% daily tickets.

Fines are a small percentage.

There has been a significant take up on concessions. The Annual Concessionary charge is £5. Blue Badge holders park for free.

QR codes in the car parks are checked regularly.

Car park maintenance has been undertaken in the following car parks:

- Wrens Warren
- Quarry
- Piglets
- Twyfords
- Broadstone
- Long
- Poundgate
- Entrance to Fairwarp Church.

There is a program being developed during the next 4 months. Car parks will be assessed/ graded to see which needs work first . There is a repair budget for the works

5. Main external Forest communications are done via facebook.

Applied to High Weald and have funding from them for access for all trail.

The forest is being Zoned and steps are being taken to make the centre more of a hub.

Need to get younger generation involved in the countryside. There are Schools that visit on a regular basis.

The representative for Danehill and Chelwood Gate said that they were looking into a cycle route from Hartfield to Fairwarp that would go close to/ over the Forest. The CEO said that although this was something that sounded like a good idea to explore, there are Forest Bye-laws in place and also consent would be required from Natural England, which would need to be accounted for. The Administration Manager suggested that it would be beneficial to have discussion with the Forest before this was taken any further.

6. Bracken

As Asulox can no longer be used, Bracken will be dealt with by contractor clearance at the end of the season and volunteer pulling.

The representative for Maresfield said that they had been contacted by a farmer (Henry Osborne) with regards to trying to get a reduction in speed on Crowborough Road to protect livestock. The CEO said that he had advised the Farmer that the Forest would support this.

7. The representative for West Hoathly suggested that the East Sussex Association are asked to assist with obtaining a baseline for traffic in the Forest.

8. It was mentioned that the Parish Grant cycle is nearing an end and the Forest should be looked at and it was indicated that the Parish Councils would support a grant application from the Forest.

Next Meetings

The CEO suggested that meetings reduce to 3 times a year after the Forest Board Meetings, so that he can bring agreed updates to the meeting.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 11th December.

Meeting closed 8.35pm