

## AIDE MEMOIRE

**Attendance:**

Mark Infield Ashdown Forest SMT  
Rosalyn St Pierre Vice Chair COAF - observer

**Parish representatives:**

Brian Phillips	Ashurst Wood
Alice Tyrrell	Ashurst Wood
Bernadette Reeves*	Uckfield TC
Douglas Denham Pinnock	West Hoathley (Director West Sussex Association of Local Councils)
Joe Saunders	Hartfield
Tony Martin	Chelwood Gate
Brigit Smith	Maresfield
Alan Shawcross	Withyham
Tony Derum	Forest Row
Martyn Everitt*	Crowborough TC

\* WDC councillors

**Introductions**

Meeting participants introduced themselves.

**Matters arising**

Recommendation that Parish Liaison meetings are scheduled three times a year, with a 12-month advance schedule of meetings. Ashdown Forest will continue to call and chair the meetings.

Meetings should continue in the informal manner begun by James Alder. Meeting notes will be prepared and circulated by Ashdown Forest.

**Forest update:**

Mark Infield briefed the participants on the activities going forward on the Forest and other areas of interest.

**Paid Parking Scheme.**

The scheme is considered a success by Ashdown Forest. The projected level of income is being met. However, a final understanding of income must await the end of a year of operation at which time a report will be prepared and shared.

Approximately 100 concessionary passes have been issued, which was welcomed by the representatives.

There is anecdotal evidence that the number of cars using the car parks has fallen since paid parking was introduced. There is no data to demonstrate this as formal visitor surveys only happen every five years. However, it was predicted that visitor levels would reduce for a period following introduction of payments and is likely to recover, as has been experienced elsewhere. Several reasons for reduced visitor levels were suggested including poor weather, the cost of living, and the return to international holidays post covid.

Displacement parking does occur but is less than was anticipated might occur. Ashdown Forest is unable to prevent people parking on roads or in village car parks but responds where there is an issue they can engage with.

It was agreed that communicating the idea that parking payments supported the Forest directly might have a positive effect on how people saw the parking payments. Parish representatives agreed to help with this.

There was and continues to be a degree of vandalism of parking signs, but this is being managed.

It was confirmed that there would be no increase in parking fees for 2024.

### **Forest management.**

Mark outlined the range of work undertaken with funding provided under the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

Issues arising:

Can the Forest Management plan prepared by Surrey Wildlife Trust for Ashdown Forest be shared with parish representatives and the public?

The Countryside Manager has confirmed that the plan, once reviewed and approved by Natural England, can be shared and will be available to the public.

Will chemical control of bracken be undertaken next year?

If the chemical used for bracken control was licensed by the government for use next year, it will likely be used where no other options are practically available.

Can volunteers help control bracken?

All voluntary work on the Forest must be agreed to by Ashdown Forest. Groups of volunteers using scythes of steep hills, which is where chemical control is used, would not be effective or safe and would not generally be agreed. Ashdown Forest is responsible for health and safety protocols for all activities it undertakes or supports on the Forest, including those of volunteers. This is why Ashdown Forest volunteers must be registered and given training and inception.

Ashdown Forest undertakes period volunteer registration drives. It was agreed that parishes should be informed about these so they can support them.

### **No-fence grazing management.**

Mark gave a briefing on the No-Fence system for controlling the movement of livestock. After testing it last year it is being used this year with great success. There are plans to use the system more in the future, cost allowing.

### **Landscape Recovery.**

Mark outlined the proposal that was developed and has been submitted by Ashdown Forest in co-operation with 42 local land managers. Mark was congratulated by the parish representatives who gave their support for the project and indicated their wish to assist it as it developed.

**AOB**

### **St Johns car park**

The situation of on-road parking on St John's Road was raised. The Withyham parish representative reported that there were concerns about the state of the car park and the poor sight lines that discouraged people from using the car park despite payments for parents dropping off or collecting children from the schools was waived.

Mark noted that St John's car park was set to be worked on this year to improve its surface. He agreed Ashdown Forest should join future discussions about the car park.

### **Weald to Waves and landscape scale initiatives**

The Weald to Waves extension to include the Ouse River was discussed. The importance of Shortbridge Stream that originates in part on Ashdown Forest was highlighted.

It was emphasized that the Larger Ashdown Recovery Landscape project remained open to additional land managers.

### **Planning application of concern**

It was noted that despite the absence of a Wealden DC plan, planning applications continued. A concern was raised that an application for planning might be within the 400m zone around the Forest. It was explained that Ashdown Forest tried to look at all planning applications within Wealden District to determine if any were within the 400m zone. This is not being undertaken at present due to the lack of staff, but any planning applications brought to our attention would be investigated and if found to be within the zone, would be challenged.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting was confirmed as 13<sup>th</sup> December.

**Meeting closed 8.40pm.**