

EFDC		
LEISURE SERVICES		
22 DEC		
ATTN	SIG	DATE

GRANGE FARM CENTRE TRUST

3rd Floor
 Crown House
 151 High Road
 Loughton
 Essex IG10 4LG

20th December 2006

Our Ref: RDN/GFT/048

Mr D McNab
 Head of Leisure Services
 Epping Forest District Council
 25 Hemnall Street
 Epping
 Essex CM16 4LX

Dear Derek

Roding Valley Meadows Nature Reserve

Thank you for attending the last two meetings when myself and Alex Pelican when we discussed the future of the above Reserve. We are also grateful to John Hall for coming to explain the views of Essex Wildlife Trust over the management of the Reserve both in the past and for the future.

It is true to say that the involvement of Grange Farm Centre Trust (GFCT) has in the past been restricted to sporadic attendance of management meetings. The attendance of Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) appointees to the Committee has been similarly disappointing. These two failures have meant that there has often not been the appropriate guidance, comment, monitoring and support of the site manager. We at GFCT recognise the failures on our part and are committed to the development of a more productive relationship for the future.

The reason for the establishment of the Reserve in 1986 was because it was 'the last surviving area of traditional managed flood and hay meadows and marsh in Essex'. The various papers we have been provided with specify the existence of hundreds of species of flora and fauna, moths and butterflies, birds, insects and other animals within both the SSSI area and the Reserve as a whole at different times over the last twenty one years. There appears to have been gains and losses over that time but no analysis appears to have been undertaken as to the extent of those gains and losses on the various species. Such an analysis would, we believe, be one of the cornerstones for monitoring whether EFDC and GFCT have done a good job in preserving the area which they jointly own.

It would appear that the primary concern must be for area and its' natural inhabitants. Secondary consideration is 'man', who visits either on his own or with his horse or his dog. We do not seem to have a composite record of the natural inhabitants. We also understand that over the last twenty one years errors in the administration of the site have occurred. Sometime this has happened because national view of 'best practice' have changed. Other times there has been lack of strong leadership by the landowners and other times has been poor management by EWT. We do not wish to reflect too much on the past rather to use it to ensure all parties preserve the Reserve in a way we all want for the next twenty year. This means developing a vision into which all three parties (EFDC, GFCT and The Manager) are committed and agreed.

The vision will have implications for all parties not just in terms of day by day management but capital commitment. GFCT is doing its' part by allowing a future warden to be located in the new building to be constructed on the other side of the motorway. We have indicated we will be sympathetic towards providing water onto the site to facilitate more efficient grazing, but this needs to be done as part of a plan to which all parties are committed.

Having agreed a vision and devised shorter term action plans to deliver that vision we need to cost the plan and then set out markers so that in the future we can test whether the actions undertaken have produced the results intended. We therefore propose a step by step approach as follows:

1. What was the condition of the site in 1986? This will be required to enable us to judge what were the measurables that existed at that time.
2. What was the condition of the site in 2006? Using the same measurables as in 1986 and such other tests as the parties concerned now consider are relevant.
3. How do we expect the site to be in, say, 2026. From this one then breaks down how you would expect the area to be every 5 years in between.
4. From the view in 3 above we can develop a properly measurable vision for the next 20 years and a properly measurable management plan for the next 5 years.
5. Once we agree a plan to 2011 we can cost it in terms of running costs and capital costs. From that will follow the really hard decisions, namely where do we find the money?

At our meeting with John Williams the issue of the demands on the Warden were discussed. The needs for the site to have an additional half warden was discussed without agreement on how this would actually work in practice, let alone how it was funded. GFCT believes a proper management plan needs to be properly resourced and that there is a need for 1½ wardens, once and if Chigwell PC join in with Chigwell Meadows.

The position of Chigwell Meadows was also discussed at the meeting with John Williams. This areas will be restored as a wildflower meadow by any future developer of the residential site closer to Chigwell High Road. The site will be leased to Chigwell Parish Council under a twenty five year lease, which will require the Parish Council to maintain the site to a specified standard. If they do this then GFCT will pay for that maintenance. There are mechanisms for judging what needs to be done and whether it has been achieved to ensure that work is carried out as anticipated.

We do not believe that the Parish Council have yet considered who is to perform the actual work that is to take place on this site. Such work is likely to be some two years away given the terms of the S106 Agreement. This may be a task the Reserve Manager could undertake and thus achieve some economies of scale overall.

This brings us to the last matter of who the future manager of the site could be. We did hear that EFDC would favour EWT and have also heard from John Williams that he too would like EWT to run the site for the next 20/30 years. We do not believe that the role of alternatives has yet been adequately investigated. With Epping Forest Conservators managing a substantial area close by there exists the opportunity to hear an alternative view. Whilst in principle we do not now have the level of objections for the re-appointment of EWT we do not believe EFDC or GFCT have yet performed adequate due diligence on alternatives to satisfy any outside scrutiny. By all means continue your discussion with EWT for renewal of the contract with defined plans, this agreed measurables and appropriate consequences for the contract break up if these are not met. We believe we both should meet with Epping Forest Conservators and hear their points of view before going back to your Task and Finish

Panel. If you would like Alex Pelican to set up a meeting with Jeremy Dagley then he would be happy to help. Please let me know your opinions.

I trust that this reflects the views which we verbally expressed at our meetings and will allow you to take matters forward such that even if contracts are not properly in place by the time the existing arrangements come to an end there is a very clear vision of where we are going.

On one last point you were going to look into contacting Thames Water regarding the issue of leaking sewage from both Chigwell Meadows and the Nature Reserve. Given the existence of an SSSI and the legal implications for landowners thereof I think we should be quite robust in our discussions with them to ensure that a plan is put in place for the storm drains such that they become exactly that and not the amount of sewage that is allowed into the storm drains system is reduced to the very minimum. It may well be that with the development of the 40 houses on the land soon to be sold by GFCT, alternative proposals could be made for that area of Chigwell generally for the benefit of both Roding Valley Meadows Nature Reserve and Chigwell Meadows.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R D Neville'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

R D Neville

Cc Alex Pelican
