

16th April 2010

Dean Forest to wit

Before

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the sixteenth
day of April in the Fifty Eighth year
of the reign of our Lady Queen Elizabeth
the Second by the Grace of God , etc in
the year of our Lord Two Thousand and Ten
A.M.R. Watts Esq., O.B.E., J.P,
R.W. Jenkins Esq., J.P.
Ray Wright, Esq.
M.V. Bent Esq.

R. Guest Esq., B.Sc. (For), M.For.Sc.,
M.N.Z.I.F., Deputy Surveyor, Forestry
Commission
R.W. Davies Esq., F.R.I.C.S., Land Agent,
Forestry Commission

K. P. Griffin B.A. Solicitor, Steward

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed former Senior Master Robert Turner and thanked him for attending the Deputy Surveyor's final Court prior to his own retirement.

In addition, Mr and Mrs Hands, the new tenants of Speech House introduced themselves and expressed their wish to sympathetically redecorate the Court Room. The Senior Verderer wished them well in their new venture and explained that any proposals should be made to the Commission and would be discussed at a future Court.

APOLOGIES

None.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 15th January 2010 were approved after slight amendment and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

(1) Forestry Commission Estate

The Deputy Surveyor provided a copy of the Final Report, summarising the results of the consultation process.

(2) Election of a new Verderer

The Court heard that the Steward is in the course of preparing a set of procedural notes for future elections. The Senior Master mentioned that the High Sheriff's authority extends to the "old" County of Gloucestershire as it was prior to the changes made by the Local Government Act 1972, but not including the Cities of Gloucester and Bristol.

The Deputy Surveyor produced a map showing the boundaries of the Statutory Forest, the Hundred of St Briavels and the present County boundary. It was noted that part of the Lea Bailey area had been "lost" as a result of a boundary revision in 1965 when there was a transfer of the greater part of the Lea Bailey Inclosures to the County of Herefordshire and thus it no longer comes under the purview of the Verderers Court.

(3) Phytophthora

The Deputy Surveyor explained that the Commission had not been able to monitor the perceived threat to the larch plantations as the trees had not yet produced needles, but a report would be forthcoming at the next Court.

(4) Speech House

Mr Davies advised that the new tenants were very keen to work with the Commission to uphold the dignity of the Court and he would obtain a list of proposals from them and report at the next Court.

(5) Cannop

Mr Davies reported that various difficulties and the high cost of moving electricity cables had been resolved, as a result of which the Commission is now able to submit a planning application for the construction of the new bridge over the road from the cycle centre to the start of the family trail.

MINERALS

Mr Davies reported that the planning permission for the extension of the Stowfield Quarry had been granted and this would extend the life of the quarry by about a further 12 years. A new lease and restoration plan are to be negotiated.

He added that there is to be a new lease for the Birch Hill quarry and new investment in the enterprise.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor commented that the Commission was experiencing a problem with dumping of dead ewes and lambs due to the high cost of rendering carcasses

He further reported a problem with poor shepherding, with sheep wandering outside the Statutory Forest, into Lydney, Coleford, Clearwell and on to the A48 at Viney Hill. The Commission had been unable to act due to restrictions on moving pregnant ewes during the lambing season.

The Forestry Commission have embarked on an educational programme to show the boundary of the Statutory Forest. There are new signs and the Highways Authority have been requested to mark roads with coloured lines to show the boundary.

In response to an enquiry from the Senior Verderer concerning identification of sheep, the Court heard that electronic marking will be introduced from the end of the year.

Mr Bent asked about the reporting arrangements regarding sheep in poor health and was advised that this was the responsibility of Trading Standards, as is the problem of sheep wandering outside the Statutory Forest.

Mr Jenkins reported that there had been compliance with the Court Order arising from the action by Forest of Dean District Council so far as the arrangements for grazing of Forest waste was concerned.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the deer management plan for the year had been completed.

He reported that there had been a significant decrease in the number of deer killed in RTAs in the 2009-2010. There had been 30 reported deaths in total, with a reduction to 15 (from 23 in the previous year) on the A4136. The most likely explanation for this was the programme of roadside clearance work that had been carried out. In addition, the Rangers had been targeting the Kensley block and only 2 deaths had been reported on the road between Speech House and the Dilke Hospital.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Court heard there had been 7 animals killed in RTAs in the 2009-2010 and that 40 had been culled since July 2009 when the management strategy had been introduced.

The Deputy Surveyor added that the number to be culled to keep a stable population is not known but the animals are extremely fertile and have large litters and often more than once per year. He added that the Friends of the Wild Boar had made a statement that the animals would

be eradicated by the Commission's actions by August 2010. He had had to deal with a rebuttal of this with the press and the media.

Mr Bent had asked about strategy for the management of the boar in a communication with Baroness Royall, the Leader of the House of Lords, and on behalf of the Ruardean Residents Association. He was advised that the information he had sought was in fact on the Verderers' website. He apologised for this and would contact the Senior Verderer or the Steward in future to ensure there was no conflict with his duties as a Verderer.

COALFIELD REGENERATION FUNDS

Mr Davies suggested this item should be renamed as "Cinderford Regeneration" as all monies will be used for the development of the new road and so forth. The Area Action Plan has yet to be finalised.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

(1) "Our Vision"

The brochure provided by the Deputy Surveyor summarises the Commission's strategy for the future in respect of the whole District and including the Forest of Dean.

(2) Forest Events 2010

The leaflet for the year was provided.

(3) Heathland

The areas with an acid soil over sandstone substrata in the Forest are few in number but the Commission is trying to recreate areas of heathland when conifers are removed. The problem encountered is the need for grazing to stop the opened up areas reverting to woodland. At Tidenham, for example, an area has been fenced off and Exmoor ponies are being used to control the vegetation. The Forest is more problematic as sheep tend to leave the open areas, so the Commission has had to resort to mechanically swiping the sites. However, there are plans to investigate the possibility of temporarily fencing sites with electric fences and using horses for grazing.

(4) Weather

More than two months of bad weather and snow had severely delayed the planting season.

(5) The Deputy Surveyor

The Court noted this was The Deputy Surveyor's last Court. He commented that this was a very sad day for him as he had enjoyed his 12 year association with the Verderers. The Senior Verderer expressed the Court's appreciation for all his hard work to increase public awareness of the duties and powers of the Verderers and the

standing of the Court in the community, such as the establishment of the website. He added that Forest of Dean had been extremely fortunate to have had his services through often very difficult times. The other Verderers, the Steward and Senior Master Turner all thanked the Deputy Surveyor for his help and kindness and wished him well in his retirement. The Senior Verderer then presented the Deputy Surveyor with a commemorative glass tankard from the Verderers.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Land in the Forest

Mr Davies reported that some 3.1 hectares had been gained as a result of exchanges of land over the previous two years.

Wigpool

The Court heard that the road to the chicken farm had been repaired by creating a new surface instead of constantly repairing potholes.

Inclosure Commissioners

The Commissioners had met on the 13th April and it was noted that some 5,300 acres are presently enclosed. This is less than half of the 11,000 acres of inclosures that are permitted in the Statutory Forest

High Sheriff

The Steward was directed to write to invite the new High Sheriff, Mr Ceri Evans of Blaisdon, to a future Court.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next Court will be Friday the 9th July 2010. The following Court date will be the 22nd October 2010.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward