

14th January 2011

Dean Forest to wit

Eleven
Before

Forestry

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the Fourteenth
day of January in the Fifty Ninth 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

R.W. Jenkins Esq., J.P.
Ray Wright, Esq.
M.V. Bent Esq.

K.G.Stannard Esq., Deputy Surveyor,

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 Mark Harper, M.P. and thanked him for attending.

APOLOGIES

None.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 22nd October 2010 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

(1) Speech House

Mr Davies advised that the excellent maintenance work to the exterior of the building had been carried out by the new tenants.

(2) High Sheriff

The Senior Verderer had received a letter of thanks from Mr Evans and his wife.

MINERALS

Mr Davies reported that the micro-hydro system at Cannop Ponds was nearing completion and that there would be a formal opening in the Spring.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor reported that there had been a noticeable reduction in the number of complaints received by the Commission since the last Court.

He added that the lifting of the unmarked sheep in Bream reported at the last Court had had a good effect in reducing nuisance in the village.

The Deputy Surveyor commented that there is now a small pot of funds to be used by the Commoners Association in connection with the removal of dead sheep from the roadside.

Mr Bent asked about the issue of sheep in The Pludds. The Deputy Surveyor advised that the problem would take considerable time and patience to resolve.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the annual cull is proceeding well and that RTAs are slightly down this year.

He also reported increased sightings of muntjac and confirmed the policy that these would be shot on sight.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Court heard that 89 animals had been culled so far but the target of 150 would probably not be attained, although it is hoped some 120 animals will be removed. There is general concern about rapid population growth as the animals are able to have two litters each year.

The Deputy Surveyor commented that there had been a meeting with the Deer Initiative who have been tasked by DEFRA to produce best practice guides for boar management. The Commission and the DI discussed a proposal to establish a group to foster liaison with and between neighbouring landowners for a coordinated cull outside the forested area. The Deer Initiative would be responsible for this and the management programme should the idea be taken forward. That group could hold a list of approved stalkers for boar whose services can be used on the adjoining land.

The Court was advised there had been a meeting with members of the community in Pillowell who after discussion of the options expressed a level of support for the use of corral trapping to try to remove problem family groups. The Commission had also

ordered a further four single animal traps to add to the existing four in use and will order a new corral trap for trial soon. It was noted that the rangers have been greatly assisted by calls from the public, with one timely telephone call resulting in the removal of seven animals from the forest.

A census is planned as soon as research is completed as to the best method of obtaining information, probably involving the use of strategically placed cameras.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mr Davies advised the Court that Action Plan for the Northern Quarter due to be published in September envisages a key use for education. The Commission will sell or lease land for the proposed college and obtain exchange land in return.

It was noted that the Home and Communities Agency are putting substantial funds into the improvement of Cinderford.

The Court heard the good news of the relocation of Ensor's abattoir within Cinderford has freed up the old site for housing development.

Mr Bent asked about the proposed bypass and was advised that if constructed, the most likely route would be through the Hawkwell Enclosure and following the line of the existing power cables. This would be the preferred route as very few trees would have to be removed.

Mr Harper added that one of the positive parts of the amalgamation of the Gloucestershire and Forest of Dean Colleges is that the Chief Executive fully supports the proposed development and that he has experience of such projects.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

(1) Phytopthera Ramorum

The Court heard that there has been a lot of press coverage about the disease affecting larch in the Dean, but the extent of the damage will not be known until the Spring flush.

(2) South West Cycling Project

The Court was advised that building has commenced on the bridge linking Pedalabikeaway and the Family Cycle Trail. Work is due to be completed in the early Autumn.

(3) Forest Holidays

The development is now fully open and bookings are very encouraging. The Christmas trading was above expectations and all the top specification cabins are now fully booked for the Easter and Summer holidays.

There has been bad news however, as the building company that was contracted to construct the cabins went into receivership after the Dean Cabins had been completed. Some local tradesmen are reported as being out of pocket as a result. Whilst the Forestry Commission and Forest Holidays regret that situation, the matter has to be between the receiver and the tradesman affected.

(4) Devil's Pulpit

A revised scheme has been given planning approval and funding is now available for work to the ancient monument and the access to it.

(5) Staffing

There has been a national meeting to discuss staffing of the Commission and it is clear there will be a substantial reduction in employees up to 2013/14. The District has 53 full time employees and this number will have to be reduced. Internal consultations with staff and Unions will be on-going during the spring.

The Senior Verderer thanked the Deputy Surveyor for attending the Court in difficult circumstances.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Future of the Forest

The Court heard from Mark Harper that the Government have no intention of selling the Forest or of putting it into private hands. He added that the Government will shortly publish its plans for forestry, but will not treat all of its estate in the same way. There are timber producing woodlands that may be sold, but this will not apply to unique woodlands such as the Dean and the New Forest.

The Court was also advised that the Commission will remain in place, at least in its regulatory role, but the management may possibly be put in the hands of a charitable trust. This would however only happen following genuine and full consultation. All parties, including the Verderers, should put forward their views when the Government plans are published.

Mr Wright commented that it is difficult to see an alternative to the present regime, with the Forestry Commission's excellent record of managing the Dean. Mr Harper conceded that if this is the result of the consultation process, then it is quite possible there will be no change.

The Senior Verderer enquired about the Public Bodies Bill and Mr Harper replied that this is progressing extremely slowly through the Commons.

The Senior Verderer stressed to Mr Harper that the uncertainty surrounding this whole issue was causing a great deal of public anger and distress. Mr Harper confirmed he

was well aware of this, but believed the publication of the Government plans and the consultation process would ensure this matter will be dealt with in a fair and reasonable manner

The Deputy Surveyor added that a meeting of all stakeholders will be arranged when the consultation process commences.

Plot Sales

Mr Wright asked about the proposed building plot sales by the Commission. An appeal had been made after refusal of planning consent by the Council. Mr Davies advised the Court that if the appeal is successful, there will be a requirement for exchange land to be provided . He added that any “loss” of forest waste in the Statutory Forest had been far outweighed by the acquisition of exchange land over the last 15 years. In accordance with the Forestry Act 1981 no woodland has been sold in the Statutory Forest since the Act.

Heart of the Forest School

It was agreed that the “No Entry” signs at the School must be made to be appropriate to the surroundings.

John Everard

The Court heard the sad news that John Everard had died. He had been the Deputy Surveyor until 1996.

Election of a new Verderer

The Court was advised that the Steward had prepared the papers in readiness for the application to Court for a Writ de viridario eligendo. He will arrange for the Affidavits to be sworn and the Petition signed.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next Court will be Friday the 15th April 2011. The following Court date will be the 8th July 2011.

The Senior Verderer thanked Mark Harper for attending the Court and advised him that the Verderers would make a statement to the press as a result of the advice he had given to the Court.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward