

15th April 2011

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the Fifteenth
day of April 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
Eleven

Before

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

K.G.Stannard Esq., Deputy Surveyor,
ForestryCommission
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. He also welcomed Ceri Evans, the High Sheriff who formally presented the Royal Coats of Arms to the Court. He commented that he was delighted the Coats of Arms from the Coleford Magistrates Court would remain in the Forest and he thanked the lessee of the Speech House for permitting them to be displayed, both in the Courtroom and in the Hotel itself. He also confirmed that they now are the property of the Verderers. The Senior Verderer thanked him for this and for all his efforts to obtain suitable Coats of Arms.

APOLOGIES

None.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 14th January 2011 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

(1) Plot Sales

Mr Davies advised that the Commission had successfully appealed against the refusal of planning permission for the plot at Mile End.

(2) Heart of the Forest School

Mr Davies reported that the County Council had changed the No Entry signs and the new signs were in keeping with the surroundings and a great improvement.

MINERALS

Mr Davies reported that the micro-hydro system at Cannop Ponds was not quite finished but it was hoped it will be opened in May.

He also produced an extract from The Quarry and Builders Merchant magazine from 1899, containing an interesting article on the quarries of the Forest.

He added that he was “holding the fort” following the retirement of John Harvey as Deputy Gaveller. This part time post had been advertised within the Civil Service, but there had been no candidates. In view of the recruitment freeze, the Commission is seeking approval to advertise the post as it requires a qualified mining engineer.

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 except in relation to a particular nuisance at Bream School. He added that at the last meeting of the Sheep Liaison Group, the Commoners Association had agreed to speak to the owner concerned.

The Deputy Surveyor also advised there is to be a meeting at the end of April with the residents of Bream and involving the Commission, the District Council and the Police.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the annual cull had been successfully completed, totalling 170, and comprising 166 fallow, 2 roe and 2 muntjac. He added that RTAs are slightly down this year at 63.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Senior Verderer commented that the draft management plan was an excellent document, containing very comprehensive details of the strategy. The Deputy Surveyor commented that the draft is to be circulated to all interested parties, including the Parish Councils, as it is considered very important to bring all the issues to the attention of the public.

He reported that 122 animals had been culled, somewhat short of the target of 150. He added that cage and corral trapping is seen as the best way forward to try to meet this year's target of 200 beasts.

It was noted the problem is putting great strain on the Rangers as the population is increasing due to high reproductive rates. It is estimated the population will increase from 300-400 to about 3500 by 2016 if cull targets are not met.

The Senior Verderer commented that the population must not be allowed to increase in view of the potential damage that will be caused.

The Deputy Surveyor reported that there are proposals for a Boar Management Group consisting of landowners and experts is to be established outside the Forest itself to co-ordinate the control the growth of the wider population. This Group will work in similar fashion to the Deer Management Groups under the auspices of the Deer Initiative.

Following a query about the use of contraception, the Deputy Surveyor advised that work on a species specific feeder has successfully completed. But no contraceptive is yet available and indeed, it is likely to be many years before this is the case. He added that the animals would not then be available for human consumption.

Mr Harper asked if the Commission is able to recover its costs from the sale of carcasses, but was advised there was an overall loss as sales covered only about 25% of the costs.

The Deputy Surveyor also commented on the boar's effect on biodiversity, with damage to the butterfly population, for example.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mr Davies advised the Court there had been few developments since the last Court, with the Action Plan still in the consultation process.

It was noted that the Home and Communities Agency had purchased the Five Acres College site and funding is available for Gloucestershire College to resite the Forest College, possibly to the Northern Quarter if the scheme proceeds.

He added that the scheme will involve major development on Commission land, for which exchange land will be required.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

(1) Parkend Cricket Club

The Court heard that an investigation into subsidence in the outfield at the Club had discovered an uncapped mineshaft.

(2) Cycling

The Court was advised that work had commenced on improvements to the Family Cycle Trail. Work is due to be completed before Easter. In addition, a 11km loop around Cannop Valley is to open in May or June. This Blue Trail will be more challenging than the main Trail. Permission was sought and granted to name this new loop "The Verderers Trail".

It was noted the lessee at Pedalabikeaway had changed and it was generally agreed the business was well placed at the hub of the Family Cycling Trail, in spite of competition from both the Parkend Cycle Centre and the Forest Holidays site.

The Court heard that the funding for the proposed bridge to link the Cannop centre to the Cycling Trail had yet to be received. There was also a problem with the need to move a power line and there had been delay caused by problems in getting Central Networks to deal with this issue. However, it is hoped work on the bridge will commence later in the year.

(3) Conservation Grazing

The Deputy Surveyor produced a discussion document containing a threefold proposal.

The first related to the use of temporary fencing to form enclosures where cattle and ponies would be grazed, to achieve significant habitat change. There are large areas of Forest waste that has become scrubland due to lack of sheep grazing, following the foot and mouth outbreak.

The proposed "paddocks" created would be opened up to sheep after some years, to enable them to be retained as grassland.

Secondly, there have been large enclosures in the centre of the Dean since about 1980. The plan is to throw open large areas, so the 5,000 acres presently enclosed would be reduced to about 1,000.

Finally, long-term grazing paddocks in the forest would be reviewed with the possibility that some of these areas could be opened up again as Forest waste.

The Deputy Surveyor proposed a one year consultation process, involving the Commoners Association, the Verderers and the Inclosure Commissioners.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Future of the Forest

The Court discussed the correspondence with the Government, regarding the establishment of the Independent Panel to review the future of the public forest estate.

Mr Harper advised that the Government's position is to await the Panel's report in 2012. It was noted that the District Council had offered their offices for public consultation and evidence taking. Mr Harper added that a private session with the Verderers could prove extremely useful and he would encourage this.

The Court heard that the Panel proposes to visit the Forest and the New Forest and that Panel members have been chosen due to their knowledge of forestry, rambling and so forth. It was noted that the members are not representing organisations.

The Senior Verderer commented that the Dean is unique due to its history and the fact that it remains very much a working forest.

Mr Harper commented that a written submission as well as oral evidence would prove extremely useful.

Speech House

The Court heard that the paintings in the Courtroom had been valued and the cost of cleaning and repairs amounted to about £2,500 or so. It is not possible to have the work undertaken in the present economic climate.

Verderers Website

The Court heard there had been a problem with uploading Minutes to the site, but the Steward was attempting to resolve the problem.

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 8th July 2011. The following Court date will be the 7th October 2011.

The Senior Verderer thanked both Mark Harper and Ceri Evans for attending the Court .

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward

