

19th October 2012

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the nineteenth
day of October in the Sixtieth 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
Twelve

Before

R.W. Jenkins Esq., J.P.
Ray Wright, Esq.
M.V. Bent Esq.
I. J. Standing Esq., BDS, M.A. MUSMS Dip.

K.G.Stannard Esq., Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission
R.W. Davies Esq., F.R.I.C.S., Land Agent,
Forestry Commission

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

APOLOGIES

None.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 13th July 2012 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

Lord Taylor of Holbeach

The Court heard that Lord Taylor had been replaced in the recent reshuffle by David Heath. The Steward was directed to invite him to a future Court.

Soudley Ponds

There is an ongoing and unresolved problem as the repair to one of the dams apparently did not meet Natural England's requirements and in any event continues to leak

Dame Janet Trotter

The Steward was directed to provide further Court dates to her.

Horse Riding

Mr Davies provided a plan showing the proposed permissive route and advised there is to be a meeting to discuss with West Dean PC

MINERALS

Mr Davies reported that a Cornish beam engine buried at the Foxes Bridge colliery site had been mounted on a plinth by Coal Authority contractors and is now a feature near the cycle trail.

He also advised that the Deputy Gaveller is seeking to protect an anomalous iron outcrop in a quarry in the middle of the Forest.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor reported that 55 sheep had been lifted and two of the owners had paid for the release of their sheep from the pound, but the remaining sheep owned by Mr Awdry had disappeared from the pound and the alleged theft had been reported.

At the next meeting of the SLG, the Commoners Association had expressed disapproval that their members had paid for their sheep, but Mr Awdry had not. As a result, the Association would not support any further lifts, but it is hoped a protocol will be agreed before the next SLG meeting to allow further lifts to be carried out.

The Court also heard the problem with sheep around The Pike House had been resolved by the Commission's reinstatement of a hefting pen away from the site and the cooperation of the shepherd.

A further pen had been established near the Pludds to try to resolve the problem in the area, but had not been used due to heavy rain causing water-logging of the site

Mr Bent commented that the sheep around Speech House belong to Mr Awdry and he has not moved them in spite of requests, but was advised they may be lifted if the SLG agree to the lifting of problem sheep near public buildings.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor advised there was nothing to report to the Court, but suggested the Chief Wildlife Ranger should be invited to attend a future Court to fully report on this issue. The Verderers considered this to be an excellent idea and readily agreed to the proposal.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

Mr Standing had represented the Verderers at a meeting attended by the Chief Wildlife Ranger, the Commission's Research Officer, a representative from the British Wild Boar Association and two from the Friends of the Wild Boar.

He reported there had been long discussions about population numbers but no agreement in this regard, nor any agreement as to a target population.

The Deputy Surveyor advised the population is believed to exceed 500 and the Commission has unilaterally set a cull target of 100 to avoid numbers getting out of control. He commented there is a well organised campaign to stop the cull and including an e-petition. There is clearly a division of opinion between those local people affected by the substantial damage caused by the boar and the Friends and their supporters.

He added that the Commission is only responsible for its own land and is taking action to fence public facilities such as Beechenhurst.

Mr Bent produced photographs of boar damage to various areas, including substantial damage at Pan Tod. He had been presented with letters from various individuals requesting action. The Deputy Surveyor commented that he was concerned about damage to open areas such as Pan Tod and it was clear that the boar would soon ruin the remedial work to repair the damage, but this would be undertaken in any event.

The Senior Verderer expressed concern that the population estimate was so vague. The Deputy Surveyor explained the three Rangers had provided a combined estimate of well in excess of 500, and probably closer to 700, but there is no scientific study to confirm this. In winter, Forest Research is to carry out a study, to be repeated in subsequent years and to establish a comparative guide. In addition, there is an ongoing study of the jaws of culled animals as this will assist in quantifying the population.

The Senior Verderer expressed concern about damage to public areas outside the remit of the Commission, such as golf courses and so forth.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mr Davies advised there will be no development until there is a commitment about the road and the proposed relocation of the Forest of Dean College.

He added that the HCA is submitting a planning application for part of the Northern United site, but this hinges on the road construction issue being resolved. Investigations continue into ground conditions and there are negotiations with galees who seek compensation.

VERDERERS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The Verderers discussed communication of Court business to the general public and how to raise their profile without becoming open to criticism. It was clear that many local people had not even heard of the Verderers or had any knowledge of the Court. The Steward reminded them that they have the overriding duty to Her Majesty to protect the “vert and venison” in the Forest and to avoid any political interference. It was noted that Cyril Hart had always taken the view that care must be taken to avoid criticism, and the Senior Verderer felt the influence of the Court should continue to be exercised with care at all times. It was also noted the Verderer’s website was open to the public.

Mr Standing commented that the Court must continue to be proactive to protect the vert against creeping urbanisation of the Forest.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR’S REPORT

(1) Bovine TB Control Policy

The Statutory Forest is not included in any control licences, so there will be no shooting or other operations in the Forest.

(2) Tree Diseases

The felling of diseased trees had commenced and approximately 100 hectares will be cleared before March 2013. The action will be drastic to prevent damage to species other than the larch.

Oak is also badly affected by Acute Oak Decline, particularly in Chestnut Wood where large numbers of trees had died, and now trees are affected at Speculation.

In addition, chestnuts are being badly affected by honey fungus, especially due to the wet weather and ground conditions.

A new and worrying problem is a disease affecting ash. The Court heard there will be no further planting of this species as huge numbers of trees had died in Europe. Poland had lost 85% of its trees and Denmark over 90%. The dieback is caused by a fungal infection *Chalara Fraxinea* and had been previously unknown in the UK, but has been brought in on imported trees.

The Commission is doing all it can to combat these problems and is investigating different species choices and alternative silvicultural methods.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Sites Visit

The Verderers will visit areas where trees are affected by disease before the next Court.

(2) DEFRA Forestry Team

The Team had met with HOOF on a visit in September

(3) Forestry Minister

Mr Standing advised the new Minister has invited campaigners to meet with him to discuss various matters.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be Friday the 18TH January 2013 and the 19th April 2013

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward