

18th January 2013

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the eighteenth
day of January in the Sixty First 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
Thirteen

Before

R.W. Jenkins Esq., J.P.
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
Penny Simpson (Mrs) M.R.I.C.S., Assistant
Area Land Agent, Forestry Commission
Ian Harvey Esq., District Chief Wildlife
Ranger, Forestry Commission

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

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed the Assistant Land Agent and the Chief Ranger for the District and thanked them for attending.

APOLOGIES

Mr Ray Wright sent apologies as unable to attend due to adverse weather conditions, as did Dame Janet Trotter, for similar reasons

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 19th October 2012 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

David Heath

The Verderers hoped the Forestry Minister would be able to attend a future Court, as his planned visit to the Forest had been cancelled due to the weather conditions.

Soudley Ponds

The Court heard of further problems as the repaired dam had been breached due to the excessive amount of water in the Soudley Valley. An inspection of other dams in the Valley indicated serious damage over the Christmas and New Year period, with all requiring repair work.

MINERALS

Mr Davies provided a general overview that the numerous quarries that had flourished in the 19th Century all needed to be kept safe. He referred to the present and future arrangements for the three large limestone quarries outside the Statutory Forest, at Stowfield, Clearwell and Drybrook. He also commented that the development of and investment in the various sandstone quarries such as Bixhead was very pleasing and providing great quality stone for sites such as Hereford Cathedral, Bath, South Wales, etc. Mr Standing commented that a wonderful volume had been published showing the Bixhead catalogue from 100 years ago

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor reported that at the last meeting of the SLG, the Commoners Association had confirmed it would not support any further lifts, but it is hoped a much stronger agreement can be put in place to control irresponsible commoning, with greater penalties for offenders. He added that although a new agreement can be negotiated between the Commoners Association and the Commission, this would not bind third parties. However, he wished to record that all meetings with Mr Holder were positive, as he wished to “modernise” commoning and was keen for the Association to manage all stock in the Forest.

The Court heard of the possibility of a substantial Lottery grant to support the Forest Waste project, to enable continued research of ecologically important areas that would benefit from grazing. A strategy report will be prepared and the Commoners Association were keen to assist with grazing. In addition, there are plans for community flocks to permit grazing in the communities, but without conflict with commoners.

The Court also heard complaints had been made both to the BBC and to Mark Harper, as the Countryfile programme had presented Mrs Turpin-West as a responsible Commoner.

DEER

The Chief Wildlife Ranger explained that he manages all the rangers in the District, including the Forest.

He advised that fallow is the prevalent species in the Dean, but there are also roe and muntjac in increasing numbers. He added that the growing population of roe was probably due to the felling of diseased tree stock.

The cull figures for fallow for the three periods 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012- present were 229,271 and 240 respectively.

For roe, the figures for the same periods were 2, 11 and 8.

For muntjac - 2, 3 and 4. He commented this species is very invasive, breeds profusely and causes considerable damage.

The Court heard the fallow population is reasonably stable. He provided the known RTA statistics and confirmed the numbers were included in the overall cull. The numbers were 64, 85 and 63.

He explained that the RTAs were predominately due to the autumn rutting season, when the deer cross roads at dawn and dusk.

In response to an enquiry, he confirmed that there are two main herds in the Forest, and there are deliberate attempts to keep the numbers of the High Meadow herd in check as the location contains many SSI areas.

The Senior Verderer thanked Mr Harvey for attending the Court and for his extremely helpful presentation and analysis of the present position.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor advised there is a well organised international campaign to stop the cull and there is clearly a division of opinion between those local people affected by the substantial damage caused by the boar and those opposed to any culling of numbers.

He added that there had been a split in the organisations opposed to culling, with the vast majority of those involved in the Friends of the Wild Boar forming a new group – the UK Wild Boar Trust, with a high profile patron.

The Court heard the cull from September 2012 to the present had been 102, with a further 28 due to RTAs and the removal of diseased animals.

He advised the Court the cull numbers for each year from 2008 were 32, 63, 122, 153 and 129. The RTAs for the last three years were 19, 32 and 49, indicating a growing and widespread population.

Mr Bent commented that local people are becoming increasingly concerned about the damage caused by the boar and numerous people had asked if it would be possible to enclose the boar in the centre of the Forest, where they could be seen by the public but thereby avoiding all the problems caused by the animals.

Mr Standing added that public opinion against the boar had become more vocal and apparent, whereas the animal rights lobby had previously enjoyed all the publicity.

The Deputy Surveyor agreed but warned that boar management must be handled in a sensitive manner and the Commission must hold a mandate to control numbers.

One worrying feature was the suspected presence of bovine TB in a boar found with lesions to all organs and in a poor state. Tests are under way.

Mr Bent enquired about Foot and Mouth and Mr Harvey advised that DEFRA have a contingency plan in place for such disease as this and swine fever.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

In response to concern expressed by the Senior Verderer that the proposed road would be constructed without confirmed plans for the area, Mr Davies advised there was a need to actually use funds that are available and indeed, extra funds from Gloucestershire First and have the road constructed to enable any form of commitment from interested parties. It was clear the College will not move until the road is in place. Any road on Commission land will be come part of the dedication Agreement with the County Council. There will also have to be substantial bat protection measures.

Mr Bent expressed concern about accessibility to the memorial on the Northern United site as it had been fenced by the HCA. Mr Davies advised that the fence is to be moved to permit access.

VERDERERS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The Verderers instructed the Steward to prepare a discussion document to be reviewed at the next Court and to then be submitted for publication to advise the general public of the role of the Verderers.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

(1) Tree Diseases

The felling of diseased trees had commenced and was on schedule to comply with a Plant Health Notice. About 150 hectares of larch may have to be felled within a few years if the disease is not controlled.

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

(2) Wet Weather

The past year had been extremely wet and much damage had been caused, such as at Mallards Pike and various land slips, especially in the Lydbrook Valley. The repairs will involve significant expenditure.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Sweet Chestnut

In response to a question from Mr Standing, it was confirmed this species is removed wherever larch is affected by p. ramorum.

(2) Richard Davies

The Senior Verderer commented that Mr Davies had been a great friend to the Court and had always been courteous and helpful during his 19 years of service. He thanked him on behalf of his colleagues and wished him great happiness in retirement. He presented him with an engraved glass mug and a sample local ale. Mr Davies responded by commenting it had been a great pleasure and privilege to work with the Court. He had attended 75 Courts and he calculated there had been more than 3000 since the Court was established, so he had played a small part in its long history. He presented the Verderers and the Steward with prints of 19th Century OS maps as a memento

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be Friday the 19th April 2013 and 5th July 2013

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward