

19th April 2013

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 April 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.
Ray Wright, Esq.
M.V. Bent Esq.
I. J. Standing Esq., BDS, M.A. MUSMS Dip.

K.G.Stannard Esq., Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission
Penny Simpson (Mrs) M.R.I.C.S., Assistant
Area Land Agent, Forestry Commission

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

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed Ian Gambles, the newly appointed Director of Forestry Commission England and his colleague Simon Hodgson, now appointed Director of Forest Enterprise England

APOLOGIES

None

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 18th January 2013 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

David Heath

The Steward was directed to invite him to a future Court.

Relationship with the general public

The Steward circulated a document he had drafted for discussion prior to publication to advise the general public of the role of the Verderers. He was directed to amend this as suggested by Mr Wright, so as to provide the Steward's address and email details. The article is to be sent to the Forester, Forest Review and The Citizen.

Forest Diseases

The Verderers thanked the Commission for arranging the visit to disease-affected sites. The presentations by Jim Souter and Peter Kelsall had been extremely informative. The Steward commented that the High Sheriff and Lord Lieutenant are to visit the next Court in July and both had expressed a wish to visit the sites. The Deputy Surveyor advised that he would make the necessary arrangements

MINERALS

Mrs Simpson advised the Court that the output from Stowfield Quarry had increased. She also commented that there is a joint venture between Lafarge and Tarmac in relation to the Quarry.

The Court also heard there is a new lease being prepared for planned new stone cutting works at Cannop, involving major investment.

There is a new Chief Inspector of Mines and a new local mines inspector. The Deputy Gaveller, Dan Howell, is establishing a good working relationship with both. A new system is to be established in relation to mine safety. In addition, freemining is being supported in two ways, through the Landscape Partnership bid to the HLF, being training as well as funding for a machine to create briquette coal, to increase the financial viability of small scale mining.

The Deputy Gaveller had also agreed to hold two open days, as this District Council initiative had proved to be very successful last year.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor advised that Trading Standards had identified sheep scab at Ruardean Hill. As a result, all graziers had been ordered to remove sheep to controlled paddocks for treatment and quarantine purposes.

The Commission had offered to assist by providing an area for treatment to take place, as one owner has no back land to hold the sheep. If necessary, Trading Standards can impound sheep and even sell to meet the cost of treatment.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor had nothing to report on this issue, save that a new Ranger had been appointed to replace Simon Holloway.

There had been over 160 applications and Jamie Diplock had been chosen for the role.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor advised the cull had been achieved, represented by 78 animals shot and 22 RTAs, In fact, a further 12 animals had been killed in RTAs since the end of the cull.

There is to be a further meeting chaired by a Verderer later in the year to set a new cull target, perhaps of 200 or more. Although the Commission receive emails from around the world requesting a halt to culling, nevertheless, newspaper articles in The Times, The Guardian, The Irish Times, The Spectator and the Shooting Times all offered a degree of support for the need for a cull and a proper management.

Mr Bent requested an estimate of numbers and was advised these probably exceed 600, especially as there are large numbers of young. Mr Bent felt the cull should be increased as the damage to the Forest is so great and widespread. He would prefer the animals to be kept in one central enclosure .

The Deputy Surveyor advised that any culling must be “reasonable” He added that new night vision equipment had been purchased, so much improved census results are anticipated.

Following a general discussion, the Verderers confirmed they would be happy to attend a meeting of all parties to try to reach a consensus on the boar cull.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mrs Simpson advised that 2 planning applications by the HCA had been successful. These related to the Northern United and Forest Vale sites. She added that a Section 106 Agreement was in place and involving substantial ecological mitigation works in view of the substantial wildlife on site. The works would involve creation of bat roosts, pond restoration and so forth.

It was noted there are substantial ground investigation works to be carried out before the spine road is constructed. The road will be on Commission land but will be maintained in accordance with the Highway Dedication Agreement with the County Council. The land exchange scheme has yet to be negotiated. An artist’s impression of the site was provided.

The Senior Verderer commented that the whole development is extremely controversial and he referred to comments made in an email that had been circulated from Keith Morgan of Dean Forest Voice. He added that the Verderers are not happy with a road being constructed without any real forward planning of the site’s use as the College move was not confirmed, for example. In addition, he had deep misgivings of the suitability of the site for any kind of development.

Mr Bent added that the whole area is riddled with mine shafts that are full of water. The Senior Verderer agreed and referred to the mining engineer's report he had seen that indicated there would be subsidence issues if the water disappeared.

Mr Standing commented that the Northern Arc scheme had been thrown out some years ago, yet the District Council and HCA had decided to progress a smaller development on a reduced area, involving some 20 hectares. He added that proponents of the scheme have highlighted the benefit of additional employment and investment, but the Verderers and many others are not happy with the use of Forest land for development, so the whole scheme remains controversial and subject to a great deal of opposition.

Mr Bent commented that Northern United should be retained as a heritage site, as it has the last complete set of mine buildings and miners had died extracting coal in difficult conditions.

Mr Wright feared there would be a land collapse if the area is developed, similar to the recent Trafalgar mine collapse. He added that he believed the Commission had made a grave error in selling the Northern United site.

The Deputy Surveyor commented that the development is a District Council scheme and seen as essential for the regeneration of Cinderford. Mr Gambles added that the scheme was a very important issue to many people and that to the extent there are decisions to be made by the Commission, then there would be a full and thorough investigation carried out. It was noted that the cost of ground investigations alone will be considerable.

Mr Bent commented there will be a legal challenge to keep all wildlife sites protected.

Mr Standing expressed his fear that the development would be the tip of an iceberg, but Mr Hodgson assured the Court that the Commission would do everything necessary to protect the Forest, while taking a balanced view to meet society's requirements.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Richard Davies

The Court heard that Richard had had a good "send off" by his colleagues and is enjoying his travels around the World.

Brian Mahony

It was noted that Brian's tree had died , but he would be asked to choose a new tree following his retirement. The Verderers approved this idea and hoped he would be able to attend a Court following the dedication ceremony.

Heritage Lottery Fund

A colleague from Dartmoor, David West had been a considerable help with galvanising stakeholder support for a major Landscape Partnership bid to the HLF, but unfortunately had fallen ill. He was therefore no longer able to assist, but the bid had to be completed and submitted by the end of May. Nevertheless, the Commission had decided to press ahead and hope to be in a position to meet the deadline.

Forest Forum

A day on the subject of tree harvesting and management was planned for the 2nd July. Mr Standing commented that the Forum gave an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback to the Commission on various issues. The Senior Verderer expressed concern that great care had to be taken to ensure there was no breach of the Verderers' duties in such a forum.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

High Sheriff

The Senior Verderer commented that the cathedral Service for the new High Sheriff had been amalgamated with the service for the Judiciary.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be Friday the 5th July 2013 and 11th October 2013

Ian Gambles thanked the Verderers for inviting him to the Court. He commented that he had been in office for a month and this had been his first opportunity to visit and to listen to stakeholders who have an interest in the Forest. It was clear to him there are huge issues, such as implementation of the Panel's Report, as endorsed by the Government, as well as the forestry matters such as disease, squirrels, boar and so forth.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward

