

4th July 2014

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the Fourth day
of July in the Sixty Second 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
Fourteen

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.,
Area Land Agent, Forestry Commission

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

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed the High Sherriff, Mr Thomas Frost and his wife, Carolyn.

APOLOGIES

None

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 25th April 2014 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

Baroness Royall

The Steward advised of the apology received from the Office of the Baroness due to her inability to attend the Court. He was directed to invite her to attend the Court in January 2015.

Chairman of Gloucestershire County Council

The Steward confirmed the Chairman will attend the Court in October.

Royal Visit

The Court heard that the fitting of the memorial plaques for the trees planted by their Royal Highnesses the Count and Countess of Wessex had been completed

MINERALS

Mrs Simpson advised the Court that Forest of Dean Stone Firms is optimistic about the possibility of underground quarrying to gain access to the blue stone strata.

The Court also heard that the Bredon Aggregates lease extension is almost complete and that the new lessees of Birch Hill quarry had taken on additional staff, purchased new equipment and tidied up the entrance to the site.

With regard to mining activity, she advised that Robin Morgan is concentrating on the Heywood drift mine rather than further activity at Hopewell

There has been no new Freeminers registered since the date of the last Court. In fact, there had been only nine appointments in the last seven years. The late Eric Morris' gale had been transferred to Tony Warren.

There are currently four working mines in the Forest and a further six under care and maintenance. The Coal Authority is concentrating on statutory nuisance, but is also dealing with the capping work at Cannop.

The Deputy Gaveler had held meetings with local operators to explain the provisions of the Mines and Quarries Act amendments to be implemented in 2015.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor advised the lift of sheep from Bream in January had upset the Commoners Association as there had been no warning. The lift was undertaken by the Police. He explained that Ceri Evans (Chair of the Sheep Liaison Group) had obtained an assurance the Police will liaise through the Sheep Liaison Group before taking future action.

It was noted the lift had occurred because of complaints of sheep being driven down the Bream High Street by Mr Awdry, who is not a member of the Association and the Police had acted under their powers. The sheep had not been claimed and had been sold by the Police.

It was also noted the Association had acted swiftly to resolve a problem with sheep faeces near Ellwood School.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor reported that the thermal imaging survey revealed a population of about 1100 with the target population being 800. He added that muntjac are seen in increasing numbers and are shot on sight (when it is safe to do so)

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor advised that nearly 100 people had attended the summer forum at Whitemead Park. The morning session had taken the form of a field visit in Parkhill Inclosure to see signs of Boar and discuss broader management issues. The afternoon session heard from 6 expert speakers, including a colleague from Germany. The evening session took the form of a question and answer session focusing in on local issues. The morning session had been attended by a film crew from the BBC, and Mark Harper MP had attended part of the afternoon session.

The Court heard that in response to a question raised by Mark Harper in the House, the Secretary of State had endorsed the Commission's approach to managing Feral Wild Boar in the Forest of Dean. The Commission now has the support of all Parish Councils and the District Council, but the opposition to culling is also very vociferous. He added that the Police are now involved in an investigation arising from the abuse of Commission staff in social media and direct threats of violence against them.

The Court also heard that up to £200,000 is to be expended to create a new larder for the boar as the existing deer larder facilities are inadequate. Further funds have been approved due to the need for additional security measures, fencing and so forth.

The Deputy Surveyor will not be setting a cull target for 2014/15. Instead the intention is to manage the boar population so that the increase in population is halted, and numbers start to drop back towards the target population of 400 animals. So as to satisfy animal rights campaigners he also said that a maximum of 419 animals would be culled (based on the previously agreed formulae of 819 (estimated population from thermal imaging survey) – 400 (agreed population) = 419 (cull target).

The Deputy Surveyor considered it extremely important to establish a management group with all surrounding landowners in order to be able to take a holistic view of the problem, due to the spread of the boar population out of the Forest as a result of increasing numbers.

In response to a question from Mr Bent, he advised only Commission staff will be permitted to shoot boar on the public forest estate, not licensed private shooters. The police had sanctioned night shooting subject to being informed in advance and a fourth ranger is to be employed.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mrs Simpson advised that the HCA planning application is now subject to the consultation process, with a revised environmental statement under consideration. A decision is expected before the end of August.

With regard to exchange land, the process is almost complete and includes the Linear Park plus some extras, but not the large parcel of land 'east of Valley Rd' that would be expensive to warden and maintain.

Mr Bent commented that the new college site had been used for landfill. The Deputy Surveyor advised that inert material had been deposited after the opencast mining at the site had concluded, but no record of any organic waste material. Mr Bent further raised his concerns of subsidence across the site in the future. The Deputy Surveyor replied that whilst the site will require significant foundations that will involve substantial additional funding, but there were no insurmountable engineering issues. Mr Bent considered this a scandalous waste of public funds. A query was raised about the Freeminer's rights and the Deputy Surveyor advised there are no significant winnable minerals left after the past opencast and deep mining activities on the site.

Mr Standing commented that HOOF is extremely concerned about proposed legislation that will permit the HCA to take public land for development. There is a motion to exempt the forest estate from the Infrastructure Bill that is presently in the House of Lords.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Safety

The Deputy Surveyor advised that following the Health & Safety Executive's intervention 2-years ago, the forest industry had collaborated and formed the 'Forest Industry Safety Accord' to spearhead a new safety culture. As part of that process a new initiative on contract management had been launched, with contractors from the Forest of Dean and neighbouring areas attending a workshop the previous evening.

Heritage Lottery Funding

The revised bid was submitted at the end of May for £3 million and the result is awaited.

Tree Diseases

There have been no new outbreaks of *Phytophthora ramorum* since 2012. Aerial surveillance so far in 2014 has not identified any suspect sites in the Dean

Forestry Commission Future

Plans for the new legislation that is required to allow the establishment of a new body to manage the public forest estate in England did not appear in the Queens Speech. The Deputy Surveyor reported that this legislation is now not expected to come before

Parliament until after the next general election. In the meantime Forest Enterprise England is working to become more autonomous from the Forestry Commission within the bounds of the existing legislative framework.

Haywood and Castiard Vale Forest Plan

A new Forest Plan for the Chestnut and Flaxley Woods has been prepared and is out for consultation. The new plan identifies areas for the a regeneration of semi-natural ancient woodland.

Cattle grazing at Haywood is to be promoted to keep vegetation growth down and to permit heathland regeneration. A mix of conifer and broadleaf planting will replace the larch removed from the inclosure in 2012 as a result of the Phytophthora ramorum infections.

Mr Standing commented that the plan contained a great deal of excellent work and took full account of archaeological factors.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

ADPD

Mr Standing commented that the District Council's Allocations Development Plan Document (ADPD) should be checked to ensure there are no hidden threats to the Forest. The consultation period expires before the next Court date, so the Steward was directed to request the Council to extend the period to mid October to give the Verderers time to discuss and comment.

The Deputy Surveyor suggested he could extract the relevant parts of the ADPD that affect the Statutory Forest and email to the Verderers for comment. It was agreed he would liaise with Mr Standing

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be Friday the 3rd October 2014 and Friday the 9th January 2015.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward