

17th April 2015

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the Seventeenth day
of April in the Sixty Third 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
Fifteen

Before

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

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

APOLOGIES

None

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 9th January 2015 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

None.

MINERALS

Mrs Simpson advised the Court that the Deputy Gaveller had visited all mines with the Inspector and they had all been found to be compliant with the new regulations.

She added that it is hoped there will be funding available from the Heritage Lottery Grant for freeminer training when funds become fully payable in 2017.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the dispute between the Commoners Association and West Dean PC had been resolved.

The Court also heard that the Commoners Association were having problems in resolving the issue with one of their members, Mr Kevin Hancocks, whose sheep had been causing damage at a Redrow Housing development outside the Statutory Forest and to the golf course. It was noted that the sheep will be lifted if the matter remains unresolved and this has been agreed by all parties concerned.

In response to a query raised by Mr Wright, the Deputy Surveyor explained that the proposed conservation grazing areas would be funded by the lottery grant and would involve fencing areas of Forest Waste and introducing cattle and ponies to graze off the undergrowth in order that sheep could be introduced. He added that there was no plan to allow cattle or ponies to roam free in the Forest.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor reported that the spring census had been completed and the results are awaited. Otherwise, there was nothing to report.

Mr Standing commented that he had recently seen a white deer in a group of a couple of dozen animals.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the cull had been completed and the total cull (including known RTAs) numbered 361 animals since September 2014.

He added that even with the addition of a 4th Ranger, it had proved impossible to meet the full cull target, but the thermal imaging survey had taken place, with the results expected at the end of April, and this will reveal the size of the boar population, but there are concerns about how to keep numbers in check.

In addition, the Animal and Plant Health Laboratory Agency had expressed great concern about diseases affecting the boar and in particular, the possibility of a classic swine flu outbreak affecting the animals and then spreading to pig farms. There are contingencies in place should there be such an outbreak, but the policy is to keep boar numbers stable.

In response to an enquiry, the Deputy Surveyor advised that DEFRA policy is that the boar is a wild animal and it is up to farmers and landowners to fence against them. The Commission manages the animals as this forms part of its duty for responsible forestry management, but there is no actual responsibility to control the population as they are wild animals.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mrs Simpson advised that planning permission had been granted, subject to the Section 106 Agreement environmental requirements. She added that the newt trapping will recommence shortly, with the spine road construction due to start this year and the new college construction in 2016.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Fly Tipping

The Court was advised of a partnership of the Commission, the District Council and the Herefordshire Council, with enforcement officers prosecuting whenever possible, in spite of the minimal fines imposed. The tipping continues and comprises builders' rubble, asbestos, tyres and even domestic rubbish. The Commission is considering deploying remote cameras to catch offenders.

Tree Diseases

There have been no outbreaks of Phytophthora Ramorum found in the Dean and no Ash Dieback. However, the growing incidence of acute and sudden oak decline is very worrying and it is not known why the problem is concentrated on the Forest as the nearest area that is also affected is in South East England.

Motorbikes and 4x4s

The Court heard that these are an increasing problem with the Community Safety Partnership of the Commission District Council and Police taking action to stop unauthorised groups entering the Forest, especially 4x4 groups.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Freedom of Information Request

The Steward had provided a copy of the email from the Information Commissioners Office and this was discussed and he was directed to respond and reiterate the position as outlined in the earlier email from him.

Worcester University Study

The Steward advised of his telephone conversation with Dr Dutton and it was agreed he should be invited to attend the October Court as the Report should have been published in time for that Court sitting.

The Forester

The Steward was asked to produce a short report for publication, detailing the workings of the Court.

High Sherriff

The Court heard that Roger Head, who resides at Highnam Court had been appointed as the new High Sherriff and the Steward was asked to invite him to a future Court.

Ruardean Hill

In response to a point raised by Mr Bent, the Deputy Surveyor explained that contractors do not remove branches and so forth after felling as this is left to rot in order to replace nutrients to support new growth. He added that footpaths and access routes are cleared, but that is the only action taken.

Speech House

The Lessee had advised the Commission that he wished to replace the marquee with a permanent structure and plans will be prepared.

There was some discussion concerning the two large paintings in the Courtroom. They are owned by the Commission and would benefit from restoration work, but the cost would outweigh their value, so there are no plans to carry out this work.

Any redecoration works in the Courtroom would be discussed with and sanctioned by the Verderers, if and when proposed.

Heritage Lottery Funding

It was agreed to invite Sue Middleton, the HLF Programme Manager to the next Court.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be and Friday the 26th June 2015 and Friday the 9th October 2015.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward

