

26th June 2015

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the Twenty Sixth day
of June 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.

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 Sue Middleton, the Programme Manager for the Heritage Lottery Fund Project and said he looked forward to her presentation as part of the Deputy Surveyor's Report.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Messrs Wright and Standing who were unable to attend.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 17th April 2015 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

None, save that it was noted there had been no further developments since the Steward had written to advise that the Court should not be subject to the Freedom of Information Act regime.

MINERALS

Mrs Simpson advised the Court there was little to report but was pleased to note both the Heywood and Wallsend drift mines were operating and producing coal at increasing levels.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor advised that at the last SLG meeting, the owner of Crooked End Farm in Ruardean had attended to complain that sheep had been put on his property on a regular basis and removed at night. He was advised the sheep will be lifted and sold. The Court heard that a further lift of offending sheep is planned at Whitecroft.

The Court also heard that the problems continue both with unmarked sheep on the Forest and with one of the Commoners Association members, Mr Kevin Hancocks, whose sheep had been causing damage at a Redrow Housing development outside the Statutory Forest. However, it appears he had denied he was responsible and that persons unknown had been driving his sheep on to the development. Investigations continue.

The Deputy Surveyor explained that there is also an issue in The Pludds area where sheep have been found in a very poor state. He added that the owner of the sheep is not known, but confirmed they did not belong to Beverley Turpin-West. Once again, investigations are ongoing.

Finally, the Court heard that the representative of West Dean Parish Council (Ian Hendy) had retired and at present there is nobody from the Parish Council attending SLG meetings, yet many complaints about sheep to the District Council from the Parish continue.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor advised there was nothing to report, save that the new deer larder had been completed at a cost of £320,000. The new facility will cater for both deer and boar carcasses.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the thermal imaging survey results had been published, revealing an increase in the boar population to 1018 animals.

He added that the cull of 361 animals had served to slow the rate of increase in the population, but statistical analysis of the results of the various surveys had revealed an increasing population density, from 5 per square kilometre to the present level of 13. In addition, the fecundity is greater than originally thought, with litter sizes increasing as sows increase in size.

The upshot of the analysis is that the Commission would have to cull 57% of the population annually to keep numbers in check and this is simply not possible with present resources.

Mr Bent commented that the damage in the Ruardean area had diminished. The Deputy Surveyor advised this was due to the fact the boar are not territorial in nature and move around constantly.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mrs Simpson advised that the newt trapping and relocation had recommenced , with the spine road construction due to start in a few months and the new college construction in 2016.

Mr Bent expressed his continuing concern about construction on the old coalfield site and the issue of gas leeching from the ground.

The Senior Verderer asked if there were any firm plans regarding the proposed Hotel and was advised no private investor had come forward, so this aspect was not presently being progressed.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

HLF Project

Sue Middleton was invited to address the Court. She had prepared a PowerPoint presentation of the project arising from the successful HLF bid, entitled "Foresters Forest". She explained the underlying concept for the initial development phase that is funded by the grant, being a series of projects based on the geology and archaeological history of the Forest, as well as the cultural heritage, such as freemining, for example.

She advised there are about 50 projects, relying to a large extent on volunteers and their involvement is essential to the successful outcome of the whole programme.

The projects include conservation grazing; a veteran tree survey; collecting photographs of important sites throughout the Forest; checking LIDAR data for archaeological importance and collating in order all records of Forest life, such as tapes. There is also a planned history App for phones to show changes in the landscape. For example, Beechenhurst car park was formerly part of the Speech House Hill Colliery until 1906.

The outcome of all the work is to be a Forest heritage that is in good order, better managed and fully recorded, leading to local people being better informed and educated about their heritage.

She explained that the initial phase was funded to the tune of about £500,000, but the second stage bid in 2016 would lead to total funding of approximately £3.7million in March 2017.

The Senior Verderer thanked her for the extremely informative presentation and wished her great and continuing success with the programme.

Tree Diseases

There continue to be no outbreaks of Phytophthora Ramorum found in the Dean and no Ash Dieback. However, the growing incidence of acute and sudden oak decline in Chestnuts Wood is alarming and funding has been obtained for a Ph.D. student to investigate this.

Rich Daniels

The Court heard that Mr Daniels had been awarded an MBE for his work in the Forest and for the HOOF campaign.

Ministerial Statements on Forestry

The Court was advised that the Scottish Government has intimated there will be a transfer of power from the Commission to the devolved Government, as a result of a statement by Aileen McLeod, the Scottish Minister with responsibility for forestry. This change had already happened in Wales, so the Commission will only exist and operate in England, based in the Bristol Office.

He added there has been a statement from Lord Gardiner to confirm the forest estate in England will continue to be managed by the Commission.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sheep

The Senior Verderer commented that only about 800 sheep are present in the Forest but there were over 6,500 before the Foot and Mouth outbreak. The Deputy Surveyor advised everything is being done to encourage new and younger local people to become members of the Commoners Association.

Ruardean Hill

In response to a point raised by Mr Bent, the Deputy Surveyor advised he would investigate the plan to replant following the felling operations.

Speech House

The conservation of the Court is one of the HLF projects and a Report is to be prepared for approval by the Verderers.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be and Friday the 9th October 2015 and Friday the 15th January 2016.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward