

9th October 2015

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the Ninth day
of October 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

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 Sheriff, Roger Head; Dr John Dutton of Worcester University and David Stock, journalist and photographer.

The Court stood for a minute of silence in memory of Ray Wright who died in August.

APOLOGIES

None

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 26th June 2015 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

None.

MINERALS

Mrs Simpson advised the Court there was little to report but was pleased to note that all freeminers operating mining activities have been found to be fully compliant with the current law.

The Court also heard that two new freeminers had been appointed, but sadly no young new applicants had come forward.

The Deputy Gaveller had given a talk to the Royal Forestry Society on the history of mining and he is also assisting the local History Society in this regards.

With regard to quarrying, the Verderers were advised the Commission is assisting the Birch Hill Quarry with the provision of water and electricity supplies for a new saw cutting facility.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor advised that at the District Council is planning a full scrutiny review with public consultation, investigating the history of commoning; both as regards its benefits and also complaints about the shepherding. He added that the Commoners Association is concerned about this review, but it is hoped there will not be a negative response and that there will be positive outcomes.

The Court also heard that the problems continue with certain sheep owners, but Ceri Evans and Mick Holder had met with Kevin Hancocks to remind him in no uncertain terms of his responsibilities.

Mr Standing added that the problems in Bream were not as bad as they used to be, yet complaints continue to be increasingly numerous.

DEER

The Deputy Surveyor advised there was nothing to report, save that muntjac numbers continue to increase.

BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor introduced Dr John Dutton from The University of Worcester. His team had carried out research into the social impact arising from the presence of the boar in the Forest.

Dr Dutton explained that the research encompassed all social aspects arising from the introduction of the boar, but did not involve any population management conclusions. He advised that the Report awaited publication, but had three main thrusts: impact on communities; economic impact and health and safety issues.

He commented that the damage to amenity land had been an important topic and had been the source of a great deal of press coverage. He added that there was a general misunderstanding of how the boar had arrived in the Forest. Some people believed the Commission had been farming the animals but many believed the presence of the boar to be the Commission's "fault" and saw no reason to take preventative measures to fence their own land, for instance. Feeding of the animals was seen as a problem as this encouraged the boar to a particular spot where they would cause damage.

The research found no clear mandate for dealing with the boar, but there was a general feeling that there was inadequate information about the boar. Also there was no balanced approach, with the press giving mixed messages, such as the Commission is doing nothing on the one hand, yet criticism of the Commission culling the boar on the other!

From the economic point of view, there were winners and losers. The cost of management and fencing was a negative impact, with one fence costing over £3,000. However, butchers had a new income stream from the boar and tourism had benefited from visitors trying to view the animals.

The research team reviewed the health and safety aspects and found a problem with the interaction between the boar and vehicles, in that there had been nearly 50 road traffic accidents involving the animals as well as more than 200 near misses. There was also concern about people stopping in cars at dangerous spots to take photographs of the animals.

In addition, there were reports of fear of encountering the animals, with dogs and people being chased by the boar. However, it was noted that the boar have very poor vision and may be approaching to investigate rather than attacking.

Local vets were approached regarding injuries to pets, but it was clear there had been few and the evidence did not support the reports of large numbers of attacks by the boar in the local press.

The Senior Verderer enquired about the cost of fencing and the Deputy Surveyor commented that the works to protect Beechenhurst had proved very expensive. Dr Dutton commented that the cost of protecting sport and leisure facilities such as golf courses and football pitches would almost certainly be beyond the means of most local organisations.

The High Sheriff asked if the boar had migrated and the response was to confirm this had been the case as numbers had increased. The Deputy Surveyor advised the animals were now in Wales and on much of the area surrounding the Forest.

Mr Bent commented that it had taken over two years for DEFRA to decide the boar were to be treated as wild animals and the delay in making this decision had allowed the population to become well established.

In response to a question on management of the boar, Dr Dutton commented that the European population had increased due to a succession of warm winters. He advised that over 675,000 had been culled in Germany, but this had had little impact on the overall numbers.

The Deputy Surveyor commented that thermal imaging survey had numbered the Forest population to be 1018 (819 in 2014). A cull target had been set at 575 plus RTAs, based on research advice to cull 57% to keep the population static. He added that in the first 4 weeks, 100 had been culled but the numbers would fall as the available daylight diminished,

The Court heard that two trainee rangers had been employed to increase available numbers to 6 in due course. In addition, two experienced Rangers from other Districts had come to the Forest to assist.

The Senior Verderer asked why the Commission had taken responsibility for the boar as they are wild animals. The Deputy Surveyor responded that there was no other person or organisation to take on the task and it was seen as part of the Commission's duty to manage the Forest. He added that the Commission would also assist with training landowners outside the Forest.

The question of diseases affecting the boar was raised and the Court heard there had been six occurrences of TB in 3 years and all carcasses are checked. DEFRA has a National Strategy to deal with outbreaks of diseases such as swine flu.

The Steward advised the Court of an enquiry from Mr Humphries concerning the boar management strategy to set a target population of 400 and agreed by the Verderers. His initial response had been to advise that the figure had been agreed by all interested parties and the Court had been requested to approve this and had done so, even though there had been no scientific evidence to support this particular number. The Verderers agreed there was nothing to add to this response as it had been very difficult to obtain any form of agreement with those organisations opposed to having a cull. Going forward, the Commission had a strategy to keep numbers under control and the Court will continue to monitor the situation.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

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

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Tree Diseases

There continue to be no outbreaks of *Phytophthora Ramorum* found in the Dean and no Ash Dieback. There is ongoing research into acute and sudden oak decline in Chestnuts Wood .

Both Corsican Pine and Scots Pine are being badly affected by *Dothistroma* (red band needle blight). Accordingly, Weymouth Pine will be grown as it is more resilient to the problem, albeit more slow growing.

Douglas Fir has been affected by Swiss Needle Cast, caused by the fungal pathogen *Phaeocryptopus gaeumannii* and particular to this tree species. This has killed all recent plantings, but the outbreak has been traced back to the nursery and action has been taken to resolve this problem.

The High Sheriff commented that phytophthora had affected yew in Highnam Woods, but the Deputy Surveyor advised he was unaware of a similar problem in the Forest

Beechenhurst

The Court heard that a junior version of “Go Ape” - “Tree Top Junior” – had proved extremely popular and had a continuous connection system to avoid the possibility of injury.

Dean Forest Railway

The Court was advised that the Trust had aspirations to extend the railway into the Forest but there would be many hurdles to overcome before this is possible and the Commission supported the plan in principle and had provided a list of requirements, such as relocation of water mains, the cycle route and so forth.

Surface Water Management

Considerable works had been undertaken to prevent a reoccurrence of the 2013 floods in Lydbrook, but the surface water management plan had been delayed due to a bad ecological report of stagnant water in times of drought.

Heritage Lottery Funding

Many programs had commenced, such as the veteran tree and bat surveys. Rare lichens had been found as a result of a systematic survey. The methodology for the planned pond survey is being resolved and older residents are being targeted to progress the oral history of the Forest.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Shale Gas

Mr Standing enquired what would happen if a licence was sought in the Forest and was advised that this would be a matter for Government policy.

Election of a New Verderer

The Steward was directed to commence the process and prepare the required Affidavits.

Robert Turner

The Steward advised the Court he had received a note from the former Queen’s Remembrancer that he had met up with Rob and Gillian Guest for lunch.

Lewis James

It was agreed that Mr James, the Commission’s Assistant Surveyor be invited to the next Court

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be and Friday the 15th January 2016 and Friday the 8th April 2016

The High Sheriff commented that he had enjoyed his attendance at the Court and it had been a privilege to be there. He reviewed the history of his own office as the oldest secular office under the Crown and it had existed for over 1,000 years. He added that he had been greatly honoured to be chosen for the office and was enjoying his ceremonial duties and the support he has been able to provide to the voluntary sector in the County.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward