

31st March 2017

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the 31st day
of March in the Sixty Fifth 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
Seventeen

Before

R.W. Jenkins Esq., J.P.
M.V. Bent Esq.
I. J. Standing Esq., BDS, M.A. MUSMS Dip
R.G. Daniels Esq., MBE.

K. G. Stannard Esq., Deputy Surveyor,
Forestry Commission

Lewis James Esq., 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 both the newly elected Verderer, Mr Richard Daniels MBE, and the High Sheriff, Lady Bathurst and her husband, Lord Bathurst and thanked them for making the effort to attend the Court. The High Sheriff presented Mr Daniels with his Verderer ties. The Senior Verderer also welcomed Ben Klinkenberg who is studying the effect of the feral wild boar on land use in the Forest and the local residents' interaction with the animals, to discover if the public are happy with the existence of the animals in the Forest.

APOLOGIES

None.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 20th January 2017 were approved as slightly amended and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

Election of a New Verderer

The Senior Verderer commented that several letters had been received regarding the election process and the right to vote in the election. Mr D J Price had commented that there had been no identification or registration process at the Cathedral and no check on voting eligibility. The Deputy Surveyor commented that he understood the right to vote would only be checked if a ballot had been required, but this was not the case in view of the overwhelming vote in favour of Mr Daniels.

After some discussion, it was conceded that Mr Price's comments required a review of the process. Further correspondence had been received concerning eligibility to vote and the need for reform was debated as persons other than "freeholders" are disenfranchised. The Deputy Surveyor agreed to review the existing arrangements and present his view for discussion at the next Court and the Steward was directed to present options to be discussed at the next Court.

MINERALS

Mr Lewis commented that Stowfield Quarry produced an annual total of 690,000 tonnes for the construction industry.

With regard to Stowhill Quarry, there is a planning application to extend the quarry into an option area where the Commission will receive royalties.

Also, the Mine Train Quarry is having a new lease until 2042 and the new model lease precedent will be used for this transaction.

COMMONING

The Court heard from the Deputy Surveyor that the Sheep Liaison Group's ("SLG") independent review group had met to revisit the terms of the 2014 shepherding agreement, but the outcome had been disappointing in that no new ideas had been forthcoming.

Mr Garbett is to attempt to review the Agreement to bring it into line with DEFRA guidelines on shepherding and if accepted, this may make the task of policing the arrangements easier as the national regulatory framework will be in place. However, although everyone wishes the tradition of commoning to flourish, this is difficult whilst there are shepherds who bring the tradition into disrepute

Mr Daniels enquired if a replacement Chair for the SLG had been appointed and was advised that no decision had been made regarding a replacement for Ceri Evans. Ceri Evans has made known his intention to stand down at the next meeting.

It was noted that all shepherds are subject to national rules and guidelines regarding animal welfare, movement and so forth and enforcement may assist with control over irresponsible shepherding. The Senior Verderer commented that the Deputy Surveyor had an extremely difficult job to undertake so far as commoning is concerned and thanked him for all his efforts.

DEER and BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor advised there was nothing to report regarding deer, beyond a disappointing increase in the number of Muntjac deer seen in the woods.

Regarding boar, the Court heard there had been a thermal imaging survey undertaken and the results are awaited, but the Deputy Surveyor commented he would not be surprised if the population exceeded 2,000 animals.

He added that there is a great deal of misinformation about the Commission's activities and unwarranted criticism that nothing is being done. This is wholly incorrect as there are six rangers on culling duties and over 500 animals had been removed by a highly motivated and professional staff doing everything possible to keep numbers under control.

The Court also heard it is becoming more difficult to cull as the animals are not moving around in large groups and keeping hidden in the undergrowth rather than in open areas.

In response to a query from the High Sheriff, the culled animals are checked to see if fit for human consumption at the boar larder. Any suspect carcasses are checked by Government vets and incinerated if unfit. There is a high incidence of TB in the animals from the High Meadow area.

In fact, the National Pig Breeders Association has become very concerned about the disease risk issue and the spread of the boar and has been approached by the Deer Initiative to fund an officer for the boar management group.

West Dean Parish Council organised a meeting of all local Parish Councils to discuss the boar issue, but did not invite representatives from either the District Council or the Commission, but the Commission is to be invited to the next meeting.

On the 19th May, Mark Harper will chair a meeting of all stakeholders to design a strategy for living with feral wild boar, probably at the Vantage Point Conference Centre in Mitcheldean.

In addition, the Deer Initiative is in the process of contacting all MPs to advise on the situation regarding the boar in the UK.

Mr Standing commented that the press reports were generally inaccurate and contained unjustified criticism of the Commission's efforts to control the boar population.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mr Lewis advised that the College construction should be commencing shortly and it is hoped the new College will be open in time for the new academic year in September.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Foresters Forest – The Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Programme for the Forest of Dean.

A decision as to whether to fund the delivery phase of the programme has been made and was successful, with some £2.5 million now available for the programme over the next five years.

Parliamentary Committee Forestry Review

The Commission grant scheme was criticised by the Committee and proposals made for revision post Brexit.

Reference was made to loss of ancient woodlands claim by the Woodland Trust, with both the Commission and Natural England providing evidence that there had been very low loss of such woodland. The Trust had given a different view and the Commission was directed to ensure woodland is protected from development.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Court Paintings

The Steward was reminded to investigate the possibility of a trust for the Verderers to hold the two paintings in a trust arrangement, an issue he had not been able to address due to illness.

Court Minutes

The Steward advised the 2016 Minutes had been bound up and sent to the County Archivist.

Calendars

The Senior Verderer advised he would have these prepared to reflect the election of Mr Daniels in place of the late Ray Wright.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be Friday 30th June 2017 and Friday 6th October 2017.

The Senior Verderer thanked Countess Bathurst and her husband Lord Bathurst for attending the Court and for the great interest shown in Forest affairs during her period in office, and Ben Klinkenberg thanked the Verderers and commented he had found the proceedings very interesting and informative.

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Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward