

30th June 2017

Dean Forest to wit

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the 30th day
of June 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

Laurence Platt Esq., Acting Assistant Land
Agent, Forestry Commission

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

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed both Andrew Stringer from Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and Kieran O'Mahony, PhD candidate from Cardiff University.

APOLOGIES

These were received from Lewis James.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 31st March 2017 were approved as slightly amended and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

Sheep Liaison Group

The Deputy Surveyor commented that he understood Henry Boughton would attend the next meeting of the SLG with a view to deciding if he would stand to be the Chair of the Group, replacing Ceri Evans.

Forestry Commission and the Press

The Senior Verderer endorsed the general feeling of the Court and expressed by Mr Standing that the media are often critical of the Commission and in virtually all cases, such criticism is both unwarranted and unfair.

MINERALS

Mr Platt advised he had met with Lewis James and the Deputy Gaveler to report to the Court and commented that the Stowfield Quarry operators have been granted consent to undertake soil gas surveys in pursuance of their planning application to extend the quarry into an option area where the Commission will receive royalties and ground rent.

Regarding mines, there had been gas checks at all old mines and no issues had been encountered except for Heywood where there always been a problem. He added that the Deputy Gaveler had renewed permission to SKB to extract water for drinks production at their factory.

The Court also heard the sad news that Michael Rees had died. He had originally applied to be a freeminer, but was unsuccessful as he had been born in Lydney.

COMMONING

The Court heard from the Deputy Surveyor that legal action is being taken by Mr Awdry against the police and the Council in relation to his allegation that a sheep lift had been unlawful. He had given a witness statement in the case.

There is also legal action pending by Trading Standards against two Commoners in relation to animal welfare issues. Again, he had provided a witness statement in the case.

The Commission's shepherd is in the Forest today acting to remove unmarked sheep and animals from prohibited areas, such as the Redrow development. The shepherd attends the Forest periodically in the summer to identify and lift unmarked sheep.

It was decided to invite an officer of the Commoners Association to a future Court to provide the report on Commoning, and the Steward was instructed to write to Mr Holder in this regard.

DEER and BOAR AND FERAL PIGS

The Deputy Surveyor advised there had been a tenfold increase in the number of Muntjac deer culled in the Forest in the past season, with 72 animals shot. He added that the numbers of roe and fallow deer seen in the Dean had apparently dropped back in the past year, but the results of the thermal imaging survey are awaited to confirm this observation.

Mr Daniels expressed concern about deer being trapped in the double wire strands topping the stock fences on the new community grazing paddocks. The Deputy Surveyor advised he was aware of the issue and had understood it resolved. Andrew Stringer was able to inform the court that the Wildlife Trust had resolved the problem by clipping the top strand to the lower so maintaining the stock proof properties whilst minimising risk to deer.

Regarding boar, the Court heard there had been 492 animals culled, but RTAs had diminished as the boar are keeping away from open areas and are less obvious generally.

On the 23rd June, there had been a Forest forum meeting of all stakeholders to design a strategy for living with feral wild boar, at the Vantage Point Conference Centre in Mitcheldean. The Steward had attended and reported that the presentations by experts and the workshop had been excellent.

The Court heard the West Dean Parish Council will continue with its initiative and Mark Harper intends to maintain his involvement.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

Mr Platt advised that the land exchange had been completed, with the Commission now owning the Linear Park and Hollyhill Wood. The Deputy Surveyor commented that the Linear Park had been originally transferred to the Council to form a barrier to Cinderford expansion, yet had now been returned to the Commission because of such expansion.

The Senior Verderer and Mr Bent both commented that they were appalled at the immense waste of public funds over many years on Cinderford Northern Quarter.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

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

Following the receipt of funding, the programme team had been recruited and 38 cultural, natural and built heritage projects have started to gear up.

Penny Simpson

The Area Land Agent will shortly be returning to duties following maternity leave.

Jim Sauter

Jim will retire in September. Jim is the Forestry Commission's Head of Forestry and Land Management for West England FD. His replacement is Steve Eyres, who is based at the Commission's Exeter office. The Court expressed their good wishes to him.

National Flood Management

The restoration of wetlands in the heart of the Forest and mitigation measures to prevent Cinderford Brook flooding are two issues being investigated. The beaver

project in Lydbrook has stalled, and it is doubtful if beavers will be released this year as intended.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Pine Martens

Andrew Stringer from the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust attended the Court and advised there is an ongoing feasibility study by the Trust, the Commission and the Vincent Wildlife Trust in relation to the introduction of pine marten to the Forest. He explained that the species is restricted to Scotland where they are thriving and central Wales where the population has been in decline. Some 40 animals had been introduced into Central Wales to strengthen that population and another 20 to be added this year as it is considered important to ensure there is no inbreeding.

The pine marten is approximately 70cm in length, half of which is a bushy tail. They have a very broad diet, comprising 50% small rodents, 20% birds and some invertebrates. The Forest habitat is good but there are issues to address in the study, comprising three areas.

The first is a biological study to check the animals can survive in the environment. One issue is the density of roads in the Forest as numbers of animals are killed on roads, a problem that is not apparent in either Scotland or Wales. However, the population in The Netherlands is extremely healthy in spite of the high density of roads in the country.

The second is the ecological impact. It was noted that introduction in Ireland had resulted in the eradication of the grey squirrel population in six areas. There is also the risk of damage to bat roosts to be addressed.

The third is the socio-economic impact, looking at benefits such as increasing numbers of people visiting to try to see the animals and threats such as damage to poultry keepers.

The study is to be completed in a few months and there is engagement with all interested parties such as RSPB and the local community by means of a public opinion survey.

Following several queries and comments, the Senior Verderer thanked Mr Stringer for his extremely interesting presentation and wished him and his team good luck with the study.

Tree Planting

Mr Daniels commented that it had been reported only 500 hectares of new planting had taken place in England and this was far below Government targets. The Deputy Surveyor explained this figure relates to new afforestation on private land, not the restocking of Commission's holdings. He added that in the West England FD, some

180 hectares are being restocked after the removal of trees due to plant health issues and routine harvesting. Some parts of the Forest will not be replanted as the Commission aims to meet the minimum 10% target of open areas for biodiversity, such as heathland and mires, but the remaining 90% will be more actively managed to provide a good source of timber.

Queens Remembrancer

Barbara Fontaine is to be invited to attend a future Court, as she had expressed great interest at a recent meeting of the Inclosure Commissioners.

Cotswold Life

The Senior Verderer advised he had been interviewed by a reporter from the magazine for an article about the Forest.

Elections of Verderers

The Deputy Surveyor and the Steward had each produced a paper on the eligibility of candidates and voters at future elections and the Verderers proposed to review these reports for discussion at the next Court.

Mr Standing commented that it may be appropriate to seek the view of the Queen's Remembrancer as she is responsible for instructing the High Sheriff to hold an election.

Deputy Lieutenants

Roger Deeks and Viv Hargreaves wished to attend a future Court and it was agreed to invite them.

Sculpture Trail

Planning permission had been granted for the construction of a large new sculpture at Beechenhurst. The new Sculpture is designed and planned as a replacement to the 'Giant's Chair' which was decommissioned recently.

DATES OF NEXT TWO COURT SITTINGS

The date for the next two Courts will be Friday 6th October 2017 and Friday 22nd January 2018.

Kieron O'Mahony thanked the Verderers and commented he had found the proceedings very interesting and informative.

)
)
)

Verderers

Deputy Surveyor
Forestry Commission

Steward