

6<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Dean Forest to wit

Before

At a Special Court of Attachment  
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at  
The Speech House on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of  
October 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

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Forestry Commission  
Lewis James Esq., M.R.I.C.S.  
Deputy Area Land Agent, Forestry Commission  
K.P.Griffin B.A. Solicitor, Steward

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed Roger Deeks, Deputy Lieutenant for the County; Mick Holder, Secretary of the Commoners Association and Professor Nicholas A.Robinson from the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University in New York State and his wife, Shelley.

## **APOLOGIES**

None.

## **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Court held on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017 were approved and signed.

## **MATTERS ARISING**

### **Cotswold Life**

An article about the Senior Verderer and the Court had appeared in the magazine.

## **MINERALS**

Mr James advised there had been little activity other than a full audit at Stowfield to ensure all lease requirements were being met.

## **COMMONING**

Mr Holder addressed the Court and was pleased to advise that the whole issue of commoning had recently become less problematic, with the Association now liaising well with West Dean Parish Council over the issue of Public Open Spaces Orders.

He added that a constitution for the Association is in course of preparation and new rules will be presented at the AGM in December.

The Court heard that DEFRA is making alterations to its own rules in relation to the Forest and these will be of great assistance in curbing and controlling irresponsible shepherding, with an absolute requirement that sheep purchased at market must be held on the new owner's own land before being released into the Forest.

Mr Holder hoped that more young people will come forward to become commoners following the introduction of the new rules and the result of an ongoing court case that will be decided in 2018. He added that there are only a few hundred sheep in the Forest but the 11,000 acres of Forest Waste is capable of holding 5,000 sheep.

The Senior Verderer thanked Mr Holder for attending the Court and for his very helpful report.

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that a teleconference had been arranged by Gloucestershire County Council involving various officers from DEFRA, RPA and AHPHA as well as himself to review how agricultural holding numbers, and thus movement licences were applied to the Forest. This was partly to address current anomalies, and partly to ensure clarity prior to new regulations being introduced. The principle change agreed was that the Forest Holding number previously existing was removed and a new Forest Holding identifying the Forest as a 'Common' was issued. This has no bearing on whether the Forest is legally a 'Common' or not (it isn't) but recognises that the land is available to more than one grazier at the same time. This will mean that in most circumstances there is no requirement for a movement licence to move animals on to or off of the common, and no stand-still period will apply to moving animals on to the common. This does further emphasise the need for all graziers to have back-land, as it is not possible for graziers to get a movement licence for stock to move direct from the common holding.

## **DEER AND BOAR AND FERAL WILD PIGS**

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the cull was proceeding very well, but he was concerned about the abuse of staff and threats made against them and their families by a few activists who oppose the cull. The Police are aware of the situation but more action is required to prevent the harassment of staff and their families.

The Senior Verderer referred to a letter he had received from one Mr Beard from Worrall Hill, requesting the Court to attempt to discover what action is being taken regarding the damage resulting from the activities of the boar. In response, the Deputy Surveyor commented that there had been no substantive progress among the various community groups to take forward the strategy discussed at the Forum, although the Forest of Dean District Council is to hold a meeting in December at which a proposal to establish a framework for a Community Action Plan for living

with the feral wild boar. It is hoped this is progressed as boar numbers are increasing and resulting in increased damage

Mr Bent commented that the damage to Pan Tod caused by the boar had been severe, but the Deputy Surveyor responded that a proposal to fence the area had been opposed by some local residents, resulting in the unfortunate damage.

In response to an enquiry by Mr Daniels, the Deputy Surveyor advised the result of the night census had yet to be received, but he believed this would confirm a substantial increase in numbers of both boar and deer.

## **CINDERFORD REGENERATION**

Mr James advised the first phase of the spine road had been completed and the College construction is on track to be open to students in September 2018. He added that the College management are now investigating such issues as transport arrangements and so forth.

Phase 2 of the development will be delayed due to both funding issues and the fact that Homes for England is attempting to secure developers to construct housing.

Mr Bent commented that he understood there had been a substantial overspend on the road construction and this was confirmed as the amount of soil that had to be removed had been far greater than anticipated.

## **DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT**

### **Jim Sauter**

Following Jim's retirement, his replacement as Head of Forestry & Land Management, Steve Ayers will work out of the Exeter Office.

### **Beechenhurst**

The large open grass area had been cleared of stone by contractors and reseeded.

### **Mallards Pike**

Interested parties have been asked to tender to operate a small café on site, in respect of which there is an ongoing planning application.

### **Biblins Campsite**

A new operator is being sought for the operation, but the lease will require the retention of the youth camp.

### **Pine Martens**

The feasibility study has ended and a decision to reintroduce the animals is awaited. If shown to be a good idea, the Commission will have to seek substantial funding.

## **Beaver**

A decision by DEFRA to progress the project is awaited.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Verderers Election**

It was agreed that any future candidate must be a resident rather than a freeholder within the defined and mapped area in order to stand.

It was further agreed that those entitled to vote at an election must be residents and not freeholders in the County (but not of the Cities of Gloucester or Bristol). The High Sheriff will be asked to make it absolutely clear who is eligible to vote and details of name, address and age will be taken at any future election.

### **Queens Remembrancer**

The Steward was directed to give details of the dates of future Courts to her Secretary.

### **Amber Connett**

The Steward advised that she is a student preparing a dissertation on the subject of living with the boar and had requested completion of a survey by the Verderers. That agreed to do so and details are to be provided for this purpose.

### **Colin Henderson**

The Steward advised that Mr Henderson had requested support to oppose a planning application for a Glamping Site near Mitcheldean. Details were provided and discussed but the Court decided it was beyond their purview to protect the vert and venison in the Forest as the site was on well-established agricultural land.

### **Dilke Memorial Hospital**

The ongoing consultation process about hospital facilities in the Forest was discussed and the Deputy Surveyor will investigate what would happen if the Dilke reverted to Commission ownership.

## **DATES OF THE NEXT COURT SITTINGS**

These were agreed as the 26th January, the 13<sup>th</sup> April and the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018.

Professor Robinson thanked the Verderers for permitting him and his wife to attend the Court in view of his academic interest in the Forest Charter of 1217 and he had found the Verderers' activities in the Forest of Dean to be the continuing embodiment

of the Charter's environmental laws and the Court remains very important in providing a forum for the peaceful resolution of any issues arising in the Forest.

Mr Deeks also thanked the Verderers for being permitted to attend and commented that he had found the work of the Verderers to be fascinating and he hoped they would be able to assist in the decision to appoint a successor to Dame Janet Trotter who will retire as the Lord Lieutenant in 2018.

Verderers

Deputy Surveyor

Steward