

13th April 2018

Dean Forest to wit

Before

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the 13th day of
April in the Sixty Sixth 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
Eighteen

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
D.L. Howell CSM, IMMM Deputy Gaveller
Forestry Commission

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

APOLOGIES

None.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Court held on the 26th January 2018 were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

Verderers Election

The Steward confirmed he had advised the Under Sheriff of the agreed new election procedures.

Forest Forum

The Senior Verderer advised he had attended the Forum referred to at the last Court and had found the event to be most interesting and excellent. Ian Standing and Rich Daniels had also attended the Forum.

Dame Janet Trotter

The Steward advised the Court of her inability to attend either this Court or the following one due to prior commitments.

Agenda

A draft new Agenda was discussed and agreed, following suggestions by the Deputy Surveyor.

MINERALS

The Deputy Gaveller produced a full Report on Freemining and Quarries and explained his bullet points in the document. A copy is annexed to these Minutes.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor advised that both the new Chair of the SLG and the Secretary had resigned from their posts and that the next meeting of the SLG will take place in May. He commented that some members of the SLG are of the view that the existence of the group is being used as an excuse by some agencies not to act under their own powers; and thus more enforcement action might be taken if the group ceased to operate. The Senior Verderer commented that this was very disappointing news as the SLG had made good progress in the past.

The Court also heard that the hearing of the case brought by Mr Awdry in relation to an alleged illegal sheep lift and subsequent sale of the unclaimed sheep had been postponed.

The Court was also advised that Mr Hancocks and Miss Nyland had recently been successfully prosecuted and fined but nevertheless can continue to keep sheep. Miss Nyland subsequently advised GCC she is no longer keeping sheep, but there are animals with her "N" mark still on the Forest.

Mr Daniels asked if there are any new and young members joining the Commoners Association but was advised that while the problems with difficult commoners remain, there is little incentive for new graziers to run sheep in the Forest. Mr Daniels added that if the Association concentrated on the good commoners and good shepherding, public opinion would be changed and commoners would be welcomed. The Deputy Surveyor added that there was interest in the conservation grazing programme and a small number of people had come forward to run stock within the new fenced inclosures.

DEER AND BOAR AND FERAL WILD PIGS

The Senior Verderer commented that when driving through the Forest, it appeared increasingly unattractive. The Deputy Surveyor commented that a combination of the damage caused by the boar; reduction in roadside maintenance and heavy snow prior to Christmas had all contributed to this, but he added that more proactive management is to be discussed as part of the strategic approach under discussion.

The Court also heard that a local person had received a caution from the Police about abusive behaviour towards Commission staff going about their lawful business in connection with the boar cull. He added that the constant abuse, and harassment of FC staff, both engaged in the boar cull, and more generally was unwarranted and

he welcomed the Police's commitment to providing better support by taking action against repeat offenders.

The Court was advised the Commission is monitoring social media and liaising with the Police if any issues arise. In addition, Council members had been advised to take care with social media to ensure the Commission's work is not undermined in any way.

Ben Goldsmith, a newly appointed director at DEFRA will be visiting the Dean and this will provide an opportunity to ensure he is fully aware of the problems with the boar in the Forest.

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the thermal imaging survey results are being assessed and the outcome is expected in June. He added that during the course of the survey, an actual deer poaching incident had been viewed and the Police had been informed, but the person or persons responsible had not been caught, in spite of the information being rapidly provided to the Police in both Gloucestershire & South Wales. An apology for the failure to take immediate action to apprehend the offenders had been received from both forces. A Commission national wildlife expert is to provide a training session for the Police on the subject of poaching as this is a problem, The rise in poaching with dogs is a particular concern, along with the openness to which culprits are boasting of their activities on social media.

CINDERFORD REGENERATION

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the College construction remains on track to be completed on time.

Mr Bent commented that the Government is to be lobbied to retain the Dilke Hospital site. The Deputy Surveyor commented that he had had useful discussions with Nigel Riglar, Commissioning Director for Communities & Infrastructure, in the County Council. Nigel's visit was ostensibly about surface water management, but the informal discussions took in such issues as CNQ, the future hospital plans for the Forest, although this is a matter for the NHS, of course as well as potential relocation of the County Highways Depot.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Beaver

The Court heard the animals will be on site in July, following completion of construction of a fence to keep the beaver in and the boar out.

Strategic Approach

Work on the Strategic Approach has begun in earnest. High level strategies are being written for built heritage, as well as the forest waterways and wetlands, for example. The latter is supported by the recruitment of a Forest Waters Project Officer, funded by FC but employed by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

Pine Martens

The Pine Marten feasibility Study is almost complete, with work now confined to finishing the report. However, the report is very promising and the expectation is that the project will move into a delivery phase shortly.

Heritage Lottery Fund Programme

Gloucestershire University had carried out a survey in relation to local heritage and one of the survey questions had concerned the activities of the Verderers, to which over 700 responses had been recorded. Copies of the relevant section of the survey were provided to the Verderers for information purposes.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Speech House

Mr Standing mentioned the three trees planted near the Court to commemorate the exemption from sale of the Dean in the 1981 Forestry Act and commented that some note of these trees should be made. The Deputy Surveyor agreed to investigate.

Veteran Trees

In response to a query from Mr Daniels, the Deputy Surveyor confirmed there is a policy for the protection and improvement of 'trees of special interest', that said trees were mapped on the FC's GIS system – and in addition two Foresters' Forest projects were looking specifically at important trees in the Forest and also detailing future management arrangements for these specimens.

DATES OF THE NEXT COURT SITTINGS

These dates were agreed as the 22nd June and 5th October 2018.

Verderers

Deputy Surveyor

Steward