

18th October 2019

Dean Forest to wit

Before

At a Special Court of Attachment
Of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the 18th day of
October in the Sixty Seventh 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 Nineteen

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

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed Dr Helen Dancer from the University of Sussex School of Law and who is undertaking a research project into forest laws.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mark Harper, but he intends to attend the January Court.

MINUTES

These were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

None.

IMPORTANT NEW MATTERS

Nothing to report.

DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE STATUTORY FOREST

Dilke Hospital

The Deputy Surveyor advised the Forestry Commission is in negotiation with the NHS who wish to open a new hospital within two years on the site of the present skateboard park. There is a covenant on this site to use for recreation only, so the Commission is in a strong negotiating position, especially as the District Council and the Cinderford Town Council wish to re-use the Dilke site for community purposes and this will involve the removal or management of a large amount of asbestos present in the buildings.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor reported there had been a meeting of the SLG on the 21st October but there had been no progress as Commoners Association have stated they do not recognise the terms of reference or the responsible shepherding agreement, despite the fact this was amended and signed by Henry Mills in 2014. There is a new chair who is a veterinary surgeon and nominated by the Commoners Association.

It appears there are approximately 200 sheep on the Forest, but only a few are owned by a member of the Commoners Association, with most owned by three commoners who are not members.

DEER AND BOAR AND FERAL WILD PIGS

The Senior Verderer commented he had seen a dead white stag near Bream, apparently one of several from the Lydney Park Estate.

The Deputy Surveyor advised that muntjac numbers continue to rise and all is being done to keep this problem under control.

With regard to boar, there are now seven Rangers, but the most experienced is due to retire and accordingly, two more will be recruited to bring numbers up to the target of eight Rangers. He added that the cull target is 800 to bring numbers towards a population of 400.

Outside the Forest, farmers have reported increasing crop damage. It is not known if this is due to increased numbers of boar or the spread of the existing population in the Dean due to the cull, as there is no systematic data available.

It was reported that DEFRA are taking a keen interest in the situation, principally due to the concerns about the possible spread of African Swine Fever, especially as a random check of in Northern Ireland found a product contaminated with the disease. This reinforces the need to stop people feeding the boar as the disease's viral agent is almost certainly in the country and an outbreak would be a disaster for the pig industry.

There is in place a contingency plan if the boar population becomes infected as all will die within a few months and a barrier of guns will stop infected animals leaving the Forest.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Speed Limits

Messrs Standing and Daniels had attended a meeting with the District Council's Leader who was delighted the Verderers have become involved, and there will be a meeting with the Council and representatives from the Police and West Dean Parish Council at the end of October to discuss the Forest Gateway proposal. This is viewed as a promising idea as it will reduce the requirement for signage and take account of the difficulty of enforcing a speed limit reduction by the Police. Mr Standing added he had attended a West Dean Parish Council meeting as a road traffic expert was due to attend, but unfortunately had failed to do so as he had diarised an incorrect date.

The Deputy Surveyor commented that cattle grids at the Gateways would be both symbolic and very useful to slow the traffic entering the Forest.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Pine Martens

24 animals had been released but 2 males had been killed in RTAs unfortunately.

Beavers

The original pair had been removed to Devon but had been replaced by one female from Tayside in Scotland. A male companion is awaited.

Our Shared Forest

The new management plan reflects the input of all interested parties and work is due to commence on the first phase of the Forest plan.

Centenary

There have been many tree planting ceremonies throughout the country and Forest stone has been used to mark all plantings, as reported at the last Court. There will be a re-enactment of the first tree planting in December in Devon. Locally, there will be a commemorative planting at the Cyril Hart Arboretum and a 100-tree avenue at Nags Head.

The Commission's garden at the Chelsea Flower Show had received a gold award and there are Royal Mail stamps in circulation.

The Deputy Surveyor presented a copy of the Centenary book "British Forests" signed by Mike Seddon, Chief Executive of Forestry England and the Senior Verderer asked the Steward to write to him to thank him for the kind gift and to invite him to a future Court.

Over 400 had taken part in the Mallards Pike run and including many staff. There have been numerous other runs that have taken place or are planned to do so.

Forest Use

A new strategy has been established to cater with booking large events and also to retain and protect quiet zones, especially in the breeding season

Tree Diseases

Ash dieback is now in the Forest and felling will take place in 2020, concentrating on roadside trees. The disease very quickly kills the trees and they become brittle and dangerous when infected.

EU membership has caused a problem with foreign plant imports, due to the lack of control over diseased stock entering the country.

The guidance is that if large numbers of trees are affected by disease, then replace with a different species.

MINERALS

The Deputy Gaveller presented his Report and a copy is attached to these Minutes.

It was noted that developments are awaited with regard to the proposed cleaner air legislation, forming part of a new Environment Act as mentioned in the Queen's Speech.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Verderers' Website

The Steward advised that Tom Wright will no longer be hosting or supporting the website after the end of the current year, due to a change in his circumstances. Following some discussion, it was agreed that the Steward would email Mr Wright and ask him to liaise with Mr Daniels to arrange a transfer of the contents of the website to a new host.

Yellow Lines

The Deputy Surveyor reported that Forestry England civil engineers had carried out the work with the approval of the County Council and to stop parking at the entrance to sites such as Mallards Pike, for road safety reasons.

DATES OF THE NEXT COURT SITTINGS

These dates were agreed as the 17th January 2020 and the 24th April 2020, both commencing at 2.45pm.

Helen Dancer thanked the Verderers for permitting her to attend the Court and explained her two-year project researching forest laws that commenced in 2018. She had spent a substantial time in the New Forest and had visited the Verderers Court there and she planned to visit the Epping Forest Verderers. She commented that she had become extremely interested in the role of verderers in the cultural heritage of the forests and would be writing a report on this subject.

Verderers

Deputy Surveyor

Steward