

17th January 2020

Dean Forest to wit

Before

At a Special Court of Attachment
Of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the 17th day of
January in the Sixty Eighth 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 Twenty

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 England
D.L. Howell Esq., CSM IMMM Deputy Gaveler
Forestry England
K.P. Griffin B.A. Solicitor, Steward

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer welcomed Mark Harper MP and Mike Seddon, Chief Executive of Forestry England.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Charles Berkeley, the High Sheriff and Dr Helen Dancer, neither of whom was able to attend this Court.

MINUTES

These were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

Speed Limits

Mr Standing provided a written report of the present position and commented that the County Council's position was not acceptable to those seeking a reduced speed limit on Forest roads, in view of not only injury and death to people but also the high number of reported collisions with animals. A meeting with all interested parties had taken place on the 29th October 2019 at the District Council offices and the following points had emerged :-

- a) There was strong support from all present, including the police, for action.
- b) 'Special Area' entry gateways on the woodland roads were favoured.
- c) Discussion with, and guidance from, Forestry England is essential.
- d) Although desired, a Forest-wide legal 40mph limit is unlikely, but an advisory 40mph limit should be possible.
- e) Intrusive signage can and should be avoided by using road painted messages.
- f) The roads involved are: Lydney to Lydbrook; Lydney to Bream; Blakeney to Parkend; Blakeney to Ruspidge; Lea Bailey to Drybrook; Edge End to Coleford; Cinderford Bridge to Broadwell; Coalway to Parkend; Speech House to New Fancy. It was suggested that the A4136 be omitted other than for Gateway Signage.
- g) There is much to be learnt from other areas, such as the New Forest.

It was agreed the Verderers would continue to work with the other interested parties to progress matters. The Deputy Surveyor commented that the Commission fully supports the principle of speed limit reduction and the issue and positioning of the proposed Special Gateways needs to be resolved, as well as the possible use of cattle grids at these points.

Mr Harper commented that the initiative introducing gateways and grids would be far more effective than a speed limit reduction that would be ignored by those who routinely drive at excess speed. The Deputy Surveyor added that communicating the proposed road safety measures to the public would be extremely important and Mr Harper agreed and believed this would lead to change of attitude in the vast majority of drivers.

Verderers Website

It was reported that the website had been successfully transferred to the new hosting service.

Centenary Tree Planting

Trees had been planted in the Cyril Hart Arboretum and an avenue created at Nags Head. Mr Bent enquired if any planting was planned for the area between the Barracks and Yorkley and was advised this in an area of open Forest Waste for grazing.

IMPORTANT NEW MATTERS

Nothing to report.

DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE STATUTORY FOREST

Nothing to report.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor reported there had been a meeting of the SLG on 13th January, but it had been very confrontational and not productive at all. He added it was difficult to understand why the Commoners Association are being uncooperative and difficult, as all interested bodies and public authorities wish to both protect and indeed extend commoning, as there are only approximately 200 sheep on the Forest, whereas there were over 6,000 before the Foot and Mouth outbreak.

DEER AND BOAR AND FERAL WILD PIGS

The Court heard that the deer cull at just over 300 is behind schedule as more effort is being put into the boar cull, where the target is 800 and over 500 animals have been removed. The weather is not helping as there had been no heavy frosts to flatten vegetation. However, the boar do not move in heavy rain, so the rangers go out after the weather has cleared and the boar start to move.

The Deputy Surveyor advised the Commission has been in contact with the Animal and Plant Health Agency to plan for any problems with diseases such as African swine flu. There is also to be a Forest forum boar and disease workshop on the 20th March, with the overriding message being not to feed the boar to prevent the introduction of the deadly disease. It is hoped an expert from Europe to speak about the disease outbreaks in Poland and Eastern Europe.

There had been fewer deaths due to RTAs this year as numbers had reduced due to the cull.

With regard to pannage, the right still exists but a licence is required from DEFRA and Trading Standards and will not be granted due to the risk of disease.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

There was nothing to report.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Weather

The wet weather has been causing damage and contract work has come to a halt. There are concerns about the possibility of groundwater flooding affecting up to 60 properties. Mr Harper asked to be consulted if this matter became a real problem. The Deputy Surveyor advised the District council is the leading authority on this.

Pillowell Recreation Ground

This piece of land was gifted to the community by Lord Bledisloe and is surrounded by Commission owned property. The local community had attempted to obtain funding to construct fencing against the boar, but a problem had arisen as the land in question is not registered and although owned by the Charity Commission, there are no appointed trustees. It appeared the current Lord Bledisloe and the Deputy Surveyor could notionally be trustees, but four are required and it will take time to resolve this issue. The support of the Verderers was requested in due course and this was agreed.

Roadside Tree Work

The work has been proceeding well to remove trees affected by ash dieback and without adverse comment, but at Fetter Hill, all trees have been affected and will need to be removed. The Commission believes this clearance of a large number of trees will lead to a lot of criticism, but the work must be undertaken.

Our Shared Forest

Work is continuing on the Forest Plan and there will be full consultation later in the year.

Foresters Forest

22 secondary school teachers are receiving training on the natural environment and built heritage. Maintenance work on 10 sites is to be undertaken.

Beaver

Two animals from Scotland are now in place and busy working on site.

MINERALS

The Deputy Gaveler presented his Report and a copy is attached to these Minutes. With regard to the clean air strategy, he advised he had no news about this. Mr Harper advised Ministers are reviewing small scale coal extraction and steam railways and other small-scale users and are very keen to permit continuation in spite of overall carbon reduction targets. Rebecca Powell MP is the Minister in charge of this and has been positively working to permit these operations to continue.

Mr Bent asked about Drybrook Quarry and although this had been mothballed for many years, the deputy Gaveler advised there is a possibility of future operations.

Mr Standing enquired about Stowfield Quarry and was advised the current planning for the site has seven years to run.

Mr Daniels commented that freemining is in a good place with enthusiastic young members in training.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

St Whites School

The Steward referred to the request for children from the school to attend the Court and after some discussion, it was suggested they could attend before the Court commences and to meet the Verderers. If accepted, the Deputy Surveyor suggested Sue Middleton ought to be contacted and involved.

DATES OF THE NEXT COURT SITTINGS

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

Mark Harper thanked the Commission for its considerable efforts to control the boar in very difficult circumstances and thanked the Verderers for the opportunity to attend the Court.

Mike Seddon added it had been a pleasure and privilege to attend the Court. He had been involved for twelve years with the Verderers in the New Forest during his time working there and although the Courts are very different, the same enthusiasm and passion is shown by both sets of Verderers.

On behalf of the Verderers, Mr Standing presented both guests with a copy of Cyril Hart's "The Verderers and The Forest Laws of Dean"

Verderers

Deputy Surveyor

Steward