

20th August 2021

Dean Forest to wit

Before

At a Special Court of Attachment
Of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at
The Speech House on the twentieth
day of August in the Sixty Ninth 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 One

R.W. Jenkins Esq., J.P.
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
Gaveller, Forestry England.
K.P. Griffin B.A. Solicitor, Steward to the Court.

Prior to the commencement of the Court, the Senior Verderer introduced Louise Osmond, a documentary film maker who plans to make a film and use still photographs to show how we relate to the land in England and including the historic roles such as the Deputy Gaveller and the Verderers in the Forest.

APOLOGIES

Received from Maurice Bent who was unable to attend the Court.

MINUTES

Approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

The Court heard Richard Stanford had been appointed Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission and it was decided to invite him to a future Court.

IMPORTANT NEW MATTERS

There was nothing to report.

DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE STATUTORY FOREST

The Court heard the District Council had established a committee to review the plans for the Northern Quarter as no developers had come forward to carry out the proposed industrial and residential development of the site. The Verderers would wish to express their views about this and decided to contact the Council to request an opportunity to do so.

COMMONING

The Court heard there had been a meeting of the Sheep Liaison Group but the Deputy Surveyor had been unable to attend due to a prior commitment. He added that the Commoners Association need to decide on a policy for responsible shepherding with all the stakeholders and that Forestry England's only interest is sheep marking to comply with the byelaws. Trading Standards are responsible for animal welfare. All stakeholders wish to see a large number of healthy and properly shepherded animals in the Forest as there are insufficient numbers at present.

DEER AND BOAR

The Deputy Surveyor advised the results of the thermal imaging survey were awaited, but it had been speculated that deer numbers had not increased and boar numbers had reduced due to the success of the population control measures undertaken.

In response to an enquiry, the Deputy Surveyor advised that muntjac numbers continue to increase and the animals are shot on sight.

The Senior Verderer asked who is responsible for boar killed in RTAs and was advised this is the Highways Authority.

Mr Daniels asked about night shooting and the Deputy Surveyor commented this is probably not undertaken during the summer months, but if there are shots heard after dark, this should be reported to the Coleford Police as possible poaching, as the Police are advised when the rangers plan to shoot at night.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

With regard to Our Shared Forest, there is a policy to create quiet areas within the Forest and where no mountain biking is permitted and dogs must be kept on a lead. It is possible these areas will be nature reserves with fencing, gates and comprehensive signage explaining the area is to be protected due to the biodiversity crisis and making it morally wrong to break the rules. It is extremely important to ensure safe sites for ground nesting birds and so forth. An Operations Manager for the Our Shared Forest strategy is to be recruited.

Mr Daniels enquired if Forestry England is proactively engaging with the cycling fraternity in view of the problems encountered in the Dean and was advised there is a great deal of work going on and media such as YouTube is being used to get the message across that any cycling must be responsibly undertaken and with due consideration to the environment and Forest residents and other visitors.

The Senior Verderer asked about the use of prosecution and was advised this can only be undertaken where an offender can be identified. The Deputy Surveyor reported that a meeting is to take place between Forestry England officials and one individual who has cut down trees for jumps and has recorded his unacceptable behaviour on YouTube. Clearly, there are no problems with identity in such a case and a prosecution will follow if necessary.

The Court also heard that licensed cycling organisations such as Pedalabikeaway and the Parkend Group are duty bound to advise customers that cycling should only be undertaken on hard surfaces. However, there is an unlicensed business hiring out mountain bikes and would need to give such advice in order to gain a licence.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

Diseases

Chronic oak decline continues apace and research studies indicate the grubs of a beetle carry the fungus that causes the problem and there is no obvious way to control this. Forestry England have a policy to clean and disinfect all equipment used where the disease is encountered.

Ash dieback has resulted in large number of infected trees being removed from Symonds Yat and Fetters Hill.

Phytophthora ramorum continues to infect larch in the Forest and two statutory tree notices to remove plantations have been received this year.

Crayfish

Native crayfish have been found dead in the Forest and it is believed due to crayfish plague, carried by the invasive North American Signal Crayfish. As a result, all fishing club activities have been suspended and members asked to disinfect equipment to try to stop the outbreak,

Peter Kelso

The Court heard Peter is moving to be the Operations Director for the Malvern Hills Trust

Visitor Numbers

2021 has seen very high numbers of visitors to the Dean, but less than the record numbers in 2020. The Deputy Surveyor commented that alternative venues are needed to take the pressure off the Forest.

England Tree Action Plan

Generous grants are available for land purchase and tree planting but this is not happening as quickly as hoped or anticipated. The Court was reminded that Forestry England can only lease and not purchase land, but it is hoped the strategy to have an ecological link from the Brecons to the Midlands will eventually become a reality.

MINERALS

The Deputy Gaveller presented his Report and a copy is appended to these Minutes. The Senior Verderer both thanked and congratulated the Deputy Gaveller for the very prompt and successful action to deal with the problem on Forest Road referred to in his Report.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Inclosure Commissioners

It is possible there will be a meeting of the Commissioners at Speech House on 30th September next.

Court Minutes

The Steward advised the signed and bound Minutes for the Courts in 2019 and the single Court in January 2020 had been delivered to the Gloucestershire Archives.

Louise Osmond thanked the Verderers for permitting her to attend the Court.

DATES OF THE NEXT COURT SITTINGS

These dates were agreed as 26th November 2021 and 28th January 2022, both commencing at 2.45pm.

Verderers

Deputy Surveyor

Steward