



**HIS MAJESTY'S FOREST OF DEAN
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
VERDERERS COURT**

17th May 2024

At a Special Court of Attachment
of our Sovereign Lord the King at
The Speech House on the 17th
Dean Forest to wit
17th day of May in the Second Year of the
Reign of our Lord King Charles the
Third by the Grace of God, etc. in the
Year of Our Lord Two Thousand and
Twenty Four

Before

I.J. Standing Esq., BDS, M.A. MUSMS Dip.
R.W. Jenkins Esq., J.P.
R.G. Daniels Esq., MBE.
Mrs S.Middleton B.Sc.

K.G. Stannard Esq., Deputy Surveyor, Forestry
England.
K.P. Griffin B.A. Solicitor, Retiring Steward.
N. L. Boon LLB. LLM. Solicitor, Steward to the Court.

APOLOGIES

Dan Howell – Deputy Gaveller

MINUTES

These were approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING

The Dilke Hospital

With the opening of the new Forest of Dean Community Hospital, the question was asked whether there was any update on the now redundant Dilke Hospital site. The site remains in the ownership of the NHS, and has been registered as an asset of community value, but otherwise, no update was available.

Speed Limits

There was nothing new to report on this issue. HM Verderers remain supportive of any proposal to introduce new speed limits in the Forest, this matter remains with the Forest of Dean road safety group and Gloucestershire Highways.

Unauthorised Bike Trails

Mrs Middleton advised she had taken Community Ranger Tamsin Sagar to view the damage at the Bixslade site.

The Senior Verderer also mentioned a Forestry England Podcast and it was agreed this would be discussed by the Verderers outside of the Court to formulate their reaction ready for the next Court.

IMPORTANT NEW MATTERS & DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE STATUTORY FOREST

The Senior Verderer enquired if a new road is to be constructed near Hopewell Colliery as he had noticed large amounts of stone and other material piled up in the vicinity. The Deputy Surveyor advised he had no knowledge of this and he would investigate, but commented the material would most likely be for repairs or upgrade of an existing forest road as there are no plans to build any new roads.

COMMONING

The Deputy Surveyor noted the situation regarding sheep in the Forest was largely unchanged.

Gloucestershire County Council Trading Standards (Animal Welfare) continue to visit the Forest as required, liaising as necessary with individual commoners and Forestry England. A concern has been proper recording of sheep movements. Most issues in recent months have related to sheep believed to belong to Kevin Hancock being out of bounds.

Mr Awdry was identified on CCTV cameras disposing of sheep carcasses at Castlemain, and Forestry England had raised this with him. The bins at Castlemain can only be used by members of the Commoners Association to dispose of unidentified fallen stock.

DEER AND BOAR

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that the annual thermal imaging survey had completed and the data had been sent to Forest Research for analysis as usual. In response to a question from the Senior Verderer, the DS confirmed last year's survey report suggested boar numbers around 600, and deer around 1800. The DS agreed deer numbers were too high, however the wildlife rangers' priority remained the boar cull.

Mrs Middleton enquired how many Rangers are operating and was advised there are currently four and a trainee. The trainee will leave at the end of their training contract in the autumn.

The Senior Verderer commented he had seen reports of the military being called out in Italy to help control the boar. The Deputy Surveyor responded that boar numbers in Europe were very high, and growing with particular issues continuing around highly populated areas such as Berlin and Barcelona, so he was not surprised that further action was being taken in Italy, but also that he had no direct knowledge of this.

Mr Jenkins enquired about boar and deer carcass sales and the Deputy Surveyor responded that the majority of carcasses fit for human consumption are sold nationally to game dealers. The DS recalled that he thinks there are currently three contracts covering West Forest District. The prices paid are low to very low and it is never going to be a profitable exercise. The DS reminded the Verderers that the driver for Forestry England's deer and boar culls is to manage populations to keep damage down to acceptable levels, it is not, and never has been an activity driven by venison sales.

Mrs Middleton enquired about poaching. The DS responded that poaching was a continuing issue, but is most likely not occurring to the same level as has been seen previously. Forestry England and Gloucestershire Police liaise regularly, but no specific action has been taken since the joint press release before Christmas.

The Senior Verderer asked if there had been any issues with the animal rights groups and was advised not since the Covid outbreak. One local activist had received a written warning of potential injunction proceedings and had moderated his activities as a result.

The new Steward enquired if there was a benefit from poaching in reducing numbers but was advised that unauthorised and uncontrolled shooting on publicly accessible land was extremely dangerous and could not be tolerated.

DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT

The Deputy Surveyor produced a comprehensive update on issues in the Forest, the salient points are recorded below:

Trees: The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that 189,000 trees of 22 different species had been planted this winter. It has been confirmed that fewer will be planted in coming years to encourage natural regeneration.

Mrs Middleton commented that 22 different species of trees was good to her protect the Forest from future pests and diseases.

Police Liaison: Regular liaison meetings are held between our community ranger/forest warden team and the local police. These meetings exchange information regarding anti-social behaviour, suspected drug taking, and fly-tipping, for example.

Forest Waters: The Deputy Surveyor was pleased to advise the Court that a family of beavers had been released into an enclosure on the Perry Hay catchment above Mallards Pike Lake. The project was part of the Forest Waters programme that aims to slow surface water flows, holding water up for longer in the Forest to mitigate against extreme storm flows and droughts.

With regard to **Perry Hay Beavers**, the Senior Verderer asked if there had been any public displeasure at the creation of a new and large enclosure stopping people roaming freely. The Deputy Surveyor answered no and advised Forestry England has been steadily removing old and redundant fencing. The Senior Verderer also asked if there are consultations on the large amount of ecological work being carried out and the Deputy Surveyor advised this is certainly the case with major projects such as beaver and pine marten reintroduction, for example. The DS confirmed in his written report that the Forest Waters Project has a steering group that includes the Environment Agency, Natural England, as well as Gloucestershire County Council, and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

The DS advised the Court of work undertaken on the **Cinderford Brook** by the Severn Rivers Trust. The Deputy Surveyor added that the proposal is to introduce local stone to the smooth lined channels to the stream and to slow the water flow and mitigate against low flows in the vicinity of the Blue Rock trail had been consulted on, but not yet implemented. The Senior Verderer commented that the concreted surface was extremely important as without it, there would be no stream as the water would simply drain away and the Deputy Surveyor replied this was known and the stone would be placed on top of the existing surface.

Mrs Middleton asked about the local nature recovery strategies and the Deputy Surveyor responded that Forestry England is already committed to this and indeed carrying out a lot of work necessary to stop decline and to help nature recover with targeted action. The Court

discussed the subject of green financing, including the application of biodiversity net gain, which is now formally part of the planning system.

The Senior Verderer commented that interested parties such as the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust would be very interested in such strategies and for example were very busy at the Woorgreens site. The Deputy Surveyor advised GWT have a farm business tenancy there granted by Forestry England and have been able to obtain funding as a result. In future, GWT are likely to be moving to a 10 year grazing licence.

On the subject of **Car Park Charges**, Mr Daniels stated it is a great shame that no free parking will be retained for local people, especially as all the places where locals could usually park to carry out dog walking have been blocked. He believed that during the "Hands Off Our Forest" campaign there had been an agreement to keep a percentage of car parks open for free access to the Forest. He expressed his disappointment and believed the strategy would be counter-productive as Forestry England would be viewed as greedy and only interested in collecting revenue from everyone. The Deputy Surveyor noted that the 'direction of travel' was to roll out car parking charges, and that this was noted in the Our Shared Forest document. This is now supported by investment in improved parking infrastructure, and yes, this will include the more widespread use of automatic number plate recognition systems, linked to robust enforcement.

The Senior Verderer enquired about Membership for Forestry England and how it could be obtained so the Deputy Surveyor reported that it was available from Bank House.

Grazing Licenses - Mrs Middleton asked about the mention of Worcester Walk in the report, as the Friends of Worcester Walk will be very happy if a grazing licence has been agreed.

Hoarthorns Farm - the Deputy Surveyor noted that a parcel of land, Hoarthorns Farm, near Edge End, had come to the market in two lots. Forestry England have submitted a tender for one of the lots, which was predominantly Grade 3 agricultural land. The organisation is currently discouraged from bidding on Grade 2 land because of wider food security policies at national level. If the tender for the parcel was successful, Forestry England will be able to create 30 hectares of new woodland. Mr Daniels commented this was fantastic news and hoped the tender would be successful.

MINERALS

In the absence of the Deputy Gaveller, the retiring Steward went through the report provided by Mr Howell. Mr Daniels expressed his gratitude to Tom Brockington for resolving the issue of timber required by the freeminers and the Court expressed their gratitude to the Deputy Gaveller for obtaining a copy of the portrait of the King for display in the Courtroom.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

THE RETIRING STEWARD

On behalf of the Verderers, Mr Jenkins expressed his gratitude to Kieron Griffin for his long service to the Verderers amounting to about 40 years. He commented that he had been a Verderer for a substantial amount of this time and had found the steward to be dedicated, reliable, kind and always helpful on legal matters. The Verderers presented the retiring Steward with a card and a case of wine. He thanked them and said he would greatly miss being involved with the Court, but he expected his successor to continue to support the Verderers for many years to come.

OUR FOREST

Mrs Middleton advised there had been two well-attended and successful community meetings to generate project ideas for an application to seek substantial grant funding from

the National Lottery to continue the highly valued work. The third meeting is planned to be in Neweast in early July.

WEBSITE

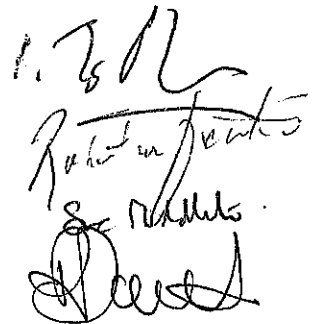
The Verderers wish to record their grateful thanks to Dr Ray Wilson for his skilful help and depth of knowledge in creating the new website. It has given us a firm foundation ready for further enlargement when needed. It is good to note this is attracting use by the public.

DATES OF THE NEXT COURT SITTINGS

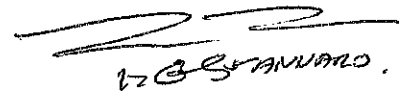
These dates were agreed as 6th September 2024 and 13th December 2024, both commencing at 2.45pm.

Mrs Middleton apologised for her mistake but reported that she would be on holiday on 6th September 2024, so asked if the date could be moved to Friday 13th September 2024. This was agreed by all.

Verderers

A block of handwritten signatures in black ink, including the name 'Robbie in front' and 'S. Middle'. The signatures are written in a cursive style.

Deputy Surveyor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. STANUARD', written in a cursive style.

Steward

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ben', written in a cursive style.