



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

**Date:** 13th September 2024

At a Special Court of Attachment  
of our Sovereign Lord the King at  
The Speech House on the 17th  
Dean Forest to wit  
13th day of September 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. MBE.

K. G. Stannard Esq., Deputy Surveyor, Forestry  
England.  
D. Howell., Deputy Gaveller  
N. L. Boon LLB. LLM. Solicitor, Steward to the

**APOLOGIES**

Dan Howell - Deputy Gaveller

**MINUTES**

These were approved and signed.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**BIOSPHERE**

The Deputy Surveyor confirms that he is speaking to Councillor Christopher McFarling on this matter. The Deputy Surveyor confirms that this matter has been made less of a priority by the District Council, but it is still progressing. It was agreed that this would be placed into Matters Arising for the next Court.

**THE DILKE HOSPITAL**

Mr Daniels asked whether there was any update on the Dilke Hospital, as it is now up for sale, and whether there was any interest in Forestry England buying the same or returning it to the Forest. The Deputy Surveyor confirmed not at present.

It was questioned as to whether the land at the far end of the site, closer to Cinderford, was included in the sale. The Deputy Surveyor explained that he was not able to confirm this, but would assume that the Dilke Hospital would likely have built up to the boundary line.

The Senior Verderer enquired as to whether the land was with an agent and Mr Daniels confirmed that it was, but could not recall the agent at the time of the meeting. It was agreed that a map of the space should be reviewed to check the boundary lines of the Dilke Hospital.

The Deputy Surveyor explained that the site of the Dilke Hospital is in the local plan, so there are restrictions on how a subsequent purchaser can use the land, for example, the land is not zoned for housing. Lydney hospital will most likely be mainly residential development, but subsequent purchasers are unlikely to do the same at the Dilke site.

Mr Daniels asked whether there was a covenant to return the land. The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that there was a grant of the land for the welfare of the miners of the Forest of Dean, but there is no wording that requires the NHS to return the land to the Crown on cessation of use.

### **SPEED LIMITS**

Mr Daniels confirmed that he has spoken to Councillor Becky Hoyland, who is the local County Councillor. There has been no progress on the speed limits. Mr Daniels confirmed that Councillor Hoyland confirmed that she would appreciate a letter from the Verderers Court requesting an update on this matter, and expressing continuing support.

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that he spoke with the Local Community Safety Partnership that morning and that there should have been an update from the Road Safety Partnership, but unfortunately the meeting was postponed.

Mr Daniels asked the Steward to prepare a letter, for approval, requesting an update on the speed limits issue for Councillor Hoyland.

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that Inspector Nick Cook had shared his concerns about Road Traffic Accidents being on the increase after many years the numbers being stable or on a downward trend. The Deputy Surveyor relayed that whilst Inspector Cook had raised the matter, it was most likely that the Police would continue to work through the Road Safety Partnership to bring about change.

### **CAR PARKING**

The Senior Verderer confirmed that he has had interaction with the recently installed photographic car parking meters, which were mentioned at the last Court. The Senior Verderer provided two recent examples of dissatisfaction of the parking meters and subsequent fines.

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that pay and display parking had been in operation in the main car parks for many years, and that Forestry England's stated intention was towards the position that all car parks are charged for. The introduction of Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology, supported by enforcement action had been promoted in the Forest and is now operational. Forestry England have long operated a membership scheme which allows members to park for free, the membership scheme represents good value for money for regular visitors.

Visitors who receive a parking reminder from Forestry England's enforcement contractors have the opportunity to pay or appeal. There is a national call centre, details of which are on the enforcement notice, and in general, a lenient approach is taken. Appeals can also be escalated through Forestry England's national parking team/complaints process to the Deputy Surveyor. In addition, Forestry England's local ranger team and recreation managers

can go into the system and cancel enforcement action if they are advised, with a robust reason, within 48 hours.

It was commented that the car parking charges will be very unpopular, and it would be good to find a positive way forward, if possible. The Deputy Surveyor responded that the new technology was more robust and provided easier, more flexible methods of payment, but Forestry England would be continuing the move towards charging across all Forestry England sites in the Forest of Dean, in line with the National Strategy.

### **BIKE TRAILS**

It was commented that there was a podcast released shortly before the last Court sitting, which some members of the Court had listened to. It was questioned whether there was a new cycle trail, as this podcast explained that a new trail was being made. The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that there are no completely new trails being made, but there has been a variation in the cycle centre, which has incorporated a new stretch of cycle path, to provide a new all-user trail to improve the offer for those with mobility needs.

The Family Cycling Trail is now known under a different name, which is the Colliers trail.

It was discussed that the "Verderers trail" and "Colliers trail" all reflect historic nature of the Forest of Dean. The Deputy Surveyor explained that it is to get people to think about what those names mean and what they reflect for the Forest of Dean. The Senior Verderer explained that the Verderers Court were asked if their name could be used in 2010, which was agreed as being a good idea. Since then, the cycle trail has been expanded. The Senior Verderer thinks that it has got to the stage that it is not helping the Forest of Dean or the environment. Should the Verderers Court have their name on the trails? It was agreed that this is a matter to consider.

Mrs Middleton commented that the green trail is an easy trail, and the next one up is more bumpy. The Green trail will provide be easy access for adapted bikes/mobility issues, which is another way of getting more people into the forest. Mrs Middleton understands the rationale for the green trail. The Verderers Court should be kept up to date with what is going on. It was suggested that the Cycle Manager be invited to a meeting, so that they could provide briefings on this point.

The Senior Verderer asked how the Verderers Court feels about their name being on something which has altered the forest so dramatically. Mrs Middleton said that she had not really been thought about the cost involved with changing the name of the trail. Discussion was held on this point and it was agreed that consultation dates should be looked at and made a note of, so some of the members of the Court can attend to ensure that they are updated.

Mr Jenkins asked whether it would be worth having an open Court to allow people to attend to update the Court on these matters and it was agreed that this would be considered.

### **IMPORTANT NEW MATTERS & DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE STATUTORY FOREST**

Mrs Middleton explained that she was interested in the works parallel to the Blue Rock Trail where Rob Wilcocks (Severn Rivers Trust) has been putting in more natural barriers in the water to facilitate species travelling upstream. Mrs Middleton commented that it appeared that there were more natural barriers in the Forest, which is positive.

It was confirmed that Beechams bore hole was likely to be taking a lot of water from the limestone, which could be the issue as to why there is a shortage of water around. The Deputy Surveyor commented that this is more of an environmental issue, rather than a forest issue. Aquifer in the forest is decreasing in volume of water underneath. It is an issue, but not specific issue to the Forest of Dean. Environment agency are to monitor this.

## **COMMONING**

This continues at low rate. There is little stock out and complaints into the office are at a low. The Forest of Dean District Council are not receiving many complaints either. Gloucester County Council Trading Standards continue to do periodic surveillance following complaints or welfare issues and are visiting around once a month.

## **DEER AND BOAR**

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that the boar census report is out. Numbers have stayed static with the culling programme seeming to maintain the level. Wildlife rangers are culling what they see, but the rangers are not seeing the boar as often as they used to. The Deputy Surveyor said that there are around 500-600 in the Forest. It was confirmed that complaints and damage is minimised, but the population is viable.

Deer numbers are higher than they should be, approximately 1,600-1,800 when target is 800. The Deputy Surveyor did not bring the detailed report with him today. Muntjac are the biggest problem. They used to be minor 15 years ago but are now more significant.

## **DEPUTY SURVEYOR'S REPORT**

### **HOARTHORNS FARM**

The Deputy Surveyor advised that Forestry England were in the process of purchasing Hoarthorns Farm, an 80 hectare site north of Edge End. The farm was being acquired for woodland creation under the DEFRA funded Nature for Climate Change. This fact is not in the public domain yet, and won't be until the legal acquisition process has completed.

As further background, the Deputy Surveyor explained that Forestry England had been funded to acquire and plant 1,000 hectare of land before 31 March 2025, and to acquire 1,000 hectares for planting in the following financial year. This target was on course to being achieved. Within West Forest District, alongside Hoarthorns, the team had acquired two sites in Shropshire and three sites in North Devon. Land in Gloucestershire had proven difficult to acquire as relatively little has come to the market, and when it has, it has been offered at only relatively high prices.

### **FOREST WATERS**

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that this is a joint venture with Environment Agency, Gloucester County Council and Forest of Dean District Council, which has been successful to date, with further funding secured for the coming years.

### **CANNOP PONDS PROJECT**

The Deputy Surveyor advised that the foot-bridge has been condemned at Upper Cannop, due to rot. This will be replaced with a moveable bridge, so when the final works are done in a couple of years, it can be relocated elsewhere. The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that they are also removing pumps, which allow Forestry England to control water levels. These pumps are being replaced with syphons, which will allow better control of water levels in heavy rainfall events. This is a necessary precaution as both dams are currently non-compliant with the Reservoirs Act and at risk of failure should they be over-topped.

In respect of the Lower Cannop spillway, engineers were getting concerned that the water was being diverted for so long, that internal erosion may happen. They are switching water from hydro back over to spillway to carry out inspections.

## **TREE HEALTH**

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that tree health continues to decline due to warm, wet conditions. Ash die back is continuing at an accelerated rate and Acute Oak decline is high. Oak are also being badly affected by powdery mildew this year.

There are plans to remove a large number of trees before March 2025, although the exact maps are yet to be received, due to legal processes. The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that Larch are also decreasing in numbers at an accelerated pace. All larch could be gone within the next 5-6 years.

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that pine martins were reintroduced to assist with the management of grey squirrels, however, there is no noticeable effect as of yet, and such an effect would not be expected in the first 10 years as the pine martin numbers grow.

Goshawk density is higher than most places in the UK. Goshawk nests are full of grey squirrel carcasses. There is not a big effect in the Forest of Dean just yet, but the ready availability of grey squirrels may be a reason as to why we have so many Goshawks. They were a species in decline, but we are doing very well locally, with 60% of UK population in the Forest of Dean.

Mrs Middleton asked if a more diverse range of trees was being planted, with the Deputy Surveyor confirming that was the case.

## **MINERALS**

In the absence of the Deputy Gaveler, the Deputy Surveyor went through the report provided by Mr Howell. The Deputy Surveyor highlighted the recent successful visit from Health and Safety executive principal inspector of mines.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **OUR FOREST**

Mrs Middleton wanted to express her gratitude to James Williams and Tom Brockington, following the Verderers visit on 12 July 2024 to look at continuous cover forestry systems.

It was commented that there was a long term experiment involving the University of Birmingham, where they artificially put CO2 in the atmosphere, so that they could measure timber growth and biomass growth. The response was that there was increased growth through the higher levels of CO2.

### **MINUTES & NEW STEWARD**

Mrs Middleton asked whether all minutes moving forward could include the Crest and the Steward confirmed that this was all set up for the next meeting moving forward.

Mrs Middleton also asked that the Steward have her photo taken and a small article placed in the local paper, which was agreed. Mrs Middleton explained that this is an opportunity to advertise the Verderers Court, and to confirm that people may visit if they wish. The Senior Verderer agreed and asked to review any wording prior to printing.

### **CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE PUBLIC**

The Senior Verderer confirmed that a letter had been received from a member of the public, and responses had been sent to discuss their concerns. Clarification was sought from the Deputy Surveyor regarding marking of trees in specific areas and concerns were raised to the Deputy Surveyor regarding the bracken around the forest and how it has taken over some picnic areas in the Forest of Dean.

### **FUTURE OF THE VERDERERS COURT**

The Senior Verderer provided a history of the Verderers Court and explained that it would be prudent for the Verderers Court to consider its role in a changing community and how they


are able to assist the community. It was agreed by all that all Verderers are to think about the role of the Verderers Court and how this could be changed to help the Forest of Dean community further. It was agreed that each Verderer would consider what the role is, what they would like to do and what could be changed prior to the next Court sitting.

The Deputy Surveyor confirmed that greater public engagement is required, with Mr Jenkins commenting that more people in the community should have the right to come to the Court. Mr Daniels commented that his concern is that people will come but the Verderers will be unable to assist due to having very limited powers. Mrs Middleton agreed that it would be good for people to visit the Verderers Court and confirmed that it would be good to have a process, even if the Verderers Court could not change anything.

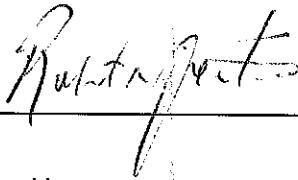
**DATES OF THE NEXT COURT SITTINGS**

These dates were agreed as 13 December 2024 and 28 March 2025, both commencing at 2.45pm.

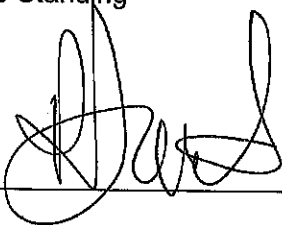
Mrs Middleton reported that she would not be able to attend the next meeting due to being on holiday, however, the date remains unchanged. The Steward suggested that set months are agreed, so that these could be continued each year, with the specific date being confirmed one year in advance. This was agreed and will be discussed further at the next meeting.

  
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I J Standing

  
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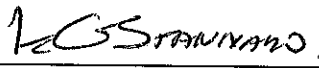
R W Jenkins

  
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Deputy Surveyor

  
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Steward