

NEW FOREST CONSULTATIVE PANEL

Minutes of the 224th Meeting, held in the Louisa Suite, Lyndhurst Park Hotel, Lyndhurst, on THURSDAY, 4 November 2010

Those present: Tim Greenwood (In the Chair)
David Stone (Panel Support Officer)
Rosalind Alderman (Panel Clerk/Secretary)
Jo Murphy (Panel Clerk/Secretary)
Members as shown on the Official List, with the exception of those listed below for whom apologies were received.

ITEM 1

1.1 APOLOGIES

Alison Russell, British Horse Society
Ian Mason-Smith, Community First New Forest and HCVYS
Peter Whapham, East Boldre Parish Council
Mark Oakley, Netley Marsh Parish Council
Ken Hubbard, New Forest Access for All
Mrs Millar, New Forest Combined Hunts
Christine Ames, New Forest Tourism Association
Sam Dovey, New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society
Ron Pearson, NFD OG
Pat Thorne, Verderers

1.2 SUBSTITUTIONS

Bernard Austin, CPRE
Julian Johnson, New Forest National Park Authority

1.3 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that unfortunately Cllr. Alan Shotter had passed away after an illness; he noted that Cllr Shotter had made a significant contribution to the Panel over his time as a member.

The Chairman welcomed Cllr. Ford as the new representative for Ringwood Town Council.

ITEM 2

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (2 September 2010)

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

ITEM 3

MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Minute item 8.2 – Following concerns raised at the previous meeting regarding ragwort growing on the verges of the A326, David Richardson (Hampshire County Council Highways Department) reported that the verges had been cut in line with the regular contract. He added that contractors visited the A326 twice this year specifically to look for ragwort and that they also responded to specific reports of ragwort. It appears that the report Eddie Holtham (Fawley Parish Council) made did not reach the right staff and consequently the particular area of ragwort he reported was not attended to on that occasion.

- 3.2 Minute item 8.3 – Mike Seddon (Forestry Commission) reported that he had been in correspondence with Eddie Holtham regarding the restoration work being carried out at Fawley Inclosure. He explained that there was still some work to be done to complete the process and that the area would then need time for the vegetation to recover.
- 3.3 Minutes item 8.5 and 8.6 – Julian Johnson (New Forest National Park Authority) reported that the NPA in partnership with other local organisations had issued a press release to create awareness of the distress fireworks could cause and asking people to bear in mind the impact fireworks could have on commoning stock, pets and animals in general.
- 3.4 Christine Ames (New Forest Tourism Association) had given her apologies for the meeting but asked the Chairman to read a statement detailing the actions that had been taken:

'Following the last meeting of the Consultative Panel all hoteliers, visitor attractions who hold firework displays and holiday parks who are members of New Forest Tourism Association have been emailed and requested to advise the Equine Forum in advance of any displays. They all hope that this will be helpful in assisting with mitigating distress to livestock.'

ITEM 4 **FORESTRY COMMISSION**

- 4.1 Mike Seddon explained that when the agenda for the meeting had been circulated the extent of the cuts to DEFRA's budget had not been known. Since that time he had received questions from Sue Bennison (Bramshaw Parish Council) and Ian Taylor (Newforce) regarding the future of the Forestry Commission in light of the likely reduced financial settlement.
- 4.2 Mr Seddon referred the Panel to the tabled letter from Jim Paice MP, the Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, which had been sent to all MPs explaining the reasoning behind the inclusion of powers for modernisation of the forestry legislation in the Public Bodies Bill, which had just been introduced into Parliament (attached as **Annex 1**). He drew their attention to the last paragraph in which the letter confirmed the Government's intention to reduce the role for the State and increase private management of woodlands and forests, whilst maintaining its commitment to continued conservation, to bio-diversity and other public benefits that woodlands provide.
- 4.3 Mr Seddon confirmed that there would be a consultation event regarding the future management of the Forestry Commission estate but as yet the details and timing were not known. Several Panel members raised concerns regarding the reported selling off of State land into private ownership, but Mr Seddon assured them that at this stage this was speculation. He did confirm that the Forestry Commission had offered three areas of land back to the National Trust that it currently managed under a lease agreement.
- 4.4 Panel members voiced their support for the service that the Forestry Commission currently provided and believed that in the past the New Forest had been seen as a special case owing to its unique situation. They agreed that the Chairman should write to Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State, on behalf of the Panel, to put forward the case for special considerations to be given to the New Forest and to ensure that the Panel was included in any future consultation.

Action: The Chairman, with the assistance of the Secretariat, to write to Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State, on behalf of the panel.

N.B. Letter sent and attached as Annex 2

ITEM 5

STOCK MANAGEMENT IN THE NEW FOREST

- 5.1 Jonathon Gerrelli, Head Agister, started his presentation by updating the Panel on the latest figures for road accidents involving commoning stock. He explained that the number of accidents attended this year was 97 compared with 118 at the same time last year. He pointed out that approximately half of the accidents involved local motorists and expressed concern regarding the lack of awareness by local people about the forest. He had attended an accident recently involving a driver from Bournemouth and had been surprised that the driver had not known that the stock belonged to someone and that the driver was responsible to compensate the owner. He said there had been 27 hit and runs this year, with 28 last year and that 60 animals had been killed or injured - marginally down on 68 last year. He explained that there was still a need to educate drivers about the risks and that the Agisters would continue to work with the NPA to raise awareness.
- 5.2 Mr Gerrelli informed the Panel that he was the Head Agister and that four Agisters worked for him each responsible for a different quadrant of the forest. He said that currently recorded on the marking fees register there were 4803 ponies, 2232 cattle, 117 donkeys, 360 pigs and 153 sheep, which totalled 7665 commoning animals and that they were owned by 700 practising commoners, the highest number for some time.
- 5.3 He explained that all stock had to be identified with the owner's mark and that marking fees were paid on all animals turned out. He pointed out that, like ponies, cattle had their tails cut and the type of tail cut used related to the area in which the owner lived. He talked about the differences in the management of the different types of animals, for example donkeys' hooves needed attention, whilst ponies' feet were much more resilient. He also explained that whilst bulls were not permitted on the forest, stallions were, but that the type of stallion and numbers were strictly controlled to ensure the quality of offspring, to limit the number of foals that were born each year and the length of the foaling season.
- 5.4 Finally Mr Gerrelli spoke about the drifts which started in August and continued until early November. He explained that this was the only time that most of the ponies were handled and that they were semi-feral. He explained this was the reason drifts were no longer publicised as there was a risk to public safety when rounding up the ponies. Agisters encouraged owners to fit reflective collars to animals to be released back to the forest as they believed them to be an important tool in reducing animal accidents, particularly when the clocks went back in the Autumn.
- 5.5 Panel members asked questions about the types of breeds that were allowed on the forest and Mr Gerrelli said there was no restriction but that the miniature ponies were common because they fetched a good price at the sales, and that hardy native breeds of cattle, such as the Galloway, did well and needed less attention than the European breeds.

ITEM 6

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETINGS

- 6.1 Julian Johnson reported that there had been two meetings of the NPA since the last Panel meeting, one in September (update circulated with the agenda) and one in October (update tabled at the meeting). He highlighted the Core Strategy referred to in the Chief Executive's report and said that the NPA had received a quick response from the Inspector and he applauded the work done by the NPA planning team. He also mentioned that the NPA were working with the Natural History Museum on a bio-diversity project saying that this was one of only two such projects being undertaken. He confirmed that like the Forestry Commission, the NPA was yet to hear what its budget from DEFRA was going to be and drew Panel members' attention to the upcoming consultation on the Governance arrangements for National Parks.

Action: The Secretariat to add the Governance Review to the agenda of January's Consultative Panel.

ITEM 7

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 7.1 Mike Moriarty (Copythorne Parish Council) asked for an update on the progress to date at Copperfields, Pollards Moor Road, Copythorne. Edward Heron (NFDC) confirmed that the NPA had now agreed funding for the investigation to establish the exact nature of the material that had been imported onto the site. He said the owners of the land had been to court, had been found guilty and fined and that this matter was now in the hands of the court. He also explained that this was a standing item on the Planning Development Control Committee agenda and that progress was therefore reported monthly.
- 7.2 Mr Moriarty said that Alison Barnes (Chief Executive of the NPA) was due to address the Parish in a month's time and that they would be keen to hear more on the subject.

Action: Alison Barnes to update Copythorne Parish Council on the latest situation at their meeting next month.

- 7.3 Eddie Holtham advised that a kissing gate had been stolen from the forest edge where a bridleway runs between the Hardley roundabout to the Fawley Inclosure alongside the A326. He said that the temporary heras fence had not been adequate to prevent livestock roaming onto the road and he had been told that the delay in replacing the gate was due to sourcing a new gate in the correct size. He questioned why the Highways Department do not work with the Forestry Commission to source the gate. David Richardson (HCC Highways) agreed to liaise with Mr Holtham outside the meeting.
- 7.4 Professor Evans (Chartered Institute of Foresters) asked whether the wooden posts used in the traffic calming scheme on the Burley Road were sourced from local woodland.

Action: David Richardson to find out where the wood was sourced and report back to Professor Evans.

- 7.5 Sue Bennison (Bramshaw Parish Council) brought in an anniversary balloon which she had found in Bramshaw Wood. She said that it had come from Basingstoke and that awareness needed to be raised as to the potential dangers deflated balloons could cause to livestock.

Action: NPA to investigate what can be done to raise awareness, although it was accepted it was difficult to know where to target the information as this sort of thing could come from anywhere.

- 7.6 Sue Bennison asked what by-laws were relevant to the parking on verges, as she said recently one of her parishioners had had a notice attached to his windscreen regarding parking on the verge.
- 7.7 Mike Seddon confirmed that under the Forest Watch initiative there was a move to discourage verge parking and parking in gateways and that initially offenders would receive a notice on their windscreen, but that repeat offenders would be reported to the police. He explained that by-laws 6 and 7 related to taking vehicles on Forestry Commission land, other than car parks and tracks, and that vehicles could also be in breach of the Road Traffic Act depending on whether their vehicle was parked on the verge or the straddling the verge and the road.

ITEM 8

DATE OF NEXT PANEL MEETING

- 8.1 The next Consultative Panel meeting would be held at **7.30 pm on THURSDAY, 6 JANUARY 2011** in the **Louisa Suite at the Lyndhurst Park Hotel, Lyndhurst.**

The meeting closed at 21.25 hrs.