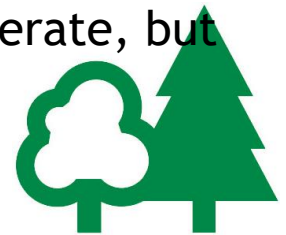


# Update to Consultative Panel

Thursday 3 December 2020



1. In early September, public were restricted to “rule of 6” when meeting up outdoors, and limits of 30 for larger events
2. Pressures of people visiting the Forest eased a little during the week once schools returned in Sept, but weekends remain very busy
3. Second lockdown introduced restrictions on non-essential travel, but allowed local travel for exercise, recognising the wellbeing benefits of outdoor exercise - this is very positive for society but did add pressure of numbers again during October, especially on days of better weather
4. Every year we normally close a small number of car parks in the winter to reduce maintenance demands when visit numbers are normally lower. This year we are keeping that under constant review and may open some if capacity is needed.
5. Second lockdown lifted this week with non-essential retail reopening, so may see some relief of pressure.
6. Forestry England staff working in the field have continued to operate, but office staff still working from home where possible



Pony Drifts have occurred this autumn (if fewer in number) under Covid-secure arrangements



Some concern over decline of important holly dominated woods (holms) and lack of regeneration

Small trial areas were fenced to exclude livestock and deer to test regeneration of holly without browsing pressure. The holly was coppiced or pollarded to encourage regrowth

A few years on it is possible to compare areas open to grazing animals with those areas where they are excluded, including some areas where livestock was excluded but deer could still have access.

Monitoring continues but indications are that temporary exclusion of browsing animals does allow regeneration of holly

Further study is needed to determine how long exclusion should take place before fences can be removed and the holly is sufficiently vigorous to withstand browsing pressure





Ash dieback, a fungal disease, is devastating ash trees across the country. Ash is very limited in the New Forest, but Forestry England have had extensive work programmes to clear diseased ash (especially where there is risk to people or property) on the chalk landscapes across Dorset, Hampshire and West Sussex

This has involved removal of thousands of roadside and pathside trees. Current costs exceed £500,000 and there is more work to do

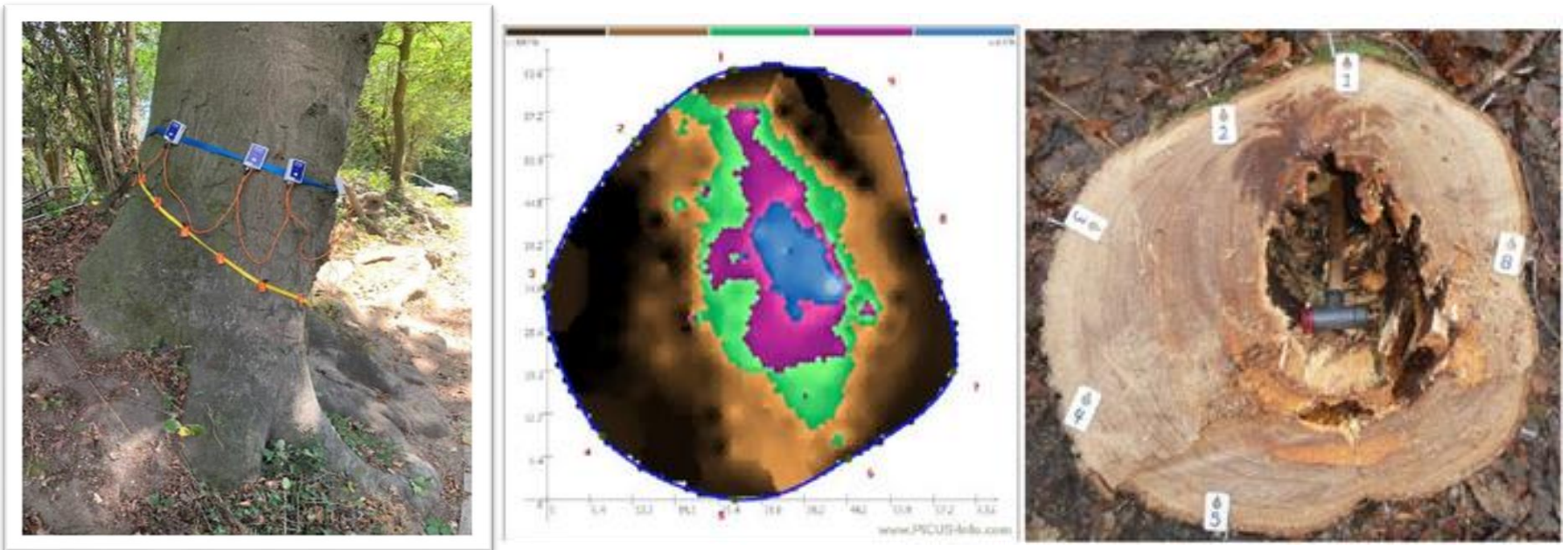
A recent Youtube video prepared by the Somerset Wildlife Trust on the impact of ash dieback on the Mendip Hills gives a good illustration of the scale of the problem: [Ash Dieback on Mendips](#)



Each year we inspect individual trees that occur within high risk zones of public use - edges of car parks, close to property, etc to look for signs of decay and potential risk of collapse or branch shedding during and after storms

Sometimes evidence of fungal decay is obvious, sometimes it is less obvious. Where signs of decay are less obvious we can use a sonic tomograph - a device that uses sound penetration to create an image of internal decay.

Our aim is to make trees safe with the minimum of intervention



# Suspension of Trail Hunting

Forestry England has suspended all trail hunting licences across England while a Police investigation into alleged evidence that hunts may have been acting illegally.

This evidence does not directly incriminate the New Forest Hunt, but the suspension applies to all trail hunt activity in England.

We will review our position in light of the outcome of the Police investigation. Timing is unknown.





# Verge Protection Work

There has been ongoing projects to protect verges on the Forest from vehicle trespass with the aim of protecting the designated habitats

A lot of work in talking with local residents and parish councils to find solutions which may involve ditching or dragon's teeth and generally there has been good progress - a recent example from Linford Bottom below



# Ridge & Furrow Restoration

We are restoring heathland in some parts of the Forest from areas planted with conifers in recent decades. These areas restore very quickly once the trees are removed as the seed bank of heather and gorse is still present and often have been growing anyway amongst the trees.

Once an area is cleared of trees, the area needs to be opened again to grazing animals. The original plough lines (ridge & furrow) and stumps often are a hinderance to safe management of livestock. We have been doing a programme of restoration where stumps are removed or sheared and the ground levelled.



# Christmas Tree Sales Open



Christmas Trees sale sites opened from last weekend using Covid secure processes

Cashless systems; space for social distancing

Demand is very strong already this year



New Forest site at New Park, the New Forest showground



We have seen a heavy crop of acorns this year

Consequently I have agreed to an extension of the pannage season beyond the initial 60 days set by the New Forest Act 1949

The pannage season will now extend until Monday 21 December

