



Verderers of the New Forest

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Hollands Wood and Roundhill Campsites Proposals

Statement on signing the "Appropriate Assessment".

The Verderers have today, alongside the Forestry Commission, signed the "appropriate assessment" under the EU Habitat Regulations in respect of the development proposals for Hollands Wood and Roundhill camp sites on the commonable lands of the New Forest.

This means that, within the very restricted scope of those regulations, the Forestry Commission's proposals must by law be deemed to have no likely adverse impact upon any of the protected species within the sites, and that, therefore, there is no adverse effect on the integrity in terms of the Habitat Regulations of the two sites.

However the Verderers continue to believe (and are so advised by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust), that the proposals will cause significant damage to the conservation value of the New Forest as a whole. They believe there is a real danger that the public will conclude, quite wrongly, that the Court supports the Commission's application or that it believes that the wildlife and habitats of the Forest will not be harmed. The Verderers therefore wish to make it clear that they have signed with great reluctance and only because the very narrow scope of the regulations prevents important Forest-wide wildlife and conservation considerations from being taken into account. In particular the Court has noted English Nature's view that: "There is a fundamental incompatibility in high concentrations of people, their equipment and vehicles in close proximity to veteran trees" (See SAC Plan 3.16 and 3.23), and that accordingly Hollands Wood should be closed within the next 15 to 16 years.

As there appears to be some misunderstanding on the matter, the Verderers emphasise that they have *already refused consent for the proposed development* under the New Forest Acts and their reasons for doing so are now on their website. That decision was made on the 21st January 2005 and the technical matters covered by today's signing do not alter it or the Verderers' continuing strong conviction that the proposals are damaging to the New Forest.

Verderers of the New Forest
6th June 2006

NOTES:

New Forest Campsite Re-development

In November 2004 the Forestry Commission announced its plans to substantially re-develop the two biggest and most popular campsites in the new Forest at Hollands Wood and Roundhill, near Brockenhurst.

At the same time they formally applied to the New Forest District Council for planning permission to undertake these works.

Verderers' Consent

As part of an entirely separate process the FC is also required to seek the consent of the Verderers as set out in the New Forest Acts. Having considered the matter, consent for the developments on both sites was refused on 21st January 2005 (copy of decision attached).

EU Law (the Habitat Regulations)

Since the planning application was made for works on two sites that are within heavily EU protected areas of conservation, a process was automatically triggered under the EU's Habitat Regulations. This process requires any authority that has a decision making role to play, such as the Verderers, to undertake what is known as an "Appropriate Assessment".

The purpose of the Assessment is to decide whether or not the proposed works that are to be carried out are likely to have an adverse effect on the EU protected species on the two sites.

This assessment also had to be carried out by the FC alongside the Verderers.

What is the process?

The very precise EU regulations that dominate how an Assessment is to be carried out required the Verderers and the FC to seek the advice of English Nature, who are the Government's own expert advisers on all conservation related issues.

EN specifically advised that the regulations, in these circumstances, did not allow them to look beyond the two campsites when ascertaining whether or not there would be any adverse effects caused by the proposed works, and that they could not therefore take into account any effects on the Forest as a whole.

What was the conclusion?

The Assessment process therefore focused entirely upon the likely effect that the building works themselves might have on the species within the immediate vicinity of the two campsites.

English Nature's expert opinion was that there would be no such likely adverse effects so long as various mitigating measures were put in place by the FC.

Summary

There is little doubt that, if the regulations had allowed the Verderers to take the likely effect of these development proposals on the whole of the New Forest into account, the conclusion of the Assessment would have been very different. Having listened very carefully to EN's expert opinion on this particular aspect, it is clear that they also share this view.

The Verderers have found this year long and narrow exercise to be very frustrating, especially as it has no bearing on their original decision to refuse consent. It was therefore with some reluctance that the Verderers have now signed the Appropriate Assessment.

In the meantime the Verderers' earlier and separate decision to refuse consent under the New Forest Acts still stands.

6th June 2006