

ADVISORY GROUP

THE VERDERERS' GRAZING SCHEME

Meeting Held at the Queen's House on 10 January 2013 at 1600hrs

MINUTES

Present	Graham Ferris (GF) Dominic May (OV) Phil Marshall (PM) Jenny Thomas (JT) Jane Smith (JS) Paula Freeland (PF) Adam Coutts (AC) Robert Stride (RC)	Chairman Commoners' Defence Association Official Verderer Head Warden, The National Trust, Mottisfont Abbey Natural England Forestry Commission New Forest National Park Authority Commoners' Defence Association Commoners' Defence Association/Young Commoners NT Commoners Verderers Grazing Scheme Manager	Chairman
	Rick Manley (RM) Colin Draper (CD)	Hants.& IoW Wildlife Trust – Head of Conservation	Minutes
Apologies	John Durnell (JD)		

1.	<p>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN/OPENING REMARKS</p> <p>Graham Ferris agreed to act as chairman in the absence of John Durnell. He welcomed Adam Coutts who has replaced Richard Stride as a CDA representative.</p>	
2.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>GF and DM are commoners and members of the Verderers' HLS Board AC, RS, and RM are commoners</p>	
3.	<p>MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>The minutes of the last meeting were approved.</p> <p>RM stated his concern over the decision to allocate Livestock Unit (LU) values of 0.8 LUs for registered pure bred New Forest ponies and 0.4 LUs for all other equines instead of the RPA value of 0.6 LUs for ponies. He felt that this could be challenged in court. CD informed the meeting that Naomi Oakley at Natural England has formally approved these arrangements which effectively provide a local 'native breed supplement' for pure bred ponies to encourage improvements in the breed. RM asked for his reservations to be minuted.</p> <p>Item 2.2.4. Capital works for concrete post removal at Dur Hill. CD informed members that work to remove the concrete posts was complete and new drift fencing, funded as a capital works project, was due to have started; this was confirmed by RS.</p> <p>Item 2.4. JT confirmed that the HLS could be affected by breaches of cross compliance by commoners.</p> <p>Item 4. Advice on whether the arrangements for the interim payment made to existing members who signed up for the Verderers' Grazing Scheme (VGS) are consistent with the 'early closure' rules for CSS Agreements, will be provided</p>	

	<p>separately.</p> <p>Item 5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JT confirmed that NE in principle supports the purchase of land by the VGS/HLS and its inclusion in the HLS area subject to acceptance and available budget. • Arrangements for the commons: discussed under Item 8 <p>Item 6.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GF informed the meeting that the working group which was established following the last meeting to consider and make recommendations on measures to manage stock numbers should that be required, has met twice. A report will be submitted shortly. • JT updated the meeting on the outcome of the survey of the Bramshaw Commons. • CD confirmed that chase up letters had been sent. • Item 7. GF informed the meeting that the 'Hot Branding' project run by Kit Thorne has been completed apart from analysis of cortisol samples which is in hand. CD was asked to check the arrangements for payment for the project. 	CD
4.	<p>HLS UPDATE</p> <p>DM informed the meeting that Wetland Restoration projects have been hampered by challenges over the proposed work at Latchmore as a result of which it has now been decided that most projects will require planning permission, putting additional pressure on FC staff. The threshold for engineering works will trigger the planning requirement. There is at best a narrow window for completion of these projects dictated by the weather, and the adverse conditions over the last 9 months have also contributed to a significant reduction in the programme of work completed in 2012/13. Flexible plans are now being made in an effort to ensure targets are met next year, including a review of the programme to identify less sensitive sites.</p> <p>The problem is compounded because the programme started slowly with underspends in 2010/11 and 2011/12. NE is allowing the underspend to be carried forward but it is unlikely that targets will be met next year, increasing the pressure to make up the shortfall in the remaining 6 years of the Scheme. The original plan was to complete the work over 8 years allowing 2 years for contingencies – that flexibility has now been exhausted.</p> <p>The future of the HLS will be reviewed jointly by the HLS Board and NE at the 5 year break point. Although failure to meet targets will pose some risk, delays due to factors outside the control of the Board will be taken into consideration together with the benefits of other elements of the scheme.</p> <p>NE has approved payment of the HR1 Cattle Grazing Supplement from the 1st of March, as the proportion of cattle turned out on the Forest has exceeded the threshold of 30% and the Verderers have agreed a target of 35% by the end of the scheme. That is important as it will compensate the loss of funding of around £80k for some inclosures which are being removed from the scheme because they will not meet the Indicators of Success (IOS) due to their percentage of non native trees. Because of the administrative burden on both NE and the HLS partners, it has also been agreed that NE will no longer provide funding for capital works, apart from the funding of around £160k which has already been approved for 2012/13; The net</p>	

	<p>balance of these arrangements is an additional annual sum of around £200k in future years.</p> <p>There are still some problems over archaeology, with disagreements between experts over the level of information provided for wetland restoration projects, but these are being addressed.</p>	
5.	<p>MINUTES OF THE VGS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER AND REPORT ON VGS</p> <p>A copy of the minutes of the VGS Management meeting held on 5 December had previously been distributed to members. OV explained that the rate of £100 per Livestock Unit (LU) was intended to reward commoners adequately for turning out stock, and to compensate any who might have felt disadvantaged if they had reduced numbers in response to the measures introduced under the old scheme.</p> <p>It had been agreed to defer a decision over the arrangements for the commons to this meeting, because it includes representatives from the NT, NE, the CDA and the commons. This is included at Item 8.</p> <p>There was a brief discussion over the administration of the grant to the CDA for b + e (car & trailer) driver licence training. It was agreed that the CDA would make arrangements for this.</p> <p>RM informed the meeting that the New Forest Trust would like to contribute towards the cost of reflective pony/cattle collars; he agreed to liaise with CD after the meeting.</p> <p>CD to provide CDA with details of the 'small grants scheme' and, if not too late, to include mention of this in the VGS notes in the CDA Annual Report.</p>	<p>GF</p> <p>CD</p>
6.	<p>POACHING BY CATTLE AT BROOK</p> <p>Members were briefed on the exchange of correspondence on this subject between OV and the CDA. Following an assessment by NE that there should be no increase in the level of poaching, the farmer involved had been asked to avoid further damage to the Forest outside his holding caused by his cattle being brought in daily to be fed. As an alternative to keeping his cattle in he was offered assistance to identify a suitable feeding area away from the farm, which he had reluctantly accepted. It was stressed that this did not affect his 'rights', but was necessary to comply with the terms of his VGS agreement if he wished to continue as a member.</p> <p>The CDA considered the OV's letter at their recent committee meeting and were waiting to see whether the use of the feeding area was proving successful, noting that it is likely that the cattle are continuing to return to the poached area expecting to be allowed in. JT, CD, and representatives from the FC are due to inspect the arrangements on 28 January and members will be informed of the outcome.</p> <p>Because the poaching is on the golf course which extends right up to the boundary of the holding, several members questioned whether or not the area is included in the HLS. This could not be categorically confirmed at the meeting; CD to check and report back. GF raised concerns that the golf course may be causing damage to the SSSI, despite a recent 'favourable' assessment by NE. A copy of the management plan for the golf course was provided for them with the recent letter from OV; CD to provide a copy for the farmer involved in this issue.</p> <p><i>Afternote. Apart from the greens and bunkers which are excluded, the golf course is</i></p>	<p>CD</p> <p>CD</p> <p>CD</p>

	<p><i>included in the HLS area.</i></p> <p>The CDA expressed concern over the implications of this case for other commoners and requested that a system be established to address similar situations in future.</p>	
7.	<p>NATIONAL TRUST HLS UPDATE</p> <p>The NT is continuing with a programme of birch and scotch pine clearance on the commons, which is well on course. Work also continues on the restoration of the 150 hectares at Foxbury with its mixture of heath and ancient and ornamental woodland.</p> <p>A small grants scheme is available to assist commoners, in particular to address poaching and compaction on the commons caused by their stock. Agreements have been reached with some commoners to keep their cattle in for the winter months.</p> <p>The national FC policy on felling licences is causing some difficulties and this will be raised at a policy meeting on heathland management in London shortly, where it is hoped that things will become clearer.</p> <p>PM confirmed that the NT is also in receipt of the HR1 supplement on the commons.</p>	
8.	<p>VGS PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COMMONS</p> <p>PM outlined proposals for the VGS arrangements on the commons. Subject to confirmation of affordability, he proposed a standard rate of £80 per LU across all the NT commons; this is a comparable level to the rate on the Forest, allowing for the difference in Marking Fees. Earlier indications that payments would not be made for grazing on the Bramshaw commons were no longer applicable as the condition of the commons has been reviewed and they have now been assessed as 'favourable'. As a condition of membership, he proposed that commoners with cattle on the Bramshaw commons should be required to keep them in for 3 months during the winter in future years.</p> <p>JT explained the background to the review which reversed an earlier unfavourable assessment. Although quite heavily grazed, the commons were found to be 'species rich' with some rare species thriving in places.</p> <p>PM questioned whether the number of animals which are recorded on the marking fee register on some of the commons may, in reality, be on the Forest, distorting the cost to the NT HLS. The apparent high stocking density is inconsistent with the condition of the Western commons which are undergrazed. By comparison, there seem to be more ponies on the Bramshaw commons than there should be, making it seem likely that they are coming on to the commons from the Forest. It is possible that they are being encouraged by the food put out for cattle and numbers may reduce if cattle are fed on their owners' holdings. Members were assured that the Agisters will continue to do their best to ensure that commoners pay the appropriate rate.</p> <p>Subject to further consideration later in the year of the requirement for cattle to be kept off the Bramshaw commons for 3 months in the winter, the Advisory Group supported the proposals which will now be referred back to the VGS Management Committee for a decision. PM was requested to confirm availability of the necessary funding before the VGS Management Committee meeting on 23 January, so that a decision can be made.</p>	PM
9.	<p>AOB</p>	

	There was no other business.	
10.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING No date was set for the next meeting.	

C F R DRAPER
VGS Manager

Distribution:

All members
All Verderers