

## ADVISORY GROUP

### THE VERDERERS' GRAZING SCHEME

**Meeting Held at the Queen's House on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2014 at 4pm**

#### MINUTES

Present	John Durnell (JD) Graham Ferris (GF) Dylan Everett (DE) James Taylor (JaT) Jenny Thomas (JT) Jane Smith (JS) Paul Walton (PW)  Adam Coutts (AC) Robert Stride (RC)  Rick Manley (RM) Leanne Sargeant (LS)	Hants.& IoW Wildlife Trust – Head of Conservation Chairman Commoners' Defence Association Countryside Manager, National Trust Rural Surveyor, National Trust Natural England Forestry Commission New Forest National Park Authority - Head of Environment Commoners' Defence Association Commoners' Defence Association/Young Commoners NT Commoners Verderers Grazing Scheme Administrator	Chairman
Absent	Dominic May (OV)	Official Verderer	

1.	<p><b>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN</b></p> <p>John Durnell agreed to act as chairman and proposed they alternate it at different meetings with himself and Graham Ferris, unless anyone else wants to be chair.</p>	
2.	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b></p> <p>GF is a commoner and member of the Verderers' HLS Board.                  AC, RS, and RM are commoners and beneficiaries of the Verderers Grazing Scheme.</p>	
3.	<p><b>MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING</b></p> <p>The minutes of the last meeting were approved.                  Matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Item 3. Kit Thorne has been paid for the hot branding project.</li> <li>• Item 5. CDA are carrying out the trailer training of young commoners now. The CDA have informed commoners of the existence of the VGS small grant scheme and the National Trust small grant scheme.</li> <li>• Item 6. Poaching by cattle at Brook. This was highlighted by the RPA inspector, who asked for a Natural England report. Natural England found the poaching not to be significant damage in the scope of the Forest.</li> <li>• Item 8. VGS payments on the commons. Phil Marshall's proposal to increase LU to £80 with extra National Trust Higher Level Stewardship was not carried out.</li> </ul>	
4.	<p><b>HLS UPDATE</b></p> <p>The Official Verderer did not attend the meeting, so there was no report.</p>	



	<p>demonstrating any interest in their small grant scheme, so that they can invite applications ready for the start of the scheme. They have received one letter of interest so far.</p>	
6.	<p><b>RPA REPORT FROM CROSS COMPLIANCE INSPECTION</b></p> <p>The RPA inspection report was issued at the end of April. It stated that the Verderers were in breach of their agreement at Burley Golf Course for three reasons:  use of an unauthorised chemical on the greens;  the storage of unauthorised chemicals;  and the fact that the area is part of the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) and therefore any use of chemicals has to be analysed in our NVZ calculations.</p> <p>The Verderers appealed these breaches on the grounds that the golf club is outside of their control and that the storage of the chemicals was on private ground. The RPA have denied our appeal. We are issued with a 5% fine this year.</p> <p>JD said there are four stages of appeal and we have just completed stage one, so we can take it further. Advisory group thinks we should continue with the appeal.</p> <p>The 5% fine would equate to roughly £100,000. The question was raised as to whether we can pass this on to the golf club.</p> <p>What impact will this fine have on the HLS spend? This needs to be raised with the HLS Board.</p> <p>A risk register could help with clarifying what the issues are. For example the cross compliance risk, over grazing, commoners pulling out of the scheme. This could be something the Advisory group helps to keep up to date, pulling in the wide experience at the table.</p> <p>The key point from the RPA inspection is that nearly all the FC licences pre-date the HLS, and therefore do not include the HLS and cross compliance.</p> <p>It was raised that the HLS needs commoners' animals to deliver the HLS. There needs to be a balance between terms and restrictions put on commoners and the rewards they are given. Bearing in mind that we want commoners to actively engage with us to ensure we do meet our cross compliance inspections. Especially with regards poaching. Poaching in Brook was on the report from the RPA, but was not deemed to be a breach this time, but it could come up again at a future inspection. The Advisory Group would like to help with any future changes to the rules of the VGS, so that it can be a sounding board as to the implications of rule changes.</p> <p>RM stated that the old CSS used to pay commoners at £100/LU in the last year of the scheme.  <i>Afternote: Actually the last year of the CSS in 2011 paid £70 per cow or pony.</i>  The first year of the VGS in 2012 paid £100 per LU for forest animals. A fixed pot means that in 2013 the payment dropped to £95 per LU due to more animals being entered into the scheme.</p> <p>Commoners may feel that they are not getting a fair deal, more needs to be made of the changing face of agricultural grant schemes and the emphasis on wildlife and the environment within these schemes.</p>	<p>LS</p> <p>LS</p> <p>JS</p>

## 7. NATIONAL TRUST HLS UPDATE

The outstanding contributions owing by the National Trust to the Verderers for their contribution to the VGS is now paid as they made two payments in 2013 to catch up. The National Trust has set up agreements with commoners on the northern commons for those who would not enter the VGS and which require specific management practices to reduce the effect of heavy grazing. These agreements are only for cattle and the VGS remains the preferred option of commoner grant agreement.

The Grazing Scheme payments have focussed on 3 commoners to get them into the National Trust's scheme to help deal with over grazing. The agreement was to keep the cattle in from 9/10/13 to 9/4/14. An example of where the agreements sought benefit to the common, was a commoner who could not feed on his holding so would not enter the VGS, an agreement was made with the National Trust, Verderers and Natural England to provide temporary supplementary feeding areas known to benefit populations of Small Fleabane, a nationally rare plant with heavier grazing requirements. This feeding was not supported by financial contributions from either the National Trust or through the VGS.

The report that Natural England did on grazing pressures, shows that western commons were satisfactory. In the western commons the National Trust are trying to get more active commoners to enter the VGS scheme.

Bramshaw common has a high cover of trees. 2ha Half moon common of clearance has been undertaken last year, plus another 5ha at Duckhill. This will be followed up with bracken management. Another 4 ha of tree clearance is planned at Blackhill and Half moon common commencing in 2014/5. Gorse stands are very mature in many places, a management cycle has been implemented. Furzeley common is a key area for gorse management. Approximately 10% was done in 2013 and another 15% is planned this year.

The National Trust has paid £1,700 for the materials for the rebuild Turfhill pound, and the Agsiters have built it.

The CDA welcomes the open forest management that the National Trust is now undertaking.

This year will see focus on single tree removals from open areas, to increase the openness. Some more work will also take place at Blackhill.

AC offered to help with gorse burning and felt that better use of local knowledge could be beneficial in the commons.

The VGS figures for the Advisory group need to show the totals for each aspect of the scheme against the figures that have had marking fees paid, so it includes cattle percentages.

The National Trust's HLS states specifically only £28/ha for grazing scheme contribution payable on National Trust HLS agreement areas. This is paid to the Verderers to contribute to the VGS.

The Verderers' HLS does not have a set rate that should be paid for grazing, but this rate is agreed by the VGS Management Committee.

	<p>The question was raised as to whether the Common rates and the Forest rates would align in future years.  <i>Afternote: This is very unlikely due to the much higher grazing density on the Northern Commons.</i></p>	
8.	<p><b>ROLE OF ADVISORY GROUP IN THE FUTURE</b></p> <p>JD was disappointed that it had been nearly 18 months since the last meeting. It was felt that we should set out distinct roles for example: the risk register; VGS objectives (which have not been reviewed since it started); review annual reports; review any proposed changes to the scheme rules or any triggers (eg change in % of commoners in scheme); identify other issues that may be arising under the HLS, that other partners may have heard about.</p> <p>Do the Verderers want an Advisory Group? What do they see as their role?</p> <p>The Advisory group needs to have value so that information can flow in both directions and the group can have benefits to the Verderers and the VGS.</p> <p>The HLS is public money and we need to ensure we are transparent in its spending and accountable. The Advisory Group could be used to balance the views of the Verderers Management Committee, which is predominantly made up of beneficiaries of the VGS.</p> <p>It was suggested that we could have an Advisory Group meeting twice a year, with some rolling items on the agenda (as per the above) and additional items could be added from both directions; the VGS Committee and members of the Advisory Group.</p> <p>JD to write to OV to suggest the proposed role.</p>	JD
9.	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>There was no other business.</p>	
10.	<p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b></p> <p>Proposed to have a meeting at the end of October/early November to finalise figures for the payment rates.</p>	

Miss L Sargeant  
VGS Administrator

Distribution:

All members  
All Verderers