



*Verderers of the New Forest
Verderers' Grazing Scheme
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All Verderers
Advisory Group Members

16 December 2013

**MINUTES OF THE VERDERERS' GRAZING SCHEME MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2013**

Present:

Mr D May (OV)	- Official Verderer
Mr R Deakin (RD)	- Elected Verderer
Mr A Gerrelli (AG)	- Elected Verderer
Mrs D Westerhoff (DW)	- Natural England Appointed Verderer
Mr H Mills (HM)	- Defra Appointed Verderer
Mr C Draper (CD)	- VGS Manager (taking minutes)

Item	Item	Action
1. Apologies	<p>There were no apologies for absence.</p> <p>OV welcomed DW and HM to their first meeting of the VGS Management Committee and described the purpose of the Committee which is to decide on how the VGS money should be spent, and to regulate that expenditure.</p> <p>It was originally agreed that 50% of the HLS money should be managed under the VGS; that includes a range of expenditure on projects and issues including payments for animals turned out on the Forest based on their Livestock Unit (LU) values. Because of the commitment to spend a minimum of £750k per year on Wetland Restoration projects it has not been possible to maintain the 50% share, apart from the first year when the VGS paid the main costs of the Beaulieu Road project. The Scheme now benefits from the additional payment of HR1 Cattle Grazing Supplement and in light of this the HLS Board has agreed to forego 'capital works claims' which are an administrative burden; there have also been adjustments to the Scheme area with some thrown open inclosures, where it would not be possible to meet Scheme objectives for reducing non native tree species during the period of the Agreement, now excluded from the Scheme. This decision may be reviewed for inclosures which are included in wetland restoration projects, as exclusion would preclude work taking place in the inclosures threatening the viability of wetland restorations upstream and downstream.</p>	

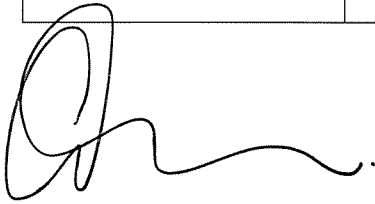
2. Declarations of interest	<p>OV, RD and AG declared their membership of the VGS. RD is a member of the New Forest Livestock Society. OV, RD, & AG are members of the New Forest Pony Breeders and Cattle Society.</p> <p>HM is taking part in the 'better boundaries' scheme. He declared an interest in Item 6 as Mr M Bull is a tenant.</p> <p>All members declared an interest in Item 6 as 2 Agisters are included in the list to be considered.</p>	
3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising	The minutes of the last meeting were approved.	
4. Presentment by Susan Mitchell at the Verderers' Court in October, on the decision to withhold grazing payments for geldings (referred to the VGS Management Committee by the Court)	<p>OV explained the background to the decision to exclude geldings from the VGS; the number of geldings has increased and, although there is no immediate concern over grazing pressure, higher stock numbers could be a problem in the future. Geldings make no contribution to the New Forest breed and interfere with the stallions. It was noted that consideration may be given in future to a removal programme for geldings, similar to the Pony Welfare Programme. There was sympathy for the arguments put forward by Susan Mitchell but the Committee did not think that it was practical to introduce an added layer of complication to administer payments to geldings only until a certain age. On balance it was therefore agreed that the original decision should stand. OV will respond to Susan Mitchell's Presentment at the January Court.</p>	OV
5. Maintenance of 'Sightline' Fencing (referred to the VGS Management Committee by the Court)	<p>'Sightline' fencing exists at 14 places around the Forest, such as immediately adjacent to railway bridges and in other blind spots where animals could otherwise step into the road in front of oncoming traffic without warning. The Forestry Commission has indicated that these will not be maintained or replaced. It was agreed that the VGS would finance this work with a budget of up to £10,000 with the fencing rebuilt using hardwood to provide a legacy. CD should survey each section and seek prices, and report back to OV for funding approval.</p>	CD
6. VGS - review of significant increases in stock numbers	<p>The VGS rules require members not to abuse or circumvent the rules or spirit of the Scheme and the committee was keen to ensure that members had not taken undue advantage by turning out additional animals simply in order to receive higher grazing payments. The committee examined a list of commoners who have turned out more than 20 additional animals since the introduction of the VGS. CD was asked to investigate the ownership of the animals on 13 applications, and check with the Agisters to confirm completion of the qualifying period on the Forest, and report back to OV.</p>	CD
7. VGS payment rate/LU	The sum of money allocated to grazing payments was set last year at £462,000. It was agreed at the time that this will be fixed for future	

	years and that the rate paid per Livestock Unit (LU) will be allowed to fluctuate annually, depending on the number of LUs claimed by members. The number of LUs has risen this year from 4,620 to 5,005; it was confirmed that the rate/LU for 2013/14 is therefore £92.30.	
8. Pound Rebuild Programme 2014	<p>The committee expressed satisfaction with the programme of 4 pounds built this year. These include Bratley Pound, work on which was carried forward from last year: a capital works bid was submitted for materials but work could not be completed in time as the timber originally provided was sub standard; the claim has been carried forward for consideration by Natural England in 2014.</p> <p>The other 3 pounds are at Bentleys, Amberwood, and Hurst Hill. Invoices from the contractor, Danny Bessant, for labour remain outstanding and CD was asked to continue to chase these up. The standard of workmanship by Danny Bessant was complimented and it was agreed that he should be invited to quote for the 2014 programme for new pounds at Puckpits, Backley, and Markway. Crabhat pound will also be rebuilt if this can be achieved within the annual £12,000 budget.</p>	CD CD
9. Small Grants Scheme New Applications:	CD to inform applicants of the decision on applications as follows:	CD
• Mr & Mrs B Paxton	A grant of £800.00 was approved for provision of mains water on 'back-up' grazing.	
• Tom & Ryan House	A grant of £1,000.00 was approved for hurdles for a mobile pound/cattle handling system.	
• Mr M G & Mrs A J Ralphs	A grant of £1,000.00 was approved for hurdles and sheeted gates for cattle management.	
• Mrs M (Peggy) Tillyer	A grant of £800.00 was approved for provision of mains water on 'back-up' grazing	
Review 2 Decisions taken at the last meeting		
• Mrs A Theron	A decision on an application by Mrs Theron for groundworks to repair damage caused by a collapsed drain under her back up land, was deferred at the last meeting, for more information. The Verderers acknowledged the use of the land as back up grazing, which had been questioned, but felt unable to support the application because there is sufficient land on the holding which is not affected	

	by the problem to support her current level of commoning.	
• Mr E R Hunt	The Committee considered an Appeal by Mr Hunt against the decision taken at the last meeting to refuse a grant, and upheld their earlier decision.	
10. Thank you letter from the New Forest Pony Enthusiasts' Club	A letter from the New Forest Pony Enthusiasts' Club thanking the VGS for their grant for 2013 was noted.	
11. Consideration of a 'Jack Donkey' scheme	<p>Consideration was given to a request by the CDA to investigate the possible introduction of a 'Jack Donkey Scheme', similar to the Stallion Scheme, to select and limit the number of Jack Donkeys on the Forest, and the time they are allowed out. It was noted that the the use of the word horse in the Verderers' byelaws, includes donkey, so the byelaw governing the turning out of male horses applies equally to Jack Donkeys, although this has never been invoked. There are probably about 12 Jack Donkeys on the Forest and there have been relatively few problems. A small number of mules are born from time to time and some donkey foals are born late. The issue has largely arisen because some owners agreed to limit the time their Jack Donkeys spent on the Forest but any benefits of this were negated by the behaviour of the remaining Jacks. It was agreed that the owners should be asked for their views on a grant to cover the cost of keeping their Jack Donkeys in. If acceptable, it was agreed that the committee would consider providing financial help to administer a Jack Donkey Scheme.</p>	
12. Fencing upgrade on A31	<p>The standard of fencing on the A31 has led to a number of incidents where stock has got onto the carriageway and there is potential for a serious incident. In places, for example adjacent to lay-bys, the fencing design has been upgraded from post and wire to post and rail which is much more robust, but the rest of the fence will be replaced over time by post and wire. OV has been in discussion with the Highways Agency over the possibility of the VGS paying the cost of rails to be fitted when the post and wire is being replaced. Unfortunately there are administrative difficulties in transferring money between budgets which have not yet been overcome, especially as the work is subcontracted. It was suggested that if this could be achieved it would serve as a long term legacy project with benefit for many years. AG and RD recorded their opposition to this use of VGS money, as responsibility for the standard of fencing rests with the Highways Agency who should ensure that it is adequate. HM felt that this is a safety issue, and should be pursued. DW agreed. It was agreed that OV would continue to hold discussions with the Highways Agency and EM Highways Services Ltd (formerly</p>	OV

	Enterprise Mouchel) over a possible VGS grant.	
13. Fencing – Long Meadow	The VGS currently has a 10 year lease from the Forestry Commission, running up to 30 June 2020, on 15 acres divided into 2 fields at Long Meadow in New Park. The fields were originally leased to support the Bloodline Scheme; they are also used for grazing for animals illegally dumped on the Forest, pending investigation and disposal. In recognition of this, the lease is provided at a discounted rate as the Forestry Commission has responsibility for dumped animals and would otherwise be responsible for funding their keep. There are currently no plans for the future use of Long Meadow but options include use for the Futurity Scheme and/or a second Bloodline Scheme. It was agreed that the matter should be referred to the Staff Committee for an assessment of what Long Meadow will be used for over the next 6 years. If there is no plan for use, the Verderers could let the lease go. If, however, constructive use is made of the fields, they must be fenced, so CD should obtain a formal quote for the work.	CD
14. Drift Fencing programme 2014 - Highland Water (Mogshade to the trig point South of Stonnard Wood)	The Forestry Commission keeper for that area has expressed concern about the condition of the fence at Highland Water between Mogshade and the trig point South of Stonnard Wood, a distance of just under 2,400 metres. The fence has a number of broken posts, including several strainers, and the wire is loose in places posing a hazard to deer and commoning stock. A quote for £1,100.00 to bring the fence up to FC standard was accepted. CD to liaise with the contractor.	CD
15. Old Pound Trailer	A quote to trade in the old pound trailer for a new trailer was accepted. CD to action.	CD
16. Breach of byelaws – Mr J Dunning; allowing bull calves over 3 months old to run on the forest.	It was agreed that no action should be taken this time with regard to an incident where 2 bull calves belonging to Mr J Dunning were found on Penn Common. Mr Dunning will be reminded of his responsibility to keep entire bull calves over the age of 3 months, off the Forest/Common.	CD
17. Land Advice Service – Priorities for work 2014	The Committee approved a proposal by the LAS to include support for commoners with IT and online access to the RPA including Single Farm Payment applications and other returns. CD to inform Julie Stubbs.	CD
18. Any Other Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A grant of £200.00 was approved towards the cost of leaflets for the ‘Pony – Look but don’t touch’ campaign. The Committee recommended that the campaign should continue to use the 	CD

	<p>original Thelwell cartoon & original text on the leaflets and posters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was agreed that RD should investigate the cost of re-painting the mobile crush which is showing signs of wear. As this is maintenance, the cost cannot come out of the VGS, and so should be funded from Verderers' funds. • The committee noted the importance of the DEFRA consultation on TB measures which could have serious implications for the Forest; HM and AG are responding on behalf of the Verderers. • AG expressed concern about proposals by the New Forest National Park Authority to remove the signs on the entrance to the Forest warning drivers about animals on the unfenced Forest roads. OV has already raised this with the Chief Executive. • Building on the success of the 10 radios already provided for the Agisters for use on the Forest, it was agreed that a further 7 radios should be purchased: a third radio for each of the Agisters so that one can be left with a helper at the pound when they are rounding up stock; and 2 provided on permanent loan to the Forestry Commission Rangers so that they can communicate with the Agisters when assisting at the drifts. The committee also expressed their thanks for the radio voice procedure training provided for the Agisters by the Army from Solent Station at Marchwood. 	<p>RD</p> <p>HM/AG</p> <p>CD</p>
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C F R DRAPER
VGS Manager

Copy to:

VGS Management Committee
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