



Verderers of the New Forest

Verderers' Grazing Scheme

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All Verderers

Advisory Group Members

19 November 2012

MINUTES OF THE VERDERERS' GRAZING SCHEME MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2012

Present:

Mr D May	- Official Verderer
Mr A Pasmore	- Elected Verderer
Mr R Deakin	- Elected Verderer
Mr A Gerrelli	- Elected Verderer
Mrs P Thorne	- Defra Appointed Verderer
Mr C Draper	- VGS Manager

Serial	Item	Action
1	Apologies. All members present	
2	Declarations of Interest. All members declared their membership of the VGS. RD is a member of the Livestock Society. RD & AG are members of the Stallion Scheme. OV stated that he had been advised by his accountant to take VGS payments annually, in order to avoid his agricultural trading showing an artificial loss.	
3	Approve, subject to any necessary amendment the Minutes of the last VGS Management Committee Meeting held on 15 May 2012. The Minutes of the last meeting were approved.	
4	To consider the rate of payment per LU for the VGS. Options for the payment rate per LU for the VGS this year were discussed. It was suggested that a higher, rather than lower, rate of payment would go some way towards compensating any commoners who may feel that they were disadvantaged if they had reduced their stock numbers under the terms of the CSS. Increased stock numbers recorded on the Marking Fee Register and the risk of further increases if payments are set at too high a level were considered, but on balance it was felt that the current stock numbers are acceptable and that any difference in the rate would have a negligible impact; noting that the payment itself is the incentive. In the meantime, the Advisory Group has established a working group to make recommendations for reducing the number of animals on the Forest, should that be necessary in the future. It was acknowledged that it is impossible to predict how animal numbers will fluctuate, but measures such as the stallion scheme and the Welfare Programme are already contributing towards controlling the number of ponies.	

	<p>This higher payment will also cushion the impact of future marking fee increases.</p> <p>In light of the above, it was agreed that the Forest rate for stock depastured on the Crown lands would be set at £100/LU, which would give the following values:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Cattle</td> <td>£100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Registered pure bred New Forest Ponies</td> <td>£80</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All other equines</td> <td>£40</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pigs</td> <td>£30</td> </tr> </table>	Cattle	£100	Registered pure bred New Forest Ponies	£80	All other equines	£40	Pigs	£30	CD
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5	<p>To consider VGS arrangements for the adjacent commons. OV reminded the meeting that, unlike arrangements for the previous Countryside Stewardship Scheme, Natural England has made it very clear that Verderers' HLS funds may only be used to support activity on the scheme area, i.e. Crown lands. This precludes any Verderers' HLS funding for grazing on the commons.</p> <p>Surprise was expressed that Natural England has reassessed the Northern Commons as 'favourable' after originally assessing them as 'overgrazed'. The latter was felt to be a more accurate assessment, regardless of the presence of several rare species of plants which thrive on poached ground. In comparison, Hale Common and the Western Commons are in much better condition.</p> <p>Accordingly, the proposal by the National Trust for a standard rate of payment for all commons was felt to be inappropriate and it was considered that a local rate should be set to reflect the higher stocking density on the Northern Commons and the undergrazing on the western commons.</p> <p>It was agreed that the arrangements for the adjacent commons should be referred to the Advisory Group for their recommendations, particularly as there are representatives of the National Trust, Natural England and the Northern Commons on this body.</p>	CD								
6	<p>To consider a bid from the New Forest Trust for an annual grant of £6,500 per year over the life of the HLS, towards the maintenance costs of Beaulieu Road. The bid was approved .</p>	CD								
7	<p>To consider a bid for funding for 'Trailer Training/Testing' for 5 young commoners per year over the life of the HLS at an annual cost of up to £3,500. The B + E (car and trailer) test was introduced on 1 January 1997; all new drivers after that date must pass this test if they wish to tow a trailer; it is also a legal requirement that candidates must complete a formal training programme. The cost of the test is £115.00 while the cost of training varies depending on the experience of the candidate and ranges from £400 - £760.</p> <p>Annual funding of £3,500 was approved to pay for training only. The cost of the Test should not be paid for out of this funding. It is hoped that this full £3,500 funding will allow at least 6 people to receive training per year.</p>	CD								
8	<p>To consider providing funding for cattle collars, subject to satisfactory completion of the trial which is being conducted at present. Funding for 1,000 cattle collars at £12 each was approved in principle, subject to success of the trial.</p>	CD								
9	<p>To consider in principle, funding for the New Forest Pony Enthusiasts Group. This item was deferred pending a detailed application. Members asked for more information about the Group, including: aims; committee; and events, plus confirmation that activities are/will be coordinated with those of the Pony Publicity</p>	CD								

	Group.	
10	<p>To consider applications for grants under the Small Grants Scheme.</p> <p>1. A grant of £2,000 to Chris Smith for cattle handling facilities on his back-up land at Netley Marsh was approved.</p> <p>2. A grant to Keith Tillman for a new roof for his barn could not be supported as his stock are turned out on the Western commons which is out of the Verderers' HLS area. It is recommended that he should approach the National Trust for a grant under their HLS agreement.</p> <p>3. A decision on two outline bids for approval in principle was deferred, pending detailed applications.</p> <p>4. The VGS Manager was asked to include information on the Small Grants Scheme in the next newsletter.</p>	<p>CD</p> <p>CD</p> <p>CD</p>
11	<p>To consider priorities for work by the LAS. (The contribution towards the cost of the LAS of £35,000 per year for four years starting in 2011, payable in arrears the following year, was approved out of committee in December 2010)</p> <p>The LAS work programme for the remainder of the grant period was noted. Members asked for greater emphasis to be given to farm visits and provision of advice to commoners. The VGS Manager was asked to include information on the LAS in Newsletters and to encourage take up of their service by commoners.</p>	CD
12	<p>To consider what action to take over a breach of Scheme rules (farming standards) by Mr Colin Shutler. Mr Shutler was convicted at Southampton Magistrates' Court on 20 September 2012 of a number of offences relating to his farming business. The offences on which he was convicted constitute a breach of VGS rules. It was therefore decided that he should not be paid a subsidy from the VGS for 2012/13 and that future payments should be subject to review next year.</p>	CD
13.	<p>To consider what action to take over a complaint about damage caused by poaching to the ground at the rear of Lush's Farm at Brook. There have been several complaints from members of the golf course at Brook over damage to the first fairway caused by cattle from Lush's Farm. The concerns were acknowledged, but it was recognised that some poaching is inevitable following extended wet weather where cattle regularly transit wet ground. Any damage has to be assessed in relation to the benefit to the environment from cattle grazing on the Forest. The Forestry Commission Area Land Agent is investigating the use of heather bales and it was hoped that these may help to improve the situation.</p> <p>It was agreed that the VGS Manager should liaise with Jenny Thomas of Natural England to conduct a formal assessment. The VGS Manager was also asked to obtain a copy of the baseline assessment for the area, carried out by the LAS earlier this year, as that may provide evidence of the condition in the summer.</p>	CD
14	<p>To consider purchase of hi-visibility waistcoats to be issued to people assisting at drifts. Approval was given for expenditure of up to £500 on high visibility waistcoats, and a further £500 on drift signs.</p>	CD
15	<p>To consider proposal for a small pound at Bolderwood Hollies. The VGS Manager was asked to discuss the proposal with the Forestry Commission and</p>	CD

	report back on its view.	
16	<p>AOB.</p> <p>FC Bracken Cutting. Concern was expressed that the FC bracken cutters funded by the HLS Scheme are underused and could be used outside the Forest. OV noted that the FC is mindful of the need to address the bracken problem on the Forest and he is confident that the equipment will be used as fully as possible. OV is keen to promote the traditional practice of harvesting bracken by commoners. This might be something that could be supported financially by the VGS subject to further consideration. The VGS Manager was asked to obtain details of the number and names of commoners who obtained licences to cut bracken this year, and the location and size of the area harvested, as well as details of any additional areas which might be suitable. The FC will issue free licences to any commoners prepared to harvest bracken on the Forest and this will be advertised in Verderers' Newsletters.</p>	CD
17	Date of Next meeting. No date was set for the next meeting.	

C F R DRAPER
VGS Manager