

MINUTES of the Court of Verderers held on Wednesday 18th June 2008 at 9.30 a.m. in the Verderers' Hall & Library, The Queen's House, Lyndhurst.

PRESENT:	Mr O Crosthwaite Eyre	Official Verderer
	Mr J Adams	Elected Verderer & Chairman of the Staff Committee
	Mr A Gerrelli	Elected Verderer
	Mrs D Halford	National Park Authority Appointed Verderer
	Miss D Macnair	Elected Verderer
	Mr A H Pasmore	Elected Verderer
	Mrs P Thorne	DEFRA Appointed Verderer
IN ATTENDANCE:	Miss S Westwood	Clerk to the Verderers
	Mr J R Gerrelli	Head Agister
APOLOGIES:	Mr P Frost	Natural England Appointed Verderer
	Mr J F Kitcher	Elected Verderer
	The Hon R Montagu	Forestry Commission Appointed Verderer

IN COMMITTEE in the Library

The Head Agister attended the meeting for the first three items.

2008/3788 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING RESUME

The Minutes of the Court held on Wednesday, 21st May 2008 were approved.

2008/3789 CONDITION OF STOCK & THE WELFARE TOUR RESUME

The Head Agister said that conditions have improved a great deal in the past month. There is a lot of food on the Forest now and the difference in the condition of stock is plain to see. The ponies generally look good although a few have still to lose their winter coats. Some have taken a little longer than usual to pick up.

Cattle also look well and with only a couple of exceptions, all the animals marked were in very good condition. They are going out in good heart.

Any animals that are not "up to scratch" will of course be removed.

The Chairman of the Staff Committee concurred with the Head Agister's report on the condition of stock.

The Head Agister left the meeting

2008/3790 STRANGLES DISCHARGE

The Chairman of the Staff Committee reported that there are one or two cases of strangles in the Moyles Court, Ibsley and Gorley areas, plus one or two at Ogdens. Most ponies recover within one or two days although one or two were rather worse and were removed from the Forest. It is mainly foals that are affected.

Mr R Ellis MRCVS, the Verderers' veterinary surgeon, contacted the people undertaking research into strangles but it appears they are not interested in the Forest.

Mr Gerrelli said he had also spoken to Mr Ellis whose advice is that strangles is something that the Forest will have to live with. It seems to be a little like human flu. Some ponies suffer more than others if they get the illness. Some animals don't get it at all.

The Court felt that as the situation has not developed over the past months, strangles could be discharged from the Agenda. If there are any further developments it will of course be resumed.

2008/3791 ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DECISIONS RESUME

The announcements and decisions were approved.

2008/3792 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST RESUME

The Elected Verderers, Mrs Halford and Mrs Thorne all declared an interest in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Mr Gerrelli declared an interest in any items concerning Campsites and the Official Verderer declared an interest in any matters concerning golf clubs.

Mrs Halford declared an interest in matters concerning Burley in her capacity as a Burley Parish Councillor.

2008/3793 FINANCIAL STATEMENT RESUME

The Financial Statement for May was approved.

2008/3794 REPORT ON MARKING FEES RECEIVED AS AT END OF MAY 2008 RESUME

Ponies	4360	Pigs	16
Cattle	2187	Sheep	62
Donkeys	121		
SUB TOTAL	6668	TOTAL ALL ANIMALS	6746

2008/3795 ANIMALS REMOVED IN MAY 2008 RESUME

	POOR	SICK OR INJURED	WANTED BY OWNER	OTHER	TOTALS
Mares with Foals	15	4	4		23
Mares with Yearlings					0
Mares	7	2	1		10
Fillies		3	1	1	5
Colts	1				1
Geldings		1	1		2
Stallions					0
Mule					0
Cattle		1			1
Calves					0
Donkeys with Foal/Yrlg					0
Donkeys		1			1
Pigs					0

Piglets					0
Sheep					0
Total	23	12	7	1	43
Total year to date	440	31	89	56	616

Two year old colts

Summary by Species

Ponies	41
Mules	0
Cattle	1
Donkeys	1
Pigs	0
Sheep	0
Total	43

2008/3796 BYELAW ENFORCEMENT

RESUME

Mr Barnes has appealed.

A meeting has been arranged with one of the families who are declining to pay the Forest rate of marking fee for animals running on the Forest.

As respects the costs awarded against Mr A R Cooper by the Magistrates' Court, now that his appeal has failed, those costs are due immediately. The costs awarded to the Verderers by the Crown Court in respect of Mr Cooper's failed appeal, are currently being taxed – a process which may take upto three months.

OPEN COURT – 10.00 a.m. in the Verderers' Hall

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Will Parke, Area Land Agent (New Forest) - retiring
 Mr Mike Seddon, Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest
 Mr Mark Street, newly appointed Area Land Agent (New Forest)

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DECISIONS BY THE OFFICIAL VERDERER

2008/3797 LORD MANNERS

We were greatly saddened to hear of the death of Lord Manners on 28th May, who was the Official Verderer from 1983 until 1993, and on behalf of the Court I would like to offer our condolences to his family.

Lord Manners provided the Court with a decade of much needed steady leadership during a difficult period, including the troubled times created by the proposed Lyndhurst Bypass Bill in 1988, during which he showed his considerable skills as a tactician, as an advocate for the Forest in the House of Lords and indeed as an experienced lawyer. He also played a key role in influencing the content and conclusions of the Illingworth Report which did so much to shore up the future financial position of the Court.

But perhaps most of all he will be remembered as an utterly fearless horseman, and I am assured that Lord Manners was the only serving Official Verderer ever to have ridden out to help on the drifts, which is an example that has not been matched since, nor is it likely to be!

I know that there are many here in the Forest who are saddened by his death, and will join me in expressing our collective gratitude for all that he achieved during his time as Chairman of this Court.

2008/3798 ROUNDHILL CAMPSITE

We have now had a further visit to Roundhill with representatives of the National Park, Natural England, and Forest Holidays at which some progress was made. We were pleased with the willingness of Forest Holidays to do everything they could to rectify the situation, and ensure that the new facilities at Roundhill campsite are finally installed in the way that was originally intended.

2008/3799 ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

We would like to remind motorists of the need to take extra care when driving across the Forest at this time of year when the foals are becoming more playful and may dash across the road without warning.

And whilst on the subject of road accidents, in the first week of June there were three unreported accidents, all in daylight. We would like to reiterate that it is an offence not to report road traffic accidents involving commoners' stock. It is the very clear policy of the Police, which we fully support, to prosecute any persons who fail to stop and report an accident with a commoner's animal.

ANIMAL ACCIDENT REPORT

2008/3800 ACCIDENT REPORT FOR MAY 2008

The agisters attended 7 accidents, compared with 10 for the same period last year.

7 ponies were killed and 1 cow was injured.

4 accidents occurred during the hours of darkness.

5 involved private cars or light commercials.

4 accidents involved local motorists and 2 were not reported.

The total killed and injured for the year to date is 27 compared with 33 for the same period last year.

The Clerk then added that 2 mares were hit at 10.30 a.m. (broad daylight) in Brook by a hit & run driver. Both suffered broken legs and had to be destroyed. She went on to say that despite an appeal for witnesses, no further information has as yet been received that may help apprehend the driver responsible for the accident. The Clerk asked that if anyone does know anything to please come forward.

PRESENTMENTS BY THE DEPUTY SURVEYOR OF THE NEW FOREST

None

PRESENTMENTS

2008/3801 **CONDITION OF FENCING ON THE FENCED FOREST ROADS**
Presentment by Mr Michael Cooper on behalf of the New Forest Commoners' Defence Association

Although we are sure you are very much aware of the weaknesses in the fencing of some of the Forest roads, the committee felt it necessary to bring it to the notice of the public through our friends of the press who are attending this court today. From our enquiries, it would appear that the fenced roads are walked once a year, and this does not include areas where the undergrowth has encroached through the fencing. This apparently is written off as inaccessible. A maintenance and inspection programme such as this, we would consider virtually non-existent and unacceptable, having regard to the consequences of a failure in any of the fencing on our 'A' road network. I refer you now to a section of the A31 at Picket Post. Here some repairs have been carried out, but in our opinion are sub standard, as the posts are too far apart, leaving the wire in between same, to be put under extreme pressure from our inquisitive animals.

We are unsure as to what cost Hampshire County Council Highways Department put on a human life, but consider the carnage caused should our stock break through onto these busy roads, having special regard to the speed of the vehicles that would be involved. I think it fair to say that it will not just be animals with broken legs that the emergency services will be dealing with.

It is our understanding that the contractors who carry out this work on behalf of the Highways Department are soon to be replaced. We consider this an appropriate time for all interested parties to enforce their views in securing a far more comprehensive maintenance schedule, and repairs carried out to an acceptable standard, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

2008/3802 **HEATHER ENCROACHMENT ON FOREST LAWNS**
Presentment by Col Peter Sweet, Commoner

Col Sweet explained to the Court that in the 1990's when he depastured his ponies on Longslade, the sward consisted of perfect short grass. Some years ago a Presentment was made complaining that certain lawns were being invaded by heather and coarse grasses and asking that something be done to halt its spread.

Nothing has been done in this respect, and Col Sweet repeated the request that action be taken with the Forestry Commission and Natural England to prevent further loss of grazing and to restore the lawn.

2008/3803 **DONATION FROM THE COMMONERS' ANIMALS PROTECTION GROUP (CAPS)**
Presentment by Mrs Rosemary Bennett

Mrs Bennett explained that CAPS is being wound up, and the trustees felt the pony collars to be a fitting way to disburse the organisation's residual funds.

The Official Verderer thanked Mrs Bennett for the very kind and generous donation of £750.00 and said that as requested it would be put towards the purchase of more pony collars which currently cost £7.00 each.

2008/3804 NEW DESIGN GATE CATCHES
Presentment by Mr Chris Aldhous

Mr Aldhous said that despite criticisms from elsewhere, he feels the newly designed gate catches, installed in several locations by the Forestry Commission, to be safer and easier to operate from horseback, or by disabled people, particularly those in wheelchairs/buggies, than the old style latches. He added that he did feel it will be essential that the catches are maintained and the gates kept properly hung.

PRESENTATION

The Court presented Mr Will Parke, the outgoing Land Agent for the Forest with a retirement gift. The Official Verderer said it was to thank Mr Parke for all his hard work during his 24 years in office in the Queens' House. He added that not many people remain in the same position in a Civil Service context for that number of years and it was a great achievement. He went on to say that Mr Parke has accumulated an extraordinary amount of knowledge about the New Forest during his time in post and there must be very few places that he doesn't know the detailed history of. The Official Verderer went on to say that it has been a pleasure to work with Mr Parke for the past six years and that he is clearly well regarded. He thanked Mr Parke for what is almost a quarter of a century of work for the Forest and wished him a long and happy retirement.

Mr Parke thanked the Court, commenting that this was only the second time that he has spoken in Open Court during his 24 years as Land Agent in the Forest. He added that he is extremely pleased to have had the opportunity to work in the New Forest for the Forestry Commission.

IN COMMITTEE in the Library

PRESENT: Mr Mike Seddon, Deputy Surveyor
Mr Will Parke, retiring Area Land Agent, New Forest
Mr Mark Street, newly appointed Area Land Agent, New Forest

CONSIDERATION OF PRESENTMENTS

2008/3805 CONDITION OF FENCING ON THE FENCED FOREST ROADS RESUME

The Clerk referred to a meeting that she had attended with Mr Parke, the Head Agister and a representative from Mott MacDonald which is the contractor in charge of the fences on the A31. Mr Parke went on to explain that the Forest's fenced roads are maintained by two different agencies. The A31, a trunk road, is currently maintained by Mott Macdonald on behalf of the Highways Agency whilst the A35 A337 and A326 are maintained by the County Highways Department.

Unfortunately, the contractors who actually do the work for both agencies are changing. Mott MacDonald loses the contract later in the summer.

During the meeting with Mott Macdonald's representative, it was explained that inspections only take place from the road side and as stated in the CDA's presentment if the fence can't be seen, nothing further is done to check on its condition. Mr Parke had suggested that it would be better to check the fence from the Forest side where it is much easier to see. To the best of our knowledge, to date this suggestion has not been taken on-board.

Mr Adams reported that he too has met "on site" with Mott MacDonald's representatives on a number of occasions. One of the

problems is the specification of some stretches of the fence which does vary along the length of the A31 as it crosses the Forest. Some parts of the fence are perfectly adequate but in many areas the posts are simply far to far apart. The result is when cattle lean through the wire it stretches or the wire or posts break. The area around Picket Post is a case in point where the fence is not stock-proof.

Attempts have been made to get the specification improved but the answer from the contractors is always that they can only replace "like with like". It seems the only answer is to try once more to get the Highways Agency itself on-board – something that to date it has not been possible to do.

It was agreed that with the imminent change of contractor, now would be a good time to make a further attempt at getting the Highways Agency to listen, preferably before three people die – which is apparently what has to happen before anyone will listen. A suitable letter will be sent to the Highways Agency in a further attempt to resolve the issues on the A31. Photographs of the worst stretches of fencing will be obtained and sent with the letter.

2008/3806 HEATHER ENCROACHMENT ON FOREST LAWNS

RESUME

Longslade is in fact a re-seeded area which was cultivated in the war and then laid to grass. As such it is felt highly unlikely that Natural England will be prepared for the grass to be maintained as it has previously stated that it wishes to see such areas return to heather.

Concern was expressed, however, that some older original lawns are also being lost to heather and coarse herbage. Bracken is also a serious problem.

It was agreed that Rachel Green, Team Leader at the local Natural England office who was also in Court this morning, should be asked for her comments. If it is not possible for the re-seeded areas to be maintained as grass, it is hoped that approval may be given for work on the natural lawns. It will be pointed out that the Forest's animals do need grass!

The Deputy Surveyor expressed concern about who would be expected to cover the cost of any further lawn restoration works.

2008/3807 DONATION FROM THE COMMONERS' ANIMALS PROTECTION GROUP (CAPS)

DISCHARGE

A letter will be sent, thanking CAPS for their generous donation.

2008/3808 NEW DESIGN GATE CATCHES

DISCHARGE

Mr Pasmore said he still has reservations about the new catches because of the protruding bolt which he felt could seriously injure a horse or pony if it became caught on it. In reply the Deputy Surveyor said the Forestry Commission had consulted widely about the new design which had been welcomed by horse-riders and wheelchair users and to date there have been no problems.

Mr Pasmore suggested the addition of a simple cover flange over the bolt would resolve the problem but the Deputy Surveyor did not wish to increase the cost of what are already expensive latches, nor modify the existing ones unless it proves necessary.

SUBMISSIONS BY THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

None

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COURTS OF CONCERN TO THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

2008/3809 ROUNDHILL CAMPSITE RESUME

A copy of the Official Verderer's letter to the Deputy Surveyor will be copied to all Verderers.

The Court decided that the application for underground gas stores should be made by Presentment as it is likely to be a contentious issue with some Forest organisations. The Deputy Surveyor confirmed the application will take time as an Appropriate Assessment and Vegetation Survey will almost certainly be required.

2008/3810 ROAD SIGNING AT BRAMSHAW, GAS REGULATOR BUILDING AT KNAVES ASH, ILLEGAL FENCE AT BEECHWOOD LANE, BURLEY SSSI SITE MEETINGS DISCHARGE

It was agreed that all the above should be discharged from the Minutes for the time being. They will be resumed as and when there is something to report.

2008/3811 LAND EXCHANGE – PIPERS WAITE RESERVOIR WITH VERNALLS FARM, LYNDHURST DISCHARGE

The Official Verderer confirmed he has signed the deed of exchange which has been sealed with the Verderers' seal. The land at Vernalls Farm is now officially part of the Open Forest. The gate will be locked open in order that the land could be used as a holding area in the event of an outbreak of animal disease. The Head Agister and Mr Stride for the Forestry Commission are discussing whether a stock pound is required on or near the land. The Forestry Commission confirmed it will retain responsibility for the fencing.

The land at Pipers Wait Reservoir is now being sold to the Water Company free of common rights. Mr Parke confirmed that the sale is subject to a restrictive covenant preventing the installation of any mobile telephone / radio mast or similar type equipment except such as is required for the exclusive use of the water company.

2008/3812 THE DEED BOX DISCHARGE

Mr Pasmore remarked that the office desperately needs a new deed box or fire safe in which to store important papers. The Clerk said that this has been discussed before but physical space is a problem. The Official Verderer and the Clerk will seek a resolution to the problem.

2008/3813 BOLDERWOOD CAR PARK – RECENTLY RE-ALIGNED FENCE DISCHARGE

The newly aligned fence has created a nice shade for the ponies. This has allegedly resulted in one or two members of the public getting harrassed by ponies whilst trying to access the information unit. The Forestry Commission said it will monitor the situation.

2008/3814 MILL LAWN STEAM & MARKWAY RIVER BLOCKAGES DISCHARGE

The Deputy Surveyor said the clearance of the blockages is in hand but there is some debate about what to do about one particular tree.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF CONCERN TO THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

2008/3815 SATELLITE NAVIGATION AND CASTLE HILL LANE DISCHARGE

Miss Macnair reported that thanks to in-car sat-nav, three caravans and a lorry tried to drive up Castle Hill Lane. There have also been similar problems in Honey Lane and Garden Road. None of these lanes are through-routes. It seems the problem is in appropriate directions being issued by satellite navigation systems. The Deputy Surveyor said the Forestry Commission is already aware of the problem which had also resulted in problems on the track to Castle Top. The Forestry Commission is considering what can be done.

2008/3816 INCREASED VERGE PARKING DISCHARGE

Certain car parks are being left empty because for various reasons the public prefer to park on the verges. Security is thought to be the main issue with people considering their vehicles are safer left on the verge than some of the car parks which cannot be clearly seen from the road. The Deputy Surveyor said the Forestry Commission is doing its best to deal with the problem and notices are put on offending vehicles by the Keepers and Rangers. This has, however, resulted in some very abusive complaints from irate members of the public. In spite of this, the Forestry Commission recognises that verge parking is unacceptable for a number of reasons and its staff will continue to issue the notices.

2008/3817 BEAULIEU AERODROME – INCURSIONS BY VEHICLES DISCHARGE

Mr Gerrelli reported that there is still a problem with illegal incursions by cars, mainly driven by young people, around the model aircraft area. The Deputy Surveyor said the Forestry Commission continues to work closely with the Police to try to resolve this problem as well as the associated anti-social behaviour. Eventually, barriers will be put back up.

The Deputy Surveyor, Mr Parke and Mr Street left the meeting.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST COURT AND PREVIOUS COURTS

2008/3818 ENCROACHMENT AT MINSTEAD RESUME

The Official Verderer confirmed that witness statements are being obtained and a letter from Wilson's, the CDA's solicitors will be sent.

2008/3819 REVISION OF THE VERDERERS' BYELAWS RESUME

There has been no further progress.

2008/3820 OVERGRAZING ON PLAITFORD, WEST WELLOW AND CANADA COMMONS RESUME

There was nothing further to report on this matter. The letter from Natural England/DEFRA has not yet been received.

2008/3821 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION RESUME

The Verderers are party to an appeal by Norman Rudd on a decision of the Information Commissioner. The appeal is due to be considered by a tribunal towards the end of July.

2008/3822 THE ATLAS PROJECT RESUME

Costs have been confirmed and the go-ahead from the National Park is awaited. The Clerk will progress this.

2008/3823 HIT & RUN REWARD RESUME
September

Due to a misunderstanding, the reward will not now be paid until September. At that time, consideration may be given to a slight amendment to the payment criteria.

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME

2008/3824 WELFARE OF STOCK AND THE COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME DISCHARGE

It was agreed that the Scheme should be stricter and more pro-active on issues of welfare.

Lapses in welfare standards will not be tolerated and will potentially trigger a loss of payment. Such lapses must be brought to the attention of the Court.

The Official Verderer said he will discuss how best to implement this with the Scheme Manager.

NATIONAL PARK

2008/3825 DRAFT RECREATION STRATEGY RESUME

The Court is invited to attend a meeting on the 24th June 2008 at 2.30 p.m. to discuss the Strategy. In the meantime, the Clerk will ensure each Verderer receives a copy of the Strategy in good time to read it before the meeting.

2008/3826 NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

RESUME

The Official Verderer reported on a recent meeting of the Key Partners Steering Group at which the policies contained in the draft NPA Management Plan were discussed. The policies as written place conservation of the Forest before social and recreational needs. This was considered by the Court to be very good news but it was queried how the other plans being developed will work with the Management Plan. The Official Verderer explained that the management plan sets out the Park's policies which must be followed by the "daughter documents" such as the Recreation Management Plan.

OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

2008/3827 MICROCHIPPING OF PONIES

RESUME

Miss Macnair and Mrs Thorne reported on a recent meeting in London with DEFRA. It seems that the derogation that it was thought had been agreed in fact has not. The EU Directive on the identification of equidae has now been ratified and according to DEFRA does not permit the derogation that was originally agreed in respect to foals sold through Beaulieu Road. Representatives from the Forest argued that there is no other practical way of managing the sale of the foals and DEFRA has gone away to consider the matter further.

The Clerk was asked to write to DEFRA reiterating why it is essential that the proposals already put forward be accepted and explaining why the Forest believes the proposals DO satisfy the requirements of the directive.

One outstanding matter that does need to be addressed is that of agreeing a Designated Area. This will be the area which, provided Forest run stock do not leave it, they will still be exempt from the need for a passport or microchip. Mr Pasmore had previously suggested an area which is felt to be practical and it is hoped DEFRA will accept. A suitable plan will be drawn up to be sent with the letter from the Clerk.

The possibility of obtaining approval for persons other than veterinary surgeons to microchip horses was also discussed. In Dartmoor there are only three vets, none of which will microchip ponies. Pet Plan has been advising DEFRA and is keen to restrict on who may microchip horses and ponies. It may be possible to obtain approval for Agisters to microchip if they are happy to do it and provided any health and safety at work issues can be satisfactorily resolved. Veterinary nurses attached to equine practices may also be permitted to chip equines and Mr Adams suggested it could be a sideline for farriers – a suggestion which was warmly received by the Court!

2008/3828 STALLION SCHEME

RESUME

Mr Adams reported on a meeting which he attended with the Head Agister and Mr Richard Cuzens of New Park Events. At the meeting Mr Cuzens gave his assurance that there would be sufficient grazing for the stallions in New Park this coming winter and also that some fencing will be carried out.

It is possible that the grazing at Cadland Manor could be made

available for longer. Mr Adams will call a meeting of the Stallion Committee to discuss the options. Consultation with stallion owners will be arranged if necessary.

The Official Verderer reminded Mr Adams that it has been agreed that the Countryside Stewardship Scheme will fund any shortfall.

The Clerk pointed out that if there are to be any changes to payments she needs to know by the end of July/early August at the very latest.

MATTERS ARISING FROM EXTERNAL COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

There were no reports.

STAFF MATTERS (including the Staff Committee)

2008/3829 AGISTER RIX

DISCHARGE

It was reported that Agister Peter Rix is waiting for a BT line to be connected before he moves in to his new house at Anderwood.

The Agisters areas will not change until Peter has moved and in any event the areas for the purposes of the drifts and any stock counts which may be carried out will remain unchanged this year.

TRAINING

No training is currently being undertaken. However, Miss Macnair reported that the Pony Society has arranged two days training for persons who complete pony passport application forms.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK

2008/3830 STALLIONS/STOCK AND THE HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

RESUME
August

Advice from the Court's insurers is still awaited in this connection.

The Deputy Surveyor has received some advice from the Forestry Commission's Solicitors regarding reporting of incidents with stock generally and he will draft a memorandum of understanding which it is hoped can be agreed by the Court. Due to pressure of work, however, the MOU is not expected for several months.

2008/3831 MANAGEMENT OF DRIFTS

RESUME

The National Park Authority has kindly offered the support of its soon to be appointed Mobile Information Unit Ranger. The Court gave this offer careful consideration and decided that it would like to accept the offer of the Ranger's assistant. The Court, however, felt that the Information and Interpretation Unit itself would be likely to actually attract the public to the drift and for that reason that idea was considered inappropriate.

The NPA also offered to fund the production of an information sheet to be handed to members of the public who do turn up at a drift. The Clerk said she would also like to send the leaflet to people who ring the office asking to attend a drift and who are advised that they should not. She felt it would be a good way of explaining why the drifts are

run, why they are so important and why they are not a spectator event.

The Forestry Commission has also offered the assistance of their Volunteer Ranger team again to help control the public and it has also been suggested that one of the Rangers could be tasked to attend selected drifts to talk to the public and endeavour to prevent clashes with those partaking in the drift. This offer was gratefully received.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

2008/3832 VERDERERS' OFFICE TELEPHONE SYSTEM

DISCHARGE

Mr Gerrelli said that whilst he was in no way criticising the office, he had received complaints about the automated telephone answering system currently in use. The Clerk said she accepted the criticisms and is, in any event, shortly going to investigate the feasibility of a new telephone system as the office will shortly lose its direct connection with the Forestry Commission's switchboard. This is most regrettable but the Commission is installing a new system, linked to the Government network and as the Verderers' Court is not a Government department, and despite the inconvenience to both staff and the public which will result, for security reasons it is not allowed to share the connection.

2008/3833 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

DISCHARGE

The Verderers considered a recent case in which they were reported as "supporting" an appellant against enforcement action. The Court agreed that where a commoner requests information for a planning authority or inspector relating to his depasturing of stock, any letter containing such information will, unless the Court decides otherwise in a particular case, include the following reservation: *"The information contained in this letter is provided at the request of the applicant/appellant. It is a statement of fact only and should not be interpreted as implying support or opposition by the Verderers to the planning proposals being considered."*

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.32 p.m.