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| | <p>factor could be used in calculating stock density. It was agreed that CD would contact Naomi Oakley at Natural England for confirmation.</p> <p>Several members expressed concern that fundamental decisions on the future of the new VGS had been made at the last meeting at which only 5 people were present; it was questioned whether or not the meeting with 5 people present was able to approve something so important. Being an Advisory Group there is no formal constitution and no quorum.</p> <p>OV explained that the HLS was not previously going well and key objectives were being missed or slipping unacceptably. Against this backdrop, bringing forward the new VGS by one year achieved an indicator of success to help reassure Natural England that the HLS was being brought back on track.</p> <p>RM and RS both requested that their reservations be minuted.</p> <p>It was agreed that despite the reservations which had been raised, the Advisory Group should look to the future with an assurance of better communication with the Verderers and the VGS.</p> | CD |
| 3. | <p>HLS UPDATE</p> <p>OV provided a brief update on the HLS. He summarised the history to date as: first year focussed on setting up; the second year, one of consolidation. In this, the third year, the emphasis is on doing more of the things mandated in the agreement such as: the baseline survey; bird surveys; and species monitoring. The shortcomings of the first 2 years where objectives were not achieved had already been discussed under Item 2 but Natural England is now satisfied that work is in hand to meet key objectives. The role of the HLS is to provide money for projects and work to meet objectives, not to control or run things itself. OV made clear that the HLS should not waste money paying for itself.</p> | |
| 4. | <p>REPORT BY VGS MANAGER</p> <p>A copy of the report by the VGS manager is attached.</p> <p>In response to a question over the .25 LU/ha grazing density it was explained that this is the standard limit set by Natural England and the calculation may include the length of time animals spend on the Forest which affects their LU value. JT stressed that this was a maximum and ideally the stocking density should be less. There are no over/under grazing issues currently identified on the Crown lands (HLS area). OV stated that the Advisory Group could recommend a sensible stocking density for the Crown Lands if it considers the .25LU/ha as too high.</p> <p>OV informed members that Natural England has indicated that a further £35/ha for heathland and grazed woodland would be available if the percentage of cattle on the Forest rises and can be maintained above 30% of the total stock. Priority for use of this additional money would be the VGS.</p> <p>It was confirmed that the interim payment for the 5 months between the end of the CSS on 30 September 2011 and the start of the VGS on 1 March 2012 will be paid automatically to everyone who received a CSS payment last year, subject to them signing an agreement for the VGS. This includes commoners on the Bramshaw commons even though they will not be able to qualify for 'grazing' payments under the VGS because the area is over grazed. Concern was expressed over this 'linkage' as</p> | JT |

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| | <p>commoners choosing not to join the new VGS will be disadvantaged and it was questioned whether or not this was consistent with the 'early closure' rules for CSS agreements; JT agreed to check.</p> <p>In further discussion over the VGS arrangements for the Bramshaw commons, it was confirmed that payments will be provided for reducing grazing pressure, so commoners should still be able to qualify for payments.</p> <p>RM expressed concern that the separate arrangements for the adjacent commons is divisive and fails to recognise that there are no fences separating the adjacent commons from the Crown lands and that animals can wander freely between the different areas. It was stressed that these arrangements have been forced on the HLS because EU rules do not allow HLS money to be spent outside the area for which it is provided.</p> | |
| 5. | <p>NATIONAL TRUST UPDATE</p> <p>PM explained that it is a requirement of their HLS that the NT should enter into a grazing agreement with the Verderers and that it has been agreed that the NT will pay £28/ha to the Verderers for managing the grazing on their commons. OV reiterated that the HLS is not allowed to spend money out of area so payments to NT commoners must be funded by the NT HLS. He also advised members that Natural England would have asked the HLS to repay the money which has already been paid to NT commoners, if no agreement had been reached with the NT HLS.</p> <p>The NT has allocated a set amount each year to support commoning. Funding may be provided for relocation of stock/reduction of grazing pressure, and for stock management, but can not be used to purchase land. The NT would like to fund more long term value, legacy projects, rather than spend more on individual payments to commoners. Money could also be spent on training for young commoners, and a possible legacy project to support this might be a suitable training facility such as the purchase of Rockford Farm. PM went on to say that the NT wants the 'right' number of animals on their commons, not 'no' animals. He also questioned the accuracy of the figures for the number of stock on the commons. It was explained that these are provided by the owners when declaring where their stock runs in determining whether they pay marking fees at the Forest or Commons rate, and the information from the marking fee receipts is then entered on the Marking Fee Register. The basis for determination is whether or not an animal spends 75% or more of its time on the commons, which is hard to verify.</p> <p>With regard to land purchase, OV asked JT to confirm his understanding that Natural England has advised that land may be purchased if contiguous with the HLS area and that any land purchased in this way may then be entered in the HLS.</p> <p>CD and PM had a meeting recently where a number of ideas for how the VGS should manage the grazing on the NT commons were discussed. There remains much detail to be agreed, particularly over arrangements for the 'over grazed' Bramshaw Commons. It was agreed that CD and PM should provide detailed proposals for consideration by the Committee.</p> | <p>JT</p> <p>PM/CD</p> |
| 6. | <p>REVISED RULES FOR THE VERDERERS' GRAZING SCHEME AND CONCERNS RAISED BY THE CDA CHAIRMAN</p> <p>A number of concerns raised by GF, the CDA chairman, in a letter sent to the OV over the Terms and Conditions for the new VGS, were discussed:</p> | |

SBI Numbers. The requirement for applicants to provide their SBI numbers has since been dropped. It was explained that the Management Committee had not asked for this to be included

¼ Acre Back Up Grazing Requirement. As mentioned in CD's report, the ¼ acre back up grazing requirement, potentially limiting the number of animals on which members would be paid, seems not to be affecting applicants adversely; none of the applicants who have returned their forms has less than the minimum area necessary to meet this condition.

Relaxation of Limits on the Number of Animals Which Members May Enter in the VGS. Although there is no immediate evidence that the relaxation of the limits on the number of animals on which commoners may claim has led to a massive increase, there continues to be concern that numbers will rise to unacceptable levels unless new controls are put in place. OV explained that the rules for the CSS had become unnecessarily cumbersome and restrictive and that the new VGS offered an opportunity to start with a clean sheet. However, numbers will be carefully monitored and measures will be introduced as necessary if they start to rise. It was agreed that GF would lead a working group to make recommendations for new measures should these be required.

GF

Abuse of the VGS. There are concerns that the rule on abuse of the VGS relies on subjective judgement and could lead to bad feeling. OV explained that the rule was introduced to deal with extreme examples such as commoners buying large numbers of additional animals simply to increase their VGS payments.

LU Values. This was discussed earlier under Item 2.

Effect Of New Rules On Those Who Reduced The Number Of Animals They Turn Out In Response To Requests By The Verderers. There is continued concern that commoners who reduced the number of animals they turned out in response to requests by the Verderers are disadvantaged because the new rules make no special provision for them. In response it was explained that the new rules allow commoners to enter all their stock in the New VGS, so no one should be disadvantaged because of earlier limits or reductions. That would have been the effect of the proposal put forward by Andy McDonald of Natural England who suggested that payments to commoners should be limited to the number of animals they turned out 3 years previously, which is why that was not pursued further. Whilst acknowledging this, it was clear that some members still felt this constitutes a breach of earlier assurances, particularly as the increase in the value of cattle means that those who reduced their numbers as requested will end up paying far more to replace them.

Jane Smith left at this point

Bramshaw Commons. The letter raised a number of queries over how the VGS will work in practice on the Bramshaw commons. There was some discussion over the extent of the formal over-grazing order which applies only to Half Moon and Blackhill commons, although the NT has applied a similar over-grazed designation on all the Bramshaw commons. It was noted that there are 2 separate issues: damage to the SSSI caused by excessive poaching; and over grazing. There had been some suggestion that this could affect Single Farm Payments to everyone claiming on the commons – JT to confirm. JT informed members that Natural England would conduct a survey of the Bramshaw commons. RM asked if representatives from the Bramshaw commons could attend a meeting with the inspection team to put across their view for

JT

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| | <p>consideration. JT explained that she would be meeting with the National Trust to discuss the findings of the survey and they could invite representatives from the Bramshaw commons if they wish.</p> <p>In a general discussion on grazing levels on the Crown lands, it was acknowledged that the VGS would need to respond to the findings if these indicated unfavourable or deteriorating conditions due to grazing.</p> <p>It was reported that some Bramshaw commoners may not have returned application forms for the VGS because they have been told that they won't receive grazing payments due to the over-grazed designation. It was agreed that CD should write again to any Bramshaw commoners who have not applied, explaining that other payments may be available, and urging them to join.</p> <p>It was also agreed that CD & PM should draft detailed proposals outlining how the VGS would address grazing issues and payments on the Bramshaw commons.</p> <p>GF expressed his thanks to everyone for attending the meeting which had been extremely useful in addressing some of the CDA concerns.</p> | <p>PM</p> <p>CD</p> <p>CD/PM</p> |
| 7. | <p>FUNDING PROPOSALS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE VGS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE.</p> <p>Members supported proposals for payments to: the Pony Publicity Group to advertise and raise the profile of the New Forest Ponies; to the Livestock Society to advertise and attract buyers to the Beaulieu Road Sale Yard; and to establish and run a 'Welfare' Scheme for New Forest ponies, which would pay commoners to permanently remove older animals.</p> <p>Members expressed misgivings over the proposal and methodology for a study by Kit Thorne into the effects of hot branding on New Forest ponies. The subject is of enormous importance to the management of the Forest, and an inconclusive or badly managed study could have a negative effect on the future of hot branding. It was agreed that GF would liaise with Kit Thorne over some of the details in her proposal.</p> <p>There was more detailed discussion over a request for funding from the New Forest Trust. The request is for an amount similar to that received from the owners of properties at Beaulieu Road who have contributed £45,000, with a further £9,000 which may be paid subject to change of ownership and, in one case, eviction of an illegal occupant, in acknowledgement of the benefits of the new water main to which they are now able to connect. The Trust would 'ring fence' the sum and invest it in a charity bond and use it solely for the long term and continued maintenance of the Sale Yard. The background to the request is that the money was originally promised in the expectation that it would be used in this way. That was before it was agreed that the HLS would pay for the water main. As public money has provided the water main it is now appropriate that the contributions should be paid to the HLS, which is where the £45,000 is now being held. It was felt important that the money should be properly accounted for in this way, and not simply passed directly to the Trust, although it was acknowledged that the Advisory Group shared the same interest in maintaining the fabric of the sale yard. It was agreed that the Trust should bid for an annual amount for maintenance/running the sale yard as this would provide better transparency. It was recognised that the Trust might be disappointed with this arrangement. A decision will be made at the VGS Management Committee meeting next week. If the proposal is adopted, the Trust will be invited to bid for an annual sum.</p> | <p>GF</p> |

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| 8. | <p>RS announced that he was standing down as a member. Members thanked him for his invaluable contribution over the last 8 years. The CDA will appoint a replacement.</p> <p>OV echoed the sentiments expressed by GF earlier and thanked everyone for their input to what he described as an excellent meeting.</p> <p>There was no other business</p> | |
| 9. | <p>No date was set for the next meeting, but it was agreed that there will be 3 meetings a year. Meetings will continue to be held at 4.00 pm.</p> | |

C F R DRAPER
VGS Manager

Distribution:

All members
All Verderers