

The Verderers New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme

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MINUTES OF THE VERDERERS NEW FOREST HLS SCHEME BOARD: MEETING IN THE LIBRARY, QUEEN'S HOUSE, LYNDHURST, 1230 HRS 27 OCTOBER 2011

Present	Initials	Appointment
Voting Members		
Dominic May	OV	Official Verderer – Verderers of the New Forest (Chairman)
Alison Barnes	AB	Chief Executive – New Forest National Park Authority
Kevin Penfold	KP	Interim Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest – Forestry Commission
Non-Voting Members		
Rachel Bailey	RB	Natural England - Team leader Hampshire & IOW
Graham Ferris	GF	Chair – CDA
Chris Caswell	CC	NF HLS Scheme Programme Manager
Observer		
Andy Macdonald	AM	Natural England – Regional Manager, East, London and South East

Item	Discussion	Action by
Introduction	The Board recorded its thanks to Chris Caswell in recognition of his organisation, drive and development of the scheme from its launch. A handover file will be created in liaison with KP and OV.	CC
Item 1 RoD	12 April RoD Amendment to Para 3a , third paragraph: to now read ' The Board agreed that cross scheme costs (ie Staff, communications) should be shared across the HLS scheme; taken to it s logical conclusion this would have the effect of reducing funds available for Grazing and Wetland Restoration which currently would be by 12%'. The Board approved 12 April RoD.	
	19July RoD. The emphasis from July onwards is to shrink non-productive expenditure. The VGS £40/ha is a non-negotiable sum, cross-cutting costs of scheme will not be	

	<p>borne by wetland funds. It was noted that as there had not been a meeting of the Verderers Advisory group since the July Board no progress had been made on the topic of the Agisters Holding.</p> <p>There remains an importance of getting the key HLS messages out and maintaining an understanding of HLS work so future Board Agendas should retain Communication as an Item.</p> <p>Board approved the 19July RoD and these were signed off by OV</p>	All
Item 2 Financial Summary	<p>The final balance of account for Beaulieu Road Sales Yard was presented to the Board. The Board was in unanimous agreement that income from the project, in the form of contributions from the hotel, Decoy Farm and cottages who will pay to connect into the sale yard's water supply, should be paid into the HLS. If required, the New Forest Trust, which is the lease holder for the sale yard, may apply for a maintenance grant separately from VGS. GF asked for the detail of the final balance of the Yard account to be circulated before the next Board.</p> <p>Board approved the payment to partners of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. NPA £92,404.72 b. FC - £471,497.99 <p>Leaving £1500 in account as pre-payment for Education visits.</p> <p>The HLS accounts for 2010/11 will be prepared and audited by BDO, starting on 7 Nov. This will occur because now VGS is part of HLS the auditors were unable to complete a full audit of VGS and they had concerns over VGS cash flow where VGS commitments do not reflect cash flow in from NE. The audit was welcomed by AM (NE). It was noted that the expenditure of partners would not be audited as this is covered by own FC and NPA internal audit.</p> <p>OV advised the meeting that VGS would adjust grazing payments to reflect the twice yearly payments from NE.</p>	<p>CC</p> <p>CC</p>
Item 3 2011-12 Programme Register	<p>To achieve a neutral balance OV explained that costs had been cut down to core items and where necessary projects would be delayed into 2012-13.</p> <p>KP noted for the meeting how wetland site spend would always have to be flexible for it was determined by weather and site features. So the flexibility of NE to allow a carry forward of up to 100% of planned wetland spend was very welcome, particularly when a site could be expensive eg Wootton Riverine.</p> <p>OV asked that the Register shows recent Access CMI</p>	<p>CC</p> <p>CC</p>

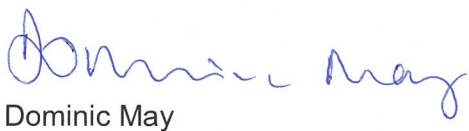
	<p>Capital Works bids for cycle waymarkers and toilet upgrades.</p> <p>The planned changes to the VGS grazing payment method were outlined by OV. This would re-open the scheme to all Commoners and in particular benefit new and young commoners. The payment system is to be simplified. The impact of opening the scheme to new and young commoners would be an increase of the grazing payments from current level of £400,000 to approximately £550,000 permitted under HLS. The plan is to introduce the changes in 2012, one year ahead of schedule.</p>	
<p>Item 5 2012-13 Programme Register</p>	<p>On the issue of whether to continue with the stream restoration work at Latchmore, the Board discussed the matter in detail and is aware of concerns from certain members of the public. AM commented that NE had received correspondence from Desmond Swayne MP on the matter. FC keen to push ahead with Latchmore. AB worried about going ahead in the face of fierce public opposition, which would affect the good reputation of the HLS, so did not agree. As chairman, OV felt obliged to vote not to proceed at this time, stating that in his view schemes should only proceed with unanimous board support. The voting partners will have a discussion after the consultation meeting of 27 Nov to attempt to arrive at a unanimous decision.</p> <p>Wetland Plan. OV asked that the wetland plan is extended out to 2020 to include all possible SSSI wetland sites. KP explained that the Plan mixes a few large sites with smaller sites for each year and that site estimates are desk assessments. Only those projects within 2-3 years have progressively more detailed estimates which can vary considerably from desk assessment. Afternote: KP confirmed that all potential SSSI sites in the open forest are already recorded on the Plan.</p> <p>AB asked for the Plan to identify sites of greatest impact on communities and discussion turned on at what stage the most contentious sites might be delivered by the scheme. OV asked KP for Simon Weymouth to present the SSSI Restoration Plan to the next Board with the reasoning behind allocations of sites to year.</p>	<p>OV,KP, AB</p> <p>CC</p> <p>KP</p>
<p>Item 4 Work in Progress – project reports</p>	<p>a. Non-Native Plants (NNP). Presented by Catherine Chatters of HIOWT. By the end of project in 2012, estimated total claim on HLS funds will be in the region of £31,018.84 which is considerably less than predicted by the PCD of 8 Nov 10, due in part by HIOWT not making claims for staff time. The innovative nature of the (hot foam) trials places the HLS scheme at the cutting edge of developments of this nature. In discussion it was noted that cattle do graze Himalayan Balsam, so grazing does contribute to eradication. The final report on NNP will be ready in the autumn of 2012.</p>	

	<p>b. LiDAR – presented by Laura Basall (LB) NPA Lidar Analyst. This volume and accuracy of data and the analytical processes under development to interpret, with the application of alternative software products, is ‘cutting edge.’</p> <p>Due to equipment failure during overfly Cambridge Technology had been unable to provide raw IR data for the bottom ‘half’ of the Forest, but a solution had been found.</p> <p>LB explained that to identify levels of differentiation of types of vegetation was in its infancy, but with more knowledge and experiment more identification would be possible.</p> <p>The issue of licence and access by the partners and public was discussed. The data is very detailed. NPA are paying for a legal opinion on the software licence to enable sharing of the information with the Forestry Commission and the Verderers. Verderers want data on own computers for use to abate encroachments, but this would require buying licences for software to interpret. NPA have these licences so what LB will provide the Verderers office is an overlay to be used on Verderers own GIS system.</p> <p>Very positive comments received from KP on the support to the work at Drivers Nursery and from Anthony Pasmore at the Verderers Court.</p> <p>OV asked for the next LiDAR update at April's board meeting.</p>	<p>AB</p>
	<p>c. Bracken Survey. Presented by Simon Weymouth (SW), Hd Ecologist and Head of Planning, FC. Based upon the findings of a 1998 report, bracken then covered some 1200ha of the open forest. The current survey has completed Area 1 only one of the ten forest management areas, and found 600ha of bracken cover.. The original budget was £7,000 - £8,000; the cost of survey only one in ten of the forest management areas is over £8,000. SW outlined several options, from stopping the survey to a major review of methodology to reduce cost. OV asked for Bracken Survey to be on the agenda again at next Board meeting. Before then, the surveyor, Jonathan Cox, will produce a report for consideration by the Board. OV had spoken directly with Jonathan Cox who revealed it is the deep litter below the bracken which changes the soil structure that is the major ecological problem . To reduce deep litter in Area 1, the FC was asked to utilise Harvesters during winter when ground is hard. Without the funding available to complete the remainder of the survey, options were discussed of other parties to deliver remainder of survey (eg PhD student or LAS), to reduce the specification by using the Cox report to enable survey to be completed by less qualified surveyors, using knowledge based descriptions of stands. The Board discussed the extent of</p>	<p>CC,KP</p> <p>KP</p>

	bracken clearance in 2011, the FC had harvested or treated some 150ha and Harvesters, with their low ground pressure, had been used on Marsh Ragwort.	
	<p>d. Land Advisory Service (LAS). OV believes that HLS has not been getting value for money from LAS and in discussion with AB had produced a new set of Terms of Reference with x 9 tasks on which he awaited LAS response.</p> <p>The £15,000 commoners' grant scheme was not a cost effective use of LAS time (35 days to deliver £15,000) so will be taken back into the control of the VGS manager.</p> <p>LAS would produce a methodology and deliver the Baseline Survey of the 168 RLR parcels of the scheme; possibly consider a task to do bracken survey at same time (as per Item 4c above).</p> <p>LAS manpower is dropping from 3 to 2, the HLOWT staff member not to assist with HLS work, therefore the HLS paid staff member is to deliver the new Terms of Reference. AB was asked if an additional person could be found to assist LAS, possibly the PhD student.</p> <p>The main advantage of making use of one organisation is the continuity of surveys and other associated tasks.</p>	AB
Item 6 Spend Strategy	<p>Amendments from KP and OV received for CC to redraft.</p> <p>RB was concerned that the spend on grazing and wetlands would not leave sufficient funds for other mandatory liabilities, such as monitoring, historic environment and bird surveys.</p> <p>OV explained that the requirement of monitoring would be met not only by use of LAS but also the use of the PhD student (pointing out that the previously proposed measurement of grazing regeneration after wetland restoration had originally been a PhD study in 1993).</p> <p>The NPA WW2 programme to which HLS is to contribute funds would meet the requirements of a historic environment programme.</p>	CC
Item 7 Capital Works (CW) Plan	<p>The Board wishes to approve all bid forms before submission.</p> <p>In the light of the Cox report (at end of November), FC asked to review upwards how much to claim for bracken treatment.</p> <p>Application for removal of Holmsley rail line concrete posts to be reconsidered.</p> <p>RB advised that the latest the CW bids can go onto the NE system is the end of January 2012.</p>	<p>CC</p> <p>KP CC</p> <p>CC</p> <p>CC</p>

	AM commented that the New Forest HLS should not be seen to be the answer for everything that the New Forest would like to do. HLS board must stick to the terms of the agreement.	
Item 8 Consultation Process	<p>Neither the Verderers nor NPA approve the current draft. KP noted and he would review after receiving comments from Verderers and NPA discussion with Consultative Panel on 3Nov. Additional amendments and proposals from NPA for better engagement of Parish Councils could be obtained from Steve Avery at NPA.</p> <p>OV listed Verderers concerns, in particular to allow refusal, and to avoid unnecessary publicity of rare plants and archaeological sites, they do not wish publication of site plan on HLS website.</p> <p>AM reminded the Board of the legal obligation to complete restoration work and suggested that the Draft should replace 'Refusal' with 'Not Approved in Current Form'.</p> <p>KP advised conditions of sites can be changed with several phases of work rather than one major contentious work.</p>	<p>KP</p> <p>KP</p>
Item 9 PhD Student	<p>Alex Lovegrove, a graduate of Bournemouth University, has been selected to start in January 2012. NPA and HLS will jointly fund the £7,000 per annum (ie £3,500 from HLS) for three years.</p> <p>The overarching topic for his 3 year PhD is Forest Dynamics; sub topics do require selection. The Board reviewed several ideas but these should be confirmed to AB before the next Board.</p>	AB
Item 10 Baseline Monitoring	Covered under Item 4 d.	
Item 11 Bird Surveys	<p>The requirement is to deliver three bird surveys both in first and second five years of the scheme. OV concern is to get value for money.</p> <p>These surveys will be a legacy item from HLS so they should be scientifically robust upon which the FC could base forest plans.</p> <p>AB offered Ian Barker, Ecologist of NPA, to take the lead and make use of a draft specification produce originally by Simon Weymouth.</p> <p>Before the next Board meeting the spec to be circulated to the Board for approval in order that discussion can take place on options at the next meeting. The outline plan is to start the survey(s) in 2013-14.</p>	<p>AB</p> <p>AB</p>
AOB	Letter to GWCT. OV to respond to letter from Dr Barbara Smith of the Game and Wildlife Conservancy Trust (GWCT) to invite GWCT to explain how the project meets HLS	OV

	<p>objectives, and to ask how costs can be reduced to make it affordable for the HLS.</p> <p>Communication. GF and KP asked for the Board to consider how it communicates internally and externally as within the Forest community messages were becoming confused on the state of projects e.g. car-free ditching.</p> <p>Visit of FC Director General 17-18Nov. KP will be taking Tim Rollinson, DG FC, out to HLS sites. OV recommended that he visit the Beaulieu Rd Yard Sale day on 18Nov.</p> <p>Thank You. AM thanked the Board for the opportunity to attend.</p> <p>Health Check. Looking ahead to the 'Health Check' in February, AM drew attention to 3 items which top the list of issues he wants the Board to address: the 'Bird Survey' specs; a full plan to meet the £7.5 m target for wetland restoration; and a draft steer on the revised payment mechanism for the VGS. Nevertheless, he was confident that issues of initial concern were being addressed</p>	<p>OV</p> <p>KP</p>
	<p>The meeting concluded at 1815hrs</p> <p>Next meeting Queen's House 25 January 2012</p>	


Dominic May

