



Verderers of the New Forest
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Official Verderer
Lord Manners

15th April 2020

MINUTES OF THE HLS BOARD MEETING HELD ON 8th APRIL 2020

Voting Members		
Lord Manners	OV	Official Verderer – Verderers of the New Forest (Chairman)
Bruce Rothnie	DS	Deputy Surveyor – Forestry England
Alison Barnes	AB	Chief Executive – New Forest National Park Authority
Non-Voting Members		
Jenny Thomas	JT	Lead Adviser New Forest - Natural England (NE)
Tony Hockley	TH	CDA Representative
In Attendance		
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator
Sonia Lorenzo-Martin	SLM	Head of Planning and Environment – Forestry Commission

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Due to the current Government restrictions regarding public gatherings this meeting was held remotely with all board papers and member's contributions received via email and an accessible shared folder.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

OV is Chairman of the VGS Management Committee.

AB declared an interest in all Wetland Restoration projects because of the NPA's responsibilities as local planning authority.

TH is a member of the VGS and a committee member of the CDA.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Cycle Counters Report

The report will be provided before the next meeting.

Spider Survey Report

Electronic copy has been distributed to the Board Members.

Holly Pollarding

Due to unforeseen restrictions related to COVID-19 and IT issues, it has not been able to update the programme register for 2020. The programme will be distributed to board members as soon as it is available.

Ridge and Furrow Site Visit
Delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Southern Damselfly Survey
Report is not available yet.

Retention of Fencing Under FDP
Ongoing liaison between Planning and Environment Manager and Verderers to agree fencing plan. Once draft is agreed, it will be shared with NE.

Consultation on Impact to Dorset Heathland
SLM shared response with OV on February 1st.

Report on Breeding Waders
The breeding waders' survey has been split into two years. Surveys for Lapwing, Curlew and Redshank have been completed. It has been agreed with NE that we would wait until HOS completed the Snipe survey this year and then send a complete report.

TH requested that details of any reports of cattle owners feeding away from designated feeding areas be shared prior to the Spring review of feeding areas.

PROGRAMME AND SUMMARY

The board were supplied with the latest available programme register that covered the period up to the end of February 2020 and projected work programmes for 2021 in the event of a roll over extension. R

DS asked if we know a forecast amount for year for the Ridge and Furrow project?

SLM replied that the programme will depend on COVID-19 restrictions and it is likely that it will be reduced if consultations can't take place.

AB asked how will lockdown affect delivery of the programme by our organisations and partners? Could a report be produced to inform the board?

SLM suggested preparing 2 different PR's with Most Likely and Worst Case scenarios. This will obviously be subject to changes in Government guidance, availability of staff and contractors and weather/ground conditions. If restrictions are extended or tightened, the team will not be able to undertake the necessary consultations to deliver some of the planned programmes.

TH asked to what extent can we adapt to circumstances using online consultation and meeting facilities, supporting revised microchipping arrangements, and using restoration budgets for reporting and public communication?

JT questioned if the Verderers and the CDA would be prepared to consider consulting on restoration proposals such as Lost Lawns without visiting sites but by examining maps, aerial photos and written descriptions of the work proposed? This would enable works to be planned and progressed for this year. But avoiding any that require local community liaison.

OV replied that he thought the Verderers would take a constructive approach to this suggestion and that they may have to try innovative ways of consulting.

FE UPDATE

The board studied the report supplied by FE for the Spring 2020 Period.

Additionally supplied were electronic copies of the SSSI New Forest Spider Survey undertaken by Richard Wilson Ecology Ltd and the Macroinvertebrate and Fish population surveys in eleven New Forest streams undertaken by BUG.

SLM supplied a brief interpretation of the Spider Surveys that commenced in late February and continued until June 2018 - 119 species of spider were recorded across all study sites (Matley Heath, Shatterford Bottom, and Beaulieu Heath).

This represents just under half the known species previously recorded (244 species of spider have been recorded from the study sites between 1940s-1980s). The surveys in 2018 have added an additional 17 species; of which four are entirely new to the New Forest.

Of the 119 species of spider recorded, 24 are Key Species, representing 20 % of the fauna. As a rule of thumb, if 10 % of an assemblage are Key Species, this is suggestive that it is of national significance. The spider assemblage recorded from the study sites substantially exceeds this threshold.

Recommendation from the report states that the survey work completed in 2018 should ideally be repeated before the end of the 2025 survey season as this would provide an informed appraisal of the 'medium term' effects of the habitat restoration works that are ongoing.

The board were also supplied with interpretation documents to accompany the Macroinvertebrates and Fish survey.

Wetland Restoration

Recent work included Walk over surveys of previous HLS and Life restoration sites to identify enhancement and maintenance programme for 2020 and a priority list has been created. An ITT Framework for wetland restoration work in South District 2020-24 has been initiated.

An estimation of costs for the enhancement and maintenance programme for 2020 was supplied.

Terrestrial Restoration

Works carried out and completed to date for January – March 2020 included Ridge and Furrow and stump shearing, a massive programme achieved this winter despite weather conditions. Full ridge and Furrow restoration completed 14.4 ha at Turfhill and North Sluffers. Stump shearing totalled 43.36 ha at North Sluffers, Highland Water, Markway and Dur Hill.

Rhododendron management., the cut and burn programme treated 40 ha this winter.

Lost lawns, the felling programme was completed for this winter by November. Apsey Shade, Linford Bottom and Anses Wood all complete.

Mature Scots Pine removal from heathland totalled 3.2 ha.

Woodcrates completed on December 19th. Timber extracted from Southern section with remaining timber to extract when ground conditions allow.

Slap Bottom felling commenced 17th December but felling work was paused. Future works postponed until confirmation from SoS is received; Timber will be extracted when conditions allow.

Clumbers completed mid-February with timber to extract from Apsey Shade clump when conditions allow.

Seedling and sapling pine

Mark Ash, Longdown and Ipley were completed totalling 18.32 ha.

Dibden and Dunces Arch postponed to September 2020 due to weather and ground conditions.

Ongoing projects include Ridge and Furrow – surveys, constraints, planning areas and contract allocation for winter 2020.

BR asked if we knew likely extent yet? SLM replied that the was LA preparing a final programme and preparing OSAs for sites and that a framework contract is in place.

Heathland restoration – planning and preparation for mature pine felling and Seedling and sapling pine removal.

Rhododendron spraying programme – areas and maps for spring/summer 2020 are under preparation.

Lost Lawns – Planning and preparation.

Surveys for EPS species.

Stakeholder engagement – Consultations to be arranged for summer 2020 for Lawns and habitat restoration. DS questioned if this was prior to community engagement? SLM replied that consultations with main stakeholders to agree the extent of habitat restoration followed by community engagement with local residents once the requirements have been agreed with partners; all this will depend on

COVID-19 restrictions and it is likely that the programme will be reduced if consultations can't take place.

Verge Restoration

The Verge Restoration Officer reported ongoing liaison with residents, locals and visitors, as well as with partner organisations.

The majority of work has been completed on the current project areas, although there are still some areas to be finished which have been delayed due to the wet weather. The board studied a summary of the Verge Restoration projects what have been undertaken. AB commented on the incredible amount of Verge Protection work underway across the Forest and commended the Officer for her efforts. TH commented that experience during the COVID19 restrictions had highlighted a need for excellent communications regarding verges.

Wetland Restoration Monitoring

The report for FRWF Evidence and Monitoring group surrounding key issues for wetlands in the New Forest has been finalised. The group are hoping to hold a virtual meeting in May to discuss. JT noted that the next stage for the Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Forum is to agree an evidence and monitoring plan. Going forward (providing the forum accept it) this plan will help the monitoring officer structure the monitoring to demonstrate desired outcomes.

ENGAGEMENT AND INTERPRETATION OFFICER WRITTEN UPDATE

The board studied the report from the E&I Officer. This included celebrating not only the successes of the HLS scheme over the last 10 years, but also the announcement that it will be extended for a further year. Engagement has focused on benefits for wildlife, the landscape and commoning, this included two HLS videos that can be viewed on the HLS website and were shared on social media. The HLS Seasonal Rangers have been very active with their engagement with the public at many different and varied locations. The Rangers engagement attracted positive feedback through word of mouth and via feedback forms. The public were asked how much they have learned about the HLS scheme on forms where 1 represents 'nothing' and 5 represents 'a lot'. 85% of people have circled 4 or 5. People have been particularly interested to hear how commoning works, as well as wetland restoration, LIDAR mapping, and the various species such as tadpole shrimp and nail fungus. Natural England suggested that the feedback forms should make people consider their own impact on the New Forest. 85% of individuals thought they had a positive impact on the Forest by sticking to the paths, litter picking, and not feeding livestock. 71% stated they had a negative impact on the Forest including being unaware of various species and good practice around these, as well as driving, traffic and not controlling their dogs enough. Future behaviour changes pledged from the public include more control over dogs, volunteering, encouraging others to use the New Forest responsibly, and attempting to cycle more frequently. DS commented on the positive engagement and congratulated the team. TH requested to ensure that the CDA be included in future press releases as the CDA would welcome the involvement in the work to better communicate the value of lowland heath and heathland restoration and commended the recent article in The Ecologist (March 2020), by the Chief Executive of Forestry England.

HIWWT WRITTEN UPDATE

The report from the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project was studied. This detailed the work that has been achieved during the past three months including surveying Gaultheria and the control of nearly a dozen different species of non-native invasive plants from the open forest. The implications of Coronavirus are that on the 17 March 2020 Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust staff were instructed to cancel volunteer work parties and not to attend face-to-face meetings with immediate effect until further notice (currently until the end of May 2020).

Hopefully the volunteer work parties planned for June, July, August and November will go ahead but the situation will need to be reviewed nearer the time in the light of up-to-date Government advice.

NFLAS WRITTEN UPDATE

The board studied the report from the NFLAS on their recent work which included giving advice to commoners on legislation, regulations, land management and rules relating to the HLS Scheme. Also reported was the positive progression of negotiations with EXXON Mobil to secure grazing land that could be made available to commoners. 6 Grants towards sustainable commoning practices and land management projects were awarded to Commoners on the Northern Commons. The NFLAS continues to work with commoners on a 1:1 basis to assist with support for online application process for Basic Payment Scheme and accessing training and skills. JMS has also participated in meetings with the newly formed Encroachment Working Group in order to facilitate improved collaboration, resources and efficiency when dealing with encroachments and other operations likely to damage the grazed areas. The NFLAS continues to work with DEFRA and other key organisations to secure future support of commoning after Britain leaves the EU. JMS reported that NFLAS have been asked to assist the Wildlife Trusts with a national ELMS Test and Trial being carried out by 5 Trusts across England. This will involve visiting six farms/commoners holdings and testing a template for a Land Management Plan which will be part of the new scheme once it starts. TH commented that he was unaware of these trails with the Wildlife Trust but felt it would be useful if these were co-ordinated with the CDA. The CDA had agreed in principle last year to participate in the Foundation for Common Land T&T, as a lowland common, but this is still in early development.

FUTURE NEW FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME UPDATE

JT reported that the ELMs policy discussion has been paused due to the impacts of COVID-19 and that it seems likely but not confirmed, that annual extensions will be available for existing HLS schemes up until 2024 but schemes will still need to meet CAP rules and regulations. She highlighted the importance of keeping records of all work undertaken and that it would also be prudent to keep a record of any work postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

TH has written to the SofS explaining the importance to the New Forest of an early decision on the Reference Period for delinked payments during the transition from BPS. Once this is announced we will have a better insight into the sustainability of cattle grazing. The CDA has welcomed the addition of several specified public goods into the 2020 Agriculture Bill that were absent from its predecessor.

HLS AGM

A Decade of Delivery – All plans for the celebration evening on June 3rd have been postponed until further notice.

REVIEW OF VGS GRANT BUDGETS

Review of the VGS Grant budgets was postponed to a future meeting.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUEST FROM HIWWT

The board considered a request for increased annual funding towards the HIWWT Non Native and Invasive Species Plants Project. The revised annual amount would be an increase from £12240 to £21067 annually. This increase would allow a vast increase in the work undertaken over the year and would generate additional volunteer hours towards the project. The board members all supported the funding request given the value of the work planned for the status of the Forest and its cost effectiveness. JT commented that the control of non-native and invasive plants is an objective of the HLS agreement and considering the boards comments about the value of the work the level of funding for the project may need reviewing in the future.

TW to inform CC on the success of the funding request.

AOB

The board received notification of the cancellation of the 2020 New Forest Show and all plans for the event have been halted.

TW reported that the annual HLS accounts for 2019 have been submitted to the accountant for audit and the final accounts will be forwarded to the board when they become available.

The Annual Healthcheck for 2019 is being collated and will be forwarded to JT for comments when completed.

TH requested that the Board meet online rather than conduct business solely by the exchange of emails during the COVID19 restrictions.

Wetland Restoration Monitoring – SLM shared with Board members the initial draft results of the first drone flight, using remote sensing technology, over Thompsons Castle conducted by the University of Southampton, to assess the degradation of this mire ecosystem. A briefing document with preliminary information was presented. This is exploratory work to see what data can be extracted from these types of sites. At present these images need ground truthing and additional surveys are required.

SLM emphasised that it was an experimental technique. University of Southampton would appreciate any **feedback** from the Board members.

DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday June 3rd – 6pm – Minstead Village Hall – AGM - POSTPONED

Wednesday July 8th – 9am – Library

Wednesday October 7th – 9am - Annexe

Delegated Actions to		
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator
Sonia Lorenzo-Martin	SLM	Head of Planning and Environment – Forestry Commission

Jul Manners
27/4/2020

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