



Verderers of the New Forest
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Official Verderer
Lord Manners

28th April 2023

MINUTES OF THE HLS BOARD MEETING HELD ON 26th April 2023

Voting Members		
Lord Manners	OV	Official Verderer – Verderers of the New Forest (Chairman)
Alison Barnes	AB	Chief Executive – New Forest National Park Authority
Craig Harrison	DS	Deputy Surveyor – Forestry England
Non-Voting Members		
Jenny Thomas	JT	New Forest Nature Recovery Senior Adviser – Natural England
In Attendance		
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator
Jackie Kelly	JK	HLS Project Manager – Forestry England
Mike Pittock	MP	Head of Planning & Environment

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESUME

Apologies from Charlotte Lines - CDA Representative

No representative from the CDA was available to attend this meeting. The board noted for future meetings it was preferable to have consistency of CDA representative whilst recognising the constraints of a volunteer organisation.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESUME

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.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESUME

JK supplied TW with Healthcheck figures for 2022.
TW confirmed with the Auditors that 2022-23 would be a 15- month accounting period to realign the HLS accounts to FE financial year of April – March
New serial line added for Holly Protection project.
TW & JK meeting this week with comms teams from NPA and FE to discuss future engagement projects and strategies.

PROGRAMME AND SUMMARY

RESUME

The board studied the latest Programme Register of spend to the end of March 2023. TW confirmed claim 33 from FE had arrived and would be paid this week.

The board discussed the increase in project costs due to inflation and how the annual payment from RPA has not increased during the life of the scheme.

Discussion was held on how to approach this issue. JT gave an indication that additional funding may be available through CS Capital Work Grants – JT to check the list to see which projects may be eligible and find out more details.

Action JT

AB suggested TW work with the NPA Finance Officer to work out a methodology to reflect inflation in the budgets for the next four years. TW to contact Nigel Stone.

Action TW

TW & JK were asked at the last meeting to produce a programme register with budgets for the 5 years of the extension. This is a difficult task as work programmes are not set years in advance and the costs are unknown. It was agreed that having considered the situation the board agreed to a 3-year projected budget. AB asked about the methods of how to establish or regenerate wood pasture with grazing in place? JT commented that NE had established techniques – JT to share these with the board.

Action JT

The board were satisfied that the HLS is delivering on its objectives and all projects are evaluated and healthchecked annually. The objectives under the current prescriptions are; Restoration of Lowland Heath – Restoration of Wood Pasture – Restoring Species Rich Grass Land and Education. Education visit figures continue to increase post Covid and the Verderers HLS can claim up to 50 visits per year which is way above other agreements. The board receives regular reports from the comms team and felt it delivers good value for money. Any board member is welcome to join the comms meetings

FE UPDATE

RESUME

Healthcheck

Data for the work delivered by FE from Jan 2022 – end of March 2023 was sent to TW for inclusion in the Annual Healthcheck. The Healthcheck is the evidence document detailing all environmental benefits of the HLS.

Action TW &

TW & JK to look through the data to find stories to promote the HLS.

JK

Staff Update

The HLS Monitoring programme for wetland restoration has been on hold pending the development of a new Evidence and Monitoring plan, which has now been agreed with stakeholders. The board studied a proposal to retire the HLS Monitoring Officer role that has been vacant since April 2022 and recruit a Monitoring Project Officer to lead on delivering the recommendations in the Evidence and Monitoring plan. It was agreed to recruit for the new post immediately.

Action JK

Terrestrial Restoration

Open Habitat Restoration

During the last quarter work to tackle tree and scrub regeneration has been completed at Longdown (22.4ha), Dibden (5.5ha) and Fawley (3.3ha). Work was carried out at Ravensnest Inclosure to restore open habitat, including removal of non-native regeneration and selected trees around mire and removal of drawn birch, oak and beech from clearfell areas (3.7ha).

The following projects are ongoing or in preparation for 2023/24:

Clearing previously felled timber from Foulford Mire, Picket Mire and Ravensnest when the ground conditions are suitable.

Sites are being assessed for inclusion in the rolling programme of work to remove natural regeneration from "thrown open" Inclosures, including Dunces Arch, Knightwood and Fawley.

Work to clear collapsed willow at Holmsley and Fort Bog to benefit Slender Cottongrass is being planned for winter 23/24.

Ridge & Furrow Removal and Stump Shearing

The following projects were completed in Quarter 5;

Work to restore new clear fell areas was completed at Matley Ridge Central (10.9ha) Matley Ridge East (5.07ha) and Perrywood Ironshill (4ha).

Planning is underway for the winter work programme including sites at Dunces Arch, Turf Hill/ Millersford, Durr Hill and Ravensnest. These are being prepared for work to start from September onwards.

Rhododendron Management

The winter programme to cut rhododendron bushes and burn the arisings was completed at Little Wootton, Black Knowl, Poor Common and Old House.

A rolling programme for work over the next five years is being based on the new survey data supplied by the FE Keepers. The NPA are launching a New Forest Rhododendron Recording Survey in May and June. Volunteers and members of the public will be invited to record sightings of rhododendron in flower via a weblink. These records will feed into the HLS work programme.

Restoration of Species Rich Grassland

Lost Lawns

Felling work to remove mature pine, birch and willow to open up lawn habitat at Anderwood (1.4ha) was completed in Q5.

The following work is ongoing or in preparation for 2023/24;

Felled timber at Anderwood and Millyford Green will be cleared when ground conditions are suitable, to complete the lawn restoration at these sites.

The previously agreed restoration at Tantany Lawn is being planned for winter 2023 (to be done in conjunction with Tantany Wood A & O restoration)

Verge Restoration

Verge restoration works were carried out in Q5 at the following sites;

DT's installed at various locations between Emery Down and Bolderwood, this included some minor repairs, adjustments and replacement of deliberately removed posts near the New Forest Inn.

DT's also installed at Rufus Stone to protect woodland

DT's and a barrier installed to reduce and define the informal parking area at Dunces Arch.

DT's installed at Brockishill to protect edges of Inclosure bell mouth and the woodland opposite.

12 DT's replaced at Broomy

Ongoing work or in preparation for 2023/24 include ongoing engagement with residents, visitors and partner organisations, preparations for the next tranches of verge restoration works as well as working with HLS partners to develop new initiatives for communications about verge parking, including raising awareness of the issues and how residents and visitors can help.

Restoration of Wood Pasture & Parkland

Holly Pollarding

Work to treat dense understorey holly to benefit epiphytic lichens was completed at Bignall Wood (0.8ha), Yew Tree Hill / Buskett's (1.2ha) and Fair Cross (1.3ha)

Restoration of A & O Woodland

A stack of felled timber was removed from Woodcrates, with the remaining timber being cleared when ground conditions are suitable.

The previously agreed restoration at Tantany Wood is being planned for winter 2023/24

Thinning A & O Plots

The felled timber was removed from Bratley Wood. Sites at Bramshaw Wood and Brook Wood are being assessed for inclusion in this programme of work to thin old planting areas and regeneration pens to restore a more natural woodland structure. Agreed work will be planned for winter 2023/24.

Bracken Management

The programme for 2023 will again focus on forage harvesting operations due to the ongoing restrictions on using Asulam.

Holly Holm Management

Following a trial to encourage holly holm regeneration by removing grazing pressure for a period of time via temporary enclosures, a number of sites have been selected to continue this programme of work. Deer-proof fencing will be erected around selected holly holms where regeneration has been in decline. These pens will be in place for at least five years to allow time for holly to regenerate around the base and the trunk.

Wetland Restoration

Repair and maintenance

The programme of wetland work for summer 2023 includes repairs and maintenance at the following sites:

Claypits Bottom, Deadman Bottom, Amberslade, Cowleys Heath East, Shirley Holms Mire, North Sluffers, The Noads Mire and Longbeech. Two of the sites would benefit from the installation of temporary fencing to help ensure the recovery and long-term stability of select areas that are particularly vulnerable to damage from stock poaching. Permission from the Verderers will be required.

Picket Bottom Mire

Proposal to carry out a small scale new wetland restoration project at Picket Bottom that was consulted on early last year. – progress has been made through the Forum to develop the FWRF Restoration Plan and Picket Bottom offers an opportunity to trial the new protocols. The HLS Board agreed to the proposal subject to the Forum's agreement.

New Forest Freshwater and Wetlands Restoration Forum (FWRF)

The next Forum meeting will be held on May 4th.

Footprint Ecology have made steady progress with the New Forest Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Plan. Following the approach laid out in the agreed Evidence and Monitoring Plan, habitat descriptions, case studies and information sheets,

criteria for inclusion of sites for restoration and measures of success against which restorations can be evaluated have been drafted. A monitoring protocol for 'meso-habitat' mapping and vegetation community monitoring of the special New Forest habitats has also been drafted and trialled at three sites – two where restoration has been completed and the third - Picket Mire where restoration is planned. Staff from Footprint Ecology have also been working on the Communications Strategy, and the communications sub-group will meet in April to further shape and finalise the strategy.

Wetland Restoration Monitoring

Species Monitoring

The following specialist surveys will be carried out this year:

Brown diving beetle (*Agabus brunneus*) and New Forest mud beetle (*Helophorus laticollis*)

Further targeted surveys for six-spotted cranefly (*Idiocera sexguttata*), focusing on sites with similar habitat conditions and high connectivity to Stony Moors (as recommended in the 2022 survey report)

Beaulieu dung beetle (*Liothorax niger*) survey sites to be re-visited in April and May 2023 as the survey was compromised by the unusually dry conditions last summer (as recommended by the 2022 survey report)

Repeat Surveys of Dartford Warbler and Nightjar.

Botanical Survey

Reports were submitted in Q5 for the post restoration monitoring at North Sluffers and Harvestslade, and baseline vegetation survey at Picket Bottom Mire, which is trialling a new protocol to monitor wetland restoration projects in the New Forest.

The board agreed to commission post restoration surveys at Pondhead and Wootton to be carried out in summer 2023.

Ridge & Furrow Sites

In 2021 a programme started of vegetation monitoring at 4 sites that are being restored from commercial forestry to open habitats. The first post restoration survey will be commissioned for Matley Ridge in summer 2023. Post restoration surveys for Turf Hill, Millersford and Dunces Arch will be planned for summer 2024, as they are due to be restored in winter 2023/24.

Wetland Monitoring Reports

Site based monitoring case studies will be commissioned for North Sluffers and Harvestslade, in line with recommendations in the FWRP Evidence and Monitoring Plan, these will combine data from various completed survey reports (including botanical survey, river habitat survey, fish and macroinvertebrate surveys) and be put into a single succinct report for each site. The report will describe the site at -5 years after restoration in the context of habitats present and relevant measures of success.

VGS UPDATE

TW reported that the VGS application forms for 2023 had been sent out to commoners.

All annual project grants have been paid for 2023.

RESUME

ENGAGEMENT AND INTERPRETATION OFFICER WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

The board studied the report from the E&I Officer – this included media coverage of the HLS Rollover announcement – the launch of the HLS Highlights video, the Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use visit and the promotion of the importance of wetlands in the Discover National Parks Fortnight. TW to work with E&I Officer on content for the New Forest Show to showcase the HLS.

HIWWT WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

The report outlining the relevant activities of the New Forest Non-native Plants Project for the last quarter was studied by the board. This work included monitoring and control of Himalayan Balsam at Mill Lawn Brook and Beaulieu River. The monitoring and control of Pitcher Plants at 5 different sites. The project officer intends to arrange monitoring of Gaultheria and Cotoneaster at various sites during Autumn/Winter 2023. Contractors undertook work to control Parrot's Feather at several sites, treatment to control Golden Club at Turf Hill, 5 sites treated to control Japanese knotweed, 1 site treated for American Skunk Cabbage. Additional treatments for control of Yellow Azalea, Buddleia, Gaultheria and Cotoneaster were completed at various sites.

ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT

RESUME

The HLS Archaeology and Heritage Team has in the last quarter continued with ongoing work and responding to new requests from the FE team including input on 6 sites earmarked for verge restoration, sites were processed with no evidence of heritage likely to be impacted. The outstanding processing of survey work conducted before the pandemic is continuing. There are 9 outstanding field survey events to process data for. The work involves converting the raw survey data records to make them suitable for submission to the county Historic Environment Record. The aim is to have it completed by late spring. Planning is underway for the surveys which will complete the gap filling exercise to complete the Heritage Mapping survey project. Data consolidation of the New Forest Heritage Map is underway with a completion date of the end of July 2023.

The Legacy of War on the Forest project is due to be started in August 2023.

The New Forest National Park Volunteer Fair 2023 was a great success, recruiting over 80 new volunteers with about 40 of those interested in the HLS field survey roles.

NFLAS WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

The board studied the report from NFLAS detailing the support given to commoning and advice given on the legislation, regulations, land management and rules relating to the HLS scheme.

FUTURE NEW FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME UPDATE

RESUME

MP advised the board that the tender request for the advisor role on future funding is going out shortly. As announced last year, the government is evolving Countryside Stewardship rather than building Local Nature Recovery as a new scheme, but incorporating all of the original ambition. Defra is working on CS+ with NE support. SFI 2023 – details will be published soon.

AGM

RESUME

2022/23 AGM will take place on Tuesday September 19th and will be held at Minstead Hall. TW to request HLS project teams to attend to promote their projects and highlight how the HLS has assisted them.

VGS CONSULTATIVE PANEL OUTCOMES

RESUME

The board were supplied with the minutes from the last two meetings of the VGS Consultative panel. The group had agreed to an additional payment to cattle keepers paying forest rate to encourage the retention of cattle being grazed during the transition out of HLS and into any new scheme. Provided that there is a continuing need for additional support for those depasturing cattle, the HLS Board is willing to make similar financial support available annually during the life of the existing HLS.

AOB

RESUME

MoA

The MoA for the extension period is still with the NPA Solicitor awaiting any comments from FE. TW will forward to voting members for approval of this internal agreement as soon as available.

Action TW

Future Agreement holder

The Verderers Court will nominate a Verderer to join the board as Chairman and be the signatory for the HLS.

Action
Verderers
Court

NFLAS Future funding request

Any decisions on the future funding past 2023 was adjourned to the July meeting. TW to add to July Agenda

Action TW

Vote of Thanks

The board offered a formal vote of thanks to Lord Manners for successfully steering the committee through an important part of the scheme's life and for his commitment to ensuring good communications with all stakeholders. He will be missed by all. The board presented Lord Manners with a token of their thanks, a beautiful picture.

Meeting closed 12.31pm

DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS 2023

Wednesday July 12th – 9.30 Kings House

Wednesday October 25th – 9.30 Kings House

Delegated Actions to		
Jenny Thomas	JT	New Forest Specialist – Natural England
Jackie Kelly	JK	HLS Project Manager – Forestry England
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator



Lord Manners
Official Verderer