



Verderers of the New Forest
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Official Verderer
Edward Heron

27th October 2023

MINUTES OF THE HLS BOARD MEETING HELD ON 25th October 2023

Voting Members		
Edward Heron	OV	Official Verderer – Verderers of the New Forest (Chairman)
Paul Walton	PW	Head of Environment and Rural Economy – New Forest National Park Authority
Craig Harrison	DS	Deputy Surveyor – Forestry England
Non-Voting Members		
Andrew Parry-Norton	APN	CDA Representative
Nicola Brown	NB	Agri-environment Co-ordinator Thames Solent Team – 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

Jenny Thomas - Natural England
Alison Barnes - New Forest National Park Authority

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESUME

OV is Chairman of the VGS Management Committee.

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

APN is a member of the VGS and a committee member of the CDA

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESUME

The MoA for the extension period is still with the NPA Solicitor awaiting inclusion of comments from FE. PW and TW to follow up on the progress.

Action
PW & TW

OV thanked everyone for their assistance in making the HLS AGM evening a great success with over 100 people attending.

PROGRAMME AND SUMMARY

RESUME

The board studied the latest Programme Register of spend to the end of September 2023 (QTR 2).

Claim 35 is due to be issued this week. TW to arrange payment.

Action
TW

FE UPDATE

RESUME

Staff Update

Suzannah Egleston joined the team in October as HLS Monitoring Project Officer.

Restoration of Lowland Heath; option HO2

Open Habitat Restoration

Previously felled timber was cleared from Ravensnest.

A consultation site visit took place in July to review and agree an initial phase of work at Ober Heath to remove mature conifer from Open Forest. Due to red deer in this area, the site is being planned for work to start in August 2024.

Inclosure Restoration Plans; FE is reviewing the completed management plans for Turf Hill / Millersford, Dur Hill, Markway and Sluffers to identify priority actions that could be delivered through the HLS programmes. Proposals will be brought to the board in due course. A short presentation was given at the OFAC meeting in October to inform them of the restoration plans and share an outline proposal for Dur Hill.

The following projects are ongoing or in preparation for 23/24:

A rolling programme of work to remove natural regeneration from 'thrown open' Inclosures. Seedling pine removal at Knightwood (13.6ha) is complete. Work to clear Western hemlock at Woosons Hill (3 ha) is in progress. Other sites to be worked on this winter include Fawley (31.4 ha), Marchwood (2.1 ha), Dunces Arch (7 ha) and Ravensnest.

Work to clear collapsed willow to benefit slender cottongrass is in progress at Fort Bog (1 ha) and Holmsley (0.6 ha).

Plans are being drawn up to remove trees from wetland sites at Anses Wood and Furzey Lodge.

Ridge & Furrow Removal and Stump Shearing

The following sites are ongoing or in preparation for 2023/24;

Work at Dunces Arch (4.8 ha) is complete, including stump shearing, removal of some ridges and furrows, and some ditch infill to restore hydrology.

Stump shearing is in progress at Ravensnest (7.7 ha).

Planning and preparation underway for restoration work to be done at Turf Hill / Millersford (13.3 ha) and Dur Hill (1.8 ha).

Rhododendron Management

The summer spraying programme is complete. Sites were treated at Cranes Moor, Valesmoor, Verely, Dur Hill, Old House, Common Moor, South Oakley, Aldridge Hill, Ober Heath, Black Knowl, Ferny Knap and Fletchers Thorns.

The New Forest Rhododendron Recording survey closed at the end of August. 44 records are being reviewed which will feed into the work programme.

Planning is underway for the winter cut and burn programme that is due to start in Q3. OV commented that he would like to see private landowners encouraged to remove Rhododendron to reduce the spread to open forest.

Bracken Management

Forage harvesting operations are in progress at sites across the forest, due to be completed at the end of October. A successful trial has been carried out using a tractor and Ryetec, to cut and collect bracken in an area of closed canopy bracken cover at Millersford Plantation (2.28 ha). The objective is to reduce bracken intensity and leaf litter to enable heathland species to recover. The Ryetec may offer advantages for certain sites compared to the forage harvester as the cutting height can be adjusted and it can be used on more difficult terrain.

Holly Holm Management

Following the trial to encourage holly holm regeneration by removing grazing pressure for a period of time via temporary exclosures, a number of sites have been selected to continue this programme of works. Deer-proof fencing will be erected around selected holly holms where regeneration has been in decline. The pens will be in place for at least 5 years to allow time for holly to regenerate around the base and trunk. Proposed sites include Freeworms Hill (south side of Fritham Plain), west side of Ocknell Wood, Seven Holms (west of Sluffers), Withybeds Bottom, Bolderwood Hollies, Berry Beeches and Potters Ford. Fencing work was due to start early autumn but has been delayed due to difficulty sourcing chestnut stakes and posts.

Restoration of Wood Pasture & Parkland; Option HC13

Holly Pollarding

This is a rolling programme of work that is treating 'urgent priority' and 'priority' areas identified in the 2018/19 survey by N. Sanderson. Sites are being selected for treatment this winter and work is due to be carried out in Q4.

Restoration of A & O Woodlands

The majority of felled timber in Woodcrates has been cleared but the contract has been extended to August 2024 because a small amount of timber in areas of wet heath could not be accessed due to ground conditions.

Thinning A & O Plots

Planning and preparation are underway to carry out thinning of old planting area / regeneration pens in A&O woodland at Brook Wood to restore a more natural woodland structure.

Restoration of Species Rich Grassland; Option HK7

Lost Lawns

Felled timber at Anderwood was cleared in the summer.

The lawn restoration at Tantany is in progress. The removal of mature Scots pine within A&O woodland is complete, along with birch removal to open up lawn areas. Holly cutting to benefit lichens on veteran trees will be carried out in late winter.

Consultation site visits took place in the summer for Balmer Lawn and Stricknage Wood. Agreed works are in progress at Balmer Lawn. Work at Stricknage will be carried out in Q3/Q4.

Verge Restoration

The Verge Restoration Officer continues to have ongoing engagement with residents, visitors and partner organisations, responding to reports of verge parking and requests for advice, and monitoring sites where measures have been installed.

Site visits have taken place to inform future work programmes and priorities for the Verge Restoration Project, including a review of informal car parking locations across the Open Forest. A programme of work is being drawn up, using principles outlined

in the Recreation Management Strategy MoU between partner organisations. A proposal of sites that could be delivered with HLS funding over the next 4 years will be brought to the next board meeting for consideration.

Wetland Restoration Repair and Maintenance

The programme of wetland work for summer 2023 is complete. Repairs and maintenance works were carried out at eight previously worked sites. The sites will be monitored over the winter months and surveys carried out to check the condition of previously restored sites. A programme of any repairs required will be put together for summer 2024.

Picket Bottom Mire

A small-scale new wetland restoration project was carried out at Picket Bottom Mire to infill a deep eroding nick point and bed level raise the channel along an Inclosure edge. Temporary fencing will be installed along part of the restoration to help recovery of areas vulnerable to damage from stock poaching.

Consultations for future projects at Penny Moor, Anses Wood, Hawkhill and Furzey Lodge have taken place and proposals submitted to the Verderers Court Committee for consideration. It will be ensured that any restoration proposals align with the principles of wetland restoration developed through the forum, as set out in the draft Restoration Plan. Agreed sites will be programmed for summer 2024.

New Forest Freshwater and Wetlands Restoration Forum (FWRF)

Work is ongoing to finalise the draft Restoration Plan and develop the Communications and Engagement Strategy. An update email is being sent to Forum members in October and the next Forum meeting will be in the new year, date to be confirmed.

Heather Baling

Budget line included to cover the production of heather bales for future wetland restoration projects.

Survey and Monitoring

Specialist Species Surveys

Surveys were carried out this summer of the following species;

Brown diving Beetle (*Agabus brunneus*) draft report being finalised.

New Forest mud beetle (*Helephorus laticollis*) awaiting draft report.

Further targeted surveys for six-spotted crane fly (*Idiocera sexguttata*) draft report received, survey was not fully completed.

Beaulieu dung beetle (*Liothorax niger*) awaiting draft report.

Dartford Warbler – repeat bird survey is complete, draft report being finalised

Nightjar – repeat bird survey is complete, draft report being finalised.

Bats – Budget line included to cover the costs of surveys if they are required before tree felling.

Botanical Survey – Ridge & Furrow Sites

Awaiting draft report from the first post-restoration survey carried out at Matley Ridge this summer. Post- restoration surveys for Turf Hill, Millersford and Dunces Arch are planned for summer 2024.

Botanical survey

A new vegetation survey protocol was trialled last year at North Sluffers and Harvestslade to monitor wetland restoration projects. This involved mapping meso-habitats and assessing their quality, which showed that at 5+ years after restoration, these sites support a wide range of quintessential habitats. Following review by Natural England, the contractor is updating the draft report with further information about the pre- restoration condition of these sites.

In summer of 2023 the contractor carried out meso- habitat mapping at 5+ years after restoration at Pondhead and Wootton. A draft report is due by the end of the year.

Wetland monitoring reports

Site based monitoring case studies will be commissioned for North Sluffers and Harvestslade once the vegetation survey reports are complete. In line with recommendations in the FWRP Evidence and Monitoring plan, these will combine data from various completed survey reports 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.

Fixed point photography

A budget line has been added to cover consumables for camera equipment.

Water Hydrology

The use of remote telemetry units has been piloted to measure water level and temperature, with units installed through the Latchmore catchment and Dockens Water. The units are being retrieved and the collected data reviewed.

Riverfly Partnership

The data collected by the citizen science volunteers from the two Riverfly sites (Wootton and Millersford) from April to October is being reviewed.

VGS UPDATE

RESUME

TW updated the board on the latest VGS spends illustrated on the Programme Register.

ENGAGEMENT AND INTERPRETATION OFFICER WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

The board studied the report from the E&I Officer – this included feedback from the HLS stand at the New Forest Show and the success of the HLS AGM. Upcoming projects include consolidating the verge messaging into one leaflet and an associated animation. Also, content regarding the importance of heathlands and "right tree, right place" and the history behind the introduction of non-native plant species into the New Forest over the last century. The Terrestrial pages on the HLS website are also in the process of being updated.

The board requested TW to look back at the previous minutes for details on proposals for NPA communications to see if it details what is expected from NPA and FE. TW to arrange a communications strategy meeting with FE and NPA staff.

Action
TW
Action
TW

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 included the recording of invasive non-native plants, monitoring the control of invasive non-native plants, practical work

undertaken by the project officer and volunteers on Open Forest and the work undertaken by contractors on Crown Land on Open Forest in 2023.

ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT

RESUME

Since the July 2023 Board meeting the Archaeology and Heritage team has been continuing with ongoing works and responding to new requests from FE. The team has received 19 new requests for Heritage Impact Assessments (Data packs) and site mark ups ahead of ground works for Ridge, Furrow and Stump Removal, Trees & Scrub clearance, Stream/Wetland Restoration and Lost Lawns. The team also made 6 site visits and attended consultation meetings.

NFLAS WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

The board studied the report from NFLAS highlighting the delivery for the 2nd quarter of 2023. This included delivering land advice and support to understand and comply with relevant good practices and HLS objectives.

FUTURE NEW FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME UPDATE

RESUME

NB gave an update on how the PA2 applications are being run. There is no upper limit on cost but directly related to what is delivered. TW reported that the RPA were having difficulty processing the Verderers application due to not being able to receive the files containing the large number of field parcels. NE has received the initial forms from the RPA. NB has agreed to pass the field numbers to the RPA via NE. The PA2 should cover the issue of the unique scale and nature of the New Forest. The next Verderers Court will discuss the financial proof requested by the RPA to support the PA2 Feasibility study. NB confirmed that a scheme or amalgamation of schemes, can be entered into (if suitable) whilst the PA2 study is still running. We are not constrained to the completion of the study's time scale. Ongoing PA2 work will help inform future scheme needs.

Action
NB

OV requested a visit be arranged from NE area staff involved in assessing future schemes for the New Forest to familiarise those involved with the uniqueness of the New Forest.

Action
TW & NB

HLS Board members were all supportive of future support schemes that secure the full suite of activity needed to enhance and maintain the forest (so support required from a range of stakeholders)

Discussions were held on the option of Landscape Recovery as a future scheme. Landscape Recovery Scheme appears a good fit with the unique values and needs of the Forest, but some key areas of detail lacking e.g. extent of eligibility & green finance expectations. More clarity from Defra/NE/RPA would be welcome. CS offer is clearer but less flexible

NB informed the board that you could enter into a development stage of LR without having to take up the scheme and that many of the concerns regarding any need for private finance would be covered by the development phase. A number of agreements are due to come out of development over the next six months and these can be monitored to see what Landscape Recovery looks like and how it may work for the New Forest. LR has the flexibility of being able to have a CS agreement under LR and transitioning into LR. Provided there is synergy between them, there could be a suite of support mechanisms in place in future

The OV questioned if there was enough time between receiving the application pack and dates for submitting the application for a scheme of this size. NB commented that there will be rolling start dates to assist with this issue

Whilst HLS has a number of rollover years to go, the complex nature of the Forest and past experience suggests the need to progress this work asap as it will take a long time to finalise

AOB

Audited Accounts

RESUME

The board examined the audited accounts for 2022/23. OV requested the headings on the balance sheets be amended to clearly show the accounts covered a fifteen-month period as opposed to twelve months. This was an action to align the HLS financial year with FE's financial year. TW to request amendment with the auditors and resend to the board for approval.

Action
TW

HLS & Curlews in the New Forest

The board received a request from GWCT who have been undertaking a programme of research on curlews that breed in the New Forest. The study is drawing to a close and the GWCT are looking into the possibility of HLS funding to be able to continue with their research. The board asked TW to reply to Mike Short and request more information on the potential costs and details of the research.

Action
TW

Meeting closed 11.30 a.m.

DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS 2024

- Wednesday January 31st – 9.30 Kings House
- Wednesday April 24th – 9.30 Kings House
- Wednesday August 14th - 9.30 Kings House
- Wednesday October 30th - 9.30 Kings House

Delegated Actions to		
Paul Walton	PW	Head of Environment and Rural Economy - NFNPA
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator
Nicola Brown	NB	Agri-environment Co-ordinator – Natural England



Edward Heron
Official Verderer

