



**Verderers of the New Forest**  
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Official Verderer  
Edward Heron

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

**MINUTES OF THE HLS BOARD MEETING HELD ON 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024**

<b>Voting Members</b>		
Edward Heron	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
<b>Non-Voting Members</b>		
Andrew Parry-Norton	APN	CDA Representative
Nicola Brown	NB	Agri-environment Co-ordinator Thames Solent Team – Natural England
<b>In Attendance</b>		
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator
Jackie Kelly	JK	HLS Project Manager – Forestry England
Mike Pittock	MP	Head of Planning & Environment

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

RESUME

All Board Members Present

**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.

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 was approved and signed by the voting members. DISCHARGE

An HLS Comms Strategy meeting was held in November. Staff from Verderers, FE, NE and NPA attended. DISCHARGE

NB & TW working on arrangements for a visit to the Forest from NE and RPA staff. Board members were asked to forward suggestions for invitees to TW. Action NB & TW

The signed audited accounts for the 15-month period 22-23 are now on the HLS Website. DISCHARGE

TW requested additional information regarding the request to fund research on the Curlew – The information did not arrive in time for consideration at this meeting. RESUME

PROGRAMME AND SUMMARY RESUME

The board studied the latest Programme Register of spend to the end of December 23 (QTR 3).

Claim 36 from FE has been received this week. TW to arrange payment. Action TW

The Annual Claim from NFNPA has been received – TW to arrange payment. The NFNPA will issue another claim for the final Quarter of 2023-24 bringing the annual claim in line with the HLS new financial year.

FE also supplied project spend forecasts to the end of March 2024.

FE UPDATE RESUME

#### Staff Update

The Senior Wetland Restoration Officer temporary appointment ended in November.

#### Restoration of Lowland Heath; option HO2

##### Open Habitat Restoration

The following projects were completed in Q3:

Natural regen removal: Seedling pine removal at Knightwood (13.6ha) and first phase work to clear Western Hemlock at Woosons Hill (3ha).

Slender cottongrass sites: Collapsed willow has been cleared to benefit slender cottongrass at Fort Bog (1ha) and Holmsley (0.6ha).

The following projects are ongoing or in preparation:

A rolling programme of work to remove natural regeneration from 'thrown open' Inclosures is ongoing at Fawley (31.4ha), Marchwood (2.1ha), Dunces Arch (7ha) and Ravensnest – all due to be completed in Q4.

Work to clear trees and scrub from spoil and stream / mire edge at Furzey Lodge Mire starting in Q4.

The initial phase of work at Ober Heath to remove mature conifer from Open Forest is planned to start August 24. Timing of the work will take into account presence of red deer in the area.

#### Ridge & Furrow Removal and Stump Shearing

The following sites have been carried out in Q3:

Restoration work at Turf Hill / Millersford (12.3ha) now complete apart from some track reinstatement which will be carried out when ground conditions are suitable.

Stump shearing work at Ravensnest (7.7ha) and Dur Hill (1.8ha) has been completed. Minor drain infill work at Dur Hill is planned for Q4.

### Rhododendron Management

The winter cut and burn programme is underway. Sites being treated include Verely, Common Moor, Mouses Cupboard and Dur Hill. AB asked if the public survey for rhododendron could be repeated this year. JK to liaise with NPA.

Action JK

### Bracken Management

Forage harvesting operations were completed in October. The HLS funded 23 sites across the Forest covering 30 ha.

### Holly Holm Management

The postponed fencing work is due to be started in the new financial year due to difficulties sourcing chestnut stakes and posts.

### Restoration of Wood Pasture & Parkland; Option HC13

#### Holly Pollarding

A mix of pollarding and coppicing will be undertaken across 9 sites (7.65ha) during Q4 to treat dense understorey holly to benefit epiphytic lichens. This is a rolling programme of work that is treating 'urgent priority' and 'priority' areas identified in the 2018/19 survey report by N. Sanderson.

### Restoration of A & O Woodlands

The majority of felled timber in Woodcrates was cleared in late summer. 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

Felling work was completed in Brook Wood (2.5ha) to thin old planting areas and regeneration pens to restore a more natural woodland structure. The felled timber will be removed next financial year when ground conditions are suitable.

### Restoration of Species Rich Grassland; Option HK7

#### Lost Lawns

Lawn restoration at Tantany is in progress. The removal of mature Scots pine within the 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 Q4. The first phase of agreed works at Balmer Lawn (1.23ha) is complete. Work at Stricknage Wood is due to be carried out in Q4.

### Verge Restoration

The Verge Restoration Officer continues to engage with residents, visitors and partner organisations on Verge protection.

Minor interventions of DT's and barriers at 9 sites across the forest are due to be implemented during Q4.

A proposal to protect verges from Boltons Bench to Denny Campsite with measures implemented in the next financial year was considered. The board requested the proposal be shared with the partner organisations for comment.

Action JK

### Wetland Restoration

#### Repair and Maintenance

A programme of work for summer 2024 is being planned. This includes repairs and maintenance at the following sites:

Shirley Holms Mire – minor nick point repairs (postponed from 2023)

Islands Thorns – repair nick point and raise bed level for a short stretch.  
Wootton – ensure link drains are working effectively along Inclosures.  
Ober Water (at Markway) – remove stakes and wooden structure; raise bed level and reprofile bankside to widen passage.

#### Picket Bottom Mire

The small-scale wetland restoration project carried out at Picket Bottom Mire has been effective in restoring the upper reaches of the site. On the lower part emergency work was carried out to prevent further loss of material following a series of extreme rainfall events and damage from stock poaching. Temporary fencing was installed along part of the restoration to protect vulnerable areas. The site has been monitored over winter and is now stable and recovering well. Monitoring will continue and remedial work planned if needed.

#### Other Wetland sites

The following sites are being proposed for summer 2024:

Penny Moor

Anses Wood

Hawkhill Mire

Furzey Lodge Mire

Furzey Lodge Mire / Rans Wood

Ravensnest Inclosure

Restoration proposals will follow the principles of wetland restoration developed through the Forum, as set out in the draft Restoration Plan.

#### New Forest Freshwater and Wetlands Restoration Forum (FWRF)

Work is ongoing to finalize the draft Restoration Plan and develop the Communications and Engagement Strategy. The next Forum meeting will take place on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

#### Heather Baling

Two hundred heather bales are being produced in Q4 for future wetland restoration projects.

#### Survey and Monitoring

##### Specialist Species Surveys

Surveys were carried out last summer of the following species;

Brown Diving Beetle (*Agabus brunneus*)

New Forest Mud Beetle (*Helophorus laticollis*)

Six Spotted Crane fly (*Idiocera sexguttata*)

Beaulieu Dung Beetle (*Liothorax niger*)

Full reports are available on the HLS Website.

#### Dartford Warbler

The repeat survey for Dartford Warbler found a record number of 544 breeding territories within the New Forest SPA. This is four times as many as in the 2018 survey when only 135 breeding territories were found, following unusually cold weather during February and March that year.

### Nightjar

The repeat bird survey for Nightjar identified 353 territorial males, a decline on the 2018 survey which recorded 435. However, the number of territorial males (as a representation of breeding pairs) still exceeds the SPA target of 300 breeding pairs in Great Britain.

### Bat

Budget line added to cover the cost of bat surveys if they are required prior to tree felling.

### Botanical Survey – Ridge & Furrow Sites

The first post – restoration survey at Matley Ridge was carried out this summer. As expected, the results show an initial loss of habitat immediately following clear-fell operations and other works to restore open habitats after commercial forestry. The site will be re-surveyed in summer 2024 to monitor how the vegetation is continuing to develop. Initial post – restoration surveys are planned this year for Turf Hill, Millersford and Dunces Arch.

### Botanical Survey

Last summer the contractor carried out meso – habitat mapping at 5+ years after restoration at Pondhead and Wootton. Following review by Natural England, 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. This project may extend into the next financial year.

### Fixed Point Photography

Budget line to cover consumables for camera equipment.

### Water Hydrology

FE piloted the use of remote telemetry units to measure water level and temperature with units installed through the Latchmore catchment and Dockens Water. The units have been retrieved and the data collected.

### Riverfly Partnership

Our citizen science volunteers surveyed 2 Riverfly sites (Wootton and Millersford) from April to October. Data is being reviewed and a programme for 2024 planned.

### VGS UPDATE

RESUME

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

Minutes from the last VGS Committee meeting were also studied and TW gave verbal updates on the VGS projects.

### ENGAGEMENT AND INTERPRETATION OFFICER WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

The board studied the report from the E&I Officer – this included media coverage, messaging during COP28, Production of Verge Protection leaflets. Updates to the HLS Website, Information shared at the Residents Conservation Day at Hyde. The updated HLS comms strategy is being finalised and The NFNP Partnership

Plan Leaders Group has commissioned the comms teams of all the organisations to progress a campaign to increase the understanding of the New Forests' special qualities around wildlife and habitats.

#### 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. A request for an additional £5,000 of funding to cover increased costs for 2024 was considered. The board agreed in principle to this grant increase but requested a breakdown of the funding request to show the rationale behind the amount requested. TW to ask CC for details and circulate to the board.

Action TW

#### ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT

RESUME

Since the October 2023 Board meeting the Archaeology and Heritage team has been continuing with ongoing works and responding to new requests from FE. The team has progressed 12 requests for Heritage Impact Assessments and site mark ups ahead of ground works for Ridge, Furrow and Stump Removal, Tree and Scrub clearance, Wetland Restoration and Lost Lawns. The ongoing work to finish processing the Winter 2019/2020 survey data has progressed with seven site surveys left to process. The Heritage Mapping Surveys will be progressed now that the GNB season has concluded for this year. The data consolidation and The Legacy of War on the Forest project has not progressed as hoped due to the high work load and reduced team. This project will progress as staff capacity and time allow.

#### NFLAS WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

The board studied the report from NFLAS highlighting the delivery for the 3rd quarter of 2023. This included delivering land advice and support to understand and comply with relevant good practices and HLS objectives. The NFLAS also gave a talk at the CDA meeting in November with an emphasis on training requirements. OV suggested working on a comms plan to promote available back up grazing opportunities with land owners.

#### FUTURE NEW FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME UPDATE

RESUME

NB gave the board a verbal update on the position regarding new schemes. This covered:

The announcement of increased rates for new and existing SFI, SFI Pilot and CS Agreements but no change to HLS payment rates.

DEFRA's plan to bring SFI and CS together under a single online portal – this will enable people to apply for both types of options with a single application. Overall ambition to expand access to Higher Tier. Higher Tier due to open for applications in the summer / autumn of 2024 as an online application process and it will then be a rolling window offer going forward.

Confirmation of ongoing commitment to Landscape Recovery – with Round 3 in 2024 – application round expected autumn 2024. No information on potential

themes for this round. Until new scheme opens the only open offers are capital grants and SFI23

50 new actions are expected to become available later in the year, no detail on those available yet but what they are has been released – includes lowland peat options. AB to make contact with other National Parks that are already in a new scheme to find out how they are finding the transition

Action AB

### AOB

RESUME

### Publishing Supporting Board Reports

OV suggested making the supporting HLS Board reports from partners organizations available online with the HLS minutes – TW to discuss with the contributors to discuss how reports may be drafted to ensure that confidential and/or commercially sensitive information can be clearly identified for redaction.

Action TW

### A&O Woodland

CH - ongoing stakeholder scrutiny of A&O woodlands and concern about lack of regeneration and woodland decline - ways of monitoring tree canopy and vegetation change over time to complement existing SSSI condition monitoring and expert opinion? Remote sensing and AI could monitor landscape scale vegetation change, not just A&O but across the whole forest giving a better overview on landscape recovery and canopy health. AB suggested LiDAR and drone use. APN wondered if the RPA mapping could be used to monitor the change in landscape.

### National Trust VGS Contributions

APN made the recommendation to progress talks with the NT regarding their position on future VGS payments. This being their last year of pledged money.

### Agisters Equipment

APN requested that in the future we ensure that local companies are given the opportunity to tender for replacement trailers etc. It was suggested that companies could register an interest for potential quotations.

Meeting closed 11.59 a.m.

### DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS 2024

Wednesday April 24<sup>th</sup> – 9.30 Kings House

Wednesday August 14<sup>th</sup> - 9.30 Kings House

Wednesday October 30<sup>th</sup> - 9.30 Kings House

Delegated Actions to		
Alison Barnes	AB	Chief Executive – NFNPA
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator
Nicola Brown	NB	Agri-environment Co-ordinator – Natural England
Jackie Kelly	JK	HLS Project Manager - FE



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