

Presentment by Mr James Young, on behalf of the New Forest Commoners Defence Association

'The Commoners Defence Association believes that a co-ordinated and systematic approach is needed to stop private encroachments onto the grazing land of the Forest. The CDA continues to pursue encroachments when they are brought to our attention. For a small, voluntary organisation like ours this is time consuming and expensive – especially so for volunteers in their spare time. Out of necessity we have to concentrate on the larger and most blatant cases.

We warmly welcome the recent appointment of a Verge Officer within the Forestry Commission and we look forward to working with them, but this is one person and we need all agencies to pull together, far more than has been the case up to date. The CDA is very grateful to the Court for their financial support and assistance in dealing with various encroachments to date and looks forward to them continuing this as well as leading a multi-agency approach. The National Park Authority, Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the National Trust must all become more proactive if the progressive loss of grazing is to be stopped. We also need to involve other interested organisations and landowners: The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the New Forest Association, and local estates – for a united and consistent approach to this growing problem.

Most encroachments onto grazing land might be small, but the cumulative impact is considerable. When the verge in front of a cottage is used to park two cars it removes around 25 square metres of grazing. When just four cottages in one lane do this it takes 100 square metres. This type of thing in a lane only has to happen 40 times across the whole Forest to lose an acre of grazing land. Our main concern however, is the continuous loss of grazing as property owners shift their fences outside of hedges and banks, or across ditches and it is obvious that the loss is significant. Hedgerows are an important source of nutrition for livestock, particularly in the winter.

The CDA simply cannot fight every case if a landowner is immune to reason or concern for the Forest. We must find a better means to act on encroachments. We need a systematic approach that shares the burden across all agencies and interested parties. In planning the NPA has a role to play, in terms of protection of the grazed SSSI, Natural England should be actively involved, and as Land Managers, the Forestry Commission, the National Trust, and local estates ought to take more of a lead. We call on the Court to co-ordinate the efforts of all of these, together with the CDA, before this war of attrition is lost.'