



Mrs Charlotte Lines

Chairman, New Forest Commoners Defence Association and practising commoner

Re: Minister's Mandate to the Forestry Commission

The Commoners' Defence Association asks that the Court reaffirms the importance it attaches to the [Ministers Mandate](#)¹. The mandate has been described by ministers as the Forestry Commission's "*licence to operate*"² on the Crown Lands with the New Forest.

As the Court will be aware the Mandate sets three objectives for the Forestry Commission's management of the New Forest on behalf of the Crown. The primary objective is conservation, including support for commoning. The second is engagement. The third is "*efficient management ... insofar as is consistent with the first and second*". These objectives are repeated in government guidance to the National Park Authority. We are deeply concerned that the Forestry Commission has reversed these priorities. Three recent decisions, in particular, have led to this conclusion.

1. **Ending rent subsidies for the Crown properties within the Forest.** We only became aware of this dramatic change from established policy dating back to the New Forest Review Group when tenants were told that they would be moved to rents at market levels for Britain's least affordable national park.
2. **Putting keepers on furlough** in March 2020, despite obvious landscape risks during the lockdown. This decision was explained on the basis that Forestry England (not the Forestry Commission) now relies mainly on trading income to fund its local work, not on the Treasury support to the Forestry Commission.
3. **The decision to abdicate management of the campsites.** The Court was told by the Forestry Commission at the start of this public-private partnership that: "*the relationship between the management of the sites and the local Forestry Commission should not alter much*".³ Recent events have shown this to be untrue. There is no longer local input into important management decisions.

Those of us who thought that the change to "Forestry England" was simply a re-badging exercise appear to have been much mistaken. Building the business brand and its revenue streams has become the primary focus. The conflict with the Ministers Mandate is obvious and deeply worrying.

We ask that the Court:

1. Demands a restatement of commitment to the Ministers Mandate from the Forestry Commission, the National Park Authority and from ministers.
2. Places a copy of the Mandate on its website, because it appears to have been removed from the Forestry Commission website.

¹ Minister's Mandate to the Forestry Commission: <https://www.realnewforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ministers-Mandate-1999.pdf>

² House of Commons, Hansard, 24th July 2006, Vol 449, Col 714

³ Verderers Court, 19th January 2005

