

# NFCDA Mid Term Meeting



Minutes from Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
Bramshaw Village Hall

## 1. Apologies

Lee Hulin, Tony Vanderhoek, James Young

## 2. Welcome from the Chairman

The Chairman noted the recent presentment regarding cattle, other livestock and dogs. He showed the poster which had been commissioned by the NFCDA which would be put up in car parks. The Committee was working with Forestry England (FE) to obtain permission for them to be put up on the open forest. Any commoner with prominent gates or land was invited to take some and put up themselves, and to encourage other commoners to do the same.

## 3. Commoners' Housing

A housing review was currently underway with the Association. FE had started to move properties on to the open market, and was offering them to all FE staff. The Illingworth Report was clear that properties should be kept for commoners, and a suitable solution needed to be reached for all parties. There were 65 properties across the forest. A clear process for allocation was required, with appropriate rents agreed.

NFCDA suggests that rents are pegged to local authority rents (NFDC affordability), usually 80% market rent. NFDC acknowledge that this is too high to be properly affordable but it is set by Govt. For the commoners' properties NFCDA recommends a maximum of 35% income limit. NFCDA would also recommend an allowance for higher income, so that higher rent is paid in those instances. This seems a sensible way to keep people in properties if they do better.

Allocation would be considered according to defined criteria, by a panel comprising Verderers, FE and NFCDA and possibly NFNPA. Judgements would be based on public good – the contribution of the applicants to the forest and specifically to commoning.

FE had suggested that some of the properties in the portfolio weren't suitable for commoners but NFCDA had pushed back hard on that – with housing costs so high, any house would be suitable for commoning. Some may not have their own backup grazing but there were commoners for whom this could work. They may not have commoners' rights but again, back up grazing elsewhere could have this.

FE could grant rights to any dwelling, as set out in the Byelaws. FE interpret the phrase 'woodsman' as anyone that works for FE. This is not correct and a commoner should be higher priority than an office worker for FE. That would open up 30+ dwellings currently used by FE staff.

The NFCDA would continue to work with FE on the process, criteria and allocation of the properties and keep members apprised.

#### 4. Stallion Scheme

There was some concern about the artificiality of the turn-out period and the small number of animals released. The Committee was therefore seeking views on the operation as it stands. There are currently 28 approved stallions in the programme.

Members comments included:

- Not producing enough foals, having to put mares to stud stallions and pay accordingly, and therefore reducing the number of forest bred stock.
- Need longer time period or more stallions, or both.
- More stallions should go out – they can't catch the mares as they are roaming so much.
- Stallions are coming out so fresh they charge about and don't settle.
- Concern about the bloodlines.
- Stallions should winter out to calm them down.
- Let them all (or a lot) of the older ones out for two consecutive years to catch all the mares. Then go back to approx. twenty each year.
- Losing the mare genetics. Aging population on the forest, needs more young stock.
- System needs to support young stock. We have the rights to keep them out – retain it if we can.
- More in favour of all the stallions going out for longer. They travel so far.
- Geldings are too many; they have stallion traits which causes issues.
- Stallions don't need to be out all year round, to reduce risk of unseasonal foals, but perhaps longer and all of them, then we would get plenty of foals.
- Consider the same number of stallions but out all year round.
- Need filly foals, need breeding lines, need rights protection.
- Need to consider what breeding them for. Livestock society appreciates the reduced numbers to achieve better prices and maintain BR sales.
- An increase in total number of foals will of course be 50% colt foals, serious problem with market, welfare.
- Regulations on passporting and chipping has all created a load more work.
- Agisters and Verderers have more work managing drifts as a knock on.
- Commoners would have to do and spend more if they want more foals. And need to take responsibility and accept the impact on the market (reduction in value, harder to sell).
- Welfare standards should not be underestimated. Remember why it was introduced in the first place. Lots of excess colts could turn that market back again. First couple of years will be chaos with late and early foals until everything settles back again. Would have to cope with poor foals and mares in for longer etc.
- On average 20 foals per year per stallion. Less per head when more were put out. Foals lower from younger colts and as they mature the numbers go up.
- Approx 500 mares a year are breeding across the whole registered herd.

The Committee would need to reflect on the various opinions and balance of views.

## 5. Any other business

**Abattoir:** Some ten or twelve years ago there was talk of an abattoir for the forest, but it didn't go further as it was deemed not profitable on the model of the time. Now the situation has changed with local sites closed. The NF Marque can't find enough producers. Funding and money have been offered as investment; a group have looked at properties. Some objections to the idea locally and no site have so far been secured. Commoners are travelling long distances to find any capacity; Sherborne and Six Penny Handley are both fully booked until the new year.

The suggestion is to create a smaller set up on a farm running two days a week, until it is fully booked and making a profit. Glover Report recommendations could support such a venture. Would start as a small venture, with local staff in place. There are pledges of money to help set up and the proposal has NFNPA support. A huge area could be serviced by such a facility, with those outside the forest coming in, and IoW users as well.

Any ideas or comments welcomed, along with any pledges for people to bring business. A show of hands indicated interest in the room for such a venture.

**Attacks on stock:** some dead, mutilated sheep had recently been found – so far very little information was forthcoming about these incidents but it was in the hands of the police. In a possibly related incident, a cow was stabbed the previous night and a church was marked. Northern commons seem to be the area of concern, so recommend vigilance.

**2019 BPS payments:** Jim Greenwood had attended a meeting the previous week. All mapping was now updated for commons countrywide. Twenty-nine map additions from Jim had all been accepted. The process was ready to go in December. Some payments would go in early December and the majority late December – with the exception of the New Forest which it was hope would start to be allocated in the new year. That would be a significant improvement on previous years if it happened. The excuse has previously been that mapping is not completed – but now surely it can't be held up for that reason any more. The New Forest really doesn't fit the BPA system so they tend to shelve it until everything else is done.

**VGS Payments:** The Verderers have not yet received monies for the VGS payments. This caused an unknown timeline again but more information would be circulated as soon as it was known.

The Chairman closed the meeting with thanks to the committee and all those helping the commoners.