

Verderers Court: **Wednesday 17th September 2024**

Presentment: **New Forest Commoners Defence Association**

**Forestry England –Bridges.**

Good morning Official Verderer, Verderers, and members of the Court.

Hilary Harper, on behalf of the CDA

In recent months a number of discussions have taken place about bridges on the Crown Lands, following Forestry England’s announcement that it has plans to reclassify bridge capacity weights, restricting some to pedestrian access only and the complete removal of others.

Fords have been suggested as an alternative but with increasing rainfall often combined with clay, this could make any alternative crossing completely impassable during the winter months.

The CDA have asked for details about which bridges these restrictions will be applied to, but has not had a response. Our concerns will be the impact on the welfare of our stock during the winter months; Commoners and Agisters not being able to access areas of the Forest, Drifts being restricted, and importantly it could result in failing to get medical or veterinary assistance to a problem.

These bridges are an important infrastructure of the Forest and need to be well maintained. The CDA understands that the FE finances are difficult, a culture of litigation and faultfinding is becoming more common but the reclassification plan needs very careful consideration before implementing.

We ask the Verderers to ensure that the FE supply a map of the proposed changes, conduct a full consultation with yourselves, the Commoners and Agisters. We are sure a compromise can be reached but it needs proper discussions with all parties please .

Thank you.