

Verderers Court: **Wednesday 17th June** 2025

Presentment – Future Agri-environmental scheme

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

Andrew Parry-Norton FFG- CDA Chairman.

Our Forest, like any other National Park, needs funding to maintain it. The infrastructure of tracks, fences and car parks, the ranger service to name a few responsibilities, all need funding. The vital job that the Commoners stock do by grazing the Forest needs a secure viable future.

The Forest Farming Group made up of several organizations, has the mission of getting the Forest into an agri-enviromemtal scheme; this is not an easy task with a Government that is reducing spending at every opportunity and with little regard to the rural or agricultural sector.

The PA2 Study commissioned by the FFG, at the request of DEFRA, has now been concluded. This report highlights the important work that the Forest requires to maintain it for the future but due to a lack of information at the time, was unable to suggest a suitable Forest wide scheme.

It now looks likely that the Landscape recovery option with maybe a few adjustments would be our best option that is now becoming the focus of our efforts. The first stage on how to enter into this scheme will require submitting a bid, this window is short, possibly only 9 weeks, so we have to be ready. DEFRA has now had their budgets set for this year so I would assume an announcement will be made soon when the window will open.

If we get into this scheme we will be the largest in the whole of the UK but this requires a huge amount of work. We will have problems and issues that will require careful handling and often compromises made but the end results will be rewarding for the Forest.

To achieve this goal all Forest organizations and stakeholders need closer cooperation, a meeting is set in July with as many landowners as possible attending to discuss their requirements, Commoning being an important part of these talks.

Time is running out, the HLS is finishing in 2028 and we need a replacement urgently, we cannot afford the luxury of time. We have a responsibility to keep up the momentum.

The Verderers have a crucial role in the Forest and will continue to do so into the future. I therefore ask that they continue to prioritize this as important work, take a joint leading role and use their influence to bring together all Forest stakeholders. Only together can we steer the Forest to long, sustainable, environmentally rich future that delivers the requirements of everything and everyone.

Thank you.