VERDERERS’ COURT 19TH MARCH 2020

ANNOUNCEMENTS & DECISIONS

CATTLE & CALVES

In February, I wrote to all commoners who pay marking fees for cattle, advising them of the veterinary advice we have received concerning cows with calves. That advice was that cows with calves under two weeks old should not be on the Forest or adjacent commons. My letter went on to stress that the burden of mitigating the risk of incidents between cattle and members of the public should not fall on the commoners alone. To that end we are pursuing a number of initiatives. The Commoners Defence Association has already advised its members that, save where horns are characteristic of the breed, cattle depastured should be dehorned. You will have noticed increased signage – again an initiative of the CDA with the support of Forestry England. We have engaged constructively with NFDog about the risks posed by out of control dogs and they have produced a helpful credit card advice card similar to the animal accident card. We are in discussions with the Deputy Surveyor and Natural England about offering easy access for walkers to fenced and possibly even refenced Inclosures. Whilst we will continue to monitor the effect of these measures it is to be hoped that they will substantially reduce the risk that I have referred to.

BRIDGE OVER SHEPTON WATER

In our February Court, Mr Brian Ingram raised concern about a bridge that had washed away in recent floods. He said that the FC did not want to replace it.

We understand that Forestry England had become aware of the loss of the bridge 2-3 weeks earlier and the debris had been recovered. The Deputy Surveyor explained that whenever a bridge needs repair, its need, either for commoners or the public, is questioned. This is because, where possible, Forestry England is always keen to reduce the number of bridges on the Forest because of the cost of regular inspections and maintenance to keep them fit for purpose. It was suggested that Mr Ingram may have mistaken questions about the need for the bridge’s replacement, as a reluctance to replace.

Forestry England was made aware of this particular bridge’s value for movement of stock across Shepton Water, which minimises the use of the road bridge as an alternative livestock crossing. This is in addition to its use by our Agisters and the commoners when managing stock. Forestry England has committed to replace the bridge but timing will depend on weather and ground conditions.

VERDERERS’GRAZING SCHEME APPLICATION FORMS

The Application forms for this year will be sent out shortly/were sent out on Monday.

THE APRIL COURT

Like every organisation we are giving careful consideration to the impact of Covid-19. No decision has yet been taken as to whether to hold the April Open Court. If we do decide to cancel it then we will disseminate that information via our website and twitter.