VERDERERS’ COURT

Wednesday 17th June 2020

ANNOUNCEMENTS & DECISIONS

THE VERDERERS’ COURT DURING THE CONTINUING COVID-19 EMERGENCY

Whilst the lockdown is slowly being eased, in order to protect our staff, the Verderers’ Office remains closed. The administration of the Court continues to be managed effectively and efficiently by our staff working remotely from home. This arrangement will continue until we are satisfied that it is safe to re-open our office.

Our Agister team also continues to work to maintain the health and welfare of the Forest livestock, whilst observing social distancing at all times.

We are grateful to everyone who contacts our office or our Agisters, for their co-operation and assistance in these difficult times.

PONDHEAD WETLAND RESTORATION

At our May Court we received a presentment from Sally Tear expressing concern about some of the restoration works carried out as part of the Pondhead Wetland Restoration project.

We have consulted Forestry England about those concerns as the partner in the Verderers’ Higher Level Stewardship Scheme responsible for executing the works in 2018.

Forestry England (FE) carried out a programme of works to improve the SSSI units 386 and 387 in the area of Pondhead. Those works were designed to establish a link between the floodplain and the river, through removing spoil banks and raising bed levels. FE has investigated the issues highlighted from 2018 with the digger as highlighted in photographs 1 & 2. The standard practice when working in a wet area is to remove the top layers of peat to one side during working practices and then reinstate them as you move out of site. In this instance there was insufficient material to reinstate the ground level to where it had been so the contractor used a small amount of hoggin to fill in and then re-laid the top-soils. This is done to ensure that the different layers of soil are not mixed, so that subsoils do not end up at the surface. At no time was any peat taken away from the site. This work will not impact on the groundwater levels, as water will filter through the hoggin as necessary. The area in the photos submitted was an area that required spoil banks to be levelled. The area where the water was held back on the floodplain in the photos submitted of a ‘lagoon’, was always a wet area even before the restoration, as the mire drains down the slope into it. The spoil banks that were on this side of the riverbank would have held water on the floodplain even more. Now as FE has removed these spoil banks the water will be better connected to the stream. The future of the area between the stream and the mire is as a wet woodland.

In answer to the specific questions:

Q1-4. The Forestry Commission project officer at the time would have been liaising on a daily basis with the contractor over these issues.

 Q5. There would not be a separate cost for this part of the project.

 Q6. The overall tonnage of hoggin outlined in the planning application was not exceeded.

FE continues to assess all mires and streams through the HLS monitoring programme, to ensure good evidence-based knowledge of the HLS restoration techniques and how sites recover post works. FE did undertake a River Habitat Survey (RHS) before the restoration work commenced and are due to undertake a repeat of this RHS on the site this year. In addition, FE is undertaking a Modular River Physical Survey (MoRPH) on an annual basis. Both surveys allow FE to assess the quality of physical functioning of river systems and the outcomes of restoration. To complement the MoRPH and RHS, FE also has Time-Lapse Cameras in place which have highlighted that when the stream is full, there is currently no (or very short) reconnection with the floodplain in some areas. To respond to the lack of floodplain connection, FE has been carrying out a detailed channel slope survey and is in the process of rectifying that lack of floodplain connection. It is inevitable in works of this scale, where you are working with natural processes, that you will have to return from time to time as operations don’t always initially deliver the results you expect. It is particularly a problem where Compromises need to be made on the site, due to having to work around other man-made structures, such as bridges, or retaining large drains, as these can have further ramifications for the long-term stability of the site. FE will be returning to this site to do some minor works this summer. The New Forest National Park Authority is aware of the requirements of this work.

With reference to the point about a mountain bike trail being created along the riverbank, having inspected the site, there are a lot of animals depastured in this area and the majority of tracks along the riverbank are from animals wandering along the bankside. Also, a number of people walk this route and FE is confident that this bankside wear is predominantly from animals and walkers. There are no obvious bike tracks, but FE will continue to monitor this.

Two members of the Court visited the site this month and they could not see any cause for concern.