

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DECISIONS – VERDERERS’ COURT JANUARY 2021

ROGER PENNY WAY (B3078)

The appalling accidents involving stock recently on Roger Penny Way have shocked us all. In 2018 I corresponded with the Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner urging the introduction of average speed cameras on that road.

Unfortunately, the resources needed to support the data collected by average speed cameras was not available at the time. I have nonetheless written again to the Commissioner seeking his support. There is due to be an election this May of the current Commissioner’s replacement. Once the list of candidates is known I will write to them all seeking their support for this measure.

DIONIS MACNAIR MBE DR GRAHAM FERRIS

In November last year the Court received the resignation of elected Verderer Miss Dionis Macnair MBE, who first joined the Court in 1973. Since then, many tributes have rightly been paid to Miss Macnair’s remarkable long period of service and contribution to the workings of the Court.

As a result of Miss Macnair’s resignation, the elected Verderers have, as laid down in The New Forest Act 1877, co-opted somebody to serve in Miss Macnair’s place. Dr Graham Ferris has been co-opted and it is my pleasure to welcome him to the Court today. Dr Ferris is a former chairman of The New Forest Commoners’ Defence Association. He will bring to our deliberations a deep knowledge and love of the Forest. He is eligible to serve as a Verderer until November 2024 when Miss Macnair’s term of office would have expired.

VERGE PARKING IN THE FOREST

There is no doubt that those car drivers who verge park damage both the grazing and the SSSI. They frequently block gateways to which access is needed and, in certain locations, make it difficult or even impossible to pass along the highway.

The Verderers strongly support measures to prevent verge parking. That approach is shared and endorsed by all organisations which are members of the Recreation Management Steering Group (RMS) including, of course, Forestry England. It is clear that even the combination of education, including face to face contact, windscreen stickers, signs and in appropriate locations physical barriers such as dragon’s teeth are not enough to deal with the problem.

The tools open to the Police are limited and, as we are all aware, their resources are already stretched.

Unfortunately, the bylaws of Forestry England, which apply nationally as well as to the Forest, do not prohibit parking on the verges in the New Forest. I understand that a change to the bylaws would take several years. Even if there were a change which brought into force a by law which prohibited verge parking, it would have to be enforced to have any real effect.

The RMS therefore believes that the only effective solution is some kind of traffic regulation order backed by an appropriate enforcement regime, such as the ability to issue fixed penalty notices. Matters of this nature are normally the responsibility of the relevant Highway Authority. Hampshire County Council has, however, indicated that its priority is predominantly road

safety, and funding constraints mean that it is not willing to introduce such a scheme although it has provided some useful information.

The RMS has, therefore, appointed independent highway consultants and is working with them to try to come up with a solution. The cost of instructing those consultants is currently being funded by Forestry England and the Verderers although contributions may be forthcoming from other members of the RMS.

A great deal of time, effort and expense continues to be put in to trying to find an effective way forward, which we hope will bring an end to the indiscriminate verge parking that damages designated habitats interferes with Forest management and the lawful activities of commoners and blights the Forest.

PARKING AND CLOSED CAR PARKS

It has been operational practice of Forestry England for many years to close a small number of car parks in the winter months, when normally demand is lower, in order to reduce wear and tear and maintenance liabilities. This winter has, of course, been exceptional in terms of demand on the Forest as a local greenspace for exercise during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This has led to increased demand on the Forest car parks at certain times and in certain places. Forestry England has been monitoring this and has re-opened closed car parks (sometimes just temporarily) where the demand for parking spaces has resulted in adjacent verge parking. It is clear that overall car park capacity is sufficient in the Forest, but people have continued to be attracted to particular sites resulting in localised pressure. Forestry England will continue to monitor the situation and do what it can, with its available resources, to limit damage to the Forest.

Regarding the long-term strategy for managing parking, this falls within the work of the RMS. Any plans to implement changes to the car park provision can only move forward successfully if there is an enforceable system to control verge parking.