

VERDERERS' COURT

17th February 2021

ANNOUNCEMENTS & DECISIONS

HATCHET POND & PARKING ON THE FOREST BY TRADESPEOPLE

The court received a presentment in December from the Deputy Surveyor and in January from Mr Thomas and Mrs Bolton about the changes to Hatchet Pond.

The Court was unhappy with the removal of the toilet block and expressed that concern to the Deputy Surveyor. However, it had already been removed. So far as the balance of the proposals are concerned, the Court does not object to them. Whilst the car parking will be more visible, on balance we agree that it is better to move the parking further away from the pond itself.

Mr Thomas and Mrs Bolton both raised the issue of verge parking. When appropriate, Forestry England's Verge Protection Officer, tackles the issue of verge parking with the use of dragons teeth or ditching and banking. However, the Verderers are keen to see a more effective and Forest wide prohibition of verge parking. This is something that is being actively pursued through the Recreation Management Strategy steering group of which the Verderers are active members.

Mrs Bolton expressed concern that the restoration of the existing carpark and track will have little effect on the ecology. We have asked Forestry England's ecologist to respond direct to Mrs Bolton on that point.

Mr Thomas also raised the issue of vehicles being parked on the open Forest during construction works on properties adjoining the open Forest. This is not permitted and Forestry England is proactive in managing these situations. When planning permissions are granted for construction work, we understand that the National Park authority draws this issue to the attention of applicants.

HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME

I am delighted to announce that the Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, England's largest agri-environment scheme has again been extended for another year, meaning important conservation projects and support for the unique commoning system which shapes the New Forest will continue into the future.

The HLS helps to protect the New Forest's internationally-important wildlife and habitats.

Launched in 2010 as a 10-year agreement with Natural England, it's managed by the Verderers in partnership with the New Forest National Park Authority and Forestry England. The scheme works to increase the New Forest's resilience in the face of habitat loss and the impacts of the climate change. It has been a rare opportunity to conserve fragile habitats and support commoners and the rollover is welcome news as Britain has now left the EU and is working on a new domestic agricultural programme which is scheduled to come into effect in 2024.

FEEDING OF FOREST ANIMALS BY THE PUBLIC

I am saddened to report that a pony is dead as a result of eating food left on the Forest by a member of the public. The pony was found choking on carrots and died two days later. Another Commoner has been left with a significant vet bill after her pony was found choking, having eating savoury pies that someone had left on the Forest for the animals.

No matter how well intentioned, feeding the ponies is forbidden in the Forest for very good reasons. Not only does it change the ponies foraging behaviours, but it may cause choke and can and does kill. Fed ponies can become aggressive, they learn to approach people and demand food if they think someone has some to offer. A pony who displays this learned behaviour cannot stay on the Forest and has to be removed for the safety of the public, the same public who fed it. The animal will then face a very uncertain future through no fault of its own.

After listening to me, you may still ask what harm can a carrot do? Well, we can this month tell you, with certainty, that a carrot can kill.

If you are concerned about the condition of animals on the Forest do not feed them, but call us on 02380 282052. An Agister will check the animal and if he feels it is necessary, he will arrange for it to be taken home by its owner. Please, **DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS.**