

PLEASE USE THE HELP WHEN OFFERED!

Presentment by Mrs Gilly Jones

Good Morning Official Verderer, Verderers,

As you are all aware, I have a major concern for the Forest and stock when the lockdown is eased.

I want to ask the Verderers to encourage Forestry England to work more closely with others that are offering to help educate visitors to the Forest.

One of the first things the new Chair of the CDA did when she took over was to offer engagement training to members, partly for the OPOF mobile exhibition, but also for members to feel comfortable to talk to members of the public using the Forest.

This training was the same, if not better than, what the FE staff had been put through. A small group has been trained to train others.

The issue we now have is a group of willing volunteers, happy to give up their time to help FE and NPA rangers and staff, unable to do this as there is no permission from FE to do this. I understand lockdown has made it difficult, but 2020 showed that we have to hit the ground running, and in my mind, we need every boot we can get on the ground.

Social media is being used, with limited results. Unless you get to people and actually talk to them, some will think they can use and abuse the Forest. Stock is being put at risk, just for that Instagram photo, that, 'my child wants to feed a donkey a doughnut' experience. Our animals are not out there for that, they should be allowed to do the job they do and not be harassed by the public.

There is a wonderful Facebook group, Litter Pickers of the New Forest, with over 1000 members, started by Stephen Green. They have collected hundreds, if not thousands of bags of litter, which is stunning work, and they are, I'm sure, being appreciated for the work they do. What I am asking for is the chance to do the same for the Forest stock.

Surely, now, there is a huge need to get as many knowledgeable people out there as we can. If not, I hate to think what this summer will bring, and what consequences it will have for the Forest. Unless we all stand together now, work together, we will slip further into the Petting Zoo. That only seems ok, until someone, probably a child, gets seriously hurt.

So, I ask for the Verderers to put pressure on FE to ease the red tape, and work closely with those who are trained, ready and waiting to help and protect the Forest we all know and love.