

Presentment

Court of Verderers April 2021



By Email: enquiries@verderers.org.uk

Mrs Charlotte Lines
New Forest Commoners Defence Association

Re: Forest campsites

The New Forest Commoners' Defence Association asks that the Court reaffirms the importance it attaches to the [Ministers Mandate](#)¹. The mandate has been described by ministers as the Forestry Commission's "*licence to operate*"² on the Crown Lands within the New Forest.

The Mandate states that the principal management objective in the New Forest should be the conservation of the natural & cultural heritage of the Crown lands.

We are deeply concerned that Forestry England is failing to meet its conservation objectives especially in regard to the forest campsites and designated habitats.

The NFCDA believe we have now reached a critical point where an extensive review into the practicality and viability of camping on the New forest is needed. Particularly in relation to:

1. The interaction between our animals and the campers
2. Impact on grazing
3. The impact on the protected habitat and species

There have been numerous conflicts between campers and animals on forest campsites over the years, in recent times the seriousness and number of incidents appears to be increasing. These incidents have the potential to threaten the continuing practice of commoning in the New Forest.

The New Forest Commoners' Defence Association feel that to protect commoning for the future the use of forest campsites needs to be looked at with some urgency, ideally we would like them restored back to the SAC habitats. It has been shown during 2020 that there are plenty of suitable alternative locations for campsites off the open forest. **We ask the Verderers to use all their powers to bring about this change to protect commoning and the New Forest.**

The New Forest SAC plan 2001 states; 'Virtually all New Forest heathland habitats require grazing management to maintain the features for which the site is designated. It is without question the most appropriate principle management tool for the Open Forest vegetation. Illingworth (1991) demonstrated that the

¹ Minister's Mandate to the Forestry Commission: <https://www.realnewforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ministers-Mandate-1999.pdf>

² House of Commons, Hansard, 24th July 2006, Vol 449, Col 714

commoning system is the only really viable way (in terms of cost, and physical effort) to effectively graze the Forest habitats which are subject to common rights. There is no evidence to suggest that this analysis does not hold today.'

Within the areas of the campsites there is a huge detrimental impact on the grazing and an increasing urbanisation of these campsites is changing the very fabric of the forest.

This is reflected in the New Forest SAC plan 2001 which states the campsites impact on specific conservation features of the forest. SAC Plan Part 4, 05b Enjoying the Forest, Access and recreation [A24]: ' We will explore the possibility of re-locating campsites within the Forest and restoring the vacated sites where this becomes necessary due to the decline of habitats within the SAC. The requirement was to implement this by 2003.'

With today's knowledge of the issues arising around campsites on the open forest, we know that none of the statutory authorities, tasked with protecting the forest, would give permission for a campsite such as these. The SAC plan recognised the consequences of the campsites in 2001 and recommended closure, yet nothing has been done.

We would welcome further dialogue with FE and the Verderers to discuss our thoughts in detail.

Contact: Charlotte@realnewforest.org