



New Forest Commoners Defence Association

Hon. Chairman Dr Graham Ferris, Derrants, Durnstown, Sway,
Lymington, Hants. SO416AL, Tel. 01590 682002
E mail gferris@derrants.com

Dear Sir,

23rd September 2013

Towards a new forest estate management body

The New Forest Commoners' Defence Association has been promoting and defending the interests of some 700 members who exercise their Rights to graze some 7,000 mainly ponies and cattle on the open unfenced lowland heath commons of the New Forest.

The largest part of these commons is Crown Land, managed together with commercial forestry and ancient and ornamental woodlands, by the Forestry Commission.

The grazing and browsing action of the Commoners' livestock together with the land management actions in support of commoning have shaped the landscape of the New Forest and the unique mosaic of special habitats which enjoy the highest levels of national and international habitat designations and protection.

The vital role of the FC in all of the above and in the unique cultural heritage of the New Forest has shaped our response below to the proposals for a new public forest estate management body in England.

Legislation

The governance structure of the New Forest which has preserved and defended this very special landscape is based on the New Forest Acts between 1877 and 1970, the powers of the Verderers embodied in these Acts and their ability to establish local Bye-Laws. The primary legislation to establish the new PFE management body must not in any way weaken this structure either by design or drafting accident.

Objectives

We welcome the individual components of the objectives in Annex A. But we feel very strongly that certainly in the New Forest context and judging by public reaction to a previous PFE consultation, also in a national context, environmental and social objectives should take priority over economic objectives as measured in simple financial terms. The ordering of objectives should reflect this priority throughout. And the Sandford Principle should be explicitly embraced.

Objectives should include the development and maintenance of local pools of skill, knowledge and experience and the provision of local employment opportunities. All of which have been grievously eroded in recent times by a misguided sense of priorities.

Governance

THE ASSOCIATION'S AIMS ARE:

1. To promote and safeguard the interests of the Commoners, particularly with regard to the welfare of ponies, cattle and other agistered stock.
2. To co-operate with the Verderers in the maintenance of the perimeter fencing of the perambulation of the New Forest.
3. To investigate and, in appropriate cases, to support any claim by any member of the Association for compensation in respect of death or injury to an animal depastured in the Forest and to assist any member in meeting a claim in respect of damage alleged to have been caused by an animal depastured in the Forest.



New Forest Commoners Defence Association

Hon. Chairman Dr Graham Ferris, Derrants, Durnstow, Sway,
Lymington, Hants. SO416AL, Tel. 01590 682002
E mail gferris@derrants.com

The Board and Guardians structure, if it mirrors the corporate Executive Board and Supervisory Board model in private industry can be successful, but needs also to incorporate an appropriate level of devolved financial authority to local management. And the definition of roles and accountability between the two entities needs to give the Guardians real power to intervene when necessary.

Natural Capital Accounts

In addition to Capital Accounts, the methodology / philosophy needs to expand to include quantification of on-going social revenue based on environmental and social good generated, if “Heritage Forests” are not to become poor relations of more overtly commercial areas of forestry.

Revenue Generation

This is a case where one size does not fit all. Access in the New Forest is open. Car parking charges would need to be carefully managed to avoid alienating the local residents. And any significant increase in revenue generating recreational events in the New Forest would run the risk of undoing centuries of careful protection of this very special environment and the loss of the cultural heritage of commoning.

Yours Faithfully

Dr Graham Ferris (Chair New Forest Commoners' Defence Association)

THE ASSOCIATION'S AIMS ARE:

1. To promote and safeguard the interests of the Commoners, particularly with regard to the welfare of ponies, cattle and other agistered stock.
2. To co-operate with the Verderers in the maintenance of the perimeter fencing of the perambulation of the New Forest.
3. To investigate and, in appropriate cases, to support any claim by any member of the Association for compensation in respect of death or injury to an animal depastured in the Forest and to assist any member in meeting a claim in respect of damage alleged to have been caused by an animal depastured in the Forest.