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New Forest LEADER+ 2000-2006 Programme and The Countryside Agency

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Forward

This report came about following a chance remark I made to the then Chairman of the Commoners Defence Association, Richard Manley. From his reply it was apparent that there had been no study done of the commoning community within the New Forest specifically looking at their present housing and land needs and also trying to look into the future to identify the problems they face in trying to ensure the continuity of the practice.

Recognising the value of such a study the New Forest Association invited the Commoners’ Defence Association and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to help rectify the situation, having worked with them before to produce the “Loss of Commonable Grazing Land Review” in 2000,

An approach for funding was made to the New Forest Leader+ project, which not only approved the idea but also found match funding through the Countryside Agency. Some two years on and after a lot of hard work, the review is now complete.

The premise for the review is deceptively simple, and is based on an acknowledgement that the stock that graze the open areas of the New Forest are its true architects and vital to the maintenance of its conservation and ecological value. Without the stock the very nature of the open areas of the New Forest would change dramatically, leading to the loss of much of its beauty, wilderness quality and ecological value.

Given that maintaining suitable levels of stock on the open forest is crucial it is obvious that it is also crucial that we maintain the community of people who own and look after the stock. In other words, the commoners who have rights of pasture over the Crown lands of the New Forest and its adjacent commons, and in particular those who wish to exercise these rights over the long term.

We are not the first to recognise the importance of commoning to the New Forest and, having spent some time trying to quantify it, I was alerted to the fact that English Nature had recently produced a document which succinctly encapsulates the situation in a far more concise way than my efforts, and which I hope they will forgive me for borrowing.

‘The quality of the habitats of the New Forest, and the rich diversity of species which they support, is dependent upon the management activities of the various owners and occupiers. Of fundamental importance throughout the Crown lands and Adjacent Commons is the persistence of a pastoral economy based on the existence of Rights of Common. The commoners' stock, mainly cattle and ponies, roam freely over extensive areas of the New Forest, playing a vital role in keeping open habitats free of scrub and controlling the more aggressive species such as bracken and purple-moor grass, and maintaining the richness and variety of heathlands and wood pasture habitats’.

Although strenuous efforts have been made over the last few years to increase the financial viability of commoning, the dramatic increases in property prices have accelerated well beyond the means of the average person to buy and/or rent within the area, especially property with land suitable for commoning. It is a sad fact that not withstanding these efforts, the income from commoning alone will never support the costs of buying a suitable small holding for commoning in the New Forest area.
Historically it can be argued that it never has, and that most commoners have always had other jobs as well. This is true, but given the fact that to buy a suitable holding would now probably require a minimum of £500,000 the possibility of raising such a sum remains well out of reach of the average person.

At present this is a problem on an individual and personal level, which is not yet affecting the fabric of the New Forest, but it will, and one of the important points that this review highlights is the slow erosion of the core commoning families in the New Forest in whom the knowledge and heritage of commoning reside.

As the comments of those that took part in our survey show, the recent dramatic rise in prices will only accelerate the problem, with the vast majority of small holdings coming on to the market being sold as amenity land and lost to the long-term commoning community.

This review does not claim to have the answers, but hopefully it has analysed and presented the problem in such a way as to help you understand the gravity of the situation facing the New Forest, and shows how a cursory analysis of the facts about the present number of commoners and stock levels mask the true problem.

We recognise that the effects of the problem identified will not become apparent overnight. However, we also recognise that it would be foolish not to start taking action now to address the problem before it becomes critical, irreversible and the cause of irreparable damage to this wonderful area.

We hope you agree and will join us in our efforts.

William Ziegler
Chairman New Forest Association

There have been many people involved in the preparation of this document, and on behalf of the New Forest Association, the Commoners’ Defence Association and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust I would like to thank:

Dr Jo Ivey who has co-ordinated it all for us, and the Market Research Group, based at Bournemouth University, who undertook the fieldwork.

All those who helped gather and those who provided the information needed, including:

The Verderers of the New Forest, The Forestry Commission, Local estates, Estate agents

And, of course, the hundreds of commoners who replied to our questionnaires and in particular those who were chosen to take part in the detailed face to face interviews.

Without the help of all of these people this document would have been impossible to complete.

Thanks are also due to Leader+ and the Countryside Agency for recognising the value of this research and providing the funding that has allowed us to carry it out.
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Words of New Forest commoners:

The community aspect is important. Because there are other commoners carrying on, I do too, but if I was by myself I would pack it in. It's a social thing. You meet people and have things in common. I suppose we're boring because we don't go on holiday and all we talk about is commoning; but as long as you're satisfied, that's the main thing in life.

As time goes on, I struggle more and more to understand why I stay here. The Forest just has no opportunity for the likes of the real commoners, the young commoners, to stay here because everything is against them. It just grieves me totally how they have allowed this to happen.

Is it really worth all the hassle? We laugh. They talk about rare breeds. One of the rarest breeds is a practicing New Forest commoner. Rare breeds die out because they are too stupid to adapt.

This report is dedicated to the commoners of the New Forest whose wealth of knowledge and experience have so often been ignored.
1. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

• The New Forest Association has joined forces with the Commoners’ Defence Association and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust to commission the research set out in this report;

• The research focuses on the lack of affordable commoners’ holdings and land and the effects which this situation is likely to have on the continuation of commoning in the New Forest;

• The research includes a review of published works, both historical and contemporary, to set the context for the situation in which commoners presently find themselves, as well as a postal survey and personal interviews with commoners, employed to discover the detail of their present situation and views on the future.

1.2 The evolution of the commoners’ holding in the New Forest

• The use of common land to support small scale agriculture was widespread across much of north-west Europe until the second half of the 20th century;

• Its continuation was ensured in the New Forest because of the protection afforded to the area by the imposition of Forest Law in the 11th century;

• Records dating from the seventeenth century up to the middle of the 20th show that there were between one and two thousand small holdings in the area of the New Forest, though not all of these are known to have common rights;

• Descriptions of holdings indicate that they were simple cottages, with a small plot of land, an orchard and a few small outbuildings;

• The rights of common attached to their property made it possible for cottagers to secure a far better living than could be attained on similar land in other parts of the country;

• Improved transport links, which were first introduced in the latter part of the 19th century, but accelerated in the 20th century, brought new residents and increasing numbers of tourists to the area which was seen as an outpost of ‘wilderness’ and beauty;

• New residents and tourism brought with them higher house and land prices which, by the 1970's, were said to rival those of parts of London.

1.3 The present housing situation

• The New Forest Housing Needs Survey, published in 2001, identified an annual need for a further 709 units of affordable housing in New Forest District. However, the work
focuses on overall housing need, and does not separate rural from urban need, nor does it mention the special needs of commoners in the area;

- The recent New Forest Rural Housing Development Strategy is aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural settlements. However, despite highlighting the need for key worker housing, including commoners, it again focuses on general needs housing;

- Censuses of the commoning population, carried out in 1991 and 2001, highlighted a number of issues which commoning is facing. In both, the problem of securing housing and land within the perambulation at prices which are affordable in the context of the commoning economy was considered to be a major barrier to young commoners.

1.4 The markets for housing and land in the New Forest

- Land Registry figures show that between 1996 and 2004 there has been a 200% increase in house prices in the South East, with a greater increase in the New Forest than in Hampshire or the wider region;

- Local estate agents presently value rural properties with land which might be suitable for commoning at between half a million and 2 million pounds and consider that they have doubled over the past 5 years;

- Rentals in the private sector are mainly urban properties, about half of which are houses. Prices range from £375 a month for an urban studio flat to £2,500 a month for a 4 bedroom thatched cottage in a rural setting;

- Presently the purchase price for grazing land in the New Forest ranges from £20,000 to £30,000 per acre (£49,360 to £74,040 per hectare). Rentals are divided between strict agricultural arrangements which range from £50 to £75 per acre (£123 to £185 per hectare) to recreational horse paddocks at £200 plus per acre (£494 per hectare);

- The Forestry Commission and landed estates of the New Forest have the main reservoir of property, including land, which is likely to be suitable for commoners to rent;

- The Forestry Commission has a policy of favouring commoners in its rentals, as do a small number of estates. However, by far the greatest proportion of these properties are let on the open market, and at market rents.

1.5 The postal survey

- The postal survey was sent out to 528 commoners at 488 separate addresses. Forty-three percent of these forms were completed and returned;

- A quarter of respondents have been commoning for all their lives. When the results are compared with those from the 1991 and 2001 censuses, it is apparent that, while the
number of commoners turning out for more than 20 years has increased, the number of lifetime commoners has declined;

- A smaller percentage of commoners live in homes which have been occupied by their families for more than one generation than was recorded by research in 1981;

- The percentage of commoners who own their homes is similar to that recorded for New Forest District Council area by the 2001 Census; but they are more likely to rent from a private landlord (mainly the Forestry Commission and landed estates), and less likely to rent from a social landlord than the wider population of the area;

- A fifth of commoners live in homes which are covered by some sort of planning constraint (agricultural occupancy, permission for a non-permanent dwelling, or a commoners’ dwelling);

- The most commonly quoted problem which commoners experience in respect of their homes is that they are too far from their land and stock;

- While almost all commoners have access to some land, well over half have 10 acres (4 hectares) or less, and a third have 5 acres (2 hectares) or less;

- Almost two thirds of the land used in commoning which is adjacent to the commoners’ dwelling is owned, while almost half of that apart from their homes is rented;

- The great majority of commoners have access to a yard and buildings to support their activities. Three quarters of these yards are owned by the commoner who uses them.

- Less than half the holdings described in the survey consist of a dwelling with adjacent land and yard which is all owned by the commoner;

- The largest number of problems associated with land and yards relate to a shortage of land or buildings because of cost, planning problems or availability;

- Over a third of respondents said that there is someone in their family who would like to common independently, but is prevented from doing so. High prices for housing and land, as well as poor employment opportunities locally, were cited as the main barriers;

- Very few of the commoners who responded to the survey thought that it was likely that their children would continue as commoners, while almost half thought that they were not likely to do so;

- Two thirds of respondents expect to pass their property on to their descendents on their death, but only a third of these properties are expected to remain in commoning into the next generation;
Almost three quarters of those who expect to pass their property onto their descendents, but do not expect it to remain in commoning, cite problems of inheritance: the need to share the inheritance, or inheritance tax, as the main reason that their holdings will not remain in commoning. For the remainder of this group, or their descendents, commoning is no long a viable option.

1.6 The personal interview survey

The commoners who agreed to take part in the face-to-face interview survey came from a range of backgrounds, and from all areas of the Forest and beyond;

All had been in commoning for a number of years, with many having been born into families whose commoning histories go back several generations;

Those born into commoning are proud of their long family histories, the traditions in which they were brought up, and their lifetime connection to the Forest;

Those who have chosen commoning for themselves are equally proud of their connection with the tradition, and keen to see it survive;

Problems identified in interviewees’ present circumstances were:
- The remoteness of their homes from their land and/or the Forest,
- Insecure tenure resulting from accommodation tied to employment,
- The need to expand their home or their holding to make their present situation viable,
- Living in a mobile home, perhaps with only temporary planning permission, and
- The need for more land to support their commoning;

Plans for the future concerned:
- How long they would be able to continue as they grow older,
- Possibilities for the expansion of their commoning with support from younger family members, and
- The problems for younger commoners who are seeking a foothold in the Forest;

Interviewees’ thoughts about their children, or other young family members were:
- Parents’ enjoyment of their young children’s enthusiasm for commoning activities,
- The awareness of the parents of many older children that there is little to keep them interested in commoning; and
- The reality of how many young people are forced out of the Forest to find employment and housing;

While the children of some of the older interviewees have managed to set themselves up independently as commoners, they are aware that it is the coming generation – their grandchildren – who are confronting real problems with remaining in the area, let alone with setting up as commoners;
• Young commoners, who have been forced to stay living with their parents or to leave the area, are bitter at the way their New Forest has been taken over by wealthy incomers who have driven the price of housing and land beyond the means of the local population;

• Older commoners are aware of how much the future of their own commoning will depend on their families (or their friends and neighbours in some cases), but many are positive about continuing;

• Commoners whose housing relies on their employment are negative about the possibility that they will be able to remain in the Forest when they retire, forcing them to give up their lives as commoners;

• The majority of commoners think that they will leave their homes, holdings and animals to their families, but are doubtful under what circumstances these will be able to remain in commoning;

• Some of those who have no direct descendents are seeking ways to ensure that their commoning assets are kept in commoning after their death;

• The majority are seeking ways to ensure that the inheritance which they can pass on to their children, other relatives or the commoning community, will not be dissipated and lost to the future of commoning in the New Forest;

• Other comments on broader issues concern:
  • The Commoners’ Housing Scheme,
  • Suggested policy options to secure the future,
  • The problems which the planning system present to commoning, and
  • Memories of cottages lost and people who have died or left, and how these have been replaced by people who come from outside.

1.7 Trends in commoners’ housing

• The report has shown in a number of ways that commoning is changing in response to change in the wider local and global environment;

• There are clear trends in the distribution of commoners’ housing away from the central parishes in the perambulation, and into Waterside and the suburban fringes;

• There has also been an increase in the number of commoners turning out ponies, coupled with an increase in the number of ponies turned out;

• At the same time there has been a decline in the number turning out cattle, with fewer animals turned out;
• Earlier research has shown the wide distribution and extent of back up land used by commoners. It identified more than 6000 acres (2400 hectares) used by commoning in 2001;

• The apparently healthy situation in commoning, evidenced by the present numbers of commoners and stock depastured, disguises a destabilising population;

• A growing percentage of the commoning population turns out for 5 years or less, as new commoners enter and leave the practice;

• Using a range of herd sizes for ponies and cattle (based on median and mean herd sizes per commoner), and a global New Forest herd of between 3,000 and 5,000 animals, the report proposes different sizes of populations of commoners needed to maintain the herd;

• The report suggests that, while it is clear that commoners’ holdings are increasingly located in boundary parishes and outside of the perambulation, the future of commoning will best be secured by retaining as many holdings as possible within the boundary of the open Forest. Wherever possible, these holdings should include housing, yard and buildings, and at least some land in the same location.

1.8 A future for commoners’ housing in the New Forest
• Present government policy on affordable housing does not allow for the provision of subsidised housing for commoners;

• New Forest District Council’s adopted local plan includes a policy to allow the construction of individual commoners’ holdings under agreement with the Council;

• The Forestry Commission is a major provider of affordable rented holdings and land to commoners;

• The landed estates play a restricted role in providing affordable houses and land to commoners;

• Proposals to create 2 commoners’ holdings on the Manor of Cadland may show the way forward for greater provision for commoners on estate lands;

• A legal framework is needed to allow for the inheritance of property to support the future of commoning;

• With the possibility that the government agenda to widen access to funding for first time buyers, the possibility of including commoners must be fully examined;

• Regard must be given to the diversity of the commoning population which has to be fully engaged in the development of any schemes to provide holdings.
1.9 Conclusions

- Commoning, as we see it today, has arisen through a history of small holding reliant on common rights which dates back to before the Norman Conquest;

- Over the centuries, industrialisation, globalisation and increasing wealth has left the New Forest with a fragment of an ancient agricultural system struggling to survive in a highly populated and wealthy part of Britain;

- This agricultural system, which supports the ecology of the area, and makes it so attractive to visitors, can no longer be sustained in an area of very high land and house prices;

- If commoning, and as a consequence, the New Forest, is to survive in recognisable form, actions must be taken to support the practice, and secure a land and property base in which it can continue over the long term;

- All forms of tenure should be considered, and local and national government policy aimed at securing affordable homes for the wider population should be developed innovatively to include the commoning population.
2. **INTRODUCTION**

The New Forest Association and its partners in this research are concerned that one of the biggest threats to commoning in the New Forest, over the long term, is a lack of affordable commoners’ holdings and land. While the fact of the growing inaccessibility of housing and land to commoners is well known, there is no reliable evidence of the scale and distribution of the problem: the effects which it has had in the past, and is likely to have on the future.

In response to this concern, the Association has joined with the Commoners’ Defence Association and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust to secure Leader+ funding from the Forest Friendly Farming Project to undertake research to investigate the scale of the problem and identify possible options to alleviate the situation in the future.

The main purpose of this research is to:

> 'confirm the situation and provide the group, and other interested parties with the factual and statistical backup needed to present the problem to those that have the power to do something about it and force them to take action now before the situation becomes critical and has a long term detrimental effect on the conservation of the New Forest both physically and as regards the cultural heritage of the area.'

2.1 **Research background and objectives**

The research conducted for this report focuses on the rural housing and land situation in the New Forest as it affects the present livelihoods and future prospects of the commoning population. It sets the commoners’ way of life into the context of an area of southern England which attracts millions of visitors each year, and has a growing population of wealthy new residents, keen to share in the space and tranquility, as well as the facilities, which the New Forest offers.

In particular, the project focuses upon:

- The number, character and distribution of holdings which support the present commoning community and its activities;
- The accessibility of holdings to commoners, particularly young people keen to set up on their own;
- The housing and land situation of active commoners and the circumstances of new entrants and leavers to the practice; and
- Projections of the future size and distribution of the commoning community and the holdings necessary to ensure the future sustainability of the practice.
In order to achieve these aims, the study includes:

- A review of published works on the past and present commoning community;
- A study of the local housing market for owner-occupied and private rented accommodation and land suitable for commoning;
- A questionnaire-based survey of practicing commoners to discover their present housing and land situation, and future needs for their family’s continued involvement in commoning;
- An analysis of the scale and distribution of commoners holdings in the past and present, in order to build a model for the level of future need for holdings.

### 2.2 Methodology

The research includes three main types of data:

- A desktop study of published documents and sources;
- A postal survey of the whole commoning population as recorded in the Verderers’ Marking Fee Register, and
- Thirty-two face-to-face interviews\(^1\) with individual commoners who have experienced housing/land related problems in the past, are experiencing them presently, or feel that they or their children will do so in the future.

The desktop study focuses on a number of different types of source material. Historical information comes from the contemporary accounts of Briscoe Eyre and Kenchington, as well as the modern interpretations of Tubbs and Kiff amongst others. The analysis of the housing market is based on nationally published statistics, a study of the local market and interviews with estate agents, representatives of the Forestry Commission and the land agents of New Forest estates.

Information on the commoners’ present situation is derived from recent studies of commoning, including two censuses, undertaken in 1991 and 2001. Other information included in the report comes from the New Forest District Council’s Housing Needs Survey, and its Rural Housing Strategy.

The postal survey is based on a short questionnaire designed in conjunction with the members of the Review group. The survey was administered by the Market Research Group of Bournemouth University. A member of the MRG team was given access to an address list of practising commoners in the Verderers’ Office. The questionnaires and a letter written by

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\(^1\) In total 39 people were interviewed, some in joint interviews. This represents 7.4% of the total number of commoners originally contacted. The qualitative results of this part of the survey are used to add background and detail to the statistical results from the postal survey, not to offer numerical information.
the Chairman of the Commoners’ Defence Association were sent directly from the office to each commoner on the list, even if more than one commoner lived at a given address. A prepaid return envelope, addressed to the MRG office, was included in the package. When the full set of returned questionnaires was received they were data entered by MRG and supplied for analysis.

Respondents to the postal survey were invited to put their names forward for an interview, particularly if they felt they had housing or land issues which could provide evidence for the research. Respondents from across the Forest, with a range of issues which they wished to discuss, were selected from the list of names supplied. These people were contacted and an interview time convenient to them was agreed. A member of the MRG then visited them in their home and conducted an open interview with them based on a schedule of guidance notes. The interviews were recorded on tape, which was later transcribed and the resultant notes supplied for analysis.

2.3 Presentation and interpretation of the data

The research is therefore based on three distinct and mutually supportive types of data: historical and published sources, a full postal survey of the commoning community, and in-depth interview information. This allows the report to generate an historical and contemporary background for the data, to set out a statistical context and to include personal opinion and experience in its analysis.

The use of full datasets of the distribution of the commoning community over the past 40 years has made it possible to indicate how the population has changed over time and to model the possible future distribution of the community. This data has been mapped to show how these changes operated across the Forest, making the trends clear to those reading and using the analysis.

The information and insights drawn from these chapters is then brought together in a consideration of possible initiatives and future policy frameworks which can be presented to statutory and non-statutory organisations in a position to access the funding and necessary planning consents. It is crucial that such planning starts in the near future, before the threat to the future of commoning becomes a reality.
3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE COMMONERS’ HOLDING IN THE NEW FOREST

3.1 Introduction

The New Forest owes its peculiar form of agricultural economy to the rights of common which have existed over the area since before the time of the Norman conquest, and the imposition of Forest Law on the land over the period between 1066 and 1086. This law prohibited the ‘assarting’ (forest clearance for agricultural purposes) of all forest land and also introduced restrictions on the exercise of the rights of common, for the purpose of protecting the stock of deer for hunting.

In Norman times the use of common land to support small scale agriculture was widespread across much of England. Over the ensuing centuries, the expansion of the country’s population and the improvement and mechanisation of agricultural techniques, led to the gradual enclosure of much open wasteland and the extinguishment of common rights over it. As a consequence, the type of pastoral agriculture which relies on access to common land was confined to an increasingly small number of areas in England.

The Forest Law could not protect the full extent of the royal forest’s boundary and, over the ensuing centuries, political allegiance was secured through the grant of numerous tracts of land both around and within the present perambulation of the New Forest to the nobility and religious orders, in exchange for services rendered, giving rise to the large estates which still exist in the locality. Better agricultural land was also sold to other owners, with much of it being enclosed, though some has remained as manorial wastes upon which certain common rights continued.

Though in decline, and subject to similar change, the type of pastoral economy practised in the New Forest was widespread through much of the areas of lowland heath in north-west Europe until the second half of the 20th century. However, social and economic pressures on this unproductive agricultural system have meant that, where they have not disappeared completely, such areas are now grazed as part of conservation management. The loss of the use of the rights of common is now so widespread that Tubbs comments that ‘so far as I know, it is only in the New Forest that a pastoral economy based on the exercise of common rights over unenclosed common land truly survives, albeit in a modified form.’

3.2 An historical view of commoners’ holdings

The earliest register of common rights was drawn up in 1670 before a Justice Seat for the Forest. The extent and detail included in the register give a clear record of the importance which such rights had for the area’s agricultural economy. Tubbs reports that

307 claims were registered, but these refer to a much larger number of holdings because the lords of the larger manors submitted single claims covering all their tenants and copyholders. Most holdings specifically mentioned were between 1 acre (0.4 ha) and 50 acres (20 ha) in size. Most of the smaller ones were the manorial tenants but there were many tiny freehold

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2 Tubbs: 2001: p 112
3 Tubbs 1965: p25

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properties. There were also many holdings in the 50-200 acres (20-81 ha) range, often identified as assarts and usually occupied by ‘Gentlemen’.  

In 1875 a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to inquire into the causes of complaints by commoners that their rights were being eroded by disafforestation. Evidence given by W. Esdaile analysed the 1854 Register of Claims which included 1200 claims to common rights. There were 571 ‘larger holders’: i.e. of over 30 acres, while the small commoners it describes as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 acre</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 acres</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-10 acres</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 acres</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30 acres</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Tubbs goes on to compare these figures with those published by Kenchington in 1944, who gives a total of 1995 agricultural holdings in the New Forest, though not all of these were recorded as having common rights:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 acres</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 acres</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 acres</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-50 acres</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-100 acres</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 100 acres</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other evidence to the Select Committee, presented by Briscoe Eyre in a paper written to quantify the value of common rights and argue against enclosure, describes the high value of common rights attached to small holdings in the following terms: ‘The “turning out” belonging to the “small places” was as valuable as the places themselves pretty near.”

He goes on to describe the livelihoods of the small holders of the New Forest in the late nineteenth century. At that time, whilst he admits that cottage stock keeping on common land was not unique to the New Forest, it was far more widespread in the Forest than anywhere else in the south of England.

Although New Forest cottagers were generally not self sufficient on their land, relying on labouring and petty trade for a steady income, Briscoe Eyre points out that the profits of the family holding compared favourably to those of a farm about three times its size, and twice its rent, as a result of the benefits accruing from the exercise of common rights. He describes the region as ‘characterised by a moderate but widespread prosperity, even in these hard times, and by a low percentage of pauperism’.

His description of the Forest at the time of his report describes the woods and heaths, with low-lying, fertile lawns and ‘Here and there, a brown hamlet on high ground, or a stray cottage with its little plot and orchard, nestling in some sheltered hollow or skirting the roadside’. Well established holdings included a garden and orchard, with buildings including a ‘cottage, cowpen and pigstye’.

The usual house plot ran to 2 or 3 roods which, with access to a good stretch of neighbouring common, would support a cow. While the cow lived on the Forest during the

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4 Tubbs 1986: p 95
5 Briscoe Eyre 1883.
6 Briscoe Eyre, *op cit*, p32: Extract of evidence 3299 Parnell.
7 Briscoe Eyre, *op cit*, p50.
summer months, two crops of hay could be taken from the ‘heavily manured orchard’. This would support the cow through the winter, with the addition of turnips, pollard and mash. On such a diet the cow could be expected to produce butter for sale over the gate throughout the year, while the skimmed milk would be used to fatten a pig.

Pigs have traditionally been the small holder’s most useful animal. They turn ‘everything to use and provide valuable manure’ and, on the Forest with the right of mast, the cost of rearing them could be reduced by one third. Briscoe Eyre estimates that, on the basis of a holding based on a single cow and as many pigs as capital and the season would accommodate, commoners could earn twice as much as their weekly labourers’ wage.

By renting a small meadow, of between one and one-and-a-half acres, Briscoe Eyre reckons that a commoner could improve his situation considerably. With the additional labour provided by his wife, two cows could be kept. The rental of five acres of meadow would enable the cottager to keep 3 or 4 cows and a couple of sows. But Briscoe Eyre argues that, by this stage, he would probably have reached the limit of his out-buildings and ability to winter stock. Unless he had well grown children, he would probably not go beyond this point, since any further increase in acreage would necessitate the hiring of labour, and a subsequent change in occupation to self employment, or as a dealer in butter, eggs, poultry and garden produce.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century better access to the New Forest, resulting from the development of the railway and extension of the road network meant that new residents started to move into the area. Kenchington describes this first wave of incomers as “new gentry” flocking into the district, many of them to old lodges and “service cottages” put on the estate market perhaps by the Office of Woods as “superior gentlemen’s residence in beautiful and romantic surroundings.” In addition, the improvement of the road network allowed the opening up of the area to residential development.

Over the remaining years of the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, the New Forest’s importance to the Crown as a source of revenue from timber was replaced by its potential as an area of recreational and natural history importance. The recreational potential of the area for residents and visitors alike started to increase property values to a level which Kenchington describes as ‘almost urban frontage values’, prompting landowners, including some of those commoners who owned their holdings, to take advantage of the potential of the growing market.

Although the industrial revolution started to bring change into the New Forest with the coming of the railway and metalled roads, descriptions of commoners holdings even from the early part of the 20th century indicate that the way of life on the Forest survived in many ways unchanged up to the time of the First World War. Jack Humby, a New Forest keeper, described the cottage in which he grew up in Linwood, in the south west of the Forest just after the turn of the century.

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8 Pollard: A tree that is cut above the reach of grazing animals (c.2-4m) and is allowed to grow again to produce successive crops of wood.
9 Kenchington 1944: p112. Although David Stagg points out the New Forest Act of 1877 prevented the Forestry Commission from selling off its holdings in the New Forest, and that this bar remained until 1981.
10 Ivey 1995: pp5-6
Roe Cottage in Linwood at the turn of the 20th century

Roe was a woodman's cottage, set down from the road, with the enclosure running behind. The cottage still stands, but it has been altered quite a lot. And, of course, the enclosure was all broad leaves then - oak and beech - now it's conifer.

When I was a boy the cottage was a simple place with no electricity or mains water. At the right end there was a small extension which we called the backhouse. It had a tall chimney built over the brick oven. In the wall which adjoined to the house there was an open fire and an earthenware sink in the corner. The well where all our water came from stood just outside the back door.

My mother used to do her baking and washing in the backhouse. In the summer we often ate in there, and our boots and outdoor clothes were hung there. When they first moved in it was an old board place, and the creepers came through the boards indoors. And, if the creeper came through, the wind must have come through too!

I think I'm right in saying it was 1904, when they pulled the old wooden one down and built the brick one, at the end, where the oven was. I don't know whether there was an oven there before, but I expect there was a fireplace of some sort.

Next to the backhouse there was the kitchen, where we had most of our meals in the winter time. Leading from that was a passage which led to the scullery, or what we called pantry, where we kept the food. It was quite big, and we used to keep the bread which Mother baked and our bacon in there. The sides of pork were salted and laid on a stone platform, before being smoked.

Then there was the sitting room on the end. At the other end there was a larger extension with a thatched roof. That was the cider house. Next to the cottage there stood a big yew tree. Both the extension and the yew have gone now though.

Upstairs there were two big bedrooms, one at each end, and a small one in the middle. You went up the stairs and turned left to the big bedroom, the smaller one was along a little narrow passage. The second large bedroom was off the stairs to the right.

At the back of the cottage we had a vegetable garden. We grew mostly potatoes, runner beans, beetroots and parsnips, and a few carrots. Peas were considered a luxury, we didn't have room for them. We grew the main food crops which would keep us through the winter. If we ran out we'd have to buy potatoes, but that was a difficult job in those days. Everybody who had potatoes wanted them for themselves. The families in the village were big and none of them had much to spare. But there we are; it was hard going.
We had about an acre and three quarters of meadow, as well as a paddock and an orchard. My father built a large pound in the yard, and a pig sty and a food store at the back. Then there was a calf shed and stables for four horses.

This cottage, and a 6 acre hay meadow, gave the forest keeper, his wife and seven children a good living with the support of his keeper’s wages. There was strict demarcation of work, and all the children were expected to pull their weight.

Other commoners relied on the sale of much of what they produced to support their households. Dan Mansbridge, born in 1905 in Longdown, recounted how, at the age of 15 or 16, his mother had taken over a little “round” ‘selling the produce: butter, eggs, anything else that was going. She used to do a lot of poultry. She’d go right into Southampton with a horse and cart, twice a week.’ According to Mr Mansbridge, at that time, the city was served by numerous small holders, who came in from the surrounding countryside to sell their produce. They developed relationships with the householders in the city and sold from door to door, mostly to order. If they had anything left at the end of the round, they would leave them with local butchers to sell for them.11

While this small-scale trade went on up to the time of the Second World War, increasing industrialisation and international competition for many of the goods which the Forest produced in the early part of the 20th century, led to the accelerating erosion of the area’s traditional economic base. The use to which many of the traditional rights had been put in sustaining a broad-based economy: the cutting and carting of turves, bracken and gorse to sell as fuel, and the breeding of hardy ponies for carting and work in the pits, were all in decline12.

Despite the gradual erosion of the economic and property base of commoning which started during this period, it was not until the years following the second world war that the traditional small holder’s way of life was seriously undermined. On the basis of a personal survey Kenchington writes that in 1942:

‘about 26 per cent were operated in the manner of miniature farms with horned stock as the main line and with little emphasis on small stock or petits-cultures. The remaining 74 percent were operated in more smallholding-like manner, but on almost all horned stock and ponies were kept, although here rather a smaller side of the production plan.

Of the miniature farm type about 56 per cent represented the occupier’s sole or predominant source of income. In the remaining 44 per cent the holding, although operated with productive intent in some way or other, was anything from a serious secondary occupation down to a hobby or that accidental appendage to a residence. With the smallholding type the position was similar and according to expectations, primary interest about 26 per cent, serious interest 32 per cent, minor interest 42 per cent.13

In the years following the war the area became more accessible as a result of the increasing use of the car, the expansion of Southampton and the urbanisation of Waterside, the decline of working commoners was matched by increasing numbers of ‘amenity’ commoners attracted to the area. In the early part of this period Kenchington notes that ‘in most Forest villages, despite all the new building of forty years there are far fewer cottages at rents the native commoner can afford. In Bramshaw parish, to go even further, the total dwellings of all classes number quite twenty less than fifty years ago despite all the subsequent building

11 Unpublished interview with Dan Mansbridge, recorded in 1995.
12 Countryside Commission 1981: p29
13 Kenchington 1944:pp146-147.
and middle-class residents. Thus native commoners’ sons and daughters are reduced to waiting for dead men’s cottages, living in rooms, or living miles from their work in council-house estates at rents more than their agricultural wages can afford.  

Undertaking an analysis of the commoning economy in the period between the mid 18th century and the early 1970’s Janet Kiff undertook an analysis of the Forest parishes of Burley and Bramshaw. Over the period covered by her study she notes that the number of practicing commoners had declined from 1200 to 327; a fact which she puts down to the decreasing viability of commoning as an agricultural system. 

She identifies a growing trend for commoners, particularly the growing number of ‘hobby commoners’ to turn out a ‘few ponies for pleasure rather than gain’. This change was leading to a growing number of ponies being depastured on the Forest ‘at the expense of the number of cattle, there having been little net change in the total number of animals turned out since 1960’.

Rising land values in the area, as a result of the demand for building land and ‘the national trend to have a second home, and to retire to country locations in the south of England’ had ‘precipitated and still affects the dropping numbers of commoners in the New Forest’. Young local people were being deterred from continuing the commoning practice of their parents by the high prices paid for small dwellings, which were comparable to those paid for properties ‘in the suburbs of London, and so are too expensive for would-be small-holders at the start of their adult life’. 

She notes that ‘There is also a general shortage of enclosed land within the Forest and growing demand for paddocks in which to keep riding ponies. The returns from using enclosed land from which to turn out animals onto the common grazing are generally small, so that unless intangible benefits such as location, environment or traditional values outweigh the costs, it pays a commoner to sell his land and move elsewhere’.

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15 Kiff 1971.
16 Kiff Op cit: p23
4. THE PRESENT HOUSING SITUATION

In recent years local government has been charged with assessing the level of housing need within their boundaries. Regular research is carried out by authorities, or consultants on their behalf, in an effort to measure the scale of need. Information gathered from such research is used to inform policy and put pressure on developers to include a percentage of affordable housing within their developments. New Forest District Council has recently commissioned such work which is now being used to underpin its housing strategy.

4.1 The New Forest Housing Needs Survey (2001)

In 2001 New Forest District Council commissioned David Couttie Associates (DCA) to undertake a housing needs survey of the New Forest district. The research included a postal survey of over 15,000 households across the district, as well as face to face interviews with 100 disabled households, 200 elderly households and 200 young households.

The research employed the standard housing needs survey methodology, based on guidance published by the then Department of Trade, Local Government and the Regions (now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: ODPM). It focused on the adequacy of peoples’ present housing circumstances and their need/desire to move to other accommodation, and the need of particular household members (notably young people) to move apart from the household. It also paid special attention to identified need groups: those with ‘special needs’, the elderly, ‘key workers’ and young persons.

The research revealed that there was an annual affordable housing need for 709 units after the number of properties coming available as a result of social re-lets had been removed from the total level of need. It further concluded that the level of need ‘greatly exceeds the number of units likely to be able to be delivered from new delivery or conversions resulting in growing levels of unmet need each year and justifies an increase in the target level of affordable housing from new delivery’\(^{17}\).

However, while the survey undertook a thorough analysis of the general and specific needs of the population of the New Forest as a whole, it did not deal with the issue of housing demand and supply in rural areas of the district. Its focus was entirely on the urban centres of the New Forest and the ability of the District Council to deal with the issues of homelessness, overcrowding and unsuitable accommodation within these areas. As a result, while the study places the problems faced by commoners in the New Forest into a wider context, it offers no information about the situation in which they presently find themselves.

4.2 New Forest Rural Housing Development Strategy

The draft New Forest Rural Housing Development Strategy which was published in draft form in January 2005 has, as its first three objectives, the aims of:

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\(^{17}\) New Forest District Council 2001 p 71
Increasing the provision of affordable housing in rural settlements of the New Forest by attracting more Housing Corporation funding to the District;

Making use of resources for rural affordable housing in the most effective way by prioritising where affordable housing is developed;

Increasing the deliverability of rural affordable housing.

However, the strategy is focused on general needs housing and states that, while ‘the shortage of affordable housing has created difficulties in the employment of key workers (and) other local workers who are not currently included in the key worker definition such as Commoners and retained fire fighters’, these groups lie outside the scope of the strategy.\textsuperscript{18}

The report notes that housing need in the district is continuing to rise as a result of smaller household sizes and an increasing affordability gap between local incomes and property prices. It notes that some of the rural areas in the district are the most expensive in which to live. Referring to the DCA survey, it points out that around 100 new affordable dwellings are needed in the district’s rural areas.

The strategy prioritises parishes according to factors which it considers key to the effective targeting of resources. These priorities are: housing need, as recorded by the council’s housing register and local housing needs surveys carried out at parish level, the current provision of amenities (such as shops, schools and access to health provision) and public transport, and the current level of affordable housing provision in each area.

The main proposals resulting from the strategy include a reassessment of the allocation of resources, the setting of a target for rural affordable housing each year, the generation of a ‘land bank’ to facilitate the speedy development of potential sites, and close working with a chosen group of locally based housing associations.

Whilst key workers are specifically excluded from the strategy, it does note that their needs will be considered in a separate strategy, The Keyworker Housing Strategy. It also adds that the ‘local definition of keyworker will be reviewed to take account of local employment, including the position of Commoners and retained firefighters’.\textsuperscript{19}

4.3 Housing issues for commoners

In 1991 and 2001 censuses were carried out specific to the commoning population\textsuperscript{20}. The main aim of the censuses was to identify the nature of the commoning community (in terms of age, gender, household type and length of time in commoning), and to ask commoners for their views on the present problems and future prospects for the practice. The two questionnaires followed the same format and, as a result, it has been possible to compare the two populations and their views.

The main points revealed by a comparison of the findings of the two reports showed that:


\textsuperscript{19} Op.cit.p17.

\textsuperscript{20} Ivey 1991 and 2001b.

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The commoning population is ageing. While, in 1991 more than three quarters (77%) of commoners responding to the survey were over 40 years old, by 2001 86% fall into this group.

Just over half (52%) of commoners are women; a figure which is slightly lower than that recorded in 1991;

The 2001 survey also showed that:

- Almost half (46%) of commoners live in two person households, with only a fifth (21%) including children under 16 years old;
- More than half the respondents to the survey (53%) have been commoning for more than 20 years, or all their life (this may be less than 20 years);
- Approximately half respondents to the survey said that their spouse or partner was also a commoner, but only 40% of children (including adult children) were involved;
- The survey indicates that there is wide variation in the amount of back-up land owned by commoners, with some declaring very large acreages, while others have none. A median value for the amount owned is 4 acres, while median renting is 1.5 acres;
- By far the most serious declared concern about commoning is the high costs and low returns which are presently dominating the practice;
- A better financial future for commoning and greater support (both financial and politically) are considered to be the most positive encouragements which respondents wanted to see;
- Affordable housing and a reasonable financial return for their work are the changes considered most likely to encourage young people to common;
- The overriding reason given for commoners continuing is the deep attachment which they feel to the way of life, the Forest and their livestock.21

In the 1991 census the problems associated with securing affordable housing and land for commoning were considered by the largest percentage of respondents to be the most serious threat to the survival of the commoning population22. The survey highlighted the problems which commoners had experienced in trying to buy or build houses, or to buy or rent land and yards at affordable prices and with sufficient security of tenure to give them the confidence to establish, continue or expand their commoning23.

21 Ivey 2001b: p16
22 Ivey 1991: p8
23 Ivey 2001b: p12
One commoner is quoted as writing, ‘Many of the holdings which have fallen to “yuppie” money in the past must be replaced to ensure the future of commoning …. Replacement dwellings must be protected by a system unique to commoning, as agricultural justification can seldom be achieved. This might take the form of shared equity with the Verderers, or similar.’ Another ended by saying ‘The day will come when it will be difficult to find strong young persons willing to tackle the physical work entailed with free range stock, such as branding, worming and handling involved by sickness and injury, because there will be no affordable local dwellings!’24

By the time of the 2001 census the economic crisis in commoning had become so severe that viability had become the most serious problem described by the majority of commoners. The percentage of responses which referred to housing and land as the most significant issues for commoning had declined from 21% to 13% of all points made. However, as pointed out in the report, this was not a result of any improvement in the situation regarding housing and land prices, but the severity of the crisis in commoning at the time.

On the other hand, when asked what would be most likely to encourage young people to common, over a third (37%) said that access to affordable housing and land were the most important issues, while a further 1% said that strict planning controls were a barrier.25

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24 Ivey 1991; p14
25 Ivey 2001b: p10
5. THE MARKETS FOR HOUSING AND LAND IN THE NEW FOREST

5.1 The market for sale

In the period following the Second World War, it was still possible to buy a simple cottage in the New Forest with a few acres of land at an affordable price. However, as noted earlier, by the early 1970's property prices were already rivaling those of the London suburbs. However, detailed information on property prices is not available for any period until the end of the 20th century.

Information supplied in a report on commoning published in 1981 sets out a price range for the New Forest at the time of between £35,000 and £65,000, ‘except for the larger properties with land’. It publishes a table, based on data compiled from local estate agents and newspapers, which indicates a ‘trebling in price of cottages in six years (between 1975 and 1981 which) reflects the demand for second homes and retirement residences from people wishing to move to the area.’

Graph 1: Average house prices: 1996 to 2004

Source: ODPM Housing Market Statistics, based on Land Registry data.

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26 Kiff 1971: p23.
27 Countryside Commission, 1981.
Using data from the Land Registry, house price information on the sale of properties in the New Forest can be charted since 1996. Graph 1, on the previous page, compares the average house price for the period in the New Forest with those for the South East Region and Hampshire.

In 1996 the average price for a property in the New Forest was £87,000, above the rest of the South East and Hampshire which both stood at around £81,000. The graph shows that, while prices in the whole region have increased by almost 200%, the rate of increase is highest in the New Forest (197% compared to 194% across Hampshire and 189% across the South East as a whole).

Graph 2: House prices by house type: 1998 to 2004

[Graph showing house prices by type from 1998 to 2004]

Source: Land Registry

Data on the average prices paid for different property types in the New Forest shows the rate of increase, this time since 1998. As can be seen in Graph 2, above, the prices paid for detached houses is significantly higher than other property types over the period. This type of property makes up a large percentage of the house sales in the New Forest district (41%) and, because they are more likely to be suitable for commoners, these are the properties most likely to be sought by people who are engaged in commoning.

5.2 The present market

As part of the research into the housing market, interviews were conducted with key estate agents in the area. Details of individual properties coming onto the market were also collected to offer evidence of the available properties which might be considered suitable for commoning.

The estate agents interviewed were those which specialised in country properties and land. The number of such properties coming onto the market varied between agents from a dozen per year up to 40 or 50. The main competitors for such properties are considered to be
locals who have made good, and are looking for something bigger, with land for seclusion, or incomers, who are mainly equestrian owners.

Prices for country properties with land were rated at between half a million and two million pounds. The combination of a large house with land presents a very desirable combination which has a ‘huge marriage value between land and property’.

While the price for such properties is considered to have doubled in the last five years, one agent made the point that they were currently much harder to sell. This is a result of the present slow housing market and the fact that owners are valuing their property at too high a price. Five years ago there was a niche market for equestrian properties and, while this may not have peaked, properties take a lot longer to sell. In addition properties are now frequently being bought for the house, not the land.

5.3 Actual property prices: a snapshot

The analysis of actual prices is based on the premise that a commoner needs a family home in a rural location, either within, or on the fringes, of the open forest. A total of 23 properties in and around the Forest were selected from the lists of local estate agents as having the potential to be used as a commoners’ holding. The prices at which they were offered ranged from £300,000 up to £1.3 million, and they were located right across the area, from Dibden in the south east to Ibsley in the north west.

The two cheapest properties were both in need of extensive renovation and for sale by sealed tender (one with a price guide in excess of £300,000 the other with a guide of £400,000). Neither had much land attached, but both were in rural situations, one on the Forest (at Burley) and the other close to it (at Highwood). One of these was subsequently withdrawn from the market, and, following some rather unusual events regarding the tendered bids, the other was subsequently placed on the open market.

The next least expensive property with land and outbuildings which was known to come up for sale was a four bedroom detached property, situated in Tiptoe, close to the open forest. It was placed on the market at £575,000 and included a ‘range of timber outbuildings set in approximately four acres’ of land. The reason that it was marketed at a relatively low price was that it was described as a farm and had an agricultural occupancy condition on it.

Besides these three properties at the lower end of the market, a further 20 properties were included in the review. They were all what the estate agents describe as ‘equestrian properties’, mostly including substantial houses, set in managed grounds and including stabling and/or other outbuildings and paddocks. Some included ménages.

The price range for this group of properties was from £550,000 for a chalet style 4/5 bedroom bungalow at Ibsley with a paddock, to a 5 bedroom property described as ‘a compact country estate’ with paddock and woodland of about 5 acres, studio, garaging, loose boxes and further outbuildings’ for £1.3 million. While there are other properties with more extensive facilities and greater luxury, it was considered unlikely that they could represent a potential purchase to any commoner.

Employing a multiplier of 3 times household income, it is apparent that a household income of £100,000 per annum would be necessary for a first time buyer with no savings or equity.
to purchase even the cheapest of these properties (a detached bungalow in need of total
renovation in a rural location, but without land, at Ibsley).

This situation places houses suitable for commoning which may become available on the
open market outside the reach of any commoner starting out in the New Forest. Only
commoners who have moved from outside the area, and have a considerable income, as well
as capital to invest, or those who inherit property in the area, would be able to consider the
purchase of any of the sampled properties.

5.4 The private rented sector

Private rents in the New Forest recorded by the Hampshire Rent Service in the first half of
2004 were comparable with other areas in the South Hampshire area. At that time, the
weekly average rent for a two bedroom house in the New Forest area stood at £147,
compared to £146 in Test Valley and £167 in East Hampshire. However, this rent is given
for the whole area, including the Waterside parishes, where both the purchase and rental
prices of domestic properties are lower than those in the New Forest itself.

Demand for rented housing in the New Forest is very high and those seeking permanent
rented accommodation are often in direct competition with holiday makers looking for a self
catering holiday cottage. This situation is particularly acute on the villages of the area, and on
the open Forest.

Rented properties advertised by the area’s letting agencies are almost exclusively in towns,
and the majority are flats or maisonettes. A snapshot of accommodation available to rent has
been taken from the Lymington Advertiser and Times (date 5th February 2005). Information
was supplied by 16 letting agents as well as 6 private property owners on 122 properties
which were being offered for long term letting in the New Forest area.

Table 1, below, shows that almost three quarters (71%) of the lettings were in the area of the
coastal settlements and south west of the Forest area, including Lymington and New Milton. Only
15% of the properties could be described as located in villages, and only two were
described as rural. One had an acre of land (on the river at Beaulieu) and one had 3 acres of
garden.

Table 1: Properties for rent in a single edition of the Lymington Advertiser & Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lymington and Pennington</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Milton and south west</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal settlements</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western fringe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest villages/rural</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>91.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyndhurst</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brockenhurst</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 There were no lettings in the Waterside parishes, although the paper does carry properties for sale in this
area.

New Forest Commoners’ Housing 21/09/2005
Over half (54%) of the properties were houses and 69% were either 2 or 3 bedroom properties (mostly flats). Monthly rentals ranged from £375 for a studio flat in Lymington to £2,500 for a 4 bedroom thatched cottage in Shirley Holmes.

5.5 The market for land in the New Forest

In 1979/80 land prices in and around the New Forest averaged at £2600 per acre, placing the area on a par with the land price for the south of England. At the time, this figure disguised a considerable amount of variation in land prices, in which ‘common land has been sold for as little as £60 per acre, whilst pony paddocks have gone for well over £5000.’

During the same period land rentals were said to range from £45 to £150 per acre, with land at the higher end of the range being rented out to horse owners. At the time these figures were considered high, since much of the land being rented was ‘pasture land which is frequently not much more than rough grazing.’

Over the intervening years, the price paid to buy pasture land in the New Forest has increased ten fold. On the other hand, while there has been an increase at the top end of the rental market, agricultural rents have only increased marginally.

Today, agents who sell small parcels of land (up to 10 acres) reckon to sell between 5 and 10 in a single year, though one said that there has not been a lot available in the past year. The main competitors for such plots are equestrian, whether locals or those coming from outside.

Prices given ranged from £20,000 to £30,000 per acre, dependent upon size and location. Larger pieces tend to be discounted, which has led to the break up of larger farms into pony paddocks across the Forest. Agents agreed that the market price for such land has doubled over the past five years.

On the other hand, in areas just outside the New Forest itself, prices are considerably lower. One large plot for sale in Landford is being marketed at £17,000 per acre. Further afield a four acre grass paddock in Wiltshire is on the market at £49,000 (£12,900 per acre).

Land rentals, too, are seriously influenced by the local equestrian market. The accepted annual rent for pasture locally is £50 to £75 per acre, dependent on quality, location and facilities included on the land. This is a price available on the agricultural market. However, the number of horse owners who compete for access to each paddock and field which comes available for renting on the wider market, means annual pasture rentals now average at £200 per acre. This places almost all the land which comes onto the rental market in the New Forest out of the reach of commoners who wish to use it as back-up land.

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29  Countryside Commission 1981
30  Op cit.
31  Information regarding the recent (spring 2005) sale of the piece of land at Bartley indicates that it was sold for £32,000 per acre.
32  A small piece of land (1.8 acres), including some outbuildings, that was recently available from one of the New Forest estates was rumoured to have previously been rented for £2000 per annum.
5.6 The landed estates of the New Forest

Realistically, the only property owners who have houses and land to rent suitable for commoning are the Forestry Commission and the landed estates on the Forest periphery. The following sections are based on an analysis of the responses given by land and estate agents to an open questionnaire delivered in person, by telephone and via a postal response (see Appendix I for a copy of the questions).

The survey reveals that all the estates who responded to the research in the Forest area do rent both houses and land to commoners and their families. Some estates actively favour commoners and other locals as tenants, although only the Forestry Commission and Beaulieu Estate offer discounted rents on their property.

5.6.1 The Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission owns 66 houses in the area of the New Forest. These are mostly 3 bedroom properties, although the list includes 3 large ‘gentleman’s houses’. Houses in Inclosures (29 in total) usually include a paddock of up to an acre of land, which is let to the tenant under a separate rental agreement.

The Commission has a written policy under which its properties are let ‘for the purpose of supporting commoning’. Under it, Forestry Commission employees who are commoners are given first priority, followed by other employees, then non-employee commoners. Properties let to commoners are rented on 4 year fixed term assured shorthold tenancies, which is dependent upon the household remaining in commoning during that time. Preference is given to younger commoners (under 35 years old), and because the houses are largely family dwellings, preference is given to families, over single persons.

According to the Commission’s records, 27 of these properties were let to commoners in July 2004. Many of these tenants are also forestry workers. A total of 35 houses are let to keepers, forestry workers and other employees of the Commission. The bulk of the remaining houses (22) are let to retired staff, their widows and other relatives, some of whom have no present connection with the Forest.

A variety of rental arrangements are used by the Commission depending upon the origins of a particular tenancy. Rental arrangements for new tenants (including most employees) are usually ‘shorthold tenancies’ assessed at market rents. The Commission reduces such market rents for new commoning tenancies.

The Commission also owns approximately 150 acres of pasture land within the Forest, at Burley Fields and Whitley Ridge. Their land agent reports that they would need ‘an extraordinary reason for not letting to a commoner’. At the time of interview almost all the land, with the exception of old tenancies which the present land agent inherited from his predecessor, was let to commoners.

Land is offered for rent by sealed tender but only to practising commoners. In the first instance, pasture land is let on a two year grazing agreement. If the arrangement proves satisfactory during this period, a further lease of 4 to 6 years will be offered.

Three small farms (30 acres or less) are presently let to commoners, while New Park Farm is let to the New Forest Show Society, which supports commoning through a number of schemes on the land.
5.6.2 Beaulieu Settled Estate

Beaulieu estate has some 126 houses and cottages which it rents out, as well as 13 farms. Many of their houses are located in the village of Beaulieu and at Bucklers Hard. These command top rents and are let to wealthy families, many of them commuters from London.

The Montagu family pursues an unwritten policy of letting their houses to local people and supporting the community of the village. They also favour local commoners, particularly where a property is associated with land. They have 19 houses which they consider suitable for commoners. Most of these are 3 bedroom properties, with some larger and a few smaller homes. All are let at sub-market rents to local families, including four commoners.

The estate also rents out 27 small parcels of land under grazing agreements (between 0.5 and 25 acres each). A number of these parcels are presently let to commoners, some in association with the rental of houses on the estate. One of the estate’s farms is also let to a commoner.

5.6.3 Barker-Mill Estate (Longdown)

The Barker-Mill Estate owns numerous properties, of which 40 are in the area of the New Forest. These range from detached four bedroom properties to smaller semi-detached farm workers’ cottages. Due to demand the majority of the properties are let separately from any adjoining land.

Most properties are let at market rents on assured shorthold tenancies, with the exception of the small number let under the Rent Acts legislation. It also has approximately 10 agricultural holdings in the area, up to 250 acres, which are let on Agricultural Holdings Act tenancies.

The estate does not have a formal policy of favouring commoners in its rentals, and, although the Estate Manager is aware that some tenants do exercise common rights, he does not have records of how many estate tenants are practising commoners.

The estate has grazing agreements on some 20 pieces of land in the New Forest area which range in size from ¼ acre to 10 acres. It also has 10 Farm Business Tenancies in the New Forest area which range in size from 1 to 100 acres. All land rentals are based on local market rents and several practising commoners rent land under Farm Business Tenancies and grazing agreements.

5.6.4 Exbury Estate

Exbury Estate has approximately 40 houses which it rents out. However, only about 10 are available for letting on the open market, the remainder being occupied by employees, or on long term tenancies. There is no great turnover of either land or buildings.

It has no written policy in favour of letting to any particular groups. Properties are let on the open market, not to anyone in particular. However, their land agent said that, if there was a straight competition between 2 applicants and one was a local/commoner, they would be favoured. The rent would be based on current market rental values.
Around 200 acres of estate land is rented out in small plots (6 acres) on grazing licences to horse owners. Rents for such land come in at £200 per acre. However, they are considered to be much harder work as tenants from a management point of view.

It also rents out two farms, with agricultural buildings, but no houses. One of these is let to a commoner. The land which makes up part of this farm is adjacent to the estate house which is considered a sensitive part of the estate. The land agent considers commoning to be good agricultural use of the land, improving the visual amenity of the area.

5.6.5 Somerley Estate

Somerley Estate owns around 40 houses which it rents out, as well as 2 farms of approximately 200 acres. The domestic properties are let on assured shorthold tenancies at local market rates, while the farms are let on agricultural tenancies, also at market rates.

The estate does not have a policy of favouring commoners in its lettings. Few properties come available on the estate, and those that do are re-let at market values. The Land Agent said that, if there was a choice to be made between a commoner and another prospective tenant with regard to the letting of property, the choice would be made dependent upon their individual circumstances and the references which they provide.

The estate also rents out some 200 acres of grazing land. The residential lettings on the estate support the agricultural ones, which is indicative of the general state of the agricultural economy. One farm tenant and one grazier are known to exercise common rights.

5.6.6 Warrens Estate

Warrens Estate has 14 houses on its land which are not presently let to estate staff. These are predominantly 3 bedroom houses (with one pair of semi-detached 2 bedroom cottages) with large gardens, but no attached land.

The estate does not have a specific policy of letting to commoners, since ‘the aim is to achieve the best possible rent as well as the best long term relationship with the tenant’. One of the estate’s employees, who occupies one of its properties, is a commoner, but there are no other known commoners renting from the estate.

The estate does not rent out any small parcels of land, but two of its farms, one of 40 acres, the other of 260, are let under grazing agreements to commoners who turn cattle onto the northern commons. The rents for these farms are at market levels. The estate’s policy regarding its rentals is presently under review.

5.6.7 Manor of Cadland

The Manor of Cadland has around 50 houses which it rents out on its land. They range from a one bedroom flat over a garage to 6 bedroom houses. They are all let at market rents, and very few come available. The estate has an unwritten policy of renting to local people, including commoners.
The estate farms most of its own land, with the exception of areas of land around the periphery which it lets out to graziers. This amounts to about 200 acres, most of which is let in plots of up to 15 acres on grazing licences to recreational horse owners. The farm manager said that there is ‘Great demand for such land in the area. The estate has a waiting list. The average commoner who wants to use it for grazing commonable animals does not stand a chance. Horse owners are willing to pay so much more.’ The estate presently rents land to five known commoners.

Farm buildings on the estate are either used by it in the running of its farm business, or rented with residential properties. Of the latter, two sets are on domestic use, and a third is in industrial use. However, two other sets of farm buildings (plus a negotiable area of land) are presently being considered for development into commoners’ holdings.

5.6.8 The Meyrick Estate

The Meyrick Estate owns approximately 100 cottages and houses which it rents out, as well as 6 farms which range in size from 50 to 2000 acres. The houses range from small cottages to large farmhouses, and are all let out at local market rents. They do not have a policy for renting to practicing commoners and, at present, are not aware of any properties on the estate occupied by commoners.

The estate rents out approximately 700 acres of grazing land as small paddocks for grazing horses. These are let on annual licenses and fetch £100 per acre.

The estate has a policy of renting larger areas of land on SSSI heathland and water meadows to practicing commoners. At present approximately 600 acres of such land is let on annual licenses to four practicing commoners.
6. **THE POSTAL SURVEY**

6.1 **Response rates**

The postal questionnaire was sent to a total of 526 commoners living at 483 separate addresses (it is reproduced in Appendix I). In 43 cases more than one form was sent to a single address so that the experience of both husbands and wives, parents and children, who turn stock onto the forest to graze, could be assessed.

Responses were received from 231 commoners: a response rate of 44%. Of these, 8 were multiples from the same address, with 7 sending in two, and one commoning household sending in three responses. The multiple responses have been excluded from the analysis of housing and land tenure to preclude the double counting of these assets. They are included as separate cases in the analysis of other questions.

6.2 **Time as a commoner**

Respondents were asked for how long they have been commoning. The written categories included length of time in years, and a category called ‘All your life (however long)’. The data show that a quarter of respondents (25%) are lifetime commoners. Of those who have not been commoning all their lives, almost two thirds (65%) have been commoning for over ten years, while over a third (38%) have been commoning for more than 20 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Years as a commoner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 -10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 20 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All your life (however long)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing$^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ In all tables ‘missing’ implies that the question was not answered by certain respondents

The categories used are the same as those used in the 1991 and 2001 censuses of commoners and the comparison shows that, while the percentage of the population commoning for less than ten years has fluctuated since 1991, the number commoning for eleven years or more has steadily increased. On the other hand the number of lifetime commoners has steadily declined over the period (see Graph 3 on the next page).
6.3 Housing tenure

Respondents were asked a number of questions about the conditions under which they lived in their home. First they were asked whether the house that they currently occupy has been in their family (or that of their partner) for more than one generation. Only 37 of the total 224 people who responded to this question said that it has. This represents 16% of the total. It should also be noted that 3 of the respondents who said that their home had belonged a previous generation to their families were living with their families. If these are excluded from the analysis, the percentage drops to 15%.

In 1981 researchers\textsuperscript{33} asked the agisters how many commoners were related to the previous occupier of their holding. The information received suggested that, at that time, some 43% were related, either by being the child or some ‘other’ relative of the previous occupier.

Next, respondents were asked the type of tenure they had on their home (multiple replies were excluded). The data are set out in Table 3, on the next page. Almost four fifths (79% or 174 commoners) said that they own their home freehold, with a further 3% owning it leasehold. Six percent (12 commoners) rent from the Forestry Commission, and a further 2% (4) from an estate. Four percent (8 commoners) rent from other private or social landlords, while 2% (5) live in tied accommodation.

\textsuperscript{33} Social Research Consultancy, 1981.
Table 3: Tenure of commoners’ houses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure of commoners’ houses</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own your house FREEHOLD (with or without mortgage)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own your house LEASEHOLD (with or without mortgage)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent it from the Forestry Commission</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent it from an Estate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent it from another landlord</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent it from the council</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent it from a housing association</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupy it as part of the conditions of your or your partners’ job</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupy it through some other arrangement (e.g. informally)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share with family/friends (for personal reasons)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share with family/friends (for financial reasons)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of own-occupiers (both freeholders and leaseholders) are similar to those recorded by the 2001 Census for the whole of the New Forest area (81% of householders in the New Forest are owner-occupiers). However, the breakdown of other forms of tenure from the census shows that commoners are more likely rent from a private landlord (8% compared for 6% for New Forest district) and less likely to rent from social landlords (local authority or housing associations: 3% compared to 10% for New Forest district).

Twelve respondents rent from the Forestry Commission, and 4 from one of the estates in and around the Forest, while only 2 rent from ‘another private landlord’. Despite the rural nature of much of New Forest district, it is highly likely that this type of renting is closely related to the commoning lifestyle of the respondents. In addition to any Forestry Commission employees who rent from the Commission, 5 respondents occupy homes tied to their employment; this represents 2% of the total, compared to 0.4% for the district. 34

Eleven commoners recorded in the table above, and a further two who sent in second respondents from a single address, share a home with their family or friends, half of these for personal reasons, the other half for financial reasons. These ‘concealed families’ are difficult to compare with the district level information from the census, since there is no information about their household composition (i.e. whether they are single people, living as a couple or a family including children). The census only considers a household to be a ‘concealed family’ if it is more than a single individual.

However, on this basis, the number of concealed families in New Forest district is given as 424 out of a total of 51,303 families: or 0.8% of the total. Twelve out of 220 commoning households sharing with family or friends represents 5% of the total.

34 Since the Forestry Commission has a policy of renting to commoners as well as their own employees, it is debatable whether Commission housing is ‘tied’ to employment or commoning.
6.4 Planning constraints

Respondents were next asked whether the property in which they live is covered by any specific planning constraints. As Table 4, below, shows, while four fifths (170 or 80%) said that their home is not covered by a constraint, 43 or 20% said that it is. The largest percentage of these (17 or 8%) are properties covered by an agricultural occupancy clause, followed by properties covered by some other form of planning constraint (14 or 7%).

Table 4: Planning constraints on commoners’ dwellings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraint</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A mobile home</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An agricultural workers dwelling</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dwelling covered by some other planning constraint</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A house built under a planning consent for a commoners’ dwelling</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>213</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six (3%) of properties were built under planning consent for a commoners’ dwelling, while a further six are mobile homes. Of this last group two have temporary planning permission, three have permanent planning permission and one has no current planning permission.

All respondents (including multiple responses from single addresses) were asked whether there are any problems with their home which make their continuation as a commoner problematic. Over a quarter (27% or 61 respondents) said that they do have problems. When asked to give brief details, 40% (20 respondents) of those who did so said that their house is too far from their land. This means that they spend considerable amounts of time and money in travelling each day to see to their stock, and many are concerned about the security and well-being of their animals. Three also said that their home is outside the Forest boundaries, which may have similar implications for their commoning.

Table 5: Problems which present home present to commoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too far from land</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too small for family: need to move</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too small for family: need to extend</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No security of tenure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive to keep up</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Forest boundaries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to share with family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fourteen respondents (28%) said that their house is too small for their family. Eight of these would like to move but are unable to afford it, while 6 want to extend their homes, but have run into problems with the planning authority. Four said that they have no security of tenure, three find their homes too expensive to keep up and three find that sharing with their family represents a problem to their commoning.

6.5 Land and yards

Respondents were asked whether they have land to support their commoning. Ninety-eight percent of those who responded said that they do. They were asked how much land they have. The distribution of the size of commoners' holdings is set out in Graph 4, below. The graph shows that well over half (60% or 129 commoners) have access to ten acres or less, with one third (33% or 74 commoners) accessing less than 5 acres.

The number who have larger areas of land declines steeply until acreages over 50 are looked at. Twenty five commoners (11%) have over 50 acres of land to support their commoning.

These figures are not greatly dissimilar to those published by Esdaillé in 1875 and Kenchington in 1944 (see Section 3.2 of the present report). In both these cases the approximately a third of small holders had under 5 acres of land (in the case of Esdaillé 34% had 1 to 4 acres, while Kenchington recorded 37% having under 5 acres). Although, both these reports record higher numbers with large land holdings than the present study, the division between commoner and farmer is not clearly made in either case.

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Once again only single responses from the same address are used in this analysis to prevent double counting of land and yards.
Respondents were asked what proportion of the land adjacent and apart from their house they own, rent or use through an informal arrangement. Table 6, below, shows that almost two thirds (62%) of land adjacent to the commoners’ house is owned, with a further 21% rented. The remaining land is subject to a combination of different types of access, including 13 cases in which some or all the land is used informally.

**Table 6: Tenure of land used in commoning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjacent to house</th>
<th>Apart from house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All land owned</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All rented</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All informal</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half owned, half rented</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most owned</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half owned, half informal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most rented</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most informal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half rented, half informal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No land</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Tenure of land and location in relation to dwelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attached to your house</th>
<th>Attached to your land</th>
<th>Separate from both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own it</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent it</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occupy it under an informal arrangement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As might be expected, in the case of land located away from the commoners’ house access arrangements have a greater tendency to be complex. Almost half (45%) is rented, while 24% is owned. The remaining third of land is accessed through a combination of arrangements, including 18 (12%) which are totally informal.

Respondents were asked whether they had access to a yard or yards which they used to support their commoning practice. Eighty-seven percent (193 commoners) said that they do, while 13% (29 commoners) said that they do not. Just over half (51%) of yards are attached to the houses of commoners and 85% of these yards are owned. Of those who have a yard attached to their land (43% of the total) 72% own the yard, with a further 20% who rent. Of the remaining 7% of yards which are attached neither to the commoners’ house or land, half are used by informal arrangement and 42% are rented.

Table 7: Tenure of land and location in relation to dwelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attached to your house</th>
<th>Attached to your land</th>
<th>Separate from both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own it</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent it</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occupy it under an informal arrangement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the data on tenure of houses, yards and land are brought together into a single variable, as in Table 8, on the next page, it can be seen that less than half (43%) of the commoners’ dwellings described by the survey include a house with adjacent yard and land owned by the commoners.
commoner. A further 18% include a house with either an adjacent yard or land; while 21% of commoners surveyed own a house apart from any yard or land.

Table 8: Tenure of property and area of land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Less than 5 acres</th>
<th>6-10 acres</th>
<th>11-20 acres</th>
<th>21-30 acres</th>
<th>31-40 acres</th>
<th>41-50 acres</th>
<th>Over 50 acres</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own house, yard and adjacent land</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house and adjacent yard</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house and adjacent land</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent house, yard and adjacent land</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share with family/friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9, below, shows the distribution of the land used by commoners according to the tenure of their house and land. It shows that almost half (45%) the commoners who own holdings which include adjacent land and yards, do not use any other land. These tend to be the commoners with small scale operations who occupy relatively small areas of land. Two out of three commoners who own complete holdings of less than 5 acres, focus their commoning on their holding.

Table 9: Tenure of property and location in relation to dwelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>No Land</th>
<th>All land apart from holding</th>
<th>All land adjacent to holding</th>
<th>Land adjacent and away from holding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own house, yard and adjacent land</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house and adjacent yard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house and adjacent land</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent house, yard and adjacent land</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share with family/friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven percent of commoners surveyed live in houses rented from the Forestry Commission or an estate which includes a rented yard and land, and a further 7% common under some other arrangement. Of the 11 respondents who are sharing their home with their family, five of these properties include owned adjacent land and yards, but the actual tenure of the houses shared by these people cannot be identified.
A third (35%) of the commoners who own their holdings have less than five acres of land, while 42% occupy between 6 and 20 acres. Fourteen percent who own their holdings have over 50 acres, making up by far the largest group of those commoners occupying over 50 acres.

On the other hand, commoners using larger areas of land increasingly have access to fields away from their holding. Eleven out of the 13 commoners shown in Table 8 who own holdings with adjacent land and yards and occupy 50 acres of more of land, include some land away from their holding in their commoning. And in cases where commoners do not own their complete holdings, even if they common from small areas of land, there is a greater tendency to use both land adjacent to their house, and land in other parts of the Forest: for only 41% of commoners occupying less than 5 acres of land is this land located adjacent to their holding. These data are set out in full in Appendix II.

Respondents were asked whether there are any problems associated with their use of land and buildings to support their commoning. Sixty-four (29%) said that there are. The comments are reproduced in full in Appendix II, but have been broadly coded into subject areas in Table 10, below. The table shows that a limited number of issues were raised by commoners. The greatest number are concerned with the scale of holdings which commoners presently have and how this is constrained by cost, planning or other controls on their use of the land and buildings, as well as the long term security of tenure which they have on their holding. More fundamentally, a major issue which underpins many of the comments, but was explicitly stated in others, was the need for a consolidated holding within the Forest.

**Table 10: Problems associated with holding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not secure tenancy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need buildings: planning problems or cost</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive for long term security</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough land/too expensive to use more</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need a holding within the Forest</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too far away from house</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongs to relative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buildings need replacement: not owned</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor land/wet in winter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>160</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>224</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6 Members of the family who would like to set up independently

When asked whether there is anyone in their family who would like to common, but is prevented by the family’s present situation, or who would prefer to common independently, but cannot afford to do so, almost a third (32%) of respondents said that there is. The comments which they made regarding this issue are reproduced in full in Appendix II. However, with the exception of a small number who identify planning controls as the
problem, all of those who made a comment said that high house and land prices, coupled with low wage levels, are the main barriers to their children, brothers and sisters and other family members continuing in, or taking up, commoning.

Respondents were then asked whether, if they have any children, they have been able to take up as commoners, or will be able to do so in the future. Only 10% indicated that their children had or would become commoners, while a further 4% said ‘some of their children’ were in this position. Forty-one percent said that they had not, or would not become commoners, and 21% thought that it was too early to say whether they would follow the tradition. Eight percent said that their children are not interested in commoning.

### Table 11: Likelihood of commoners’ children becoming commoners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of them</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have any children</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too early to say</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children not interested in commoning</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.7 Inheritance options for commoners

The remaining questions on the survey form concern the future of commoners’ holdings after their death. Two thirds (67%) of the respondents expect to pass their home onto their descendents and, of these, 37% expect that their home will remain in commoning after their death. Almost half (45%) are not sure whether it remain in commoning, while 18% think that it will not.

### Table 12: Likelihood of property remaining in commoning after present occupier

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property will remain in commoning</th>
<th>Whether commoner intends to pass property to descendents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked the reason for their negative response to either of the above questions. A list of options were provided, as shown in Table 13, on the next page. The first three groups are those who said that they did not expect to pass their property onto to their descendents, either because they do not own the property or because they do not have anyone to whom they wish to leave their home.
Table 13: Reason that property will not remain in commoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason given for negative response</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't own the house I live in</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't have any descendents</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't want to pass it on to my descendents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are not interested in commoning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commoning isn't viable anymore</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will have to be sold to share the inheritance</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will have to be sold to pay for death duties</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost half all the respondents (43%), and 70% of those who expect to pass their property to their descendents, identify problems associated with the inheritance: a number of heirs and the problems of inheritance tax. For the remainder of this group, or their children, commoning is not a viable option.

Respondents who do not think that commoning is a viable option any more were asked to give their reasons. Almost half (49%) of those who gave reasons said that commoning is not viable because of the high costs and low incomes which it generates (‘Not economically viable – only for enjoyment/tradition’ and ‘Prices too low/costs too high’). Most of this group added that the practice could only be looked at as a hobby or the continuation of an important tradition (33%). Seventeen percent highlighted the problems of competing for housing and land.

Table 14: Reasons that commoning is no longer viable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not economically viable - only for enjoyment/tradition</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot compete for housing and land</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices too low/costs too high</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only viable as secondary employment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance of public: lack of respect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young need some form of encouragement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commoning not efficient: out of date</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only attractive if additional funding found</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does remain viable</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucracy and paperwork</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>146</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Others (9%) said that it could only be made viable if the outgoings are subsidised by an external income source, while the weight of bureaucracy and the paperwork involved are additional burdens. The need for increased subsidies, particularly for small commoners, and
the importance of finding ways to encourage young commoners to continue were also highlighted.

Finally, respondents were asked to say whether what they had said about the future of their house after their death was likely to apply to their yard and their land. Approximately three quarters (79% for yard and buildings and 72% for land) said that it did, while the remaining respondents said that the fate of these parts of their property, or some part of them at least, would be different.

**Table 15: Whether land and buildings will be inherited with house**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To some of it</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to explain in what way this might vary, very few made any comment. Those who did so, said that they did not own these assets, or that they owned them, but not their house, or that the difference in value was a material consideration in the fate of various aspects of their estate.
7. **THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW SURVEY**

The postal survey included a section which asked the respondent to agree to a personal interview with a member of the fieldwork team. Over a hundred people completed this section of the questionnaire. A sample of 32 was selected from this group. The selection was made to represent the geographical spread of holdings, as well as commoners who described problems in their present situation or fears for the future of commoning on their holding or in their family. The choice was informed by the personal knowledge which members of the research steering group have of the great majority of commoners in the Forest.

The interviews were conducted by two trained interviewers who, although they have no personal experience of commoning, had been briefed about the background to commoning and the issues which they might expect to encounter. They were not given any specific information about the people they were to interview.

The interviewers set up appointments with the interviewees at mutually suitable times, in the commoners’ homes. The interviews were open discussions, based on a list of 19 subject areas (see interview outline sheets in Appendix I). They varied in length from half an hour to an hour (although one lasted two hours). Most of them were conducted with single family members, but a small number included more than one person in the discussion.

The following section sets out the responses of the individuals and families interviewed. It focuses on:

- Their commoning background,
- Their present situation,
- Their plans for the future,
- Their children’s involvement in commoning,
- Information on other young members of their families who have set up independently, and
- Their feelings about the inheritance of their holdings, land and animals.

There is also a final section which deals with some of the wider issues which interviewees brought up, including some suggested ways forward, problems experienced with the planning system and complaints about the effects of incomers to the Forest.

### 7.1 The interviewees

A considerable effort was made to select people for interview from all types of commoning background (excepting those who have only recently taken up commoning), who would be able to shed light on different types of housing and land problems they have experienced or expect to arise. They come from all areas of the Forest; some living within the perambulation, and others outside it, and they describe a wide range of different tenure situations in relation to their homes, their yards and their land.

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*New Forest Commoners’ Housing*  
21/09/2005  
44
7.1.1 Length of time as a commoner

The shortest length of time commoning given by an interviewee was seven years, while a large proportion said that they had been commoning for much, or all of, their lives. Although a small number of this group said that they had married into commoning, or started when they were teenagers, a sizeable proportion came from a commoning background, with a number of commoning family histories going back for multiple generations.

The group also represented a range of personal circumstances. The majority was married or co-habiting, and a wide range of ages meant that, while some had young children who were just starting to be introduced to commoning, others had older children who might be deeply involved in the practice, or had no interest whatsoever. Some of the older interviewees relied on their grown children to help them maintain their animals and a few were winding down their stock numbers because they could no longer cope.

Not all the people interviewed had problems with their housing or their commoning base. Some had experienced problems in the past, but had now resolved them. Others have struggled for years and do not see any way of improving their situation. But the majority look ahead with great concern for the future of commoning. Their children have moved away; the cost of housing and land makes it impossible for their children to set themselves up as independent commoners; or their home will have to be sold when they die, denying their children the chance to have a home in the Forest.

7.1.2 How commoners started

The interviewees fall into two main groups regarding their introduction to commoning. The first are those who come from historical commoning families, who have never known life without commoning, and are fiercely protective of the tradition and the Forest which supports it. Among this group it is customary to give a child a pony when it is born, or as a small child. This is the start of their herd. As children they learn to ride, how to handle animals and how to work alongside their parents in the everyday management of the family herd.

*I think it’s in Hayward Sumner’s book one of my great, great grandfathers was a tenant for Lord Normanton at Highwood Farm. He paid part of his rent with half a side of venison. Previously at Linwood Farm over by the Redshoat. My grandfat her’s mother was born in the High Corner Inn. We’ve been in the forest for a good many years.*

*We’ve always been in the forest. Two hundred and fifty years. They had more animals then. They didn’t look to keeping animals to sell, so much as for use for themselves. They always had spare ones to sell but they kept pigs and killed them for their own use.*

*We have the longest established pony herd of everybody. When my great great grandfather married, his wife brought 9 ponies as a dowry (1847) - and that’s how the herd started.*

They are also socialised into the commoning community. As children, they take part in drifts and point-to-points, and many attend the Beaulieu Road sales to sell their own animals.
Their friends are commoners’ children; they learn how to be a commoner in an informal, practical way, on a daily basis. Even if they leave the Forest for a time as a young person, to travel or work elsewhere, they have been drawn back to the area and the community in which they were born.

There was a desire to come back and get involved. I just had opportunities open to me in my life and took them. I don’t regret anything I’ve done but it’s been much more difficult getting back in to the Forest because of taking those opportunities.

The second group are equally proud of the fact that they have chosen to common. Many were born locally, but into non-commoning families, or ones in which commoning had been abandoned. A few have moved into the area and, learning about the local history and farming practices, they have decided to take up commoning, and become devoted to it and the community which supports it.

My grandparents were farmers and commoners. My great uncle as well. My mother and father didn’t common but before that they did. School friends I made tended to be into farming or commoning. It led on from there really. I used to share animals which I kept at their holdings for years until we got set up in our own right.

My mum and dad took a bit of an interest but it was just me. My interest is just to keep commoning going. I wouldn’t say I was in it to make money because I don’t.

Sometimes you are better off bringing in new blood with new ideas to keep commoning going and that is more important because things change.

7.2 Present circumstances

Having established some background information about the interviewees, the fieldworkers went on to address issues specifically relating to their commoning past, present and future, following a similar line to that established in the postal survey, but seeking the detail behind the initial response. A number of specific issues were raised by interviewees in relation to their own household’s present circumstances:

1. They own or rent a house which is remote from the Forest and/or the land which they occupy so that each day is a round of traveling to and from their animals;
2. Their home is tied to their employment, so that when they retire they will have to move away from the Forest and their commoning;
3. They need to expand their home, or construct additional buildings, in order to make their continuation as a commoner more viable, but have been refused permission to do so;
4. A small but significant number of commoners live in mobile homes, some with temporary permission for residential use;
5. They need more land to support their commoning, but the prices being paid for either purchase or rental are too high for them.
7.2.1 The problem of remote housing and land

In terms of present problems expressed by interviewees, this is undoubtedly the most frequent. Commoners who make this point are living in the areas around the Forest perambulation, either along Waterside, or on the western fringes. They may have land in several plots close to their home or within the perambulation, or may share commoning facilities with other family members – often their parents. The remoteness of their home from their stock leads to numerous problems: they have to make daily trips, often for year after year, to manage and care for their stock; they have restricted their commoning because of their inability to monitor their animals closely; or they try to support elderly relatives both as commoners and personally, from a remote location.

Our house and plot of land are rented. We rent a further acreage elsewhere. We have stables and outbuildings with the house. Our farm yard is about a mile away. Having the majority of land elsewhere is difficult. It takes most of the day to feed the stock. Ideally we need all our land much closer to house - but land is very expensive. Equestrian people are prepared to pay more.

I live at Ringwood and my land, yard and buildings are 3 miles away. I have done this 6 mile round trip now for over 30 years to get to my stock. In winter, what gets me most is the awful piece of road from Poulner Chapel down to Linford. The slipperiness of the road & bad camber on the curve, causes vehicles to drift into the middle of the road.

We just look after our ponies. If we had lived out there and got more involved then - I don't know - we might have done more. But the logistics of us living 7 miles away from where the land is, you just couldn't have cattle.

The situation of young commoners, struggling to set up independently highlights the way in which the high cost of housing and land within the Forest threatens their future as commoners:

I’m quite fortunate that I am able to use the land my parents own to keep my stock. My parents live 4 miles from here and they have some ground they rent a couple of miles on from there, plus further ground ten miles away. I’d love to change it. I don’t have a life at the moment. I spend my time traveling.

We’ve just moved into this house. We chose West Totton because it’s the only area we could afford and it being close to the areas in the Forest I need to go. We considered New Milton – it’s the same price bracket as Totton - but it was the wrong side for me.

My son is totally dependant on myself - which is wrong... and you know you can't get into a situation where you say when you die you can hand it over to your son. He's not going to wait - I could live for another 20/30 years.

7.2.2 Commoners living in tied accommodation

As the postal survey demonstrated, tied accommodation is widespread in the Forest. The Forestry Commission, as well as local estates and other large land owners, rent out houses to
their employees, as part of the employment agreement. This enables a number of commoners, who would not otherwise be able to do so, to turn out from their holdings.

The interview sample included forest keepers, forestry workers and others whose employment entitles them to such accommodation. While this group was clear about the privilege they enjoy living in properties often deep in the heart of the Forest, they were also acutely aware that they would no longer be able to stay in the Forest when they retire.

The house I live in is a Forestry Commission dwelling and I have no security of tenure. So when the Commission have done with me they say, ‘Thanks, off you go’, and I get an eviction notice. Well I've currently lived in my house since 1969.

We need to think what we are going to do in 8 years time when my husband retires. I'm not sure if we can stay in the Forest or keep stock. We're in a "state of flux" at the moment.

Even rented accommodation causes some commoners to be concerned over their future:

It's a major worry. If we lose this house, everything collapses. We daren't rock the boat to be honest. We're living on a constant knife edge. The structure that is here can continue into our family. The children can take it on as it stands. (Daughter continues) I don't want to be dependent on them. I'm dependent on them for a lot of my grazing but I don't want them to be involved with the roof over my head.29

7.2.3 The need to build new or extend existing property

A number of interviewees said that, either in the past or presently, they had a need to extend the house or outbuildings which they own or rent, to accommodate their family or their animals. Some have experienced problems with the planners, with the owners of the property or with the conditions under which they occupy the property.

The need to extend a house was highlighted by young families with growing children, as well as by older people who wanted children to be able to move in with them and continue to support their commoning.

I've lived in the current property for 3 years but we have owned the land for 30 years. This house is part of the Commoning Trust. Because commoning dwellings are particularly small, it is a big problem if you have your children and their families living with you. I only have three bedrooms and I wouldn't want to move out. It would be very useful if the Commoners' Housing Scheme looked upon you favourably if you needed assistance from you children to continue commoning. It would be nice if you could extend to accommodate a "granny annex" really.

We sold our bungalow in order to enable us to buy this property which had electricity, but no hot water or bathroom or toilet. It had a couple of acres with New Forest access. The council just wouldn't let us extend the property enough. It just had three bedrooms upstairs and we wanted to put a small extension on with another bedroom and a bathroom.
Up to 2 years ago we lived in a town-house and had land and buildings up here. But now we live on site. We had some land and buildings here and, after six years and 4 attempts we did get permission to build a bungalow.

My parents were also in commoning, they started me off. My dad has moved nearer to us. We couldn’t afford to move out there or get planning permission so we’ve all had to move out. We tried to get planning permission in the late 1980’s but the New Forest Council wouldn’t let us. We could have helped with the property and the upkeep of the land as that’s what they found too much. They’ve retired now. They live up the road now.

Our problem is we can’t afford a house that has all the land with it. We would like to have a barn/stable with the house and shed on the land at Canterton. Current facilities limit what we can do at commoning. We would like to do a bit more - even though we know there is no money in it. Planning is a long protracted process. You really need to ask the planners what you can have and then plan accordingly. We’re not put off. We will go through with our plans at some point - within next 5 years.

Not a positive outlook at the moment - if I got planning permission it would be a bit different perhaps. If you were on site you could do more things. My wish is to be able to afford a house and that. I keep wondering if I am doing the right thing or whether I should sell everything and get a house and settle down.

7.2.4 The problem of temporary housing

There are a number of commoners in the Forest who live in mobile homes and some of these have only temporary permission to stay on their land. The postal survey indicated that 3% of commoners live in mobile homes: across the whole commoning population this represents 11 households.

There are half a dozen or so original characters here, holding on by the skin of their teeth. One or two are in mobile homes now, same as us. We’re very cramped for space here but they (the children) would rather be here than in the town.

My temporary planning permission has now run out - and I’ve put in for another temporary license – which the Council has refused. Because of foot and mouth I lost half my herd. As a consequence the Council has now said that I no longer need to be here and want to evict me. I’ve built my herd back up again to 70 animals. Nothing will put me off of being a commoner. I have to do yet another Business Report for the Council. A planning application will be going in shortly. I still have no hot water - because the Council can’t decide what is going to happen to me. I’ve got to the stage where I’m not going to throw any more money at it until they decide what they are going to do.

7.2.5 The need for more land

The price of land for rent or sale in the Forest has been shown to be well outside the reach of the majority of commoners, whether they want to extend their agricultural activities, or are considering applying for a commoners’ dwelling. There is no shortage of suitable land
coming onto the market, but competition from recreational horse owners puts the asking price outside the economics of commoning. And if land is being sought with the intention of putting in for a commoners’ dwelling, the situation can be even more critical.

_Grazing is what I desperately need, but you have to be grateful for small mercies. (What I have at present) means I can have injured ponies back here or ponies that need attention, because when they are out in the forest they are not always fit and healthy._

_I had a tender come through yesterday for a bit of ground down the road. Its 1.77 acres which is a tiny bit, but it has sheds. It would be ideal, but I can’t touch it. That’s come from Longdown Estate. A chap down the road had it for years and years and he can’t believe the money it’s going for._

_Nothing drastic. It would be nice if there were some land you could rent in your own name at a sensible price. If I could rent a nice piece of ground, I would keep, say, 6 cows. That’s not likely to happen - land is a problem around here … too expensive to rent._

_I think you have to have two acres to build on and then hand an acre over to tie you to the commoners’ dwelling set up. I’d have to buy additional if I do it. I’d try to buy round here but the prices are so high, I don’t know how people do it._

_My daughter would consider applying to the Commoners’ Trust if she could buy some land - but land is like “gold dust” and you have got to get it before anyone else - and it’s pretty impossible really._

_Getting land in the first place is the problem - before applying to the Commoners’ Housing Scheme._

### 7.3 Plans for the future

Interviewees were asked what their plans were for the future of their commoning. People’s view of their future clearly depended on their age, as well as their present circumstances. A number of older commoners said that they had no intention of increasing their stock, with some saying that it was time they thought of winding down a bit. On the other hand, some of the younger interviewees saw their future in changing their housing, acquiring more land or more stock.

No-one who was interviewed expressed a negative view of their own future as a commoner, although some admitted that their plans were not really likely to be realised. This issues raised by this question fall into the following subject areas:

1. How long, and under what circumstances, older commoners will be able to continue
2. The possibility of the expansion of a family enterprise based on the contribution of younger family members;
3. The problems for younger commoners seeking a foothold in the Forest.
7.3.1 How long they will be able to continue

We are happy with our present situation. The main thing is we own the land - so we are secure. I don’t intend to get any more land. I shall stay the same - as long as I can cope with it. My daughter and son-in-law are also involved and help.

I would want to stay commoning as I am today as I get older. I’ll stay the same as I am today - I know I can manage those - and I’m not getting any younger.

7.3.2 Continuing the family enterprise

We plan to expand next year by getting a couple of cows - heifers - my granddaughter is very interested. We might increase stock further if we get on okay.

One young commoner, whose father has been a Forestry Commission employee and tenant for many years, and who commons with him, would like to take on the tenancy when his father can no longer cope. However, he is unsure of his rights and the attitude which the Commission has to such successions:

We live in our own house, but I haven’t really investigated taking over Dad’s tenancy. His house would be just big enough for 4. I could not just up & move in now, as the place would be overflowing a little bit. The Commission’s Estates Department official said I should refer to their Head of office to discuss whether I wanted to take over the tenancy. So there’s been cases where they’ve allowed tenancies to go to other members of the family.

7.3.3 Younger commoners’ struggle to gain a foothold in the Forest

Like the commoner above, a number of the younger commoners interviewed are continually seeking ways to establish themselves within the Forest boundaries:

My main aim would be to move back into the Forest with a small field and a stable at the house. That’s probably quite unrealistic if I’m honest. Maybe just getting some land closer to me will be a help but when you see where I live now, what is around me, it’s totally impossible. There isn’t any ground. It’s all built on or about to go for development.

I would love some animals. Buying a house hasn’t been cheap and finding land or backup grazing not easy to buy - it all costs money. But I’m hopeful that I’ll have animals in a few years time.

But even some older ones keep the dream of one day being able to live within the perambulation:

It’s a bit of a dream to have a dwelling with land and access to the Forest.

7.4 Children’s involvement in commoning

Interviewees with children were asked whether they thought it likely that their children would continue to common as they grew older. Almost all those with children expressed a desire that they should continue, but a number were despondent about the level of interest.
which their children showed in continuing. Some, with younger children, were proud of their children’s interest, their riding skills and their help around the holding. Some older children are described as ‘fairly interested’, or ‘may come back to it’, while others have moved away from the Forest to seek employment and affordable housing.

The main points made by interviewees were:
1. The interest which their young children showed, which they hope will continue;
2. The fear that older children are losing interest or will be forced out by circumstances, and;
3. The reality of what some parents are facing as regards their children’s futures.

7.4.1 Young children’s enthusiasm

We have one daughter who is 10 in April. She comes on the drifts with us when we go. She knows quite a lot about commoning. We’ve always tried to involve her. We take her on the drifts and she runs around and has a laugh and shouts and it’s a family thing. She wants a riding horse but we can’t afford it. It is purely down to price.

I hope my son will - he’s nearly 5. At the moment he is really interested… probably because it’s what his dad does and it’s a bit of fun. He’s too young to tell at the moment but we have given him a few of his own ponies.

My sister has a daughter and son (8 & 5). They’ve got their own animals - the boy seems very keen - but I wouldn’t encourage my sister to get them to common. I would urge them to do something different …. Just common as a hobby. It would be better to do a job like his father - a lot better wage.

7.4.2 Fears for the future

I don’t think my 2 lads would follow on commoning, because there’s nothing to draw them in. If you’re only getting £20 for a foal at Beaulieu Road, that amount to a 15 year old is not much. It can be earned by a youngster in the local fish and chip shop or doing a paper round. The wallet is a big encouragement for doing things, otherwise they’re doing it for its own sake.

We have two girls (12 & 7), so they are brought up to it, but they are not really involved. They’ve got their own ponies. But it’s too early to say if they will get involved in commoning. It would be nice if they did – but it’s unlikely. There’s a good chance my daughters may leave the area with jobs. If they stay, like us, they may do it as a hobby - it’s also a sort of way of life - but it doesn’t pay the bills.

All three of them have always been interested in ponies but at the moment I’m not really sure. Anyone whose had teenage children could tell you they grow up with ponies and they tend to drift a way for a few years to do more important things.

Who knows what will happen? Sometimes they come back as strong as ever or they might just drift. At the moment, being late teenagers, I wouldn’t like to say what could happen. They have always loved and been very interested in horses, but they know there is no income in commoning in our situation. I don’t think it’s a priority to them at the moment but if there was a different set of
circumstances then it may be different. They come out with me in the mornings at weekends and my oldest daughter will go in the week if I am unwell.

If my son is interested, we will probably expand a little bit. If he wasn't interested - in 20 years time you would be looking to cut down the number of animals you keep. That's going to be one of the biggest problems... like when we have a drift - the youngest ones help the older ones - that's how it's always been. It will be a problem if there are no younger ones coming through. There's a big jump already - I am regarded as one of the younger ones - but I am 40 now.

7.4.3 The reality for young commoners and their families

My eldest granddaughter dearly loves her horses and likes cattle. She works with cattle. Now - how many 21 year olds are into work by 5am? She does calf rearing and would love to common and doesn't mind a bit of mud and slosh! Another granddaughter is at Sparsholt college - doing an Estate Management course, trees & pheasants etc. The youngest wants to be an animal behaviourist. 2 of the 3 girls ride. So all the granddaughters are very keen on agriculture generally andcommoning. My 16 year old grandson, on the other hand, is not interested.

Most young commoners have to live off their parents, certainly for the land and stables. It's even the surrounding ambience of the place. If it's got anything that is in any way remotely good for a commoner, money just says 'oh isn't it lovely' and walks all over you.

Our children are not involved in commoning at the moment. Our son has just bought a terraced house, with his partner, in Dibden. He couldn't see how he could have animals at the same time. My daughter would also have taken any opportunity to common - if it had been there - but she has now moved to Scotland with her partner. I can't see them ever commoning as things are.

I wouldn't say he would never come back to it but at the moment - this is the trouble - you have these interim years where you have to see the rest of the world. You can't stop them doing it and they need to do it so they can hold their own against outsiders. Most of them have traveled and they can turn round and argue just as well as everyone else. Lots of people go away and then come back to it. They go and see the other side of the thing, in terms of animals and the attitude of things outside the Forest. Because of that they are so much more confident and able to stand up to criticism.

My eldest daughter would have done but there is nowhere for them to live. Once they move away they are brought up in a different environment, playing football Saturdays - computers. They are not going to want to come back here, out in the country. You have to be used to it. There isn't a lot here for them.

7.5 Young relatives who have set up independently

Some of the commoners interviewed have seen their children and other relatives set themselves up on independent holdings, but the problems for the next generation are clearly expressed by others.

My daughter, who is 42 years old, has set herself independently as a commoner. They turn out ponies and own their own land - some with house and a separate piece. They own several acres and they ride. My daughter uses our stables when necessary. They may put their mare with our stallion if
they want. My daughter bought her own property when she was 21 years old (a flat in Southampton). When she married, her husband had a bungalow, they pooled their resources to buy their property in the Forest.

I’ve got a brother and a sister and a half sister. All my brothers and sisters all do it. My sister lives in a rented house, which is a farm. My brother has ground from my dad and other commoners who be helps. My other sister still lives with my dad so she does it through that.

Our oldest son has moved out (of home). His partner is within a commoning family and they live in a small flat on the estate because his girlfriend works there. It is a very small flat. There is no land at all. She keeps her ponies somewhere else and pays rent. Our son is really helpful to us but there is no way he could set up on his own and have his own machinery or ponies. It would be fantastic if they could actually afford to buy a place within the Forest as they could continue the traditions then. The way things are going I could see them having to move out of the Forest.

The problems of being able to continue commoning are now for my grandchildren. My children are settled and organised. The grandchildren are interested in continuing, but there’s nothing to encourage them.

There is a great deal of bitterness among some of the younger commoners who are frustrated in their wishes to continue as adults on their own terms. One young commoner commented:

The only way I will end up moving back into the Forest, which is an absolutely awful thought, is when my parents die, and that upsets me. Purely because there are so many homes that are second homes to people from elsewhere who come down here and spend perhaps just into double figures during the year. As such the likes of me get pushed out of the Forest, because that is what happens. I feel so strongly about it. If I had to get on the housing ladder now, I wouldn’t be able to do it, full stop, wherever - but in this area I wouldn’t be able to do it.

I wanted to do this (interview) as I’ve got very strong feelings. I definitely feel that I have been pushed out. I know that I’m not the only one that feeds that. A few people of my age have had lucky breaks in the fact that they’ve had ground left to them, though that doesn’t happen very often to people at a young age. Or they have been able to buy ground for them to use the housing scheme. I haven’t been in that situation to do that. It’s quite difficult.

7.6 How commoners see their future

When they were asked how they see their future as they grow older, many mature commoners are confident that they would continue. Either their children and younger relatives will help them, or their neighbours will step in. Younger commoners, and those who are reliant on tied accommodation commented on the ways in which they hoped to secure their long term future in the Forest.
7.6.1 The future for mature commoners

If our children don’t like it then, it might not be possible for us to continue. I would like to continue but you never know if your own children will be the same as you are. It depends whether they get a house in the Forest. I would hope they would use the housing scheme, as it’s very good. The only thing I can say is that you have to have the ground in the first place.

I will stay working for the Forestry Commission until I am 65. The Housing Scheme would be of interest to me. I expect, with the National Park, it will be more difficult to get housing (more clauses in it). If a nice bit of ground came along and I could do that, it would be great.

I’m 70 now and helping out my daughters, daughter-in-law and granddaughters with their commoning. My daughter-in-law may be over more often if her ponies come from Brockenhurst. She can take over from me.

I most probably will (keep some cattle) again. When I retire in four or five years, if I am still fit I might. I would be nice to do that for a couple of years. I don't think I'd get any more ponies. If people could help me that would be good. When I’m really old, in my 80’s, I couldn't manage.

7.6.2 The move out of tied or shared accommodation

I don’t think we could afford the land to then be able to participate in the Housing Scheme. We've been looking at houses in the area for the past 2 years and we’ve seen absolutely nothing we could afford. House prices are leveling off - but will never drop in the Forest. It’s so gloomy that one has to move away - my husband has worked/lived here all his life … why shouldn’t be continue to do so after retirement? There isn’t a pool of holdings to rent or anything like that - so I find it very gloomy to be honest.

I bought a bit of ground. Retirement is ten years down the line and I have to prepare as the Commission are going to evict me. Don't forget I have never earned a large salary. I managed to scrape enough money together to buy my land. I got planning permission for a barn. I've made a hard surface yard. I want to carry on. Hopefully I might be able to go the Forestry Commission and say I want to carry on with my job but I will vacate the house you've supplied me with and live in my own. That would release a cottage for someone else. What is so dreadfully unfair, I bought that ground 25 years ago and I can get permission to build a house through the Commoning Trust, but if I went through the council I can’t get permission.

I don't own the house I live in. It is owned by the family: my brother, my sister and me. We have just agreed another 10 years before it is sold. That is the biggest problem as, once it’s sold, even a third of what is here wouldn’t allow me to stay in the Forest. My brother and sister aren't farmers; they look on it as their pension fund.

I don’t know what will happen in ten years time. It’s a long time. Anything could happen in between. We could have foot or mouth again, I just work from year to year. What I would really like is: one 5 acre field down the road does belong to me outright. It would be nice to put a commoners’ dwelling on there, but 10 years is a long time and things change. I would have like to have bought the cottage at the end of the road but it'll end up going for £300,000 plus.
7.7  Issues of inheritance

Interviewees were finally asked what they would like to see happening to their houses, land and commoning assets when they die – and what they think is likely to happen. The majority said that they would leave their homes, land and animals to their children or other family members, and hope that they would carry on. Some had considered leaving everything to a single heir who might continue the tradition, while others accepted that their property would have to be sold to divide the inheritance between several people, or to pay death duties.

A few have already placed some of their assets in trust for their children or grandchildren. However, amongst the majority there is an admission that there is no guarantee that commoning will continue on their holding, and that only time will tell. Some, who have no direct heirs, are looking for ways to ensure the commoning future of their holding, through a trust arrangement, or even through leaving ‘house and land to people who will continue commoning: Friends not family.’

It is very difficult - it would be nice to think it was used in the same way we use it, but it is probably unlikely because it will be passed to our children and sold - to be divided between them.

I would like to leave my house etc. to my son. If we have more children, I would hope they could come to some arrangement to keep on commoning. But the price of properties may be the issue - they may have to sell it and split it and, perhaps, pay the inheritance tax through no fault of their own.

The wish of my father was that my oldest daughter, who they helped to bring up, would inherit this house. She would be half interested, but where she has lived it hasn't been practical. I would hope that one day she, and her three sons - although I don't think they are interested - maybe they will become so, and keep it all coming on. Hopefully, my younger daughter will be down the road in a commoning house anyway. I think I will share my animals about. If any nipper was really keen, I would think about giving some to them.

This is where it gets difficult. We've seen the error, I can criticise what other people have done but when I'm in the same boat, I daresay I'll do the same. The thing is, I've seen a lot of holdings split up because they have got to be sold to pay off the family. Part of me says I ought to leave my holding to one of the sons to keep it in the family. What sort of trouble is that going to cause with the other two? I don't think it would to be honest, but I can't afford to take that chance as I don't want to break my family up. There is nothing worse than money to cause problems.

We've set up a discretionary trust - it's as simple as that. So at least no inheritance tax will be incurred - at the present time.

7.8  Wider issues

Finally, interviewees were asked if they wished to make any further observations about the situation of commoning in the New Forest today. Not surprisingly, perhaps, these comments made up the bulk of some of the interviews. Comments included the possible role of the incoming National Park, the future of the hunt and dead stock disposal, the need for an abattoir, the economic situation in commoning, and the Stallion Scheme.
Some of these comments are set out in the following paragraphs, but the selection is restricted to concerns and suggestions about the housing and land situation. In this way it is intended that this chapter will feed directly into the next one, which deals specifically with proposals to provide a firm future for commoning in the New Forest in terms of housing, holdings and land.

7.8.1 The Commoners’ Housing Scheme

I am not happy with the Commoners’ Housing Scheme - which is an unpopular opinion - because I know CDA will support plans to get housing for commoners. It involves putting a house where there wasn’t one … I am not sure I agree with that. There should be a way of getting commoners into houses that are there already. It would be nice to see properties that people could rent.

If I became too incapacitated to common, obviously my children would come and common from the house. I would then have no where to live. Because commoning dwellings are particularly small, it is a big problem if you need to have your children and their families living with you - only have three bedrooms and I wouldn't want to move out. It would be very useful if the Commoners’ Housing Scheme looked upon you favourably if you needed assistance from your children to continue commoning. If you are in a commoning house and you have kept it going for, say, 20 years it’s obvious you are not trying to make it into a mansion. Then it would be nice if you could extend to accommodate a "granny annex" really.

Getting land in the first place is the problem - before applying to the Commoners’ Housing Scheme.

I haven't worked all my life to give the ground to someone else. I have to consider my retirement. It all depends if I get planning. Want to try and do it on my own merits first - rather than do it through the Commoners' Trust.

I worked very hard for my land - do you think I am going to give it away? This is going to my kids - not to them at the Council.

7.8.2 Alternative ways forward

Part of the way forward is pushing the right policies through the NF District Council to put into their Local Development Framework. Getting policies put in there that recognise the importance of commoning.

If you don't have commoning, you don't have the New Forest - it's all connected …. It all stems from commoning I think. I perceive planning as a way of resolving it.

Getting rid of stamp duty would assist first time buyers. Also by raising the threshold of inheritance tax.

My main concern is it is so expensive to live in the Forest and that is the most fundamental problem facing people. There should be a way you can buy a bit of land really.
Where there is a development, at least one property should be allocated to a local person/first time buyer. On the Beaulieu Estate they have built some houses for only local people to rent - quite a good idea really.

Ideally there should be affordable places to rent with a bit of land - although that may be asking a lot. Maybe that’s the way to go… reasonable rents on a long lease.

Property should be able to be left to a Trust for continuing commoner use. I know the Commoners’ Defence Association have worked hard to start such a scheme.

Unless they allow us to carry on commoning, what happens to all those properties left to the Commoners’ Trust. If there was no commoning on the Forest, who would be entitled to these Trust properties?

It is important, this house. Commoning will die out. If there is a chance of young families getting a house in the Forest then commoning will continue. When I was 16 or 17 there was dozens of young commoners coming on the same age. Now proper young commoners under 30 you could count them on one hand.

7.8.3 Commoners’ planning permissions:

Planners would only allow a box really - 4 windows with door in the middle. 100 square metres is the biggest we could have. It is classified as a ‘Small Dwelling’. When seeking planning there was no consideration given to us being commoners - didn’t make a ‘blind bit of difference’ with NF District Council.

What’s happening with housing in the Forest now is that developers are buying, knocking down and building mansions. The locals have to appeal to get a granny annex.

The Council says they’re helping commoners, but we can’t see where. Lots of people come from Surrey & Berkshire and these properties seem reasonably priced to them, which is forcing property prices up all the time.

Also incomers can afford to resubmit planning permissions whereas locals and commoners have to really think about the costs involved. Five years ago there was a 3 bedroomed place for sale with 5 acres, with an agricultural clause: i.e. anybody who was not involved in Forestry, Agriculture or Horticulture could not purchase it. I went to Appletree Court Lyndhurst to enquire whether I could buy this place as a farrier and commoner- I was told ‘No’ - even though I was a commoner, it was disregarded.

This is where the problem lies with the economic viability of commoning. Years ago we couldn’t get planning permission to build, as a commoner, because what we do could not sustain our lifestyle by even a quarter!

7.8.4 Incomers…… and those who have left

My grandfather’s house now belongs to incomers, last time it was sold for £400,000 and the cottage he built up the lane is now on the market for half a million. Both properties are no longer in commoning.

New Forest Commoners’ Housing 21/09/2005
Years ago my grandfather, father, uncles and near neighbours all turned out cattle and ponies. Now it’s just my nephew (who hasn’t turned out any cattle) and me at Linford who exercise the common rights. The rest are gone. These incomers buy up property because they love the area, but do not understand that the Forest is there because of us and our ancestors.

Incomers don’t often bother commoning, if you’re a solicitor or doctor, looking after a few old cows isn’t a high priority.

This is where the big problem lies - these people are dropping out now. There’s also the second, floating, strata of incomers, who maybe turn out 2 ponies (not usually cattle). They’re run as pets, as opposed to an ‘enterprise’. After a few years they move, get fed up or dispirited after perhaps having an animal knocked down. They then see the minuses and don’t stick with it - there’s a constant turnover: nice people, but they don’t contribute long term.

Often newcomers are professional people, whose occupation has brought them to the Forest (not their own choice). The job transfer means that they’ll only be here for a couple of years. Some are quite interested in the Forest. There’s lots having an ‘urban’ mindset (not rural), they’re very vociferous, constantly complaining about ponies being in the village, no streetlights- i.e. non-existent contribution.

A 3 beded bungalow with land near Burley was demolished, and a new property built 2 years ago. It’s a mansion, the garage is bigger than original bungalow. Locals did object. That’s progress.

Linford is a beautiful place. Planning approvals granted do annoy us where properties have changed their use from that originally granted, or have been approved for a doubling of the size. Some properties with agricultural ties have been sold and then used as holiday accommodation. What can you do?

My cousin’s old house which is opposite. It used to be a little commoners’ home. When the father died he left it to one of the sons and then he died. The house ended up being sold and now they are not commoners; he’s a pilot. The planners have allowed that house to be transformed with a big wooden extension added on. The property would be out of the price range of many now. I can’t understand these people spend lots of money on a property and then knock it all down. Why don’t they just buy a house like that elsewhere? This house suits us but if it was put on the market, if it wasn’t knocked down, they would rip it all about and add bits.

If you have always been brought up on farms and in villages as commoning children, and then you have to go …… I have friends who have had to go and live in the middle of Southampton … it’s quite sad really.
8. TRENDS IN COMMONERS’ HOUSING

This section of the report focuses on the evidence of change within the commoning population itself, and looks at how this change may affect the future shape of commoning – or how the future of commoning may be affected by actions to forestall that change and protect the cultural heritage.

Some of the information set out in earlier chapters of the report has indicated that the population, and the base upon which it operates, is changing:

- Commoners’ census data from 1991 and 2001 indicates that the population is ageing;
- It is also apparent that the number of commoners who were born into the tradition is in decline, although the number of long term entrants is increasing;
- The percentage of commoners who live in a house previously owned by their family has dropped by 28% since 1981;
- While historical studies of commoning make it clear that the relationship between the commoners’ holding and open Forest was central to the practice, today many commoners have problems with the remoteness of their houses from their land, or from the Forest itself, and;
- Despite the significant financial contribution which commoning made to the livelihood of commoning families in the past, there is a strong feeling within the population that commoning is not financially viable, and must be seen as an important tradition whose main role is the conservation of the New Forest.

8.1 The distribution of commoners’ holdings

At the beginning of the postal survey, respondents were asked in what village and/or parish they live. This data was brought together with village and postcode information from the full Marking Fee Register used to send out the questionnaire. This information has been brought together to produce the tables and maps in the present section of the report which show the distribution of commoners’ holdings, and the ways in which that distribution has changed over the last 40 years.

In 1989 Joanne Page undertook a study into changes in the location of commoners’ holdings. She identifies what she calls the ‘Core area’ of commoning parishes.

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36 Following the dispatch of the questionnaire an anonymised and numbered list of villages, postal towns and post codes was generated as a basis for this part of the analysis.
parishes contain the majority of commoners’ holdings (82%) and the largest proportion of
commoned animals is turned out from these holdings (86%). However, this division makes
the assumption that the land most important to commoning is that in the area in which most
commoners live. If, instead, the parishes of the New Forest area are divided into those which
lie wholly within the perambulation of the open Forest, those which lie partly outside the
perambulation and those entirely outside the open Forest, it is possible to see the way in
which the population has moved over the past 40 years.

The three areas described above have been named (see Map 1 on the next page):

- The central parishes
- The boundary parishes
- Parishes outside the open Forest area

Table 16, below, sets out the number of holdings broken down by this three way division of
parishes in 1965 and 2004. The table shows that, while there has been a slight increase (1%) in
the percentage of the population living in the boundary parishes over the period, there has
been a marked decline (7%) in the percentage living in the central parishes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boundary parish</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Forest</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Parish</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data are set out graphically in Maps 2 and 3. Map 2 shows that distribution of the
commoning population in 2004. It makes the concentration of commoners’ holdings in the
central and boundary parishes of the Forest clear. Bramshaw, Beaulieu and Brockenhurst
have the highest concentrations within the perambulation, while Fawley has the highest
outside it.

However, Map 3, on the following page shows the changes in the percentage distribution
(not the actual numbers) of the commoners’ holdings between 1965 and 2004. In this it is
clear that there has been a redistribution of the population away from some of the central
parishes (notably Burley, East Boldre and Bramshaw), and the boundary parish of Boldre.
The population has slightly increased in the central parishes of Beaulieu, Lyndhurst and
Hyde, and the boundary parishes of Hale, Ellingham and Copythorne. However, the only
marked increase is in the parish of Ringwood.

In Waterside, there has been a slight overall increase in the percentage of holdings from 14%
to 17% of the total, with increases in Fawley, Marchwood and Totton, and decreases in
Hythe & Didben and Netley Marsh. The data behind these maps are set out in Appendix III.

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38 Note: the Commoning population in Bramshaw is an underestimate, since a number of northern commoners
are presently refusing to pay marking fees and do not, therefore, appear on the Marking Fee Register.

New Forest Commoners’ Housing 21/09/2005
Map 1: Parishes of the New Forest.
Map 2: Number of commoners’ holdings 2004:
Map 3: Change in the number of commoners’ holdings between 1965 and 2004
Map 4: Number of pieces of backup grazing land by parish: 2001
Map 5: Acreage of backup grazing land by parish: 2001

Acreage of Back-up Land - 2001

- 1 - 50 acres
- 51 - 100 acres
- 101 - 150 acres
- 151 - 200 acres
- 201 - 250 acres
- 251 - 300 acres
- 351 - 400 acres
- Over 400 acres

Perambulation boundary
National Park boundary

Legend:
- Perambulation boundary
- National Park boundary

- 1 - 50 acres
- 51 - 100 acres
- 101 - 150 acres
- 151 - 200 acres
- 201 - 250 acres
- 251 - 300 acres
- 351 - 400 acres
- Over 400 acres

Based upon the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office. Crown Copyright Reserved.
If the number of animals turned out is included in the analysis (using 2001 data), it can be seen that, in the central and boundary parishes, the number of commoners turning out ponies has increased (by 42%), as have the total number of ponies turned out (by 28% and 33% respectively). In areas outside the Forest there has been a large increase in the number of commoners turning ponies out (53%), coupled with a 39% increase in the number of ponies. However, in all areas of the Forest, there has been a drop in herd size.

Table 17: Numbers of animals and commoners turning out by parish: 1965 and 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ponies</th>
<th>Cattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>turning</td>
<td>turned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parishes</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parishes</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In respect of cattle, on the other hand, there has been a 47% drop in the number of commoners turning cattle out from central parishes, with 15% fewer animals turned out, but a 22% increase in average herd size. In the boundary parishes there has been a smaller decline in the number turning cattle out (7%), but an increased number of animals turned out (23%) and a 28% increase in average herd size. Outside the Forest perambulation there is little change in the number of commoners turning cattle out, but a marked decline in numbers turned out (50%) and in average herd size (56%).

8.2 Back up grazing land

Comparable data is not available for land used to support commoning. However, a study carried out in 2001 into back-up grazing land did reveal some important information about land use in commoning. The study was based on a postal questionnaire sent to all practising commoners which included questions on the location and area of land used for commoning.

39 Back-up land is the agricultural land used by commoners to sustain their commoning activity. It may be used for any of the following activities closely associated with the modern commoning economy in the New Forest:

- to bring stock off the Forest during the winter, or at any other time for welfare reasons – because of injury, sickness or deteriorating condition, and to facilitate activities such as calving or the finishing of animals ready for sale;
- to cut and dry hay or silage for commoned stock, or for sale as part of the commoning economy;
- to graze ponies for use as riding animals in the management of the commoned herd, or young stock which are being brought on to be sold as riding/driving ponies;

New Forest Commoners' Housing 21/09/2005
The survey identified 384 pieces of back-up land across the Forest which the commoners who responded said that they were using at the time to support their commoning (see Table 18, below). Almost half of these pieces of land (46%) are in the central parishes of the Forest. More than half of the pieces of land in the central parishes (55%) are owned by the commoners who farm them, with a further third (30%) rented and the remainder used under informal arrangements.

**Table 18: Distribution and tenure of pieces of back-up land**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area owned</th>
<th>Area rented</th>
<th>Area other arrangements</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>Column %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central parishes</td>
<td>97 55.4%</td>
<td>53 30.3%</td>
<td>25 14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary parishes</td>
<td>52 62.7%</td>
<td>19 22.9%</td>
<td>12 14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside perambulation</td>
<td>54 42.9%</td>
<td>59 46.8%</td>
<td>13 10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the boundary parishes where 22% of the identified pieces of back-up land are located, almost two thirds of these (63%) are owned, with a further 23% rented. The one third (33%) of areas of back-up land lie outside the perambulation; however, are these more likely to be rented (47%) than owned (43%) by the commoners who farm them.

**Table 19: Distribution and tenure of acreage of backup land**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area owned</th>
<th>Area rented</th>
<th>Area other arrangements</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>Column %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central parishes</td>
<td>733 40.4%</td>
<td>905 49.9%</td>
<td>177 9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary parishes</td>
<td>738 72.4%</td>
<td>191 18.7%</td>
<td>91 8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside perambulation</td>
<td>1026 30.6%</td>
<td>2234 66.7%</td>
<td>91 2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2497</td>
<td>3329</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the acreage incorporated in all the areas of back-up land is analysed by the three areas (see Table 19, above), it can be seen that over half (54%) lies outside the perambulation. Two thirds (67%) of this land is rented by the commoners who farm it.

- to keep non depastured cattle sheep and pigs, and other livestock (poultry, goats etc) which form part of the cottage economy of the commoner
Almost one third (29%) of the acreage lies in the central Forest parishes, where half of the land (50%) is rented, and a further 40% owned by the commoners who farm it. Land in the boundary parishes is far more likely to be owned (72% of the acreage) by commoners, but makes up only 17% of the total acreage of back-up land identified.

The table also shows that the survey identified 6000 acres used for commoning purposes by the respondents. The distribution of this land, both by number of pieces and total acreage is set out in Maps 4 and 5 on the previous pages. The full data are set out in Appendix III.

8.3 Size and location of commoning population of the future

8.3.1 Commoners needed to manage the herd

As noted in the introduction of this report, the importance of commoning for maintaining the ecological balance in the New Forest is now well established. The Verderers’ Stewardship Scheme is monitored on the size of herd needed to maintain this balance, while the New Forest SAC Management Plan\(^40\) gives guidance on how the size and distribution of the herd might be managed. English Nature advises that a herd of between 3500 and 7000 livestock units, with the total of neither cattle nor ponies falling below 25% of the global total, should be used as the maximum and minimum numbers depastured.

If this herd is to be managed over time, it is essential that a viable commoning population is maintained. While Table 17 shows what is apparently a healthy commoning population in 2001, with 407 commoners turning out 3332 ponies and 105 turning out 1641 cattle, the figures disguise trends which indicate that commoning is becoming destabilised.

Information from the Marking Fee Register over the period 1965 to 2001 shows that the increase in the number of commoners is coupled with an increase in the percentage of commoners who only turn out for a few years. Graph 5, on the next page, shows the percentage of the population who have paid marking fees for 5 years or less. Over the period from 1965 to 1996 this percentage has increased from 35% to 60% of the total population. There is presently only anecdotal information on this group of commoners, but if the increase in the population consists of people who are not likely to remain as commoners for a sustained period, or will leave the area to follow employment opportunities elsewhere, this will result in the long term decline in the dedicated and experienced commoning population.

\(^{40}\) New Forest SAC Management Plan, English Nature 2001
Data over the same period show that the average number of ponies kept by a commoner has remained at fairly steady at 10 animals, while the number of cattle has fluctuated between 15 and 25 head, averaging 20 per commoner. And if, instead of the average number, the median is calculated, the number of ponies per commoner is 5, and cattle is 10.

In order to maintain the number of animals at levels specified in the New Forest Stewardship Agreement, the following calculation uses the average and the median number of animals per commoner to calculate a range of the number of commoners needed:

**Table 20: Number of commoners needed to maintain stock levels in New Forest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of total required herd</th>
<th>3000</th>
<th>4000</th>
<th>5000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total to be cattle</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resultant percentage of ponies</td>
<td>67.00%</td>
<td>67.00%</td>
<td>67.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cattle</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>1650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of ponies</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2680</td>
<td>3350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Using the median number of commoners turning out: 5 ponies and 10 cattle**

| Number of commoners needed to maintain numbers of cattle | 99 | 132 | 165 |
| Number of commoners needed to maintain numbers of ponies | 402 | 536 | 670 |
| Sub Total | 501 | 668 | 835 |
| **TOTAL (excluding 18% who turn out both)** | 412 | 549 | 686 |

**Using the mean number of commoners turning out: 10 ponies and 20 cattle**

| Number of commoners needed to maintain numbers of cattle | 50 | 66 | 83 |
| Number of commoners needed to maintain numbers of ponies | 201 | 268 | 335 |
| Sub Total | 251 | 334 | 418 |
| **TOTAL (excluding 18% who turn out both)** | 206 | 275 | 343 |

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41 The Median value (Latin = middle) is the one at the centre of a distribution. It is used as an alternative for the average (mean) value, when the range of numbers is thought to be distorted by a small number of very different values. This is so in the case of animal numbers where the great majority of commoners have a relatively small number of animals, while a few have very big herds.
In the case shown in the chart above, herd sizes of 3,000, 4,000 and 5,000 are used at a 33% cattle to 67% ponies ratio. These figures give a range of commoners from 206 to 412 to maintain a herd of 2010 ponies and 990 cattle up to a range of 343 to 686 to maintain a herd of 3350 ponies and 1650 cattle (figures very similar to those recorded in 2001). If different proportions of ponies to cattle are used slightly different figures arise and, because of the way in which the number of commoners keeping large herds affects the average herd size, if more commoners keep large herds, clearly the number of commoners needed to maintain the stocking levels will move towards the lower end of the range in each case.

8.3.2 Future location of commoners’ holdings

Earlier in the present chapter it was shown that a growing number of commoners’ holdings are to be found in parishes outside of the perambulation. This trend is clearly related to the high price of land and housing within the Forest, compared to the more urban residential areas around its periphery. When this information is brought together with the evidence set out in commoners’ quotes in Chapter 6, it is clear that this situation is not sought by commoners, and most often results in problems in the management and care of stock, as well as reduced scope for commoning enterprise.

It is a well established fact that a commoners’ holding should consist of a suitable dwelling, plus a yard with buildings and as much of its land close to it as its location allows. In light of these requirements, this report proposes that the future of the New Forest’s agricultural system will be best served by the continuation of a commoning population living and commoning from complete holdings situated within the central Forest parishes, and those parts of boundary parishes which lie within the perambulation.
9. A FUTURE FOR COMMONERS’ HOUSING IN THE NEW FOREST

9.1 Present national and local government policy

Government policy on the provision of affordable housing is well established. It is directed at providing housing for families who cannot afford to buy or rent on the open market, as well as certain vulnerable groups who need specialised housing. More recently policies have been introduced to make housing accessible to certain groups of employees generally known as ‘key workers’.

The specifications laid down by government on the categories of household which can access subsidised housing, either through rent or sale, mean that groups such as the commoners of the New Forest are unlikely to be considered eligible\(^{42}\). Access to housing through key workers schemes is presently restricted to medical, teaching, prison service and social services employees. Although there is some scope for local authorities to include their own locally defined groups within the classification, this is presently only likely to be a means to lobby for funding these groups\(^ {43}\).

Recent government guidance\(^ {44}\) sets out government policy for sustainable development in rural areas. The policy emphasises the need to support the character and quality of the environment and has general provisions to support dwellings associated with rural enterprises. Although it is not yet clear how this guidance will operate in the context of commoning in the New Forest, it is likely to offer the new National Park Authority the opportunity to devise policies to support the development and maintenance of commoners’ dwellings.

New Forest District Council has a policy in its Local Plan which was first used by the New Forest Commoning Trust to facilitate the construction of four commoners’ dwellings, and later, in an amended form, by the District Council itself to oversee the construction of a further six dwellings\(^ {45}\). Under this scheme, a commoner who is recognised as such by the commoning community (in terms of animals depastured and length of time as a commoner) is enabled to build outside an existing settlement. The scheme is covered by a binding agreement which controls the size of the dwelling and secures it to commoning for the future.

Tight planning controls in the New Forest, designed to restrict development in the countryside and control the siting and style of building, must be welcomed by the commoning community. However, they also have the effect of increasing property values.

\(^{42}\) Full details of eligibility and the operation of the Key Workers Living Scheme are available on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk).

\(^{43}\) Although in response to a written parliamentary question made by John Denham MP to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Yvette Cooper (Minister of State (Housing and Planning)) stated ‘we are proposing to allow Regional Housing Boards to define eligibility for our new First Time Buyer programme, which could include key workers not currently included in the definition of Key Worker Living to reflect local priorities.’


\(^{45}\) Policy NF-H8 Revisions to Adopted New Forest District Local Plan, 2001.
and restricting access to existing property. Even properties with agricultural occupancy conditions on them are unavailable to most commoners, since there is a requirement to provide a business case for occupying such controlled dwellings, and the majority of commoners cannot provide this, as commoning rarely provides a sufficient income to support the commoner\textsuperscript{46}.

The ‘Illingworth Report’, published in 1991, stated that housing is one of the ‘key issues relevant to the long-term survival of commoning\textsuperscript{47}. The recommendations in the report establish the principles which underpin the Forestry Commission’s retention of its housing stock to ensure a supply of affordable rented holdings for commoners, and express support for the New Forest Commoning Trust, which was then being proposed.

The report also focuses on the ‘fierce competition’ that exists in the New Forest for agricultural land, which comes from ‘landowners, from riding stables, from other equestrian-based tourist facilities and from those who seek a “mini-estate” to enhance their residences.’ It proposes the policy under which the Forestry Commission now lets the agricultural land that it manages to commoners.

9.2 What is a commoners’ holding?

In order to establish the types of affordable holdings presently available to commoning, and suggest ways in which the supply can be increased and maintained in the future, it is essential to define what the minimum commoners’ holding comprises:

- A dwelling in reasonable condition and of a size to accommodate an average family. This would normally be considered to be a house, but a number of commoners do live in mobile homes, and other types of accommodation should not be ruled out;

- A yard in close proximity to the dwelling which includes a range of out buildings suitable for storing fodder and machinery, as well as adequate housing for stock;

- A minimum area of grazing land in close proximity to the house for the containment of stock in times of need: ill health, poor condition, calving/foaling, or imposed restrictions. It is suggested that the holding size adopted by the District Council’s Local Plan policy NF-H8 of 2 acres be accepted as a minimum for a viable commoners’ holding;

- All this to be located within or close to the perambulation of the open Forest.

- In addition to this, many commoners use additional areas of land for grazing, hay making and other agricultural activities. These do not need to be adjacent to the holding, but the comments of many commoners indicate that travelling between home and land is a major problem for their commoning enterprise. It is suggested

\textsuperscript{46} Local Plan policy NF-H6c, states ‘it can be demonstrated that the existing farm or forestry enterprise is financially sound, or in the case of a proposed enterprise that it is planned on a sound financial basis and intentions are genuine,…’

\textsuperscript{47} Illingworth 1991
that at least some additional land is located within the vicinity of the commoners’ holding.

9.3 The existing stock of commoners’ holdings

Chapter 6, which dealt with the responses to the postal survey, indicated that over 80% of commoners own their own homes, either freehold or leasehold. In addition, 43% of these properties have been shown to include a house, a yard with buildings and some land as a single holding. These holdings may be seen as the ‘core’ stock of commoners’ dwellings at the present time.

On the other hand, information from commoners set out in Chapter 7, showed how this stock is being reduced by the sale of properties following the death of an ageing parent, and the difficulty that younger commoners have in continuing to live within the Forest perambulation. The photographs of the development of a number of commoners’ dwellings into large houses with conservatories and stables, set out at the end of this chapter, show graphically how the stock is being reduced through their conversion into country homes by incomers, or even by letting them fall into ruin.

The price of houses in the New Forest, particularly those with land and farm buildings, make it almost impossible for one generation to follow another in the family holding. The division of the family’s estate on death and high death duties mean that it is very unlikely that a single heir will be able to continue to live in the family holding. Means must be found to stem the flow of commoners’ holdings out of the community, and ensure the retention of the core stock of dwellings.

9.4 Commoners’ dwellings built under the Local Plan policy NF-H8

As noted above, ten dwellings have now been built under Planning Policy NF-H8. The Local Plan describes the scheme in paragraphs D3.28 and D3.29. The following extracts set out the main points of the legal structure under which such properties can presently be built:

‘In appropriate circumstances a single dwelling outside an existing settlement may be permitted under Policy NF-H8 to assist commoners who wish to continue their family’s commoning traditions but who, on wishing to set up home themselves, are unable to afford to purchase on the open market a dwelling from which they can continue commoning. In order to guarantee the long term availability of dwellings built for commoners under this policy, applicants will be required to enter into legal agreements and to demonstrate a long term personal and family commitment to the exercise of common rights on the New Forest. The purpose of this policy is to assist to maintain the commoning tradition that is essential to maintaining the landscape and ecological character of the New Forest. An agreement has been devised by the local planning authority under which the commoner, who will be responsible for building the dwelling, will transfer the freehold interest of the site to the District Council. The District Council will then divide the land into grazing land and building land. The building land will be conveyed back to the commoner with imposed covenants restricting the use of the dwelling and land to commoners. The grazing land will be leased back to the commoner. The District Council in turn will be responsible to the local planning authority for monitoring and checking that the dwelling continues to serve the needs of commoning. In the event that the applicant at some time in the future reduces
Holding built under the New Forest Commoning Trust scheme in 1999
Holding built under the NFDC Commoners’ housing scheme in 2003
his/her commoning below a substantial level the agreement will give the District Council the right to repurchase the property. The District Council will then arrange for the property to be resold to another commoner under the same terms and conditions at a prior agreed price based on the construction cost of the dwelling and the market value of the land associated with it.

The complexity of the agreement, the necessity of giving up ownership of their land to the District Council, and the non-existent prospect of making the usual level of return on investment in property, has deterred a number of commoners from using the scheme. However, others see securing their own, or their children’s, future in commoning as the most important consideration.

Comments made by those interviewed included:

I don’t believe in the Commoners’ Housing Trust - it’s a con - because they end up dictating to me what I have to do for the rest of my life. 

Commoners’ Housing Trust is a good idea … and a step in the right direction - but not with the rules and regs attached to it - it’s all got strings and when you ask them pointed questions they can’t answer you.

I was unhappy with the criteria that were used. I’m sceptical and suspicious of how these things are sorted out. Left a bitter taste, given our commoning history.

What I have had to do is give my son 2 acres, which has got near access to the Forest - with the hope he can carry on commoning - without that he can’t.

The Commoners’ Trust is what we are trying to get my son into at the present time. We have made the initial application to the NF District Council - early stages of that at the present time.

The recent announcement by the newly formed New Forest National Park Authority that it will be taking sole responsibility for planning within the New Forest National Park means that the future development of a policy to secure the development of such properties is likely to be directed by this newly emerging body.

9.5 Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is probably the organisation presently best placed to offer commoners access to holdings in the Forest at reduced rents. Its policy which prioritises commoners for rental of land, and discounted rental of houses means that, in July 2004 some 27 commoners were living in FC houses and nearly all the pasture land which they own in the Forest was rented to commoners. While a number of these commoners are also employees of the Commission, the contribution which these rentals make to the commoning economy should not be under-estimated.

However, there is concern that future access to Forestry Commission property in the New Forest could be at risk. The Commission has to operate within agreed financial parameters,

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48 These comments highlight the fact that there is some confusion in the commoning community about the present arrangements for the building of commoners’ dwellings and the transfer from the New Forest Commoners’ Trust to the District Council which took place following an amendment to the Local Plan in 2001.

and there remains the possibility that the current favourable housing policy could be reviewed, leading to a return to the policy of selling off its houses in the New Forest.

Additionally, inflated land values in the Forest may be placing the Commission’s grazing land beyond the reach of commoners. Two pieces of land offered for rent late in 2004 were tendered at prices far in excess of the normal agricultural rates paid by commoners for other pieces of Commission land. Since no guide price was included in the tender guidelines, bidders did not know how high they might have to bid to secure the land. In the event, both pieces were rented to commoners, but at unexpectedly high prices. There was considerable concern in the commoning community that such high rental prices are unsustainable.

9.6 Landed Estates in the New Forest

The other main source of rented housing, holdings and land within the Forest is the landed estates which exist throughout the area. They control large areas of pasture, as well as a considerable stock of housing which may be suitable for commoners. However, the interviews with land agents and managers on the estates indicated that the majority are constrained by the pressure to make a profit from their assets.

Only Beaulieu and the Manor of Cadland presently have informal policies to place commoners at the top of the list of prospective tenants for either housing or land, and this is set in the context of supporting the wider local economy. In almost all cases, rents for both housing and land are pitched at market levels, meaning that commoners have to compete with people on high incomes to secure a property.

The proposal by Maldwin Drummond to create two dedicated commoners’ holdings on his estate, may show a way in which the estates with land in the New Forest could contribute to the future of commoning. It is a model which Mr Drummond feels could be replicated across the Forest, providing 20 to 25 commoners’ holdings for rental at affordable prices.

9.7 The future

At present the great majority of commoners live in homes which they own themselves. These properties form the core of holdings for the future of commoning. If this stock of commoner owned holdings is not to disappear over the coming years as a result of high house and land prices, coupled with the need to sell property on the death of its previous owner, means must be found to allow those young commoners who wish to retain their family home and continue the tradition of their family to do so.

In addition to the owned stock, the creation of commoners’ holdings for rent by the estates in the New Forest, and the retention of housing and land suitable for commoning by both the estates and the Forestry Commission may be seen as the foundation of a dedicated stock of commoner’ properties for rent. A third source of holdings may be found in the transfer of holdings and land left in perpetuity to commoning by present commoners and other property owners in the Forest to a suitably constituted management body.

A number of commoners replying to the postal survey or during interviews, expressed the desire that their holding should remain in commoning after their death. If an acceptable legal framework can be created to enable property to be left to commoning, and a suitable
recipient of these properties can be located or set up, this may provide a means through
which such property could be let or leased to commoners, and secured for the future.

Through the means set out above, it would appear that a ‘core’ of commoners’ holdings
could be retained by commoners or made accessible for renting to those who, in the short or
longer term, are unable to start up or continue to common in the Forest. Additionally, if
government policies designed to make home ownership available to a wider range of first
time buyers are to be extended, it is imperative that a mechanism is found to include
commoners in future schemes.

Moreover, recent consultation with commoners through the schemes promoted by Forest
Friendly Farming has drawn attention to the diversity of commoners’ ambitions. Reluctance
to engage in the housing scheme presently managed by New Forest District Council can be
seen as an example of their reticence to be confined by a set of rules and conditions. Thus, it
is important to be aware that schemes which are intended to be attractive to a wide range of
commoners are likely to fall short of the expectations of many at whom they are aimed. It is
clear that each commoner has his or her own view of how they see the future, and that they
must be fully engaged in the process of finding the solutions.
Coronation Cottage in 1989 (photo Joanne Page)

Coronation Cottage in 2005
Box Cottage in 1984 (photo by Tony Johnson)

Box Cottage in 2004 (note the loss of Forest frontage)
Luke’s Cottage ca 1950

Luke’s Cottage (now Turnstone Cottage) in 2004 – only the cob bakery remains substantially unchanged
Harry Burt outside his cottage ca 1950

Harry Burt’s cottage in 2004
10. **CONCLUSIONS**

Commoning in the New Forest has a history whose origins predate the Norman Conquest. Over many centuries the rights of common enjoyed by the smallholders of the area have enabled them to make a simple but adequate living on the basis of a few acres of land and small scale enterprise. This formed part of an integrated system of agriculture which supplied the surrounding population with food and local markets with livestock.

The importance of the New Forest in terms of landscape and ecology was first recognised in the nineteenth century when improved transport links brought visitors and new residents to the area to enjoy its ‘natural’ beauty. Today the vital role which the commoning has played in the maintenance of the Forest’s ecosystems is fully appreciated, but much of the social and economic structure which underpinned this ancient form of agriculture has gone forever.

The viability of commoning has been undermined by the industrialisation of agriculture and the globalisation of the markets for food and other produce. The New Forest pony, once in demand as a sturdy and sensible working animal used in agriculture, commerce and industry, now has to compete in the recreational horse market with larger warm blooded animals. And New Forest cattle, raised on the poor grazing of the heath, fetch a low price in a market over-supplied with animals fed on high grade foodstuffs and concentrates.

Against this backdrop, the New Forest itself has become an important area for recreation and retreat from the stresses of urban living. House prices, influenced by the area’s attractiveness and its proximity to a number of large and densely populated urban centres, are comparable with those of London, and agricultural land is sold and rented at a premium rate to satisfy a large demand from recreational horse owners.

In the past the practice of commoning, integrated into an economic network, was focussed on a locality and constrained by poor transport links. Commoners lived and worked within their own small part of the Forest. Today, widespread access to motor vehicles and the roads which criss-cross the open heath mean that it is possible for commoners to operate across the whole Forest, or even from outside the perambulation. While this has created opportunities for some commoners, and enabled others to continue to practice against the odds, the dispersal of their holdings and separation from their livestock are physical evidence of the strain under which the system now operates.

The land and property bank which commoning acquired over many years has been eroded as successive generations have sought to remain in the area. Houses have been sold and land divided to resolve inheritance rights. The majority of these assets are lost to commoning forever. In the period since the Second World War house prices on the open Forest have increased from levels affordable to soldiers returning from war service, or the sons and daughters of commoners, to those within the pockets of only those with large sums of money to invest or substantial incomes. The commoner has been priced out of the Forest.

The recognition of the importance of the New Forest as an area of international ecological importance has, until recently, focussed on the physical effect which the grazing of commoned stock has on the fabric of the ecosystem. Over a sustained period the commoner has remained invisible, and the realities of commoning as a broadly based agricultural system have been ignored. Even today, the need for a commoning population is measured in terms of the retention of a herd of the right size to maintain the Forest’s ecosystem in the best
heart. The essential land base for commoning continues to be measured in terms of the acreage needed to bring commoned stock back in for the winter.

This report has shown that commoning is more than the ponies and cattle which support the delicate ecology of the New Forest, and which visitors come to see grazing on the open heath. Commoning is an ancient agricultural system, a part of which is the grazing of stock on the common lands of the New Forest. Its importance as cultural heritage has now finally been recognised in its own right by the government’s proposal to consider the New Forest as a World Heritage Site and its recent designation as a National Park.

Some may argue that commoning is in a healthy state: animal numbers are high and there are more commoners practising than there have been in a number of years. But this report has shown that these numbers disguise the growing destabilisation in the population. The diminishing land and housing base, the frustration and anger of young commoners and the erosion of the established commoning families whose children see no future in the Forest, signal the loss of the traditional commoner. New commoners are welcome, but they lack the knowledge and skills which underpin this complex agricultural system, and many of them do not stay.

If commoning is to survive, it must be protected: and this must be done in a number of ways:

- There must be education of the public, and the local administration, to the important role which commoning plays in the ecosystem of the area which they enjoy;
- There must be long term financial stability for the system; and
- Policies must be introduced to ensure an affordable base of housing and land to secure the future of commoning, both domestically and agriculturally. These should include mechanisms to:
  - Make it possible to avoid the sale of holdings on the death of the owner if younger relatives wish to continue and common from it;
  - Allow holdings to be inherited by a body which will secure them for commoning in the future;
  - Assist commoners in developing business cases for the occupation of dwellings which are covered by agricultural occupancy conditions;
  - Continue the present government policy which allows the Forestry Commission to retain its stock of houses suitable for commoners;
  - Encourage local estates to support commoning through the rental of land and holdings to commoners at affordable rates and potentially through the development of a dedicated stock of commoners’ holdings for affordable rental;
  - Seek innovative means to channel government funds for key workers into the provision of affordable housing for rent, shared ownership or sale to commoners;
  - Ensure the continued development of suitable commoners’ dwellings under the direction of the New Forest National Park Authority;
Encourage all the local authorities in the area of the New Forest\textsuperscript{50} to support the future of commoning in their strategic development and forward planning.

\textsuperscript{50} New Forest District Council, Test Valley Borough Council, Salisbury City Council, Christchurch Borough Council, East Dorset District Council, as well as the County Council in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset.
APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE AND QUESTION LISTS USED IN INTERVIEWS
# New Forest Commoners: Face-to-face interview outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family: generational history</th>
<th>1. How long have you been in commoning?</th>
<th>All my life (Go to 2) Number of years (Go to 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Could you give me a brief outline of your family’s history in commoning in the New Forest? (How many generations; where did they live over the years; who was involved, etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Could you tell me how and why you became involved? (Was it a move to the New Forest which introduced you to commoning practice and how did your housing circumstances at the time you started affect your decision to take up commoning?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present housing/land circumstances. Immediate plans.</td>
<td>4. How did you arrive at where you presently live? (The land and yards which you use?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Is your present situation OK, or do you still have problems to resolve? (If so, please say what these are and how you expect to resolve them)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. What are your plans for the next few years? (Expand/wind down, etc)</td>
<td>Move, increase holding, start winding down (Go to 7) Stay the same (Go to 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Do you think your plans are likely to be realized? (What are the problems that you will face in achieving your aims?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children/ other young relatives</td>
<td>8. Do you have children or your own or within your wider family who are involved in commoning, or likely to become so when they get older?</td>
<td>Yes (Go to 9) No (Go to 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Could you give me details of these young people and their commoning involvement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Do they share your home/yard/land?</td>
<td>Yes (Go to 11) No (Go to 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. What sort of problems and advantages does the situation have for your/their commoning and how could things be improved?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Are there younger members of your family who have managed to set themselves up in independent homes/yards/land as commoners?</td>
<td>Yes (Go to 13) No (Go to 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Could you describe how they achieved this? (Was there land/housing in the family which they inherited/bought/rent. How else did they come by the house/land which they use? Are they struggling to survive?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How do you see your housing/land situation and your active involvement in commoning developing as you get older?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Are your children/other young relatives likely to be supportive?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What would you like to see happen to your house/yards/land after you (and your husband/wife) die?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. What do you think is likely to happen to your house/yards/land and your animals after your death?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term future: inheritance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. What is or was your main employment?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Do you have other comments you wish to make about your commoning?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questionnaire for Land Agents of Estates in the New Forest area

1. How many cottages/small holdings/ farms do you rent out on the estate
   a. Cottages/houses
   b. Small holdings
   c. Farms (please give approximate acreage)

2. Could you give some indication of the type and size of property which the estate owns which might be suitable for commoners (e.g. number of bedrooms, possibility of renting adjacent land, rent levels [i.e. market or subsidised])

3. Do you have a policy of renting to practising commoners? Yes No
   a. If so, could you give brief details of the type of agreement which you might make with a practising commoner? (Or do you have a written policy which you could append to this questionnaire?)

4. As far as you know, how many and what type of the estate’s properties are presently rented to practising commoners?

Land

5. Do you rent any land in small plots (5-10 acres?) Yes No
   If ‘Yes’, could you say approximately
   a. what acreage and
   b. what level of rents and types of agreement the estate commonly holds with its tenants.

6. Do you have a policy of renting to practising commoners? Yes No
   a. If so, could you give us brief details of the type of agreement which you might make with a practising commoner?

7. As far as you know, how much of your land is presently rented to practising commoners? And to how many commoners do you rent?

8. Do you have any general comments to make about the estate’s position in relation to the commoning economy in the New Forest?
**Estate agents**

**Houses for commoners**

1. Does this agency deal with small holdings or small farms that might be suitable for commoners?

2. Do you presently have any such properties on your books (could I have details)?

3. About how many such properties would you expect to come onto the market in a single year?

4. Who are the main competitors for such properties?

5. Could you give me a price range for such properties at present market rates?

6. How would you say that these prices have changed over the past five years (please give an approximate % increase or decrease)?

**Land for commoners**

7. Does this agency deal with small areas of agricultural land?

8. Do you presently have any such properties on your books (could I have details)?

9. About how many such properties would you expect to come onto the market in a single year?

10. Who are the main competitors for such properties?

11. Could you give me a price range for such properties at present market rates?

12. How would you say that these prices have changed over the past five years (please give an approximate % increase or decrease)?

**For agencies that handle rentals:**

13. Do you handle the rentals of houses that might be suitable for commoners (i.e. in a rural setting and including outbuildings/land)?

14. Do you presently have any such properties on your books (could I have details)?

15. About how many such properties would you expect to come onto the market in a single year?

16. Who are the main competitors for such properties?
17. Could you give me a price range for such properties at present market rates?

18. How would you say that these prices have changed over the past five years (please give an approximate % increase or decrease)?
The New Forest Commoners Housing Survey 2005

Simply indicate your chosen answer by ticking the appropriate option or writing in the space provided. We ask that one person only should fill in the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your help.

Q1  In which Parish or Village do you presently live? (please write in the name)

Parish..............................................................................................................................................................................................

Village..............................................................................................................................................................................................

Q2  How long have you been a commoner in the New Forest? (please tick only one box)

Less than 1 year......................................................... ☐  11 - 20 years ............................................................... ☐

1-5 years ................................................................. ☐  over 20 yrs .............................................................. ☐

6 -10 years ................................................................. ☐  All your life (however long).......................... ☐

Q3  Has your house been in your family (or that of your partner) for more than one generation?

Yes ................................................................. ☐  No................................................................. ☐

Q4  Which of the following options best describes your present housing situation? (please tick one option ONLY)

Own your house FREEHOLD (with or without mortgage). ................................................................. ☐

Own your house LEASEHOLD (with or without mortgage). ................................................................. ☐

Rent it from the Forestry Commission ................................................................. ☐

*Rent it from an Estate (please specify below) ................................................................. ☐

Rent it from another landlord ................................................................. ☐

Rent it from the council ................................................................................................................................. ☐

Rent it from a housing association ................................................................................................................................. ☐

Occupy it as part of the conditions of your or your partners job ................................................................. ☐

Occupy it through some other arrangement (e.g. informally, from someone in your family, etc) ................................................................................................................................. ☐

Share with family/friends (for personal reasons) ................................................................................................. ☐

Share with family/friends (for financial reasons) ................................................................................................. ☐

*Other (please specify below) ................................................................................................................................. ☐

* Name of Estate you rent from .................................................................................................................................

* Other .................................................................................................................................................................................................

The New Forest Commoners Housing Survey  January 2005
Q5  Is your home....?
   Rent
   Own
   Other arrangement (e.g. informal loan or in exchange for other services)

Q6  Are there any problems with your house which make your continuation as a commoner difficult? (e.g. it's too small for your family, it's too far from your animals or your land, etc.)
   Yes......................... Go to Q8
   No .......................... Go to Q9

Q7  If "Yes", please can you give some explanation for the problems ?

Q8  Do you have land which you use to support your commoning?
   Yes......................... Go to Q9
   No .......................... Go to Q12

Q9  How much land do you own/rent/borrow in total?
   Less than 5 acres.................................
   5-10 acres...........................................
   11-20 acres ...........................................
   21-30 acres ...........................................
   31-40 acres ...........................................
   41-50 acres ...........................................
   Over 50 acres ......................................

Q10 About how much of the land that IS ATTACHED TO your house do you own or rent?
(please tick ONE box in each row if applicable)

Q11 About how much of the land that IS SEPARATE FROM your house your house do you own or rent?
(please tick ONE box in each row if applicable)
Q12 Do you have a yard or yards including buildings for your animals, storage for feed and machinery which you use for your commoning?
- Yes ......................... Go to Q13
- No .......................... Go to Q15

Q13 Which of the following best describes the capacity in which you use your main yard?
- Own it ....................................................... ○
- Rent it ....................................................... ○
- Occupy it under an informal arrangement ○

Q14 Is your main yard.....?
- Attached to your house ........................................ ○
- Attached to your land ........................................ ○
- Separate from both ............................................................... ○

Q15 Are there problems about your land or yard which makes your continuation as a commoner difficult?
- Yes ......................... Go to Q16
- No .......................... Go to Q17

Q16 If "Yes", please can you give some explanation for the problems?

Q17 Is there anyone in your family who would like to common (or live in their own independent home as a commoner), but cannot at present because of the problems of securing land or housing in the New Forest?
- Yes ......................... Go to Q18
- No .......................... Go to Q19

Q18 If "Yes", please can you give some explanation for the problems?

Q19 If you have children, have they been able, or are they likely to be able to set themselves up as commoners independent from your holding?
- Yes ............................................................... ○
- No ........................................................................................................ ○
- Some of them ........................................................................................................○
- I don't have any children ...................................................................................... ○
- Too early to say ....................................................................................................... ○
- Children not interested in commoning .................................................................... ○

Q20 Do you expect to pass your house on to any decendants upon your death?
- Yes ......................... Go to Q21
- No .......................... Go to Q22

Q21 If "Yes", do you think that it will remain as a commoner's house after your death?
- Yes ............................................................... ○
- Not sure ....................................................... ○
- No ............................................................... Go to Q22
Q22 If "No", please tick the option or options that best explains why your house will not be passed on to your descendents or why it will not remain a commoner's house?

- I don't own the house I live in........................................................................................................
- I don't have any descendents........................................................................................................
- I don't want to pass it on to my descendents................................................................................
- Children are not interested in commoning......................................................................................
- Commoning isn't viable anymore (please go to Q23)........................................................................
- It will have to be sold to share the inheritance................................................................................
- It will have to be sold to pay for death duties................................................................................
- * Other (please specify below)........................................................................................................

*Other ...........................................................................................................................................

Q23 If you think commoning isn't a viable option any more, why is this?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Q24 Does what you have said about the future of your house apply to your......?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yard and Buildings</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>To some of it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>To some of it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q25 If "No", could you say how the situation differs for your yard, buildings and land?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Follow on Interview

If you would like to take part in this part of the survey, which will provide us with invaluable first hand information about the problems which commoners face in maintaining their commoning base, please complete your details in the boxes below. Someone will be in touch with you shortly after we receive your completed questionnaire to arrange a convenient time and day to visit you.

Your details will be held securely by the Market Research Group for the purposes of contacting you to take part in an in depth interview and will not be made available to any third party. If at any time you wish your details to be removed from the database this will be done immediately on request (please contact Nicky Johnston on 01202 963887 or 07710 778470

Name...............................................................................................................................................

Address...........................................................................................................................................

Telephone Number............................................................................................................................

Thank you very much for completing this survey, now please put it in the pre paid envelope supplied and return it to The Market Research Group
APPENDIX II

DETAILED DATA ON LAND AND COMMONERS COMMENTS
### Relationship between holding and size and distribution of land used in commoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>How much land do you own/rent/borrow in total?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than 5 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house, yard and adjacent land</td>
<td>All land apart from holding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All land adjacent to holding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Land adjacent and away from holding</td>
</tr>
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<td>Own house and adjacent yard</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Rent house, yard and adjacent land</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other arrangement</td>
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<td>Land adjacent and away from holding</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Distribution of land in relation to holding, by area used for commoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total land own/rent/borrowed</th>
<th>Distribution of land</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>All land apart from holding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 5 acres</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10 acres</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>11-20 acres</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-50 acres</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 50 acres</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Problems associated with yards and/or land

- Bad health - arthritis. Refusal of permission for agricultural worker’s dwelling.
- Attached land is too small - it needs more land close to it on longer leases for security (if land rented/leased became unavailable through set aside or other scheme with landlord - would make a big difference).
- Limitation on stock numbers.
- Not enough land.
- Not enough land.
- Not enough room. No adjacent grazing.
- Not large enough.
- Too small.
- Too small to expand.
- Distance from house.
- Land too far from house to look after stock properly. Would be better if we could live on the land.
- Main land rented is 10 miles away - difficult without transport.
- Most of land 20 miles from yard.
- No housing near land.
- Not living close to yard & land means travelling to feed animals before & after work.
- Too far from house.
- Have no guarantee that land will be available for long term future. Would love to buy own land but it’s too expensive.
- If my father looses the tenancy of the property he lives in I loose the use of his buildings and land.
- When my parents die the house and land currently used as homestead will be taken over, leaving me with no buildings or paddock.
- Lack of certainty with regards to landlords plans & lack of upkeep.
Lack of long term agreement for large parcel of rented land and rent increases.
Lease of land and house is dependant upon my employment with Forestry Commission and may cease when I retire.
Not very permanent for us in long term commoning.
For both yard and land, very informal arrangement.
The informal agreement will end when the current owner dies.
Will be sold on owner’s death.
Because we are very limited by the amount of stock, as we have limited barn space and have been turned down for extra barn space, we have another farm unit elsewhere. This is inconvenient & stops us farming properly here.
Cottage has insufficient outbuildings to serve the 14 acres of pasture. Stables, field shelters & feedstore/workshop needed.
I could really do with a formal livestock yard especially for cattle.
Insufficient outbuildings.
Need more buildings and planning is a problem.
No buildings.
No room for storage of equipment and feed.
Planners would not let us build on it. No electricity.
Problems in erecting buildings and making hard standing suitable for today’s needs in animal husbandry.
Problems with NFDC development control - field shelter & small barn.
The hay barn is on rented ground away from house. We think we would have difficulty getting planning permission for a barn here.
Poor wet land when most needed in winter months to be used as back up grazing in the lean months.
Very poor ground in winter.
Belongs to my parents - will have to be sold to share inheritance & pay death duties.
Borrow from parents who are commoners.
House belongs to parents who are commoners. Not enough room for all of us.
When the grandparents pass on.
Buildings in very poor condition - need replacement. No money available from FC.
Cost. Not mine, therefore any outlay e.g. needs electricity - as there is none.
Outbuilding/yard need replacement/repair/upgrading to fit purpose. Possible planning difficulties. Land virtually all rented - therefore no SFB /ES etc.
Expense of renting.
Expensive for very poor clay fields & very wet. Need more land.
House, yard and field rents are always on the increase. Leads to uncertainty of viability.
I cannot afford to purchase or rent a yard or buildings that are in the right area of the Forest.
If the lease became too expensive or became unavailable.
It is very expensive to rent therefore you have to consider whether commoning is worth continuing, when you cannot afford to buy land in the Forest.
Need more land but it is very expensive and not readily available.
I have no land as it is too expensive to buy & very rarely comes up for rent.
Insufficient land for grazing. Cannot afford more land only house with rights - as relative died.
I need a holding within the Forest to enable me to continue commoning. Owing to the price of property in the NF this is unlikely unless I obtain planning consent for a Commoners Trust holding on my father’s land.

I would like to set up on my own with house and land but cannot see how this is going to be possible.

In the middle of a residential area. Constant enquiries from housing developers.

NFDC refusal to live on site. Recreational Horse, footpath and it lays a bit wet in winter.

No direct Forest access: therefore have to box all animals in and out.

Not located in the right place. Difficult to get on to it in the winter.

We have to leave our animals over night, and hope nothing happens to them.

When our lease runs out, we still won’t be able to afford to buy a property in the New Forest!

Increase in volume and speed of traffic past gate to property (direct access to Forest), also shared entrance with neighbour.

I’m lucky to have good neighbour.

One is an objectionable neighbour!

Members of the family who would like to common but cannot: reasons

Finding employment to provide sufficient income. 2. Finding & securing established long term accommodation. 3. Finding land & equipment.

Two daughters who currently are commoners but live outside forest perambulations due to high cost of housing/land-currently using our facilities.

I need a holding within the Forest to enable me to continue commoning. Owing to the price of property in the NF this is unlikely unless I obtain planning consent for a Commoners Trust holding on my father’s land.

Availability and Price.

Both children would common. As it does not pay enough to live on they both have other jobs. Cannot even contemplate affording property or land in this area. Cannot afford a house with small parcel of land to be used as base.

Cost. Whilst she has managed to rent a home the only way she can afford it is by working full time, outside of commoning or farming.

Cost.

Daughter and partner, plus 2 children, cannot afford to live in area.

Daughter and son are on NFDC list to rent as both cannot afford to buy.

Daughter keen on commoning but no chance of buying land or probably being able to rent, as not enough available for young commoners.

Daughter who lives outside forest boundary.

Financial.

Financially not possible.

Grandson. Problem: cost & planning.

House & land prices too expensive in forest, which has forced myself & partner to find accommodation in Totton.

House prices. Planning consent.

Housing is too expensive for locals on low wages.

Housing too expensive for daughter to buy.

I cannot afford to purchase suitable property in the perambulation of the New Forest.
Lack of affordable accommodation in and around Forest.
Lack of affordable housing.
Lack of affordable housing.
Lack of buildings or back up land.
Lack of finance to provide enough space for base.
Lack of housing.
Lack of land/space available that is affordable.
Land and housing is all too expensive.
Land and houses too expensive to buy in Forest.
Land and housing in the Forest is too expensive.
Land prices are too high. No affordable housing.
Land too dear.
Live too far from holding.
Main problem would be obtaining permission to build a property on land here, although there is plenty of room.
Me: I'm capable, independent. I started from scratch, built the farm, BSE, foot & mouth. 3 young kids. All in 15 years, still no house.
My brother is keen to start, but not enough room.
My daughter, son-in-law & grandson would like to have a common, but cannot afford anything in the Forest. My son-in-law works locally & rents in Breamore.
My elder sister, due to cost & non-availability of housing/land within Forest.
My father gave my brother land to build his own bungalow, from where he could run the farm, upon his death his widow sold it. Remaining land was left to myself, brother & sister.
My father owns a home on the edge of the forest, but has the same informal agreement as above.
My son & daughter will not be able to afford to live here until we die and they move into our house.
My son & his family would love to have a pony on the forest, as my daughter has done for the past 25 years.
My son lives in a semi detached house on an estate, with no garden or means of exercising forest rights.
My son loves the Forest and commoning but I am worried that he will one day not be able to afford to live in the Forest.
My whole family would like to be commoners but the cost of living in a suitable place is prohibitive. The return on commoning is not enough also.
My younger sister lives too far from the holding & local housing costs etc prohibit her living locally.
Myself. I want to continue commoning but security of my animals is becoming an issue.
New property priced out of the market. Old forest property taken by big business firms.
Nowhere to rent. Cannot afford to buy as all holdings suitable are bought as equestrian holiday homes for the wealthy: over 405 in Burley.
None available-too expensive - Large estates adjacent prefer to let to short term - or pony paddocks.
Not a chance of affording it. Has moved away.
Not enough room in house/yard or fields for any more stock.
Our daughter cannot afford to common without our help.
Our son would like his own land but obviously cannot afford it.
Parents and sister cannot afford land, property.
Planning permission; mortgage.
Price - too high.
Property & land too expensive to live in forest - far too many second homes in Forest that could be for true commoners.
Shortage of land and prices.
Son - unable to get permission to build on land.
Son of 27 years, currently renting a flat in Southampton.
Sons and daughter cannot afford to buy a house in the Forest.
The price of housing.
The price of property, etc.
They cannot afford to buy/rent a suitable property.
Too expensive for them to buy.
Too expensive to buy homes.
Too expensive to buy property in Burley.
Too expensive to buy suitable property, can only afford house on housing estates.
Too expensive to rent or buy land for our children (young adults- wanting to leave home - would like to common) and are commoning at present under parents.
Unable to afford rent.
Unlikely to find employment locally or to afford housing or land.
Wages not sufficient to obtain a mortgage, also only the few get into Forestry Commission holdings etc. Only certain ones get picked - the majority get overlooked - even though commoners for a lifetime.
When my son lives on his own, he will have to move too far away due to cost of housing.
Would love to own our own ground /small holding or house but cannot compete with house prices!
Yes, grandchildren would like to live in Beaulieu near the forest but cannot afford it.

Other reason that property will not remain in commoning after death of present generation

Commoning unlikely to continue here at these premises, when we move from this tied house.
It will be passed to an animal charity for all time.
The house I live in has already been ‘sold’ to a daughter.
The house is separate from our land - in Southampton.
Don't live in a commoner’s house.
I think the trust will ensure it remains a commoner’s cottage.
My descendants will have to decide.
Not an ideal commoning base.
Unlikely to remain viable in my lifetime due to problem with land. 2 of my 3 children want to common.
We will have to downsize to avoid death duties & help our son to get a place.
Would like if possible to give it up for commoning, but how? and what if I have to sell it to go into a home?

**Reasons given for commoning not being a viable option any more.**

- Fifty years out of date. Profitable farming requires size and large capital together with modern methods and intelligent management.
- A lot of money/energy has to be put into this activity and not many people are prepared to do this in this present age.
- As a 3rd generation commoner I believe that Commoning is not viable, will only continue if people like me are happy to subsidise commoning from enjoyment.
- As a living it is not viable.
- At best for ponies Commoning is a break even situation. Most young commoners will find it a burden, unless we can attract additional support.
- Because the public are not educated enough on the matter, they do not respect the commoners animals.
- Beef prices too low.
- Cannot compete with high paid hobby pony/horse owners, for back up land locally.
- Commoners need to earn enough to live and this can only be done by obtaining additional paid employment.
- Commoning has never been a viable option. People have always needed another form of income to supplement commoning.
- Commoning has never been viable business. For many years life is too fast. All you can do is use the forest to the best of your ability – it’s way of life.
- Commoning has taken a pasting for some years. It ‘bred into you’. You keep going by tradition not income.
- Commoning isn’t viable, but it's a way of life & the Forest brings everyone together regularly. Good community spirit, especially on Autumn days, Boxing Day & Point to Point!
- Commoning is a way of life rather than a financial proposition for most small commoners (non farmers).
- Commoning is a secondary occupation following a main income working for wages to support family.
- Commoning is becoming increasingly difficult. Commoners’ housing is unaffordable. Income supplement could help overcome this under the ‘Single Farm Payment’ attached to commoning.
- Commoning is carried out as a loss making hobby. It has only been given lip service with regard to the overall costs incurred by commoners with such a beneficial impact on the NF area.
- Commoning is getting harder because of the prices of ground & housing. Commoning is still possible as long as you are dedicated & you have a good job to support it.
- Commoning is viable as a spare time occupation.
- Commoning on a small scale is probably no longer viable. I had 14 cows and 14 horses and made no profit. The last 15 years have no been good for commoners.
- Cost of renting back up land.
- Costs involved and income received.
Difficult to decide - the financial return is small; the work is hard; but it is a traditional way of life.

Due to financial state of agriculture, commoning can only be seen as an expensive hobby.

Farming in general is in a state of uncertainty. Hardly anybody now would or could make a living out of commoning-only a hobby now.

Financial reasons - lot of work for no reward. Disheartening with losses due to R.T.A's etc. Interference from public and the uninformed.

For me it never has been. It is my hobby.

Housing and land are too expensive for genuine commoners - being priced out by outsiders.

Housing usually out of reach of genuine or young Commoners, if on the open market, making supply short and the practice non viable.

I am retired & have 2 animals on the forest as a hobby. I doubt commoning is financially viable.

I do not have enough help at home for me to continue commoning.

I do not think it is financially viable but it gives me satisfaction that I am doing my bit.

I keep stock on the Forest as an interest only and because I like to see them there, not for financial benefit.

I think this is a perfect opportunity for commoning to take a forward leap. What with the NF marque etc.

In this day & age Commoning due to various restrictions e.g. EU directives, Labour Government's prejudices, breed society registration rules is the reason why it is not viable & is only done for pleasure & tradition in most cases.

Increasing potential for losses due largely to rapidly worsening road traffic situation and so-called accidents to commoning animals each year.

It's getting more difficult with cost of renting or to buy land.

It's not viable, but it's a hobby.

It is a fact that in recent years we have been putting more into commoning than we are getting back. Hopefully with new schemes and initiatives this can turn around.

However some of my children will need proof of this before they are convinced.

It is only viable if we are supported by additional financial support from other sources.

It may not be very viable but must continue as a way of life.

Lack of interest & low return on outlay.

Lack of money to support one totally.

Loss of subsidy payments on cattle will have significant impact unless SFP on commons is targeted to active commoners. Increasing restrictions and e.g. transport costs - loss of abattoirs significant too.

Low sale price of animals.

Making a profit from commoning is becoming increasingly difficult.

Needs to be in conjunction with other employment.

Not enough money in it.

Not enough money to be made with ever increasing living costs, mortgage etc...

Not informed enough to question whether viable, but it is most certainly essential if the Forest is to continue in its present form.

Not possible to earn a reasonable living. Renting land is expensive as is purchasing. Selling not profitable.
Not possible to survive entirely on Commoning - need additional employment. On a part-time basis it is just viable.
Not sufficient affordable housing for younger families to continue. Not viable for me (and my children) in future because of inflated land & property prices. Not viable to make a living because ponies don't sell for much. Only viable as a semi-hobby. One needs other income to supplement. Non-commoning families with commoning rights should be encouraged to become commoners on a part-time basis.
Politics, paperwork (DEFRA). No homes for the young to start and unaffordable. Price of ponies too low. House prices too high to rent or buy locally. Renting/leasing grazing land for horses is expensive as hobby riders can afford more usually.
Property and land too expensive.
Removal of support (Financial). Pressure from housing market. Increase paperwork & rules (i.e. OTMS)
Small scale is no longer economic and type of animal that can survive on the Forest is no longer required in the modern market.
The cost to rent land and low prices in animals.
The cost of all aspects, from renting land to general running costs of vehicles, vets, disposing of casualties in the future, animal fodder, cost of erecting buildings.
The price of buying or renting land is too expensive.
The size of income to fund equipment & animal care over & above the holding means 2 incomes are required, leaving insufficient time for a family as well as livestock. Too few 'hefted' commoners are having children.
There is not enough help to encourage young commoners, and the National Park status is not going to improve it.
There's no money in it, it's a way of life or hobby.
There is no lack of interest carrying on the tradition, it's just extremely difficult, lack of affordable housing & land will eventually restrict the number of commoners.
There is no support as I have tried the Commoning Housing scheme & was rejected. The returns are just not adequate. It has to be done part time or as a hobby.
To start up- No/very little ground available, at high rents. Interlopers commoning with no real historic/present knowledge. (social status) Too many of the wrong kind of rules & regulations. Forest overused. Not enough viable retail outlets.
Too much ‘Health & Safety’. Red tape, National Park - run for the general public, can’t hold a drift as too many people walking dogs.
Too much interference from outside people.
Too much meddling.
Unfortunately commoning has followed arable dairy and beef in as much as to make it viable livestock and land would have to be increased and land prices in the Forest are too expensive - therefore commoning is a hobby that just about pays for itself.
Unless you have a base/land to use that is affordable, then the income cannot stack up - mortgage rates dictate a high income.
Unlikely to be self-sufficient. You need another income.
Up and coming young commoners will not continue the tradition as there is no financial incentive for the smaller commoner.
We are commoners because we like to, not for money.
- We would probably always departure stock whether it is viable or not, just because we love the Forest.
- Will be viable as long as there is a suitable ‘base’ for commoners to operate from, and that there is sufficient back-up grazing land available.
- Yes, so called progress has squashed the small commoner off the map. Traffic on roads, dogs loose in Forest etc!
- You common because it’s a way of life but unfortunately it is not economically viable because of the cost of housing/land. We are considering moving away to buy land in Dorset/Wales.
- Youngsters from existing commoning families have the expertise & are prepared to put in the time, but they are hampered & disillusioned by land availability & house & land prices.
APPENDIX III

DATA USED IN MAPS
### Actual numbers of holdings in each parish: 1965 and 2004

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<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>2004</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Ashurst &amp; Colbury</td>
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Acreages of back-up land occupied by respondents to questionnaire in each parish and grossed up areas estimated to be used by whole commoning population

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<td>27.80</td>
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<td>Totton &amp; Eling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>107.04</td>
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<td>Wellow</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>163.43</td>
<td>66.19</td>
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<td>Whiteparish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimborne</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodgreen</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>92.34</td>
<td>37.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>6075.93</td>
<td>9929.61</td>
<td>4021.49</td>
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Commoners of the New Forest: A study based on census data'. University of Southampton.


The New Forest. New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust.
