

## **NFA MEMBERS' DAY 2018**

### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT:**

Much has happened over the last twelve months on the national scene that will have an impact, one way or the other, on the Forest, a number of which were mentioned in my report last year.

#### ***Farm Subsidies***

The Forest's organisations have come together to form a group in order to deal directly with the Government and present the best case for what our local farmers and landowners need once EU funded subsidies cease. The group, which I have chaired, has already given the Minister responsible for National Parks, Lord Gardiner, a clear and simple request in writing which I personally handed to him at the New Forest Show. We asked for a basic principle to be acknowledged, which is that farmers in highly protected areas of national importance like the New Forest should be rewarded for the public benefit that they supply by conserving the landscape. We also asked that any such reward be governed by a scheme that was locally designed and locally led. I am happy to report that in the long awaited 25 year Environment Plan this principle has been firmly acknowledged.

#### ***25 Year Plan***

The plan was launched by the Prime Minister herself, which is a very encouraging sign of how high up the government's agenda conservation has reached. The plan is full of quite widely worded ambitions for our countryside, but overall it is a positive and very encouraging document, the main theme of which is a determination to ensure that there is a net gain for the environment over the 25 year period, with an ambition for this generation to be the first to hand it on in a better state than we found it. Quite a challenge!

I can report that in a follow-up meeting between Lord Gardiner and England's National Park chairmen, it was made clear to us that special places like the New Forest are expected to become exemplars of landscape conservation. We were all encouraged by the Minister to go away and consider putting together pilot schemes which would show how best to replace the existing regime of EU farm subsidies. The Forest's farming group has much thinking to do.

Another surprise inclusion in the plan is a "21<sup>st</sup> century review" of National Parks and AONBS, which together cover 25% of our landscape. Lord Gardiner was not able to tell us what this might entail or when exactly it would begin.

One of the key areas that such a review will cover is whether there is scope for the expansion of existing parks and the creation of new ones.

### ***Recreation***

The consultation that I mentioned last year has now taken place and the overwhelming priority chosen by the public is raising awareness and understanding of the special qualities of the area (especially the safety of commoners' animals), with sustainable transport (ie public transport, reduced traffic and safer roads) coming a close second. The consultation was commissioned by a group of the Forest's statutory bodies, including the Verderers, Forestry Commission and National Park Authority. The next step is now to formulate some clear and concrete actions, which will then be subject to a final public consultation in the summer. The ultimate aim is to ensure that recreation is properly managed, including taking a fresh look at where recreational facilities are provided in the Forest (such as car parks, which have changed very little since the 1970s) and in places that are away from sensitive areas and close to where people live. The group has as its watchword when deciding on any of these actions "Is this good for the Forest?", not just now but for the next fifty years or more – the long term protection of the Forest must always come first.

### ***New Housing***

Our association, the proud watchdog for the Forest, is always on guard when it comes to planning and development, and has been watching the emergence of both of the areas' Planning Authorities Local Plans, and making comment and criticism whenever necessary. The biggest potential development on the near horizon is the old power station at Fawley, however as I sit on the planning committee at the time of writing I can say no more on the matter!

On behalf of our members I will conclude my report with a heartfelt thanks, as ever, to our Chairman and Council for all their hard work and vigilance over the year

*Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre*  
*President*