



PRESENTMENT TO FEBRUARY 2025 VERDERERS' COURT

Official Verderer, Verderers and the members of public attending court today, I am Sarah Nield, Chair of the New Forest Association (NFA). I am giving this presentment on behalf of the association following the Official Verderers' announcement and the Deputy Surveyor's Presentment both made to the last court.

It will be no surprise that the NFA is pleased to hear that Habitat Regulation Assessments will be available to the court prior to a decision being made on the proposed extensions to the cycle network. But it is important that the SSSI protections are not overlooked. The Verderers, and indeed Forestry England and the National Park Authority, have obligations to the forest's SSSIs being:

“to take reasonable steps ... to further the conservation and enhancement of the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features.”¹

We suggest those reasonable steps should include the same environmental scrutiny required for a planning application affecting a SSSI.² No doubt Natural England will provide guidance.

Turning to the Deputy Surveyor's presentment, we call for the immediate introduction of the additional cycling management measures outlined in the Deputy Surveyor's original September presentment. As a reminder these measures include:

- introduction of the cycling code,
- the correction of Cycling Apps to remove unlawful routes,
- improved signage and maps of the existing network,
- a widespread education campaign,
- cycling ambassadors/wardens – although we remain to be convinced how sustainable volunteers operating only on the network will be and suggest that further thought be given to this initiative.

These measures surely are not, and should not be, conditional on the proposed extensions so there is no reason to delay. Forestry England are primarily responsible for

¹ Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 s28G.

² Eg an Ecological Impact Assessment undertaken in accordance with CIEEM guidelines to assess all 'biodiversity' impacts.

addressing damaging recreation on the open forest and recreational mitigation payments should provide the funding.³ The National Park Authority as partners to the Recreational Management Strategy have an important role to play too. The early introduction of these measures, coupled with monitoring, would also test their effectiveness and show whether more robust measures are necessary.

Immediate introduction would further demonstrate everyone's desire to protect the forest from the damage and disruption caused by unlawful off-network cycling. The NFA is willing to play its part in this drive for example our members may be able to contribute to monitoring unlawful cycling and support any educational campaign as well as possibly contributing to correcting Cycling Apps.

³ See <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/app/uploads/2024/04/New-Forest-SAMM-report-Footprint-Ecology.pdf>