

Presentment to the October 2025 Verderers Court

Official Verderer and 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 to report to the Verderers the results of our Byelaw Watch conducted last month and to plead for urgent progress on recreational management.

You will be aware that the NFA has conducted Byelaw Watches in the New Forest since 2022 which we have reported to this court. This years' Byelaw Watch took the form of a static watch involving volunteers observing in 8 car parks across the Forest between 11.00 - 15.30 on August Bank Holiday Monday. All Byelaw Watches have recorded widespread breaches of the Forest Byelaws – the most significant byelaws are conveniently summarised in the New Forest Code. The detailed results of this years' Byelaw Watch are contained in the Report accompanying this Presentment, but the key results are:

- Despite many visitors showing appreciation and respect for the Forest, a total of 232 breaches were recorded.
- The most frequently observed breaches were:
 - Cycling off designated cycle tracks - 171
 - Petting & feeding ponies/donkeys – 33
 - Failure to clean up after dogs – 11 though this and litter numbers were well down from previous Watches perhaps due to the work of the Litterpickers & NFDOG.
- The hotspots were Balmer Lawn, Boltons Bench and Hatchett Pond. Particularly worrying were interactions between ponies and visitors at Balmer Lawn.
- The observations indicate that certain activities are associated with different groups of visitors and specific breaches:
 - Cycling off designated tracks is almost entirely due to individuals and small groups although two groups of 12 and 17 were seen at Hatchett Pond.
 - There is a predominance of family groups, including children, petting and feeding livestock.

These results reflect what is widely known and of course there are efforts to try and address damaging behaviour. We have codes and signs, two PSPOs, numerous educational initiatives, some FE and NPA rangers - although frankly not nearly enough. We have a Recreation Management Strategy and proposals for Cycling Management and a Recreation Mitigation Partnership. The latter would bring direction, co-ordination and much needed funds. BUT what we don't have is enough action. The Recreation Management Steering Group does not appear to have met since February and the Advisory Group not for almost a year. Cycling extension and management and

Recreation Mitigation plans both seem to have stalled whilst PSPO enforcement is just about non-existent and PSPO engagement data is unknown.

I make no comment for now about the likely impact of car parking charges given that worryingly no presentment concerning these plans (that clearly affect the public) was made in open court only through a press release. So, we must await the September Court minutes to learn more.

What I do ask is that this Court does all it can through its work with the relevant authorities to make meaningful progress on recreation management in the Forest. The FE with the NPA and the Verderers are key partners in the Recreation Management Strategy which needs to be put back on track. The risks arising from visitors' feeding and petting stock and the interference with stock management and damage to the Forest from other common breaches are just too serious.