

New Forest Association

August 2026 Newsletter

COMMONERS MONTHLY AUGUST 2026

A HOLIDAY – I am a Commoner taking a holiday in August!! My last expensive holiday was in 2004, and this one is to go and see the eclipse and visit Iceland. Oh dear, I think I should have spent ‘that’ money on ‘that’ fencing ‘that’ needs doing before the winter. Who looks after my livestock on the forest? The Commoning culture is there, and I just have to let my Commoning friends and the head agister know the dates of my absence. The only way that Commoning can work here in the New Forest is to work as a collective. When we check our stock out on the Open Forest, we will check everything else around and pony drifts and cattle roundups would not be successful without the ‘Commoner Team’.

Fire at Bratley/Backley/A31 August 2026

Most of you will have heard about this Forest fire caused by a van that caught fire on the A31. Clive Chatters has written the following note to inform us of the implications for the Forest that is immediately affected.

Whilst drafting this note (morning of 14 August), fire-crews are still on site and access is understandably restricted. What we know of the extent and nature of the fire is limited to 3rd hand reports and remote sensing. Never-the-less, this is clearly a significant event.

The response to the event by the emergency services, public bodies and Forest bodies has been admirable. As far as we know, no people have been injured, nor homes damaged. The fire is now being managed and the remedial works needed to re-open the A31 are being planned. The early recognition of the need to ensure the dual carriageway is stock-proof is welcome. As far as we know, no livestock were killed or injured by the fire. Forest ponies and cattle are familiar with fires (due to winter prescribed burning) and avoid them until the vegetation starts to regrow, at which point the sward is positively attractive to livestock.

The extent of the fire relating to the many habitat types present has yet to be established. The heaths of this plateau are relatively dry with some valley mires and humid heath. The ‘Ancient and Ornamental’ pasture woodlands of Bratley and Bratley Water fall within the area affected, but it is unclear whether the fire penetrated the woodland floor. It would be very regrettable if the fire burnt into this concentration of veteran trees.

The vegetation in this part of the Forest is relatively lightly grazed due to its remoteness from significant commoners’ holdings, the scarcity of productive lawns and the relative fragmentation of these heaths. This means the heaths tend to have taller vegetation with a far higher burden of flammable material than more close-cropped swards. In landscape terms this means tall heathers and dense swards of Purple Moor-grass. In addition, the ungrazed/ fenced corridor of the A31 had a high level of flammable material.

Fires are wholly natural phenomena in heathland landscapes. 'Hot' summer fires are unwelcome due to their ferocity and risk to burning into organic soils. 'Prescribed' burns of the winter months play a positive role in managing the habitats /grazing and, co-incidentally in reducing summer fire risk by reducing the standing crop of flammable material and diversifying the structure of the vegetation. The Forestry England teams who design and manage prescribed burns are exemplary.

The vegetation will start regrowing once the fire has past and there is rain. There will be some species prejudiced by the fire whilst other will be beneficiaries. Whilst extensive and unwelcome, this fire is a relatively small proportion of the heaths of the Forest. Those species which don't have fire avoidance/survival strategies will be able to recolonise naturally from the surrounding landscape.

A strategic issue to consider is how such events may be avoided in the future, ideally by supporting the commoners' grazing regime and prescribed burns to diversify the structure of the vegetation. Without grazing, the regrowth following the fire will favour high-biomass species and add to the burden of flammable material and increase future risks.

Once the fire is extinguished and the area is made safe, it will be possible to survey the area and come to be informed assessment than these initial observations.

Clive Chatters

Our thanks and admiration must go out to the fire fighters who have been tackling the fire and all those who have aided their work in one way or another. It is so difficult to fight a fire on rough terrain with limited access to water, they have done a commendable job.

The Fires Services remind us that:

- Barbecues and other fires ARE BANNED in the New Forest.
- MAKE SURE cigarettes are out and dispose of them properly.
- Sunlight shining through glass can start a fire so take your litter home or make sure bottles and other rubbish goes in the bin.
- . Poorly maintained vehicles are more likely to catch fire.

So please take care

Verge Watch – Interim Update

We have published an interim Report which we have sent to Forestry England – you can find it on our website <https://newforestassociation.org/interim-verge-watch-report-2026-by-jolivey-council-member-and-sarah-nield-chair/> . The headlines are that generally verge parking has not been as serious as many feared although car parks have been noticeably less busy. The recreational management function of car parking changes thus appears to have had an impact. Between 26th April 2026 until 4th July 2026, 160 reports were received from all parts of the Forest. There are several locations where repeat verge parking was recorded as visitors continued to use favourite spots or discovered new ones. These locations included Broadley Inclosure, Latchmoor (near Setley), Ipley Manor, Stoney Cross, Hale Purlieu and Moyles Court. Reports were recorded every day,

mostly in the early morning and late afternoon with some sunny weekends seeing a surge in reports possibly a result of lack of capacity in some car parks.

We thank those members who have made reports and remain hopeful that Forestry England's car park wardens address those areas that continue to suffer from verge parking. After some thought we have decided that we should continue Verge Watch until the end of August to try and capture the impact of summer visitors. So please keep the reports coming, here is the QR Code



Verge parking in the New Forest

Protecting verges
Please park with care

Parking on the verge erodes and damages the Forest. Please park only in an official car park or within your own property.

The New Forest is of international importance for nature. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and has the highest possible conservation status and protections.

As an unfenced, open landscape this includes its miles and miles of roadside verges.

forestryengland.uk/new-forest

A Planning Wild West!

Last March we reported on the New Forest District Local Plan Initial Consultation which looked to implement the Government's call for an over 100% increase in the district's annual housing building target. This brings threats to back-up grazing provision, increased recreational and infrastructure pressure and adverse environmental impacts. Our planners have been gearing up to respond to the next stage of this local plan, but it has been delayed and there is unlikely to be any local plan in place for several years taking us beyond the demise of NFDC and the advent of local government reorganisation. This is very bad news!

NFDC joins other local planning authorities surrounding the Forest – BCP, Wiltshire and Test Valley – who have delayed their local plan preparation. Local Government reorganisation is not the only reason; the Government has introduced a new local plan

process for those plans that are not in place by the end of 2026. The New Forest National Park Authority are due to meet this deadline but, for one reason or another, other local planning authorities are not. The result is ‘a planning wild west’ as, with no or an inadequate local plan to guide development, house builders will be tempted to take advantage and bring forward speculative applications. We are seeing this already happening. We are watching out for these applications and are putting together an expert team to build opposition arguments that can be tailored to prospective sites.

We have made presentments on this danger to both the Verderers and the National Park – they can be viewed on our website see

<https://newforestassociation.org/presentation/presentation-to-the-july-2026-verderers-court-on-housing-targets/> AND

<https://newforestassociation.org/presentation/presentation-to-the-new-forest-national-parks-board-meeting-on-23rd-july-2026/>



Events

Old House Walk Report

It was as well we delayed the start of our visit to the Old House in Burley as it was a hot day, but Richard Reeves led us through Sir Dudley Forward's Ride before the welcome shade of Berry Wood. As we went Richard provided a fascinating explanation of how settlements of old shaped the Forest we see today. He provided a different perspective to view the Forest through the lens of the habitat legacy left by Roman and Iron Age settlements to the imprint of more modern forestry practices for example the King's Mark on trees selected for ship building. Our host was generous with refreshments on our return for which we were all very grateful.

Our thoughts and thanks go out to all at the Old House which lies very close to the Bratley/Backley/A31 forest fire. They are on the frontline, and I know have been supporting those fighting the fire.



New Forest Show

A dedicated team of council members and trustees attended all three of the days of the New Forest Show and rather hot it was at times! We met with a steady stream of visitors, both members and non-members who liked, and were supportive of, our new logo and branding. Each day we asked our visitors a question. On Day 1 it was *Is Commoning Important to the Forest?* The vast majority thought commoning is indispensable and of course we agree. On Day 2 the focus shifted to environmental protection and was asked *Should the New Forest become a national nature reserve?* The vast majority thought it should with just a few maybes. On the last day 3 we turned to recreation and asked *What Impact does Tourism have on the New Forest?* Here the opinions were more missed. The majority thought the impact was negative, but several recognised the beneficial economic and educational opportunities whilst a few responses sat on the fence .

We also helped New Forest Together gain a show presence and they took full advantage! They gathered over 1500 signatures for their petition which now stands at over 30,000.



Autumn Talks

Our evening autumn talks series is coming together so far, we have:

Suzanne Kemp will talk about New Forest Ponies and their Bloodlines on Tuesday 20th October 2026

John Stride will talk on Climate Change and the Forest on Tuesday 24th November 2026

Marcus Ward will talk on Pine Martins in the New Forest on a date to be announced.

So please make a note in your diary.

Other Upcoming Events

War Graves of the New Forest Tuesday 6th October 2026 to Sunday 29th November 2026 at the New Forest Heritage Centre has an exhibition on the Commonwealth War Graves in the Forest .



Sven Berlin: Disturbance in the West. (1934 – 1970) A new exhibition, will open 12th September 2026 at St Barbe Museum + Art Gallery, Lymington, to reveal the provocative impact made by legendary artist Sven Berlin (1911-1999) on both art and social history in Cornwall and the New Forest.

