



Verderers of the New Forest
THE KINGS'S HOUSE
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Official Verderer
Edward Heron

MINUTES OF THE HLS BOARD MEETING HELD ON 29th April 2026.

Voting Members		
Edward Heron	OV	Official Verderer – Verderers of the New Forest (Chairman)
Paul Walton	PW	Head of Environment & Rural Economy - New Forest National Park Authority
Craig Harrison	DS	Deputy Surveyor – Forestry England
Non-Voting Members		
Jenny Thomas	JT	New Forest Nature Recovery Senior Adviser – Natural England
In Attendance		
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator
Suzannah Egleston	SE	HLS Project Manager – Forestry England

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESUME

Andrew Parry-Norton - CDA Representative
Alison Barnes – Chief Executive – NFNPA
Mike Pittock – Head of Planning & Environment - FE

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESUME

OV is Chairman of the VGS Management Committee.
PW declared an interest in all Wetland Restoration projects because of the NPA's responsibilities as local planning authority.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESUME

None arising. Minutes from the January meeting were approved and signed.

PROGRAMME AND SUMMARY

RESUME

The board studied the latest Programme Register of spend to the end of March 2026 (QTR 4).

See programme register and actual spend to date attached below.

FE UPDATE

RESUME

See report attached below.

SE to provide TW with the new films to use at the New Forest Show. The board was updated on the progress of the new HLS Website which is due to go live in May.

Action SE

SE to work with the E&I Officer on an engagement and comms plan for the upcoming work at Knightwood.

Action SE & JL

Staffing Proposal

HLS Engagement Officer

SE provided a refined request for this role and the board agreed to recruit for the post as a dedicated HLS role for 22.2 hours per week.

Action SE

VGS VERBAL UPDATE

RESUME

TW gave a verbal report on the VGS annual grants paid at the beginning of April.

ENGAGEMENT AND INTERPRETATION OFFICER WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

See report attached below.

HIWWT WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

See report attached below.

ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT

RESUME

See report attached below.

NFLAS WRITTEN UPDATE

RESUME

See report attached below.

FUTURE NEW FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME UPDATE

RESUME

JT gave a verbal report

AOB

TW requested the simple AGM be moved to September and could cover 2024 & 2025 Action SE & TW once the Healthcheck report has been collated.

SE to bring budget of future projects to the next meeting in order to allocate funds for finishing projects if no replacement scheme is secured. Action SE

Meeting closed 12.45 p.m.

DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS 2026

Action TW

AGM – Sept date TBC

Wednesday July 22nd – 9.30 The Annexe - Kings House

Wednesday October 28th – 9.30 Kings House

Delegated Actions to		
Suzannah Egleston	SE	HLS Project Manager - FE
Tina Woodley	TW	VGS Administrator



22nd July 2026

Edward Heron
Official Verderer

Spend profile 2025-2026 4th Quarter

Register Serial number	Task Mgr	Project Title	Budget 2025-2026	Revised Forecast 2025/26	Actual spend to 31.03.2026	Updated by	Comments
	Verderers	Grazing Scheme STAFF					
1	TW	VGS Project Staff	£39,757.00	£39,757.00	£23,341.71	TW	
2	TW	Administration	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	£12,277.76	TW	Bank charges introduced
			£49,757.00	£49,757.00	£35,619.47		
3	TW	VGS Grazing payments 2025 £774,957 Grazing Scheme Cattle Supplement	£1,024,957.00	£1,024,957.00	£987,929.01	TW	Increase to 2025 cattle supplement now £250K - Increase to Grazing payment to £774,957
4	TW	Sponsorship of Land Advice Service	£53,905.22	£53,905.22	£53,905.22	TW	
5	TW	Small Grant fund	£20,000.00	£20,000.00	£11,350.00	TW	increased Sml Grant fund by £5k
6	TW	Microchipping at Beaulieu Road Sales	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	TW	no microchipping 2025
7	TW	Reflective collars	£24,000.00	£24,000.00	£19,460.00	TW	
8	TW	Agister Salary contribution	£57,000.00	£57,000.00	£57,000.00	TW	
9	TW	Stallion Scheme	£17,737.00	£17,737.00	£21,253.91	TW	
10	TW	Bloodline Scheme	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	TW	
11	TW	Futurity Scheme	£8,000.00	£8,000.00	£8,000.00	TW	
13	TW	NF Livestock Society (Marketing + £1,000 Foal Shows)	£9,000.00	£9,000.00	£9,000.00	TW	
14	TW	NF Trust (Beaulieu Road Maintenance)	£6,500.00	£6,500.00	£6,500.00	TW	
15	TW	NF Pony Enthusiasts Club	£1,500.00	£1,500.00	£1,500.00	TW	
16	TW	Pony Welfare & Fallen Stock Programme	£25,000.00	£25,000.00	£26,750.00	TW	
17	TW	Young Commoner training	£3,500.00	£3,500.00	£3,500.00	TW	
18	TW	Drift Fencing	£24,000.00	£24,000.00	£15,948.72	TW	increased by £5k from micro chip fund
91	TW	Agisters Equipment Servicing / Etc	£1,845.27	£3,451.16	£3,451.16	TW	
19	TW	Pound rebuild programme	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	£10,766.81	TW	
		VGS Sub Total	£1,281,944.49	£1,283,550.38	£1,236,314.83		
		VGS Grand Total	£1,331,701.49	£1,333,307.38	£1,271,934.30		
		Higher Level Stewardship Overheads - STAFF COSTS					
20	TW	HLS Secretarial Support from Verderers	£15,812.00	£15,812.00	£15,812.00	TW	
21	NPA	NPA Staff Costs	£27,594.00	£27,594.00	£0.00	TW	
22	NH	FC Supporting Staff & Admin costs	£26,430.00	£26,430.00	£25,867.96	CB	
			£69,836.00	£69,836.00	£41,679.96		
		Higher Level Stewardship Overheads - Other					
	NPA	Communications - Support	£32,086.00	£32,086.00	£0.00	TW	
23	CB	Communications - Phones & Trackers	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£1,117.24	CB	
24	CB	FC Office Overheads	£3,000.00	£3,000.00	£2,046.00	CB	
21	CB	FC Staff Overheads	£15,000.00	£15,000.00	£9,081.52	CB	
93	CB	FC Vehicle Leasing	£30,000.00	£30,000.00	£22,196.02	CB	
		Non Native and Invasive Plant Control	£60,132.00	£82,086.00	£34,440.78		
33	TW	Non Native plants Project	£37,000.00	£37,000.00	£37,000.00	TW	
			£37,000.00	£37,000.00	£37,000.00		
		Scheduled Ancient Monument					
32	CB	no projects planned	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	CB	
			£0.00	£0.00	£0.00		
		National Park Authority					
71	NPA	Lidar Analyst	£44,571.00	£44,571.00		TW	
73	NPA	Lidar Non-Staff	£9,423.00	£9,426.00		TW	
			£53,994.00	£53,994.00	£0.00		
		Redundancy Contingency					
600	TW	Project Staff	£4,524.57	£4,524.57	£0.00	TW	
			£4,524.57	£4,524.57	£0.00		
		Forestry England TERRESTRIAL RESTORATION					
63	CB	Open Habitat Restoration	£241,825.00	£241,825.00	£232,975.70	CB	
64	CB	Tools, Equipment & Maintenance	£0.00	£0.00	£2,560.34	CB	
1903	CB	Ridge & Furrow removal	£192,545.00	£192,545.00	£136,611.65	CB	
65	CB	Rhododendron Control	£56,450.00	£56,450.00	£15,651.00	CB	
66	CB	Bracken Control	£41,580.00	£41,580.00	£30,966.00	CB	
2405	CB	Anderwood	£0.00	£0.00	£20,388.00	CB	
68	CB	Coppicing/Pollarding	£38,000.00	£38,000.00	£15,420.00	CB	
2201	CB	Conifer removal from A&O woodland	£55,470.00	£55,470.00	£0.00	CB	
2202	CB	Thinning A & O plots	£1,425.00	£1,425.00	£19,536.00	CB	
69	CB	Lost Lawns	£2,375.00	£2,375.00	£0.00	CB	
2410	CB	UXO Surveys	£0.00	£1,380.00	£1,380.00	CB	
70	CB	Verge Restoration	£80,265.00	£80,265.00	£65,724.26	CB	
			£709,935.00	£711,315.00	£541,212.95		
			£0.00	£0.00	£0.00		
		Monitoring					
102	CB	Bats	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	£2,540.85	CB	
25	CB	Botanical Survey	£75,900.00	£75,900.00	£61,328.10	CB	
104	CB	Resources / Monitoring Equipment	£6,000.00	£6,000.00	£3,794.58		
107	CB	River Habitat Survey	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£0.00	CB	
140	CB	Breeding Wader Survey	£19,000.00	£19,000.00	£17,231.00	CB	
191	CB	Rare Spider Survey	£11,820.00	£11,820.00	£9,192.00	CB	
2404	CB	Wetland Monitoring Surveys	£0.00	£4,680.00	£4,680.00	CB	
2407	CB	Invertebrate Survey	£21,240.00	£21,240.00	£17,700.00	CB	
105	CB	Riverfly Partnership	£200.00	£200.00	£71.00	CB	
			£141,160.00	£145,840.00	£116,537.53		
		WETLAND					
		Project Staff Costs					
57	CB	Terrestrial Works Supervisor Pb6a	£37,908.00	£37,908.00	£41,919.24	CB	
60	CB	Contract Manager Pb4	£51,414.00	£51,414.00	£56,392.87	CB	
61	CB	Terrestrial Restoration Works Officer Pb5	£40,635.00	£40,635.00	£46,718.40	CB	
62	CB	Wetland Restoration Officer Pb5	£40,635.00	£40,635.00	£46,718.40	CB	
622	CB	Monitoring Officer Pb6a	£40,635.00	£40,635.00	£46,664.53	CB	
623	CB	Verge Restoration Officer Pb6a	£37,908.00	£37,908.00	£25,343.29	CB	
2206	CB	Works Supervisor Wetland Pb6a	£18,954.00	£18,954.00	21,024.31	CB	
			£268,089.00	£268,089.08	£284,781.04		
		Wetland Restoration					
2408	CB	Consents	£400.00	£400.00	£100.00	CB	
48	CB	Repair and Maintainence	£75,000.00	£75,000.00	£50,912.84	CB	
47	CB	North Sluffers	£150,000.00	£150,000.00	£68,396.03	CB	
152	CB	Wetland Restoration Sites - Shirley Holms Mire	£866.40	£866.40	£866.40	CB	
2406	CB	Longdown	£45,000.00	£45,000.00	£34,317.41	CB	
			£271,266.40	£271,266.40	£154,592.68	0.00	
		T&C Planning Costs					
	CB	Planning Application & Site Planning	£70,000.00	£70,000.00	£0.00	CB	
			£70,000.00	£70,000.00	£0.00		
		Total Habitat Restoration	£750,515.40	£755,195.40	£555,911.25		
		Total FE spend all serials	£1,536,880.40	£1,542,940.40	£1,157,432.94	claim 45	£510,146.09
		FINANCIAL SUMMARY					
		Planned Spend Estimate			Actual Spend to Date		
		Total VGS Spend	£1,368,701.49		£1,308,934.30		
		HLS Overheads Staff Costs	£69,836.00		£41,679.96		
		Non Native plants & SAMS	£37,000.00		£37,000.00		
		Monitoring	£141,160.00		£116,537.53		
		Project Staff Costs	£272,613.57		£284,781.04		
		Terrestrial & Wetland Restoration	£981,201.40		£695,805.63		
		T & C Planning costs	£70,000.00		£0.00		
		NPA	£53,994.00		£0.00		
		TOTAL Planned Spend	£2,994,506.46	TOTAL Actual Spend	£2,484,738.46		
		Income from NE		Actual Income from NE	£4,316,682.75		
		End of year payment	£4,316,682.75	End of year payment	£4,316,682.75		
		Bugeted in-year Reserve 2025	£1,322,176.29	In-year Reserve	£1,831,944.29		
		B/fwd Reserve from 2024	£1,443,358.77	B/fwd Reserve 2024	£1,443,358.77		
		Budgeted accumulated Reserve	£2,765,535.06	Accumulated Reserve	£3,275,303.06		
		Education Payment - Annual payment					
	NPA	Educational Access - payment per visit	£5,190.00	£5,190.00			

Spend profile: 2025-26					
Register Serial No.	Project Title	Budget Apr25-Mar26	Revised Forecast	Actual spend to 31.03.26	Comments / Proposed restoration sites
HLS Overheads - STAFF COSTS					
22	FE Supporting Staff & Admin costs	£26,430.00	£26,430.00	£25,867.96	
60	Project Manager Pb4	£51,414.00	£51,414.00	£56,392.87	
61	Terrestrial Restoration Officer Pb5	£40,635.00	£40,635.00	£46,718.40	
57	Works Supervisor Pb6a	£37,908.00	£37,908.00	£41,919.24	
62	Wetland Restoration Officer Pb5	£40,635.00	£40,635.00	£46,718.40	
622	Monitoring Project Officer Pb5	£40,635.00	£40,635.00	£46,664.53	
623	Verge Restoration Officer Pb6a	£37,908.00	£37,908.00	£25,343.29	
2206	Works Supervisor Pb6a (0.5 FTE)	£18,954.00	£18,954.00	£21,024.31	
	Sub-total	£294,519.00	£294,519.00	£310,649.00	
HLS Overheads - Other					
23	Communications	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£1,117.24	
24	Forestry England - Office Charges	£3,000.00	£3,000.00	£2,046.00	
93	Forestry England - Vehicle Leasing & Business Related Mileage	£30,000.00	£30,000.00	£22,196.02	
21	Miscellaneous Staff Costs	£15,000.00	£15,000.00	£9,081.52	
	Sub-total	£50,000.00	£50,000.00	£34,440.78	
	Sub-total Overheads	£344,519.00	£344,519.00	£345,089.78	Overhead Expenditure
Historic Environment					
		£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Option HO2 Restoration of Lowland Heath					
63	Open Habitat Restoration	£241,825.00	£241,825.00	£232,975.70	
64	Tools, Equipment and Maintenance	£0.00	£0.00	£2,560.34	
65	Rhododendron	£56,450.00	£56,450.00	£15,651.00	
66	Bracken Control	£41,580.00	£41,580.00	£30,966.00	
1903	Ridge and Furrow	£192,545.00	£192,545.00	£136,611.65	
2410	UXO Surveys	£0.00	£1,380.00	£1,380.00	
	Sub-total	£532,400.00	£533,780.00	£420,144.69	
Option HC13 Restoration of Wood Pasture & Parkland					
68	Coppicing/ Pollarding and Holly Management	£38,000.00	£38,000.00	£15,420.00	
2201	Restoration of A&O Woodlands	£55,470.00	£55,470.00	£0.00	
2202	Thinning A&O Plots (timber clearance)	£1,425.00	£1,425.00	£19,536.00	
	Sub-total	£94,895.00	£94,895.00	£34,956.00	
Option HK7 Restoration of Species Rich Grassland					
69	Lost Lawns	£2,375.00	£2,375.00	£0.00	
70	Verge Restoration	£80,265.00	£80,265.00	£65,724.26	
2405	Wetland Restoration sites: Anderwood	£0.00	£0.00	£20,388.00	
	Sub-total	£82,640.00	£82,640.00	£86,112.26	
Survey and Monitoring					
25	Botanical Survey	£75,900.00	£75,900.00	£61,328.10	
102	Bat Surveys	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	£2,540.85	
104	Resources/ Monitoring Equipment	£6,000.00	£6,000.00	£3,794.58	
105	Riverfly Partnership	£200.00	£200.00	£71.00	
107	River Habitat Surveys	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£0.00	
140	Breeding Wader Surveys	£19,000.00	£19,000.00	£17,231.00	
191	Rare Spider Surveys	£11,820.00	£11,820.00	£9,192.00	
2404	Wetland Monitoring Surveys	£0.00	£4,680.00	£4,680.00	
2407	Invertebrate Surveys	£21,240.00	£21,240.00	£17,700.00	
	Sub-total	£141,160.00	£145,840.00	£116,537.53	
Wetland Restoration					
47	North Sluffers	£150,000.00	£150,000.00	£68,396.03	
48	Repairs and Maintenance	£75,000.00	£75,000.00	£50,912.84	
152	Wetland Restoration sites: Shirley Holms Mire	£0.00	£866.40	£866.40	
2406	Wetland Restoration sites: Longdown	£45,000.00	£45,000.00	£34,317.41	
2408	Consents	£400.00	£400.00	£100.00	
TBD	Planning Application and Site Planning.	£70,000.00	£70,000.00	£0.00	
	Sub-total	340,400.00	£341,266.40	154,592.68	
Operational Expenditure					
	Operational Expenditure	£1,191,495.00	£1,198,421.40	£812,343.16	Operational Expenditure
	TOTAL Expenditure	£1,536,014.00	£1,542,940.40	£1,157,432.94	TOTAL Expenditure

Actions from HLS Board Meeting held on 28/01/2026

- Recruitment for the ecologist and habitat restoration officer has been completed.

Overview of habitat restoration delivered January 2026 – April 2026:

HLS project	Habitat restoration work delivered January 2026 to April 2026
Open habitat restoration	Fawley Inclosure – removal of natural regeneration Highland Water – removal of natural regeneration
A&O (Ancient and Ornamental) woodland restoration	Gritnam Wood – thinning of historically planted beech and removal of non native trees from A&O plot.
Ridge & furrow	Clearfell Restoration including stump shearing, rake and burn of arisings, and artificial drains infilled: o Dames Slough
Rhododendron	Rhododendron cutting and burning took place at several sites across the forest (see report for details).
Verge restoration	Remedial works took place at Matley to fill in the eroding ditch.
Holly coppicing/pollarding	Holly Management for Epiphytic Lichens took place at 10 sites across the forest: • Long Beech • Little Wood • Shave Wood • French's Bushes • Gutter Heath • Buskett's Wood • James' Hill • Pig Bush • Stubbs Wood (Penerley) • Dibden/The Noads Total area managed = 9.5ha
Wetland restoration and repairs/maintenance	Felling completed at Knightwood
Monitoring	2025 rare Invertebrate report and 2025 rare spider survey received. Brown diving beetle survey started.

HLS Forestry England Progress Report

Updates should be read in conjunction with the FE HLS Budget Forecast (Annex A – Q4 2025-6).

Budget Update

Claim 45 has been prepared. An updated Forestry England HLS budget forecast is attached (Annex A – Q4 2025-6) summarising Forestry England's spend for the financial year against the initial budget proposals (01 April 2025 to 1st April 2026). There was an underspend for the 2025/26 financial year, but this reserve has been allocated to future habitat restoration projects to be delivered before the end of the HLS scheme.

The proposed budget for the 2026/7 year is also attached (Annex A - 2026-7 predicted budget).

Staff Updates

Recruitment for an HLS Ecologist and Habitat Restoration Officer to support our current habitat restoration work is progressing well – they will both be starting over the next few weeks.

Attached is Annex B, setting out a request for a temporary, project specific Engagement Officer.

Restoration of Lowland Heath: Option HO2

This option aims to encourage the restoration of lowland heathland, including both dry and wet heathland, and mire habitats on the Open Forest. Such sites are likely to have become degraded by scrub, bracken, secondary woodland encroachment or inappropriate drainage. Management will help to restore and strengthen the vegetation mosaics characteristic of lowland heathland, and thus enhance the integrity of the historic landscape character of the area.

Open habitat restoration: PR serial no. 63

The HLS Scheme is funding the restoration of lowland heath on sites that have been used for plantation forestry. This programme of works includes removal of mature conifer, clearance of felled conifer and removal of natural regeneration, on areas of wet and dry heathland open to grazing livestock.

Removal of natural regeneration from the following sites was completed over the winter period:

- o North Sluffers
- o Ipley
- o Milkham Inclosure
- o Highland Water Inclosure
- o Fawley Inclosure

HLS Board Meeting Update January 2026- April 2026

Mature conifer removal:

- The following projects were completed between September 2025 & April 2026 including the removal of mature conifer and in some cases native broadleaves from open habitats, bogs, mires and drain lines supporting future wetland restoration:
 - o North Sluffers
 - o Knightwood Inclosure
 - o Ipley Inclosure
 - o Matley Bog
 - o Milkham Inclosure

HLS Board Meeting Update January 2026- April 2026

Image 1: North Sluffers - before and after regeneration removal



Ridge & furrow removal and stump shearing: PR serial no. 1903

The HLS Scheme is funding the restoration of lowland heath on sites that have been used for plantation forestry. This programme of work includes the removal of ridges and furrows and shearing of stumps to restore areas of wet or dry heathland, currently open to grazing.

- The following projects were completed over the winter:
 - o Highland Water
 - o Milkham
 - o Holidays Hill Inclosure
 - o North Sluffers
 - o Dames Slough

Rhododendron management: PR serial no. 65

The HLS Scheme funds a rolling programme of work to control non-native rhododendron that is encroaching on open habitats. Different methods are used, depending on the size of the plant; smaller plants are targeted through foliar spray, while larger bushes (>1.2 m in height) are cut down and arisings burnt. Many sites have been surveyed, and this work continues to inform the programme.

- The winter cutting and burning of rhododendron took place in January and February at the following sites:
 - o Backley Inclosure
 - o Berry Wood, Burley Moor, Picket Plain, Backley Plain, Bratley Wood, Vereley
 - o Whitley Wood, Gritham Wood, Ober Heath, Black Knowl, Whitefield Moor
 - o Shirley Homes, Widden Bottom

Bracken management: PR serial no. 66

The HLS Scheme funds a rolling programme of work on areas that have been restored to open habitat where bracken is becoming over-dominant and outcompeting other native species, thus reducing species diversity.

Image 2: Bracken harvest at Ravensnest before and after photos



Holly holm management: PR serial 2301

This is a one-off project following on from a successful trial to encourage holly holm regeneration by removing grazing pressure via temporary enclosures. Deer-proof fencing has been erected around selected holly holms where regeneration has been in decline. The pens will be in place for at least 5 years to allow time for holly to regenerate around the base and trunk.

Management and monitoring have been undertaken and continue (e.g., see images below).

Plans are in place to identify a further six locations for pens for the late summer and autumn 2026.

Image 3: Impact of Holly Holm management – the left hand photos shows the same holly plant, 3 year apart that was not contained within an enclosure. The right hand photos show a holly plant, 2 years apart showing successful regeneration within an enclosure pen.



Restoration of Wood Pasture & Parkland: Option HC13

The aim of this option is to restore wood pasture (including the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) habitats of pasture woodland, riverine woodland and bog woodland in the Open Forest) to favourable condition. This applies where land has been planted with conifers or where Scots pine has spread and trees or other non-natives need to be removed.

Holly pollarding: PR serial no. 68

HLS is funding the restoration of A&O woodlands through a programme of work that aims to reduce the shade from dense holly to benefit epiphytic lichens. This is critical work as the old growth pasture woodlands support an internationally important lichen assemblage.

A rolling programme of work is targeting sites highlighted in a 2018/19 Holly Management and Epiphytic Lichen Conservation Survey Report conducted by Neil Sanderson as 'urgent priority' and 'priority' areas, encompassing 29 woodland areas. Over the last four years 51 sites have been worked in 21 of the woodland areas. Once the programme has achieved its targets, a review will evaluate the completed work and identify next steps.

Over the last few months holly pollarding has taken place at:

- Long Beech
- Little Wood
- Shave Wood
- French's Bushes
- Gutter Heath
- Buskett's Wood
- James' Hill
- Pig Bush
- Stubbs Wood (Penerley)
- Dibden/The Noads

Alongside Holly pollarding we also carried out halo vegetation management around decaying beech stumps for the Green Forest Hoverfly (currently only found in the New Forest and Great Windsor Park) on or adjacent to 4 of these sites – James' Hill, Frenches Bushes, Gutter Heath and Buskett's Wood.

Restoration of A&O woodlands: PR serial no. 2201/ 2202

HLS is funding the restoration of ancient and ornamental (A&O) oak and beech woodlands by removing conifer trees and other non-natives. Forestry England applies the following principles put forward by Natural England: fell any conifers shading veteran trees; fell regenerating conifer; fell conifer growing amongst young oak and beech; and restore glades or edges of lawns

HLS Board Meeting Update January 2026- April 2026

and heathland where conifer have colonised open areas. This will also allow the woodland to naturally expand in future, and aims to restore a more natural woodland structure in old planting areas and regeneration pens in A&O woodlands.

Work has taken place at Gritnam Wood (photos below) to thin same-aged Beech trees to encourage a more diverse age structure.

The initial phase of regenerating conifer removal was also undertaken at Wick Wood.



Restoration of species-rich grassland: Option HK7

This option is targeted at dry and wet grasslands and associated permanent and temporary ponds in the Open Forest that are potentially rich in plant and associated animal life. They are sometimes on difficult ground and may have suffered from issues such as drainage, invasive species (including bracken, scrub and non-native species), eutrophication and under/overgrazing.

Lost lawns: PR serial no. 69

HLS is funding the restoration of species-rich grassland that has been encroached by scrub and invasive species. This involves a rolling programme of work targeting sites identified in the Lost Lawns Report (N. Sanderson) to restore glades or edges of lawns and heathland.

Natural England has commissioned some further research with the Fresh Water Habitats Trust to survey and assess the requirements for the management of the Marl Pits. Following these recommendations the HLS team will consult and deliver the works in 2026/ 2027. To support this project, and help inform future management, Forestry England have commissioned a moss and stonewort survey of the Marl Pits in the New Forest.

Verge Restoration: PR serial no. 70

The HLS funds a Verge Restoration Officer (VRO) who raises awareness of the importance of the verges which are a designated feature of the New Forest's SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). The VRO actively engages with local communities and visitors, patrols and assesses SSSI verges across the HLS agreement area, and plans and oversees practical measures to protect and restore the verges from the damaging impacts of vehicles.

Remedial works took place at Matley as there were some issues with the stability of the ditch and bank works.

Wetland Restoration

Where habitats are unfavourable because of drainage operations (such as in riverine and bog woodland, heathland and mire habitats), restoration of a more natural physical, geomorphological and hydrological regime by agreed management is required. This might include removal of structures which prevent seasonal inundation, raising of (over-deepened) stream bed levels, restoration of braided channels (watercourses with many small channels) and reinstatement of natural meanders. Such works are undertaken as part of the ongoing programme of wetland restoration projects and are guided by the restoration plan agreed by the Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Forum (FWRF).

Planning is underway for several restoration projects due to take place in 2026, including Knightwood, where felling along the watercourse was completed over the winter (see images below)

Before



After



Repair and maintenance: PR serial no. 48

Previously restored wetland sites may need further interventions to help restore natural processes. Forestry England carries out an ongoing programme of work to monitor restored sites, identify any issues and implement works to address them.

Over the winter period monitoring of previous sites has been undertaken and plans for repairs are being worked up.

Other wetland sites: PR serial numbers 33, 1801, 42, 2401, 2402, 2403

A programme of mire and stream restoration work that aims to restore the natural hydrology of an area, improve the condition of wet habitats, protect streams and mires from further erosion, help to manage flood risk and increase resilience to drought.

Future wetland sites:

Restoration work at the following sites will be undertaken this summer (2026):

- o Knightwood
- o Ipley
- o North Sluifers
- o Fawley

Update: Forest Freshwater & Wetland Restoration Forum (FWRF)

The Forest Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Forum (FWRF) was set up as an independent and advisory body focused on strategic and long-term freshwater and wetland restoration priorities in the New Forest National Park. Some example objectives include:

- To assist member bodies planning restoration by sharing information, experience and advice
- Help facilitate communication between all stakeholders
- Set strategic level objectives
- Review the Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Plan which creates a framework for delivery of restoration projects

The Wetland Forum met in February, where John Stride was welcomed as the new chair. Dr Sophie Lake provided an update on the work flow and reporting template documents produced by Footprint Ecology, to assist members undertaking restoration projects in following the plan agreed by the forum. Aldous Rees from Natural England gave a presentation on the New Forest River and Streams Condition Assessment 2024-5, and a site visit to Lodge Heath provided an opportunity to have useful conversations around restoration work delivery. Minutes can be found on the wetland storymap here: [New Forest Wetlands](#).

Heather Baling: PR serial no. 100

N/A

Surveys and Monitoring

This includes a programme of specialist species surveys - as directed by Natural England - and a monitoring programme to support our restoration work. Examples of previous specialist species surveys undertaken include those conducted for large marsh grasshopper, brown diving beetle, New Forest cicada and various New Forest spiders. Previous reports can be found [here](#).

Botanical survey: PR serial no. 25

Habitat and botanical surveys have been conducted on our wetland restoration sites to assess the vegetative response to the restoration of a more naturally functioning watercourse. This is using the vegetation survey protocol which has been developed through the Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Forum and aims to pragmatically collect useful and repeatable data.

More information relating to the methods used can be found within the reports and in the [Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Plan](#). The final reports will be published to the new HLS website.

Vegetation surveys for upcoming wetland restoration sites have been commissioned, and will commence late April/May.

Invertebrate surveys: PR serial no. 2407

Invertebrate surveys have been conducted over the summer, at four sites (North Sluffers, Dockens Water/Rakes Brakes Bottom, Turfhill and Picket Plain). The overall aim of these is to record rare and notable invertebrate species and get an idea of species composition at each site. Both daytime hand searches and light trapping have been used to catch and identify individuals.

A substantial list of species was produced through this, including species which have not been recorded in the New Forest for several decades.

A final report has been submitted and will be added to the new HLS website.

Spider surveys: PR serial no. 191

Repeat spider surveys of those completed at Matley Heath and Shatterford Bottom in [2019](#) (in which several rare and notable spider species were recorded) have been undertaken over the summer.

A final report has been submitted and will be added to the new HLS website.

Fixed point and timelapse photography: PR serial no. 104

A fixed-point and timelapse photography programme is run by the HLS Monitoring Project Officer to document visible habitat changes following restoration.

Water Hydrology: PR serial no. 103

Monitoring water hydrology helps document changes in flow regime and, the impact of river restorations on flow levels and rates.

The HLS monitoring project officer is currently working with the Environment Agency and Fresh Water Habitats Trust to monitor water levels at Foulford Bottom, Knightwood and Millersford.

Riverfly Partnership: PR serial no. 105

Over the last eleven years, the HLS scheme has supported the citizen science Riverfly Partnership Project. Volunteers are trained to identify and survey specific groups of freshwater invertebrates, whose diversity and numbers can tell us about the overall health and characteristics of our streams.

Surveys (2025) took place monthly between April and October at Linford Brook and Worts Gutter. For 2026, volunteers will survey at Worts Gutter and Dockens Water – they have successfully undertaken the first surveys of the year.

HLS Engagement Officer Role – 12-18-month FTA

Need for role:

Under the HLS scheme, Forestry England are looking to deliver a large wetland restoration project in partnership with the National Trust, and with close support from the HLS partners (The Verderers, The New Forest National Park Authority, Natural England and The Commoners Defence Association). The project is likely to require planning permission and represents a significant opportunity to restore freshwater and wetland habitats within the New Forest.

Past experience with restoration projects—particularly wetlands—has shown that failure to undertake effective stakeholder liaison can delay, disrupt or, in some cases, prevent delivery altogether. At the same time, external scrutiny of land management and nature restoration projects is increasing, bringing an associated risk that misunderstanding or opposition could negatively affect our ability to deliver large-scale nature recovery and other public benefits. Given the scale, complexity and visibility of the proposals, a high level of proactive public engagement and consultation will therefore be essential to ensure clear understanding of the project's aims, benefits and long-term monitoring, and to mitigate risks to delivery.

The Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Forum brings together partner organisations and key stakeholders involved in the delivery of restoration projects across the Forest. Through this forum, a Restoration Plan and accompanying Communications Plan have been developed, setting out the ecological benefits of wetland restoration and establishing a clear framework for delivery. Central to this is the importance of early, ongoing engagement with local communities, and clear, consistent communication of why restoration is needed and how it will be delivered.

The proposed HLS project is intended to be the first of a new programme of ambitious wetland restoration schemes, supporting the Nature Recovery objectives set out in the New Forest National Park Authority Partnership Plan, Forestry England's Forest Design Plan and Natural England's SAC objectives. As such, it will play an important role in shaping understanding and support for future projects across the National Park.

While Forestry England and the New Forest National Park Authority both have established communications teams, the scale and specialist nature of this project requires dedicated, project-focused engagement. The National Trust, a project partner for the Millersford project have highlighted that an engagement officer was a critical element to their HLS delivery at Foxbury.

A Wetland Projects Engagement Officer would work alongside existing NPA and Forestry England communications staff, complementing their strategic communications role by leading on local, place-based engagement, coordinating consultation activity, and acting as a consistent point of contact for communities and stakeholders.

Role description and responsibilities:

The Engagement Officer will play a central role in ensuring the successful delivery of large-scale wetland restoration projects through consultation and stakeholder engagement. The postholder will act as a key link between project partners, stakeholders and the local community.

It will be a part-time (3 days per week/ 22.2 hours per week – to be reviewed), temporary role (12 months with possibility of extension).

Key responsibilities will include:

- Act as the primary point of contact for public engagement, responding to enquiries and concerns from local communities, stakeholders and interest groups in a clear, informative and constructive manner.
- Design and deliver consultation and engagement activities, such as parish council meetings, drop-in sessions, workshops, guided site visits and online engagement events, to support the planning and delivery of projects.
- Build trust and understanding with local communities and key stakeholder groups, addressing historical concerns from previous restoration projects, including issues around project impacts, objectives and monitoring.
- Coordinate engagement activity across partner organisations, ensuring messaging is aligned and that communication efforts are not duplicated or inconsistent.
- Support the planning application process by ensuring statutory and non-statutory engagement and consultation requirements are met and appropriately documented.
- Gather, record and feedback stakeholder and community responses to project teams, helping to inform adaptive management and ongoing project development.
- Monitor and evaluate engagement activities, reporting on effectiveness and identifying lessons learned to improve future engagement approaches.

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Report to HLS Board: April 2026

Jonathan Low, Communications Assistant / HLS engagement officer

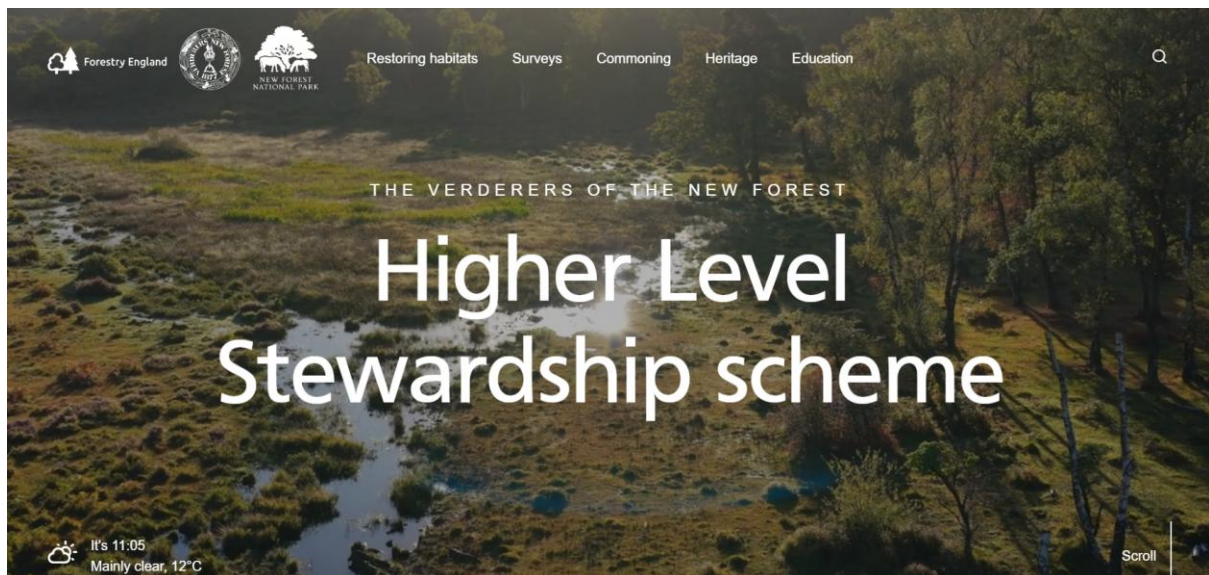
New website

Work continues apace to get the new HLS website up and running, with official launch anticipated for early May.

Representatives from the NPA, FE and Tina Woodley have held regular meetings to discuss content for the site and how best to display this information.

The website is very visually led, so will include a wide range of photography and video footage to support case studies and other written content.

Main sections of the website will comprise habitat restoration, survey work, commoning, heritage and education.



Photos/Video

The majority of the photos and video on the new website are courtesy of local photographer and videographer Matt Roseveare, whom the NPA commissioned last year to capture a range of images and videos showcasing HLS sites/work, species and landscapes.

Matt's work will also help support the promotion of HLS work on social media in the coming months.

Content plan

A plan has been drafted for some upcoming comms on various subjects including stallion selection, seasonal messaging on foals, wetland restoration case studies (including video), drifts, plus highlighting the work of the archaeology and education teams.

We also plan to re-release the stallion video which proved extremely popular last year, coinciding with the release of the stallions out onto the Forest.

Output will be staggered over weeks and months through various channels (social media, press releases, etc), with the new website being at the forefront of the released information.

Miscellaneous

Helping co-ordinate the reprinting of 500 verge parking leaflets.

Coming up

Launch of the new HLS website (date to be confirmed).

Promotion around the AGM later in the year (date to be confirmed).

Supporting other projects and highlighting work as and when required.

NEW FOREST NON-NATIVE PLANTS PROJECT REPORT TO THE NEW FOREST HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME BOARD MEETING TO BE HELD ON 29 April 2026

This report outlines relevant activities of the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project since the previous report dated 06 January 2026 which was submitted for the Higher-Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS) Board meeting held on 28 January 2026.

Work to be undertaken by contractors during 2026 (approved herbicide application)

The following work will be undertaken by professional contractors to control invasive non-native plants on the Open Forest on Crown Land between late May and September. These timings depend on the species of plant being treated and suitable weather conditions.

Japanese knotweed

- Near Thorney Hill
- Near 'Leafy Screen', Burley
- Near 'Hillview' at Linwood

American skunk cabbage

- Mill Lawn, Burley (downstream of Rooks Bridge)

Yellow Azalea

- Near The Old House
- Soarley Beeches

Parrot's Feather

- Hincheslea Bog
- East End
- Silver Stream

Cotoneaster

- Hawkhill car park
- Sluifers
- Ocknell
- Near Bramble Hill Hotel
- North of Hatchet Pond
- Rans Wood
- Setley Plain
- Setley Pond
- Vicinity of Little Hatchet Pond & Hatchet Moor car park
- North of A31, near Minstead
- Near Rufus Stone car park
- Near Shatterford car park
- East of Avon Water
- Horseshoe Bottom

- By post box at Emery Down
- Pilmore Gate Heath
- Acres Down
- Boundway Hill

Gaultheria

- South of Fletcher's Hill
- Dibden

Recording invasive non-native plants

The Project Officer has been responding to a steady flow of reports from residents and commoners about non-native plants they may have spotted on the Crown and boundary land. The Project Officer has investigated all reports, visited sites and contacted landowners in question with Skunk Cabbage being a particular issue already this season.

Monitoring work has begun for suitable species, such as Skunk Cabbage, with other species scheduled in over summer months.

Control of invasive non-native plants by Project Officer and volunteers

The project Officer has already started on the Cadnam River (Open Forest/Bignell area) checking for and removing any Himalayan Balsam plants, work parties involving volunteer teams will not start until Mid-May/Early June.

The Project Officer and 1 volunteer have been cutting spadices off of flowering Skunk Cabbage plants to prevent them going to seed in advance of the contractors coming in to treat with herbicide at a later date. In some cases, very small plants have been removed by hand and trowel.

Other Activities

New Forest Biodiversity Conference 4 March

Project Officer did an evening talk about non-native plants to VESPA (Wild New Forest) project volunteers. Identification guides were handed out.

Minstead Parish 11th March

Project Officer held a talk at Minstead Hall to educate residents on the importance of 'stopping the spread' of garden plants from boundaries, non-native plant identification and responsibilities.

New Forest Non-Native Plants Project Forum 31 March

The annual non-native plant project forum was held at Brockenhurst Village Hall and was well attended.

Various dates since last report

Working with water companies (Southampton/Wessex/Bournemouth) and local action groups (LAGS) such as the Blackwater Conservation Group to organise work parties to remove Himalayan Balsam at various sites and water treatment works across the forest.

Training

14th April – Water Safety qualification (lasts 3 years) Completing this training enables Project Officer to work near water leading a team of volunteers or other staff members and also covers rescue, throw lines, what to do if you fall into water whilst wearing waders, etc.

All other training is currently up to date.



The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project, hosted by Hampshire & Isle of Wildlife Trust, is very grateful to The Verderers and the New Forest HLS Board for the continued financial support given by the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

Report prepared by Holly Fitzgerald, New Forest Non-Native Plants Officer
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22 April 2026

260422 Report from HIWWT for HLS Board Meeting on 29 April 2026 HF

LiDAR and Archaeology Report

April 2026 Board Meeting

Report by: Gareth Owen

HLS Archaeology and Heritage Team:

Since the Jan 2026 Board meeting the team has been continuing with ongoing works and responding to new requests from FE HLS Team.

The team received two new requests, issued six Data Packs and progressed several ongoing requests for advice, Data Packs (Heritage Impact Assessments) and site mark-ups ahead of ground works such as Stream/Wetland Restoration, Habitat Regeneration and Clear-fell Restoration.

Concluded requests with Data Packs issued include; Fawley Inclosure, Black Knowl, Blackensford Botton, Shirley Holms and Gritnam Wood.

At the end of March our Assistant Archaeologist, Hilde, left the Authority and we are currently progressing recruitment for a new post holder.

Conducting these heritage assessments ahead of groundwork provides ongoing opportunities to identify, record and protect a range of heritage assets within the New Forest that could easily be damaged by the heavy vehicles used in some HLS restoration works. It also facilitates the ongoing detailed assessment of LiDAR data of the New Forest which has often led to new archaeological discoveries.

The findings from this work are added to our growing heritage GIS database, currently holding details on over 4500 individual heritage assets recorded through HLS work. Following completion of a site assessment the data is subsequently submitted to the Hampshire Historic Environment Records, to share our growing understanding of and promote further research into the heritage of the New Forest.

NEW FOREST LAND ADVICE SERVICE

Report to the HLS Board meeting, April 2026
Progress and Work Programme 1st January to 31st March 2025

Report by: Rhys Morgan

This summarises the work completed to support commoning in the New Forest.

- Proactive work with commoners to deliver land management advice. and support to understand and comply with relevant practices such as Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition and HLS related objectives.

6 commoners supported

- Advice to commoners where HLS land adjacent to their holdings is being affected by inappropriate operations or management, to advise and promote best practice land management.

3 commoners supported

- HLS Commoner Training program:

The original questionnaire including an interest to learning about Cattle calving –

Continuing from the autumn pig event, interest to run further events at commoners' holdings was expressed. For this occasion, Storms Farm was chosen. as venue had the calving stock available and meeting room for the PowerPoint talk.

For the 9th of March event I set the Eventbrite to 30 commoners in order to keep the group small enough to discuss the topics. 28 arrived for the event on the Monday. afternoon.

First Andy and Sarah - Storms farm - talked about the cattle livestock they keep. Questions and answers in the barn with conversation developing from the group on the different cattle breeds they keep.

The group then sat in the equine stables for a group chat on the same subject – Alex was able to provide a presentation to the group on the following subjects:

1. How to Improve the chances of delivering a live calf
2. Pre-Calving Factors and Peri-Calving Factors
3. Which Breed? Breed of Dam and the Breed of Sire
4. Nutrition and BCS
5. Facilities and Equipment
6. Prevention of abortion and timing to intervene with the livestock during birth.



Storms farmyard talk + Tom Gould was able to bring his cattle catcher on the right of the picture to show the group a calving gate built into the structure as an alternative item of equipment on the market.



The group was able to pass knowledge across the room from their own cattle experiences over time. Rope usage was also discussed regarding the extraction of difficult calving. We had hoped to have had a "calving gate" at the event to demonstrate the positive use they would play with calving - supply on demand would not reach us for a further 3 months.

When asking the group, a sizeable number in the room raised hands that they would be interested in a calving gate to help them with future cattle management so I will investigate how this could possibly be addressed funding wise.

Hopefully, these events will encourage further interest in livestock keeping for the open forest. Reaching the numbers we wanted for the event, timing of the day did prove more difficult for some age groups to attend – Several young commoners attended but we will look to address this in the autumn with a further event and timing of the day subject to funding needs and numbers booking on.

I also attended an evening meeting with the young commoners committee in March to discuss the opportunity for the group in the future through the funding an event.

- Items separate to the HLS funding - included to represent the cross over we have with projects supporting commoners across the forest.
- 1. Farming in protected landscapes: Various commoners have been guided individually through the funding opportunities for 2025 – 26.
- 2. WEIF EA funded projects: 2 Commoners holdings have been improved for WEIF EA funded projects through the winter of 25/26 this winter. Both are adjacent to water courses associated with the open forest.
- 3. New forest southern cluster: I facilitated a Southern cluster evening about BNG and Green finance with three quest speakers. This took place on the 24/02/26 - 12 of the 20 in attendance being New Forest commoners.