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£16M DEAL SECURED TO PROTECT FOREST

A LANDMARK £16m conservation deal has been agreed to restore New Forest landscapes and fund commoners for the next 10 years.

The agreement — the biggest of its kind in Europe — was signed at a special ceremony at the Verderers' Court in Lyndhurst on Wednesday. It will unlock a host of projects to preserve the area's character, history and ancient traditions.

Adding their names to the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLSS) were the Commoners Defence Association, the national park authority, the verderers, the Forestry Commission and national ecology body Natural England.

The money will be equally divided between supporting commoning and varied conservation work. It replaces the previous system which only focused on paying commoners for grazing at a rate of between £25 and £60 per animal.

The money set aside for commoning — the Verderers' Graz-

ing Scheme Fund — will be managed by the verderers and paid directly to livestock owners and used for larger scale projects to benefit the commoning community.

Speaking at the launch after two years of discussions, Official Verderer Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre said priorities were to install a water supply at the Beaulieu Road sales yard, provide agisters with new Land Rovers and stock trailers, and secure a permanent stock of back-up grazing land.

He thanked Natural England and added: "On our wish list for the future would be to leave a lasting legacy that supports the Forest and commoning for perpetuity."

Alan Law, Natural England's director for the south-east region, said: "This is an important moment for the Forest as this massive agreement will bring a wide range of New Forest conservation, landscape and educational benefits into one scheme."

The HLSS replaces the old Coun-

Mechanic raced to save cottage from thatch fire



Quick action: firefighters contain the blaze and (inset) Phil French

A MECHANIC'S quick thinking helped stop a fire at a Lyndhurst thatched cottage spreading out of control.

Phil French (44) sprang into action while working at Pat's Garage when he spotted flames licking around the chimney of the house in Romsey Road on Friday in last week.

Firefighters had already been alerted just after 10am when Phil and another man he did not know ran to the scene, grabbed a garden hose and sprayed water at the flaming roof for up to 10 minutes before back-up arrived.

Phil did not immediately realise how serious the situation was and told the 'A&T': "I opened the doors and thought, hang on it's snowing — but found it was ash." But when he saw the flames he ran over the road to help.

"I was stood on a raised area squirting water up into the thatch to stop it from spreading," he said. "We put the flames out, but every time we stopped the flames came back — you can't get right in there with a garden

hose, it's a hard enough job to get it up there."

"I think they sent the whole of Hampshire fire brigade out! They probably took about five to 10 minutes tops to arrive, but at the time I was thinking, where are they?"

The crews from six stations across the New Forest and Southampton pulled out sections of thatch to prevent flames spreading, restricting the damage to a small area of the roof. No one was in the house at the time.

Redbridge station manager Mickey Smith praised the actions of the two men as "courageous", but warned: "We would remind people to take great precautions with fire as it is a very dangerous thing and they could get caught out."

He added: "This type of incident is always very difficult to deal with due to the make-up of the thatch roof."

"The crews did a fantastic job in making a break in the thatch to stop the fire spreading to involve the whole of the property."

"Had it not been for their swift actions and hard work there is no doubt that the damage would have

been much more significant."

He said the owner had taken all precautions and even recently attended an advice session. An investigation found the blaze had been caused by sparks flying from a bonfire in a neighbour's garden.

Phil said: "If we weren't there maybe the house would have gone up or it wouldn't have made much difference. I wouldn't have called myself a hero — I was just glad to have saved the house if it was going to go up."

(Continued on page 3)

No ambulance for 'heart attack' sailor

THE ambulance service has apologised after a dinghy sailor with a suspected heart attack had to be flown to hospital by coastguard helicopter because there was no transport available.

Emergency services were alerted at about 11.15am on Sunday when Frank Wenman (76) suffered chest pains competing in Lymington Town Sailing Club's Sunday Series race.

Mr Wenman, who had a heart condition, was taken by the club's own rescue team to the shore off Bath Road where he was met by Lymington coastguard officers and treated at the scene by emergency co-responder and fast response ambulance crews.

However, South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) was unable to send hospital transport, so the coastguard rescue helicopter was called out.

It landed in the park next to the bandstand in Bath Road and flew the patient to Dorchester Hospital after he had been given oxygen. The sailing club said he was discharged two days later.

SCAS has come under fire several times before over its failure to promptly send ambulances to emergencies. County councillors recently said it was putting lives at risk in the New Forest by prioritising urban call-outs above rural ones to meet targets.

A SCAS spokeswoman told the 'A&T': "Unfortunately at the time of the call the service was experiencing a higher than normal demand on our services with a significant number of serious life-threatening and emergency incidents ongoing in the Forest area. This was partly due to unexpected short-term staff shortages on the day."

"The nearest available ambulance was despatched to the scene as soon as it became available."

(Continued on page 3)

'Poison pond' probe after three dogs die



Investigation: the pond at Lakewood in Highcliffe

RSPCA inspectors investigating the mysterious deaths of three dogs are set to search for clues at a Highcliffe pond.

Post mortem examinations of the animals' bodies, all thought to have died during the past week, were taking place at a government laboratory in Winchester on Thursday.

The investigation was launched after a relative of one of the dog owners who walked his pet at Lakewood heard two others, who also regularly exercised there, had suffered the same fate.

The relative, who did not want to be named, told the 'A&T' the animal was rushed to the Priory Vets surgery in Highcliffe late last week. The dog later suffered fits and was moved to the vet's hospital in Christchurch

but had to be put down.

He said: "As the three dogs have fallen ill seemingly after being in a small geographical area I thought there clearly may be something wrong."

A spokesperson for the RSPCA said: "I can confirm this has been reported and details have been passed onto a RSPCA inspector to investigate."

A spokesperson for Priory Vets confirmed three dogs had died in unexplained circumstances. He said: "We do not know anything at this stage and it is too early to come to any conclusion about anything."

"I can say we will be doing some tests and of course we are happy to help any investigation."

Theme park roller-coaster threat forces NPA into planning U-turn

NATIONAL park authority members have performed a planning U-turn to allow a New Forest theme park to keep an unauthorised £1m roller-coaster that was refused just five months ago.

When the controversial Edge ride opened at Paultons Park in the spring last year neighbours complained it was generating extra traffic, pollution and noise from screaming visitors.

However, after Paultons' bosses warned they could actually keep the ride by legally moving it closer to homes — without having to get permission — the NPA's planning committee voted on Tuesday by nine to three for it to stay where it was.

Another roller-coaster, the £2m Cobra, was allowed to remain in December last year, and the committee was split between those who felt the Edge was a step too far and supporters who said it benefited the local economy.

NPA member Barry Rickman said the national park was "very lucky" to have Paultons on its doorstep. "I could not have picked anything



On track: the £1m Edge ride was refused five months ago

better to have alongside us — it takes pressure off the Forest," he said.

But Alan Weeks said nothing had changed since the last application to keep the Edge was refused in October last year.

He added: "The Cobra ride which we allowed last year is different; the noise is spread out because the carts only transport three or four people at once, I was always supportive of that."

"The Edge carries up to 80 people who are all screaming at once. I voted against it the first time and I will vote against it now."

Paultons had warned that if it was refused permission, it would shift it to an area of the site officially designated as an "amusement park" where permission was not needed.

Speaking for the park, Richard Mancey said the current location next to the Cobra was the best possible. "The closest neighbours have written in support. Moving the ride would bring it closer to them," he warned.

The latest application prompted

(Continued on page 3)

Mother's Day grave thefts condemned

A WOMAN has condemned thieves who snatched tributes from the graves of her mum and baby nephew in New Milton on Mother's Day.

Wendy Keeping said her family had been "devastated" by the theft of a small resin angel, a floral basket tub and two large plant pots outside St Mary Magdalene Church in Old Milton Road.

The items were laid on Sunday but had all disappeared when a family member returned to the graveyard later that day. Mrs Keeping told the 'A&T' the police did not seem to care when the crime was reported.

"We're just devastated because we thought the world of our mum and nephew," she said. "We're a caring family and see our graves have floral tributes every week."

"To us it seems someone obviously couldn't afford to buy anything for their mum on Mother's Day so went around the graveyard looking for something to steal."

"I hope they realise what they've done. It's devastating for families, they put things down for their loved ones and then they go missing."

DISTRICT NEWS

BURLEY
Land sale caravan fear
Burley villagers fear countryside land being sold off by a water company will be used to accommodate caravans. The Hacking Trust is only expected to finalise the deal to buy the land, off Castle Hill Lane, in June but has already set up an auction to sell it on Monday. Page 2

EAST BOLDRE
Allotment 'neglect' threat
Allotment holders in East Boldre may have their plots confiscated by parish councillors who said they were being neglected. At its meeting, the council heard the two sites along Main Road were teeming with weeds and strewn with tyres. Coun. Ted Sparks said "something really drastic" was needed. Page 4

BROCKENHURST
College gets top grade
Brockenhurst College has been named the ninth best public sector organisation in the country to work for. It beat off competition from more than 200 others to reach the Sunday Times' top 75, receiving an award at a London ceremony last week. Principal Di Roberts said she was "delighted" and praised staff. Page 13

MILFORD
Farewell to minister
More than 100 well-wishers bade farewell to the Rev. Erle Parker after he retired from ministering at Milford Baptist Church. A special party was held the day before Erle held his last service, which coincided with his 65th birthday, and he told the 'A&T' it had been "a privilege" to serve. Page 23

Regular features

Personalia p.8, Townsman p.8, Letters p.9, Christian Comment p.11, Obituaries p.13, Sport p.16, p.17 & p.18, Planning p.22

What's On
Details of forthcoming local events appear on pages 6, 7, 8 & 9

Eating out
Local restaurant advertising appears on pages 10 & 11



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Forest funds deal signed



A new chapter: (l-r) Commoners Defence Association chairman Graham Ferris, deputy surveyor Mike Seddon, Official Verderer Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre, Natural England area manager Wanda Fojt, and NPA chairman Clive Chatters

Roller-coaster wins approval

(Continued from front page)
1,446 letters of support and Mr Mancey said over 800 were written by "local people". He added: "All the letters in support were individual submissions. We did not ask people to send in templates."
Both Copythorne Parish Council and New Forest District Council's environmental health officers had withdrawn objections amid fears moving the ride would cause more disturbance. NPA officers advised approval.

NPA member Maureen Holding said: "This recommendation to grant permission is a victory for common sense. It is good for local jobs and good for the community. Everyone agrees this is the best possible location."
But Peter Frost said the NPA had been "trapped between a rock and a hard place". He said: "Paultons deserves to be congratulated on a very successful campaign; they seem to have convinced everyone that something has changed — when in fact it hasn't."
"We don't seem to have much option here, but I would like to have seen the parish council here supporting it and explaining to us why they changed their view."

A spokesperson for the company said afterwards: "This decision now regularises all the rides and attractions in planning terms at the park."
"We would like to thank all those local people that have supported us over the last few months, both by actually writing to the national park authority and also by sending us their support."
"This has been greatly appreciated by the directors and management and everyone that works at Paultons. We are now looking forward to the 2010 season at the park."

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Man showed 'total disregard' for ASBO

A HOMELESS man from New Milton accused of breaking his ASBO 13 times was told by magistrates he had shown "a total disregard for court orders and security".
Twenty-year-old Taron Crutcher appeared in court for sentencing after being found guilty at a trial in January of yet again breaching the ASBO given to him in 2007.
Prosecutor Emma Currie said the order banned Crutcher from behaving in a way that was likely to cause anyone who was not a member of his household harassment, alarm or distress, and from going into certain areas of New Milton and Lymington.
Crutcher was outside New Milton's Tesco Express store on January 11th when he was seen shouting, swearing and gesturing at cars, and scared one passer-by, Lindsey Cooper, into crossing the road and phoning the police.
Crutcher was arrested and in interview confirmed he was there but insisted he had not shouted anything, said Ms Currie. Two further charges that he had breached his ASBO on February 18th and March 3rd, were dropped.
Defending, Sally Day said solicitors would be challenging Crutcher's ASBO which she said had actually expired in January. She pointed out he had been on remand for 35 days already and urged the Bench to sentence him for that time so he could go free.
Magistrates agreed and Crutcher was allowed to leave the court. But the presiding magistrate, Keith Calum-Hale, told him: "You cannot keep going on like this, it has gone on long enough."
Crutcher is due to reappear on Tuesday March 23rd when solicitors will argue before district judge Lorraine Morgan that his ASBO should be discharged.

Coastguard rescues sailor



Emergency: the stand-in helicopter touches down in Lymington (Photo: Keith Gunn)

(Continued from front page) patient and their family."
She added: "We send our sincerest thanks and gratitude to members of Her Majesty's coastguard who were on scene to take the patient to hospital."
"We are awaiting further information about our patient's condition and are sorry for the delay and the distress which this has caused to the professionals."
Christchurch borough councillor Christine Payne will present the winners and runners-up with prizes at the opening of the exhibition on Saturday March 27th. The photographs will be on view at the museum until April 24th.

Mechanic saves home from fire

(Continued from front page)
Thatch property owners can obtain information packs by contacting their local fire station or the service's community safety department on 023 8064 4000. More details about the scheme can also be found online at www.hantsfire.gov.uk/yoursafetyathome/thatchfires/thatchinformation.htm

Fire crews car wash for charity

FIREFIGHTERS in the New Forest will be joining colleagues across Hampshire in national car wash day today (Saturday) in aid of the Fire Fighters Charity.
Crew members from Ringwood, Burley, New Milton and Lymington will be among those getting the soap, sponges and hose jets out at their stations from 10am to raise money and add a shine to even the dirtiest car.
It will also be an opportunity for drivers to have a chat about fire safety in the home while their vehicles are given a gleaming finish. In return, the firefighters will be asking for a donation to support their charity.

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