**Forest Farming Group**

**Terms of Reference (26th January 2021)**

**1 Background**

The group has its origins in the decision of the UK to leave the European Union and consequently the Common Agricultural Policy. The CAP has been the mechanism for providing financial support to New Forest farmers and land managers through the Single Payment Scheme, Basic Payment Scheme and environmental stewardship schemes; Countryside Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship.

The primary focus of the group has been to work together to promote the need for a bespoke scheme of payments for public benefits to be put in place post 2020 (when the UK formally leaves the EU); to obtain appropriate reward the New Forest’s farmers for the environmental services that they provide, either through practicing their common rights or managing their land within and around the National Park. The group has identified the range of public goods provided by the New Forest (see Appendix 1) and published the report ‘Understanding the New Forest’s Natural Capital’ in 2018 which gives an evidence base and proposes a structure to help create a replacement for the current system that will be specially suited to the New Forest area.

The group has made representations to government ministers and officials and responded to consultations on the future of farming and the Environmental Land Management (ELM) Policy Discussion Document

**2 Purpose of the Group**

The primary purpose of the group is to work collaboratively to ensure continued financial support from the emerging ELM Scheme and other sources of funding in order to maintain and enhance the public goods that the New Forest provides to society.

In so doing the group will provide a single voice to represent members on key issues whilst ensuring it complements and supports rather than duplicates the work of other groups and agencies.

It is not intended for the membership of this Group to automatically become signatories and/or beneficiaries of a new scheme.

**3 Key strategic objectives for the group**

* To secure the best ELM outcome possible for the Forest, one that will fund a range of
* habitat restoration/management and visitor management interventions on the New Forest
* SSSI/SAC/SPA/Ramsar designated areas that delivers enhanced public benefits
* To recognise and incentivise the positive contribution of sustainable commoning to the conservation objectives of the open Forest.
* To safeguard the cultural heritage of commoning
* To look beyond the ELMS for funding and investment opportunities
* To share data and evidence to help establish a common view
* To monitor and review progress

**4 Area of interest (geography)**

The area of interest is primarily the New Forest SSSI and land with rights within the perambulation but could include other land beyond which provides additional support to the system of commoning within the perambulation

**5 Group Membership – as of December 2020**

* Verderers of the New Forest
* New Forest Commoners Defence Association
* New Forest National Park Authority
* Forestry England
* National Farmers Union
* Natural England
* National Trust

Note: it is anticipated that the group membership may be extended to include additional commons landowners whose holdings might fall within a future Forest ELM scheme

**6 Chair, Vice-Chair and Accountability**

* A Chair and Vice -Chair will be drawn from the group membership
* Both Chair and Vice Chair will be elected on a 2-year term
* The Chair will be accountable to the membership of the Group

**7 Group Administration**

* In the event of a vote, voting will be restricted to the following organisations who each have a single voting right: NFNPA, CDA, Verderers, FE.
* The Chair will remain neutral but has a casting vote in the event of a tied vote
* No representation can be made by any individual on behalf of the Group, without all voting members written approval in advance
* Group members will not have more than two representatives at meeting unless it is otherwise agreed
* New Group members must be approved by all existing voting members.
* New Group members will not automatically have a vote. This will need to be separately approved by all existing voting members
* The group will meet at a frequency appropriate to respond to the national development of an ELM scheme, but this is expected to be at least 3 times a year
* Sub-groups can be formed as appropriate
* Topics for agenda items will be sought from members prior to each meeting
* An agenda will be agreed between the Chair and Vice Chair and circulated 1 week before the meeting
* Minutes and supporting papers will be circulated within 1 week of the meeting
* The NFNPA will provide the secretariat and knowledgeable facilitator for the group
* An action plan will be prepared by the group facilitator and reviewed as required
* Non-members can attend by invitation to provide specific advice or insight
* Being a member of the Group does not preclude member organisations to maintain their own lines of communication with DEFRA providing they make clear that they are not doing so as a representative of the FFG
* With pre notification an observer from any organisation can be invited to join the group or attend meetings but will have no voting right

**Appendix – Public Benefits provided by the New Forest**

The New Forest delivers a large number of ‘benefits’ to the public, all of which have a value, sometimes referred to as natural capital. These services include the following in no particular order;

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Provided by the New Forest** | **Public benefit** | **Economic value** |
| Biodiversity and ecosystems including wetland restoration | Education, nature, beauty, inspiration, health and wellbeing, wildlife watching, pollination, lower flood risk, water quality | Local produce – food (linked to pollination)  Health |
| Commoning and farming | Local produce, education, iconic landscape, nature, local economy | Local produce  Employment |
| Best practice land management and livestock husbandry | Local produce, living working landscape, water quality, soil management | Local produce – food, craft  Soil and water |
| Cultural heritage and archaeology | Education, inspiration, | Visitor economy |
| Forestry | Local produce, rural economy, air quality, health and wellbeing, nature | Local produce - timber  Renewable energy – wood, biomass  Employment |
| Iconic landscapes | Inspiration, public access, recreation, health and wellbeing, nature | Health  Visitor economy |
| Tranquillity | Health and wellbeing, low pollution levels, air quality, iconic views | Health |
| Carbon storage | Ameliorating global warming, improved quality of environment | Reduced cost of climate change impacts |