

-VERDERERS COURT MEETING 21st May 2021-

Minerals report from Deputy Gaveler

The impact of Covid-19

- Difficult times shortly followed the last Court meeting, with no-one foreseeing the scale or level of impact from the ensuing epidemic of Covid-19. Following UK lock-down instructions from the Government, activity of all kinds was halted overnight, with the sounds of mining and quarrying in the Dean silenced for what would be an unknown length of time and history temporarily paused.

Having spoken to one local individual during lock-down regarding the situation, I was aptly reminded that “the coal has been lying in the ground for over 300 million years and that having to wait a few more months for the sake of everyone’s health was a very small price to pay”. Humbling words.

As lockdown restrictions were lightened with small groups forming working ‘bubbles’ and businesses starting to return, so did activities at some of the small mines. At one location staggered working group were formed so that everyone could participate in some sort of work activity and to this end, most sites are now back to some kind of operational normality and Freemining resumed.

All that being said, throughout Lock-down, work has neither stopped or slowed down within Forestry England.....

1. Freemining - General

- No new request for Application to register as a Freeminer since the last Court meeting.
- A gentleman by the name of Shane Davies has enquired about the possible registration of his Grandfather (George Davies) who last worked at Cannop and Northern Utd Collieries. Unusually his birth-registration was made in Westbury on Severn (though home-born at Molly Meeks Cottage on Nelson) and after seeking some Council I have determined that the registration application can be made. George is 99 and requires a sponsor! – *I have not heard from Shane since lock-down but sincerely hope that the family is well and at some point, can complete the Registration for George.*
- Total number of Freeminer registrations since 01/09/1838 = **4369**. Total number of Free Quarrymen registered = **320**
- A new site of coal exploration has been very recently secured at Little Drybrook near Clements End which is looking to work the Whittington coal seam in the Drybrook No3 Gale. The Gale is owned by a Freeminer who is giving a small group of younger miners an opportunity to open and operate a small mine under his supervision. The group have previously spent a number a year’s honing their underground skills at another operational mine and this is a rare opportunity to add an addition working mine to the Dean.

The site has been the focus of much local interest as unusually, it is near to a hamlet, but the future operator has spoken to and explained the small-scale operation will have little-to-none impact and it would appear that most residents are very supportive of local tradition and looking forward to seeing coal. – *Now named ‘Freeminers Folly’ and being developed at*

a slow but professional pace, coal is now ahead of them (the illusive Whittington Seam aprox 3ft thick) and another active mine added to the list.

- The new mine site at Oakenhill is still yet to break ground as it seems to have rained continuously since the last Court and ground conditions are not conducive for the placement of heavy machinery. *Update – some preliminary trials have been undertaken at the site, but the initial results have not been particularly fruitful with it looking more like the minerals have already been extensively worked with evidence of old roadways. Further trial work is to be undertaken before investment of time and resources.*

2. Coal Authority

- ALL operating coal mines in the Hundred are now fully CA compliant – all now have either Operator Licences or Combined Licences/Lease.
- The above-mentioned site at Little Drybrook will require an Operator’s Licence in accordance with Part II of the 1994 Coal Industry Act for which an application is being drafted. *Now submitted but as with all other Government departments during the pandemic, experiencing reduced staff/working, not yet processed.*
- I have had two ‘Teams’ meetings with the CA during Lock-down with nothing ‘out-of-the-ordinary’ to report. The operational mine site list have been updated and returns submitted in accordance with Operators Licences.

3. Quarries (Subject to DFMA 1838)

- No new applications for Grant of Stone-tract by a Freequarryman OR Freeminer.
- **Great Berry Quarry** –Mr J McGrindle of Blakeney Hill has commenced production on a small scale. As per our letter of intent, Mr McGrindle will be offered a lease renewal, as the term left on the existing lease is short. The minerals’ planning was however preserved prior to Assignment from R Read. *Renewal in process.*
- **Knobb Quarry** – A new lease is in place for the working of this quarry. There has subsequently been third party interest regarding operation of this quarry, and I am expecting a conversation regarding its future. *Renewal completed and Quarry assigned to Norton Stone of Gloucester.*
- **Monument Quarry** – Nothing to report. The quarry will be subject an inspection (by myself) later this year but my initial finding are that all is in order. *Status Quo remains.*
- **Birch Hill Quarry**, Fetter Hill – Are undergoing renewal of their Lease - offered in accordance with Part II; S34 Dean Forest (Mines) Act 1871 and in line with the current planning permission expiring 2033. *Renewal completed.*

4. Quarries (Being dealt with Land Agent) including matters from previous Court

- **Stowfield** – A Rent and Royalty review is ongoing with Wardell Armstrong taking lead. The quarry hit production figures for operational period 19/20 as expected (700K Tonnes) and is on target for its projected figures for 20/21 of approximately 750k Tonnes *Projected figures have obviously been impacted by the closure (and staff furloughed) with April to September quarterly return being 264K Tonnes*
- **Stowe Hill** – No further movement regarding the planning on the option site containing FE reserved minerals. Until this has been secured there is no conversation to be had with Crown Estates unless they begin to extract from the exempted area in their existing quarry. *The status quo remains the same.*
- **Foxes Bridge Tips** – The lease for the rights to extract clay from by Coleford Brick and Tile is up for renewal at the end of this ensuing year and is likely to be offered under the existing terms. To date only a few samples have been taken from tip No.3-*Coleford Brick and Tile have decided not to renew the Lease for the tips on account of samples producing poor quality results and are choosing to out-source their clay from elsewhere. The tips will subsequently undergo light restoration and will become an organic extension to the surrounding wildlife habitat area.*

5. Other General Information

- The draft Minerals Local Plan (MLP) for Gloucestershire 2018 - 2032 was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in December 2018 and the public hearing sessions were held in June 2019. As part of the examination process, a number of proposed Main Modifications (considered necessary to make the Plan sound) were identified and were subject to public consultation which came to an end on 11th September 2019. To accompany the schedule of proposed Main Modifications (MM), a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) were also prepared for consultation
- Examination of the MM document revealed that the Inspector had suggested certain additional requirements relating to quarry allocations for Stowe Hill, Drybrook and Stowfield quarries. Those requirements are that any future planning applications for those quarries will require the preparation of a hydrological/hydrogeological impact assessment in accordance with EA guidance and an Economic Impact Assessment.
- On 23rd December 2019, the County Council received from the Planning Inspectorate the Inspector's Report for the Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire (2018 – 2032) examination. The report concludes that the plan provides an appropriate basis for mineral planning in Gloucestershire and is capable of adoption, provided that main modifications that underwent public consultation between July and September 2019 are incorporated into the plan. The County Council will now consider the Inspector's Report and make a decision as to whether to make progress towards the final adoption of the plan.'
- *The Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire (2018-2032) was adopted 20th March 2020 and is available to read in full at <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/planning-policy/minerals-local-plan-for-gloucestershire/>*
- The Mines Inspectorate have just gone through a recruitment drive and I can confirm that a new Mines Inspector has been appointed (name to follow). This Inspector is likely to cover the Dean as both Bob Leeming (HMCIM) and Cliff Seymour (HMPIM) and now both part-time.

Final note.....

- The Air Quality (Domestic Solid Fuels Standards) (England) Regulations 2020 came into force 1st May 2021.

I can confirm that the above DRAFT legislation was adopted as a UK Statutory Instrument 2020 No.1095 and included exempt coal worked by virtue of the Dean Forest (Mines) Act 1838 as recognised under Part 5 of the referred Instrument. For your information I attach a copy of the relevant sections at the back of this report.



DIGGING!!

REPORT END.



Deputy Gaveler

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Dean Forest.



21/05/20