COMMONS ACT 2006: SECTION 38

PROPOSED WORKS ON IPING AND TROTTON COMMONS, WEST SUSSEX

APPLICATION REFERENCE: COM 749

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF

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FOR SUSSEX WILDLIFE TRUST

Personal background

1. I am a local veterinary surgeon who qualified in 1979, hold the Certificate in Cattle Health and Production, and have worked in a Lewes based practice for over thirty years. I was born in Lewes and my father worked as a farm veterinary surgeon in Lewes also.

2. I am currently a Director of Cliffe Veterinary Group, Lewes and responsible for the Farm Department. I am also a Director and Senior Official Veterinarian for XL Farmcare South East who are the Veterinary Delivery Partner for the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) in this Region and responsible for delivering Government bTB testing by veterinary surgeons in the South East Region.

3. I am an experienced TB tester for over 30 years and have worked with individual farm clients, the local NFU and other vets in offering advice on the control of bovine TB.

Welfare of Conservation Grazed animals

4. The welfare of Conservation Grazed animals needs to be excellent not least because they are often in the public eye and regularly being observed by walkers and other outdoor enthusiasts. Certain breeds of cattle and sheep are better suited to the conditions and nutrition and temperament required, and these are selected by Sussex Wildlife Trust. High standards of fencing and gateways are imperative for containing the said animals, along with explanatory signage with contact details in the case of emergency and stating the need to keep dogs under control. Sussex Wildlife Trust provides these facilities. Sadly, the biggest welfare issue for Conservation Grazed animals is the risk of being attacked by passing dogs that are not under control. The resulting wounds may require veterinary treatment and can be fatal.
Sussex Wildlife Trust

5. Sussex Wildlife Trust has been a client of ours for over 14 years and we have been providing veterinary services (including bTB testing and Health Planning) for their cattle and sheep during that time. Prior to that, we had provided the same service since 1985 to the Trust’s Grazing Officer Gary Baldock when he was managing his own farm. In my opinion the livestock are diligently cared for by Gary Baldock and his staff, despite the wide distribution of animals across the Counties of East and West Sussex. Sick animals can be transported to and taken care of at Sussex Wildlife Trust’s Southerham Farm near Lewes. Being a lifelong wildlife enthusiast, I am also a member of the SWT.

6. Until recently, Sussex Wildlife Trust’s cattle have been grazed on various sites across Sussex and Routine Herd Testing has been carried out, as required by DEFRA, on all cattle. Any cattle moved have had a clear Pre Movement Test (PRMT) during the 60 days prior to moving. Reactors were found at Southerham Farm, Lewes in 2008 and a dead badger was found on the same holding and confirmed by Winchester VLA to be infected with the same strain of bTB as was being found in the cattle. More recently, in 2015 a Reactor cow was found at Stedham Common in West Sussex. This animal had earlier grazed in East Sussex (not Southerham Farm) and passed a PRMT before moving to West Sussex but was confirmed to be infected with the East Sussex strain of bTB.

In relation to bTB, Sussex is split into three Regions: a High Risk Area (HRA) (southern East Sussex), an Edge Area (northern East Sussex) and a Low Risk Area (LRA) (West Sussex) according to the respective prevalence of bTB in those Regions. bTB is likely to have become endemic in the wildlife in the HRA and to be contributing to new outbreaks of bTB in cattle herds, whereas bTB outbreaks in the LRA are primarily caused by the movement of infected animals into the Region, according to APHA. The APHA also reports that between 2011 and March 2015, 53 herds in West Sussex were placed under bTB restrictions with 5 confirmed breakdowns.

7. According to the Cattle Tracing Service, 21,464 cattle were moved into West Sussex in the year up to August 2015 whereas SWT moved none of its own cattle into West Sussex during that period.

8. Immediately after the 2015 bTB occurrence, Sussex Wildlife Trust carried out a Herd Health Plan Review at which the risks attached to the movement of animals into West Sussex were reviewed. As part of the Sussex Wildlife Trust’s new Herd Health Plan, it has been agreed that cattle moved into West Sussex from out of county will be held in ‘quarantine’ either in sheds or on fields where there is no risk of nose-to-nose contact with a neighbour’s cattle. During this period, the Trust will undertake post-movement and a pre-movement bTB tests and only if these tests go clear, will the Trust then move its cattle on to the sites that require grazing in West Sussex. These requirements are in excess of the legal obligations that ordinarily apply to owners of cattle and the Trust’s willingness to voluntarily apply these additional bTB tests demonstrates their desire to reduce the risks.
9. Furthermore, Sussex Wildlife Trust has subsequently agreed to cease any such movement of animals into the LRA of West Sussex from a HRA (East Sussex or Hants) and this will further reduce the risk of importing bTB disease into West Sussex. SWT has also actively supported the setting up in 2014, and ongoing work, of the East Sussex Badger Vaccination Group including the vaccination in 2015 of badgers on the land that is grazed by SWT cattle.

Conclusions

10. In my opinion Sussex Wildlife Trust manages its livestock to a high standard of Health and Welfare in its various secure conservation sites across Sussex while also successfully integrating access to the public. In contrast to commercial animal-rearing, the numbers of cattle involved are small. Furthermore, after the recent Herd Health Plan Review, the reduction in the movement of these animals from outside West Sussex will now further minimise the risk of introduction of bTB disease.

Signed

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