



## NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release: 22 March 2021

### **New support for the New Forest commoning community**

The New Forest National Park remains one of the few places in England where the ancient tradition of commoning is still widely practised.

Commoners have been grazing their animals on the open Forest since before the Norman Conquest in 1066, helping create and maintain the landscape and rare wildlife which makes the New Forest so special.

However, the rising price of land in the New Forest is making it difficult for commoners to find affordable back-up grazing, and even harder for new and young commoners to establish themselves.

In a new initiative helping address the issue, ExxonMobil Fawley, which owns land on the edge of the New Forest, is renting some of its untenanted grazing land to young commoners at a reduced rate.

The first two commoners to benefit from the scheme, Daniel Drodge and Louise England, are renting land at Hardley Halt, giving them the vital back-up grazing required to bring their animals off the open Forest.

ExxonMobil Fawley has installed new stock fencing and a holding pen (pound) and provided a mobile water tank at the 10-acre site.

Daniel, 27, was born into a commoning family and has a herd of 12 Forest-run New Forest ponies, which he hopes to extend over time.

Daniel said: 'I have loved commoning from the very beginning, following in the footsteps of my father and grandfather. I remember going out onto the forest checking on the ponies from a very young age.

'I find it so special that the ponies' bloodlines are passed down through generations of commoning families. I bred a filly last year whose grandmother had been bred by my grandad.'

Daniel will use the land at Hardley Halt for extra feed during the winter and bringing in mares and foals. He said: 'To be honest it is near impossible to find back-up

grazing in the New Forest at affordable rent, so I'm very grateful I have been given the opportunity by ExxonMobil Fawley to rent this back-up land.'

Louise England and her partner Dan were gifted their first pony by Dan's aunt and uncle in 2014 and have slowly increased their herd since.

Louise said: 'We now have four Forest-run mares and were lucky enough to finally breed our first foal in 2019 - a Forest-bred filly! That was a real moment and made all the hard work and commitment to commoning over the years worthwhile.

'We didn't want to expand our herd too much without having enough back-up ground, so when the opportunity came up to apply for grazing, we jumped at the chance. I'm extremely grateful to be able to use this facility, as it gives us the comfort that we have somewhere secure to bring our younger ponies home to winter, or mares and foals home to wean. The pound will be a great help in handling these ponies and makes a huge difference to how we will be able to common.

'I am so excited for the future for new and young commoners if more affordable grazing like this will be able to be made available.'

ExxonMobil Fawley first considered how land outside of the Fawley operational footprint could be used during a land review requested by Refinery Manager Simon Downing.

Following the in-depth review by ExxonMobil Fawley's Estates team, the New Forest Commoners Defence Association (NFCDA) was contacted to explore the full extent of the land's potential. The initiative advanced with ExxonMobil Fawley, the NFCDA, the New Forest National Park Authority and the New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS) working together.

The team at NFLAS worked with the then Chair of the Young Commoners, Oliver Cook, and local contractors who were also commoners, to prepare the site for livestock. Young commoners were able to express their interest in the land through a bespoke application process.

Julie Melin-Stubbs, Manager of NFLAS, said: 'It has been a pleasure working with the team at ExxonMobil Fawley over the past couple of years to identify these sites and survey them to assess their suitability for grazing.

'The two main areas of work for NFLAS come into play through this initiative: supporting commoning and encouraging sustainable, best practice land management to support nature and the environment. Many of these sites will become better for nature once they are grazed.'

ExxonMobil Fawley and NFLAS have recently identified two more pieces of land which will be rented to young commoners who were shortlisted in the original application process, Daisy Slocombe and Matt Pooley.

Julie added: 'There is still more land to be offered over the coming years as we get the grazing infrastructure installed so, in time, more commoners will benefit from this initiative.'

Simon Downing, ExxonMobil Fawley Refinery Manager, said: 'This year marks 100 years of a refinery on this site and is the 70th anniversary of the opening of the new Esso refinery. As far back as 1951 the commitment to supporting the local community and to being a good neighbour has been a priority for the site. That has not altered over the last 70 years and I can't think of a more appropriate way of celebrating this special anniversary than by supporting a centuries-old New Forest tradition right on our doorstep.'

- Ends -

Note to editors

### **New Forest Land Advice Service**

The New Forest Land Advice Service is an independent advice service for the land managing community in and around the New Forest and Avon Valley.

It offers support for landowners, farmers, New Forest Commoners, equine owners, graziers, Town and Parish Councils and community groups.

The service is jointly funded by the New Forest National Park Authority, the Verderers of the New Forest and Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

### **ExxonMobil Fawley**

- ExxonMobil Fawley is the collective name given to Esso Petroleum Company Limited and ExxonMobil Chemical Limited which are part of Exxon Mobil Corporation.
- The Fawley refinery is the largest in the UK. Approximately one in six cars in the UK operates on fuel produced at Fawley.
- Over the past six years, ExxonMobil Fawley has contributed in excess of £1m in community support.

### **New Forest Commoners Defence Association**

The New Forest Commoners Defence Association (NFCDA) has been in existence for over 100 years.

The NFCDA's primary focus is on safeguarding the interests of commoners, particularly around the welfare of animals turned out to graze the New Forest. The NFCDA works closely with the Verderers of the New Forest and supports members with legal claims.

For more information on the NFCDA please visit <https://www.realnewforest.org/about/>

## About the New Forest National Park Authority

### Protect - Enjoy - Prosper

The New Forest National Park Authority's statutory purposes are to:

-Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park -

**Protect.**

-Promote opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities –

**Enjoy.**

We also have a duty to:

Seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the Park – **Prosper.**

The New Forest National Park was designated in March 2005. Its unique landscape has been shaped over the centuries by grazing ponies, cattle and pigs which roam free. Majestic woodlands, rare heathland and a spectacular coastline provide fabulous opportunities for quiet recreation, enjoyment and discovery.

Visit [www.newforestnpa.gov.uk](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk) to find out more.

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Attachments

- Commoner Daniel Drodge's ponies on grazing land at Hardley Holt. [Commoner Daniel Drodge's ponies on grazing land at Hardley Holt.](#)