

Date: 18 March 2021
Our Ref: JR/saw
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Mr G Dalton – Chief Executive
Defence Infrastructure Organisation
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Hart District Council,
Harlington Way,
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Dear Mr Dalton

Residents have raised questions with the District Council about potential revisions to the Aldershot and District Military Lands Byelaws. We the undersigned, as District Councillors on Hart District Council, would like to express our concerns.

We firstly acknowledge and accept that much of the army training lands within our district are identified as Special Protection Areas (SPA), designated as such for providing habitat which sustains several Natura 2000 annex one bird species. As such we recognise that any increase in visitor pressure is to be avoided. Our district council has adopted policies to mitigate the adverse impact on the SPA resulting from new residential development through the allocation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

At the same time, we recognise the importance of these relatively vast tracts of lowland acid heaths as offering a valuable and locally much-loved recreational outlet. While encouraging people to keep dogs on leads during the breeding season and insisting that mountain bikers keep to marked trails, we would be concerned to see erosion of the freedom that people have to roam these lands, which the public have enjoyed for many decades and generations.

We also recognise that the general public need to treat the area with respect and to ensure that they keep the land clean and safe, particularly in regards to collecting dog faeces and not littering. Our experience is that the vast majority comply with such expectations. We also expect the public to respect operational training and not to interfere with or endanger themselves or soldiers by accessing the land during training exercises and manoeuvres. It would be reasonable to treat formal "Ranges" areas a little differently from open exercise areas. Beyond that we would hope to see a return to the inclusive regime which has for many decades successfully allowed the public to share the use of these lands with the armed forces.

We are particularly concerned that changes to the bylaws should not attempt to tighten the definition of metalled pathways as permitted for use by cyclists, a definition which in general use includes roads made of small stones. It has been suggested that the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) intend to limit their definition of a metalled pathway to just tarmacked roads.

We would like to see a presumption in favour of open access to the public which only forbids such access to those areas when in active use. We would also ask the DIO to look favourably at providing more access points through the fencing which now encloses the Long Valley area so as to facilitate strategic access to adjoining publicly accessible open spaces. This would also have the benefit of reducing the incidences of people cutting the fence.

One of the indirect consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic has been a dramatic increase in people experiencing mental health challenges. Access to open space is widely recognised as a simple but effective mechanism to combat some of the underlying stress which contributes to such issues. We would therefore hope that the DIO are responsive to the need of the local population to benefit from access to such open spaces.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in more detail, either in person or via a range of teleconference applications.

Yours sincerely

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Councillor James Radley
Deputy Leader of the Council



Councillor Chris Dorn
Hart Military Covenant Partnership
Representative



Councillor Chris Axam



Councillor John Kennett
Chairman of the Council



Councillor Sara Kinnell
Cabinet Member for Regulatory
Services



Councillor David Neighbour
Leader of the Council



Councillor Alan Oliver
Cabinet Member for Environment



Councillor Richard Quarterman
Cabinet Member for Commercialisation



Councillor Dermot Smith