

Minutes of MOD - HCAF Liaison Meeting – 9th December 2020 – MS TEAMS meeting

Those present :-

Lt Col (R) Mark Ludlow (ML) - TSO Security and Public Access Officer

Mark Sumer (MS) - DIO Access and Recreation Advisor

Dean Howard (DH) - DIO DTSO Security and Public Access Officer

Sandra Smith (SS) - BHS

Ian Russell (IR) - Surrey Countryside Access Forum Chair

Alan Taylor (AT) - Hampshire Countryside Access Forum Chair

Alan Marlow (AM) HCAF – representing walkers

Gill Plumbley (GP) HCAF - representing equestrians

Nick Chamberlain (NC) – British Cycling

James Nevitt (JN) – DIO Senior Access and Recreation Advisor

Apologies

Sue Coles, Andy Whincup.

1) Minutes of the meeting 30/7/20 were approved

2) Byelaws Review update

MS reported that there had been a push recently to complete the Byelaw Review ready for presentation to the Secretary of State and from there to public consultation.

The information given was for information only – and not yet for comment.

The land covered by the new Byelaws is divided into two categories;

Protected Areas that are closed to unauthorised persons and;

Controlled Areas where access is only permitted when the area is not being used for military training.

MS explained the management principles behind provision of access across the MOD estate as part of the Byelaw Review (BR) and the need to balance the sometime conflicting requirements of enhanced public access with the conservation piece. Within the Controlled Areas it was envisaged that there would be a system of permissive routes and permissive zones.

The BR does not affect public rights of way.

There remains no public access to all water bodies by unauthorised persons.

Public access to Long Valley, Area G2 at Pirbright and Ash Ranges RDA will continue to be managed by a system of gates and signs when the areas are in use for military training. **ML**

added that access points currently have a horse accessible foot/cycle gate with a flip sign which notifies whether the area is open or closed – a system which works well as regards military training whilst at the same time enhancing public safety and enabling public access when military training is not taking place. In the case of these areas' notification of opening and closure times is also published on the You.Gov site.

SS thanked Mark for the update but asked for clarification that horse riders would not require permits. MS confirmed that horse riders would not be required to hold a permit to use the permissive routes or permissive zones.

ML provided background information, explaining the problems involved with balancing wider public access and the legislative requirement to protect SSSI, SPA and other ecological areas across the estate.

AT thanked ML for the useful background. He agreed in principle with not permitting access during training – but queried how this was to be managed. He also queried whether the different sections marked on the military maps were discrete units and whether access would be allowed on areas not in use.

ML explained that this is how the maps are currently labelled and when allocating areas to troops allows deconfliction between different units and types of training which may take place concurrently.

AT commented that areas which are designated SSSI and SPA must also affect military training in those areas so could they offer assurance that the military would not damage land that the public is not allowed to enter.

ML assured that the ecologists would very quickly pick up on any such issues and that we have long established conservation groups for all our areas that manage this piece in close cooperation with the DIO environmental team. JN added that the MOD did its best to manage all estates appropriately and ecology was a constant concern.

AM questioned whether any consideration had been given to parking. MS responded that the military does not intend to provide areas for parking and nothing has been discussed so far beyond the agreed parking places on the map. This issue does not form part of the BR. AM pointed out that increased access would increase demand. MS responded that such details would be decided later as part of the bigger picture.

AM commented that much work had been carried out regarding the principles concerning the Aldershot estate and questioned whether such principles would eventually be applied nationally. MS replied that they may well be used as a boiler plate for further BR rollout on other sites.

SS asked what the implications maybe on existing rights of way. EG – would footpaths become open to bikes and horses. Also, would the military close public rights of way for training?

MS confirmed that public rights of way will not be affected by the proposals and that outside of the BR DIO will continue to improve access to public footpaths where appropriate.

IR commented that illegal use is a challenge and asked how effective policing could be enforced. MS replied that there needs to be clarity about where bikes and horse riders can and can't go and resources need to be focused where and when needed.

AM asked if there was any idea of timing for the review. JN replied that hopefully it would go to the Secretary of State by early January.

ASH RANGES

MS gave an update on progress. Part of the multi-user perimeter route has already been opened. The final intention is for a full circular multi-user route and this will hopefully be completed over the next couple of years. Some vegetation and culvert clearing has been undertaken and some resurfacing will be necessary from the old St. John's Ambulance station towards Ash Vale Station. There will be a CSF bid to carry on the circular route next year focussing on sensitive area.

Investigation of the area around Tunnel Hill is continuing and there will be a site visit post Covid.

PIRBRIGHT

MS has contacted SCC about the bridge at Cowshot Common but has had no reply. Currently the bridge is a foot bridge but if funding were available this could be extended for horses. IR offered to provide relevant contact details for SCC officers.

The bridge over the canal off Brunswick Road does not belong to the Canal Authority so the matter has been referred to Highways.

ML confirmed that neither the bridge nor the track on either side belong to the Canal Authority – just the tow path and the canal. Bob Milton has provided historic evidence that the bridge was the public highway. MS to contact the Basingstoke Canal Trust to discuss further following this new information.

MS has contacted Network Rail who have granted permissive access for cyclists and horses.

MS commented that once the Byelaws Review is completed he will examine different options available for the multi user routes.

BLACKWATER ALLEY

AT commented that the Blackwater Valley partnership is looking at ways to integrate their SANGS from Cove to Fleet Pond. The crossing of Kennel Lane presented a safety issue. ML replied that the route south of the railway track is utilitarian rather than recreational. Southwood woodlands are no longer part of the military estate. Wider discussion of this issue will continue.

CHILCOMB RANGES

MS has looked at the access points to the site. The signs are out of date and there is no way of knowing opening times.

AM said all that is needed is an up to date contact notice stuck on the existing signs.

MS will implement this simple solution but information needs to be accessible before the long walk to the gate is undertaken. The issue is where to put the information panels. Chilcomb has an active parish council who might help. Another suggestion was a virtual panel covering Chilcomb and Winchester.

WOOLMER FOREST

Authorisation has been given by EA to repair the bridge on the permissive track parallel to the peri track. MS to approach a local landowner to ask if a 30 yard section of footpath could be improved to a permissive bridleway in order to avoid a boggy section. There is more work to do – but funding has been agreed. An application to divert a public footpath in two places needs to fulfil legal requirements not to obstruct a public right of way. An informal consultation with the parish council was positive.

A Catterick video – Respect the Range Campaign was shown. Its aim is to educate the public as to the risks on the military estates. ([Here](#))