

THREE COUNTIES BRIDLEWAYS GROUP

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30th June, 2000

Dear Mr. Smith,

Site Meeting on Hardings Ride, Alice Holt Forest, 30th June, 2000

I would like to thank you for meeting us on site this afternoon. We realise that you only started your job as Rights of Way Manager with Hampshire County Council last January and there must be a multitude of loose ends to pick up and address; particularly since HCC were without a Rights of Way Manager for about a year. Hopefully you will now have a clearer idea of the problems aroundabout here. These were:

- A wide tarmac surface has been raised and driven across the BOAT to access the Forestry Commission car park. This gives the impression that it is the major road with the result that traffic on the BOAT, which should have the right of way, could be in collision with vehicles accessing the car park. In addition the tarmac is totally out of keeping with the rest of the surface of the byway. This could result in a horse slipping, especially if it was trotting or cantering as it passed over this metalled strip. It is an abuse of this ancient highway which has not been protected because permission was not sought and no consultation took place with the Highway Authority before the surface of the highway was interfered with. Both as a group and as individuals we have complained about the change of surfacing since it took place. We therefore say that it is not appropriate to assume that as the surface has been down for some time it may not be removed. We say that it should be removed and the BOAT reinstated to the original level with a material more sympathetic to the rest of the path which for the most part is turf. Possibly gravel or scalpins overlaid with turf would be acceptable.

There should also be a physical obstruction like an offset stile to force traffic accessing the car park to dead slow.

Last year the Access Officer for the British Horse Society visited the site and agreed with the Forestry Commission under the terms of their recently signed

concordat that a sleeping policeman and suitable signing should be placed either side of this crossing to warn of its existence. Because it is turf and therefore green it is not readily visible, especially to an unsuspecting visitor. We were therefore dismayed to see that there were no horsecrossing signs in place. One of the sleeping policeman signs had been removed as had the sleeping policeman itself. The explanation given by the Recreation and Access Officer for the South Eastern Region of the Forestry Commission, Mr Colin Palmer, was that it had only been removed for a couple of months while they were filming and the intention was to replace it.

I have to record that the only reason Mr Palmer and a colleague had presented themselves was to say that we should not be parked on the BOAT!!!

- The next problem was the unofficial access's the public had made to the BOAT from the play area on one side to the carpark on the other. This would take place both on foot and on bicycles. This element of surprise would cause a horse to shy, spin or bolt or simply not go past. It was therefore a severe restriction to the safe use of this highway. A possible solution may be to fence the entire length of Hardings Ride with sheep netting, where it passes the car parks and play areas.
- A very near miss indeed was recorded by one of our members when she was riding her horse along the BOAT during last week. A bicyclist who could not have known he was crossing a public highway only just missed her. During your visit we asked several members of the public if they were aware that they were crossing a public highway. In all cases the answer was negative.

We were relieved to hear that if an accident should happen in any of these circumstances then the insurance claim would fall on the Hampshire County Council and or the Forestry Commission. However no amount of insurance could compensate for the damage and stress such a situation would cause.

I expect you will recall Mr Palmer said that some years ago he had discussed with me the continuation of a path to cross the A325 to access a Public Bridleway No. 62 Binsted, but that in their opinion the A325 was too dangerous to cross. We say that it is not in his remit to decide whether the public should or should not be permitted to cross a road. That is a decision for the individual and every available safety measure should be made to enable the public to cross any road safely. I enclose a letter from Lord Sewell in which he says he agrees that Public Bridleways should not just end at the boundaries to Forestry Commission property and should be allowed to continue through and join up to existing bridleways on the other sides of the forest. Perhaps this is a matter which you could take up when you meet Mr Williamson. I would be happy to provide you with examples although you will probably find these in your files already.

We must not let you forget that you saw several places in the middle of Harding Ride which were very eroded and in some places deeply rutted with tractor wheel ruts. They are almost impassable at this time of year but are completely so in winter when they become lakes.

Headley Park Rifle & Pistol Club

We then visited the site of the Headley Park Rifle and Pistol Club. This problem still persists and again you will find all the previous correspondence in the file. At least I was able to show you a possible solution to get the horses off the road so that if frightened by the noise of the guns they would not be on a metal surface or mixed up with traffic. I enclose a copy of the 1815 OS Map which shows the route of the old road which is now a strip of common land and would provide a suitable solution to the problem.

I also enclose a copy from the Records Office at Winchester of the confirmation of the resolution to divert the road C102 by the Headley Park Club. I believe it was up to the then owners of Headley Park Club to make the diversion. As this has never been recinded perhaps they would be happy to exchange such works for dedicating a bridleway through the land they fenced off last July. In any event it seems there is a public right of way which has never been made available, and on the grounds that those bends are dangerous for all users we would like it to be made so. We have a strong claim of 20 year user which we have not yet submitted which follows a slightly different line to that shown on the old plan. I did show you where this came on to the C102 near the newly erected gate. Maybe I could show you the rest of the route when you are up this way again.

We thank you again for taking the time and trouble to come and meet us and hope that you will be able to resolve these problems for us. We look forward to working with you in the future and that your time with the HCC will be happy and rewarding.

Yours sincerely,

Maureen Comber
Hon. Sec.



PS Saturday 1st July. I have just checked the gate latches on BW4 Broxhead. I am amazed. They have been replaced and are useable. Ideally the latch handles could be a few inches longer but they are now negotiable. You may now tick that one off your list. Many thanks again we are most grateful for your intervention.