

22nd April 2005

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Legal and Electoral Services

West Berkshire District Council
Council Offices
Market Street Newbury
Berkshire RG14 5LD

Our Ref: MS/L14_0376/07_54015

Your Ref:

Please ask for: Miss M Sherman

Direct Line: 01635 519416

Fax: 01635 519431

e-mail: msherman@westberks.gov.uk

Dear «Title» «LastName»

BRIDLEWAY 18 THATCHAM – Proposed changes

West Berkshire Council is proposing to make some changes to part of the above right of way, following the development of the former MoD Depot at Thatcham into the Kennet Heath housing estate. Planning consent has already been given for 519 new homes and consent is currently being sought for about an additional 300 new homes on the site. Bridleway 18 Thatcham runs immediately adjacent to the site. It is not physically affected by the new buildings but it will be used by many more people when the development has been completed. I enclose a location map which shows the site and the route of Bridleway 18 (Map 1).

The bridleway can legally be used by walkers, horse-riders and pedal cyclists. It currently crosses the mainline railway by way of an "at grade" crossing. This is completely unsuitable and potentially unsafe for anyone other than an able-bodied adult walker.

Following extensive enquiries, it would seem that at the moment there is no equestrian use of the bridleway either across the railway (because of the dangerous crossing) or on the section of bridleway north of the railway (because of the urban nature of the route and the lack of links with other bridleways). It is well used by walkers and pedal cyclists. North of the railway, the bridleway is quite narrow and has the appearance and feel of an alleyway running between the railway fence and the old MoD chain-link fence. A new earth bund (2 metres in height, topped with a 2 metre high fence) is to be created as part of the development to reduce noise from the railway. This will run alongside the current chain-link fence and is likely to make this section of the route even more unattractive.

New footbridge across railway

Work to construct a new steel footbridge approximately 30 metres to the east of the at-grade crossing is just starting. The costs of providing a fully accessible bridge have unfortunately proved prohibitive. This has therefore constrained the design of the bridge to a simple up and over stepped design for pedestrian access only, although a narrow ramp adjacent to the steps which will facilitate the wheeling of cycles up/down both sides of the proposed bridge has been incorporated into the design. The design does however, allow for

ramps to be added/the bridge to be upgraded in terms of its accessibility if/when additional funding becomes available. The southern end of the bridge will link to the definitive line of the public bridleway. The northern end of the bridge will enter the Public Open Space forming part of the Kennet Heath development and will be linked to the Footpath/Cycleway – please see attached Map 2.

There are two proposals that I would like you to consider:-

Proposal A (see Map A)

The total closure of the section of bridleway between the points marked A, B, C, D and E on the map. This would close the at-grade railway crossing and the “Alley” section of the route. Alternatives to this route would be provided as follows:-

A public footpath on the section of path A-B, so in effect this section would be downgraded from bridleway status to footpath status

The provision of a 2-metre wide pedestrian footway through the new housing development parallel with the section C-D but north of the bund – see Map 3

The provision of a 3.5 metre wide Footpath/Cycleway/Bridleway alongside the east-west Spine Road (Urquart Road) of the development. This would give any equestrians or cyclists the option of crossing the tracks at the level crossing next to Thatcham Station.

The provision of a 3-metre wide north-south Footpath/ Cycleway to meet the northern end of the footbridge.

Proposal B (see Map B)

The total closure of the section of bridleway between the points marked D and E. This would close the at-grade railway crossing.

The down-grading of the public bridleway to footpath status between the points marked A, B, C and D.

The creation of a pedestrian link between point D and the Public Open Space north of the railway, to link with the northern end of the new bridge.

There would still be the provision of the 2- metre wide pedestrian footway and the 3.5 metre/3 metre wide footway/cycleway as in Proposal A.

The proposals could be achieved by using section 118 of the Highways Act 1980 to totally extinguish the appropriate lengths of bridleway and by using section 116 of the Highways Act 1980 to extinguish equestrian rights and to retain public footpath rights.

Please note that a minor diversion may also be needed to regularise the situation between Points A and B where the existing bridleway is obstructed by the housing estate to the west of the site. The changes would ensure that the definitive line of the bridleway is changed to follow the route that walkers/cyclists currently use, i.e. the north/south route. You should also be aware that the proposed western extent of the housing

will extend approximately 3 metres further west than the existing MoD chain link fence between points A, B and C. A brick wall with planting will be built alongside the eastern boundary of the bridleway between these points

New bridleway and circular route.

It is the Council's intention to try and obtain the provision of a new section of bridleway running parallel to the south side of the railway line. This would link the existing Bridleway 18 and Station Road south of the level crossing. It would then be possible to provide a circular route with Bridleway 25, taking in Crookham Common.

Consultation

I am writing to obtain your views on the above proposals. I appreciate the matter is very complicated so if you need any further information please do not hesitate to telephone Sallie Jennings, Rights of Way Officer on 01635 519070. She works part-time and is in the office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

I would be grateful if you can answer the following questions.

1. Would you prefer the Council to proceed with Proposal A or B?
2. If the Council were to make an Extinguishment Order to close the section of bridleway across the at-grade crossing, (D-E) would you raise an objection? It would be replaced by the bridge which can be legally used by pedestrians and cyclists.
3. If the Council were to make an Extinguishment Order to close the length of bridleway running parallel to the railway line (C-D) would you raise an objection?

It is hoped that the footbridge will be available for public use by the end of July 2005. It is also hoped to extinguish the at-grade railway crossing within the same timescale. I would therefore be grateful to receive your comments on the above by 27th May 2005 at the latest. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Michele Sherman
Legal Executive