

## **NFA Presentment on Proposed Cycle Network Extension to the November '24 Court**

Official Verderer and Verderers and the members of public attending court today, I am Sarah Nield, Chair of the New Forest Association, also known as the Friends of the New Forest. I am giving this presentment on behalf of the association as a further response to the Deputy Surveyor's Presentment to the September Court.

The forest and commoning face many challenges one of which is intense recreational pressure which is forecast only to grow over coming years. Thus, any proposal which adds to recreational pressure demands the Court's careful scrutiny in the light of reliable and robust evidence. Yet this evidence is presently lacking. We pointed out several omissions in our presentment to the October Court. Given our further work, I wish to look further at three of the more serious omissions.

Foremost are the Habitat Impact Assessments required by the Habitat Regulations 2017 to ensure that the forest as a protected site will not be adversely affected. Assessments are required for each of the proposed routes and the cycle network as a whole but the Deputy Surveyor has only promised these assessments. This is unacceptable. The Habitat Regulations make clear that the court must be able to consider these assessments when coming to an informed decision.<sup>1</sup> Conditional approval is not an option.

Our inspection of various routes suggests that quite extensive upgrading work will be required -in some cases stretching several hundred meters. For example, the proposed track to the east of Knightwood Oak passes initially through wet and boggy ground and would only be feasible with considerable upgrading work. Clearly certain upgrading work could adversely affect grazing, as well as fragile habitats. So how can the court make an informed decision and fulfil their statutory responsibilities under the New Forest Acts without full details?

The Recreation Management Strategy does call for a coherent cycling network<sup>2</sup> but only in the wider context of recreation focussed on "gateway" sites and away from the tranquil and nature rich but fragile areas of the forest.<sup>3</sup> We have asked FE on several occasions for the rationale behind each of the proposed extensions but, although promised, none has yet been received. Thus, we have had to speculate. I only have time

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<sup>1</sup> Habitat Regulations 2017 para 63. See also Government Guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/duty-to-protect-protect-restore-european-sites> and Stephen Troman's legal advice supporting the OEP's Report on Environmental Protection Regimes available at <https://www.theoep.org.uk/report/environmental-assessments-are-not-effective-they-should-be-due-practical-barriers>.

<sup>2</sup> Para [6.2].

<sup>3</sup> Paras [4.1 & 4.2] supported by expert research by Footprint Ecology see <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/managing-recreation/managing-recreation/research-into-recreational-use-of-the-new-forests-protected-habitats-footprint-ecology-2020/>.

to highlight a few of the more worrying examples. We are happy to share our fuller insights including those routes which we do not think present significant issues – mainly already gravelled tracks within inclosures. Incidentally I am reliably informed by entomologists that sandy tracks are home to endangered species which could be further jeopardised by intensified recreation.

The Ogdens, Ashley Walk, Cadman's Pool, Fritham network has raised significant objections already with which we fully agree particularly when there is existing access provided by Hampton Ridge. The distance of this area from "gateway" sites has contributed to its tranquil designation with a high risk of environmental disturbance. The proposed tracks from Matley towards Deerleap and Ashurst are also over unmade tracks in sensitive areas and the track across Parc Pale is over a site of archaeological significance despite a relatively quiet road nearby. Some routes, for instance near Janesmoor, are parallel to existing quiet roads so why replicate?

I reiterate the NFA supports a coherent cycle network and its role in sustainable transport - many of our members are keen cyclists and we recognise the popularity and benefits of cycling. However, any network extension must NOT jeopardise the forest we care so passionately about. We all seem to want our piece of this special place, and we have heard moving pleas both supporting and questioning this proposal, but the bottom line is that we must ensure that the forest and its unique treasures are not further jeopardised by our own activities whatever they may be.

We thus urge the court to postpone any decision until they can consider these proposals in the light of:

- full Habitat Impact Assessments;
- details of any upgrading works;
- evidence that routes will not intensify recreational pressure on the tranquil and more sensitive areas of the forest and fit with the emerging spatial plan.

Presentment to the Verderers Court 20/11/2024 by Richard Taylor – Chair of the New Forest Cycle Working Group - regarding the Forestry England proposal for promoting responsible cycling and improving the New Forest off road cycle network.

Good morning Verderers and members of the Court. My name is Richard Taylor, and I make this presentment as chair of the New Forest Cycle Working Group.

At the Verderers Court in September this year presentments were made by Forestry England and the Cycle Working Group proposing measures to improve the off-road cycle network in the New Forest and promote responsible use of the improved network.

Since September there has been a great deal of healthy debate and discussion regarding the proposal. We wholeheartedly welcome this as it is only by working together that we can break the decades long stalemate on cycling in the Forest and find a workable solution for all sides for the long term.

A Cycle Working Group online survey in early 2022 highlighted the problems with the existing system for cyclists. We had over 1400 responses. 91% were local with 71% cycling from home. 85% use the gravel tracks, but while 80% know they should stick to the approved network, only 43% know how to tell if they are on it. 76% want better connected gravel tracks. This paints a picture of a dysfunctional network desperately in need of improvement. These figures along with further details of the survey are attached as additional information to this presentment.

I believe there is some degree of misunderstanding of the proposals made by Forestry England with support from the Cycle Working Group, and I would like to take this opportunity to provide some clarification.

The intention of the two-year long process of developing these proposals has been to improve the situation from that which currently exists, as highlighted by the Cycle Working Group survey. To provide a coherent network and improve adherence to that network, with better digital and paper mapping, better waymarking, and a better understanding of how staying on track for all users protects the New Forest.

The Cycle Working Group have committed huge amounts of time and effort to assist with the production of a long-term sustainable plan. Always adopting a pragmatic approach in a spirit of compromise. Discussions within the joint working group with the Verderers have led to a far greater understanding of the issues on both sides. We have communicated this to cycling groups locally and nationally. The presentment made by Cycling UK at the October Court is evidence of the progress made and the chance we have at this moment in time to move things forward. We have also made every effort to ensure that the Forestry England proposals dovetail

with the separate process of producing a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan. We want to find a way forward, and we have made significant compromises along the way.

All of the routes have been considered individually. Many routes originally requested by the Cycle Working Group were removed from the proposal following detailed discussion with the Verderers in the joint working group.

On the phased introduction of the new routes, none would be introduced until all necessary permissions are in place along with revised waymarking. The commitment to update digital mapping on an ongoing basis would allow this to be accurately reflected in digital mapping apps with paper maps updated regularly. Cycle ambassadors will help ensure that this information is communicated on the ground.

An ongoing review and monitoring process would be put in place to ensure a long-term sustainable future for the network.

More detail on these and many other aspects of the Forestry England proposal can be found in the additional information supplied with it in September.

The Forestry England proposal fulfils the principles of the Recreation Management Strategy, and the New Forest Partnership Plan. It meets the purposes and duty of the New Forest National Park with its objective of increased adherence to a network of properly connected and maintained gravel tracks, reducing the impact of all users on the designated sites of the New Forest. The routes included are intended to reduce the impact on commoning activities following advice from the joint working group with the Verderers.

The ongoing strength of feeling around this issue has been amply demonstrated by the degree of debate and discussion generated. The cycling community have made every effort to understand the issues involved and find a solution. We ask that you accept the Forestry England proposals to provide a way forward that protects the Forest for the future.

Richard Taylor

**Additional Information for Presentment by Richard Taylor as chair of the New Forest Cycle Working Group to the Verderers Court on 20/11/24**

**Summary of the New Forest Cycle Working Group online cycling survey from Early 2022.**

Below is a summary of responses to the above survey which are relevant to off-road cycling in the New Forest. This provides valuable insight into the problems cyclists experience in the New Forest and the desperate need for an improved network with better connectivity, waymarking, and mapping. We have used this information to help develop our communications strategy for reaching the right audience should the revised network and measures to support adherence to it be approved.

There were 1441 responses.

1330 respondents submitted the first part of their post code. This showed 91 % were local (792 in SO postcodes, 308 in BH postcodes, and 113 in SP postcodes).

Of 1441 respondents 94% cycle as individuals, couples, or family groups.

Of 1427 respondents 71% cycle from home and 24% arrive by car.

Of 1441 respondents 85% use the gravel network for at least part of their ride with most of these using a combination of roads and gravel tracks.

On how they decide where to cycle off-road – 45% know the area well and don't need additional information, 20% use verbal recommendations, 45% use online maps, and 32% use paper maps.

Of 1423 respondents 74% cycle more than once a month.

When asked about problems with cycling in the New Forest – 76% wanted better connected gravel routes.

When asked about the status of the New Forest and how to cycle within it – 98% knew it was a national park, 78% knew it carried special designations, 80% knew they should stick to the approved network, but only 43% knew how to tell if they were on the network.

Of 1385 respondents 47% cycle off network. Two thirds of these gave their reasons for being off network as - desire to reach their destination more quickly/they were lost/they did not understand about permissions. Four fifths remained on gravel tracks when off network.

# **Presentment to the New Forest Verderers Court, 20 November 2024**

## **Cycling and Tranquillity**

Good morning Official Verderer, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning.

My name is Professor Bob Damper. I am a lifelong cyclist and have been a resident of Hampshire for the past 44 years, during which time I have come to know and love the Forest as a special place to experience natural beauty and solitude. Although I speak here as an individual, not on behalf of any organisation, I think it will help you understand my perspective if I say that I have been a member of the New Forest Cycle Working Group (CWG) for 13 years, I am a member of the New Forest Access Forum and of the New Forest Association (aka. Friends of the Forest). I was very pleased to be a part of the joint working party consisting of members of the CWG and representative Verderers, supplemented by officers of Forestry England and the National Park Authority, whose painstaking work over nearly two years led to the proposal presented to this Court by the Deputy Surveyor on 18 September.

At the following October Court, it was good to see a very full range of views on the FE/CWG proposal aired in presentments from a variety of local and national organisations, and the public. Many of the issues raised are addressed in the proposal. There is, however, one important matter that I believe calls for additional public discussion, namely the likely impact on tranquillity.

Tranquillity is highly valued as a rare commodity in today's busy, bustling, noisy world. It is frequently cited as a key motivation for people to visit protected landscapes, even more so than enjoying the natural beauty of the landscape<sup>1</sup>. It is explicitly listed as the 6th of 9 special qualities of the Forest in the National Park Management Plan, and it is heartening to note that you, the Verderers, have a published policy on tranquillity. It is important to recognise that tranquillity is highly subjective and, therefore difficult to define objectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Denise Hewlett, Lisa Harding, Tom Munro, Ainara Terradillos and Keith Wilkinson, "Broadly engaging with tranquillity in protected landscapes: A matter of perspective identified in GIS", *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 158 (2017), pp.185-201.

Opinions vary widely on how human activities affect tranquillity. To some, any human presence whatsoever is a detractor from tranquillity. But a moment's reflection tells us that it is simply not feasible to close down whole tracts of protected landscape to visitors. Ultimately, tranquillity is there to be enjoyed in line with the second purpose of any UK National Park; a purpose that all public bodies must seek to further.

Two important attempts have been made to map tranquillity across the Forest. The first was by ASH Consulting in 1996, using a methodology in which experts defined the factors impacting tranquillity. Areas of the Forest were assigned to one of five zones from A (least tranquil) to E (most tranquil). Based on the ASH report, the Verderers published their previously mentioned policy in 2007. However, the ASH report is now superseded by the Land Use Consultants 2015 New Forest National Park Tranquillity Area Mapping and the ASH report is effectively obsolete, being no longer available online. The 2017 LUC report sought to recreate the earlier Tranquil Areas Map of the Forest using the same 1996 methodology but more up-to-date data sets and taking account of the positive effects of land cover (e.g., the way that woodland can "dilute" noise from nearby roads), as well as covering a rather larger area and introducing an additional sixth zone of very high disturbance.

Since the Deputy Surveyor's presentment, concerns have been raised about the effects of the proposal on tranquillity. The minutes from 18 September record (p.12) that in Committee following open Court "It was pointed out that two routes go through tranquil areas<sup>2</sup> which is not ideal". Then on 16 October, a presentment from a resident of Ogdens asked for careful consideration to be given to the effect on tranquillity of adding the existing robust track through Hasley and Sloden Inclosures to network. And the Friends of the New Forest eNewsletter October 2024 states "we remain seriously concerned, particularly in the absence of supporting evidence, about the potential impact upon ... the tranquillity of the forest". With no disrespect to the Friends intended, after all I am myself a member, I think we make best progress by turning this around and asking what is the evidence that cycling is a detractor of tranquillity over and above walking, say?

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<sup>2</sup> That is, zone E areas.

Interestingly, cycling is barely mentioned in either of the ASH or LUC reports. Why is this, if it is as impactful on tranquillity as some would have us believe? The proposed routes in zone E are all on gravel roads engineered to support forestry operations. It is surely evident that if anything it is the forestry operations and associated access tracks that impact tranquillity, with the additional effects of cycling being very marginal indeed. The LUC report deals cursorily with cycle routes in Table 2.19 (p.32), which lists 31 categories of feature negatively impacting tranquillity grouped under Roads, Railways, Airports, Settlements, Electrical Infrastructure and a final group of Other Noise Disturbances and Recreational Effects. Careful consideration of this table reveals that Cycle Routes (included in the final group) have the **very least** impact of the 31 categories by some margin, with any disturbance limited to within 100 metres of the route and then only in tranquil zone D. This marginal impact can be readily appreciated by referring to the Tranquil Areas Map 2015 (Fig. 3.1) on which the current cycle network is barely discernible, if at all, and then only on the Fritham-Frogham gravel road.

Walking is not considered a detractor in either of the ASH or LUC studies. Why should cycling be considered more disruptive than walking? A recent BBC survey voted the bicycle humankind's best ever invention. To many, it is a thing of simplicity and beauty. The cycle is silent and fleet. If it is a visual intrusion, more so than a walker, it is not there for as long as a walker. And of course, there are far fewer cyclists than walkers: the 2018/19 Footprint Ecology New Forest Visitor Survey found that the main recreational activity was either dog walking (55%) or walking (26%), with cycling accounting for less than 5% of responses. One might well ask why a minority activity like this, with its positive benefits to the individual's physical and mental health and low environmental impact, should cause such unwarranted concern.

In summary, there is little credible, objective evidence to support the assertion that cycle routes in the New Forest have any serious negative effect on tranquillity. Although it is undoubtedly important, and should certainly be valued and protected, tranquillity is subjective and means different things to different people. Hence (quoting Hewlett *et al.*, footnote 1): "policy makers and planners should only consider tranquillity models as general guides". I



respectfully submit that the case has not been made to veto any or all of the proposed new routes on the basis of impacts on tranquillity.

Thank you for your attention.

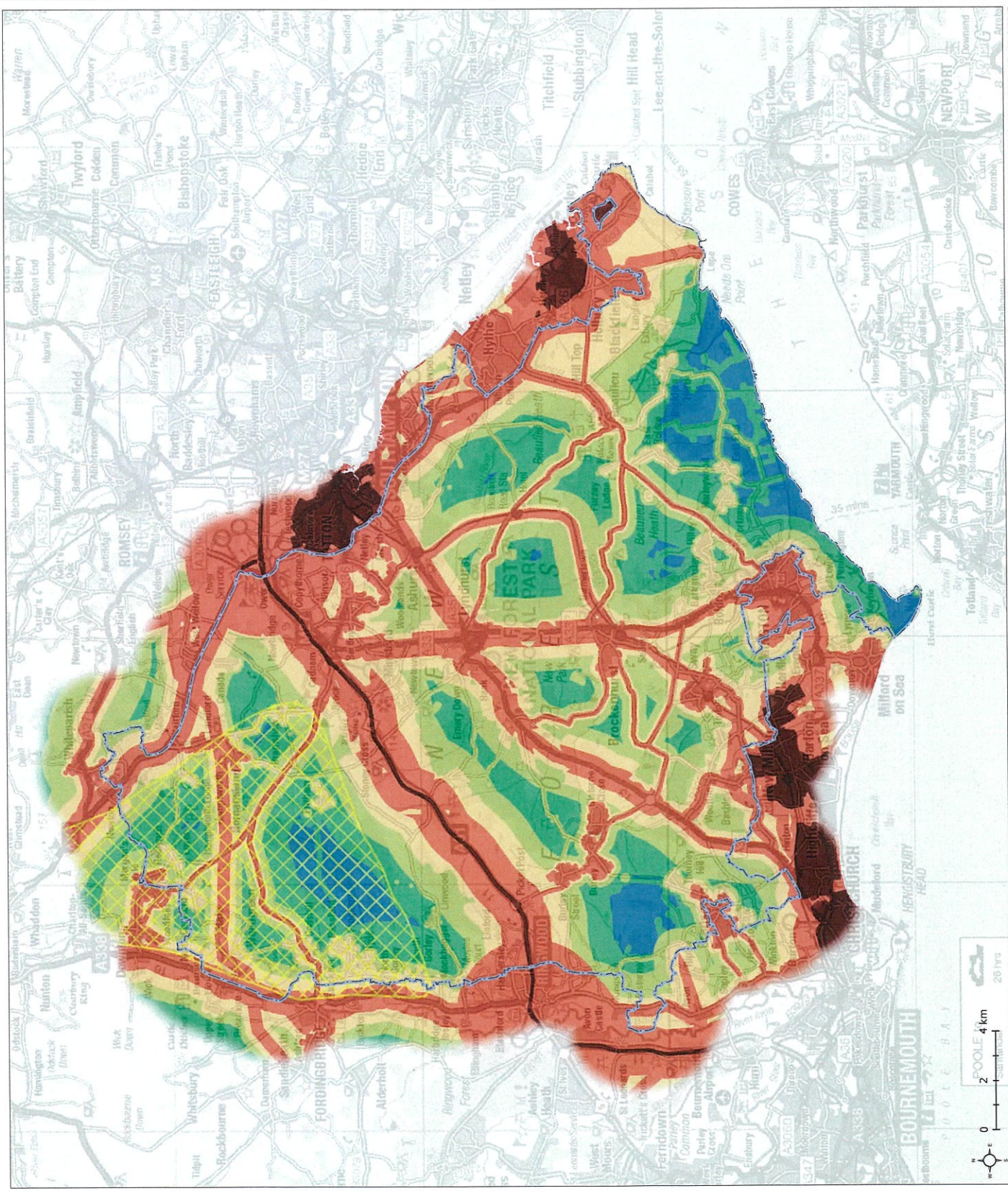
New Forest National Park  
Tranquil Areas Mapping  
2015

Figure 3.1

Tranquil Areas Map 2015

- Most highly disturbed area
- Level A (least tranquil)
- Level B
- Level C
- Level D
- Level E (most tranquil)
- Approximate area vulnerable to noise by light aircraft & military helicopters
- National Park boundary

Please note that this 2015 tranquil areas mapping follows the criteria used in the original 1996 mapping as far as possible. However some aspects of the original methodology are unclear and have been updated. Therefore this should be treated as new baseline mapping, and should not be directly compared to the 1996 study.



Map Scale @ A3: 1:150,000



New Forest National Park

Source: New Forest National Park, OS Mastermap, OS Vector Map Local, OS Address Base, OS Nerdian, Forestry Commission

LUC LDN 106\_5990-01\_025\_Fig3\_1\_Final\_Tranquil\_Levels\_250k\_A3 18/03/2015  
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Presentment by Greener Brockenhurst to the Verderers Court 20<sup>th</sup>  
November 2024

Good morning Verderers

My name is John Dickinson and I am here representing Greener Brockenhurst. Greener Brockenhurst is a community environmental action group formed in 2019 and we make this presentment to support Forestry England's proposals about enhancing cycling in the New Forest in which a great deal of effort has already been invested and considered.

Greener Brockenhurst is first and foremost an environmental group, not a cycling group ([www.greenerbrockenhurst.org](http://www.greenerbrockenhurst.org)). We undertake and support projects and practises which are environmentally positive including promoting active travel which is good for physical and mental health and for the environment. As a group we care deeply about the unique and special nature of the beautiful New Forest in which we live at the same time we acknowledge the health recreational and enjoyment benefits it offers to residents and visitors alike.

Greener Brockenhurst believes that Forestry England's proposals present a coherent and workable strategy that will improve the off road cycle network, will provide for better functionality, connectivity and accessibility for all. This will enhance the usability for local residents and provide better guidance for visitors so that they will be encouraged to respect the forest, its traditional ways and enhance the facilities in the forest encouraging visitors on whom many local businesses depend.

The benefits of the proposals that we see are as follows:

The sustainable management proposals in Forestry England's presentation of the 18<sup>th</sup> of September with monitoring and education will help to preserve the unique nature of the forest and protect the environment. They provide a balance between competition from an increasing population and

an increasing number of users with the need to protect the local environment

Improved signage will greatly help those unfamiliar with the forest and reduce inadvertent transgressions that may see cyclists straying into sensitive areas.

Safety of cyclists particularly young and inexperienced cyclists will be improved by joining up cycle routes. In Brockenhurst in particular Rhinefield Road from the village to the Beachern Wood car park is narrow and hazardous for cyclists with drop offs at the edge of the paved road that can cause significant injuries. Creating a cycle route from the junction of Meerut Road and Rhinefield Road across to Bolderford Bridge would be a massive improvement in accessibility to the extensive traffic free trails in the forest towards the Ornamental Drive and Lyndhurst.

A further enhancement would be to connect the Holland Wood campsite with the village where there is busy road traffic and very narrow pavements around Balmer Lane and the Bridge over the Lymington River and from the campsite to the traffic free trails in the forest West of the A337. This could be achieved if access through the New Forest show showground could be secured.

A longer term goal would be to create a traffic free or better cycle route between Brockenhurst and Lymington a short section of which is in the proposals. The present A337 is very hazardous for cyclists.

Greener Brockenhurst respectfully ask the Verderers to consider Forestry England's proposed proposals favourably.

May I thank you for your attention

**Response to Forestry England's presentment to the Verderers Court 18/09/2024 – A proposal for promoting responsible cycling and improving the New Forest off road cycle network.**

Good morning Verderers,

My name is Henry Mellor and with respect I make this presentment on my own behalf and in full support of Forestry England's proposal.

I was born in Croydon and from the age of 10 raised into adulthood on a croft in Argyllshire. I trained as a Chartered Surveyor, Land Agency & Agriculture, living in rural Scotland for a total of 35 years. I therefore bring this experience to environmental and countryside issues.

My wife and I moved to Brockenhurst 12 years ago. I have since been a Parish Councillor in Brockenhurst and served as the Disability Representative on the NF Access Forum. I am a keen cyclist both on forestry tracks and on public roads around the NF National Park. In my opinion there is no better cycling experience than this and I count myself highly privileged to have this peaceful and healthy pursuit available directly from my back door.

We all have reason to be deeply concerned about the loss of biodiversity in the New Forest, both amongst woodland and over heathland areas. This, of course, includes cyclists who need to be aware of how complex and sensitive the balance between nature and recreation is and of the importance of cycling responsibly to avoid damaging the Forest environment. Striking a balance between prioritising the interests of nature and the need for fresh air recreational facilities, walking, horse riding, cycling, using a mobility scooter etc., is not a task that can be left to chance or to endless rhetoric of who is to blame for its deterioration. Like any other complex task, it needs to be managed with consent and a willingness for cooperation on all sides.

The proposed Management Plan is the most compelling reason I have for supporting Forestry England's proposal. No doubt a cycling management plan would have best been implemented years ago when by now it would have had time to become established and have gained the confidence of stakeholders, including cyclists. With the likelihood, if not certainty, that pressure on the New Forest National Park recreational facilities will increase along with a growth in the surrounding population, there is surely a need for decisive and timely action by the leading stakeholders.

I applaud the dedicated commitment and foresight of the Cycling Working Group and of the main stakeholders who have come to the table in recent times, and I am grateful to the Verderers who have given groups and individuals the opportunity to state their views in this Court today.

I would respectfully ask the Verderers to consider Forestry England's proposal favourably.

Henry Mellor

Presentment to the Verderers Court 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024

I, Tim Kilsby, am a longtime resident of Brockenhurst and cycle, walk and run extensively in the New Forest.

I fully support the proposals made by Forestry England to promote responsible cycling and improve the off road cycle network in the New Forest.

The current provision for offroad cycling in the New Forest is limited and inadequate. As a network it is disjointed and impractical making travelling from one place to another, for leisure or utility purposes, more difficult and lengthier than it should be. It does very little to promote cycling. The proposals represent a rare and great opportunity to improve the situation.

More routes, both long and short with better signage, would encourage more people to use their bikes rather than their car. With public transport around most of the New Forest being poor, improving off road cycling provision is much needed and overdue.

With the climate emergency upon us, sustainable modes of transport, such as cycling, should be promoted wholeheartedly. The proposals would complement wider Hampshire County Council plans for the promotion of cycling, and, hopefully in time, lead to a reduction in car use and dependency in the New Forest. The drastic reduction in traffic during the pandemic was a very welcome, though shortlived positive during a terrible period for the country.

Cycling is a quiet activity which does not disturb the tranquillity of the forest. In my experience it is the drone of constant traffic, which can be heard in parts of the forest, which can undermine the peace. Encouraging people to explore the forest by cycling would increase people's appreciation of the beauty of the area.

The proposals promote active travel and would get more children into the habit of cycling. It is sad and to the detriment of their health, independence and enjoyment that safety concerns have driven children from using their bikes.

Obesity is a major problem nationwide- exercise, such as cycling, should be promoted.

Improving the network and signage would result in fewer people on bikes straying from marked routes accidentally. Whilst the vast majority people on bikes cycle very responsibly, any temptation to use unauthorized areas would lessen with a better cycling network.

Forestry England's proposals for keeping mapping updated, providing cycling ambassadors and monitoring are helpful and sensible and should ensure any changes come about smoothly.

I consider that Forestry England's proposals for off road cycling would enhance the New Forest as an area to visit and to live in. It would, of course, be sensible, as envisaged, to monitor and evaluate any changes, but I have no doubt that, should these proposals be adopted, they will be received positively by locals and visitors alike.

I urge the Verderers to support Forestry England's proposals which would be a very positive and forward looking development for the New Forest

Tim Kilsby 19.11.24

**Presentment by John Jackson, resident of Sway on 20th November 2024.**

I am here to offer my personal support to Forestry England's Proposals for an Improved Off Road Cycle Network.

My late wife and I chose to move to the New Forest when we started a family well over 30 years ago. We wanted our children to grow up in a small village, walk to school and have ready access to the countryside. Most importantly, we wanted the beauty and tranquillity of the Forest to be their playground and help shape their minds and bodies. We wanted to allow them an extended childhood, one we saw denied to our nieces and nephews in the cities. It was one of the best decisions we ever made - we love the New Forest.

We walked extensively in the Forest from when they were carried in a papoose until we couldn't keep up with them. We went on courses on foraging for fungi and berries. My wife and daughter rode and stabled our two horses off Mount Pleasant Lane. But we also rode bikes. It allowed us to cover much greater distances. At first we took our two children on our own bikes. When they were not much more than toddlers they got their first bikes and our rides went no further than the end of the disused railway line, on the way to Holmsley. Later as they grew older and stronger we extended our rides and regularly rode out for a pub lunch, often stopping to look at the flora and fauna.

There is little road cycling infrastructure in the Forest and as a result riding a bike on our narrow, busy roads can be dangerous, I know this only too well. Katherine, my wife, returning from the hairdressers, was knocked off her bike on Mount Pleasant Lane, suffering serious head injuries. At one in the morning I had to consent to emergency brain surgery. Parents do not want their children cycling on our roads.

In the early 2,000's sections of the previously Permitted Off Road Cycling Routes were cut. This was problematic, as some of the routes no longer made sense. Many ended up as short circular routes, ending some safe off-road routes for people to travel between our villages and to and from features.

Reducing pollution benefits both the health of the Forest and its residents. That is why I: walk or cycle when I can; use public transport if I can't and my car as a last resort. I believe we all need to do everything we can to encourage this.

I appreciate your concern that use of the Forest can threaten its very nature, a nature you are here to protect. As a resident I share your concerns but I believe that allowing people to more easily access wider parts of the Forest on gravel tracks will help your cause. Let me quote David Attenborough "No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced".

That is why I ask you to approve the proposals so that people can experience the Forest by bicycle. on an improved network of trails that join up sensibly and are easier to navigate with better, discrete signposting.

Good morning verderers and members of the court.

My name is Martine and I come before you today as a New Forest resident. I live in Sway with my husband and 7 year old daughter. We love living amongst the wild beauty of the forest and the roaming animals.

As any parent will know, getting children active can be challenging and walking 'range' is highly compromised. For that reason our favoured way to enjoy the forest together is to cycle. I love the joy my daughter gets from these outings and the exercise and stress relief that comes from connecting with nature for us all.

Currently our route options in the forest are severely limited. Often having to do out and back routes rather than more interesting loops to avoid riding on the roads, which put our family at the mercy of often impatient, inconsiderate drivers. A terrifying prospect for a young child. A situation which would be greatly eased by the proposed improvements to the cycle network.

It has also been hard to explain to a child why we are not allowed to ride on paths identical to the ones we are permitted on. Often just as wide and gravelled, but out of bounds because we choose two wheels as our method of accessing the forest. Afterall, cyclists do not erode where they pass any more than walkers and certainly less than horse and rider (according to multiple scientific studies\*) But yet, large tracts of the forest are out of bounds for us. We are residents of the forest, but we feel excluded from much of the tranquillity, beauty and nature that we wish to enjoy.

As a family we are advocates for nature and undertake regular litter picking in the forest. We wish not to destroy, rampage or terrorise other forest users or animals on our two wheels, as the Lymington Times often seems to characterise cyclists - please don't tar us all with the same brush. We wish only to enjoy its beauty and be treated as equals alongside horse riders and walkers. Only by giving the younger residents of the forest good and unfettered access to it can you hope to engage their interest and steel their hearts to defend this beautiful place for generations to come.

"You can not love what you do not know."

This morning, I ask you to Support Forestry England's proposals for improved management of cycling in the forest and a better connected network.

\*Summary of scientific trail erosion studies:

<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/comparing-relative-impacts-of-various-trail-user-groups>



Official Verderer, Verderers, ladies and gentlemen – good morning.

My name is James Aldred, I am a freelance wildlife cameraman and writer. I grew up in Ringwood before moving to Bristol to work at the BBC Natural History Unit. I own a paddock in the north of the Forest and was given permission to film wildlife in the Forest during the 2020 lockdowns. On the back of that film, I also wrote a book called Goshawk Summer.

I mention this because the focus of my work during that period was the wildlife located within the designated Northern tranquil area now under consideration for new cycle routes.

*I am not anti-cycling*  
*Simply*  
The reason I am here today is to raise awareness of that areas internationally rare and precious ecology in the hope that this will be taken into consideration ahead of any proposed development.

As a direct result of it containing less visitor infrastructure than other regions of the Forest, this area is an important refuge for many vulnerable species that have disappeared elsewhere as a direct result of human disturbance. These include *A quarter of* ~~17~~ species of birds currently on the UK Red List.

*17* Species such as cuckoo, woodcock and linnet which are now globally threatened and whose UK breeding populations have suffered a 50% decline in the past 25 years.

It is also a refuge for many species that often go unnoticed: all 6 native species of British reptile can be found there. Animals that are intrinsically tied to the highly threatened lowland heath biome. With only one sixth of the UKs original lowland heath now remaining, I would argue that the protection of our last remaining fragments should be of utmost priority. Indeed, the Smooth snake in particular is extremely rare, and under the

Wildlife and Countryside act of 1981 it is illegal – not only to kill or injure one – but also to *destroy its habitat*, either deliberately or by accident.

As we all know, the forest was hugely impacted by high visitor numbers during post-lockdown periods – many areas not usually accessed, were. I encountered numerous off-road cyclists well away from designated routes and even had to confront one chap armed with spade and saw, intent on building a racetrack through the middle of a Fallow rutting stand. An extreme scenario, for sure, but as unfortunate as that period was, it also offered a useful glimpse into the direct impact on wildlife that high visitor numbers can have.

It's not the act of disturbance *per se* that concerns me, it is the effect of an increase in the *frequency* of disturbance events. For example, a curlew flushed from its nest once will resetttle quickly. If it is flushed several times a day, it won't take long for predators to work out where the nest is and take the eggs. This happens regularly in busier parts of the Forest.

Indeed, of the 46 pairs of curlew that attempted breeding on the forest in 2020 - only 3 chicks successfully fledged. This was as a direct result of high human presence in hitherto undisturbed areas. I believe that this is directly relevant to the future of the northern area being discussed.

One might argue that the occasional snake run over by a bike, or a failed nest or two represents an acceptable level of attrition that should be absorbed for the greater good. I understand the desire to spread visitor impact more evenly across the Forest and recognise the need to provide equal access opportunities for all. But the fact is that many of these species now have nowhere else to go.

I know that most cyclists will keep to official routes. But <sup>I fear</sup> it won't be long before off-piste tracks become established by others through ancient woodland or across sandy heath. And once those cross-country trails become established, they will attract more attention until they become accepted as the norm, causing exponential erosion and disturbance. I <sup>doubt</sup> fail ~~to see how this can be policed effectively around the clock.~~

Surely, meaningful conservation should begin at home, and it is my opinion that such a development in the Northern designated tranquil area would represent the thin end of the wedge leading to further ecological damage of this fragile and unique region in the future.

As such, I urge extreme caution as I also believe that we are beholden to the next generation to ensure that we act as responsible custodians of *their* natural heritage. We have a moral obligation not to place our own temporary desires above the welfare of the environment.

Finally, I hope that ~~I am correct in assuming that~~ a detailed independent ecological review has been undertaken by a third party as part of the feasibility study for the proposed development.

Thankyou for your time and consideration.

20 November 2024

# Verderers court presentment

My name is Jo Lankester and I come before you today as a resident of Lyndhurst.

I have been coming to the New Forest for as long as I can remember: starting 40 years ago with my very first camping trip with my family, and since then spending countless weekends and holidays here. This year I was fortunate enough to fulfil a lifelong dream to live here after moving to Lyndhurst.

The New Forest shaped my childhood, helping to forge a deep connection with nature, and an appreciation of all the sights and sounds of the forest. I vividly remember early morning hikes to welcome in the dawn chorus, and spotting deer flitting amongst the trees on family bike rides.

As an adult, I have ridden my bike all over the world, and I believe there is something inherently special and unique about the New Forest. I love to spend time walking or out on my bike here: there's nothing better than pouring over an OS map to plan a traffic free route, packing a picnic, learning to identify the flora and fauna, and stopping at a cafe before heading home. Sometimes I'll ride on my own, and sometimes with friends. Sometimes, I'll see no-one but ponies, and other times, I'll share my ride with walkers and families on bikes, all enjoying their time in the forest.

I know I am extremely privileged to have had these experiences in the forest over the years. As a resident, I hear the daily grumbings about the tourists and visitors, with their accompanying traffic jams, busy highstreets, and cafe queues. But until very recently, I was one of those visitors, and I can't help but remember the joy, peace and tranquillity that coming here has brought me over the years.

I truly believe it is incredibly important for folks from all walks of life to have the opportunity to spend time in nature, and that we should be encouraging them to do so in a responsible manner, which respects the places we love. Increasing the number of joined up bike trails, improving waymarking and educating visitors would make a huge difference, improving access to the forest in a structured and planned way, and helping to keep cyclists away from the busy and dangerous roads, while avoiding areas of the New Forest that need to be protected.

It is our collective responsibility to protect our wild spaces in the UK, but how can we expect folks to understand what we want to protect and why, if they can't experience places like the New Forest for themselves?

This morning, I ask you to Support Forestry England's proposals for improved management of cycling in the forest and a better connected network.

# **Presentment by Sue Fenn New Forest Off Road Club**

I am here to fully support Forestry England`s proposals for Improved management of cycling in the forest and a better connected cycle network.

When I moved to the area in 2019 I would ride my bike out in to the New Forest using the lanes and roads to take my leisure but recently I have found myself more drawn to cycling off road to better enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the forest.

I pride myself on my navigational abilities but at times have wished there were more and better signposted routes for me to follow.

Fortunately as a member of the New Forest OffRoad Club (NFORC) I have been able to join some of their social rides and discover many new trails in areas of the Forest I had never experienced before.

I don't ride far or fast or frequently but I do look forward to meeting up with like minded others, and discovering the peaceful beauty of the New Forest together.

Ride leaders ensure everyone knows how to ride responsibly when in a group on the trails and on a NFORC ride we stop often to take in the sights sounds and smells of the place.

People share their knowledge of the very special flora and fauna. Local history is included and I have learnt much about the special place that is protected by the verderers.

Not all cyclists are the same.

Having recently retired I have more time to explore and as Natural England said in their Included Outside report 2022 about the importance of allowing older people to build connections with nature and to be active “people need a loo, a brew and something to do” and riding off road gives me those opportunities. Improved management of cycling, better waymarking and an improved network of trails would enable me to link together existing routes and spend more time in nature.

Often during a ride and always after a ride refreshment is necessary and I enjoy spending my money in local cafes and shops and supporting the other small businesses in the area. My increased knowledge of the New Forest has led me to spend more of my time and more of my money in the local economy and an improved network would lead me to find new and different places to spend my pension. People riding bikes like me, bring money into the local economy and traditionally spend more than people in cars, on average spending 9% more according to The Value of cycling report on [.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

## **Electric bikes on the New Forest - a presentment in favour of Forestry England's proposal to open up a further 40 miles of cycle routes**

Good morning verderers and members of the court. My name is Lynn Chapman and I come before you today as a person who enjoys riding my electric bike responsibly on the designated forest tracks.

I welcome Forestry England's proposal to open up a further 40 miles of forest tracks and the proposed new section that would make the most difference to me is from Longdown Inclosure through to Matley Wood, Lyndhurst and Denny Wood.

I note that the subject of electric bikes has already been extensively discussed in previous courts and in particular the meeting of 17th November 2021 where several presentments clearly laid out the benefits of e-bikes and where they stand in terms of UK law. However I also note from the meeting of 16th October this year that the issue of e-bikes was raised again, questioning whether their use should form an argument against Forestry England's proposal and by implication, suggesting that riders of e-bikes ride less responsibly and cause more damage - pure conjecture as there is no evidence to suggest either is true.

I think that unfortunately there is a misunderstanding between e-bikes that are legal and 'e-bike-like' machines which do not meet UK regulations and are in fact classed as mopeds or motorbikes, which are already banned on the forest.

I would like to take this opportunity to put the record straight once and for all so that this confusion does not arise again.

The UK Government quite clearly states that an EAPC (electrically assisted pedal cycle) must have pedals used to propel it, a maximum power output of 250 Watts and be restricted to 15.5mph. Bikes meeting these requirements are classed as a normal pedal bike and can be ridden on cycle paths and anywhere else pedal bikes are allowed.

Ref [www.gov.uk/electric-bike-rules](http://www.gov.uk/electric-bike-rules) (accessed 13/11/2024)

The law couldn't be clearer then, e-bikes that meet these requirements are legal and there is no reason to single them out. To do so shifts the focus away from and totally misses the far more significant point that all bikes should be ridden responsibly, regardless of whether they are electrically assisted. Forestry England's proposal has in place the recruitment of ambassadors to address this very point. To conclude then, the use of e-bikes on the forest should not be used as an argument against Forestry England's proposals.

This morning, I ask you to support Forestry England's proposals for improved management of cycling in the forest and a better connected network.

Presentment Verderers Court 20/11/24. Colin Palma.

Official Verderer, Verderers, ladies and gentlemen of the court,

My name is Colin Palma, I represent myself and my wife Annie. On 31<sup>st</sup> October we sent a letter to The Verderers, New Forest District Council and Forestry England outlining our views about the newly proposed off road cycle routes within the Forest.

We consider it huge privilege to live, drive, walk and cycle in the New Forest. Without exception, every time we walk or cycle in the Forest we feel the benefits to our health and mental well-being are immense. However, we are all too aware of the significant difference between the walking and cycling experience.

When we walk we are able to experience quiet contemplation, appreciate the landscape, its wildlife, and have a feeling of being in a wild and remote place, especially in the 'tranquil areas,' as defined by the Verderers in 2012, to which I address most of my comments.

Off-road life in the Forest generally moves at 3mph. Off-road cyclists can regularly exceed speeds of 20mph. It is inevitable the noise generated by cyclists, especially when in groups, changes the integrity and dynamic of the Forest. Their very presence destroys the peace and quiet needed to benefit wildlife and walkers. The disproportionate speeds they can reach render a genuine danger to horse riders and walkers. In essence off-road cycling is a highly disruptive activity to wildlife and anyone in search of peace and quiet. It is incompatible within designated tranquil areas.

We appreciate the current permitted cycle tracks do not always make sense, but responsible cyclists still have the option of using 125 miles of off-road tracks, can still use roads to make a circuit, and the



more adventurous can always access the nearby Ringwood Forest for more challenging mountain bike routes. In short, they have choices.

Only a handful of places in the whole of the South of England can claim to have defined tranquil areas. Indeed the overwhelming majority of the Forest does not fulfil a tranquil area. My cycling instincts encourage me to rush to embrace this proposition, but my love and concern for the Forest, and all that its history, its wildlife, its ecology and its future represent, lead me unequivocally to reason, allowing cycling within these areas not only threatens its future, but is eroding its value now. If there are any areas on our doorstep worthy of being regarded as sacrosanct, tranquil areas must surely be held up as one. Regardless of the benefits to commercial or recreational activities, losing tranquil areas is surely a price too high to pay. Once these unique places are given over to any disruptive activities they will be lost forever. They warrant being treated as inviolate.

Whilst Forestry England boast these new routes, quote, 'represent a once in a generation opportunity...and will result in real benefits for the Forest and all those whom use it,' we believe this is erroneous, because it will be to the benefit of one minority group at the expense of the majority of other Forest users, its wildlife, and its ecology.

Finally, history may judge this was less a generation of opportunity, but more the generation that relegated a unique and treasured national park into little more than a theme park, the generation that knew the price of everything, and the value of nothing, and sold out. Annie and I, therefore urge the Verderers to reject this proposal by Forestry England.

## **Cycling in New Forest**

Official Verderer, Verderers and members of the court

My name is Rob Crates I live and run a business in the New Forest

We are all aware of the impact of recreation on the forest; litter, fires, dog waste, erosion, noise disturbance and I recognise that this naturally can lead to fear regarding anything that might encourage more people and more impact.

I can see that the expansion of the cycle network might tap into this fear of ever increasing pressure and I want to share an alternative view. I believe that we need to accept that the cyclists are already here and will continue to come and ride whatever happens to the cycle network.

The real challenge is how to manage the situation and balance the needs of all the people who want to share this lovely area with the needs of the environment itself.

As you are aware the current cycle network does not work, lacking logical routes and connections. As a result, cyclists are accessing the tracks of the forest that make sense to them to access. Whilst there are rules in place limiting cycle access, these rules are not perceived as fair, logical or fit for purpose so are ignored.

Enforcement of any rules in this environment is tricky, and more often than not, it will rely on people choosing to do the right thing. The practicalities of enforcing rules is unlikely to be successful.

Far simpler to have a cycle network that serves the needs of cyclists accompanied with an educational programme and a set of recreational rules for the New Forest that apply to all recreational users and workers, not just cyclists.

I believe that rules are more likely to be followed if they are both environmentally logical and socially fair.

Environmentally logical rules can be in place to protect the flora and fauna, disturbance of animals and other people as well as managing erosion and

damage from use. There might be appropriate times of year to close or limit access to areas for all users or only have certain users on some paths.

When rules are socially fair there will be a consistency of access appropriate to the different user groups needs. This doesn't mean open access for all. Whilst paths can be shared, it could be socially fair for some paths to be exclusively open for walkers, if the needs of cyclists and horse riders can be met in other ways. In the same way that some paths could be open just for cyclists or horse riders.

By making transparent and explainable access decisions that balance the differing needs of people with the needs of the environment we start to stand a chance that rules will be followed out of choice.

If we look at the current situation in the New Forest though the lens of these two rules we can see why its not working.

- 1) Telling people not to access tracks that have been built to cope with forest machinery or not to use paths that are rutted with vehicle tracks is a hard argument to win on environmental grounds.
- 2) It is both socially unfair and environmentally illogical not to allow cyclists on tracks that are open to pony and carts.
- 3) It is socially unfair to keep cyclists away from areas on the grounds of protecting tranquillity. Tranquillity is often what they are looking for as well. If its acceptable for the hunt to run through, groups of runners or hikers to access and dogs to play off lead then the argument for tranquillity seems tenuous.
- 4) Disturbance of wildlife and stock is minimised when people and dogs remain on established predictable tracks. If we genuinely wish to protect ground nesting birds and create space for nature then in some places there are times of year when access off paths needs to be limited for everyone.

The cyclists, walkers, campers, horse riders and picnickers are here. This isn't really just a conversation about opening up more cycle paths its an opportunity to consider how to appropriately enable forest use sustainably for all users so that it can be enjoyed equally now and forever.

I actually think that the future that people are concerned about is already here, and it can work quite well. I was walking my dogs on Fritham plain this weekend. A good range of people were there, dog walkers, families, horse riders, and hikers enjoying both the gravel paths and the heathland tracks creating space for each other and also enjoying interactions with each other. In and amongst them cyclists using a logical but unapproved path, sticking to the gravel and fitting compatibly with everyone else.

This is the moment to get on the front foot. Enable meaningful cycle routes so cyclists have no need to venture off piste, and at the same time create an educational approach that embraces all users of the New Forest. Rules and enforcement will only take us so far, helping people connect with our landscape so that they respect it out of choice is key. Then as long as the rules are both environmentally logical and socially fair we stand a chance that people will follow them.

## **Proposed revisions to the New Forest permitted cycling network.**

**Presentment to the Verderer's Court, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024.**

Good morning. My name is Nick Wood, and I'm joint owner of a bed & breakfast business here in the village. Each year we welcome around 500 visitors to Lyndhurst many of whom come to cycle in the forest. The vast majority enjoy the cycling, however one thing I regularly hear is that the cycling routes are not particularly well connected. In addition, many feel that the existing cycle network is difficult to access from the village centre, involving pedalling along busy roads for some distance before they can escape the tarmac and traffic!!!

Rather than bring their own, a lot of our guests decide to hire bicycles during their stay. However, rather than using the shop here in Lyndhurst, many decide to hire from the shops in Brockenhurst or Burley. Doing this allows them easier access to the cycle network but does involve a car journey, before and after cycling, thereby unnecessarily increasing the traffic on our local roads.

On behalf of my guests I would 100% support the proposed changes to the cycle network.

On a related, but unconnected issue, I would also welcome any improvements that could be made to the sign posting of walks in the forest. Many of our guests spend a day doing the "Parish Walk" for example, however I regularly receive feedback on the lack of signage, and tales of guests getting lost. I have been told that there is a reluctance to put up signs as this is seen by some as "urbanisation", however I would suggest a few carefully placed posts would be very beneficial and help ensure visitors don't stray into parts of the forest they shouldn't.

Thank you for your time.

Good morning verderers and members of the court. My name is Jane Such and I come before you today as an avid cyclist and someone who appreciates and enjoys the New Forest.

I currently volunteer as a British Cycling ride leader and cycle coach. I am also a Bikeability instructor teaching Hampshire school children to cycle safely on the road.

I cycle mostly for fun. I am passionate about helping others to access cycling, especially women. British Cycling say that three times more men than women cycle for fun, to address this imbalance they launched a programme called 'Breeze'; to get more women cycling.

Sustrans research found that a leading reason women cycle less frequently than men is 'an intimidating traffic environment'.

The traffic-free cycling environment in the New Forest is a safe haven for me, and many of the women I cycle with.

I feel safer cycling and leading rides when using the off-road tracks. I truly appreciate the forest and the way I feel when I am immersed in it. I feel grateful that I have access to such a special place.

I am a responsible cyclist, as are those I ride with. I respect the forest code and as a cyclist, I believe sharing the tracks means I am very aware of my responsibility, not only for my own safety, but for the safety of others. I make sure to give priority to walkers, children, dogs and horse riders, and of course, to the animals who live there. I actively encourage the people I cycle with to do the same.

I support the proposals for a better-connected cycle network as this would increase my own safety and the safety of my fellow cyclists by giving us more traffic-free access across the forest.

I support the proposal for improved management of cycling. I believe improved signage and updated digital mapping information would guide future cyclists to stay on the official cycle routes while still avoiding busy roads.

I would advocate for the updated cycle guidance, by visibly following it, sharing it and talking about it with fellow cyclists.

I believe that cycle ambassadors would help embed and sustain the improvements.

This morning, I ask you to Support Forestry England's proposals for improved management of cycling in the forest and a better-connected network.

Thank-you for listening and thank-you to everyone who maintains the forest for others to enjoy.

Good morning verderers and members of the court. My name is John Kernick and I come before you today as a resident of Hampshire.

I was born in Southampton and spent all my childhood birthdays in the New Forest. As a child most of our trips to the Forest were, like a lot of people with cars, on the edges. Exploring came later, walking or on bikes and occasionally horses. The real magic of the Forest comes from spending time in its wilder places, where you hear Cuckoo or may be lucky enough to spot a Dartford Warbler or a Hobby.

At the moment the cycle network in the Forest is incomplete, cyclists are forced into making disruptive interventions in order to connect and continue to other cycle paths, avoid busy roads or to just start a journey from where they live. This can be hazardous to ground nesting birds such as the Dartford Warbler which choose the Forest as one of the only places in the UK to spend winters and breed in the Spring.

The use of dedicated trails by cyclists rather than potentially going off piste will be of huge benefit to the survival of these ground nesters.

The proposed additional 40 miles of paths, on the whole exist already, 90% of the proposed new paths just need a change of use. I personally think this will be huge benefit to Hampshire residents and will encourage a new generation to respect and appreciate this very special resource that sits on our doorstep. It will deter cyclists from wandering off the paths and onto heathland and will empower other users, walkers and cyclists to call out bad behavior. There will be no excuse.

This morning, I ask you to Support Forestry England's proposals for improved management of cycling in the forest and a better connected network."



Official Verderer, Verderers, Members of the Court,

Derek Bunyard, Hyde.

Verderers you have fought to protect the precious Tranquil Areas in the New Forest before, notably in 2009 and 2012. Please don't let that work be for nothing now. At the very least please insist on the precautionary principle until the full costs and impacts of the proposed cycle routes in these areas are made clear.

Three new cycle tracks are now proposed, running through the North West Tranquil area. This is the largest remaining specially protected tranquil area in the New Forest. It currently has the highest conservation rating. Latchmore Shade for example hosts a large number of rare species, including 18 recorded red-list birds. These are special places. There is already a well-used cycle track linking Hyde and Fritham which runs through the area. Three more tracks would effectively slice it into 5 or 6 pieces substantially damaging the tranquility which currently allows these rare species to exist. The Tranquil Area includes Fritham, a small village with a big car parking problem at the start of the existing track. Three more cycle tracks converging here would add to the problem since many people bring their bicycles to the Forest by car.

The whole Tranquil Area in the North West Forest is heavily protected under RAMSAR, SSSI, SAC and SPA. I would like to ask what is the exact status of these designations? I am aware that private individuals could be prosecuted and heavily fined for any infringement. Is Forestry England exempt from these important regulations?

Where are the Habitat Assessments for upgrading these tracks and for making new ones across these protected areas? What is Natural England's role in this, given that its statutory duty is to enforce laws to protect wildlife and the natural environment?

In general the existing Forest tracks belong to Forestry England and residents are obliged to pay for the right to access their homes. Each resident is also required to maintain the stretch of track outside their property, for the use of Forestry England and themselves, ~~not for large numbers of regular cyclists~~. What are the financial implications for the installation, maintenance and repair of these tracks to cope with greater use, bearing in mind that many (for example the one at Ogdens) are used regularly and daily by heavy tractors and agricultural machinery. With the permitted infill materials which are allowed, <sup>bitter</sup> experience shows that repairs don't last.

There are further financial uncertainties which need to be resolved and made public. Footprint Ecology's report on Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (2023) estimated works for mitigating the effects on conservation from recreation would cost £22 million. It considers aspects related to dog walking, car parking, Ranger involvement etc. but does not specifically consider cycling. Can the expense of new routes through the North West Tranquil Area be justified in view of the ensuing damage to wildlife and protected places? Before any decisions are made the costs and funding sources of these proposals must be calculated and made available.

Verderers please stand up for these special <sup>places</sup> ~~places~~ once more.

Good morning Verderers and Members of the Court. My name is Sue Barrett. I'm here as a resident of Ringwood.

I love the New Forest. And I love riding my bike. And as someone who regularly visits the Forest, I see how hard it is for many to navigate the current off-road network and to keep to the permitted tracks. It's poorly signposted and it's badly fragmented.

I have a vision that the New Forest can have an effective off road cycle network; that those who ride bikes can co-exist happily on shared paths with other users, all enjoying the benefits of quiet recreation; and that all users understand how important it is to respect the unique qualities of the New Forest.

For that to happen there must be:

1. Improved infrastructure
2. Raised awareness and education.
3. Monitoring

I see all those elements in Forestry England's package of proposals. Today, I would like to focus on the need for improved infrastructure with the proposed addition of tracks.

Mr. Parry-Norton, CDA Chair, in his October presentation expressed his concerns and recommended that cyclists visit the proposed new tracks to make an informed decision. And so, I have done that. And as I've walked along, I've been asking myself 2 questions-

- i. If I were to ride my bike here, would I be disturbing tranquillity or destroying habitat?
- ii. What benefits would there be?

Here are a few of my findings:

So many of the proposed new routes utilise existing hard packed gravel tracks already used by walkers and horse-riders. E.g., the track from Ashley Walk car park to Hampton Ridge. In fact, my 1994 map of New Forest cycle routes shows that used to be a permitted cycle route, as did others that have been proposed. Some of the new routes are on existing lanes currently used by motor vehicles. E.g., In Burley from the school to Church, and over at Ogden's. So, if I were to ride my bike responsibly on these already existing tracks, would I be causing anymore disturbance than other users? I don't think I would be.

Some proposed tracks are such good active and sustainable travel options that could reduce car emissions and congestion. E.g., From the West, the route from Ringwood, through Hightown to Picket Hill alongside the A31 to Picket Post would mean I would leave my car at home more often and travel by bike more often because it provides a direct, safe off-road route onto the Forest network. From the East, the tracks suggested from Ashurst Station, across Matley Heath, alongside White Moor, and into Lyndhurst could have such a significant impact for encouraging people to travel by train, then bike, safely into the Forest without the need to bring a car.

Some will bring a car though. And so, the proposed new sections that link a car park directly to the cycle network (e.g. Anderwood, Knightwood Oak, Bolton's Bench, Dibden, Sway) could bring significant benefits:

They would be influential in channelling cycle behaviour directly onto permitted tracks.

The car park could provide a space for awareness raising and information.

These additions represent improved, safe access for other users directly onto the network such as those with children and pushchairs or those with a wheelchair.

It's not just people who ride bikes who could benefit from these proposals. It's all of us who love the Forest and want to protect it.

If nothing is done, people will continue to get lost, or continue to cycle along their own made-up route.

If nothing is done, we will not be moving towards a culture of more sustainable, active travel.

If nothing is done; if people are denied access to green spaces and tranquillity, and if children do not have meaningful connections with nature, then the long-term success of nature conservation is under threat.

I therefore ask you to accept Forestry England's proposal for promoting responsible cycling and improving the New Forest off road cycle network.

Verderers Court  
20 November 2024

Local Resident  
Brian Tarnoff

## Recreation Proposals and Management Strategy

Good morning, last month I confused all but a few people here. While many were either supporting the FE backed Cycle Working Group proposals for offroad cycle network changes on the Crown Lands without any acknowledgement of the impact of those changes, while others picked rather easily picked holes in the well meaning but poorly presented scheme. I did neither but simply asked the Verderers to await feedback from both the Access Forum and the Recreation Management Strategy Advisory group, both of which are still to consider the detailed route extensions\*.

My complaint was not about the proposal or anything about the Cycle Working Group, but the way in which Forestry England has brought this forward, not just not bringing the proposals to those required advisory groups in a timely fashion, but the lack of necessary detail.

The extended routes were published as one map of the whole Forest with over 30 squiggles showing the routes. No rationale, no risk, habitat and tranquillity impact assessments, no note of current suitability, condition, safety, need for investment and maintenance of any route. Just squiggles. If in my professional life I'd submitted a such a thin project specification, I would have been fired on the spot.

These aspects of the proposals may well have been considered by the Cycle Working Group, but they are not evident in the current documentation†.

Forestry England's remit for the Forest, as expressed in the Minister's Mandate puts Conservation as the primary objective. Even without this, legally within the National Park, and as members of in the Park's Partnership Plan, this is also the case. Some ecologists including those from the NFA have judged some routes unsuitable. Forestry England have ecologists, and have access to Natural England who could weigh in, but not even a preliminary report has been shared.

This puts the Verderers in an uncomfortable position, not having received a fully vetted proposal, they may be the ones who have to say "no" to some of the routes, which both FE and NE would have had to block.

Forestry England and the Verderers are partners in the National Park Authority's Recreation Management Strategy. This acknowledges that we've inherited an outdated infrastructure of car parks and campsites. The planned solution is a new spatial strategy to determine better locations, but no criteria or evidence base for such a plan has been revealed. Any proposals built on the old infrastructure only serves to promote continued use and therefore a perceived need. Without a coherent Strategy all proposals for recreation including the current cycling proposal are hopelessly undermined. For example: investing time, effort and public money promoting routes to and from car parks that may be for good reason be shut in the near future.

Inevitably, cyclists may be frustrated. I hope they will be patient, but also acknowledge that the New Forest is not a leisure park, but land with the status and management of a National Nature Reserve‡, with livestock and working Forestry. Legal and policy protections for habitat and the other special qualities of the National Park, will rightfully limit recreation. A proper Recreation Management

Strategy could include a successful, practical, sustainable, and well considered review of cycling provision on the Forest. I ask that the Verderers encourage their partners in FE and the National Park to deliver one §.

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\* The Verderers will be aware elsewhere of the issues that arose out of the former via the email I sent to New Forest Local Access Forum Chair, Caroline Rackham on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024, and copied for their information.

† I'm given to understand some rationale documentation may be published this month, but it's useability against the existing map is to be seen – the onus is on those backing a proposal to make the information coherent, and complete and not issued, piecemeal upon request.

I'm reminded of the pig's ear made of the Materials Movement document for the Latchmore proposal, which included a document that presented information as a series of 22 tiny spreadsheets, some of which only had one line of data, a few had a single cell. I was able to easily present this consolidated into 3 tables, and added summary tables for useful analysis:

<https://newforestassociation.org/material-world/>

‡ The New Forest, Colin R. Tubbs, 2001, New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust. pg 33

In 1959 the Forestry Commission and NCC signed a joint Minute of Intent in which the Commission formally accepted 'the importance of the New Forest as an area of National Nature Reserve status' and agreed to consult the NCC over the preparation of management plans and annual programmes of management work. Consultation later became a legal requirement under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. A new Declaration of Intent, this time between the Forestry Commission, English Nature and the Verderers, was signed on 25 July 1995.

Two clauses are of key importance:

Clause 14:

The Forestry Commission will continue to manage the New Forest as an area with the status of a National Nature Reserve, and to maintain the nature conservation interests for which it is designated under national and international legislation or agreements.

Clause 18: The three organisations declare that the prime objective of management shall be the conservation of the traditional character of the New Forest. All parties will agree a general management strategy which will form an appendix to this Minute of Intent, the whole being included in the Forestry Commission's Management Plan for the Forest.

§ I won't repeat my criticisms of the current aspiration filled, strategy absent RMS which include Presentments from January and May 2018.