

Public Rights of Way Team,
Floor 2, Riverside,
Temple Street,
Keynsham.
BS31 1LA

8 October, 2007

Re. Bath and North East Somerset Council (Public footpath BA22/17(part) Bridge Farm, Southstoke) Public footpath diversion order)

Dear Mr Higgins,

I wish to object to this order on the following grounds:

This footpath is part of the Limestone Link route and runs through an area designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The council has a stated policy of protecting this Right of Way in its Local Plan.

To divert and reduce the width of this footpath for 350 metres would in my opinion seriously reduce the attractiveness of this part of a highly popular recreational walk. If this part of the Limestone Link is reduced to as little as 1.2 metres (as the unauthorised diversion currently does) then what is to stop other landowners doing the same. The whole of the Right of Way could then be reduced to a footpath that a lot fewer people would choose to use as a recreational walk. To be attractive to walkers a recreational footpath needs to be wide enough to allow 2 people to walk comfortably side by side, or to allow people to easily pass each other without standing aside. Although a short distance of narrow footpath may well be acceptable, a distance of 350 metres is not.

Footpaths that are fenced in on both sides invariably become more restricted as time goes on. A pathway of perhaps 2 metres width that seems acceptable at first quickly becomes reduced to less than 1 metre by undergrowth and/or hedge growth. A good example of this is the recently fenced-in Right of Way close to Rainbow Wood farmhouse. At least in this instance the farmer appears to have good reason to enclose the footpath as the field was used for lambing. Whereas at Bridge Farm the field has been notably lacking of any livestock since the unauthorised diversion was created.

During the spring of this year it became obvious that the proposed footpath would present problems that never occurred before. The unauthorised diverted footpath became extremely muddy and slippery with only a collapsed barbed-wire fence between the path and a sheer 4-metre drop. The path felt extremely dangerous to use.

The council has in its Local Plan recognised the ever-increasing demand for recreational walks thus:

'B4.2 The demand for sport, recreation and leisure grew steadily throughout the 1980s and 1990s and this trend is likely to continue. Principal areas of growth include the participation of women, the middle-aged and elderly and non-professional workers. Although membership of clubs for formal sports remains low there is a considerable growth in the participation in informal recreation. This is reflected in Bath and North East Somerset where walking in the countryside and swimming are the most popular activities.'

The Local Plan also states:

'Development which adversely affects the recreational value of or access to existing and proposed routes for walking, cycling or horse riding including those shown on the Proposals Map and other public rights of way will not be permitted.'

This included:

'Existing

Limestone Link: Compton Martin to Hinton Blewett and along Cam Valley to Dundas Aqueduct; along Kennet and Avon canal towpath and St. Catherine's Valley to Monkwood Reservoir.'

The best way of ensuring that no development (that would affect the recreational value of this footpath) takes place here, would be to keep the Right of Way on its original line (as stated in the definitive map statement) and to a width that reflects its original historic width. This would ensure that this part of the Limestone Link retains its undoubted attraction for all walkers.

The BA22/17 Right of Way is unique in that in addition to the picturesque quality of the Cam Valley, it also follows the historically interesting route of the old Somerset Coal Canal. The Somerset Coal Canal features in the Local Plan as a place of Special Historical Interest. Knowing that you are walking the same canal towpath that had been in use more than 200 years ago adds greatly to the joy of walking here.

Finally, I would question whether the notices posted on-site with regard to this order complied fully with the Highways Act 1980. The notices appear to have been fixed in an inconspicuous position to the fences that obstruct the legal Right of Way rather than conspicuously at each end of the Right of Way (part) it is proposed to divert.

Clearly the act intended that all users of a footpath would be made fully aware that a diversion order had been made and that objections could be submitted if they chose to do so.

In this instance as the landowner had already created an unauthorised diversion, was the council not under an increasing obligation to ensure the notices were conspicuously displayed where footpath users would see them?

Yours Sincerely

Maurice Nash.