

SHREWSBURY & DISTRICT RIDING CLUB
AGM – 15th November 2011 - ACCESS & BRIDLEWAY REPORT

A lot has happened since I gave my annual report to you last November, and I have kept you up to date in my Bridleway reports in the Spring and Summer newsletters, especially with regard to Shropshire Council who, as I told you in June, have both cut back and reorganised their Countryside Services, amalgamating them all into what is now called Outdoor Recreation. They now cover Recreation and Play Areas and Parks and Countryside Sites as well as all aspects of Rights of Way. They hope to have all in place by December, but there will be less people to do all the work. Shropshire Council had achieved a great deal over the last few years improving the rights of way network; it is going to be down to all of us to help to maintain these improvements for the future.

It is important that people still report any problems they encounter, either via Shropshire Council's Call Centre on 03456789000 or on the Council's website. They need to know of any problems, but will only prioritise those that are a danger to the public, or are part of a promoted route: the rest will be dealt with as and when possible. Local Parish Paths Partnership Groups may be able to help with resolving things more quickly, so do consider joining or forming one in your area.

Please don't forget the BHS www.horseaccidents.org.uk Website. It is important that you report any road accidents, and any incidents with dogs, slippery roads, gates, windfarms, fireworks and low flying, as they need the statistics to take things forward. They are going to be adding Chinese Lanterns, and bird scarers to their list of categories, in a few weeks time, but you can still report those now on the site.

I have responded to member's queries and access problems and continue to represent you at the Shropshire Riding & Carriage Driving Groups forum supported by Linda Russell and, as liaison officer from the club to the BHS, I work with and support Angela Williams, the BHS County Access & Bridleway Officer. I have also responded on your behalf to consultations on The Local Transport Plan Provisional Strategy for 2011-2026, where, yet again, they seem to have forgotten that horses exist on County Highways; The National Grid Mid Wales Connection Project, which could impact greatly on Shropshire; and The Independent Panel on Forestry "Call for Views", for which I did an analysis of all the access available in Shropshire's Forestry Commission woodland. We are lucky that we currently have free access on roads and tracks in most of Shropshire's FC woodland, but of course that could all change if any is sold off or passed on to other organisations to manage; and I have also responded on the National Planning Policy Framework, where many organisations are concerned about the impact that relaxed planning regulations could have on the countryside, and many riding routes may be compromised or lost due to planning decisions.

I continue to campaign on reinstatement and maintenance of unsurfaced Unclassified County Roads. I am currently trying to get the Council to produce a definitive list of Shropshire's County roads, as we have for Rights of Way, in order to stop the current problem of unmade up bits of road disappearing from their maps. Shropshire's Countryside Recreation Team have now taken over the maintenance of a number of unsurfaced roads used mainly for leisure. This is a good result, as for leisure they are the higher status routes, but for highways they come bottom of the pile!

I have recently campaigned, successfully, to get the information on the access through for walkers, cyclists and horse riders during road closures reinstated on the Temporary Traffic Regulations Orders. I was told they had been cut out to save printing costs. My suggestion of a general heading saying access available unless otherwise stated on individual orders has been adopted. They also now have this information on Shropshire Council's website under Road Works. Road repair crews were turning riders back when they had a legitimate right to go through. The Orders mainly apply to motorised traffic unless, for instance, a bridge is missing.

I recently attended the BHS National Access Conference as your representative. There were some interesting and encouraging speakers and presentations. Of special interest was the presentation on

enforcement by a Cornwall Council Officer. They stand no nonsense, and have achieved a great deal, especially with avoiding repeat offending in cropping and obstruction of routes.

I reported to you in June the excellent news that the three landowners had dedicated the through route of The Vinnals Bridleway. We thank the landowners for their common sense approach in recognising the use and status of the route and avoiding years of costly legal procedures, and hope that this will inspire other landowners to follow suite. Shropshire Council can prioritise route dedications.

There is plenty of room in the countryside for everyone and it is important that, as Richard Benyon, the Minister for the Natural Environment stated “local authorities make the most of their off-road networks through integration of use”. We share our riding routes with all categories of user, including cyclists. It is important that cycling routes are available to horse riders.

It is also important that everyone uses routes with consideration for others, which is generally the case. There is however concern at present over New Mountain Bike Maps that have recently been published, jointly by Shropshire Council and The National Trust, promoting cycle routes on a number of the Long Mynd bridleways as “very fast” or “fast” downhill tracks, including the Jack Mytton Way down into Carding Mill Valley which is described as “fast flowing technical track”. This wording, encouraging speed, could be misleading to cyclists who may not realise that by law they must give way to walkers and to horse riders on bridleways. We have been assured that warning signs to cyclists will be put up in appropriate places, and that “more sympathetic language” will be used in the next reprint, but as we understand 10,000 have been printed, that could be sometime away.

I am currently busy writing up a number of circular riding routes to the North of the 10 ‘Ride Shropshire South Shropshire Hills’ routes, which link to the other route I am working on; the linear Humphrey Kynaston Way from the Jack Mytton Way on the Long Mynd, to Nesscliffe and Grinshill. Due to cuts there may not be funding to print leaflets, but it is hoped to have them available soon to download on Shropshire Council’s www.shropshireriding.co.uk website where all the promoted routes in Shropshire are available.

I would also encourage you to use the countryside stewardship permissive routes whilst you still can. Two new ones just slipped in before the deadline at Farley and at Hem Lane, both to the north of Minsterley, and now with maps on the website <http://cwrnaturalengland.org.uk> but a number are coming to the end of their 10 years, and, under current policy, they will not be renewed.

Good on and off-road provision is very important for equestrians. Please do not take your riding routes for granted. Many are only on the definitive map and kept in good condition, due to the hard work of volunteers. Horse owners are busy people, but if we all give just a little time in our local area, together we can achieve a great deal, and keep the access to our beautiful Shropshire Countryside for future generations of horse riders to enjoy.

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