

Highways Act 1980 - Section 118 & s119

Dorset Council (Part of Bridleway 80, Beaminster at Chantry Farm)  
Public Path Diversion Order 2023

Dorset Council (Part of Footpath 79, Beaminster at Chantry Farm)  
Public Path Extinguishment Order 2023

Landowner response to Mark Oppe's Statement of Case

The diverted bridleway proposal has received overwhelming support from a wide cross-section of the local public and regular users, including those with concerns around; 1) mobility and accessibility, 2) flooding and erosion impact of works to B80, 3) biodiversity and ecology, 4) RDA and rider access. This is further evidenced by universal use of the proposed new bridleway for over two and a half years.

The proposal is also supported by additional key relevant active interest groups, notably the BHS, West Dorset Wilding and the Ramblers, who all support this proposal for appropriate and improved public enjoyment and access.

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In response to selected points made in Mr. Oppe's statement of case (shown in red font below), please see our comments (in black font):

"2.1. Bridleway 80 ( B80 ) and Footpath 79 ( F79 ) are historic routes and public rights of way shown on the Definitive Map and 1846 Tithe Map of Beaminster. A continuation of B80 north of Beaminster Down forms part of the Monarch's Way."

"2.2 The section of B80.... is a "Holloway""

See Richard Meatyards, Ramblers Statement of Case, 7/1/26, which questions this assertion

- The Tithe Map (1843) suggested a possible "blind lane" due to an untithed strip with multiple adjacent ownerships, but this is undermined by the route appearing from the public highway disconnected at point A.
- LIDAR mapping shows no evidence that the route continued northward from F to link with Beaminster Down Road or the continuation of Bridleway 80, which would be expected of a genuine through-route holloway.

"2.3 .... The Holloway north of Chantry Farm, B80, if unobstructed, would be an important resource for Beaminster."

"6.14.3.1 The extinguishment of the Holloway will be a great loss to the enjoyment of the public and residents of Beaminster, due to its historic, ecological, educational and recreational value."

The B80 has been largely unused and technically impassable since the 1950s, it being "overgrown and fallen in" due to land slip. We reference the Beaminster Town Council's 1951 Survey, and the Ramblers' Milestone Survey of 1999. Also see Dorset Council's response to the OSS dated 24th November 2023.

Further, several letters of support, evidencing broad public opinion, suggest B80 would never be used in preference to the proposed new bridleway, were it excavated, This has been in use for at

least the last two and a half years: See landowner submission points 5,7 & 8 for landowner and broader public commentary on accessibility suitability, and a firm preference for walking point O to B on the proposed new route which is similar to the adjacent B80 route – reference landowner submission point 1.

Reference points 13, 14 & 15 of Landowners Submission regarding biodiversity commitment for the future of the bridleway, along with suggested future public viewing access and education, along with the positive impact on Dorset Council's RoWIP, without the need for invasive excavation.

The senior archaeologist, The Ramblers and all letters of support that address the suggestion of excavating B80 to achieve standards suitable for walkers and riders, make the point that this risks damaging the very historic fabric they would be seeking to preserve, and that any moderate archaeological gain would not outweigh the ecological impact.

**“4. ....there is no suggestion or evidence that the condition of the bridleway is due to an event such as a land slide, it is due to neglect.”**

This is not correct, see the area north of Point D where the bridleway turns eastward. Again, see Richard Meatyards', Ramblers Statement of Case, 7/1/26, along with the historical reports from Beaminster Town Council and The Ramblers, referenced above;

- The 1951 Parish Survey states the bridleway was "completely overgrown and fallen in" — the phrase "fallen in" is the closest any document comes to explicitly describing structural collapse of the path or its sides.
- The 1999 Ramblers Milestones Survey records that "this bridleway is overgrown, flooded and is to all intents impassable" — confirming the deterioration was longstanding and pre-dated the current owners.

**“2. The present route of F79 between Point B and M is currently almost impassable in wet conditions and will be made more difficult if shared with horses. Less than 3% of the population ride and if the Application is successful the majority of the public who walk will be materially disadvantaged.”**

We reference point 16 of landowner's submission: Point B to M has been part of the shared permissive route for over two and a half years, so already used by horse riders and walkers alike for that period.

Whilst this section can be muddy, it is in the same condition as it was prior to this shared status, indicating the addition of horse riders has had no negative impact on the condition of the surface. Further, taken as a whole, the proposed new bridleway has a more suitable surface and accessibility credentials than the existing FP79 and B80, as evidenced by almost all letters of support; reference landowner submission points 5,7,15.

The proposed new bridleway will enable effective machinery access for surface maintenance required, including the addition of hardcore. Currently there is no practical machine access to areas including point B to M, nor to the disused bridleway between points C - E, making effective maintenance impossible.

There is a requirement to upgrade the surface between points P–O–Q–B–M–N, where necessary, referenced in paragraph 4.58 of Dorset Council's Strategic and technical Planning Committee notes, which addresses this concern.

**“There is no opposition to the diversion around the house and outbuildings.”**

We welcome Mr. Oppe's support of the diversion of the bridleway and footpath around the house and farm buildings.

**"6.1.3.1**

**The watercourse which runs down the current route of Bridleway 80 runs under the applicants' house. Works to reopen Bridleway 80 could increase the risk of flooding, so the diversion is in the interest of the landowners in terms of managing the watercourse.**

**There is no evidence to support this and this is for the convenience of the landowner and not a lawful consideration for diversion and extinguishment."**

Reducing the risk of flooding is indeed for the benefit of the landowner, as well as the public: There is overwhelming evidence to support this. See several letters of support referencing the increased risk of erosion and flooding, including that from West Dorset Wilding, Dorset Council's Committee Report (4.13,) photographs 1,2,3,4,8,9 provided by landowner, and landowners submission points 8, 9,10,11.

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Appendix – Other Matters Raised

**"5.8.4. Comments that reference the ecology of the Holloway are not relevant as the landowner has now introduced game birds, invasive species, which are harmful to native species, to the environment. The Holloway has its own ecosystem which will only be protected by removing the obstructions, rehabilitation and subsequent regular use."**

We have introduced a small, 12-strong confusion of Guinea fowl. They eat ticks, which our cattle suffer from. This includes the serious, often fatal, impact of Red Water Fever they spread. We are hoping to control this, having lost a pregnant heifer, her calf and a sire bull to it over the last 12 months.

At this low density / acre (1:10,) they have a negligible impact on the environment.

We make regular, annual attempts to pull, burn and control Himalayan balsam, along with ragwort. Its profusion is a function of the multiple water courses on the land that carry seed downstream.

Lastly, we point to our other active bio-diversity credentials, in our farming techniques, commitment to the local eco-tourism economy, and wider ecological actions with West Dorset Wilding.

We question how regular public use would protect B80's ecosystem.

See landowner submission points 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and other public opinion on these matters.

**"5.14.4.1. On 7th April 2025 Beaminster Town Council withdrew their support and oppose the current proposals."**

Beaminster Town Council originally offered no objection to the proposed new bridleway, stating it "would seem a sensible solution." And cited a desire to retain the woodland walk.

See Dorset Councils Strategic and Technical Planning Committee report and landowner submission point 1 (preferred streamside walk.)

On learning that they'd changed their mind, we invited them to visit the area to discuss their concerns around Holloway status and offered to make a representation at their subsequent meeting. These were both declined.

**"The primary reason for this Application is shown in a email exchange between the landowner and Carol McKay of Dorset Council 14th July 2022."**

Taken in the context of the full email exchange, having never been through this process before and its complexity with two routes in question, this was a request to clarify terminology.

**"Ecological Considerations**

**1. The Ecological Report shows no endangered species within the Holloway."**

See point 12 of landowner's submission and ecological report referencing evidence of protected species, including dormice.

**Conclusion**

We therefore seek confirmation of the orders.

Signed

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the person on behalf of the organization.

Dated 26/02/2026