

## **Local Access Forum Multi-User Subgroup**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To allow members to review the Summer Horse Riding Trial permissive bridleway access at Thriftwood (extension to Ockwells Park) and decide on whether to recommend that the Council continues to keep this permissive access open next year.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

The Summer Trial of Permissive horse riding at Thriftwood began in June 2022 and has now closed for the winter months.

The following targeted comms approach was taken:

- Create a webpage about the trial, including the FAQs and other guidance –with a friendly URL <https://www.rbwm.gov.uk/horse-riding-at-thriftwood>
- Strong on-site signage plus the route map and reference on the signage the link/QR code to the above webpage
- Comms in members bulletin to alert Councillors prior to start.
- Internal comms to relevant departments, including customer services, plus LAF – share link to webpage
- Contact local riding stables and equestrian businesses

Information was supplied about research done into conflict and perceived conflict between users along with a list of areas (inc. West Berks) where there has been little problem with multi-use paths.

Suitable signage and waymarking was placed around the route to show riders where they can and cannot go and to let people know where to expect to see horses with a messaging to all users that considerate behaviour is key to raise awareness that horse riders are permitted in specific areas and to encourage acceptance.

Minor modifications to the footbridge comprising a ramp and anti-slip surfacing were arranged.

Ground condition, signs and behaviour were also taken into consideration during the trial.

As the trial is now over, it's important to review how the trial went to help decide whether this seasonal permissive bridleway access is evidenced to be workable.

### **FEEDBACK:**

Most of the feedback received comprised of emails in the first few weeks of the trial along with a letter of support from the BHS (See Appendix 1) with concerns over possible conflict between dogs and horses highlighted by not only the Parish Council but also from one individual email.

The Parish Council also expressed concern over damage that may be caused to the ground and impact on users, the difficulties with any ‘enforcement’ of not following the guidance and the spill over onto other areas of Ockwells Park not authorised. Despite these misgivings, the Parish Council did agree to the BR access as a trial which would be reviewed.

Comments about the signage were received from horse riders including Trisha Mentzel (LAF member) in the early days of the trial which allowed modifications to be made to way marker posts (increasing the height and using a brighter colour) along with additional signs to be installed and clarifications to be given on where horse riders were allowed to be. It is acknowledged that ongoing engagement with users will be needed to help ensure that all users of this space know where horses are allowed to be.

Information about the risk of horse manure to dogs was added to the webpage after the Parish Council raised it as a concern.

Positive feedback was received from local horse riders who expressed their gratitude **“Thank you for creating this riding route for the summer. It is much enjoyed by me, my horse and my friends”**

Cllr Haseler as the local ward Councillor and an admin of the Ockwells FB group confirmed he has not received any further comments since the trial went live other than the initial ones regarding improved marking of the route.

He also stated that he’s not aware of any negative social media posts either.

Significantly, there were no reports received of any conflict or incidents between users during the trial.

Overall, the feedback seems to indicate the trial has been a success with minimal tweaks required. If this permissive access is open again next year, monitoring of ground conditions, signage and behaviour will continue along with messaging to raise awareness and encourage acceptance. As mentioned previously, continuing dialogue with all users will be welcomed.

Once the LAF has decided on whether it supports this access the Parish Council and other stakeholders will be asked to give their views after which a final decision can be taken.

**Resolution sought – Does the LAF support this permissive bridleway access at Thriftwood being made a permanent seasonal access while available?**

Photos taken on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

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Photos taken on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

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Photos taken on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

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