

Representations and Objections to the Order (incl. supporters);

The Ramblers, Dorset Area

BY E-MAIL

Ms Vanessa Penny
Definitive Map Team Manager
Environment and the Economy Directorate
DCC, County Hall
Colliton Park
Dorchester
DT1 1XJ

15 October 2014

Your Reference: KJS RW/P118

Dear Ms Penny

Highways Act 1980
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
Dorset County Council (Footpath 16, Melcombe Horsey and Footpath 26, Cheselbourne)
Public Path Diversion Order 2014

I have received a copy of above Order, and I wish to object to it, on behalf of both the South Dorset Group of the Ramblers, and the Dorset Area of the Ramblers.

Background

In July 2010 the Ramblers were consulted at the pre-application stage about the proposed diversion, which we did not support. At that time it was stated to be in the interest of the public. Despite our lack of support, in September 2013 the application went ahead, this time being made in the interest of the landowner. We again objected, but the Officer's recommendation to the Roads and Rights of Way Committee (16 January 2014) that an Order be made was accepted and resulted in this current Order.

The South Dorset Group Footpath Secretary and I made a site visit on 11 October 2014, and we agreed that our objection should be maintained, for the reasons set out below.

Recreational walkers do not walk merely to get from (figuratively speaking) A to B: routes are selected using rights of way which take walkers through locations and landscapes which are full of interesting features and sometimes challenging. Walkers in the countryside do not necessarily enjoy flat, uninteresting, straight-line paths, but look for variety in scenery, surface type and elevation. It is therefore disappointing that this proposed diversion has no redeeming features: a comparison of the two routes can be summarised as follows:

Existing route (A-B-C):

- valleys and inclines
- a variety of directional views, including the deep valley of the Open Access land, sheep grazing pastures and arable land
- added height along B-C

Proposed route (A-D)

- nearly 600 metres of flat, level path with one-directional view.

We acknowledge that the route of the proposed diversion has no furniture, which would be ideal in an outer-urban/small village locality, where more users might need easy access, but this location is neither of those.

Furthermore, the proposed diversion (A-D) is some 195 metres shorter than the currently walked route (A-B-C) which equates to a loss of nearly 25%. The route of bridleway 19, Cheselbourne is already in existence as a public right of way, therefore cannot be used in any calculation of either 'gain' or 'loss': it is purely the length of the existing and proposed routes which should be compared.

It could be argued that the views south from the proposed route A-D are the same as those from footpath 26, Cheselbourne (B-C): however, A-D is some 20 metres lower than B-C, and the only immediately visible view from A-D is a large arable field, whereas from B-C there is pasture (for sheep), and the arable field is mostly hidden, giving panoramic views.

I would like to address points made by the applicantⁱ. The Minutes of the aforementioned Roads and Rights of Way Committee meeting state that the applicant '... confirmed that he had the support of the parish councils, the British Horse Society and The Friends of Dorset's Rights of Way.' Could I point out that the proposed diversion applies to a *footpath* on which neither of the two latter groups has user rights? We agree that the proposal for the diversion is in the landowner's interest: it removes the route from his land, but why this should allow better land management is puzzling. If the footpaths were cross field paths then this would be more understandable, but the route hugs the headland, uses existing gates and a gap, and has only one stile. In the Countryside Codeⁱⁱ visitors to the countryside are advised '...to leave gatesas you find them....'. The fact that there are electric fences along routes does not cause problems, providing there are warning signs visible, and hand grips provided when these are crossed. Any route is straightforward providing that it is well signed.

Finally, I attach an extract taken from Dorset Explorer, showing the route of the footpath as it was in 1902 (or thereabouts), which is far closer to the existing route than that proposed.

We therefore object to the Order on the grounds that the proposed route is less enjoyable for the user than the existing route.

Yours sincerely

Jan Wardell

Mrs Jan Wardell
Area Footpath Secretary
Ramblers, Dorset Area

Kate Gocher

Ms Kate Gocher
Footpath Secretary, South Dorset Group

ⁱ Minute 10.7 from Roads and Rights of Way Committee, 16 January 2014

ⁱⁱ Natural England and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs: 19 August 2014