

Since I was a Parish Councillor from 1999-2003 I have been aware of the dangers of pedestrian/vehicular conflict on particular stretches of this bridleway. Over the years many meetings have been held with Senior Rights of Way Officers, Highways Inspectors and Road Safety Officers. Senior Rights of Way Officer Mr. Rod Webb (now retired) was so concerned that he arranged for many Warning Signs and Road Safety Signs to be installed. Such was his concern that in 2004 he agreed that the ROW Offices would pay for an 'amenity gate' to be erected across the bridleway. Unfortunately, the Parish Council became inquorate at this time and the offer was not taken forward. The paperwork is still on file.

The history of what is now known as Bridleway 18 is well recorded. Prior to WW2 it was simply a muddy farm path running from Frying Pan (the last house in the northern part of Mill Lane) down to Mill House and Seatown. It was gated shortly before Mill House. From Frying Pan to Mill House there were no other buildings, caravan parks, etc., it was simply open fields. The owner was the Weld Estate. During WWII it was taken over by The Ministry of Defence and a concrete track created over the footpath in order to collect pebbles from the beach towards the war effort. The Defence Estates state that the path was handed back to the original owner after the war. In the 1953 Sale of 'Parts of the Chideock Estate' on behalf of the Weld family many 'lots' were sold that abutted the 'concrete track' including Mill House and adjoining land. At this time each 'lot' was advertised with all 'rights and easements' which led to 'lawful authority to drive a mechanical vehicle' over certain parts of the 'concrete track'. It is important to note that these 'rights to vehicular access' were given in 1953. The Sale Details including detailed information about each 'lot' and Maps of the 1953 Sale are all held on file.

Over the years many Landowners have been quoted as stating that they 'own the concrete path' but put to test none actually produced any evidence. It is without doubt that some have a 'legal right' to use parts of the concrete track which was at that time a 'footpath'. From the evidence of all the Legal Conveyances in 1953 the owners are still The Weld Trust. In April 1996 an application was made by The National Trust to upgrade the Chideock Footpath 18 (A to B) (Roadstead Farm to Seatown) to a Bridleway. Mr.Cox stated that 'as the owner of the concrete track from A to D he agreed to the proposal. No proof was requested that he was indeed the owner and as later discovered on his recent 2012 Planning Application he only owned a small section to the south albeit this had not yet been acquired at the time of the bridleway upgrade application. It was during this 2012 Planning Application that permission was sought to create an 'alternative access' using Bridleway 18. Whilst some 'vehicular rights' extended to the concrete track the northern section was not covered by these rights and many from the community 'objected' to this part of the planning application.

During the Planning application stage I personally took this matter forward with Suzie Ricketts from the Legal Department who was extremely helpful. She asked for the Planning Officer to obtain exact 'rights and easements' and ownership details from the applicant's solicitor which were given. This showed a small section to the south that claimed ownership and 'private rights' to middle stretches. The stretch of bridleway to the north did not have 'private rights' and therefore should disqualify it from use as an 'alternative access'. It was at this stage that the ROW Office decided that this northern stretch of bridleway was actually part of the County Road. No dual status had ever been recorded. Ms. S. Ricketts was very thorough in her investigation and asked the ROW Officer Carmel Wilkinson on several occasions to check the Grid References which denoted the end of the County Road on the List of Streets. It was clear to myself and others that the Grid Reference stated on The List of Streets ended the County Road at Roadstead Farm. This was additionally confirmed with the use of the same Grid Reference number being used on the 1996 Public Path Creation Order (Ministry of State document) where the bridleway 'would join' the County Road. Ms. Ricketts may also have had concerns as she

asked ROW Officer Carmel Wilkinson on more than one occasion to check the Grid Reference numbers again. Miss. Ricketts last email stated ‘ *The Rights of Way Manager has also confirmed that she has carefully checked the extent of the vehicular highway against the relevant Grid References. I must accept her decision on this matter as final, in her capacity of formal Consultee of the District Council for the planning application.*

Following many letters of objection, meetings, telephone calls etc., it appeared that no-one at the DCC was prepared to discuss this. DCC insisted that they were right. It was at this stage that [REDACTED] and others contacted MP Oliver Letwin. Over several meetings including a walk along the bridleway, Oliver looked at our evidence, i.e. The List of Streets, The Public Path Creation Order and the Dorset Explorer Map. He sought advice from Ordnance Survey and it was agreed that we had a very strong case. I also had lots of other evidence but as far as he was concerned the List of Streets, Footpath Creation Order and Dorset Explorer Map were all that had been needed to convince him. Oliver also made contact with Mr.Cox in order to suggest a simple solution in that an adjacent road ran through the holiday park and Mr.Cox could ask his holidaymakers to use that instead of the bridleway. Mr. Cox refused. At our meeting with Oliver, he suggested that a letter be drafted for the Parish Council to send to DCC officially stating the case on behalf of the community, who are naturally concerned about this serious issue. The rest is history – a year later a Report was produced that simply ignored the ‘legal proof’ and gave a list of ‘assumptions’ based on old maps. They also stated that there were errors and discrepancies but did not outline what they were. They also cited two old planning applications. Had bothered to check these carefully they would have realised they had no relevance whatsoever.

Now that the Election is over we are having another small meeting with Oliver on Saturday 13th in order to discuss the Report. Those of us representing the community ([REDACTED] and myself) feel at this point that little should be done until after this meeting.

As I mentioned earlier, I have so much additional ‘evidence’ including past correspondence stating that the County Road ended at Roadstead Farm. I keep also asking the question that if the County Road continues to Point E then without private rights one would have to travel to Point E and then reverse back – albeit not being prepared for this in advance since there are no signs advertising this.

This is of course, a brief resume of a long and detailed history of this bridleway but I would be very happy if you would like to look at all the files and documents in my possession for you to call in and so I could go through them in a calm and peaceful manner with you. I will also throw in a really good cup of coffee! The seemingly unnecessary threat to our amenity to walk in peace and safety to the sea is naturally upsetting. However, we do feel the issue should be dealt with correctly and in proper manner, avoiding any unhelpful friction between the officialdom of councils and the local community.

Our reasons for trying to ‘protect’ this bridleway is purely for the safety of pedestrians both resident and holidaymaker and that many can enjoy a peaceful and safe walk to the sea. I cannot see that the closure of this part of the bridleway to vehicular movement will have any impact on the running of the holiday parks.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]