



# THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

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our reference: MSE 5043/0/0/41/22/1

Dear Sir/Madam/Gentlemen,

## The Ridgeway Long Distance Route

I enclose a letter setting out the Secretary of State's decision on the draft Traffic Regulation Order which would have banned the use of motor vehicles on most of the western section of the Ridgeway on Sundays and Bank Holidays, and which was the subject of the public inquiry held between 20th October and 4th November last year. As you will see, the Inspector found that the evidence presented to him was insufficient to justify curtailing long-established vehicle rights as proposed in the draft Order. The Secretary of State agrees, and has decided that the Order should not be confirmed.

In reaching this decision the Secretary of State has consulted the Secretary of State for the Environment. They both recognise that there are problems on the western part of the Ridgeway, and that these need to be tackled. The route has been designated as a National Trail. This recognises that the route has a particular importance for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and should be managed so that they find it attractive to use. Designation does not imply an automatic ban on motor vehicles, but in some circumstances curtailing the use of the route by motor vehicles might be appropriate. Each case needs to be examined on its merits, and on this occasion the Secretary of State decided that the evidence presented at the Inquiry was insufficient to justify curtailing vehicle rights as proposed in the draft Order.

With that in mind, both Secretaries of State regard it as essential that all parties should examine the situation afresh and use their best efforts to develop a package of management measures which will minimise the potential conflict between the various kinds of user. The Secretaries of State look to the Countryside Commission to take the lead on this, and expect that in due course the Commission will report back to them on the action taken.

The Countryside Commission has previously worked with reputable organisations representing vehicle users to develop a Code of Voluntary Restraint. It has also published



a management strategy for the Ridgeway for the period 1992/1997. These documents should afford the Commission, the local authorities and the user groups a good starting point.

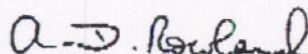
As part of the package of management measures, it may be appropriate to encourage, and possibly even require (through local authority Traffic Regulation Orders), vehicles to use convenient alternative routes instead of those stretches of the Ridgeway where there are particular problems. Identifying and sign-posting such routes would be a positive step towards this. Providing extra sensitively-placed car parks might also encourage more of those who use the Ridgeway solely for recreational purposes to leave their vehicles and walk.

Part of the current problem seems to stem from the expectation of a number of users that they will not come across any vehicles on the Ridgeway. It is important that the way the Ridgeway is described, whether in publications or on maps, does not give the impression that vehicles are not allowed. The description in publications could usefully be reviewed in order to prevent misconceptions or inaccurate expectations about the rights of vehicles on the route. Recreational vehicle groups can also do much to help the situation by continuing to educate their members so as to behave courteously towards other users, to avoid excessive use of the route, and to make sure that their activities are compatible with the nature of the route.

The Secretaries of State for Transport and Environment believe that much can be achieved to minimise the problems on the western part of the Ridgeway if the sort of measures and approach described in this letter are pursued in a constructive and determined manner. They look to all parties concerned to employ their best efforts to achieve this.

On a more general front, the Secretary of State for the Environment is considering whether there are easier and better ways of managing the use of byways and of enabling traffic authorities to use their traffic management powers more effectively. DOE officials are discussing these matters with interested parties, including the DOT. While it is too early to say what the outcome will be, both Secretaries of State are keen to ensure that, where appropriate, byways should be specifically recognised as a recreational asset and managed accordingly.

Yours faithfully



A.D. Rowland





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6 December 1993

Sir/Madam/Gentlemen

**THE RIDGEWAY LONG DISTANCE ROUTE (OVERTON HILL,  
WILTSHIRE TO STREATLEY, BERKSHIRE SECTION)  
(RESTRICTION OF MOTOR VEHICLES)**

1. Between 20 October and 4 November 1992, Mr M F Davies, an independent Inspector, held a public local inquiry to hear representations about a draft order which would, with certain exceptions, ban the use of motor vehicles on Sundays and Bank Holidays on most of the western length of the Ridgeway Long Distance Route. A copy of the Inspector's Findings of Fact, Conclusions and Recommendations is attached. A copy of his complete Report may be inspected or obtained as explained in the appendix to this letter.
2. The Inspector considered that in light of the evidence presented to him he was unable to recommend that the order should be made. The Secretary of State has decided to accept this recommendation.
3. The Secretary of State has considered carefully all of the representations, both oral and written, together with the Inspector's Report. He has noted the following points in particular.
  - (a) Most parties now accept that agricultural vehicles have been responsible for most of the damage to the surface; this problem is being addressed, with some success; and the order would have no effect on agricultural vehicles.
  - (b) There is considerable uncertainty over the reliability of the figures in the 1988/89 Ridgeway Users Survey, comparing vehicular, pedestrian, and horserider usage. The Inspector concluded that as one of the main concerns was the amount of vehicular usage, it must be of fundamental importance to have accurate base figures, and even the adjusted figures agreed during the inquiry were only a 'best guess'. He therefore concluded that such uncertainty was an unreliable basis for making a



traffic regulation order.

- (c) While a number of those in favour of the order claimed that motor vehicles caused danger to other users, and individual experiences were reported, no comprehensive record of incidents was available. The Inspector concluded that no evidence had been produced to show that a TRO would reduce danger.
- (d) The Inspector found much of the evidence adduced to support the contention that there is "conflict" between motorised users and other groups was based more on attitudes and opinion than on hard facts. He believed that it would be unwise to rely on the expressions of opinion of people's attitudes without strong factual evidence.
- (e) Although many of those in favour of the order mentioned noise from motor vehicles as a major source of annoyance to other users, there is uncertainty over how much of this emanated from noisy scramble events adjacent to (but not on) the Ridgeway. The Inspector found that noise was not a major factor; the trouble was that a few noisy machines gave rise to complaints out of proportion to their numbers.
- (f) Again due to the lack of comprehensive records, and in view of the open nature of the route, the Inspector did not consider that any pollution and dust caused by vehicles could be considered significant.
- (g) Although the proposed ban on vehicles would apply only on Sundays and Bank Holidays, the Inspector concluded it would effectively preclude many people in employment who are recreational vehicle users or motor cyclists from pursuing their activities on the Ridgeway altogether; and he considered that this could be justified only if there was a very strong case for it.
- (h) The Inspector accepted that the policy of the Countryside Commission was to give priority to walkers, riders and cyclists on National Trails, but if that priority has to resort to banning motorised users who, at the time of the establishment of the National Trail had equal rights that were well known, then there needs to be a strong case to justify it.

4. The Secretary of State accepts the Inspector's findings of fact and notes his conclusions. The Secretary of State has had regard to the fact that the Ridgeway is a National Trail, that is to say a long-distance route approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment under section 52 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. This means that the route is one on which the public should be able to make extensive journeys on foot, horseback or bicycle and that, at the time of its approval, for the most part it did not pass along roads mainly used by vehicles. No recommendation was made at that time under section 51(3) of the 1949 Act for the restriction of traffic on existing highways along which the route passes, but circumstances can change and section 22 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 provides the means of considering whether the imposition of such restrictions is



5. The Secretary of State has also taken into account that the purposes for which he is empowered to make the proposed Order under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 include all the purposes listed in section 1(1) of that Act as well as the additional purpose introduced by section 22(2) and quoted by the Inspector above paragraph 9.47 of his Report.
6. Nevertheless, having regard to the Inspector's findings of fact and conclusions and to the evidence given at the Inquiry and, in particular, to the points made in subparagraphs (a) to (i) of paragraph 3 of this letter, the Secretary of State does not consider that a sufficiently strong case for making the Order for any of the statutory purposes has been made. Consequently the Secretary of State no longer proposes to make the Order.
7. A copy of this letter is being sent to those who objected or made representations, to those that appeared at the inquiry, and to their representatives.

I am Sir/Madam/Gentlemen  
your obedient servant

*A.D. Rowland*

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