

NFNPA 493/16

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 21 JANUARY 2016

UPDATE ON THE NEW FOREST CYCLE EVENT ORGANISERS' CHARTER

Report by: Nigel Matthews, Head of Recreation Management and Learning

Summary

This report updates Members on the extent to which the Cycle Event Organisers' Charter and associated Safety Advisory Group systems have helped manage the impacts of cycle events in the New Forest. There have been various improvements, and complaints appear to have been fewer, but further work is necessary.

Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report. Work to manage the impacts of cycle events will not affect one type of group more than another and should make the events safer and more enjoyable for all.

Recommendations

- 1 To confirm the Authority's support for the ongoing work proposed to seek compliance with the Charter by cycle event organisers and safer, more considerate cycling by participants.**
- 2 To review the effectiveness of the Charter in January 2017.**

Papers

NFNPA 493/16: Cover Paper

Contact

Nigel Matthews
Head of Recreation Management and Learning
Tel: 01590 646684
E-mail: nigel.matthews@newforestnpa.gov.uk

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2013 Members agreed to support the establishment of a Cycling Liaison Group to develop an updated code of conduct for cycling in the New Forest and a new charter for cycle event organisers.
- 1.2 In December 2013, Members reaffirmed the Authority's commitment to taking a lead on encouraging safe and responsible cycling within the National Park. They also gave notice that they would be minded to make an Article 4 Direction in 12 months' time in response to issues relating to large events should it be considered necessary. This would have placed restrictions on venues hosting the events (i.e. the start/finish).
- 1.3 The Liaison Group unanimously agreed a revised [Cycling Code](#) in February 2014. This is generally well-received and is regularly referenced in instructions to participants of cycle events.
- 1.4 The Liaison Group was unable to unanimously agree the full text of a charter for event organisers. Differences of opinion remained primarily over whether or not an upper limit (cap) to the number of participants should be included, and whether riders in all events should be expected to wear rear identification numbers. In June 2014 Members resolved that they would only support the Charter if it included a cap of 1,000 cyclists and required that riders wear rear numbers.
- 1.5 Other statutory organisations (New Forest District Council, New Forest Association of Local Councils, Verderers of the New Forest, Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire Council, Forestry Commission and Hampshire Constabulary) subsequently gave their support for the [Cycle Event Organisers' Charter](#), including clauses on the cap and rear numbers, and NPA Members confirmed their support in January 2015. Members asked that the effectiveness of the Charter be reviewed in January 2016, hence this report.
- 1.6 Most of the larger 2015 events were already at least part-planned at the time the Charter was finalised, so it is possible that its effectiveness will grow in 2016. If appropriate, certain elements could be amended, provided these are also supported by the organisations listed above, but none are proposed in this report.
- 1.7 This report focuses on the larger cycle sportive events held during 2015. There were 5 one-day events with 400-700 riders and 2 two-day events (organised by UK Cycling Events) with about 2000 riders each day.
- 1.8 Our staff were able to monitor all these events in person and additional information (both positive and negative) has been received from a range of sources. These included emails; the SAG feedback system (see next section); forums such as the Equine Forum and parish council meetings; the Consultative Panel; internet forums; representations to NPA members; conversations with local Police, NFDC and HCC officers; four event organisers; event participants; Department for Transport and British Cycling staff.
- 1.9 We have repeatedly confirmed and demonstrated our support for cycling as a healthy, non-polluting method of transport and form recreation. The Charter aims to

help cycle event organisers minimise negative impacts and maximise the benefits so that their events are welcomed by all involved and affected.

2 Feedback received via the events register on the Public Events and Safety Advisory Group (SAG) webpage

2.1 This is a summary of all the feedback about cycle events received via the Register of Events on the SAG webpage. It should not be regarded as a comprehensive assessment of all cycle events. Indeed it is a relatively small sample of public opinion. However, it does provide a snapshot of some of the themes being voiced via other channels (as at 1.8).

2.2 2014 Summary. *Note that the feedback facility was introduced late in the year 2014 and there were few other events between that time and the end of the year.*

- a) 9 feedback entries: 7 from one person; 2 other people (1 entry each)
- b) All entries related to one event only: New Forest 100 (11 & 12 October 2014) run by UK Cycling Events (UKCE).
- c) The feedback referred to individual cyclists and event management:
 - Various observations of poor rider behaviour including undertaking, riding more than two-abreast and ignoring priority signing at pinch points (and one of 'friendly well-behaved' cyclists)
 - Criticism of marshalling, choice of feed station, poor rider identification numbering, the large size of the event and high rate of flow of cyclists

2.3 2015 Summary

- a) 15 feedback entries: 4 from one person, 2 from two others, 7 other people (one entry each)
- b) 7 entries related to the Wiggle Spring Sportive (11 & 12 April) run by UKCE. This feedback was used by the SAG when it held a debrief meeting with UKCE.
- c) 1 entry about the New Forest Middle Distance Triathlon (27 September). This was about cyclists causing someone to fall off their horse and has been passed on to the event organiser.
- d) 1 entry about the 2015 Cycletta New Forest (20 September). This expressed a general dislike of cycle events and their impacts and did not specify issues with this particular event.
- e) 6 entries (and a duplicate) about the Wiggle New Forest 100 (19 & 20 October) run by UKCE. This feedback will be used in a face-to-face meeting with UKCE prior to their next event.
- f) The feedback about the two UKCE events referred to individual cyclists and event management:
 - Various observations of poor rider behaviour including verbal abuse, litter, undertaking vehicles and ignoring priority signing at pinch points
 - Criticism of feed station management, marshalling, identification of riders, signage at one location and the size of the event

3 Positive observations and improvements observed during 2015

- 3.1 There is a higher level of awareness among principal event organisers about the need to liaise with the SAG and to plan events carefully. Organisers of all the larger events liaised with the SAG this year.
- 3.2 Communication between event organisers and local parish councils has improved – information about all larger events has been provided enabling local people to take account of the events as they plan their day. There is greater local awareness of potential issues and better opportunity for dialogue where appropriate.
- 3.3 Communication between event organisers and the Verderers is much improved – all potential clashes with drifts were avoided amicably. We also know of at least one instance of good advance liaison with a riding school.
- 3.4 Negative coverage in the press has reduced and although there continues to be criticism from certain hotspots parish councils have generally been happier, and two provided positive feedback about events that had attracted criticism in the past.
- 3.5 Anecdotal evidence from officers attending other meetings and forums is that the Charter has had a positive effect.
- 3.6 Management of feed stations has improved, with more toilets, better marshalling and a focus on litter.
- 3.7 Many participants have been observed riding to very high standards of safety and consideration.
- 3.8 Many participants have been observed enjoying healthy exercise and appreciating the New Forest's unique environment.
- 3.9 Some events include significant fundraising for charities.
- 3.10 Some local businesses (and parish councils) benefit from increased income through use of their premises.
- 3.11 As well as being a good example of the above improvements, UKCE has made other helpful changes: provision of a named contact person/phone number for each event; pre-event registration the day before to reduce traffic issues on the day; effective numbering of cycles (front only); good instructions to cyclists (in advance and on the day); starting early to avoid traffic; up to three different routes reducing impacts on other users on any individual route; rider times are provided in an alphabetical list rather than in time order and routes are varied between events.
- 3.12 As a result of the attention given to cycle events, organisers of other types of event are proactive in seeking ways to resolve issues.

4 Remaining challenges

- 4.1 There is still a public expectation that the SAG or its constituent members have the legal powers to stop or control the events. This is not the case and the Charter is voluntary.
- 4.2 At the time the Charter was developed, two clauses received a lot of attention: the cap of 1,000 riders and the provision of rear identification numbers. These were included because more complaints were associated with the largest events run by UKCE (with ca. 2,000 riders/day) in which participants were not identifiable from the rear (and could therefore not be easily held accountable for any poor riding that might be observed). UKCE argued then and still does that its events are safe and have minimal impacts and that rear identification is not necessary. Because it was not compliant with either the cap or the rear identification clause, UKCE was sent 'amber' letters prior to both its events this year, stressing the importance of following the Charter and requesting that the event plan should be changed.
- 4.3 With some 2,000 riders to release over a 2.5-hour period UKCE releases riders at a higher 'density' than observed for other events. They are released in groups (with suitable verbal instructions) but at peak times the group size (typically 40-50) and interval (often only 2 minutes) results in a flow rate of some 20 cyclists/minute until the route splits or until faster riders have left the slower ones behind. Whilst the degree of impacts are affected by the amount of other traffic and the type and width of road, there does seem to be a basic and logical correlation between rider flow rate and impact: more cyclists means larger/longer groups and fewer/smaller gaps for overtaking cars.
- 4.4 The length of the routes and the complexity of the events inevitably result in occasional localised issues (e.g. a junction that is difficult to negotiate; a feed station that is temporarily 'overwhelmed' with participants; signs that are not taken down as quickly as they should be).
- 4.5 Some individual cyclists behave or ride inconsiderately.
- 4.6 Some motorists are rude to event marshals and cyclists or drive dangerously close to cyclists.
- 4.7 Some people appear to proactively look for problems and some complain about things that are personal opinions and not against the Highway Code, e.g. cycling quickly (but within the vehicular speed limit / not dangerously or carelessly), riding two abreast or calling out to each other when cycling.
- 4.8 Some people remove event direction signs making it potentially dangerous for cyclists and necessitating the use of painted back-up signs on the road (using degradable paint).
- 4.9 The shortage of parish council halls restricts where events can be routed and may necessitate the use of venues that may not be the best.
- 4.10 Not all event organisers feel the SAG provides a fast enough response, though this is sometimes because not enough information has been provided.

- 4.11 Although improved, the SAG web page is still long and arguably too complex for event organisers or for the general public (who can't easily find the feedback system).
- 4.12 The organiser of the Cycletta put warning signs up about this event at least three weeks in advance – this created sign 'clutter', a negative expectation and some confusion since other events happened before the Cycletta. On the day, this women-only charity event had minimal impact.
- 4.13 The system for gathering feedback about specific events is not yet good enough; too few people know it exists and it is not easy enough to find the SAG events register (within which the feedback option is located). We are also aware of claims that the way in which the feedback is used is not transparent enough. Depending on how it is done, calls for all the feedback provided to be made public risks compromising the anonymity and effectiveness of the current system. Nevertheless, the processes by which feedback is given and used should be reviewed to address both practical issues and perceptions.

5 Proposed ongoing work

- 5.1 Encouraging and enabling event organisers to manage their events in ways that contribute positively to the New Forest and with minimal impacts is an ongoing task for NPA officers and for all key 'signatories' of the Charter, particularly NFDC, HCC and the Police. The Charter is referenced in HCC's recently approved Cycling Strategy, including the action to: 'Work with the New Forest Public Events and Safety Advisory Group to increase compliance with the Cycle Event Organisers' Charter'.
- 5.2 Further improvements are to be made to the SAG web page including better signposting for those who wish to provide feedback. The way in which the SAG works and the responsibilities of the individual member organisations is being reviewed by NFDC, so changes in the webpage will also be addressed through this process.
- 5.3 As part of the review of the SAG, measures will be implemented to streamline responses to event organisers when they submit their event plans. Where they are necessary, de-brief meetings will hopefully happen more promptly.
- 5.4 Effort will be made to confirm that feedback received is taken seriously. Further advice will also be given about the kind of feedback that is most useful and whether this is best given via the SAG register, direct to one of its constituent members or to the event organiser. Event organisers may be willing to promote more widely their event hotline phone number (e.g. on event direction signs) thus facilitating an immediate response by the event organiser where appropriate.
- 5.5 A fresh (annual) message will be sent from the SAG to all cycle event organisers reminding them of the Charter and the importance of very careful event management.

- 5.6 Through the Local Sustainable Transport Funded work programme, NPA officers have been liaising with the New Forest Access Forum and local user groups to develop ways of encouraging all road users to be more aware of and tolerant of each other. A short video will be launched early in 2016, with links to other useful videos.
- 5.7 Organisations represented on the SAG will continue to encourage careful management of feed venues, for example to ensure cyclists are able and encouraged to exit the highway immediately on arrival.
- 5.8 Those organisations will also continue to scrutinise routes. Where issues such as congestion, difficult junctions or clashes are likely to occur, advice will be given so that the event organiser can amend their event plan.
- 5.9 It may be possible to give greater scrutiny to whether flow rates are likely to be high enough to significantly impact on other road users (taking into account the proposed rate at which event participants are to be released, route splits, proposed timing of release of faster and slower riders, the width of the roads and the volume of vehicles expected for the time of day). Whilst it is the event organisers' responsibility to assess these risks it should be possible for SAG members (in particular Hampshire Highways and the Police) to anticipate any issues based on a growing body of local knowledge and experience. This in turn would inform advice given to event organisers about release rates, timing of routes or even the need for a temporary road closure.
- 5.10 The County Council will also try to coordinate events and works to minimise traffic congestion.
- 5.11 Parish councils may wish to review their joint stance towards the use of their halls so that the best locations are available to well managed events.
- 5.12 At a national level and in liaison with the Department for Transport, British Cycling has conducted a survey of local authorities to ascertain the degree to which sportives are causing issues. Whilst they are positive about the growth in sportives in recent years, they have said that regulation of the events would help issues such as calendar coordination. Regional British Cycling staff already provide guidance and support to organisers of sportives that choose to register their event(s) with them. British Cycling's work may help us in the New Forest – provided their national stance is appropriate for our local circumstances – so officers will continue to liaise with them.
- 5.13 Most other national parks do not have particular concerns about on-road cycle sportives though there is recognition that the activity is growing across the UK and that some events result in increased journey times and litter. We are aware of ongoing issues in Surrey (especially Box Hill), in Purbeck (where they have adopted a charter based on the New Forest charter), and in Dartmoor (where Dartmoor NPA is organising a workshop for event organisers in February). Developments in these areas may become useful to the New Forest so we will continue to monitor their progress.

- 5.14 The New Forest Charter is very thorough. It already refers to all the issues discussed above and it is unclear what benefits would arise if aspects of the Charter were to be amended at this stage.

6 Summary

- 6.1 We continue to welcome and support cycling as a form of transport and recreation. We also remain committed to working with cycle event organisers to minimise negative impacts and maximise benefits so that their events are welcomed by all involved and affected.
- 6.2 In the year since the Charter was finalised some improvements in cycle event management have been made and most participants do follow the Cycling Code. A number of actions are proposed to encourage all event organisers to comply with the Charter and to encourage all participants to cycle safely and considerately.
- 6.3 A central system for gathering feedback about the events has been put in place and used. Improvements are planned that will make the system easier to find, use and ensure the information given is used to best effect.
- 6.4 It may be possible to better predict the impacts of different rates of flow of rates cyclists and thereby inform advice given to event organisers about planned release rates.
- 6.5 There are opportunities to work with British Cycling and other parts of the UK to confirm the extent to which cycle events are causing issues elsewhere and bolster the case for a national approach, potentially including a change in regulation if deemed necessary.
- 6.6 Progress should be possible on all these fronts during 2016 after which a further review would be appropriate.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 To confirm the Authority's support for the ongoing work proposed to seek compliance with the Charter by cycle event organisers and safer, more considerate cycling by participants.**
- 7.2 To review the effectiveness of the Charter in January 2017.**