

NFNPA 514/17

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 19 JANUARY 2017

UPDATE ON THE NEW FOREST CYCLE EVENT ORGANISERS' CHARTER

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

Summary

This report provides a second update 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. Until September the level of public concern was relatively mild but a very late change of route to the autumn Wiggle New Forest 100 event caused considerable concern and demonstrated the need for ongoing work to encourage and enable high standards of event organisation.

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. The Authority confirms its support for the ongoing work proposed to seek compliance with the Charter by cycle event organisers, safer and more considerate cycling by participants and greater tolerance and positivity by those not involved in the events.**
- 2. Review the effectiveness of the Charter in January 2018.**

Papers

NFNPA 514/17: 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 At its meeting in January 2016, Members asked that a further review of the [Cycle Event Organisers' Charter](#) should be brought to the Authority in January 2017 – hence this report.
- 1.2 The history of the development of a [New Forest cycling code](#) (in February 2014) and the Charter (in January 2015) was covered in [last year's report](#).
- 1.3 The Charter has become a useful set of best practice instructions for cycle event organisers: an excellent starting point for anyone who asks what they need to do when organising an event in the New Forest. It still includes a cap of 1,000 cyclists and requires that riders wear rear numbers.
- 1.4 This report focuses on the larger cycle sportive events held during 2016. There were 4 one-day events with 400-850 riders and 2 two-day events with between 1300 and 2000 riders each day.
- 1.5 The report is based on evidence and feedback gathered by NPA staff that monitored events; emails received before and after events; the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) feedback system (see next section); the Equine Forum; parish councils (especially Brockenhurst and Sway); internet forums; NFDC, HCC and Police officers; event organisers and participants; Department for Transport and British Cycling staff.

2. Feedback received via the Register of Events

- 2.1 We have again looked at the feedback about cycle events received via the Register of Events on the SAG webpage. This is a relatively small sample of public opinion but it does enable some comparison between events and between years. As can be seen from the totals below, the system was used by more people this year, probably due to both a greater awareness that the system exists and because the Register of Events was easier to find on the SAG webpage.
- 2.2 In 2015 (the first year for which the system was in place for a full year) there were 15 feedback entries from a total of 10 people. Of these entries, 13 related to just two events – both run by UK Cycling Events (UKCE).
- 2.3 In 2016 there were 29 feedback entries from a total of 22 people. All feedback was forwarded to the relevant event organisers, and where appropriate used in SAG debrief and planning meetings.
 - a) Four entries related to the Wiggle Spring Sportive (9 & 10 April) run by UKCE. Whilst mostly highlighting negative observations, two entries included positive comments.

- b) Two entries related to the New Forest Conqueror Sportive (3 July) run by UKCE. One of these was wholly positive; the other partly so.
- c) Three entries related to the Garmin Ride Out (2 September) run by Action Medical Research. One of these was negative; the other two were wholly positive.
- d) There were 20 entries about the Wiggle New Forest 100 (24 & 25 September) run by UKCE. 18 of these were negative; two were positive.

3. Positive observations observed during 2016

3.1 For the majority of the year (as in 2015), cycle events seemed to take place more peacefully than in the past. The following observations list some of the evidence for this.

- a) Most, though not quite all, organisers of the larger events liaised with the SAG. The Code is regularly referenced in instructions to participants of cycle events.
- b) Communication between event organisers and town and parish councils (mostly via the SAG and New Forest Association of Local Council's nominated representative, Cllr Neal Martin) was generally timely and effective. There is good local awareness of potential issues and better opportunity for dialogue where appropriate, and the information provided enables local people to take account of the events as they plan their day.
- c) Most Parish councils have again been happier.
- d) Communication between event organisers and the Verderers was again very good, with no clashes with drifts.
- e) Negative coverage in the press was less.
- f) Anecdotal evidence from officers attending other meetings is that the Charter has had a positive effect.
- g) Management of feed stations is usually good, with enough toilets, better marshalling and a focus on litter.
- h) Many participants have been observed riding to high standards of safety and consideration, and they often express appreciation for the New Forest's unique environment.

4. UK Cycling Events

4.1 UK Cycling Events (UKCE) ran about 80 sportive events across the UK during 2016. Four of these were in the New Forest:

- Wiggle Spring, 9 & 10 April, total of ca. 3310 participants, based at Somerley Estate
- New Forest Conqueror, 3 July, ca. 550 participants, based at Gang Warily
- Wiggle Bournemouth, 6 August, ca. 830 participants, only used the west of the Forest.

- Wiggle New Forest 100, 24 & 25 September, total of ca. 3470 participants, based at Somerley Estate

They already have the same pattern of events in their provisional calendar for 2017.

- 4.2 Currently, only UKCE regularly attracts over 1,000 participants/day to cycle events in the New Forest. This is the only UK location where they ran two-day events this year, and only in a small number of other locations (Dorset, Surrey and Cambridgeshire) did they attract over 1,000 riders. The company does not believe the cap of 1,000 participants is appropriate and does not currently intend to provide riders with rear identification numbers.
- 4.3 As in previous years, UKCE has in place a range of measures to help each event go well. They usually provide detailed event plans a long time in advance; a named contact person/phone number; pre-event registration the day before to reduce traffic issues on the day; *front* numbering of cycles; clear instructions to cyclists (in advance and on the day); starting early in the day to avoid traffic in the early stages of the event; up to three different routes, reducing impacts on other users through the middle of the event; rider times provided in an alphabetical list rather than in time order.
- 4.4 Issues identified with the first two events included poor rider behaviour, lack of advance liaison with riding stables, vandalism at the event venue and the removal of safety signs. They were able to respond positively to specific requests such as the provision of a marshal at a church in Alderholt, in Dorset, and accredited marshals near Boltons Bench to direct traffic – both during the Spring event. Impacts on colt inspection at Beaulieu Road, were less than feared.
- 4.5 Of much greater significance is that at 11am on Wednesday 21 September, UKCE sent out an email announcing that they had changed the route of the event of 24 & 25 September. The organisers had struggled to find a feed station in the north/west of the Forest but then secured the use of Bashley Village Hall and made changes to the planned routes so that riders on their short, standard and epic routes all had access to facilities. The revised short route included Wootton, Sway and Brockenhurst, which would otherwise have been avoided.
- 4.6 This 'late minute' change brought back to the surface many of the concerns that prompted the creation of the Charter, and at the time it felt as if the clock had been turned back two or three years. Negative feedback included cyclists riding more than two abreast or too fast, use of metal stakes for signage, lack of liaison with riding stables and too few marshals, but most were expressing frustration about the number of cyclists cycling close together and the resultant impacts on other roads users.

- 4.7 On the positive side, and in part as a result of all the work surrounding the Charter, the flurry of phone calls, e-mails and associated activity that followed also demonstrated the ability of local people and organisations to work together remarkably effectively.
- 4.8 For example, Brockenhurst Parish Council responded with an article on the front page of the Lymington Times, notification to the Business Association, Friends of Brockenhurst and both churches and with notices posted on its web site and notice boards. The revised map had an error in Brockenhurst: it indicated that the route went along Brookley Road (the High Street), and indeed despite a phone call to UKCE this is what was painted on the road. Quick action by the Parish Council (with their own paint), and an additional sign from UKCE at The Rise, successfully directed most cyclists on a much more suitable route.
- 4.9 At Wootton, Burley Manor Riding Stables worked with UKCE staff who sent a car with a flashing light to help lead a group of ridden horses to and back from the Open Forest, holding back cyclists when the horses had to cross the road.
- 4.10 The late change of route was obviously not what UKCE wanted and we believe that lessons have been learned, not least the importance of agreeing suitable feed stations well in advance. The local people that displayed much good will and generous efforts are to be commended.

5. Ongoing work

- 5.1 Managing cycle events in the New Forest is likely to require ongoing coordination of effort across a wide range of local organisations. The SAG organisations (especially New Forest District Council, the Highway Authority and Police) have a key role in advising event organisers but it is clear that the NPA, town and parish councils, local groups and businesses also have roles to play. The list of actions that follows, reflects the 'challenges' and 'proposed work' that were covered in greater detail in last year's report.
- 5.2 We need to continue to remember that the Charter is voluntary and that neither the SAG nor its constituent members have the legal powers to stop or control the events.
- 5.3 We will continue to encourage and expect individual cyclists to ride safely and considerately. We should also expect a similar standard and attitude amongst motorists. Early in 2016, NPA officers (in liaison with the New Forest Access Forum and local user groups) launched a short, humorous video encouraging all countryside users to be more aware of and tolerant of each other and this has now been viewed by over 2,000 people.

- 5.4 The SAG is still committed to encouraging compliance with the Charter, and any event which does not comply with the cap of 1,000 riders and the lack of rear rider identification numbers will be sent an 'amber' letter stressing the importance of following the Charter and requesting that the event plan should be changed.
- 5.5 An 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. We will look to see if we can draw attention to specific things that can be highlighted in the letter (e.g. advance liaison with riding stables).
- 5.6 Parish councils and village hall committees are likely to continue to review when and where they will accept bookings for feed stations. On some routes, and for some events, these premises are ideal – and a useful income is generated.
- 5.7 The SAG organisations will continue to look at event plans and advise where they foresee particular issues. Some routes used by UKCE (e.g. those that use wider roads) have had less impact on other road users than others (where long narrow roads are used). It may be possible to find a small number of 'preferred' routes that have both minimal impact and suitable feed stations.
- 5.8 The 'density', or rate of flow of riders, is largely controlled by their rate of release at the start, coupled with where the splits are within an event. This, and the width and type of road, in turn affects the ease with which cars can overtake. Ideally there is a low density and an early split.
- 5.9 The remit and terms of reference for the SAG are being reviewed by NFDC. We anticipate that this will not significantly affect the way it deals with cycle events, but it is likely to prompt a revision of its web page. This page was improved this year but further changes will hopefully make it even easier for event organisers and the general public to find the information they want (including the feedback system).
- 5.10 Resolutions of conflicts are much more likely to be achieved through positive dialogue than where there is confrontation, so officers will continue to work with all involved to facilitate this.
- 5.11 At a national level, the Police and British Cycling appear keen on bringing cycle regulations up to date, and we understand that the Department for Transport is still looking at this. However, we have no assurance that any changes would help address New Forest issues, and no timescale has been set.

- 5.12 Most other national parks still 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, litter etc. Outside of national parks, significant concerns seem still to be in pockets (e.g. Surrey and Purbeck) rather than widespread. Where specific programmes of activity are in place to address issues, they closely reflect the New Forest response: codes of conduct for event organisers, events calendars to help coordination, circulation of information to and via parish councils, encouragement to ride courteously etc. The Government rejected a call by Surrey County Council for local authorities to be able to regulate sportives. Officers will continue to monitor the national picture.
- 5.13 The New Forest Charter seems to have stood the test of time. Although some people (mostly cyclists and cycle event organisers) would prefer reference to the cap and rear identification to be removed, these clauses usefully highlight the ongoing need to take into account impacts on other road users and the accountability of participants.

6. Summary

- 6.1 We 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 The cycling code is widely supported, including by cycle organisations, and we will continue to find ways in which it can be promoted. The Charter has helped raise the standard of cycle event organisation and encouraged a joint approach to managing potential impacts.
- 6.3 Progress is easiest in a positive environment where cyclists, motorists, local people, event organisers and statutory and non-statutory organisations look for solutions rather than problems. A significant amount of good will has been displayed that should help us achieve further improvements.
- 6.4 The SAG remains central to the process by which individual events are managed, together with effective communication amongst town and parish councils and the additional impetus provided by the NPA. We will continue to work together to improve systems and ensure best use of resources.
- 6.5 We will continue to keep an eye on developments elsewhere in the country, both to learn from others and to capitalise on any prospects for a coordinated national approach.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Authority confirms its support for the ongoing work proposed to seek compliance with the Charter by cycle event organisers, safer and more considerate cycling by participants and greater and mutual tolerance and positivity by all.

7.2 Review the effectiveness of the Charter in January 2018.