

Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000

NOTICE OF RELEVANT AUTHORITY DECISION FOLLOWING REVIEW OF DIRECTION RESTRICTING CROW ACCESS

Prepared by Natural England

Access Authority: Wiltshire Council
Relevant Authority: Natural England
Local Access Forum: Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum

Direction reference: 2008090037

| Land Parcel Name | Direction Reference | Details of restriction on original direction |
|------------------|---------------------|--|
| Woodley Down | 2008090037 | 1st September to 1st February every year until 2015 To prevent disturbance to game and disruption to shooting |

Natural England has now decided how to proceed following its review of the above mentioned long-term direction to restrict CROW access on this land.

A second consultation has been held between 27th March and 1st May 2015 with statutory consultees and the general public.

We received feedback from the Ramblers who have no objections to the continuation of the current direction, but ask that suitable warning notices are in use when shooting takes place. They suggest that these 'clearly state that the restriction on access does not affect public rights of way and that all public rights of way remain open at all times'.

Outcome of the review:

Natural England's decision is to vary the direction to extend it for a further six years as proposed in the second consultation.

The restriction covers three parcels, Woodley Down, Ashgrove Bottom and Long Down that are managed as an integral part of the Ashcombe Shoot, run by the Ashcombe Estate, who rent the shooting rights from the landowner of these parcels.

The Ashcombe Shoot is a partridge and pheasant shoot covering approximately 1634 acres, including five parcels of open access land totalling around 163 acres. The shoot consists of 24 principle drives (reducing to 14 over the course of the shooting season), with 13 (54%) utilising open access land, and four utilising the 3 rented parcels covered by this restriction.

The Shoot holds four drives across the land covered in this application, one on each of the two western parcels, Woodley Down and Ashgrove Bottom, and then one

either side of Long Down. They are all both pheasant and partridge drives and during a site visit with the estate manager in 2015 were found to still be an important part of the shoot, as detailed in the Second Consultation Summary Report.

Simple calculations dictate that there are on average 2.6 shoot days per week, and 50% of those use the high quality Ashgrove Bottom drive, and on some of these days the other drives will also be used.

It should be remembered that a Public Right of Way (PRoW) runs along the bottom of Woodley Down and Ashgrove bottom, and the Wessex Ridgeway runs along the bottom of Long Down. These PRoW give good public access to all three parcels and are managed by stops or banksman who ask walkers to pause if shooting is in progress. However as these access routes pass very close to these drives and vegetation cover on the downland is sparse, if people did access these areas it is likely that the quarry will respond by moving away and that it may be difficult to recover the birds back in time for the drive. As the use by released birds is intensive and the cover sparse, even low access levels could have a significant effect in disrupting the shoot. Given the main three drives are now shot more regularly than in 2006 a total exclusion is again to be given for disturbance to the quarry.

As the PRoW bring people very close to the guns people determined to disrupt the shoot would be very difficult to manage. This combined with some shoot days being organised at short notice dictates that a total exclusion on shoot days was proposed to be necessary for disruption to the shoot. This however is already covered by the exclusion required to prevent disturbance to the game.

Natural England's policy for long term directions is that they should not be given for a period of more than 6 years. Therefore the original direction will be varied to have an end date of 1st February 2021.

Signage

The importance of signage was discussed on the site visit with the Estate Manager, as a restriction is of little use without information on the ground to inform people that a closure is in place. This was echoed by the Ramblers in the consultee comments, so Natural England advises and expects that restriction signs will be clearly displayed every year during the closure period.

Summary of changes made to the existing directions:

| Land Parcel Name: | Details of restriction on original direction: | New details of restriction |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Woodley Down | No Public Access 1st September to 1st February every year until 2015 To prevent disturbance to game and disruption to shooting | No Public Access 1st September to 1st February every year until 1st February 2021 To prevent disturbance to game and disruption to shooting |

Details of the restriction will appear on the relevant map of access land on the Open Access website - <https://www.gov.uk/outdoor-access-recreation/rights-of-way-open-access>

Where a direction restricts access indefinitely, for more than five years, for part of every year, or for part of at least six consecutive years, we have a statutory duty to review it within five years of the date of its issue.

Date review completed: 29th May 2015