

Avebury Parish Council

Draft: Response and Plan: Proposed closure of Ridgeway over summer solstice 2016.

The Parish Council is holding an extra ordinary meeting at short notice on Wednesday 30 March 2016 to consider a proposal by the National Trust to obtain a temporary Traffic Regulation Order to close the Ridgeway for a period over summer solstice.

1. The Parish Council:

- a. notes that people with 189 campervans and 79 tents occupied informally the Ridgeway and associated areas north of Sanctuary at summer solstice in 2015. Access to the Ridgeway can be gained from Green Street as well as Sanctuary.
- b. notes that the National Trust proposes to obtain a temporary Traffic Regulation Order to close the Ridgeway over the period of summer solstice in 2016 and possibly for four succeeding years.
- c. understands many of the National Trust's reasons for wishing to close the Ridgeway, as stated below by the National Trust's General Manager, Wiltshire Landscape, but notes that most of those reasons equally apply to the rest of the Parish if displacement occurs:

'It was clear last year that the number of people gathering on the Ridgeway was growing, and that the byway was becoming a destination in its own right. Serious concerns were highlighted around the safety and well-being of those camping on the Ridgeway; others seeking to move along this byway; and NT staff and volunteers managing a safe Solstice for all. To be specific, the high number of people camping in vehicles and tents on the byway and surrounding areas was of particular concern. They established an illegal campsite - without access to water or sanitation – and some did irreparable damage to monuments and surrounding land in the World Heritage Site. With hundreds of vehicles and tents tightly packed together on both sides of the byway, there was no room for emergency vehicles to gain access. In such a circumstance, were a vehicle to catch fire, for example, the fire would likely spread rapidly and anyone injured could not be reached by emergency vehicles. This is clearly a potentially lethal situation. In previous years, the resulting environment has been intimidating for those wishing to use the byway, and not safe for NT staff to manage. This is not a situation that we can ignore, and not one that the Trust can allow to continue.'

- d. is very concerned about additional risks that are specific to inhabited areas.
- e. believes closure of the Ridgeway is a major decision. It could affect many of the 480 people that live in the Parish, together with many of those that work and visit the Parish.

2. The Parish Council laments that:

- a. the National Trust announced its proposal only two weeks ago, has not previously consulted the Parish Council and proposes to finalise its decision to apply for the TRO in only two weeks' time. The National Trust could have made this announcement months ago and there is now insufficient time for proper consultation and consideration on the proposal.
- b. the National Trust has only focused on the Ridgeway and has not undertaken impact and risk assessments on the implications of its proposal on other roads, by-ways and private land in the Parish, and on local people.

- c. English Heritage has not undertaken impact and risk assessments on the implications on roads, by-ways and private land in the Parish of its proposals to ban alcohol and change parking arrangements and charges at Stonehenge.
 - d. the National Trust and English Heritage's proposals are being made at a time when police numbers will be reduced at Avebury and no officers will be on point duty at the entrances to Avebury Trusloe, Avebury High Street and Green Street.
3. The Parish Council believes that a significant increase in risks that public safety, public nuisance and possibly crime and disorder will arise at any time and place in the Parish over summer solstice if the Ridgeway is closed. The spectrum of risks is greater and wider in the Parish, which is inhabited, than the Ridgeway, which is not. Fire is, for instance, one risk that is cited on the Ridgeway, but is an example of a serious risk that would particularly affect occupiers of thatched houses. This wider spectrum of risks in the community is especially worrying in the light of paragraphs 2b, 2c and 2d above.
 4. The Parish Council proposes that:
 - a. the National Trust defers applying for a temporary TRO until after solstice 2016 to give time for proper consultation and consideration for a comprehensive, long term plan that meets the needs of all.
 - b. safeguards the welfare of its staff by employing specialist contractors to manage the Ridgeway in 2016.
 5. If the National Trust decides to apply for a TRO in 2016, the Parish Council believes it is essential that there is a need for a parallel and comprehensive plan to prevent the risks perceived by the National Trust on the Ridgeway, and other risks, being displaced and harming others anywhere else in the Parish. The Parish Council proposes that:
 - a. the National Trust employs specialist contractors to safeguard the welfare of people in the Parish affected by the consequences of its decision.
 - b. any TRO on the Ridgeway includes provisions to ban waiting, except by permit holders, on any road or by-way in the Parish:
 - i. 24 hours a day on the same dates as the Ridgeway is closed
 - ii. or alternatively at night-time, between the hours of [10.00pm and 5.00am?]
 - c. the police and Wiltshire Council provide sufficient officers/staff to enforce regulations and ensure a peaceful solstice.
 - d. the Parish Council works with residents and others to take action by, for instance, parking vehicles strategically on roads and by-ways to deny parking by those displaced from the Ridgeway.
 - e. the Parish Council works with owners of land and buildings to prevent incursions on to private land
 - f. before and after photos are taken of areas that may attract informal occupation in 2016 so that an accurate record of the impacts of displacement from the Ridgeway can be provided for the management of solstice in 2017.
 - g. the Parish Council publicises its arrangements as widely as possible in concert with others to deter displacement.
 6. If the National Trust decides to apply for a TRO in 2016, the Parish Council urges that it only does so in respect of 2016, rather than the next five years, so that a review of its effectiveness across the Parish can be held and a comprehensive, long term plan can be drawn up and agreed.