

# Shifford Carriage Driving Group (RDA)

Charity Number: 1208637

Website: <https://shiffordcarriagedriving.org>



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**Carriage Driving for Disabled People**  
**Enriching lives through horses.**

## Consultation/Survey

### Letcombe Bassett & West Challow Green Road BOAT and Letcombe Regis and West Challow BOAT

#### Our Opinions

1. We support the seasonal prohibition of motor vehicles on the Green Road BOAT. However, we are of the view that this should be a year round prohibition and should include motor cycles.
2. We oppose the seasonal prohibition of horse drawn carriages with four or more wheels and wider than 1.6m on the Green Road BOAT
3. We support the TRO to prohibit the use of motor vehicles, including motor cycles from the Letcombe Regis and West Challow BOAT.
4. We oppose the TRO to prohibit the use of horse drawn carriages exceeding 1.6m in width from using the Letcombe Regis and West Challow Boat.

Below we set out the context that informs our opinions, our views and concerns. Our opinion is also based upon local knowledge and consideration of the contents of the Statements of Reasons.

#### Who we are.

Our carriage driving venue is currently located in Charney Basset, Oxon. We provide therapeutic pleasure drives around the village and on the tracks around our venue, for severely disabled adults and teenagers and those with disabilities that prevent them from continuing to ride. We drive in convoy with one 4 wheel carriage and one two wheel carriage.

## **Why we matter**

The therapeutic benefits of carriage driving (CD) are immense for those who are no longer able to independently engage with outdoor pursuits and exercise, or to immerse themselves in the enjoyment of the natural world.

CD produces a sense of wellbeing, freedom and enhanced independence for our participants and respite for their carers. It also provides physical therapy by increasing core strength and balance, provoking gentle muscular stimulation and developing hand eye co-ordination.

## **Current situation and limiting factors.**

There are 470 RDA groups nationwide of which only 60 provide carriage driving. We are one of two groups in Oxfordshire. The future of RDA Carriage driving is at risk due to the lack of availability of circular safe off road and quiet lane driving routes. We are aware that over the years a number of local RDA CD groups have ceased to operate due to the increasing volumes of traffic and heavy vehicles on minor roads.

Save for the Lyford Road, upon which we occasionally drive, the other minor roads leading from the village are unsuitable for us to drive on due to a combination of traffic volume, lack of visibility, narrow width and pot holes. In the two years that we have been at our current venue the traffic through the village has noticeably increased.

Within the Vale of the White Horse there are very few byways and none within the Charney Bassett area that we could utilise as safer circular routes accessible from our current venue. Therefore, we are constantly seeking to identify off road and quiet lane routes within a reasonable transportation distance and with parking areas of sufficient size to allow for loading and unloading horses and carriages.

The ability to access such routes would enable our group to survive and develop so as to be able to accommodate a greater number of disabled participants as well as extending our activities to include longer distance and competitive endurance drives leading to RDA participant awards. This in itself would enhance our participants' sense of self worth and achievement.

The Byways within a reasonable travelling distance of Charney Bassett, and with the potential to address our needs are those that are subject of this consultation. That is because there is the possibility of being able to arrange suitable parking at

the Letcombe Riding Club field in Letcombe Regis. That field gives direct access onto the Letcombe Regis and West Challow BOAT and then onto the Green Road BOAT leading to a circular route down Holborn Hill into Letcombe Bassett and back along Bassett Road to Letcombe Regis. These roads are fairly quiet lanes with mainly good visibility.

### **General Consultation Comments**

#### **A) Factors that exclude us**

At present we are excluded from using these routes for the following reasons.

- Insufficient width between barriers and blocks to allow access.
- Complete blockage by a telegraph pole at the junction of Green Road and Holborn Hill
- A deep, open and unprotected ditch immediately adjacent to the northern edge of the just about navigable part of the Green Road carriage way at the Holborn Hill end.
- The damage to the surface of the carriageways caused by the passage of motor vehicles including motor bikes.
- In sufficient maintenance of the carriageways to ensure a navigable safe surface and width of track capable of providing dual safe passage for all users.
- Additional safety concerns arising from the risk of encountering motor vehicles and motor bikes, particularly those travelling at speed as there is currently no possibility of safe dual passage on any part of the Green Road BOAT (Note- a horse and carriage cannot reverse more than a few steps particularly on an incline) There are few places where a carriage or motor vehicle could pull off the main track to allow the other to safely pass. Then there is the issue of the speed and noise of approach of motor vehicles in a confined space which could potentially unsettle the horses.

#### **B) Specific concerns about barriers**

We note that the Statements of Reasons submit that the prohibitions should apply to horse drawn carriages of wider than 1.6m. The track width of our 4 wheel carriage is 1.5m. The 2 wheel carriage is a little narrower. Even though we would not be subject of the proposed orders and could lawfully use both BOATS there would be a continuing access issue if OCC were to install enforcement barriers to prevent access by motor vehicles, similar to the one already installed at the B4507 end of the neighbouring Cornhill Lane BOAT. Our concerns in relation to this barrier are:-

- The gaps between the 2 side posts and the barrier measure 1.6m. That leaves a clearance of a mere 10cm for our 4 wheel carriage. The British Horse Society recommends that gaps and gates on a Byway should measure between 1.8m and 3m.
- Looking at the barrier from the direction of the B4507, the gap on the left handside is on a slope. The ground is rough both on the approach and on the descent behind the barrier. There is vegetation/a hedge directly in front of the gap. To navigate through the gap the horse would have to approach at an angle and then make a turn back onto the track before meeting the hedge on the opposite side of the track. Taking into account the overall length of the equipage (horse and carriage) this is a tight turn with miniscule clearance. The gap is not therefore safely navigable for the following reasons. The horse may stumble on the rough ground, or the carriage could hit a bump. A bird could fly out of the hedges and startle a horse. The driver could make a minor steering error, all with the potential for the shafts or side of the carriage to collide with the barrier. This is an accident waiting to happen with potentially catastrophic consequences and a public liability issue for OCC.
- The gap to the right hand side has a smoother and more level approach. However, there is an additional hazard on the far side in the form of a metal gatepost next to the hedge and adjacent to the descent back on to the track of the Byway. The descent is also rough impacted chalk and the carriageway of the Byway is fairly narrow. Even if the gap were widened to the minimum recommended 1.8m, navigation would still be challenging. A national competition standard equine in an off road carriage and with an advanced level driver could perhaps safely make the turn. An RDA pony with a lower to the ground(adapted) carriage and a novice disabled driver may not be so lucky.
- For these reasons our disabled driving group is in reality excluded from exercising the right to lawfully use Cornhill Lane and it is of concern that a similar situation will arise in respect of the BOATS subject of this consultation.
- It is also of concern that should a horse drawn carriage approach this barrier unawares from the direction of the A417 it is likely to become stuck. The byway is too narrow for the equipage to turn round and retrace its steps. Due to the lack of safe clearance between the gaps the driver and any passengers may be faced with having to dismount, detach the horse from the carriage and lead it though the gap, then pull the carriage through manually before putting the horse back to the carriage on the B4507 side of the barrier. Detaching a horse from and putting it to a carriage carries an

element of risk in a familiar environment. Those risks would increase in an environment of this nature.

### **C) Other comments in relation to the Statements of Reasons**

- We note that both statements seek to restrict/prohibit access for horse drawn vehicles of a width greater than 1.6m. However, neither statement illustrates or evidences that such horse drawn vehicles have or are likely to cause damage to the surface of the Byways, comparable or to the extent that damage has been caused by motor vehicles including motor bikes. It is likely that motorised vehicles will be travelling at far greater speeds than a horse drawn vehicle of whatever width on this type of terrain and will cause greater friction with the surfaces. Consequently we surmise that the motive for seeking to exclude horse drawn vehicles with a width of greater than 1.6m has more to do with the width of the gaps that are being incorporated into enforcement barriers to prevent access by motorised vehicles.
- The Letcombe Regis/West Challow statement says that “ *Under the Highways Act 1980, the Council is required to maintain the Byway to a standard suitable for ordinary traffic appropriate to its character....*” and argues that “ *to upgraded the Byway to a standard suitable for larger vehicles .... would fundamentally alter the rural and historic character of the route*”

What therefore was the rural and historic use of these routes? and what would be the character of the ordinary traffic that historically used them? We would submit that historically they are likely to have been drove roads that later evolved into transportation routes for horse drawn draught ,farm wagons and carts, pleasure carriages and as cross country coaching routes. Usage as leisure routes for motorised vehicles is a very modern concept . Accordingly, if the surface of these routes have, over time, been allowed to degrade, then to be compliant with the Act surely the standard of maintenance is that suitable for the type of ordinary traffic that would historically have made use of them.

- We also note that it is argued that alternative routes exist for larger motor vehicles , including Windmill Hill Road that runs parallel and provides a safe and appropriate means of access. We do not think that this statement is reasonably applicable to larger horse drawn vehicles.