

Applicants Case for the Proposed Diversion of Public Rights of Way adjacent to Hill House Farm

Prepared on behalf of Messrs Oliver.

1.0 Introduction

This report will discuss the reasons for the application for the diversion, extinguishment and creation of public rights of way proposed to be approved.

2.0 Background

Messrs Oliver purchased Hill House Farm in December 2013. At this time it was utilised as a mainly arable holding. Since the purchase significant investment has taken place in the creation of livestock housing for cattle and pigs alongside a further building for straw storage adjacent to a handling system for cattle and sheep (as hatched in red approximately on enclosed plan). The land is now utilised as a mixed livestock and arable farm. Hill House Farm is ran alongside Messrs Oliver's other holdings, Haswell Farm and Grange Farm. Hill House Farm is most suitable to be the hub farm steading as it is within the centre of the holdings and can be utilised for all cattle management across all of the land owned by Messrs Oliver with all cattle (fattening) brought to Hill House and then dispersed from Hill House into outlying fields.

3.0 Proposal

Messrs Oliver has proposed an alternative public access route (footpath) which provides a new link of a significant 1km length for pedestrians heading in the Haswell direction. Currently walkers who wish to travel this direction currently have to walk along the road, either the B1283 or the Ludworth Road. The new link would enable pedestrians to stay off road and will create much better connectivity for the north/south paths that it crosses. This application also offers an alternative bridleway leading from the highway to the eastern side of Crime Rigg quarry to join bridleway number 12.

4.0 Safety Issues

Across the summer months there can be between 2500-2700 cattle which are handled within the cattle sheds on the farm and around 600 housed in addition to the 2500 pigs in the winter months. To access Hill House Farm steading the section of bridleway 12 is utilised from land in all directions. Please see plan provided in order to demonstrate cattle movements on the holding. Land in the ownership of Messrs Oliver has been starred in red. It is clearly shown that Hill House Farm has a central location across the land holdings and consequently why it is utilised for animal handling. All cattle from the surrounding land are walked by foot to Hill House Farm. In addition to regular intakes of store cattle purchased throughout England and Scotland which are brought in either by articulated or rigid cattle wagons.

Movement schedule	
1	When cattle are brought onto site they are held in sheds at Hill House Farm to be dosed and vaccinated.
2	Turned out to grass
3	At 8 weeks cattle are brought in to be wormed
4	Turned out to grass
5	Brought in for final time at finishing weights.

As shown above, the cattle on this holding undertake five movements to and from the buildings. This accounts for approximately 12500- 13500 cattle movements across the bridleway. The public cannot be at risk from becoming entangled in these livestock movements which is the current position.

The section of the bridleway from the B1283 to Hill House Farm is regularly in use for livestock movements from the south. This track is not suited for a range of users as there is very poor visibility both onto the B1283 and along the track itself due to its steep sides and sharp corners.

At present vehicles, livestock, walkers and horse riders all come into conflict with each other posing dangers to all with the only current way of avoiding this is for farm workers to be positioned on the bridleway when the above regular livestock movements are taking place. This is practically unfeasible and the only solution is to have the bridleway relocated. Upgrading footpath 14 to a bridleway to meet the existing bridleway which follows round the east of the quarry would overcome the above mentioned safety concerns. This will be fenced to 4m wide but will be surfaced with stone, details of surfacing to be confirmed with DCC.

5.0 Bio Security Issues

All keepers of cattle are required by law to have their animals tested for bovine TB at prescribed intervals which must reflect the regional risks of bovine TB and comply with EU legislation. As an Approved Finishing Unit the farm operates a stringent TB testing regime which requires tests to be undertaken every 90 days at a minimum.

Testing is undertaken in batches of 300 and the cattle are required to be within the handling facilities on day 1 and 3 of the test. Consequently testing 600 cattle takes 4 days to complete spread out three days between each test. The cattle are also moved to the handling facilities at additional times for other welfare purposes and medical treatment over and above the normal management movements..

Hill House farm also runs a pig rearing enterprise fattening 2500 housed pigs. Bio-security is particularly paramount within a pig unit. Waste food may contain micro-organisms that are not harmful to humans but could be harmful to pigs consequently the public should not be able to walk in this close proximity to the livestock as contamination from discarded food, such as packed lunch boxes could cause a notifiable disease risk and threaten the pig industry. Examples of this are Swine Fever and Foot and Mouth Disease. This opinion has been validated by Howells Veterinary Services Ltd. A supporting letter from the Veterinary practice is enclosed within the application.

6.0 Farm Security

The security of the farm steading is inhibited by the existing right of way which runs past the farm steading. Farm steadings utilise a range of equipment which is not fixed and cannot reasonably be locked up at all times throughout the day due to regular use requirements, consequently farms are

often targeted by thieves. A right of way within this close proximity gives thieves the chance to inspect the holding, including layout for gaining access and awareness of the farms property. This right of way inhibits the farmer's ability to secure his property as public access makes it difficult to spot suspicious behaviour. The holding has been subject to thefts in previous years. This change to the right of way would be a key in making the farm holding more secure. An example of this was a break –in in September 2014 where a number of valuable tools were stolen. When reviewing CCTV footage of the incident it was clear that the right of way had been used to access the property.

7.0 Conclusion

This alternative routing provides significant public benefit whilst also overcoming issues currently faced at the farm steading. As outlined above there is a significant danger to the public who may accidentally become entangled within livestock movements and the only realistic way of overcoming this is to divert the public rights of way away from the holding.