

Public inquiry to be held into plan to fence off part of common

British Horse Society says case will be legal test of equestrian rights in UK as council plans to use land for grazing

A PUBLIC inquiry into plans by West Berkshire Council to fence off Padworth Common seems likely this year following objections from The British Horse Society, which says it has become a legal test case on equestrian access to commons countrywide.

The district council has confirmed plans to fence off part of the 23-hectare site for the "sole purpose of containing livestock intended for use as conservation grazers".

The council intends to use the area to graze a small number of cattle and ponies on Padworth Common and says that, as it is largely unenclosed, especially

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near adjacent properties and main roads, stock fencing is a necessity.

The council's website states: "Under the Commons Act 2006, such fencing is considered 'works' and is subject to a formal consent process under section 38."

The website also says that an informal consultation was carried out, prior to the commencement of a legal process.

It says: "The user group and residents meeting which we held on July 31, 2011, was very well

attended and proved useful to us in establishing the concerns of the main interests in attendance. We hope to address some of these concerns in our application."

The West Berkshire access and bridleway officer for the British Horse Society, Janice Bridger, said that the plans would restrict public access to the common and had triggered a huge response.

She said: "A large number of objections have been received. I believe about 120, and a public inquiry has been called. I have not been informed of the date yet but May has been suggested."

The council's proposals, she

continued, would fence horse riders out of a significant part of the south common, while allowing access to all other user groups, plus cattle and its own conservation ponies.

"The logic for this is unclear, especially as riders have been using the common in living memory without any reports of damage to the common as far as I am aware.

She said that the society's legal counsel had advised excluding horse riders from the common was unlawful, adding: "This will be contested at the public inquiry, which is turning into a test case on equestrian access to commons such as Padworth



throughout the country."

According to the chairman of Padworth Parish Council, Keith Gilbert, West Berkshire Council owns the part of the common in question and manages the remainder of the land.

News in brief

Motorcyclist hurt in second A4 crash in two weeks

A SECOND serious crash within two weeks has occurred along the Bath Road, Thatcham.

On Friday, a motorcyclist was involved in an accident with a car on the Bath Road between the Floral Way and Pipers Way roundabouts, at about 7pm.

The motorcyclist, a 40-year-old Reading man, was taken to the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, in a critical condition with serious injuries.

On Tuesday, police spokesman Craig Evry confirmed that he was in a stable condition.

Just over a week earlier, on January 24, Thatcham Town Cricket Club captain Robb Fraser was killed after the bicycle he was riding was involved in an accident with a Hanson lorry.

Mr Fraser, aged 40, of Henwick Lane, had been cycling along Bath Road at the junction of Pound Lane at about 8am when the accident happened.

He was taken to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading, by land ambulance, but later died.

Blown fuse causes town centre power cut

'Signs are inadequate' – Lib Dems join row over Park Way bridge fines

"This is typical political oppor-