

Byways & Bridleways Trust

Press Release

Ford Perfect?

The Byways & Bridleways Trust welcomes a commonsense decision about the diversion of a public bridleway in Northumberland.

In 2007, Northumberland County Council made an order to change a cluster of public rights of way at Hedgeley Northumberland, including moving the fording point where Bridleway 2 crosses the River Breamish, which is notorious for running 'high and fast' at times.

Local walker and cyclist Alan Kind objected to other aspects of the council's proposals, but was happy with the proposed new ford, as it has shallow banks and is on an area of shingle – an ideal 'bottom' for a river crossing. When coming to her decision on the proposals, the Secretary of State's Independent Inspector, Mrs Sue Arnott, noted that sections of the proposed new bridleway route to the west of the ford are in poor condition, and asked the council to come up with an alternative scheme. This they did, while changing the new ford to cross the river diagonally.

Alan Kind objected to this. He said, "Historically, fords are as straight across a river as possible, and for good reason. In crossing any ford, the passenger is subjected to a force from the water flow. Pedestrians are most vulnerable to being knocked over by flowing water coming at them from behind, or from a rear quarter. This is because a force applied in that direction can quite readily make the person's knee bend suddenly. This is easily tested on dry land. Further, the council concedes that this ford is subject to fast flows and high levels, so any passenger should have to experience only a minimum 'time exposed to danger'. If the council thinks otherwise, can I please see their risk assessment?"

In her decision letter, Mrs Arnott agrees, and writes, " ... I take on board the objector's concerns. I therefore propose a modified new route ... adjusting slightly the alignment of the crossing to make it a little more direct and not only shorter but safer."

The Trust welcomes this pragmatic view and looks forward to the restoration of this excellent, and too-long-unusable, public bridleway.

[Decision letter FPS/R2000/4/15 of 16 December 2009]