

To: New Forest National Park Authority Members

19th January 2015

Subject: Cycle Event Organisers Charter

Dear Member,

We write in connection with the Cycle Event Organisers' Charter to be discussed at the meeting of the Authority on 22nd January 2015.

http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/309/new_forest_national_park_authority

The Charter is of course advisory and all cycle event organisers in the New Forest National Park run their events within the law. It is also worth noting that the Government Vision for the National Parks of England states that National Parks are '...locations for large-scale community, charitable or other events...such as...cycling events...'.

Cycling organisations have been actively involved in the creation of the Charter from its inception, as a result of which the majority of the Charter reflects practices that have been developed and followed by the major cycle event organisers over a number of years. In particular the cycling organisations were instrumental in putting the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) at the centre of the process.

However we depart from the Charter on two points and cannot support it as written. We do however believe that common ground can be achieved if the Charter is suitably amended.

Case for Amending the Charter

The Charter follows on from the successful development of a Cycling Code aimed at influencing rider behaviour.

After claims from local resident and organisations that cycling events were variously threats to the Special Qualities of the Forest and a danger to humans and wildlife, no evidence has emerged to support these claims. The central objection to the cycle events, along with a general antipathy to cyclists in general, is of inconvenience to motorists. Further, the larger events that are the focus of the arbitrary, non-evidence based limit of 1000 riders in Section 2.1 occur only twice a year and over routes that are regularly rotated, whilst event organisers, working in conjunction with the SAG, have continued to improve and develop their event management plans.

The requirement for numbering in Section 4.1 is currently greater than that required by the Highway Code of motor cyclists, leading to the prospect of a child in an event being asked to have more by way of numbering than the rider of a high powered motor bike.

It was clear from some attending the Cycle Liaison Group that the requirement for all riders to wear numbers front and rear was motivated by a desire to photograph and report riders during events. This form of vigilantism, only one step removed from the illegal removal of signs and the spreading of tacks on the road, can only lead to confrontation and danger to participants.

Our view therefore is that the Charter as written is both discriminatory and disproportionate.

Discriminatory in that advisory limits are not recommended by the NFNPA for the number of participants or vehicles attending non-cycling commercial events that also lead to local traffic congestion, such as the New Forest Show or events at the Beaulieu Motor Museum. Nor have limits been recommended in other areas where local issues have arisen such as the number of dog walkers during the ground nesting bird season or the number of riders of shod horses; indeed the NFNPA has previously undertaken significant policy changes when challenged by the equestrian community.

Discriminatory in that the wearing of numbers in general, let alone front and rear, are not being advised by the NFNPA for any participants in any other recreational activity.

Disproportionate in that the advice on numbering is more onerous than that required by the law of motorcyclists and disproportionate given the low frequency of the primary event involved.

The question as to whether this prolonged exercise, which has driven cost across a number of public bodies, is a good use of taxpayers' money in these constrained times arises separately.

Potential Consequences

There is increasing anecdotal evidence that some motorists are displaying a more aggressive attitude to cyclists in general. Publishing a Charter that does not have the support of event organisers on the points mentioned will lead to an increased probability of confrontation and potential danger.

It should be the job of public bodies to minimise these possibilities not increase them.

Further, and notwithstanding the careful qualification of some of the public bodies supporting the Charter, there will be an expectation in some quarters that the limit will be policed or enforced, if not by the Police or the NFNPA then by some locals themselves.

National Park Authority

This Charter is unlike any other we are aware of in the UK National Parks and as written will go one step further in establishing the anti-cycling credentials of the Authority following the publicity surrounding the 'Boris Bike' scheme and the handing back of grant monies won for cycling projects. To claim, as has been done in the pre-amble to the agenda item, that this is not an 'Authority' document is not credible; it is the Authority that commissioned the Charter, solicited support from public bodies and it is this meeting of the Authority that will determine its content.

We urge that as Authority members, charged with acting in the best interests of the Authority and not as the representatives of any interest group, you consider and implement our suggested changes so that a document can emerge that is supported by the cycling community and that will demonstrate a degree of unanimity.

Amendments

In light of the above we request that you amend the Charter as follows so that it will then benefit from the support of the cycling organisations:

Section 2.1 replace the fifth bullet point

'To reduce inconvenience to other road users, including local residents, businesses and other cyclists, please accept a maximum of 1,000 riders. If another cycling event is planned for the same day, using the same roads, the total number of riders should not exceed 1,000.'

with

'The number of riders in an event to be agreed with the SAG based on the nature of the event, the route and the traffic management plan.'

Section 4.1 amend

'Participants should be clearly identifiable to marshals, when used, through use of rider numbers: A6 on front and A5 or larger on back.'

to read

'Participants in individually timed events should be identifiable to marshals, when used, through use of rider numbers on front and/or on back.'

We await your considered position

Co-signed:

British Cycling - Mark Adams, Regional Development Manager South
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CTC – Tejesh Mistry, Head of Development South
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cc Cycle Event Organisers
Campaign for National Parks
Organisations in section 1.3 of the Charter