

Wakefield District Cycle Forum has now received the results of a formal complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman brought on its behalf by Dr Sandy Clark, a longstanding and respected member of the Forum, against Wakefield Metropolitan District Council.

The Council's own cycle strategy says, "It is very important to carry out pre-consultation before any decisions are taken to install a barrier". Nevertheless, no consultation took place before an A-frame

at Haw Park Woods was replaced with a kissing gate. The council had received a complaint about the A-frame from a disabled user, but the gate they replaced it with created access problems for cyclists, including those with disabilities, adapted cycles, tricycles, recumbent cycles, cycle trailers or other variants. The type of barrier the Council installed requires some cyclists to dismount, contrary to design guidance.



Although WDCF's complaint addressed cyclists' concerns, kissing gates cause problems for pedestrians with pushchairs, wheelchairs, crutches and mobility scooters. Once the gate is open, access is easier, but opening it requires possessing a RADAR key, the dexterity to insert and turn it and move the bolt and then the ability to reverse to open the gate, all of which create difficulties for many.

Government cycle design guidance says that:

- There is a general presumption against access controls (barriers) unless there's persistent and significant problem of antisocial moped/motorbike use that can't be controlled by periodic policing.
- Access controls that require the cyclist to dismount or cannot accommodate the cycle design vehicle are not inclusive and should not be used.
- An access control that requires cyclists to dismount will exclude hand cyclists and others who cannot easily walk.'

It suggests an alternative solution of bollards.

WDCF has asked for details of the number of incidents of antisocial motorbike use but the local authority has not supplied this. Forum members believe that the more cyclists, horse riders and walkers use a path or trail, the less attractive these are to antisocial motorbike riders. It supports periodic policing where necessary.

The Council accepts that it was at fault and has agreed both to consult about the changes to the gate and to retake the decision about what access arrangements should be sited there. In future, it will provide guidance to staff that all such changes to access must be subject to a full and proper consultation. It will make any necessary changes to the configuration of the gate within eight weeks of the Ombudsman's decision.

Sandy Clark, who raised the complaint on behalf of the Wakefield District Cycle Forum said 'It is a pity we had to take this matter to the Local Authority Ombudsman in order to get Wakefield Council to implement its own policy and national guidelines on access to cycle paths. Hopefully this successful complaint will ensure that future access controls to our path network in Wakefield will not deter any legitimate users.'

WDCF is grateful to Sandy Clark for his tenacity and looks forward to being consulted about the existing and any future barriers.

