

TITLE: Request for the Temporary Closure of Footpath 4 Remenham (part)

FOR CONSIDERATION BY The Executive on 28 January 2016

WARD Remenham, Wargrave and Ruscombe

DIRECTOR : Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment

LEAD MEMBER: Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The temporary closure will allow the Henley Festival to be organised and run in a safe manner whilst enabling residents and visitors to continue to use Remenham Footpath 4 via a short detour.

The Festival Trust applies annually for this closure to enable the safe management and execution of a locally and regionally enjoyed festival.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is recommended to:

- 1) approve the making of an Order for the closure of Footpath Remenham No 4, for a closure of an 80m section of the footpath for the set up and de rig of the Festival stage from Monday 4th July to Wednesday 6th July 2016 inclusive and from Monday 11th July to Tuesday 12th July 2016 inclusive.
- 2) include within the closure a 488m section for evening performances from Wednesday 6th July to Sunday 10th July 2016 inclusive, under Section 16A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, subject to the receipt of the requisite consent of the Secretary of State for Transport.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Authority is required to consider whether it is necessary for traffic to be restricted for the purpose of facilitating the holding of a relevant event and whether it is reasonably practical to hold the event otherwise than on the highway (in this case a footpath). The applicant has stated that it is necessary to restrict traffic for the holding of the event and that it is not reasonable for the organisers to hold the event other than on the road in question. Therefore a decision is needed on whether to approve the making of the Closure Order if the event is to proceed. The duration of the closure is also required to be approved by the Secretary of State for Transport.

Background

1. A request has been received from the organisers of the Henley Festival of Music and the Arts for the closure of Footpath No. 4 Remenham between the hours of:

Day (2016)	Times	Length of closure (metres approx)
Monday 4 th July	00.01- midnight	80m
Tuesday 5 th July	00.01- midnight	80m
Wednesday 6 th July	00.01- 17: 45pm	80m
Wednesday 6 th July	17: 45 -midnight	488m
Thursday 7 th July	17: 45 - midnight	488m
Friday 8 th July	17:45 - 1:00	488m
Saturday 9 th July	17: 45 – 2:00	488m
Sunday 10 th July	17:45 - 23:30	488m
Monday 11 th July	06:00 - midnight	80m
Tuesday 12 th July	00: 01- 23:59	80m

The closure periods from Monday 4th July to Wednesday 6th July 2016 and from Monday 11th July to Tuesday 12th July 2016, are for the build and dismantling periods when there will be movement of equipment and vehicles on the footpath. The closures required for the set up and dismantling of the stage will be for the shorter length of footpath approximately 80m. An alternative route will run parallel to the closed section of the right of way at a distance of approximately 10m from the footpath. Henley Festival will make every effort to re-open the towpath sooner on Tuesday 12th July, as long as it is safe to do so.

2. The Festival takes place after the Henley Regatta. The Festival's organisers make use of the Regatta's infrastructure such as marquees and stands, which are already in situ. The main Festival events are held on a large 'floating stage' constructed in the river bed, the building of which takes place on and adjacent to Footpath No.4.
3. As Highway Authority, this Council has a statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of any highway for which they are the Highway Authority. As such, it is for the Council to consider any application for the closure of a highway, albeit on a temporary basis, in conjunction with this statutory duty.
4. Notwithstanding the above, in its capacity as a Traffic Authority, the Council is empowered by the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to make an Order to regulate traffic on a temporary basis in order to facilitate the holding of certain events (a "relevant event") on the highway, provided that it is satisfied that the event cannot be held otherwise than on a road. At section 142(1) of the Act the term "road" is defined as any length of highway or any other road to which the public has access and therefore includes any footpath.
5. If the Order is made as recommended, it would continue in force for more than three days. Section 16B(1)(b) of the 1984 Act provides that, before the Order can be made, the consent of the Secretary of State for Transport would be required. In 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 the Secretary of State, after detailed consideration of the material facts, approved the making of a similar length closure order.

6. Whilst there is no legal requirement to consult in respect of the application, the Council agreed at Executive on June 25th 2015, that for applications for temporary closures on rights of way affecting the Thames Path and the Blackwater Valley Footpath, (for special events) the following policy will be adopted: 1) prior consultation will be carried out with the following groups: The Ramblers' Association, The Open Spaces Society, Natural England, the relevant Parish Council and the ward member for the area through which the path is situated; and 2) the decision as to whether a closure will be made will be taken by the Executive unless it is agreed by the Executive Member for Environment that such referral to the Executive is not required.
7. Consultations were sent out in October to those organisations agreed by the Executive as well as Henley Town Council, who has asked to be consulted in previous years. The deadline for comments was 6th November 2015. Henley Town Council's Recreation and Amenities committee and the Full Henley Town Council resolved that: The Town Council supports the diversion of the footpath along the towpath to accommodate the Henley Festival 2016. Remenham Parish Council has no objection to the Order. The Ramblers' Association has no objection to the Order. Natural England has no objection to the Order. The Member for Remenham and Wargrave has no objection to the Order. However, the Open Spaces Society has objected. In 2015 there were no complaints or objections to the Temporary Closure of part of footpath Remenham 4, from members of the public, local clubs or Remenham residents.

Analysis of Issues

Open Space Society issues	WBC response
The event could be held elsewhere.	The event uses the same infrastructure as used during the Henley Regatta. It is not a matter for the Authority to state where the organisers should hold the Festival but whether it is necessary to close the footpath or not where they chose to hold the event.
The council must satisfy itself that it is not reasonably practicable for the event to be held otherwise than on a road.	The stage is next to the footpath where ticket holders watch the performances. Access needs to be limited to satisfy the licensing requirements and because electrical cabling etc is placed across the footpath. It is therefore considered that it is necessary that the relevant event encompasses the use of the adjoining footpath.
The council needs to be aware of its statutory duty, under section 130 of the Highways Act 1980, 'to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of the highway.	The duty is effectively suspended during such times as the Council uses its available statutory powers to close the path by legal order,
This is the Thames Path National Trail, a route of international importance, which should not be interfered with merely for a private event.	The legislation does not preclude the making of orders for commercial events or on national trails. Natural England has not objected to the proposed closure.

The council needs to 'have regard to the safety and convenience of alternative routes suitable for traffic which will be affected by the order.	The alternative routes identified for use by the public during the closure period is considered to be appropriate for this relatively short term diversion.
The Society urges the council 'to challenge the festival to demonstrate why it cannot operate with the path left in place'.	The council is satisfied that the event cannot be held without the closure of the footpath for the reasons given above.
The OSS states that the alternative route needs to be a public highway.	This is not the case. WBC should only have regard to the suitability and convenience of the alternative route for the traffic affected by the order.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	The organisers of the Henley Festival pay all legal, advertising and inspection costs of the Closure Order		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

N/A

Cross-Council Implications

N/A

List of Background Papers

Letter of application.
Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
Letter of permission from the Stewards of the Henley Regatta
Letter of objection from the Open Spaces Society

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