

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PATH FROM SCONCE TO THE TRACK AT FAWEATHER CABINS

The Friends of Baildon Moor are leading a public consultation on behalf of the stakeholders on proposed work on this well-used path.

Introduction

Baildon Moor is a registered urban common, with rights of access by the public for 'air and exercise' and recreation in a wide range of activities. The Moor itself is a relatively small area (399 hectares) with rich natural and historical features, yet is one of the most heavily used areas of upland moorland in the country, which has an impact on the moorland environment itself, and on other users.

Increasing numbers of people are visiting to enjoy the special qualities of the area: its inspirational open spaces, its opportunities for walking, riding and cycling; for bird watching and plant study; and for its rich historic evidence.

All users are asked to leave no trace on the moorland environment:

- Always take all your litter and leftover food home with you. Bins are also provided in the car parks. Please don't leave it for local people. Littering offenders can be fined
- Consider the impact on the trail of how you walk, run or ride.
- Keep to existing paths and tracks; go through puddles, not around them to avoid widening the trail or creating new lines.
- Travel in single-file so as not to widen the track.
- Wet and muddy paths are more vulnerable to damage. If it has been raining for a while, please stay off the soft areas.
- Make no additions or alterations to the natural environment, such as by planting trees and flowers or removing saplings and wild plants.
- Lighting fires, barbecues and camping are not permitted.
- Avoid damage to walls, fences, gates and stiles.
- Protect archaeology, habitats and species; in particular wet heath vegetation communities and ground nesting birds, especially during the nesting period 1st March to 31st July.
- Avoid areas of wetland off the paths where threatened plant species are present
- Please follow the Countryside Code
- Close all gates.
- Individuals and user groups should all be seeking to minimise conflict between other users.
- Show consideration for the safety of all users, both real & perceived. People should feel safe as well as being safe.ⁱ

The track

This track runs from the junction of the Sconce path (which starts at the car park opposite the White House below the Eaves on Hawksworth Rd) and where it joins the recorded footpath and stile at Sconce, than to the west along the Moor's north boundary to where it meets the access track across the moorland to the cabins (Fawether or Robinson's). There is a circular 2 km route back up the access track across a relatively easy surface and gentle slope suitable for a range of users, ability and fitness.

A track continues west here as part of a larger route around the Moor.



Figure 1 Existing path in dotted black; new proposed route in green

The westerly portion of the track runs through land which is wet much of the year. Due to increased use and high rainfall over the last year in particular, the surface of this popular route has degraded further and has widened to up to ten meters in places where users have made their own way round the worst areas. This has caused a serious loss of appreciable areas of moorland vegetation and habitat on the south side. There is less impact to the northwest towards the boundary wall, where the vegetation is tussock grass and dense bracken. Negotiation is difficult for walkers and cyclists, and is often too soft for safe usage by horse riders. The surface itself is wet and unstable and is likely to deteriorate further with use and exposure.

The area south of the current route is classified as wet upland heath, with heather and grasses prominent. The northwest corner of the area is largely dense bracken. Adjacent fields over the boundary wall are grazed. Some trees; birch and one oak; can be found along the ditch embankment, with a few gorse and holly shrubs. These can provide good cover for birds such as wren and warblers.

Scope

In considering these proposals, one needs to bear in mind the Friends of Baildon Moor remit:

1. To work in collaboration with Bradford Metropolitan District Council and others to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Baildon Moor.
2. To promote Baildon Moor as an open space amenity for education, recreation and leisure time in the interests of social welfare and with the objective of enhancing the quality of life of those living, working near or visiting Baildon Moor.

In some cases, these aims can conflict and striking the right balance can be a challenge.

There are compelling environmental reasons and a general public will to maintain the area as open moorland, while on the other hand the patterns of human access and usage are more similar to that of a country park.

Background

Wider plans for paths and access improvements across the Moor and surrounding woodlands are under discussion to create a coherent framework with a variety of approaches appropriate to the local features and to support and manage access for the range of different user groups and abilities. Input from stakeholders, archaeological, wildlife and environmental groups is important in part to both protect sensitive areas and also to spread the traffic load onto some of the many other informal trails in the network. The Walkers Are Welcome initiative for Baildon adds impetus to this, supported notably by Baildon Parish Council.

While the larger plan is needed, while this is under development urgent consideration is required for this path in question.

Recent related work includes the path from the Lower Eaves car park to Sconce, which had deteriorated and widened significantly and suffered from poor drainage in places. This was rebuilt and surfaced in 2011 by the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (CBMDC Countryside Service (CSS) with grant funding obtained by FoBM. This has been generally, though not universally, well received and widely used.

At the boardwalk towards the west end, this path runs through a designated SEGI (Site of Environmental General Interest)) where plants such as sundew and several rare wild orchids are found. It was, and remains, essential not to change the rate of drainage in this area as this will compromise this fragile habitat.

While the popularity of this path and the increase in access is to be welcomed, particularly by new and less mobile users, it was not intended to become the general model for other paths on the Moor and in the woodlands.

On the route in question, some improvements to drainage were made by the Countryside Service and local volunteers in winter 2012-2013 by clearing the west portion of the boundary drainage ditch and adding several pipes and surface stones. Further clearance downstream up to the confluence with the beck in the far corner is planned as routine maintenance.

A path along the east of Hawksworth Road was cut in 2010 and is in frequent use, particularly by horse riders.

FoBM have in place a programme of bracken clearance which is undertaken by volunteers on many popular paths on the Moor. The extent of clearance possible is dependent on numbers of volunteers. A number of these paths link with the path in question here in this northeast corner of the Moor.

Framework

The Moor has been under Higher Level Stewardship status (HLS) through Natural England from 2012, which affords increased protection for this valuable upland moorland habitat. Land management responsibility and ownership remains with City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (CBMDC), under the management of the Countryside Service (CSS).

HLS Management Aims and Objectivesⁱⁱ:

“The aim is to manage the site to deliver favourable condition for all interest features described, to conserve and enhance (SAM and Historic Environment Record (HER) designated and other HE features and to strengthen the landscape character, whilst seeking to do this in a way that is consistent with the owner’s business and other objectives.

- To maintain, enhance and where possible restore the number and diversity of species and structure of the existing moorland.

- Improve the condition and cover of grazing suppressed dwarf shrubs on dry heath, blanket bog and wet heath.
- Maintain and restore the hydrological integrity of the peatland system and other notified wetland features.
- Maintain the existing native broadleaved woodland and enhance, where appropriate, woodland cover e.g. along gills/cloughs.
- Maintain, subject to natural change, breeding bird species numbers (any decrease within limit of acceptable change) and assemblages for which the site has been designated (may refer to conservation objectives).
- Restore areas of degraded notified habitat, esp. dry heath, wet heath or blanket bog;
- Other site-specific interests, e.g. rare plants; geology.
- Retain all the features listed on the Historic Environment Record (HER) and protect them from damage.
- To maintain all Designated and other HE features in a stable condition, to protect them from damage, and to implement measures to enhance their survival.”

The following points from the HLS are also pertinent here:

Surface material ⁱⁱⁱ

Under several of the options put forward, new surfacing and sub-surface materials will be required on at least part of the route. While the gravel used for weather-proof surfacing does consolidate and naturalise over time, the materials used need to be in keeping with the location, preferably from the start. For example, builder’s rubble is not permitted.

Drainage ^{iv}

“Hydrological integrity of moorland habitats is an important part of sustainable moorland management. It is therefore agreed that there will be no new drainage works or gripping carried out on the Land.

The maintenance of drains along walls or established tracks (surfaced tracks where drains currently exist) can be maintained but not deepened, widened or improved. It should be noted, however that and ground disturbance, including the dumping of material from drain cleaning should not take place on scheduled monuments within prior consent; both activities should be avoided on any known Historic Environment (HE) features.

Artificial (e.g. grips) and other man-induced (e.g. erosion gullies) drainage across areas of moorland and in particular blanket bog can lead to significant changes in the hydrology, morphology and ecology of the habitat. They can also cause damage to HE features.”

It is apparent that a main feature of the path under consultation is currently is that drainage is poor and could usefully and easily be improved. It is by no means clear whether this would in fact change the hydrology generally, or of the SEGI but this concern does need to be addressed carefully.

Upland flushes (purple) are nearby and at lower elevation and form part of the SEGI.



Figure 2 Character of Vegetation

Options for improvement

There are two alternatives to the line of the route itself:

1. Extended route

Lengthen the route by diverting it away several metres to the west from the lower, wetter ground to be nearer the boundary drainage ditch and raised embankment (in green on map Fig 1).

At the same time, the route could be extended into the corner of the Moor to provide a longer path better suited for recreation. This is likely to be nearer the recorded line in places than the current route.

Adding gentle curves and slopes would increase interest and also reduce speeds by cyclists and runners when slower users are also present. Water bars or rolling dip profile will likely be required on the steeper slope to reduce water erosion and may also assist in this. Any bars need to be at a shallow angle to the trail and low profile for general users.

The inclination by users to create “desire lines” by cutting across the corner should be reduced by the recreational nature of the pattern of usage but would need some consideration in planning. The old route bed could be allowed to regenerate with some temporary restrictions to access, either naturally or with appropriate moorland replanting.

Localised drainage cuts across the current damaged route may also encourage users to keep to the path.

Reduction of bracken within this area is a side benefit. Planting of gorse etc. may be appropriate here, giving both bird cover and containment of traffic.

2. Existing line

Follow best line along and within the existing widened route, defining limits clearly. Adding gentle curves and slopes should still be possible.

There are several alternatives for any approach to maintenance or construction:

1. All-weather graded gravel path route

Create an all-weather, graded gravel path, similar to the current Sconce path. This would also be similar in material and character to the path up to the Swastika Stone site above Ilkley.

This option would require using a small digger to remove all stones and outcrops to a certain depth, backfilling gulleys, with drainage pipes added underneath where needed. The path material would be a light-coloured free-draining gravel at least one meter wide, cambered to ensure water run-off. The Sconce path used a yellow surface material; a more subdued tone may be more appropriate and acceptable though this fades over time.

Damage during construction would be limited to the path itself, as the plant would work on the path as it was built (likely from the west), and all site access made along it.

Several sections at the west end are narrow and run between bell-pits and an especially wet area. This area may be an example of where boardwalk or duck-boards may be beneficial in containing traffic, whilst meeting the drainage requirements and remit for the preservation of the historical features prescribed above. Recycled plastic material types are non-slip, do not deteriorate and can be reused or reset in the future. The west boardwalk on the Sconce path uses this material, first laid 15 years go. Treated timber is less initial outlay but does not last as long.

2. All-weather graded gravel path for worst parts of the route

Undertake works as in 1. above, but on specific areas of the path only. The surface of the most easterly third of the path is satisfactory much of the year and does not require the same measures as the wide wet portions. Natural ground features could thus be retained here, though levelling of the ruts could be desirable. Water bars or rolling dip profile may be needed in this steeper slope.

This would require somewhat less work and funding than option 1, and would incur reduced visual impact in the eastern part.

3. Drainage and remarking

Improve local drainage and delineate the route better in places, with no change or additional material to the surface.

4. Make no intervention

Leave as currently found.

Routine maintenance of the boundary drainage ditch would continue for all options.

Current Site Survey

1. East end by Scone stile 1



Figure 3. East end by Scone stile

2. East end from Scone stile 2



Figure 4 East end from Scone stile 2

3. East end from Scone stile 3



Figure 5 East end from Scone stile 3

4. Middle wet section 1

The trail has been widened appreciably from this section on as users have bypassed the worst areas.



Figure 6 Middle wet Section, looking east

5. Middle wet section 2



Figure 7 Middle wet section 2

6. Middle wet section 3

New proposed route is nearer to the wall to the west (left on pic)



Figure 8 Middle wet section 3

7. Middle wet section 4

New proposed route would be nearer to the wall on left outside of pic.



Figure 9 Middle wet section 4



Figure 10 Middle wet section 4

8. North west corner

New proposed route would be nearer to the wall on the west/left and ahead through the bracken



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

9. Westerly section 5



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17 Boardwalk may be useful here



Figure 18 Path route to run along ditch



Figure 19 Boardwalk example on Sconce path, before 2011 restoration

Action

Public consultation and engagement with all those with an interest in this shared public green space is essential. The involvement of the main stakeholders: Countryside Service, FoBM, and Baildon Parish Council is also key.

If any improvements are to be achieved this year it is essential that public and expert consultations, objective review and final proposals are made ASAP so work can begin. Any work needs to be carried out when the ground is dry, whilst doing this earlier will also allow more plant regrowth and naturalisation of the works. Potential disturbance to nesting bird requires consideration, though work should be away from these areas and no more invasive than the same period of public access.

Requests for comment from the public will be made in several locations and online. Deadline TBD. Responses can also be made to info@baildonmoor.org.uk.

Funding and labour questions arise and will be raised with Baildon Parish Council on Mar 19th 2013.

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ⁱ http://baildonmoor.org/wordpress/?page_id=173

ⁱⁱ AG00295822 / Version 2.0 / 13 Sep 2011 / Part 3 / Page 5 of 17

ⁱⁱⁱ TBA

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