
LARA News

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Incorporating *MFU Matters*

New 'Concordat' - Planning Really Matters

Richard Caborn, the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning, has issued (12 March 1999) a new Planning Concordat intended to 'assist in the delivery of a modernised planning system' to 'help achieve a speedier and more transparent [planning] process' - with emphasis on encouraging laggardly local authorities to speed up their plan production processes.

Issues of importance for motor sport are visible here. Firstly, the Concordat makes Government planning policy clear - individual cases should, increasingly, be decided in accordance with the development plans for each area. So positive statements and policies for active recreation, in structure and local plans are going to be even more important in the future. But, perhaps of greater importance to LARA clubs, the Concordat links to the development plan process other factors including: '*Achieving sustainable development*' - motor sport must develop and polish its environmental credentials.

'*Set within a regional context*' - this must help avoid the nimbyism that plagues motor sport (and other active recreation) and deals a blow to the 'go and play somewhere else' philosophy that some planners have employed in the past.

'*Co-ordinated with other policy areas...*' - It is important that this should be translated into a future requirement that development plans must take account of the policies and targets in the appropriate recreation strategy documents for an area.

It is difficult for development plans to take proper account of temporary uses of land - such as most motor sport events - but recreation strategies can do this. This is a positive move by the government - but motor sport clubs and organisers must get involved to get 'Best Value' in the future.

What's In A Name?

At a time when walkers have the prospect of being able to wander in "Open Access", motor sport continues to struggle to retain what it already has. The Nantwich and District Motorcycle Club in Cheshire is suffering resistance to its application for a Certificate of Lawful Use at its track at Hatherton, Cheshire, on the basis that when *Motorcycle Scrambling* changed its name to *Moto-Cross* the nature of the sport also changed. Crewe and Nantwich BC says -

Scrambling was a sport over a natural course on non-specialist motorcycles but Moto-Cross is over a man-made course on specialist machinery.

We suspect that few in the sport ever noticed when the change took place. The same courses, and the same machines, were used, by the same riders. Is this a failure of those who manage the Planning process - as it relates to motor sport - to move with the times, or should someone have kept them informed?

Planning Obligations for Sport Sport England guidance

Sport England (the new name for the English Sports Council) has issued its Planning Bulletin #4, which deals with planning obligations. Such agreements typically come into being where planning consent for a change of use of land is granted, and the operator agrees to fulfil conditions over-and-above the scope of the planning consent.

The Bulletin reports a recent case involving motor sport, where the race circuit at Croft, near Darlington, achieved a very substantial safeguard for its future operation. Croft Circuit (formerly Croft Autodrome) is an airfield-based track, with use and original planning permissions dating back to 1963. After a period of reduced use in the 1980s and early 1990s, some substantial investment was made, a new track surface laid, and activity levels increased again. There was some local resident opposition, which included arguments that the racing activity had lapsed and been abandoned, but this was not accepted by a Planning Inspector considering a new application by the circuit operator. The circuit operator went to the planning inquiry having unilaterally offered a new set of noise controls to replace the rather outdated

and ineffective controls incorporated as a condition of the original planning consent.

The Inspector considered the whole issue of the racing. He decided that on balance, if the appeal were allowed, the circuit would 'seriously diminish residential amenity in a rural area, especially in summer and at weekends'. But the Inspector then considered what would happen if the appeal was not allowed: the original planning consents, with their outdated noise controls, would continue, and the local authority would have no effective control over such matters as camping and car parking. Balancing these considerations, the Inspector decided that the new planning consents should be granted, with the circuit operator under an obligation to conform to the new noise code.

This is a significant decision. The circuit operator's initiative in offering new and better noise controls probably swung the Inspector's decision, and allowed him to give greater weight to the facts of the particular case than to the general (anti motor sport) policies of the development plans. If the circuit had been a totally new proposal, rather than a facility dating back 35 years, it may not have got consent, but for other long-standing tracks that come up against present-day problems, there is a lesson here.

Well Done All - Buckinghamshire

A complaint to Bucks CC claimed damage to a footpath by an MSA-authorized motoring event. A site visit revealed that the course did not involve the path. As the Council officer says -

The report made to me was of a route obstructed by mud and ruts. This is not the case, and I can offer no explanation other than perhaps the complainant was not actually walking the public right of way ...

A good example, says Ian Davis of the MSA, of the way that misunderstandings can arise, and how they can be eliminated by looking at the evidence. Also a good example, says LARA, of the way that co-operation with motoring clubs and governing bodies can resolve concerns. Well done all round.

SASPs - the OASIS idea is reborn

Five or six years ago the Sports Council (as it then was) proposed an idea to identify and list Outstanding Areas of Special Importance to Sport (OASIS) which would go some way to

balancing conservation designations of land by acknowledging its use by, and value to, sports. The idea was warmly welcomed by LARA, but never developed; the many changes to the structure and policies of the Sports Council intervened. Now Sport England is looking at resurrecting the concept with Significant Areas for Sport (SASPs) and has been holding workshop sessions with interested organisations to debate the issues involved. LARA sent Ian Davis (Motor Sports Association) and Alan Kind (Planning Officer) to the workshop on 16 March 1999, where Helen Lease of the consultancy undertaking the project for Sport England outlined the concept to ourselves and representatives from water sports, climbing, swimming and badminton.

There was an interesting debate about the pros and cons - including the fear of 'ghettoisation' of sport into designated areas only. LARA explained that one of the major deficiencies of the current land use planning system is the inability of development plans to identify and encompass activities that are just temporary, but regular and long-established, uses of land (such as motorcycle trials). Although it was felt by the professionals present that it is unlikely that SASPs could become a statutory designation (unlike SSSI or AONB), LARA stressed that the identification of recreational land uses in local and regional recreation strategies would be highly advantageous to all concerned. If the Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG 17) can then be changed to recommend (or even direct) that development plans must take account of the content of recreation strategies, outdoor recreation has a clear path through which to feed its land use history and current requirements. The consultants noted this point for further consideration.

The comment was made during the meeting that the hoped-for positive revisions to PPG 17 are certainly not on the near horizon (which is a pity), and the LARA *Heritage Motorsport Directory* was circulated to all consultees as an example of how governing bodies can participate in a SASPs-type process and make it a valuable component of land use development planning. There will be

more opportunity to participate in the build-up to a structure for a national SASPs initiative as the consultants review this latest input and report back to Sport England.

AMCA's Oldest Track under Threat

The AMCA have been running moto-cross and motorcycle trials on land near Brownhills, Staffs for nearly 50 years, but this will cease if the long awaited Birmingham Northern Relief Road is finally built. The site is close to housing, and by careful management has given many thousands of riders the chance of a go at off-road competition over the generations. Being very close to Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall, the facility is of particular value and it will be sorely missed.

The land is of a sandy nature with a disused quarry included as well as a stream which modern riders will not go near, but which used to prove a big draw for spectators of scrambles in the 'good old days' of Gold Stars and Matchless in the 1950s and 60s. This venue was well used for television events by ITV in the 60s, the days of real 'live' programmes. When foot and mouth disease was common, and motoring clubs agreed to suspend such sports, this site not being agricultural was used by BSA and Norton Villiers for motorcycle testing purposes. When the new road is built, the proposed Burntwood Toll Booths will be on the line of the moto-cross starting straight. The local Lichfield District Council does not seem interested in helping to find another site, despite the clear and longstanding demonstration of demand for such a resource in this area.

Footnote: There is an application for a Crematorium to be built nearby, which has prompted certain AMCA members to comment that having spent so much time at the site, they may well finish up there.

National Forest Wheels Park

LARA continues to work closely with the officers of South Derbyshire District Council to identify possible motor sport sites in the new National Forest. Four potential sites have been graded in order of suitability, and outline development plans drawn up and presented to the District Council. The response to the aim of providing a safe and well-managed area for off-road motor sport training is positive. It also envisaged that

non-motorised activities such as cycling will be provided for at the site.

Motor Sport in the Peak Park

Since 1984 the AMCA (Amateur Motor Cycle Association) have owned, and enjoyed, over 100 acres of land situated in the Peak Park north of Buxton.

Under the Town and Country Planning Acts and General Development Order the Peak National Park has renewed consent for part of the land to be used for motor cycle racing on a maximum of 8 days per year. One of the reasons for this restriction is that the site is an SSSI, and therefore the rule allowing for a limited number of motoring events without planning permission does not apply. Last year the site was not used for any official events but a moto-cross meeting was staged again in April this year and it will be used about 4 times this year.

One of the biggest problems is the unofficial practice carried out by casual trail riders (and local hooligans) who are tempted as they pass the site - the access gate cannot be locked as there is a right of way for horses along the edge of the land.

The AMCA now owns 8 sites in 8 different counties, none of which has needed planning permission except the Derbyshire track. Funds to buy land for events were set up 20 years ago - a small levy was included on all entry fees paid by riders for moto-cross events. All the land bought has been previously used for the sport by local clubs.

Scott Trial - Yorkshire Dales

The Richmond Motorcycle Club is engrossed in a battle to retain the possibility to carry on the sport which it has enjoyed in North Yorkshire for almost a century. The Scott Trial is one of the oldest in the motorcycle sport calendar; but it is under some threat due to sections of its route crossing areas of land that in the intervening period has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). LARA continues to give expert advice to the Club as it plans with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to harmonise the continued staging of the event with SSSI rules. A solution to satisfy all parties is in prospect.