

Our Own Worst Enemy?

Will large events in unsuitable locations bring back the threat of the '14/28 day rule', and thereby harm the hundreds of small, considerately organised, events that take place every month?

This is from an e-mail received by LARA, with our response beneath. Only the names and places have been removed. What do you think? How can carefully and considerately organised events be safeguarded from the fallout from inconsiderate organisers?

"Dear LARA,

"As a community we recently had an endurance off-road motorcycle event in our midst. As a result I have been a frequent visitor to your web site, which contains all sorts of useful information. I live in a very small village, accessed along a single-track road with passing places. The road normally serves just the 40+ houses in the settlement and is a 'no through road'. Right at the end of the road (1.5 miles) is a farm where, over the last 18 months or so, the farmer has been holding various off-road events including scrambling, off-road endurance, quad bike events and Land Rover/ex-military vehicle rallies. These events have gradually been increasing in size and impact. We have been very tolerant of the noise and traffic that these events have caused for us as a local community, and although people have grumbled to one another, I am not aware of any complaints that were made to official bodies or to the farmer.

"This all changed when ***** held a very large event here. Watching the build up to the event – we are never informed that events are about to happen – I became increasingly concerned that this was something on a scale beyond anything that we had experienced before. I spoke to the farmer a number of times to express my concern at the amount of traffic that the event was generating (we live right on the roadside). Many of the vehicles are large camper vans towing trailers, all travelling along a no through road, a narrow country lane with a few passing places. The volume of traffic was so great that local residents could not go about their everyday activities in any normal way, as these vehicles are unable to reverse due to their size and the narrowness of the lane. Residents waited in passing places, but no sooner had they moved off, than they had to reverse again as another convoy of large vehicles came towards

them. The farmer informed me that the event had 200 motorcyclists participating. By the day of the event, this was patently untrue as traffic increased again enormously to a constant flow. My brother was one hour late for work on the day of the event, as he simply could not get out of our lane. Eventually nearly 500 riders took part, apparently because another local scramble had been cancelled at short notice, so they all came to this event. As you can imagine, the noise at the start of each race was unbelievable, and could be heard four miles away. Possibly because the event had taken so many additional competitors, there were numerous accidents. Although there was a team of medical people on site, the emergency ambulance had to be called three times (traffic was by this time being marshalled due to local complaints) and the air ambulance twice. I have spoken to many people about the event, including people involved in motorsport and they all felt that this particular event was badly organised and that the local community has had to tolerate a lot of issues with it.

"What really bothers me is that we could potentially have fourteen events like this over a year. If planning permission were sought (and in my opinion it should be for motorsports and other potentially disruptive events) it would never be gained because the access road is unsuitable. It is downright dangerous to be honest. There are many children living here at the moment, and because it is a quiet place with little traffic and the no through road means that we are essentially a 'closed community' everyone knows one another, and children can walk safely to one another's houses to play or to play on the common land. That weekend's event made it necessary to completely change the way we live, and I don't think that this is fair. I am not an incomer; I have lived here for all of my life.

"I have done a lot of background research about motor sports and planning and regulation since this event, because I want to understand how it all works. These are some points which I think might resolve issues with motor sports, and protect communities like my own – people who are anti-motor sports are not intolerant *nimbys* as portrayed in some places: many of us have had bad experiences with the sport:

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- Remove Permitted Development Rights for motor sports, and force all organisers to apply for planning permission even for temporary use – this would give the parish council and local community a say in how these events are organised and have enforceable ground rules to which they can be held accountable if things go wrong.
- All motor sports events should be held to certain standards – the AMCU guidelines look very good to me and at least then we would have some way of controlling the size, noise impact, traffic and environmental impact of these events. It would also be good to prevent large vehicles from arriving at all hours of the night as these cause considerable disturbance to sleep.
- The local community must be informed when events are to take place so that we can plan for the disruption caused and allow extra time for journeys or even to leave the village if we can't cope with the noise and additional traffic. We need to know when the events are to take place, how many people are expected and the nature of the event so that we can decide whether to stay or leave for the day.
- The effect on local communities is real. I honestly don't think that participants or organisers appreciate what it is like to be on the receiving end of these events, three weeks after the event I still feel angry about it every day.

"I do apologise for the rant, but I feel that the current situation is neither satisfactory nor acceptable. I spoke to some of the people who were participating in the event, and they obviously felt uncomfortable about it too because it all seems to be done 'undercover' as it were. Unfortunately our experience of the most recent event has really turned people against the farmer and local people will now be seeking every opportunity to find fault in order to close his site down. If planning permission were required then everything would be in the open and we would all know where we stand, and we would feel somewhat better protected against the worst excesses of this sport, which we have sadly seen at first hand."

We replied:

"Dear XXXXX,

"Thank you for taking the trouble to contact LARA with this information. I do not know of the site, or the events, but from what you say, it sounds like the farmer

is hosting events of different types, organised by different clubs. Within LARA the three national organisations that organise/permit events the most are: The ACU (moto-cross, enduro, trials); The AMCA (ditto); The MSA (car & 4x4 events).

"As you have noted from the AMCA's handbook, these national bodies are very conscious of the need to be 'good neighbours', not to over-use any site, and to have due regard to householders along access routes. I do not know if any of the events you mention come under any of these organisations, but I will copy this to those bodies in order that they can check. What we call 'pirate events' can be a big problem. The organisers have no 'stake in the future' of the sites, and generally are in it to make money. The clubs within LARA's member organisations are doing it 'for the sport' and often have a considerable stake in their local communities.

"I fear that I cannot agree with you about removing permitted development rights. To do that would hit the likes of the ACU, AMCA and MSA very hard, for no good reason. I get to hear about 'planning problems' nationally, and properly organised motor sport is generally not the culprit - and if it does create a local issue, it tries to sort it out. Even if Permitted Development Rights were scrapped, 'pirate events' would very probably continue – just as unlawful use of public rights of way continues. The idea of hitting the innocent in the hope of catching the guilty is surely not reasonable and appropriate in 2008?"

"Your district council has considerable powers to deal with planning breaches and issues where appropriate. There is no proven case for further restrictions. If the council is looking in to this, and wants to know how and by whom events were permitted and organised, I am sure that the ACU, AMCA and MSA will be pleased to talk to the officers. It is not in our interests to support 'bad events'. The major motor sport organisations have no remit for events that unreasonably disrupt the local community and environment, and I can assure you that they will not simply consign this e-mail to the waste bin.

"I hope that helps, and please feel welcome to stay in contact.

"Yours sincerely,

"LARA"

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