

Motor sport and planning – future trends

1. Leaving aside the current threat to motor recreation, and some aspects of motor sport, from the *defra* proposals to alter the law concerning byways, motor sport operating within the scope of the planning system is almost certainly going to face the prospect of increased and increasing pressures, just to retain the level of land access currently enjoyed. The motor sport organisations, and the industry, may wish to consider whether any pre-emptive changes to current rules and practice should be investigated.
2. The future problems may currently be described as, i), those likely to arise, and, ii), those we know will come about. The most serious ‘immediate threat’ is still an unknown quantity, but we believe that the status quo will not remain, and that any change will be to the sport’s disadvantage.
3. Two years ago, the motor sport community reacted quickly and effectively to a government-sponsored report that seriously misrepresented motor sport as operated under permitted development rights, and which recommended that PDRs should be scrapped, or radically curtailed. In the end, the Government took no action consequent on that report, but the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has stated that there will be a consultation paper on changes to permitted development rights ‘later in 2004’. This indicates that the Government is minded to make changes, and the consultation will probably have ‘preferred options’, inviting views on how and why these might be varied.
4. There are various ways that permitted development rights *might* be altered in ways that adversely affect motor sport:
 - Class 4 PDRs will be abolished altogether (unlikely, but possible).
 - PDRs will be reduced from the current 14 days (for racing) and 28 days (for non-racing events).
 - PDRs will be removed altogether in areas of certain designations – e.g. national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty; perhaps on land adjacent to conservation designated land.
 - PDRs will remain (perhaps cut in number of days) but there will be a requirement for ‘prior notification’ to the planning authority; this is analogous to some existing agricultural operations.
5. Whatever, motor sport organisations would be well advised to plan on the basis that the 14/28 day rule will not continue in its current form.
6. What we do know for certain is that the current land use planning system is going to change radically over the next few years. The forthcoming Planning and Compensation Act will change the system of structure plans and local plans. There will be a form of structure plan, but this will not prescribe land uses in any local detail. The local plans will be replaced by ‘local development frameworks’, which will be ‘wrappers’ for a set of smaller documents dealing with specific topics – schools, transport, recreation, and several others. These specific topics will be addressed and to a degree driven by ‘community plans’, where locally assessed needs will be defined and quantified. It is probable that these community plans will be developed by local forums constituted in a

similar way to the local access forums that deal with open access and rights of way matters.

7. The Government has made it clear that because the local development frameworks will not 'zone' land for any particular use, any application for planning permission will, usually, be approved only if it accords with policies in the LDF. This principle is even stronger than that with the current local plan system.
8. Even more than now, the future of site-based motor sport will depend on positive plan policies in every planning area. Even more than now, getting positive, and blocking negative, plan policies, will depend on the willingness and ability of local motor sport people to engage in the 'community forum' processes. Be sure that organisations like the CPRE and Ramblers' Association will engage to the maximum. Expect this new system to come into operation over the next three – five years, in a transitional process.
9. So, the likelihood is that permitted development rights will be ratcheted down, while the alternative of getting planning permission for any site will become, if not harder in itself, more dependent on there being a 'sympathetic' local planning policy in force. What can motor sport do?
10. Obviously there will be scope to make representations on any proposed change to permitted development rights, but if the consultation paper has a preferred option, expect it to be hard to deflect the Government too far from this.
11. When the 'community forum' system starts up, motor sport – like every other activity – will have to 'play the system': if not in having a representative on every forum (that is, frankly, unrealistic), then having a comprehensive pack of briefing materials, with local tailoring, so that each forum is informed about the sport(s) and its needs.
12. There will be no 'automatic' transfer across of existing planning policies to the new plans. Where positive policies applying to motorsport exist, we will have to watch that these are not quietly 'missed' in the transitional process.
13. Beware also a landscape 'designation' issue just starting to show above the horizon: 'tranquility mapping'. This looks like it might develop into an additional 'layer' of land description to go with open access land.
14. There is also something that motor sport can do on its own initiative: it can look at the various disciplines of motor sport and take steps to make each more acceptable as a 'mainstream' recreation. The key element is, of course, *noise*.
15. Appended to this report are two recent decision letters on planning applications. One is for a commercial quad bike track (successful), and the other is for a 'driving centre' (unsuccessful). The quad bike track succeeded because the inspector, properly informed, did not think noise would be a problem. The inspector said, quite plainly, that had the application been for moto-cross, or speedway, it would have been a different matter. The driving centre failed on visual impact – the site is in an area of outstanding natural beauty, and the inspector holds that this imposes particularly stringent visual parameters – and the activity should be sited in a 'less sensitive' area.
16. These two decisions, while obviously based on the facts in each case, probably illustrate well how such matters will go in the future. As much as motor sport

takes steps to reduce noise, public expectations seem to move even faster. It will become ever more difficult for motor sport to claim any sort of 'right', or reasonable expectation, to make noise. What Silverstone, or Brands Hatch, may achieve through 'status', or political muscle, will not be mirrored at a lower, local level.

17. It is indicative that, in recent years, the recreational motoring activities with fewest known permanent track problems have been recreational/commercial 4x4s (road-legal vehicles); recreational quads (quiet vehicles); indoor karting (walls); outdoor karting with four-strokes (demonstrably fairly quiet); and motorcycle trials (generally, an infrequent use of the same site, mostly quiet). Moto-cross, banger racing, and speedway, remain beset by problems.
18. *Is it time for a radical, pre-emptive, shift by motor sport itself?* It is highly unlikely that society and the Government are going to change tack and become more tolerant of noisy sports. To survive, the sport(s) must adapt to its environment as this changes. There are two ways of adapting that seem 'obvious' from this standpoint:
 - Change the vehicles so each emits much less noise. Do something as radical as a 'five year plan to eliminate noise from moto-cross'. Put in place measures such that, in five years time, all moto-cross bikes racing will make no more noise than a road-legal motorcycle. That is surely good for business in the medium-long term, as the new generation of machines become available? The Government has announced its intention vigorously to enforce against illegal motorcycling, so eliminating the noisy residue would be in line with national policy.
 - Change the nature of some motor sport disciplines. It is a fact that the character of modern moto-cross tracks makes them into more of a visual intrusion than in past years. Other disciplines, like grass track racing, or sand racing, are far more temporary in character, because the tracks are laid out on flat land, in two, rather than three, dimensions. Absence of an unsightly built facility actually permits a little more tolerance of the occasional noisy event, if such is truly temporary and occasional.
19. The rise of super-moto shows that the sport still evolves in the rise and decline in the popularity of disciplines. Noisy moto-cross (and disciplines of similar character) on permanent, or semi-permanent, built circuits, is simply going to become ever more an unacceptable temporary use of land, and not sufficiently acceptable to win a positive planning policy in the local development framework. Can the sport's governing bodies, and the industry, 'engineer' a shift towards sporting disciplines that do not leave a visually intrusive calling card, and are such that the operation of the machines is less noisy?
20. The status quo is almost certainly living on borrowed time. There is a door of opportunity in the changes to the planning processes, but some motor sport disciplines will simply be denied the chance to go through it, because people with influence fear and dislike them. The planning environment is going to become harsher for noisy and unsightly activities. To survive, those activities must change, and quite quickly.

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