

My apologies for the lateness of this submission; I normally deal with emails in the evenings and this one has been taken up with a Parish Council meeting. I would be grateful if the following could please be submitted to the Court?

The Verderers' Policies and Bylaws document, paragraph 6.1, states the belief that the New Forest should be available to the public for their quiet recreation. For a great many this takes the form of cycling and a proportion have reached the stage in life when the occasional cycle ride involves muscles that are no longer as pliable and capable as they once were and for whom the assistance provided by electrically assisted bicycles makes possible the continued enjoyment of a pastime otherwise lost. The extensive network of waymarked cycle tracks thus enables access by cycle to the heart of the Forest, especially at this special time of year, and for this section of the community the ability to use an electrically assisted bicycle or tricycle is a lifeline; to deny them the use of a means of transport that is perfectly legal to use on the highway is to compound the cruelty of advancing years and serves no useful purpose; they are just wishing to pursue the quiet recreation which is central to the Policies of the Verderers.

Cycling in the forest already caters for a range of riding experiences from the quiet enjoyment of level trails to the adrenaline fuelled downhill MTB as indicated on the Forestry England website. I suggest that users of the downhill MTB courses are unlikely to encounter walkers whatever their choice of machine and that one limited to 15.5 mph will in any case be of no interest to such a rider.

It is not the machine that should be of concern but the manner in which it is used, and indeed the same can be said of horses. I am not aware of conflict between riders and walkers but it must be recognised that the potential does exist for the inconsiderate rider to cause alarm and injury to walkers; the fact that reported incidents are rare is undoubtedly due to the consideration of both parties. Just because a horse can canter at around 15 mph does not mean that it will be ridden in such a manner close to walkers, and likewise just because an electrically assisted pedal cycle can achieve the same speed does not mean that in all cases it will be ridden so fast when walkers are encountered. Rare examples of both will be found, no doubt, but in the main I suggest that the average user of an electrically assisted pedal cycle will be no more inconsiderate or aggressive than the average horse rider or the rider of an unassisted pedal cycle. It is indeed possible for electrically assisted pedal cycles to be made to exceed the approved speed limit and power rating but even that does not mean that they will be used irresponsibly, in just the same way that the magnificent thoroughbred horses that some of the riders are fortunate enough to ride are capable of so much more than the mild pony but in the main they are not ridden irresponsibly; however the potential still exists.

There will, unfortunately, always be "anti-social behaviour" but within the context of cycling I do wonder how this is defined. I cannot feel that the use of a perfectly legal electrically assisted bicycle as a means of quiet recreation is so serious as to merit the same anti-social label as, for instance, lighting fires and barbeques, particularly during dry spells, or of throwing stones at ponies. Or feeding them on the roadside, for that matter. A fine of £100 and to be considered as anti-social, as is implied in an article in the A&T of 1st October, simply for quietly cycling in an otherwise responsible manner in such a delightful setting seems to me to be contrary to the open access to a national park that we strive to achieve, and I would suggest to those making these difficult decisions that quiet recreation takes many forms and the riding of a bicycle of whatever kind is no more or no less than the riding of a horse and the freedoms to do either should be equal. Electrically assisted pedal cycles are here, and are here to stay, and should be as acceptable on waymarked cycle tracks as they are on the public highway and the problems caused by the few should be dealt with under the same anti social behaviour measures that apply to other Forest users who misbehave.

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