

Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000

NOTICE OF RELEVANT AUTHORITY DECISION FOLLOWING REVIEW OF DIRECTION RESTRICTING CROW ACCESS

Prepared by Natural England

Access Authority: Peterborough City Council
Relevant Authority: Natural England
Local Access Forum: Peterborough Local Access Forum

Direction reference: 2018118766

Land Parcel Name	Direction Reference	Details of restriction on original direction
Barnack Hills and Holes National Nature Reserve	2018118766	24 May 2019 to 24 May 2025

Natural England has decided how to proceed following its review of the above long-term direction to restrict CROW Access rights on this land. A consultation was held from 15 March 2024 to 15 April 2024 with statutory consultees and the public.

We received comments from one member of the public who was supportive of the proposal to extend this direction for a further six years.

Outcome of the review

Natural England's decision is to leave the original direction unchanged in the way it was originally proposed and extend the end date for a further six years.

- Access by people with dogs is excluded within any fenced area when livestock are present.

This exclusion does not apply to Public Rights of Way.

Natural England is satisfied that restriction of the access rights to the extent specified is necessary to enable conservation grazing on site, which provides suitable habitat for the designated flora features.

Background to the existing direction

Barnack Hills and Holes National Nature Reserve (NNR) is a 22 hectare site leased and managed by Natural England. The NNR has been publicly accessible for over 40 years and is mapped as CROW access land, the rights for which came into effect across the whole of England on October 31 October 2005. The site is well accessed

by people living locally and from the nearby population centres of Stamford and Peterborough, and dog walking is a popular activity on the site. Results from a 2023 People Survey carried out on site show that over 60% of visitors are dog walkers.

The site requires regular grazing to provide suitable habitat for the flora features notified under its designations as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI). Grazing is closely monitored and adjusted as necessary to provide suitable habitat for the designated flora.

Section 26(3)(a) of the CROW Act provides powers to Natural England as the relevant authority to give a direction for the purpose of conserving flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features on CROW access land. The relevant authority may only give a nature conservation direction where it is satisfied that restriction of CROW access rights to the extent provided by the direction is necessary for this purpose.

A direction was put in place to exclude access to people with dogs while any compartment was being grazed by livestock. This was due to the history of regular incidents of sheep being chased, with multiple sheep fatalities each year as a result of attacks from dogs off lead.

This exclusion allows effective grazing of the site to continue for the benefit of the notified grassland species. All other areas of the NNR are available for dog walkers to access during the times when the exclusion was in place.

Current management of the site

At present, the NNR is grazed by up to 120 sheep; there are no ponies on site. Grazing usually happens between Sept and March, although some summer grazing has occurred in recent years.

The entrances to each compartment are clearly signed when sheep are present and the other four compartments where livestock are not present remain available to dog walkers. When the sheep are completely removed from the site the entire NNR is available to people visiting with dogs. The Public Right of Way at the southern end of the NNR is now fenced off from the main part of the site and is unaffected by the direction to restrict access.

To assist with livestock management over the last couple of years, a group of volunteers check the sheep on a rota basis at least once a day for any issues, injuries and escapees.

There has been increased community engagement with the NNR in the last few years. A Village Forum has been set up with a representative from Barnack Parish Council and local users of the NNR. The Forum meets bi-monthly and is an opportunity to provide an update on NNR works, grazing plans etc.

The NNR Reserve Manager has confirmed that the restriction has been working well and though the situation with dogs and grazing livestock on site has generally

improved in recent years they wish to retain the direction to reinforce management on site.

Prior to this review there had been only one serious incident with livestock and dogs in last 3 years with a sheep that had escaped from the grazing. During the consultation period there was a further incident where a sheep was killed by a dog. NNR staff are considering how best to manage the site alongside this restriction to further deter dog walkers from accessing the grazing compartment.

Extension of the direction to exclude access.

Natural England's policy for long-term directions is that they should not be given for a period of more than six years. Therefore, the original direction will be extended to an end date of 24 April 2030.

Details of the restriction will appear on the relevant map of access land on the Open Access website - www.openaccess.naturalengland.org.uk.

Where a direction restricts access indefinitely, for more than five years, for part of every year, or for part of at least six consecutive years, we have a statutory duty to review it within five years of the date of its issue.

Date review completed: 24 April 2024