

# HODGEMOOR RIDING ASSOCIATION



## Hodgemoor Wood Development Plan 2002-2003

This is a 1-year plan commencing in early 2002 for the improvement of amenities for walkers, riders and cyclists in a Site of Special Scientific Interest serving communities in Southern Buckinghamshire. This plan is the key to harnessing energy into the creation of a network of bridleways and trails across the much wider area from Penn Wood all the way across to the Amersham triangle and Beaconsfield to the South. The Hodgemoor Riding Association is making the proposal, with the support and co-operation of the Buckinghamshire County Council and of Forest Enterprise.

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### *Hodgemoor Riding Association*

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# 1) Present Situation

## **An area of outstanding natural beauty**

Hodgemoor Wood is one of the largest tracts of semi-natural broad-leaved woodland remaining in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns and has a wide and contrasting range of soil types. The combination of the varied structure of the woodland on such a wide range of soils is exceptional in the Chiltern Hills. It was classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1992. Most of the Wood has been leased by Forest Enterprise from Bucks County Council and is within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Forest Enterprise is the agency responsible for the management of forests and woodlands owned by the nation.

## **An amenity**

Hodgemoor is a popular community wood, close to the villages of Seer Green and Chalfont St Giles. Many dog walkers, ramblers, horse-riders and cyclists from a catchment area reaching from Uxbridge and Beaconsfield up to Amersham and Rickmansworth regularly use the Wood throughout the year. Many children come to the Wood, not only as walkers, riders and cyclists but also on school trips because of Hodgemoor's status as a SSSI. With an area of only 253 acres, considerable pressure is placed on the Wood by these users, and particularly by the horse-riders.

## **Boggy trails**

Hodgemoor Wood has a car park, a circular walking trail, a BMX track and a network of permissive riding trails. It also has one statutory bridleway. Where the soil is particularly peaty or clay-based, many sections of the riding trails have become so boggy as to be virtually impassable. Some parts do not even dry out during a good summer. This is destructive to the overall well-being of the Wood and discouraging to users. This poor state of the riding trails is not a new problem. Horse riders have been using the Wood for years, and Forest Enterprise has tried to find solutions. Currently, horse riders are - understandably - tempted to poach large areas of woodland to avoid the boggy sections and so create progressively larger and larger boggy areas. Walkers - who also use these riding trails - are obviously not happy with this situation. Ideally, all boggy sections of trails should be given a well-drained hard base, which would be suitable for all users, whether riders, cyclists or walkers. But funding is the problem.

## **Funding Problems**

In November 1994, Forest Enterprise felt it would have to close the riding trails unless some attempt was made by the riding community to help find a funding solution. A riding permit system was tried but did not succeed. In early 1996 the Hodgemoor Riding Association was formed. Funding from

Bucks County Council was obtained to provide a hard base on 130 metres of a main riding trail. This has helped greatly and is in good condition after 6 years. But this only forms a small part of the network. Due to lack of resources, Forest Enterprise has not been able to maintain any of the other riding trails in the last four years. Forest Enterprise has in June 2001 altered some trails to routes better adapted to horse use. Nonetheless, most trails remained boggy even during the summer, and some riding trails may have to be closed unless a funding solution can be found.

### **Development of greater Public Access in Hodgemoor Wood and the surrounding Area**

The Hodgemoor Riding Association, along with its partners, Bucks County Council and Forest Enterprise, is now seeking to develop public access to rural land in this part of Buckinghamshire. With help, Hodgemoor Wood could become the core of a whole network of public bridleways and permissive trails, which would greatly enlarge access possibilities for walkers, cyclists, ramblers and horse-riders.

#### New Bridlepath to Hodgemoor Wood

Bucks County Council on 1 August 2001 opened a new bridlepath that extends from the Seer Green/Chalfont St Giles Road to the south-eastern edge of Hodgemoor Wood. This is a great asset, as it leads beside open fields (a rarity in this area). It also makes Hodgemoor Wood more easily accessible to users from the south, that is to say, Chalfont St Peter and Jordans. Bucks CC is currently planning to extend this new public bridleway alongside further fields and up through the eastern edge of Hodgemoor Wood to Bottrells Lane. Its completion is a priority.

#### The Amersham Triangle

This new route would lead directly to a whole new area, "The Amersham Triangle" to the north of Hodgemoor Wood. This land, encompassed by two busy main roads the A413 and A 355, is owned by Bucks CC, who is planning to dedicate new public bridleways on it (see annexed map).

#### The Penn Area

Hodgemoor Wood and this new "Amersham Triangle" area also link logically to the west to Penn and Coleshill. The Onyx Environmental Trust recently contributed towards the development of Penn Wood by its purchaser, the Woodland Trust. The Woodland Trust is planning a public bridleway route through this Wood which would provide a link northwards to other existing bridlepaths towards Little Missenden.

South of Penn Wood, the Penn Area Bridleways Association has established a good network of permissive riding trails that link in with bridleways. The Penn Association and the Hodgemoor Riding Association are very keen to improve the link between the two areas. The main barrier to this is the main Amersham/Beaconsfield Road, the A355.

The Traffic Management department of Bucks CC in Beaconsfield was contacted by the Association regarding the installation of warning signs at the two main crossing points, the Magpie Pub and White's Hill and also at any other future crossing resulting from new bridleways. New signs were installed in early September.

### **The Growth of Horse Riding as a Recreational Activity**

Horse riding is currently a fast-growing recreation and is encouraged by the government. The British Equestrian Trade Association National Survey of 1999 estimates that 2.4 million people (4.5% of the population) enjoy riding each year contributing £900 million into the rural economy. This part of Buckinghamshire has one of the highest concentrations of horse-riders in the country. Within 2 or 3 miles of the Wood boundaries, there are at least 11 livery yards as well as private owners representing an estimated 300 horses and ponies (see attached map).

### **Hodgemoor as a Education and Leisure Facility for Youngsters**

Many young horse-riders use the Wood, and more would do so if the trails were not impracticable. In particular, Aescwood Riding School, with a regular clientele of 160 children ranging from 4 to 16 years, organises hacks every weekend and throughout the holidays. In fact, 60 of these children raised over £2000 towards the project in November 2001 by doing sponsored rides in the Wood. During their trips into the wood, young riders are taught to respect nature, the Wood itself and other users. Forest Enterprise also has an educational programme for the young, encouraging school and scout visits.

### **The Need for Safe, Off-road horse-riding**

Apart from the few bridle-paths, Hodgemoor Wood is the only area locally where hacking is possible off the roads. Many riders are reluctant to hack in the Wood because of the terrible state of the trails. They therefore stay on the roads with the resulting possible dangers for themselves and motorists.

The British Horse Society estimates that there are at least 3000 accidents involving horses on roads in the UK every year, that is to say 8 a day. Over 100 horses are killed. Other reports suggest the accident rate could be much higher: nearer 29 a day, or over 10 000 a year. Many police reports do not include the fact that equines are involved in accidents.

The British Horse Society has led several campaigns to educate both motorists and horse-riders on mutual road safety. On October 13<sup>th</sup> 2001, the BHS organised a national riding and road safety day. Hodgemoor Riding Association members contributed by taking a pony and trap round local villages and distributing leaflets. The Association held a riding and road safety evening on November 1<sup>st</sup>. The Association fully supports the recently started Central Chilterns Traffic Management project and hopes it will

expand southwards. This project will introduce "Quiet Lanes" where certain rural roads are designated as safe places for walking, cycling and horse-riding and will have a lower speed limit.

All these initiatives help, but obviously the more off-road facilities that can be provided, the better it is for everybody. This safety aspect applies equally, of course, to cyclists: the less they are on the road the better it is.

The outbreak of foot and mouth emphasised the importance of off-road riding, with horse riders restricted to roads in built-up areas. The completion of the Hodgemoor Wood project would create 2 to 3 miles where horse-riders and cyclists could at least spend around half-an-hour to an hour off the roads, and it could provide the starting point for a whole network giving 20 to 25 miles off the roads.

### **PR Potential in Sponsoring Safety Campaign**

There is the possibility of developing the PR potential of a Brett association with the Hodgemoor Wood project. Brett could spearhead a safety campaign for horse riders and cyclists with a strap line such as "Off the roads and into the Woods!". Both riders and cyclists could wear fluorescent bibs and badges. The local press has already shown quite an interest in the project (see attachments) and is keen for any further news on its progress.

## 2) Objectives

The Hodgemoor Riding Association through this development plan aims

- a) to improve the amenities of Hodgemoor Wood for riders, cyclists, ramblers and walkers,
- b) to create a core facility that would generate greater public access to rural land for all users in the surrounding area
- c) to limit damage to this important SSSI wood by preventing further degradation of the permissive trails in the wood,
- d) to reduce the danger of horse-riding and cycling on roads, and
- e) to increase co-operation and co-ordination between walkers, ramblers, riders and cyclists.

The principal activity proposed in the plan is the creation or improvement of riding paths by surfacing them with hard core suitable for cyclists and horse-riders.

### Creating a High Quality Network of Riding Trails

From a conservation point of view, a good network would motivate riders to stay on the trails and would no longer damage other areas. Walkers and cyclists would also benefit, as they use the riding trails. Local motorists would benefit, as there would be fewer riders on the roads.

### Future Maintenance of Riding Trails

Once these improvements are made, Forest Enterprise with the help of the riding association, will be able to maintain the trails more easily. This will involve

- keeping vegetation from the trails,
- removing dead trees and overhanging branches,
- repairing any surface defects,
- removing litter and
- improving trail signs and way markers.

### **3) The Partnership: Hodgemoor Riding Association, Forest Enterprise and Bucks CC.**

Hodgemoor Riding Association is aware of the need to find a consensus of opinion between the various people using the wood, and the bodies that represent them. We are working in a spirit of consultation and co-operation with them.

#### **Forest Enterprise**

Hodgemoor Riding Association is working closely with Forest Enterprise to develop the network of riding trails a) where the soil is most suited to horse use, and b) where the least disruption to the wood and other users would be created. Forest Enterprise is fully aware that the Hodgemoor Riding Association is very keen to encourage co-operation between horse riders, cyclists and walkers, so that the Wood may be best preserved. Forest Enterprise is an agency of the Forestry Commission, responsible for administering wooded areas. The Forestry Commission is the long term tenant of Hodgemoor Wood.

Although Forest Enterprise cannot help with cash funds for this project, they will input considerable resources by assuring the maintenance of the trails (see 6, Funding Sources).

Contact: **Emma Munday, Recreation Manager, SE England.** Forest Enterprise Chiltern office, Upper Icknield Way, Aston Clinton, Aylesbury, Bucks HP22 5NF. Phone number 01296 625825

#### **Buckinghamshire County Council**

Bucks CC is the owner of Hodgemoor Wood and leases it to Forest Enterprise. One public bridleway, for which Bucks CC is responsible, has existed through the western side of Hodgemoor Wood for many years. Bucks CC sees this project as an incentive to create greater public access through an enlarged bridleway network in the area.

To this end, Bucks CC has already recently opened a new bridleway from Threehouseholds, Chalfont St Giles to the south-east corner of the wood, and are now in the legal process of extending this route northwards to meet Bottrells Lane. Once this is completed, Bucks CC has plans to create new bridleways on its land to provide new links northwards towards Amersham.

Bucks CC has only limited funds available but intends to have these routes (see annexed map) open within the next 12 to 18 months.

With one bridleway in the Wood, and now a second in the pipeline, Bucks CC sees itself as a key player in the Wood's future. If this project is fulfilled

and the permissive trails are given a sure future, Bucks CC can feel more confident about pursuing its greater public access plans outside the Wood.

Contacts: Mike Walker, 01296 383413  
Jonathan Clark, Area Rights of Way Officer: 01494 475368

## **Other Participants in the Project**

### **English Nature**

Because of Hodgemoor's SSSI status, any work undertaken must be agreed by English Nature. This project has the support of English Nature (see attached letter). The Association and Forest Enterprise are currently finalising the trail surfacing specifications with English Nature, so that current contractors' estimates can be revised if necessary.

Contact: Jenny Young, Conservation Officer, Thames and Chiltern Team:  
01635 268881

### **Groundwork Thames Valley**

This environmental regeneration charity is already involved in a Brett funded project locally. In their status of an Environmental Body, they have agreed to register our project with Entrust. Should the Association get a grant, Groundwork could be called upon if necessary to help manage the project.

Contact: Paul Hodson, 01895 832662

### **Chiltern District Council**

The Council is interested in funding the project but is restricted in how it can do so. An application will be made in January 2002 for a £2000 grant to fund administrative costs and/or machinery costs to be used in trail improvement.

As part of its Millennium Project - the creation of three local walking and cycling circular routes known as the Chiltern Heritage Trail - the Council has repaired lengths of the existing bridleway running through the western side of Hodgemoor Wood. Their contribution has amounted to about £7000 to repair approximately 250 metres length.

Contact: Jan Longhurst, Grants Administrator: 01494 732144

### **Sustrans**

Sustrans, the "sustainable transport" charity, has managed this Millennium Project on behalf of Chiltern DC. The Association is in contact with Sustrans seeking advice on contractors and materials. Sustrans is obviously supportive of the new bridleway and repairs to riding trails that will give better surfaces and greater scope to cyclists as well as riders.

Contact: Simon Pratt: 01296 435578

### **Penn Area Bridleways Association**

This association is very interested in developing links with the Hodgemoor Riding Association. PABA's experience in permissive riding trails and a permit system in Common Wood should be very useful to Hodgemoor. Their committee member and founder Miranda Souter addressed the general meeting of the Hodgemoor Riding Association on 28<sup>th</sup> June to explain the functioning of a successful riding association. The PABA is supportive of our efforts and wants to help create a larger network of paths and trails in the Penn - Hodgemoor - Amersham area.

Contact: Miranda Souter 01494 812347

### **British Horse Society**

The Hodgemoor Riding Association is a member of the BHS. One of the main aims of the BHS is "developing new opportunities for safe, off-road riding". The BHS Committee for Buckinghamshire fully supports our Association's initiative and has made a £500 donation. The BHS local 2001 autumn newsletter published an article "Improving Riding Paths by co-operating with walkers and authorities" on the Association's work.

Contact: Brenda Wickham: 01753 882827

### **South Bucks Riding Club**

South Bucks Riding Club is situated on the outskirts of Chalfont St Peter, just 2 miles from Hodgemoor Wood. It organises several well-attended events a year. It has a contact list of around a 1000 riders, most of whom are based within 20 miles. It fully supports the Association's objectives (see attached letter).

Contact: Sue and Jeff Jarvis: 01494 873200

### **Friends of Hodgemoor Wood**

The Friends represent walkers' interests in the Wood. They are fully aware of the Association's objectives and have been consulted on the proposed improvements that they support. They feel strongly that riding trails should be of high quality to deter riders from straying onto footpaths or into the woodland.

Contact: Andy and Jan Still: 01494 873388

### **Chiltern Society**

We have consulted with the Area Secretary and Rights of Way Group of the Chiltern Society. They have expressed in writing their pleasure at "learning what other organisations with similar aims are doing" (letter of 30<sup>th</sup> July 2001) and an article on the Association "Improving Riding Trails keeps horses off the roads and off walkers' paths" was in the 2001 December issue of their magazine.

Peter Deegan, Area Secretary 3B: 01494 771250  
John Coombe, Rights of Way Group: 01895 672068

### **Residents' Association of Chalfont St Giles**

This Association is being consulted on the proposed improvements.

**Other local bodies**

We expect to make more significant contacts with other local bodies including the Parish Councils of Chalfont St. Giles, Seer Green and Jordans.

**Hodgemoor Riding Association**

The association has existed for 7 years but has renewed its positive efforts in view of the dilapidated state of the amenities. Their efforts have met with very positive response from Forest Enterprise, Bucks County Council and other users of the wood. The Association has a duly established constitution and is close to securing charitable status.

The present officers of the Hodgemoor Riding Association are

|                                      |                            |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Marcus Bicknell (Chairman)           | Robin Richards (Treasurer) |
| Susie Bicknell (Secretary)           |                            |
| Terry Holbrook (previous Chairman)   |                            |
| Audrey Holbrook (previous Treasurer) |                            |
| Judith Broadley                      | Heather Black              |

Susie Bicknell doubles as editor of the association's newsletter and she can be contacted on 01494 872447 or by e-mail on [sBicknell@btinternet.com](mailto:sBicknell@btinternet.com). All parties can read about our activities, and those of the Friends of Hodgemoor Wood, on the Hodgemoor website <http://www.hodgemoor.org.uk>

#### 4) The plan for Hodgemoor Wood: 4 phases over 1 year

Hodgemoor Riding Association has worked with its partners to plan a development of the paths in the wood over a period of time, depending on funds available, usage and other considerations. The principal paths and their development are shown on the maps attached.

The permissive trails are so deteriorated and muddy (see map) that they are impracticable to horse-riders. The project would improve selected trails over time and help keep horses away from the paths frequented by ramblers and walkers.

##### Phase 1: Completion of New Public Bridleway

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2001, Bucks County Council opened this new route from the gap in the Threehouseholds road (picture right) to the south-eastern corner of the Wood, and is in the legal process of extending this through further fields and up the eastern edge of the Wood to Bottrells Lane.



This leads into a whole new area that Bucks CC is planning to open up north of Bottrells Lane (see map).

The section of the bridleway already opened needed little preparation as it leads along field edges. However, the second section needs much more work, as nearly half of it runs through the eastern edge of the Wood, and therefore falls under **English Nature and Forest Enterprise** requirements for providing a hoggin base. Around £500 worth of contractor costs have been saved in June to August 2001 by voluntary Hodgemoor Riding Association working parties clearing thick holly and hawthorn from around the existing footpath to prepare for drainage and laying hoggin and its upgrade to a bridleway. **Completion: early 2002**

## Phase 2: Highfield, the Dell, and the Yellow Brick Road

In a second phase the Hodgemoor Riding Association and partners would resurface the path at the north west of the wood called Highfield. This enables riders to complete a loop from Bottrells Lane and the new path up near the car park to the West end of the wood and the bridle path back to Widmer Corner. Highfield is presently extremely boggy; exposed roots and pot holes make riding there not just impracticable but dangerous. The Mulcerns Drive needs no significant repair. The first part of the Dell (picture below) would be done at the same time, as would repairs to relevant parts of the Yellow Brick Road.

**Completion mid 2002.**



## Phase 3: The Glade

The northern stretch of the Glade Path has improved in the last year since firs to one side have been felled allowing light to it. However the stretch from Widmer corner to the Dell is always very bad and has not even dried out in these last dry weeks. Remaining stretches of the Dell not done in Phase 2 would be completed in phase 3. **Completion autumn 2002**

## Phase 4: Bracken Ride and the Beeches

Resurfacing parts of Bracken Ride and the Beeches would complete the circuit of permissive riding trails proposed to us by Forest Enterprise.

**Completion early 2003.**

### Map of phases 1 to 4

The New Bridleway (red) runs from Threehouseholds to the south-east corner of Hodgemoor Wood. The Spring Link through the East end of Hodgemoor Wood will link the bridleway to Bottrells Lane. Improvements to other trails are colour-coded by phase.

## 5) Overall Funding Requirements (REVISED 16.01.02)

Costs are based on quotes tendered by Forest Enterprise in March 2001 (see Annexes). The quotes cover preparation, draining (when required), brush clearing, the material (neutral pH hoggin as the wood is a SSSI) and laying. The quotes are given on a per metre (m) basis. We give here a low (£1875 per 100 m) and high range (£2500 per 100m) for the costs involved, to reflect the various quotes.

Now that English Nature is finally confirming the specifications, these quotes are being revised. Other quotes more recently obtained specifically for the bridleway completion may also be revised. Exact estimates are difficult, as the amount of preparation (e.g. soft surface to be removed, drainage requirements) cannot be ascertained until work has started. However, the uncertainty over the exact cost should not be a problem for this type of project, as it is in phases, and the most frequented trails in the worst condition are given priority.

As Third Party Funding is needed for the Brett Trust, a grant for all four phases is requested. £50,000 would do the job very well, £35,000 would cover all 4 phases at the low estimate, but would still cover 3 phases at the higher estimate. The Association will manage the budget to get the best execution of our objectives, i.e. best value for the funds available

|   |      | <u>Low</u>                       | <u>High</u>                      |
|---|------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Phase 1: Completion of Bucks C.C. Bridle-path.</b>           |      |                                  |                                  |
| Bridlepath Extension to Bottrells Lane                          |      |                                  |                                  |
| 200m of hoggin path 1.2 metres wide                             |      | £6,500                           | £8,000                           |
| Drainage of boggy area with spring                              |      |                                  |                                  |
| <b>Phase 2: Highfield, the Dell, and the Yellow Brick Road.</b> |      |                                  |                                  |
| Highfield   | 500m |                                  |                                  |
| Dell Part I   | 100m |                                  |                                  |
| Yellow Brick Road repairs                                       | 100m |                                  |                                  |
| TOTAL   | 700m | £13,125                          | £17,500                          |
| <b>Phase 3: The Glade.</b>                                      |      |                                  |                                  |
| The Glade, Dell Part II   | 400m | £7,500                           | £10,000                          |
| <b>Phase 4: Bracken Ride and the Beeches</b>                    |      |                                  |                                  |
| New Mount   | 200m |                                  |                                  |
| Beeches   | 400m |                                  |                                  |
| Total   | 600m | £11,250                          | £15,000                          |
| <b>Total of phases 1,2,3 and 4</b>                              |      | -----<br><b>£38,375</b><br>----- | -----<br><b>£50,500</b><br>----- |

## 6) Funding Sources

### Hodgemoor Riding Association

The funding priority of the Association is to raise the large sum required for surfacing the trails. Once this has been accomplished, maintenance will be within the scope of Forest Enterprise, though the Association would obviously continue to support requirements.

The Association organised various fund-raising activities in 2001 including two sponsored rides as well as raffles and donations. Funds stand at just over £3,400. Future fund-raising events planned are a demonstration in February of the Alexander Technique by Joni Bentley and a Dressage and Cross Country demonstration by Sue Edwards (famous event rider) is planned for late March 2002.

We anticipate that the association would raise £1500 to £2000 annually to contribute to trail maintenance.

### Forest Enterprise

Forest Enterprise will provide full maintenance support for this project. They have in the summer already changed numerous waymarkers to indicate various route changes in the permissive trails and installed some horse barriers to prevent horse-riders straying off riding trails. They estimate that their contribution to the project, once the permissive riding trails have a hard base, to be @ £6,600 p.a. This is made up of 24 days work by rangers, 12 days by contractors plus materials.

### Bucks County Council

Bucks CC is a full partner in this project in terms of its clear commitment to greater public access both in and around Hodgemoor Wood. It has already dedicated a new bridleway across its own land to the Wood and has firm plans for other new bridleways to the north of the Wood, again on its own land. Not only does Bucks CC have the preparation costs in terms of clearance, installation of gates etc, but also the legal costs of making new routes into statutory bridleways. They estimate their costs for completing the link-up network north of Hodgemoor Wood to be £30,000.

### Why the Trails cost so much

Hodgemoor Wood has been classified by English Nature as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and has a very varied soil structure. As a result cheap hardcore cannot be used for trails. Hoggin - a mixture of clay and gravel - has to be used which can cost around £2000 per 100 metres. For the trails to last, they also have to be well prepared before the hoggin is laid. It's worth doing the job well: the Yellow Brick Road that was done about 5 years ago is bearing up very well.

**Please note that hoggin is a surface suitable for riders, cyclists and walkers.**

This proposal is made by the Hodgemoor Riding Association, with the support and co-operation of the Buckinghamshire County Council and of Forest Enterprise.

**Signed for Hodgemoor Riding Association**

Susie Bicknell, Secretary

Date

Annexes:

- Map of phases 1 to 4
- Map of enlarged riding network and high concentration of stables
- Request for Quotations for building trails (March 2001)
- 2 quotations for building trails (April 2001)
- letter from Bucks CC confirming £2000 contribution
- Letter of support from English Nature (March 2001)
- Letter of support from the South Bucks Riding Club
- Letter of support from British Horse Society
- Press clippings