

OFF ROAD MOTOR CYCLING



A Briefing Paper
September 2005



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Off Road Motorcycling A Briefing Paper prepared by the Working Group

1. Introduction

Increasingly in recent years the Council's land has been used for unauthorised off road motorcycling. In particular Denham Quarry at Brindle has been used for trials biking with more open areas of land in the Yarrow Valley Country Park and former Duxbury Colliery for moto cross.

In conjunction with the police our Neighbourhood Wardens have stopped offenders, issued warnings and done everything reasonably possible to stop the activity but have never been able to answer the standard response "where can we go to do this?" This discussion paper and preliminary proposal sets out to answer the question and has been produced by a small Working Group for presenting to the Executive Cabinet to seek Member's views on the problems and opportunities.

It has been prepared following a consultation exercise in respect of a similar proposal for land at Chisnall Lane, Coppull which was withdrawn in the face of objections on grounds of ecology, noise, pollution and traffic congestion. These same issues will arise with the site now under consideration but the proposal has been scaled down, in the light of earlier consultation, to a small club and junior facility which will be managed to keep noise to a minimum with limited numbers and consequent traffic access to the site. Individuals and bodies consulted on the original proposal included

- Members and Officers of Chorley Borough Council
- Member of Parliament
- Town and Parish Councils in the Borough
- Lancashire County Council
- Lancashire Constabulary
- Adjoining Local Authorities
- Local schools
- Motorcycle clubs
- Off road motorcyclists
- Highways Agency

2. Background

As a result of complaints from members of the public and the introduction of the Police reform Act 2003 which gave Police Officers the additional powers to tackle the problem of "off road" motor cycles, Chorley Borough Council's Neighbourhood Wardens were invited to join in several local initiatives in an attempt to reduce local complaints and target offenders who used motor cycles 'on' and 'off' Road illegally.

Lancashire Constabulary received 546 complaints of motorcycle nuisance within the area of Chorley Borough during 2004. During the same period the Neighbourhood Wardens received 108 complaints.

These problems have increased in recent years, probably for 3 main reasons.

1. A less tolerant society who are more inclined to complain to the police as a result of greater community involvement and consultation
2. A more modern generation who are no longer content with the more traditional activities such as football, cricket or rugby and require locations or more extreme outdoor pursuits such as off road riding.
3. Expanding residential areas and therefore more restrictions on available accessible land that will not cause nuisance.

The purpose of the initiative was to reduce complaints and remove unlicensed riders and uninsured vehicles from the road making it a safer place for people who reside/work/visit the Borough, and to prevent misuse and damage of Council land. It has become clear that the problem has been caused by semi-professional riders practising their skills in order that they can enter competition and young people who either rig up a motorcycle or in some cases steal such a machine to practice their skill.

Under the Police Reform Act 2003, the Police are required to warn offenders and after that warning they can seize each machine. To date Lancashire Constabulary have warned 80 riders and seized 10 machines in total. At this time there are 67 riders currently under the 12-month warning period. It became common practice for riders to refuse to stop and as such other methods were developed to locate and identify offenders. If they resided in Council property they were also threatened with eviction and if evidence was available they were reported for summons or cautioned.

This initiative is labour intensive on each event and often resulted in further follow up enquiries where this has been broken down into actual hours worked. Lancashire Constabulary 420 hours and Neighbourhood Wardens 704 hours.

Whilst speaking with offenders and other legitimate riders it was identified that the Borough Council lacked facilities within the area and it became very clear that a resource is required to educate, train and develop new skills for young people. This would –

- reduce the danger of an unskilled rider having an accident or injuring other persons
- reduce damage to Council property and complaints from the public
- reduce staff time in addressing this issue
- improve the quality of life for local residents and riders.

Lancashire Constabulary and the Neighbourhood Warden Service are both unable to continue this labour intensive initiative in the long term as it takes each agency away from their core role. Their time could be better spent addressing other issues to improve the quality of life of local residents and as such an 'Off Road' track would be supported by Lancashire Constabulary and the Neighbourhood Warden Service.

3. Demand for Facilities

The background to the problem suggests there to be two basic categories of rider –

- club riders who are willing to support, use and pay for facilities through a properly managed and affiliated club
- those with enthusiasm and inclination but no money – primarily teenagers who cobble together bikes and then want to ride them.

If the Council is to develop a proper facility within the Borough it needs to cater for both.

4. Site Requirements

The ideal site needs to be –

- big enough for at least 2 tracks catering for a range of abilities from beginner to experienced rider and a range of uses including moto cross bikes, quads, off road buggies & trials bikes.
- away from residential property likely to be disturbed by the noise of bikes and traffic coming & going from the site.
- close enough to the areas in which the problem teenagers live in order to encourage them to use it.
- serviced with electric, water and drainage supplies.
- capable of development with proper facilities including a workshop, store, toilets, small car park etc.

A site which meets most of these criteria has been identified at the site of the former Duxbury Colliery, approx 2 miles to the south of Chorley

The land is shown on the plan with this paper and lies within the ownership of the Borough Council having been acquired several years ago for the purpose of reclamation to supplement outdoor leisure facilities in the Borough. It comprises the site of the former colliery workings, now heavily overgrown and is one of the problem sites mentioned earlier where unauthorised riding of badly silenced motorbikes gives rise to many complaints and action by the police and neighbourhood wardens. Bringing it into a properly regulated and supervised use should minimise nuisance to the local community.

Discussions with trials motorcyclists indicate a preferred option for their branch of the sport at Denham Quarry which, although eminently suitable for the trials riders does not offer scope for other off road motorbikers and has problems of access, ecology and parking which are currently being investigated.

5. Development

The site could be developed to give -

- a beginners track for 5 - 10 year olds using 50cc to 110 cc bikes
- an intermediate/senior track for 10 year olds upwards riding larger bikes
- storage, workshop & toilet facilities
- a small car park for up to 20 cars

6. Management

The way in which the facility is managed will be critical to its success in resolving the problems without impinging unduly on the local community. It must be run through a properly affiliated club run in accordance with ACU (Autocycle Union) rules under the auspices of the Borough Council as landlord. The ACU imposes conditions on affiliation and accreditation which govern noise levels, safety, track design, fencing, security, marshalling etc.

Two clubs are represented on the working group with a constitution and membership capable of taking on the management role, namely Central Lancashire Off Roaders (CLOR) and KJ Moto Cross. Both have been established to cater solely for local riders and are affiliated to the ACU. A business plan for the clubs is currently in preparation to support funding bids and form the basis for a lease from the Borough Council.

7. Funding

Initial “start up” funding could come from –

- CBC capital grant
- Sponsorship & support of local businesses
- Matched funding from sources such as the Lancashire Small Sites Reclamation Scheme

Revenue funding would come from the club levying fees for the use of the facility through annual subscriptions, daily fees and track hire or event management. In order to cater for the youngsters who cannot afford to pay fees and would otherwise continue to ride in the country parks there will be opportunities for some form of payment in kind e.g. marshalling, track preparation & repairs etc.

8. Partners

| Partner | Input | Role |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| CBC | Project co-ordination Development & management advice Direction of youngsters to the facility | Land owner |
| Lancs Constabulary | Project advice Direction of youngsters to the facility | Adviser |
| K.J. Moto Cross CLOR | Management | Leaseholders and operators of the facility |
| St Michaels School | Club user for off road buggies Direction of youngsters to the facility | User & adviser |

9. Consultation Issues

Although no formal consultation has been undertaken pending submission of this document to the Executive Cabinet a number of objections to the proposal have been lodged by Coppull Parish Council in whose area the site lies, Adlington Town Council whose area is immediately adjacent, Lindsay Hoyle, Chorley's MP and a number of local residents. The principal grounds of objection are essentially those which came out of the consultation exercise at Chisnall Lane and will need to be properly addressed if the project is to succeed. These are as follows -

- **Noise** – poorly silenced bikes are a major source of nuisance but this does not have to be the case. If the facility is run with a prohibition on the use of competition exhausts the noise output can be restricted to the level of traditional road bikes and add only marginally to general levels of traffic noise.

Restrictions on days and hours of operation will be needed to ensure that the facility does not impose unreasonably on the local community.

- **Traffic** – access to the site is not as problem with a number of potential entrances & exits. Because the proposal has now been scaled down to a club use catering only for the local moto cross users and juniors it will not generate the traffic levels envisaged in the open public facility envisaged in the Chisnall Lane proposal.
- **Ecology** – no surveys have been carried out at this stage to ascertain the effect of the proposal upon the existing flora and fauna but will be undertaken and mitigating measures put in place if it proceeds. The nature of the site, being a former colliery site with workings and spoil storage physically lends itself to the use envisaged but the fact that it has remained undisturbed for many years has allowed it to develop its own, secondary, environment which needs protecting.
- **Security** – whilst not in use the track will present an opportunity for the sort of unsupervised use which it currently attracts and which causes a lot of local nuisance. Fencing and other security measures will need to be put in place to guard against this.

The Working Group

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