

Lawful Hunting and Holford Parish Council

Holford Parish Council has been concerned that there have been, and remain, complaints about the manner in which “Hunting” has been conducted on the Quantock Hills within the Parish Council boundaries and surrounding areas.

The Parish Council is neither Pro nor Anti “lawful hunting” but recognises a possible role for the Council in identifying areas where “hunting” is not permitted and seeking to encourage “hunting” organisations to prepare, adopt and publicise a self-regulating code of conduct for “hunt” participants and followers in areas where their activities may lawfully take place.

The Parish Council deprecates unlawful or criminal or anti-social behaviour during the course of “hunting” and will attempt to maintain on its website contact details of agencies, including the Police, to whom complaints may be made.

What action can the Parish Council take

The Parish Council has obtained information from significant landowners detailing the boundaries of their land. These details have been incorporated on a map which the Council has published on its website. The map indicates land where “hunting” is not permitted.

The Parish Council has held liaison meetings with local residents and with local Police representatives.

It is the Parish Council’s intention to initiate discussions with representatives of Staghound and Foxhound bodies in order to bring to their attention the access limitations collated on the map which has been prepared. As importantly, the Parish Council will seek to persuade “hunting” bodies to prepare and adopt a Code of Conduct to operate before and after “hunting” activities. The Code should include the Parish Council’s map. During a “hunt” the hunt should provide wardens or other measures to prevent ingress into areas where “hunting” is not permitted. The Code should also regulate behaviour. It should be a requirement that it is followed by any member of the “hunt” organisation.

A problem which has been identified by Police is that regulation by the “hunt” of “hunt followers” is currently at best meagre.

Discussions have not been possible during the Covid plague and must await the end of risks and restrictions associated with it.

A Hunt Forum

Following on from fruitful discussions with “hunt” organisations the Parish Council will seek to arrange a half-day “Forum” meeting. The purpose will be to allow relevant interested parties, that is, landowners, local residents, Quantock Ranger service and other conservation interests, Police, National Trust, League Against Cruel Sports and any other relevant body or organisation expressing an interest, to come together to raise and respond to matters of concern and to reach agreement on the future conduct of “lawful hunting” activities on the Quantocks around Holford.

In the light of the current Covid plague it is not possible to predict the timing of such a “Forum” event.

Specific Issues

The website title page for the map can be changed to reflect more accurately that the map's purpose is primarily to indicate land where "hunting" is not permitted.

The Parish Council is concerned about the proper conduct of permitted "lawful hunting". Its language needs always to reflect this.

A "Hunt" has no obligation to inform either the Parish Council or members of the public of its "lawful hunting" intentions, arrangements and dates. This is a large part of the problems which arise. A Code of Conduct needs to provide that the "lawful hunt" will voluntarily publish such information in a timely manner.

The regulation of firearms is a matter for the Police and not the Parish Council. Police representatives have indicated that alleged firearms infringements will be investigated with the utmost vigour. The Council would be most concerned if ever firearms were carried which did not strictly observe the law and any conditions attached to a firearms certificate. Strong advice about such matters should be contained in a hoped-for Code of Conduct to be prepared by "lawful hunts".

The Parish Council understands that permission may be given by landowners for access onto their land by vehicles under the control of, and part of, a "lawful hunt". This assumes that the "lawful hunt" will ensure that no access is gained unlawfully over bridleways or restricted byways and that there is no vehicular trespass onto restricted land.

The Parish Council understands that useful contact information is available from conservation and landowner and law enforcement agencies. The Parish Council needs to consider whether such information could be collected and kept up to date on its website.