

Environment Guidance for Organisers & Planners

This article will be of interest to all National and Regional post holders, club officers, event planners, organisers and controllers.

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Key Considerations:

- Enter into a dialogue with local agencies and groups that have an interest in the land you would like to use for orienteering.
That way you are more likely to understand the concerns and attitudes in place, which is invaluable when applying for permission to hold an event: they know you, and you know the issues.
- Do some research prior to mapping or planning dates: there is no point in finding out problems once work has been done.
- Orienteering brings benefits to localities, such as good maps and economic benefits. Are there other ways in which you might be seen to be contributing rather than exploiting? Keep the key people informed about any conservation aspects of orienteering, and offer conservation groups a display area at the event.
- Is writing a letter sufficient? Have you more to gain by a meeting, where you can show that you are seeking a win-win outcome?

The Role of Clubs

- Ensure that all event organisers are familiar with the Environmental Policy and Guidelines.
- Build up liaison with local conservation officers and groups.
- Build up a store of knowledge about issues and relationships with landowners and agencies.
- Invite them to give a talk at club events, and offer to reciprocate.
- Keep them informed about plans and appropriate developments.
- Maintain a record of environmental audits, and issues related to the clubs areas.
- Promote group travel and car sharing to events.

Changing patterns of use of land

Electronic punching, park orienteering, cycle orienteering and fixed courses have all contributed to a broadening of the range of land suitable for orienteering and the balance of factors to consider will vary according to the uses of and pressures on the area.

Whilst these guidelines are most concerned with the issue of nature conservation, the use of parks, public footpaths and small areas lead to other concerns which must be addressed during planning, particularly the impact on other users and the avoidance of conflict. Most land

managers will regard off-road bicycle events as potentially far more damaging than foot events. This is not only because of increased erosion caused by wheels, but also the potential for accidents resulting in claims for damages.

At The Outset

Investigate the Environmental Dimension BEFORE starting to map an area, and before deciding on the venue and date so that you are able to meet conservation officers and others on their own ground.

Further details about conservation designations are given in the Environment Contact document.

- Consider the proposed **location, timing** and any **specified restrictions** so that the event is likely to have the least possible impact on the land
- Seek to avoid areas where vulnerable features are known to exist and try to avoid sensitive times of year (usually nesting time for birds, and wild flower blooms)

Landowners will normally know of environmental sensitivities, special sites and wildlife in relation to their land, and it is normally their responsibility to liaise with the relevant agency. In some cases, landowners may delegate that to event organisers, in which case **it is worthwhile becoming fully informed about issues and attitudes prior to making contact.**

Agreements and Licences

These days, most of the public bodies that manage land, such as Forest Enterprise (Forestry Commission), The National Trust, The Woodland Trust, Wildlife Trusts (National or Local) will require that an agreement or licence is signed as part of granting permission to hold an event.

Where a site is, or could be, used regularly by a club, it may be worth negotiating a long-term agreement that will enable forward planning based upon the agreement terms. An alternative in some cases, especially where there are conservation issues, is the concept of a **site statement**. This should set out basic information on

- ownership,
- constraints (such as the location of vulnerable habitats),
- presence of particular species, contacts, potential parking areas and
- any agreements on frequency and timing of events and limitations on numbers

The idea is to update these as changes occur and generally help organisers and planners with good information rather than having to start from scratch each time an event is organised. In such cases, or where a club is aiming to secure an agreement, the faith and good will of land owners and agencies will be enhanced if a club monitors its events and tracks impacts, both good and bad.

In this way, the club could be contributing to the body of knowledge about the area, and also help orienteering as a whole.

Dealing and negotiating with conservation bodies

Strategy

All of the conservation bodies deal with access permissions at the local level, so you will need to contact the relevant office directly. Headquarter addresses are given at the end of this document, and in all cases, local details are available on web sites.

Be aware that, whilst national bodies and head offices will tend to take a detached, logical approach to questions of access, local individuals and officers may have a deep commitment to a conservation issue which can result in their taking an entrenched position. Such agendas may not always be transparent, and it is best to be armed with an understanding of the issue at stake prior to making contact as a combative 'it's my right' approach is likely to achieve nothing positive, whereas if you are seeking partnership on a basis of mutual understanding, much can be achieved.

Attitudes to access by conservation bodies have changed during recent years, and the balance has officially moved to one of encouraging access, excepting where damage to wildlife or habitats is a serious possibility (see the position statements of the relevant body on access). Therefore, if there is actual research-based evidence on either side, this should be taken into consideration.

Tactics

The aim should be to **develop a dialogue with the local office** based upon the idea that both sides want to maximise access AND ensure the protection of natural resources. Decisions are initially made by local officers, and if these seem unreasonable, too broad, or against available research, you can usually appeal to the head office. However, this should be a last resort, and before that, event organisers can help matters by:

- Finding out as much as you can about the issue at stake.
- When approaching conservation bodies, show that you understand the problem, and do not assume that they will understand the nature of orienteering.
- Try to persuade the main influencers to visit an orienteering event, in particular to experience how quiet and non-intrusive it is.

If visitors are invited to the event, it may be appropriate for them to visit a typical control site. This should be selected with care: it should be reasonably accessible and be a fair representation of the event, on typical terrain and with a typical frequency of use. The most likely comments that the visitors will make are that it is so quiet (they expect to see a good proportion of the number known to be at the event, not the one or two per minute average that even a busy control site has). These comments will stem naturally from observation of a typical event in progress. There is no need to "dress-up" the event or bias its image, to attempt to do so would be a disservice to the Sport.

- Visitors will need escorting by a responsible official, the more senior the better. Take advice where there are gaps in your knowledge.

Considerations when choosing an area for an event

The type of habitat

English Nature have offered the following guidance:

- Woodland as generally less sensitive than heath and moor and that plantations are less sensitive than ancient semi-natural woodland.
- Except in Scottish Caledonian pine woodland, conifer likely to be less sensitive than broadleaved woodland
- Wetlands may be particularly sensitive to trampling - this includes wet parts of woodlands, bogs, mires and marshes
- Hill grassland is likely to be less sensitive than meadows
- Where natural vegetation is dense, the possibility of damage caused by runners breaking through should be considered during planning and avoided as far as possible.

Timing of an event

This can be critical, particularly regarding:

- Breeding seasons and bird migrations.
- Double bookings with incompatible activities, such as motor-cycle scrambling, car rallies, shooting etc. (It does happen!)

Number of Competitors

The more people passing through an area, the greater the likelihood that damage will occur. The number and locations of controls, routes and density of competitors can affect the extent and severity of any impact on the natural environment. It is very important that land-owners and agencies understand the extent to which the planner can direct where competitors go.

Frequency of events in an area

Events which involve more competitors, or which are held regularly may have more impact than those which are held as a one-off, or very infrequently. It is worth keeping records of use of areas, and reasons for limiting frequency in order to show others that we are responsible in our approach.

Minimising the Impact of an Event

Event Details

In discussions with the responsible body, establish whether it is appropriate to cover environmentally sensitive issues clearly and explicitly in event details and on the day. This can include explanation of the way in which they are being addressed, pointing out any interesting features in the area. This may provoke local volunteers or other support for the conservation initiative.

It may be worth considering providing some information to other users of the area about orienteering, and the specific event.

Car Parking

It is increasingly the case with conservation bodies, that gaining permission for an event will be easier if runners are bussed in from a nearby town than if they are all coming by car to park at the event. Car journeys and parking are a major issue, so seek to choose sites which are accessible to some level of public transport if possible.

Give consideration to limiting potential damage, particularly to road or ride verges and in the event of heavy rain. Field parking in wet weather can lead to churned-up gateways and mud being carried onto the road. Consider a lorry load of gravel, chippings or other suitable material for consolidating the gateway area.

Organisers should check the condition of the road after the event and, if necessary, arrange for the removal of any mud and debris.

Assembly areas

Ideally, a visitor should not be able tell that an area has been used following the event.

All paraphernalia must be removed completely from the site. Flattened grass will generally recover within a few days, but an area that contains sensitive vegetation that could be damaged permanently should not be used.

Toilets

In seeking to minimise the impact of an event, portable toilet services which include the removal of all waste should be used wherever possible. If occasions arise when toilets have to be dug, permission must be sought from the land owner, and rules regarding such facilities checked with the local water company. In all such cases, dug toilets need to be situated well away from any surface water, and discretely situated.

Litter

Minimise, and remove litter.

- The normal standard for orienteering events is that NO litter or other event-related materials remain after 24 hours following an event.
- Encourage competitors to remove their own litter from the site. Providing bins so that sacks of rubbish end up in landfill is not a real solution. Signs can be posted to encourage people to take responsibility for their own rubbish. Retailers should be encouraged to provide separate bins for cans, plastics and food waste.
- Ensure that plastic drinks cups and bottles, and aluminium cans are recycled.

The provision of separate bins for cans, plastic and general rubbish near to any catering facilities, or at a spot convenient for the assembly and parking areas is recommended. (This material will then have to be deposited at a local recycling depot, which should be planned for.)

- Control description sheets, particularly those issued at the start are loose and liable to be dropped out on the course. The late issue of separate description sheets is not compatible with environmental good practice.

Considerations when setting courses

This is a key consideration when presenting a proposed event to a conservation body: they need to be persuaded that damage will not result from allowing the event to take place. The particular strategy used, for instance the number and distribution of controls, will depend upon the circumstances, and the manner in which it is agreed that impacts can be minimised.

Number of controls

Using a lot of controls spreads the runners over the area, but using fewer controls with varied access directions can be equally valid. Where compulsory or obvious routes are used to channel competitors away from a restricted area, ensure that the ground can cope with the heavy use, and that the route is obvious.

Drinks stations on the course

Some competitors carry drinks for considerable distances before discarding the cups, so bear this in mind when positioning drinks stations: for example, it may be better to place the drinks at the start of a track run rather than at the end.

Walls and fences

Areas notified as out-of-bounds, including all walls, fences, hedges and boundaries which may not be crossed, need protection against accidental competitor incursion by good reliable planning. This means that the best routes should naturally avoid the out-of-bounds areas. If there is doubt, place a control banner on the required route.

If there remains any danger of incursion, OOB boundaries should be clearly marked (e.g. by tapes) and patrolled. With sensitive boundaries, such as walls and fences, it is worth checking them before and after the event, and rectifying any damage found.

Nesting birds

This is probably the biggest issue limiting the planning of orienteering events, and as a result of the EU 'Birds' and 'Habitats' Directives, EN, CCW, SNH and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland have a statutory duty to only allow 'operations' to go ahead if they can be satisfied that NO damage to the protected species will result.

Some nesting birds are extremely sensitive to disturbance whilst others are less so, and the extent to which orienteering affects them is, in most cases, not known. There are obvious concerns about ground-nesting birds, which occur particularly in heaths and moors (although some birds, such as the Dartford Warbler, described as 'ground-nesting' actually nest off the ground in bushes or scrub.)

The Precautionary Principle (or Precautionary Approach)

Remember, the agencies are required to apply the precautionary principle' (Appendix 2) in arriving at decisions, so our arguments must be carefully researched and reasoned. What studies there have been suggest that our impact is not great, but that may not be accepted by those concerned with the conservation of an area.

Appropriate limits

Rather than simply banning use of a wide area, it is to be hoped that conservation officers will be realistic about the extent of protection required, and the likely threat caused by orienteering. Whatever the case, it is essential that those applying for permission are *sensitive to the issues and reasonably well informed*.

Sensitivity of land:

As a general guide:

- Land is generally more sensitive during bird breeding season, especially on habitats with ground-nesting species
- Lowland heathland with ground-nesting birds is likely to be particularly sensitive February to July.
- Sites with colonial nesting birds (such as seabirds) are extremely sensitive to any level of disturbance during the breeding season.
- Moorland with ground nesting birds is most sensitive from March to June inclusive.
- Be aware that certain sites are also important for congregations of migrating and wintering birds, especially waders and waterfowl on coasts, estuaries and certain moorlands.
- Marsh and bog
- Studies show that marshy ground is the most affected and slowest to recover terrain in orienteering. It is advisable to minimise the compulsory crossing of such terrain.

Marshy sites may still be used as control points, but at the edges and not the centre, and positioned so that runners approaching and leaving the site are not obliged to pass through the marsh.

- Steep places:

Descending and ascending steep slopes can cause erosion. Where this might be regarded as unacceptable due to the nature of the ground or the sensitivity of the area, unconsolidated sand dunes for example, consider adjusting the leg or the position of the control banner. Whenever control sites are on or adjacent to steep slopes, including pits, depressions, knolls, gullies, spurs and so on, give thought to the routes in and out before fixing the position of the banner. An adjustment of a metre or two may make a considerable difference to the potential for erosion.

- Deer sanctuaries

If the competition area contains deer, they may be disturbed by competitors and take flight. This is a natural response for deer and their sensitivity to disturbance should not be overrated. Studies show that deer return to their normal haunts and base level of anxiety soon after an event. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the provision of one or more deer sanctuaries that deer can flee to during the event. There may be suitable places adjacent to the competition area. If not, provision might be made within the competition area itself by selecting a no-go zone and keeping all competitors out by suitable planning or declaration of out-of-bounds.

- Livestock

If the competition area contains livestock, they may be disturbed by (or even disturbing to) competitors. Similar measures to those for deer should be considered but on a much smaller scale, since disturbed livestock tends to move only short distances. If courses have to cross fields with livestock, it is better to concentrate the courses across one end of a field so that the stock can congregate and remain undisturbed at the other.

- **Badger Setts**

The Badgers Act 1991 makes it an offence to damage a badger sett or disturb a badger in residence. The Act does not distinguish between the unintentional interference that might be caused by orienteers passing across a sett and the deliberate and serious measures directed specifically against badgers for various purposes. It is therefore good practice for active badger setts to be avoided in competitions. Crossing points and control sites should be selected so that runners are not encouraged to cross active setts. Mappers and Planners may recognise active setts using notes available from British Orienteering Office. Alternatively, the landowner may know of setts or the local Badger Protection Group (a list is held at British Orienteering Office) may be willing to give locations of setts in the competition area. *It must be understood that Badger Groups will be reluctant to release such information unless they can be assured it will be held in confidence.* For this reason Mappers should not label badger setts as such on orienteering maps. Nor should Planners mark out-of-bounds on the map or on the ground. The aim should be for competitors to compete in an area containing an active badger sett without being made aware of its presence.

- **Archaeological remains/ruins**

These may be the key element in a conservation area, and can be vulnerable to damage if crossed by numbers of participants. Consideration should be given to protecting such sites as for any sensitive area or boundary.

After the event

Objective 1: Leave no trace of the event

We have a long history of good practice in this area, which we hope to maintain and improve upon. Good planning will reduce the clear-up work required, and good liaison with landowners and managers will ensure that they understand your concern for their land, and end up being satisfied.

- Leave no litter, markers, equipment.
- Leave areas used in at least as good a condition as they were found.
- Collect all equipment and materials used on the course (including marker tags).
- Repair any boundaries that have been damaged.

New Paths

Be aware that temporary trails may be created through vegetation. These will normally disappear quite quickly, certainly over a growing season. In areas frequented by people and animals a temporary trail could be consolidated into a path by regular treading in the weeks and months following the event, and this can be a major concern to locals. If such a possibility is likely and undesirable, block off the potential path with brushings or other material after the event

Objective 2: Observe and record impacts on the land: [The Environmental Audit](#)

Real data on the impact of orienteering will be essential at all levels in future years, and if collected, will help us maximise the areas we are allowed to use as it is a powerful aid in getting others to understand our concern for the environment. All documents should be kept in club archives, and the essential information copied to National Office.

Definitions and References

The Sandford Principle:

From the 1971 National Parks Policies Review Committee (Sandford Report). Most conflicts can be resolved by good management but

"where it is not possible to prevent excessive or unsuitable use by such means, so that conflict...becomes acute... [conservation] must prevail in order that the beauty and ecological qualities for the national parks may be maintained."

Government policy over 20 years, and enshrined in section 62 of the 1995 Environment Act. Circular 12/96 gives conservation precedence over recreation in order to conserve.

The precautionary principle

Derived from the Rio Declaration:

"where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation".

"Sustainable Development for the UK", CM4345 of May 1999 states that precautionary action requires transparent decision making, and assessment of costs and benefits of action.