



James [REDACTED]

Restriction of access to Ash Ranges

1 message

James [REDACTED]

10 January 2020 at 17:40

To: michael.gove.mp@parliament.uk

Cc: andrew.gomm@guildford.gov.uk, jo.randall@guildford.gov.uk

Dear Mr Gove,

I am writing to you as my MP to ask for your help in a local matter for which is particular importance to my wife and I. We moved to Ash Vale 6 years ago and live approx. 100 metres from the main gate to Ash Ranges on Heathvale Bridge Road. Our decision to move here was based upon 2 main factors.

The first was the great train links to London, I have previously sought your help in the diabolical service that South West Railway now provide since the first group took over South West Trains.

The second was Ash Ranges which, being public land and a site of special scientific interest, when not being used for military exercises are open to the public. This is a wonderful, open place where we along with many other local residents walk our dog daily. This is a good means of getting essential exercise to stay fit and well, despite having busy stressful jobs.

Over the past year I have heard rumours that the MoD plan to remove all access for the public to the ranges citing the excuse of occasional vandalism. I have seen the result of this and from what I have determined speaking with local Police/PCSOs and other walkers, it is being caused by a small number of local youths. I can totally understand how costly and frustrating this is for the MoD but having been a member of the public trying to report vandalism and get something done, I have limited sympathy.

I am not aware of any security the MoD have in place, the police when called have limited powers and have difficulty gaining anything other than foot access. I am also not aware of a publicised number to report any incidents to.

Speaking with various locals on the ranges it appears that even when vandalism has been reported to the front office by the main gate on Heathvale Bridge Road as it is happening, the staff on duty have no wish to do anything. There also appears to be no security when the office is closed other than a single Flood Light.

Unfortunately, in today's society we all have to take a certain amount of precaution to ensure the property under control is safe and secure. We all have to lock our cars, front doors and put security into our homes to deter burglars etc. In the case of the ranges it is clear that the MoD have no interest in security measures and thus, whilst none of us should have to worry about vandalism, they have to accept that they could do something to prevent this.

I have just been for a walk and noticed that there is a new gate and fence installed at the front entrance. This currently isn't being used but has the ability to be locked and block access completely.

Having studied the Byelaws covering this "Ash Ranges Byelaws 1983" and "Aldershot and District Military Lands Byelaws 1976" (which I have attached) it is clearly stated in the second of these documents in Section 2 "Use of Lands by Public" that:

"Subject to the provisions of these Byelaws the public are permitted to use all parts of the Military Land not specially enclosed or the entry to which is not shown by notice as being prohibited or restricted, including those Ministry of Defence roads thereon which have been constructed and made up for general use by vehicular traffic, for the purposes of open-air recreation at all times when the Military Lands are not being used for military purposes for which they are appropriated."

If the MoD were to remove all access to the public they would be contravening the byelaws made by the Secretary of State for Defence which came into force 17th May 1976. I don't believe they have the right to do so. This is of course unless the MoD have decided to stop using the ranges altogether in which case the land can be made accessible at all times and left totally within the hands of Surrey Wildlife Trust.

I would be very grateful if you could look into this matter for me? Perhaps the Secretary of State has a view on this topic. I am also copying our local conservative councillors (Andrew Gomm and Jo Randall) to this email. If you would like to discuss this matter in person I am more than happy to drop by your office in Westminster, speak with you on the phone ([REDACTED]) or for you to come to my home and see the area first hand.

For reference my full contact details are:

[REDACTED]

5/8/2020

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Many thanks in advance

James

