

Statement Regarding the Bridleway Closure near the sewerage works in Beckford

In response to the Parish Council following up on complaints from residents, councillors were invited to attend a meeting with Severn Trent Water regarding the closure of the public Bridleway past the sewage plant in Beckford. On 6th March 2025 six members of the Parish Council met with representatives from Severn Trent and their construction contractor Avoe.

During a positive, helpful meeting, it was explained that the expansion will increase the plant's treatment capability from 9L of wastewater/second to 19L/s.

It was also explained that the closure of the Public Right of Way (PROW) had become necessary due to unanticipated issues affecting the interaction between work on the scheme and public access. Severn Trent and Avoe would prefer not to impact public access, but have to address safety concerns and at present believe closure is unavoidable.

Access to the works is via land owned by Overbury Estates and when surveyed an old culvert beneath the bridleway was found to be collapsing and unable to withstand the additional heavy traffic usage planned. Severn Trent/Avoe brought in a temporary bridge to prevent further damage to the culvert and continue full bridleway access. Unfortunately, the shared access use of the bridge has presented safety concerns. Notably for horses, with a number of riders reporting that their horses spooked on going over the bridge structure - which is metal and extremely noisy when in contact with horseshoes.

In response to these concerns Severn Trent/Avoe have tried to find alternative solutions, including using rubber mats over the bridge to dampen the noise and loaning ear defenders for riders to use with their horses. Unfortunately, no fully workable solution could be found. For mats to be thick and heavy enough to be effective without slipping when driven on, when combined with plant machinery they would add too much mass for the load bearing capacity of the bridge, and whilst horse ear defenders could be loaned at one end of the bridleway and returned at the other there was no practical way to ensure such a system was operational outside of working hours.

It was also noted that some of the large vehicles accessing the site have blind spots that prevent their drivers from seeing all of the users of the bridleway - particularly young children.

Other routes to access the site were considered, but there was nothing viable as all were significantly harder to access and more intrusive onto private land.

It is ultimately planned that as part of the ongoing works the culvert will be repaired, but when this will happen is outside the control of the team on location. At present there is no timescale for the repairs to be carried out.

The only remaining option for safety was to seek closure of the PROW. This was a reluctant decision and one that Severn Trent have indicated they are open to re-evaluating, should a safe, viable alternative solution come to light.

The current closure has been authorised by the Secretary of State for Transport via Worcestershire County Council.

There seems to be some confusion from residents regarding the scope of the closure, with several comments indicating the belief that bridleway closure means that access is closed only to horses. This is not the case.

A bridleway is a shared use right of way, not one exclusive to horses. Per [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), bridleways are "for walking, horse riding, bicycles, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs". The closure of the bridleway applies to **all** categories of users, including walkers and cyclists as well as horses.

We have asked Severn Trent whether there might be capacity to vary this and introduce restricted categories of users rather than a wholesale ban. They have indicated that they are willing to explore doing so, as long as relevant law and public safety allow.

The closure permit currently in force is for up to six months from issue. This is the standard duration for which such permits are issued. ***However, this does not necessarily mean that the bridleway will be reopened in or before August. There can be applications to have the permit for closure renewed.***

The works to the plant are currently estimated to continue until mid-way through 2026.

Severn Trent are mindful of the impact on public users, including walkers, riders, and cyclists who use the path to commute avoiding the A46, and would prefer not to close the access - but public safety makes it currently unavoidable.

We have discussed future plans and all parties have agreed to try and keep lines of communication open so that residents can be kept up to date regarding the works.

Post-meeting Parish Councillor and local Footpath Warden Mike Wing contacted Worcestershire County Council's PROW department to discuss whether restrictions could be modified. He was advised that this may be possible, but it would be the responsibility of Severn Trent to investigate, progress, and ensure they have all risk controls and prevention measures in place.

Diane Colvin
Chairman
Beckford Parish Council