

22/06/21

FAO Jeremy Quin MP

Dear Jeremy,

We are writing to you regarding the ongoing issue of access to the Ash Ranges.

Public access to MoD land is hugely important, and whilst we of course appreciate there are inevitable overriding reasons when the land needs to be used for defence purposes, ultimately, this is common land.

We remain worried by the inconsistencies in the reasons given for restricting access to Ash Ranges, and we are also concerned that ongoing reviews of the bylaws could – potentially – result in wider restrictions being implemented.

It is now more than a year since access to the Ranges has been restricted. The decision to implement restrictions was made at the beginning of last year's first lockdown, and many residents were understandably hugely disappointed by this news – especially given how vital access to open land is for people's physical and mental health during a pandemic.

The justification that the restrictions were implemented in order to prevent vandalism and to safeguard the public seems questionable. Incidences of vandalism look to be few and far between, and also, we feel the public overall are best placed to make a judgment about their own safety as they have done for many years. You will, of course, have seen all of the correspondence from Ash residents and Ash Parish Council detailing their analysis of why the DIO's explanations do not command their confidence.

It is also the case that whilst only 12% of the land is being restricted, it seems illogical that the area closest to the Ash community, which causes the maximum possible disruption to residents who have for so long benefitted from swift access to the ranges, has been targeted. Whilst the proximity to the Ash Firing Ranges is appreciated, we know that residents find it anomalous that the Stoney Castle Firing Ranges and Henley Park Firing Ranges have evaded similar restrictions.

Whilst the bylaws review is yet to be concluded, we know that members of the local community would relish the opportunity to contribute, and we would be grateful for any news on how this might be facilitated. We remain hopeful that the findings of the review will confirm that residents' access to the Ranges in their entirety – when appropriate – should be upheld, and we urge you to use the conclusion of the review into the bylaws overall as the perfect opportunity to lift these restrictions.

We know that other colleagues are also deeply concerned by the question of access to MoD land and would welcome a meeting before the recess to discuss this issue.

We shall look forward to hearing from you.

With every good wish,

Michael Gove – **Member of Parliament for Surrey Heath**
Jeremy Hunt – **Member of Parliament for South West Surrey**
Jonathan Lord – **Member of Parliament for Woking**