



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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JEREMY QUIN MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE PROCUREMENT

MSU/4/6/1/is

14 October 2021

Dear Michael,

We have met and corresponded on the subject of the Ash Ranges Technical Area on many occasions. I fully appreciate how frustrating the decision to lose the Technical Area has been to many of you constituents.

The Army very much values good relations with the local community. I am delighted that the preservation of Ash Ranges over many years has ensured that MOD training can take place alongside an important local amenity for the general public.

As you are aware the vast majority of the Ash Ranges area lies outside the Technical Area and remains open whenever training allows.

Unfortunately, there are legitimate reasons why the Technical Areas, the actual firing ranges, have been closed. The loss of training time owing to vandalism is one reason, the other, is the growing awareness that providing open access when training is not taking place to an area close to a large population which contains man-made hazards with considerable risk of injury or worse is simply not appropriate.

Despite looking into the issue in depth we do not believe it would be right to reopen the Technical Areas to general access and will not be doing so. However, we have been working hard to try and mitigate the concerns raised.

We have already completed footpaths to provide members of the public with a woodland walk, which is permanently available even when ranges are live. This work has ensured a continuous route between the extensive woodlands comprising area E7 and which includes the water feature known as the Flash and a popular canal sidewalk and area E5 to the south, this again will be permanently available even when the ranges are live.

I am keen to do more to extend access. We have been working on two proposals and I found our meeting last Thursday extremely useful. It was very helpful to get a local perspective on the practicalities and I know my team on the ground are very aware of the importance we attach to this project. As discussed we wish to enhance access through a two phase programme.

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Phase one

The principle of this is to provide a continuous hardened route from Furze Hill in the North to Area E5 in the South and enabling access onto this route from Chandlers Road. This will be achieved by connecting existing hardened routes outside the existing perimeter with hardtop currently inside the perimeter and installing new fences, access gates and hardening some new areas. As well as increasing the amount of hardtop access for those with mobility issues this will have the added benefit of providing approximately 15 acres of woodland convenient to residents in close proximity to Ash Vale for use whenever the ranges are not occupied. Work will begin on the first phase this financial year, to be completed by Summer 2022.

Phase two

The principle of this is to provide an East-West route at a convenient central point to allow easier access from Ash Vale through the Technical Area on a designated fenced path and out onto the broader Ash Ranges area.

As you are aware, Ash Ranges is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Protection Area, and a Habitats Regulation Assessment is required prior to any construction works. In addition to this, an Explosive Ordnance Clearance is required before any fence can be installed. We are working hard to ensure that these assessments are completed by the Summer of 2022 so work on the second phase can commence.

Both phases will seek to provide increased convenience to residents but need to be undertaken in a way that minimises the amount of environmental harm, cost to the public purse and impact on military training.

Maps are provided at Annex A showing the whole area and Technical Area within it as well as outlining what we discussed on improved public access routes.

I do hope the work being conducted will be recognised as a very real attempt by the MOD to provide a better outcome for local residents.

I am copying this letter to Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Ranil Jayawardena MP, Jonty Lord MP, Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP, Angela Richardson MP and James Sunderland MP.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Quin', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JEREMY QUIN MP

