



**OUTRAGED:** People in Leavenheath are angry at a decision to close a popular bridleway in the village.

# Bridleway closure will ‘put people in danger’

## Villagers furious over damage to well-used path

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**Furious Leavenheath residents say pedestrians will be forced into dangerous situations after the impending closure of a well-used bridleway, which they say has been damaged beyond recognition.**

Beacham's Bridleway, a path linking Leavenheath, Nayland and Stoke-by-Nayland, will be shut for six months from April 3, from Mondays to Fridays, between 6am and 6pm, to enable construction traffic to access a controversial development at Beacham's Farm.

Planning approval was granted in late 2017 to restore and extend the existing farmhouse and build a new two-storey home on the site.

This was despite recommendations from planning officers, and objections of residents, two parish councils and the Dedham Vale Society, which called it “an over-development” in the Area of Natural Beauty (AONB).

Since then, notice has been given to shut the bridleway, which dates back to ap-

proximately 1700 and forms part of the Stour Valley Long Walk, St Edmunds Way and the Nayland Circular Walk, for at least half a year, potentially rising to a full year.

Suffolk County Council's highways department says this is necessary for health and safety reasons, as HGVs will be driving to Beacham's Farm, and people will be diverted to alternative routes.

A hard-standing surface has now been laid down on a 650-metre stretch on the eastern end of Beacham's Bridleway, but the county council insists the path will be restored once the work is completed.

However, this has outraged villagers, who say no public consultation was carried out before these alterations were made and that the path has been irreparably damaged because of this.

Lifelong resident Linda Dainton, who keeps horses at her home in Cock Street, told the *Free Press* the path is the natural safe route for horse riders, walkers and cyclists.

Without this, she says people will be forced to use busy roads that are narrow and have lots of blind bends.

She recounted an incident in September 2014, when she

**“If you close that bridleway, it's an accident waiting to happen”**

**Linda Dainton**

Resident of Cock Street, Leavenheath

and her horse were knocked over when a car sped around a blind turn in Plough Lane and struck them.

“If you close that bridleway, it's not a question of being brave enough to go somewhere else – it's an accident waiting to happen,” she said.

“It's not a road, it's a unique bridleway, much used and much loved by everyone. What they have done is destroyed something very unique that's been there for 300 years.

“They say when they've finished, they will put back top soil, but it won't be the same. They're never going to get it back to how it was.

“The actual site, you've never seen anything like it. It's disgraceful what's happened.

“You can't just close a

public amenity because you might meet a lorry, which only has right of access because it's going to Beacham's.

“They are giving the priority to the landowner. Why isn't there any priority given to the walkers, horse riders and cyclists who are using this bridleway?”

Lesley Wright, who also regularly rides on the path, wrote to Suffolk County Council suggesting the closure could be avoided, if signs are placed on each end of the bridleway warning of likely construction traffic, and if the HGV drivers are advised to be considerate.

“As riders, we are quite capable of judging situations for ourselves as they arise,” she wrote.

“We are quite accustomed to heavy farm and agricultural equipment, especially when navigating the narrow lanes and roads within our county.

“Should the bridlepath be closed, then dozens of horse riders would be forced to use the much busier public roads. This would be far more dangerous.

“We very much hope that common sense can prevail and that a common sense approach can be adopted.”