

EVIDENCE FILE

BOXING DAY MEET, MENDIP FARMERS HUNT, PRIDDY GREEN,
26TH DECEMBER 2023

BY ACTION AGAINST FOXHUNTING 19 JAN 2023

This file shows:

- That the Hunt did not follow the Risk Assessment they devised for their Boxing Day Hunt meet on Priddy Green
- That the Hunt failed to consider the unhygienic interaction between children and hunting hounds in their Risk Assessment
- That the Hunt put children at risk
- That the Hunt created foreseeable dangers for the public
- That the Hunt ignored Somerset Council Highways' attempts to engage with them concerning a road closure, failed to take advice and lied about it in their Risk Assessment
- That the Hunt's failure to close the road resulted in health and safety risks, and damage.
- Future actions

Risk Assessment

Extract from Hunt's Risk Assessment

"Horses to stand in designated area of village green"

What happened on the day

Evidence shows horses standing in different places, all over the green and on the roads. NB – all these photos were taken during the meet.



Extract from Risk Assessment:

“Any young horse asked to wear the appropriate colour ribbon on its tail”

What happened on the day

The risk assessment only mentioned “young” horses. It did not consider older horses that may be unsettled by the number of people. Two horses with red ribbons in their tails were observed, and some riders had trouble controlling their nervous mounts.



Extract from Risk Assessment:

“Hounds to be held up in a designated area of the village green”

What happened on the day

It was clear that the hounds were meant to be in a specific place. However, hound control was poor, and hounds ran freely over the green.



Extract from Risk Assessment:

"The Hunt has reviewed the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and does not deem any of its hounds to be 'dangerously out of control'"

What happened on the day

Woman appears to ask hunt servant to control dog. She picks up her child, who is clearly frightened,



Extract from Risk Assessment:

*“Hounds let out before attending the meet to minimise volume of waste matter carried.
Designated team, provided with a manure scoop and barrow, to sweep the village green immediately after the event for all faeces and litter.
These will then be disposed of in line with environmental regulations. ”*

What happened on the day

Hounds defecated freely on the green.

The designated “team” was one woman with a shovel. She did not cover the entire green, and missed a great deal of the waste. She did not have a barrow. It is believed that the faeces were disposed of in the bushes.



Extract from Risk Assessment:

“Designated parking stewards in high visibility jackets to ensure cars park considerately. Stewards placed on main arterial routes into village. Highways not to be blocked so as not to inconvenience/obstruct other road users. Cones used to block off any no parking zones.

What happened on the day

There were no parking stewards, though one person was observed wearing a high vis jacket. This person was inactive and spent much of his time talking to people on the edge of the green. Cars parked where they wanted to park – mostly on the mown grass verge opposite the green. Somerset Council urges people to report cars parked on verges. As it was extremely wet, the verge was damaged and left in a dangerous state, with deep ruts.

Horses and riders occupied the roads (photos above) blocking the highway. Members of the public thought the road was closed, and wandered about in it, thinking they were safe.

The photos of the tyre marks were taken after the meet had ended.



Extract from Risk Assessment:

“The Hunt has liaised with Somerset Council regarding the Highways Act 1980 and there is no requirement to close any roads when the Hunt meets on the village green”.

What happened on the day

The hunt had NOT liaised with Somerset Council – as this Freedom of Information request from 12th December shows

Our Response:

I have detailed below the information that we hold.

Mendip Farmers Hunt have not engaged with Somerset Council at all regarding a Boxing Day meet in Priddy.

Please quote the reference number 13393789 in any future communications.

Extract from Risk Assessment:

"All Hunt supporters are briefed not to interact with any protestors/saboteurs".

What happened on the day

An assault and attempted theft by a hunt supporter took place at the end of the meet. There is video evidence, but it is with the police.
Crime reference number: 5223315540

Extract from Risk Assessment:

“Should the weather be bad enough that the presence of horses on the village green would damage the healthy covering of grass, measures will be taken to stand the horses on an area of hard standing adjacent to the village green. Permission to be sought from local farmer/property owner”.

What happened on the day

It had been raining very heavily in the days before Boxing Day. The surface of the green was extremely wet, and as horses moved over the green, their hooves sank into the mud. Often, this was audible. Most horses remained on the grass, and no effort was made by the hunt or any hunt servants to move the horses off the grass. The grass was left in a dangerous and damaged state.



Hounds and Children

The Risk Assessment did not mention hounds and their interaction with children. There was no consideration of hygiene (other than to designate a “team” of people with “barrows” to clear up the faeces – but (see above) that did not actually happen).

Children were allowed unrestricted access to hounds. They stroked the hounds and touched them as much as they pleased. Hounds jumped up at the children (sometimes in groups) and put their faces close to the child’s face, sometimes licking them. Hounds passed from child to child, freely.

There were no handwashing facilities or any sanitation measures whatsoever.

Hounds did not stay in the designated area, and little attempt was made by members of the hunt to retrieve them. Discipline of both children and hounds was lax.

Hounds defecated and urinated on the green, and ate horse dung. Immediately afterwards, they were petted by children.

Hunt staff offered no hygiene advice to parents, or children.

The risks to children from petting hounds are entirely foreseeable.

Risks, Pathogens and References

Farm animals are known to carry a multitude of **pathogens and diseases which they can pass to people.**

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/zoonoses.htm> Hounds are likely to have consumed any of these pathogens when fed the raw stock.

Dogs can pass diseases to humans <https://www.dogsforgood.org/good-advice/zoonoses/>

Children are particularly vulnerable to picking up diseases from animals. They have immature immune systems and often put their hands in their mouths.

Proper Practice

1. Children/hound interaction at meets can be compared with the activities of petting zoos. Petting zoos must have high standards of hygiene <https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/visitor-attractions.htm>

The HSE advice says this

- Tell [visitors] about the risks and where and when they will be able to use washing facilities (in particular, remind nail biters, pen chewers and thumb suckers).
- Provide information signs to remind them;
- alcohol gels and wipes are **not** a substitute for hand washing
- washing facilities should be sufficient for the expected numbers of visitors needing to use them at one time, and should include running water (preferably warm), soap and paper towels

Boxing Day meets are held outdoors, with no running water available. Hand gels and hand wipes are not sufficient



Conclusion

The fact that the Hunt did not observe their own Risk Assessment suggests a number of issues:

- The Hunt may not have shared the Risk Assessment with the rest of their volunteers or riders, so they did not know what they were meant to be doing.
- The Hunt only wrote it to satisfy the council, but did not consider it important enough to share or observe
- It was impossible to observe the Risk Assessment given the location, the number of visitors and the chaotic nature of the event
- The Hunt was dishonest about their lack of engagement with Somerset Council, in case the council insisted on a road closure, and they did not want the trouble. Somerset Council reached out to the hunt repeatedly.

Health and Safety Risks

- The Hunt put children at risk of illness by their lack of hygiene measures and failure to control hounds.
- **The Hunt should not have brought hounds to the event as it is impossible to provide warm running water, soap and towels for the children at this location.**
- The Hunt created trip and slip hazards on the green by not moving their horses from the wet ground as the risk assessment stated.
- The Hunt created dangers for the public by bringing nervous horses to the event, and apparently incompetent riders.
- The Hunt created slip and trip hazards for the public by allowing visitors to park on and damage the grass verges.
- The Hunt created dangers for the public by failing to clean the Green thoroughly afterwards.

Damage

The Green is not a suitable place to hold a large meet with horses and riders during the winter.

- The Hunt caused damage to the Green because it was too wet for the meet.
- The Hunt caused damage to grass verges by failing to provide fit parking for the event

Road Closure

The road should have been closed. This would have avoided:

- Damage to the grass verges by vehicles, as parking could have been restricted to tarmacked areas.
- Damage to the Green as the horses could have been moved to the road.
- Risks to members of the public, who stood about in the road, thinking it was safe
- Loose hounds running in the road causing vehicles to stop.

Legal issues

The Occupier's Liability Act 1957 makes the owner or manager of land/property legally responsible for the health and safety of all users. If an accident occurred because the Hunt failed to observe their own Risk Assessment, it is likely that the Hunt's own insurance would be invalid. The next recourse for an injured person would be the owner/manager of the land – Priddy Parish Council. As AAF, and Protect the Wild, warned Priddy Parish Council of potential issues prior to the Meet, but Priddy Parish Council ignored them, it is possible that councillors might find themselves personally liable, as ignoring the warnings could be seen as negligence.

Further action by Action Against Foxhunting

AAF has reported both Priddy Parish Council and the Mendip Farmers Hunt to the Health and Safety Executive and the Local Authority.

Suggested further action by Priddy Parish Council

Given the level of damage to the Green, the dangers to the public (in particular to children), the Hunt's dishonesty and failure to observe their own Risk Assessment and Priddy Parish Council's own potential risk, the Council should not allow the Hunt to use the Green in future.